



Universidad de Concepción

Dirección de Postgrado

Facultad de Educación

Magíster en Innovación de la Enseñanza, Aprendizaje y Evaluación del Inglés

**The contribution of Alliteration as a Phonological Awareness strategy through
Multisensory Materials on the Pronunciation of words with Initial /s/ Clusters
/sk/, /sp/, and /st/ on a Group of Preschoolers.**

Tesis para optar al grado de Magíster en Innovación de la Enseñanza,
Aprendizaje y Evaluación del Inglés

Emilia Paz Abril Hernández Montesino

Concepción – Chile

2024

Profesor guía: Dr. María Jesús Inostroza Araos

Facultad de Educación

Universidad de Concepción

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the support of my big loving family and pets, particularly my cat Cacao who was next to me during countless hours of writing in the middle of the night.

I would also like to extend my thanks to my friend Juan Pablo, who was always there to provide feedback and words of encouragement. His vision helped me polish my work.

To my colleagues, who were a source of inspiration and support during this journey.

To the professors of the program, that provided their guidance throughout the courses. Particularly, my advisor, Dr. María Jesus Inostroza, for sharing her knowledge and helping me get through every step of the process.

To my mom, who was a dedicated student and has been my role model in my academic journey so far.

Table of Contents

List of Figures (1-13)	6
List of Tables	6
List of Acronyms	7
Abstract	8
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	9
1. Problem Statement	10
1.2 Research Aims	10
CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	11
2.1 Very Young Learners	12
2.1.2 VYL and EFL in Chile	12
2.2 Very Young Learners & Pronunciation	13
2.2.1 Acquisition of Consonant Sounds in L1	14
2.2.1.1 Normal Acquisition of Initial /s/ Consonant Clusters	15
2.2.2 Epenthesis in Intelligibility in the EFL context	16
2.2.3 Pronunciation Instruction and assessment with VYL	17
2.2.4 Pronunciation in the EFL Curriculum in Chile	18
2.3 Phonological Awareness & Alliteration	18
2.3.1 Phonological Awareness (PA) Interventions	19
2.3.2 Multisensory Approach to PA Interventions	19
2.4 EFL Teachers Perceptions on Pronunciation	21
2.5 Listening to Children's Voices	22
CHAPTER III: METHOD	25
3.1 Type of research	26
3.2 Participants	26
3.3 Research Question and Specific Objectives (SO)	27
3.4 Research Problem	27
3.5 Stages of the Action Research	28
3.5.1 Piloting	28
3.5.2 Intervention Sessions	28
3.5 Data collection techniques	29
3.5.1 Rating Scale	30
3.5.2 Participant Drawing Task and Interview	30

3.5.3 Self-Recorded Audio Diaries	31
3.6 Data Analysis Techniques	31
3.7 Ethical Considerations.....	32
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS.....	33
4.1.1 Pronunciation Rating Scale Results	34
4.1.2. Global Pronunciation Results	34
4.1.3. Individual Pronunciation Results	35
4.2 SO2: To explore students’ perceptions about the intervention and the use of multisensory materials.....	38
4.2.1 Use of Colour	38
4.2.2 Represented Activity	39
4.2.3 Subjects	41
4.3 SO3: To examine the teacher researcher’s self-perceptions of the intervention and the multisensory materials.....	43
4.3.1 Perceived Effectiveness	44
4.3.2 Pedagogical Awareness.....	46
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION	49
5.1 SO1: To assess students’ pronunciation of the initial /s/ consonant clusters /sk/, /sp/, and /st/ in different isolated lexical items when using the alliteration strategy. .	50
5.2 SO2: To explore students’ perceptions about the intervention and the use of multisensory materials.....	51
5.3 SO3: To examine the teacher researcher’s self-perceptions of the intervention and the multisensory materials.....	51
5.4 Implications for EFL for Very Young Learners.....	53
5.5 Limitations	53
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION.....	55
6.1 Summary of main findings.....	56
6.2 Personal Reflection	57
6.3 Recommendations	58
CHAPTER VII: REFERENCES	60
CHAPTER VIII: APPENDIX.....	68
Appendix A.....	69
Pronunciation Rating Scale	69
Appendix B.....	70

Interview Questions.....	70
Appendix C.....	71
Guidelines for keeping the audio diary	71

List of Figures (1-13)

Figure 1: Mean Age of Acquisition of Consonant Phonemes.....	15
Figure 2: A Schema for Empirical Enquiry into Disabled Children's Voices.....	23
Figure 3: Action Research Stages (own authorship)	28
Figure 4: Drawing Task and Interview Process.....	30
Figure 5: Assent Form Sample.....	32
Figure 6: Global Pronunciation Performance	34
Figure 7: Global Cluster Pronunciation Score Mean.....	36
Figure 8: Individual Pronunciation Score Mean of Cluster /st/	36
Figure 9: Individual Pronunciation Score Mean of Cluster /sp/	37
Figure 10: Individual Pronunciation Score Mean of Cluster /sk/	37
Figure 11: Drawing by Participant B	39
Figure 12: Drawing by Participant A	40
Figure 13: Book Pages Samples	41
Figure 14: <i>Drawing by Participant D</i>	42
Figure 15: <i>Summary of Dimensions, Themes, and Sub-themes</i>	43
Figure 16: Word Cloud of the Most Frequent Concepts mentioned in the Audio-Diaries	57

List of Tables

Table 1: Participants' Characteristics (own authorship).....	26
Table 2: Intervention Sessions.....	29
Table 3: Information sources to analyse students' perceptions	38
Table 4: Overview of the Coding Scheme Developed for the Drawings	38
Table 5: Theme: Active learning: Sub-themes, Frequency and Quote Examples ...	45
Table 6: Theme: Participation/ Engagement, Sub-themes, Frequency and Quote Examples	46
Table 7: Theme: Pedagogical Awareness, Sub-themes and Quote Examples	47

List of Acronyms

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

VYL: Very Young Learners

PA: Phonological Awareness

MINEDUC: Ministerio de Educación (Ministry of Education)

SO: Specific Objective

Abstract

Pronunciation with very young learners is a debated due to the trend of exposing students to English instruction as early as nursery school. This would be helpful for students' language skills based on the 'earlier the better' notion. Nonetheless, in Chile there is a lack of materials supporting the curriculum's pronunciation intelligibility aims. This report shares the outcomes of an action research study using alliteration through multisensory materials with a group of EFL very young learners in a private preschool in San Pedro de la Paz, Chile. A five-session intervention was designed to examine the influence on the pronunciation of three initial /s/ clusters (/sk, /sp, and /st/), and to explore the participants' and teacher-researcher's perceptions of the process. The activities to raise awareness of these initial /s/ clusters, included interacting with a puppet, games, and storytelling. Data was collected during a four-week period through a pronunciation rating scale, a drawing prompted interview, and audio diaries. Numerical data was analysed based on global and individual production, and qualitative data through Content Analysis. Findings suggest phonological awareness interventions using multisensory materials have a positive influence on preschoolers' pronunciation, recommending their implementation. Further studies are needed to explore similar strategies with preschoolers.

Keywords: phonological awareness intervention, action research, alliteration, EFL, preschool, very young learners

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1. Problem Statement

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in early childhood education under the notion that ‘the younger the better’, which states that the earlier students are exposed to English lessons the better their performance will be. This means that in many countries very young learners (VYL) are starting their lessons as early as pre-school and nursery level (Cadierno et al., 2020). In Chile, there is a rising concern in this area with a curriculum proposal that suggests guidelines for Pre-k and Kindergarten EFL lessons. Nonetheless, despite this growing increase in starting earlier EFL lessons, there is still a gap in speaking skills, particularly in pronunciation. This area is often not covered by the materials available by the government, despite it being one of the main objectives of the curriculum, which is a focus on intelligibility in speaking skills. Additionally, focusing on pronunciation at an early age seems to be effective, as young learners may develop better pronunciation skills than older learners and adults due to cognitive development between ages 4-6 (MINEDUC, 2022).

One common pronunciation issue is the initial /s/ clusters, which pose challenges for Spanish-speaking learners. In their native language, these clusters do not occur, leading to common errors such as epenthesis, where an extra vowel sound is added before the consonant cluster. If these errors are not treated early through explicit instructions (Naeini, 2017), they can affect intelligibility in speech later on (Haslam & Zetterholm, 2018). Conversely, these sounds can be acquired through the development of Phonological Awareness (PA), which is essential to early language development, particularly in the acquisition of pronunciation skills. There are different strategies used to develop phonological awareness, such as rhyming, alliteration, blending, among others. However, alliteration—the repetition of initial consonant sounds in words—has shown promise in studies using it as a strategy for very young learners (Soto, 2019; Sila, 2020).

1.2 Research Aims

This action research study explores the use of alliteration to support the pronunciation of initial /s/ consonant clusters (/sk/, /sp/, and /st/) using multisensory materials among pre-kindergarten EFL students in city, Chile. It examines the pronunciation of the initial /s/ clusters using a pronunciation. In addition, a drawing task and follow-up interviews provide insights into how students perceived the use of alliteration and the multisensory materials of the intervention in their language learning process. Moreover, it explores the teacher-researcher’s perception of the intervention. By evaluating the results from the different sources, this study seeks to offer insights into the contribution of alliteration as a phonological awareness strategy in EFL classrooms with very young learners. The findings of this pedagogical innovation are expected to contribute to early language education by providing educators with evidence-based strategies for addressing pronunciation challenges in young learners through multisensory materials and tools.

CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Very Young Learners

In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) world, there have been many terms used to refer to children learning a language from 0 – 4 years old including young learners, or very young learners (VYL). In this section we will look at how authors have defined these terms, to later discuss the term chosen for this study to define the target group.

Some authors in the field emphasize the importance of clearly defining terminology in research to ensure a precise and comprehensive representation of the target group (e.g. Nikolov, 2016; McKay, 2006). In Nikolov's (2016) study the definition of 'young learners' pertains to students aged between 6 and 14 who are in the process of acquiring a second language. Similarly, McKay (2006) defines young learners as children ranging from 5 to 12 years old engaged in learning a foreign language or a second language. These slightly different interpretations of the age range within the category of young learners highlight the variability that exists in the field of EFL when establishing such definitions.

Regarding learners that are younger than 6 years old, Mourao and Ellis (2020) argue that the concept of "very young learners", commonly used in the English language teaching (ELT) world does not specify the age of the learners which could be misinterpreted. Moreover, they suggest instead the use of the concept "pre-primary children" *which refers to children between three years old and beginning primary education*". (Mourao & Ellis, 2020, p.9). Additionally, the use of the word "child" or "children" instead of student, appeals to their view of them as competent, insightful learners. In contrast to the word "student" or "pupil" which can be confused with older learners. (Mourao & Ellis, 2020). In this study, we will use the term "very young learners (VYL)" as to refer to pre-primary children.

This is an important differentiation for the study as it defines the target group and helps the study remain relevant in addressing the specific characteristics and the developmental phases of the children who are not yet enrolled in primary education. The concept used in this study will be of "very young learners" to refer to preschoolers aged 3 to 6.

2.1.2 VYL and EFL in Chile

In Europe, early language learning has been promoted since the early 2000s. For instance, Enever's 2011 ELLiE (English Language Learning in Europe) report offers a comprehensive overview of early language learning initiatives and policies across European countries, showing that English is the most introduced foreign language across Europe. In her analysis, both challenges and advantages of successful foreign language learning are discussed (Enever, 2011).

According to Enever (2011), aspects observed in successful foreign language programs include high status of the subject, continuous learning, and international projects that support interculturality. Regarding successful teacher qualities, the study found that they create a positive environment that supports the use of the L2, enjoy teaching the language, and keep students on task. On the other hand, some challenges are the curriculum design and the need to emphasize playful methods for young children, and the need for specialized teacher training to effectively teach young

learners. Finally, drawbacks faced by different countries in implementing early language programs are resource allocation and teacher preparedness (Enever, 2011).

These issues are consistent with more recent studies, such as Prošić-Santovac and Savić (2021) that mention problems such as the type of program and exposure to English, appropriateness of approaches and methods used, curriculum development, teacher qualifications and their English proficiency, availability and adequacy of resources, assessment of children's progress, continuity of language learning, and parents' role and support.

Despite of the growing global incorporation of EFL into primary education, research about teaching English to young learners (ages 5–11) in Chile remains minimal (Inostroza, 2018a, 2018b; Inostroza et al., 2024). This is supported by Ulloa Salazar and Díaz Larenas (2018) who mention of a lack of studies in Chile regarding strategies that improve the teaching of English to young learners and the need for more research in the area and innovative approaches.

In Chile, research specifically focusing on VYL is scarce; however, there are some insights about the use of different types of materials. For example, a study carried out by Ulloa Salazar & Díaz Larenas (2018). with kindergarteners reveals that the use of audiovisual materials-based teaching strategies, such as using flashcards and videos, could enhance comprehension, motivation, and performance but emphasizes the relevance of consistency in their use

A more recent study with a similar target group found that the use of memory and bingo games showed to be beneficial in enhancing students' oral English skills, supporting their motivation, and creating opportunities for meaningful practice (Werlinger & Inostroza, 2024). Similarly, Aros Orellana's (2021) study on EFL strategies for learners aged 5-7 identified effective strategies such as using realia, songs, and body language to support their learning. It revealed that some effective strategies with this type of student are: *1 Activities using realia 2. Using songs, chants, and rhymes to practice speaking 3. Establishing classroom routines 4. Correcting errors in choral repetition 5. Student-centred activities 6. Using body language.* These were the top strategies analysed that have been used by EFL teachers in the Metropolitan region in Chile.

This gap in empirical studies reflects a need for further exploration into the specific challenges, and effective strategies related to teaching English as a Foreign Language to children in the Chilean educational system.

2.2 Very Young Learners & Pronunciation

The teaching of pronunciation to very young learners (VYL) is supported by some studies that show the benefits for improvement and accuracy (e.g. Lasagabaster, 2008; Richards et al., 2017). Nonetheless, EFL teachers face challenges when teaching pronunciation to VYL due to the characteristics of this target group.

Research suggests that starting EFL instruction at a young age can have a positive impact on pronunciation development. For instance, a study by Lasagabaster (2008)

found that 3-year-old preschoolers who received EFL instruction for 15 minutes a week showed significant improvement in pronunciation over a 6-month period.

Moreover, a study by Richards, Burt, and Freeman (2017) found that preschoolers who received explicit pronunciation instruction showed significant improvement in their pronunciation accuracy compared to those who did not receive such instruction. The effective teaching strategies identified in the study (Richards et al., 2017) encompass a range of techniques such as modelling, repetition, drills, engaging games and songs, and provision of constructive feedback. These methods were found to significantly contribute to the overall improvement of pronunciation skills in young language learners, underlining the importance of structured and intentional pronunciation instruction in educational settings.

However, teaching pronunciation to very young learners can be challenging due to their limited attention span, lack of phonological awareness, and individual differences in cognitive and linguistic development (Richards et al., 2017). Some recommendations for teaching pronunciation to preschoolers include keeping lessons short and engaging, using visual aids, focusing on functional language use, and encouraging peer-to-peer interaction and collaboration.

One study that analysed pronunciation issues in English preschool classrooms in Nigeria (Ekanem et al., 2022) found various challenges. For instance, pronunciation is often considered one of the most challenging aspects of second language learning for both teachers and students due to the complexity of phonological features. Students can face hesitation and show a lack of confidence. It also found that it is a neglected aspect of the language often overlooked in favour of skills tested in examinations. The most crucial challenge being the lack of sufficient resources and systematic support. These challenges suggest the need for supportive strategies and use of resources that are adequate to the needs of preschoolers.

2.2.1 Acquisition of Consonant Sounds in L1

Various studies (Crowe & McLeod, 2020; Edwards, 2008) have been made on the mastery of consonant sounds by English native speakers, which reveal that children seem to acquire these sounds in a specific order.

One study that described English consonant acquisition by 18,907 children living in the United States (Crowe & McLeod, 2020) revealed that on average, 13 consonants (including all plosives, nasals, and glides) were acquired between 2;0 (years; months), and 3;11 (years; months) (/p, b, t, d, k, g, m, n, ŋ, f, h, j, w/), seven additional consonants were acquired between 4;0 and 4;11 (/v, s, z, ʃ, l, tʃ, dʒ/), and the remaining four consonants were acquired between 5;0 and 6;11 (/ð, ʒ, ɹ, θ/).

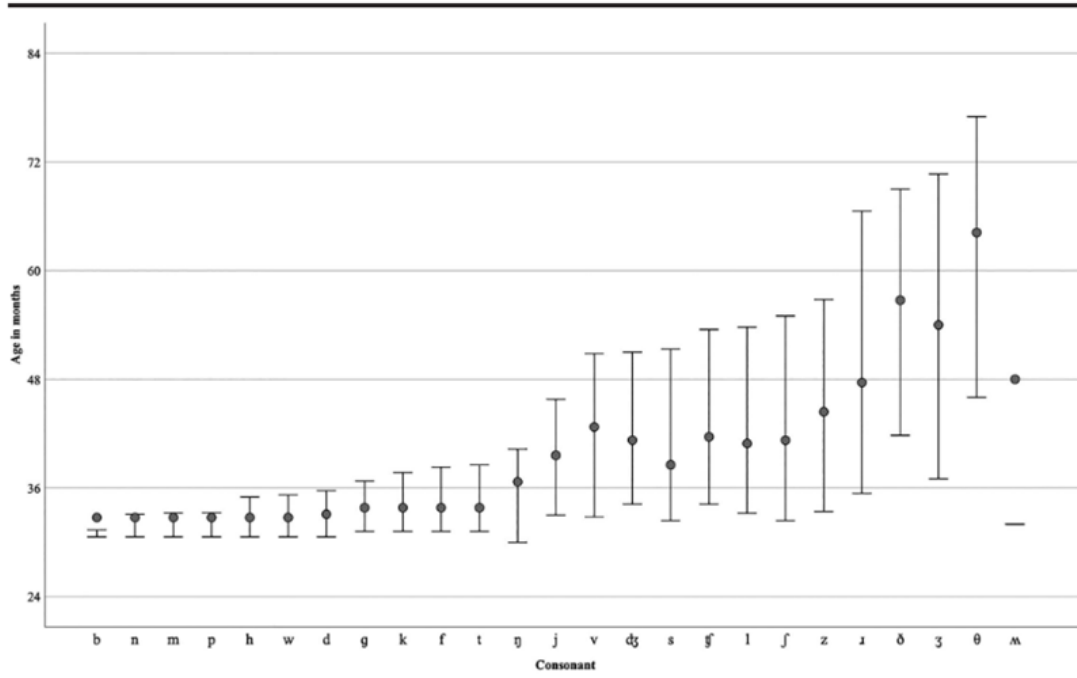
Focusing on fricatives and plosive sounds as outlined in this study, it was observed that plosive sounds such as /t, k, p/ are typically acquired by children before reaching the age of 3, equivalent to 36 months (about 3 years). Contrarily, the acquisition of the fricative sound /s/ tends to occur after the age of 3. This developmental pattern is elucidated in Figure 1 below, which provides detailed information on the average age at which children acquire various consonant phonemes.

Similar results can be found in the case of Spanish consonants. One study examining the production of 3, 5, and 11 years old in Chile (Vivar & Leon, 2009), found that their

children at the age of 3 have over 80% of normal consonant articulation. Moreover, the consonants showing the highest difficulty were the fricatives and liquids /l/-/lh/ - /r/. On the other hand, the sounds with the lowest acquisition difficulty were the nasal and occlusive consonants.

Figure 1

Mean Age of Acquisition of Consonant Phonemes



Note. Reprinted from *Children's English Consonant Acquisition in the United States: A Review*, (p.8), by Crowe & McLeod, 2020, *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, Copyright 2020 by Kathryn Crowe and Sharynne McLeod.

2.2.1.1 Normal Acquisition of Initial /s/ Consonant Clusters

A consonant cluster is a group of consonants that appear together in a syllable without intervening vowels. Consonant clusters can occur at the beginning (e.g., "spl" in "split"), in the middle (e.g., "lkst" in "milks"), or at the end (e.g., "nd" in "hand") of a word. (Crystal, 2008) As shown by the aforementioned examples, they can happen at initial, mid, or final position in word. In this section, we will focus on initial /s/ consonant clusters.

Regarding consonant clusters in English, one-third of the monosyllable words begin with a consonant cluster (McLeod et al., 2001). This predominance of clusters has made them of particular interest to teachers of English focusing on pronunciation. Despite the relevance of clusters, the literature on the specific age of acquisition and clusters is limited since most studies on the age of acquisition and phonological development are limited to single phonemes (Huo & Wang, 2017).

In McLeod and Crowe's cross linguistic study (2008), they reviewed data from speakers' production of over 27 languages including: Dutch, Italian, Turkish, Spanish,

among others. Results showed that trills, flaps, fricatives, and affricates were learned later than plosives, nasals, and nonpulmonic consonants (such as clicks). In comparison to consonants with anterior tongue location, the majority of labial, pharyngeal, and posterior lingual consonants were acquired sooner. Plosives and nasals generated with anterior tongue placement, on the other hand, were acquired earlier than anterior trills, fricatives, and approximations.

In another study of McLeod, Reed, and Doorn (2001) assessed consonant clusters acquisition of English and other languages including Spanish. Results showed that in terms of the initial consonant clusters /st/, /sp/, and /sk/, it was assessed that most children master these clusters by the age of 4.0 (years, months) (McLeod et al., 2001).

2.2.2 Epenthesis in Intelligibility in the EFL context

Crystal (2008) defines Epenthesis as characterized by the insertion of an additional phoneme or sound segment within a given word. This linguistic phenomenon is frequently noted for its role in facilitating smoother pronunciation or for adhering to the specific phonotactic constraints in a particular language. The strategic employment of epenthesis serves to enhance the overall fluency of speech, as it assists speakers in articulating words with greater ease and conforming to the intricate phonological patterns inherent to their native tongue. Furthermore, one of the reasons to treat initial /s/ consonant clusters is to prevent the addition of an extra vowel at the beginning of words, which happens with speakers of Spanish, and can cause comprehensibility problems (Martinez & Tremblay, 2013). Moreover, results in Martinez & Tremblay's study of Spanish and German speakers' production of initial consonant clusters and epenthesis suggests that perception difficulties may be partially responsible for Spanish speakers' production and word-recognition difficulties with initial /s/ clusters in English.

However, production data suggest that articulatory problems may also play an important role. In addition, in their study, Martinez & Tremblay (2013) found that proficiency alone does not seem to help overcome this difficulty. This last point suggests the need for explicit pronunciation treatment for this phenomenon.

In another study regarding epenthesis, Haslam and Zetterholm (2019) found that the presence of an extra initial vowel was the second most common reason for a mismatch in the results of intelligibility of English as a Lingua Franca, the first one being the elision of a consonant in a cluster. The placement of the epenthetic vowel also influenced whether listeners could accurately identify the intended word structure, particularly affecting initial clusters more than final ones. This insight supports the notion that maintaining the integrity of consonant clusters seems to be significant for intelligibility in non-native speech.

Therefore, due to the relevance of consonant clusters in the English language (McLeod et al., 2001) and their impact on intelligibility (Haslam & Zetterholm, 2019), it could be beneficial to develop a deeper understanding into how to support the product of consonant clusters.

2.2.3 Pronunciation Instruction and assessment with VYL

In terms of pronunciation instruction with VYL, literature states that we should consider the following aspects: developmental abilities, exposure of the target language, repetition and practice, and the use of a multisensory approach (Garton & Copland, 2017). Regarding, the assessment of pronunciation with this target group can be done through hands-on activities for example through picture and word matching (Pinter, 2006) with the avoidance of written tests. Both pronunciation instruction and assessment are discussed in this section.

Teaching pronunciation to VYL is supported by studies showing benefits in accuracy improvement from interventions with preschoolers. For instance, Lasagabaster (2008) found that 3-year-olds who received 15 minutes of EFL instruction per week showed improvements in their pronunciation within six months. Similarly, Richards et al. (2017) observed that explicit pronunciation instruction led to significant accuracy improvements in preschoolers.

In terms of pronunciation instruction and developmental abilities, Garton and Copland (2010) emphasize the importance of age-appropriate language instruction, including pronunciation, tailored to the cognitive and developmental skills of young learners. These include young learners' capacity for intuitive learning, curiosity and enthusiasm, imitation and mimicry, which could be exploited in activities (Garton & Copland, 2010).

Regarding the exposure of the target language, in EFL contexts, most students have a limited number of English lessons per week (2-3 hours) (Philominraj et al., 2019). This might have a negative impact on pronunciation as Lightbown and Spada (2013) state that the role of input and exposure in language acquisition is key. Furthermore, VYLs benefit greatly from immersion in natural language environments for developing pronunciation skills.

Finally, in terms of the type of exposure, Puchta and Williams (2004) emphasize the importance of repetition and practice in language learning for young learners, through songs, chants, and games. Moreover, the activities suggested followed multisensory approaches. This point will be further discussed in **section 2.3.2** multisensory approaches to PA.

Concerning assessing pronunciation in preschoolers, it usually does not involve written tests since very young learners often have not mastered their literacy skills yet. Instead, oral and interactive methods are used to evaluate their pronunciation. These approaches emphasize the importance of gradual skill development through playful and engaging activities rather than formal written tests, aligning with the natural learning progression of preschoolers (Cameron, 2001). Some suggested assessments tools to use with very young language learners include observation notes, listening and repetition exercises, picture and word matching, voice recording and playback, and finally rubrics and checklists. (Cameron, 2001; Celce-Murcia, et. Al., 2010; Pinter, 2017; Levis, 2016; Mckay, 2006)

2.2.4 Pronunciation in the EFL Curriculum in Chile

The subject of pronunciation, which has a focus on intelligibility in the Chilean curriculum, has been a matter of controversy due to the inconsistency between the objectives, and the materials offered (textbooks), in addition to a lack of activities to support pronunciation. The study by Bustos and Millar (2020) analysed the materials and the curriculum's learning objectives, as well as the rationale behind what a curriculum proposal should consider for English in non-mandatory levels (pre-k to 4th grade).

In Bustos and Millar (2020) study of 5th grade's material, they concluded that a limited number of objectives from the textbooks are devoted to pronunciation (2 out of 16 learning objectives). Nonetheless, this does not correlate to the expectations of the curriculum on pronunciation which states that at the end of their learning process 5th grade students should *communicate an intelligible message with proper pronunciation* (MINEDUC, 2016). This number of objectives for pronunciation is deemed insufficient by the authors (Bustos & Millas, 2020). Second, there seems to be a lack of activities and specific guidelines to teach pronunciation. In their study, Bustos & Millar (2020) found that most exercises that target it are devoted to just identifying sounds rather than producing them. Most of the activities are embedded in vocabulary exercises, focusing on repeating sounds or doing minimal pair work.

Third, judging by the exercises described in the 5th Grade English textbook (MINEDUC, 2015), pronunciation is to be taught implicitly through the teaching of vocabulary (Bustos & Millar, 2020). This is alarming, knowing that literature on EFL pronunciation and feedback favours explicit teaching over implicit to reduce errors (Naeini, 2017).

In Arellano et al. (2019) study on curriculum proposals rationale for young learners in Chile (grades 1-4) and early years education, pronunciation is mentioned as a *key factor* to consider when designing a curriculum for a school program in early primary years.

Finally, since 2022 there are two curriculum proposals for English at Pre-primary level: Pre-K and Kindergarten. The proposal for pre-k students (NT1) states that regarding pronunciation students should be able to correctly produce sounds of the English language that could interfere with communication in key or frequent words (MINEDUC, 2022). In addition, it is suggested that young learners develop better pronunciation in foreign languages than older learners and adults, possibly due to their cognitive capacity and language skill increase during ages 4-6 (MINEDUC, 2022).

We could conclude that both the proposals and the official curriculum consider pronunciation as an essential element in an EFL classroom with very young learners (VYL), who could potentially achieve an intelligible pronunciation.

2.3 Phonological Awareness & Alliteration

Phonological awareness has been defined as the ability to mentally manipulate the speech stream into smaller and smaller parts (Goldsworthy, 2012). This ability allows us to identify different sounds in words (initial, middle, and final sounds) and thus produce them correctly. It is under the umbrella of Phonology and presented as one

of the basic skills for speaking and listening, which are the foundation of the development of reading and writing skills (Kung, 2020).

One of the basic phonological awareness skills for children to acquire is the capacity to recognize initial sounds, as it is through identification that they can distinguish different sounds and words. This recurrent use of the initial sound across various words in phrases or sentences is called Alliteration (Carruth, 2019). Being an integral strategy, alliteration is often incorporated into phonological awareness interventions alongside rhyming, segmentation, and onset and rime (Sila, 2020). In empirical research, interventions using these strategies have been examined extensively. The subsequent discussion will examine some studies that have explored the efficacy and impact of these interventions on very young language learners' phonological awareness development.

2.3.1 Phonological Awareness (PA) Interventions

The development of a phonological intervention for English language learners is a multifaceted process that needs careful consideration of the students' proficiency level and age group. Normally, phonological intervention programs encompass a range of strategies. For instance, activities to develop identification, rhyming, and alliteration, which target early phonological awareness skills (Soto, 2019; Sila, 2020). As students' progress in their learning journey, more advanced activities like blending and segmenting are introduced to enhance their basic awareness of phonological components. For learners demonstrating a higher level of phonological proficiency, interventions may incorporate activities focused on deletion, substitution, reversal, and general manipulation to further refine their advanced awareness of phonological structures (Kung, 2020).

Phonological Awareness (PA) Intervention programs for preschool children including alliteration activities have shown positive results. For example, one study in Slovenia with preschool students implementing an L2 P A intervention and movement showed that the participants improved their production of rhymes, alliteration, and segmentation (Sila, 2020). In another Phonological Awareness Intervention with bilingual Latino preschoolers ages 3-5 in the U.S., results showed that students could transfer their skills from one language to the other, and improved their overall language proficiency (Soto, 2019). Both studies (Sila, 2020; Soto, 2019) highlight the benefits of implementing these types of interventions for very young learners.

2.3.2 Multisensory Approach to PA Interventions

The common element in most phonological awareness interventions with very young learners seems to be the multisensory aspect of the techniques which include visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic elements.

Regarding visual and kinaesthetic elements, Sapi'ee and Tan's (2020) study with rural ESL learners from Malaysia, a PA program was designed to increase students' literacy in the target language as English is taught as an L2. In their intervention, each letter

and sound that was taught had a corresponding and accompanying distinct hues and movements. For instance, the visual image of the word "ant" is associated with the letter "a," which generates the /æ/ sound. Chin patting is a gesture that indicates the generation of a certain phoneme; however, it can only be performed in the region designated for the face (the place of articulation). Additional learning exercises in the learning repertoire included creating letters with clay, connecting dots, phoneme, syllable, and word ensembles, and shoulder-arm-hand motions. The results were positive as after the intervention, students demonstrated a high understanding of initial phoneme detection, onset-rime, and syllables (Sapi'ee & Tan, 2020).

Other PA interventions with visual, auditory and kinaesthetic elements have shown to be successful. In Derby's (2020) study investigating the impact of a multi-kinaesthetic method that combines visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic elements, the "See the Sound/ Visual Phonic" (usually used with deaf students) was used to assess the potential in hearing preschool students' phonological skills. This method provides a visual cue, as well as a physical association with the sound. The study's findings showed that See the Sound/Visual Phonics has the potential to be a useful tool for fostering better phonological awareness abilities in a range of students.

See the Sound/Visual Phonics (hereafter STS/VP) is an instructional curriculum that improves phonological awareness by using hand-shape cues and corresponding written symbols to represent all English language sounds. This multisensory approach is not a communication system but an intervention to make the sounds of the English language more accessible to a variety of learners. Hand cues and cue cards are unique and kinaesthetically tied to mouth production, providing visual and tactile representations of individual phonemes and phonemic information. For instance, the sound of the /t/ phoneme by, "*flicking the index finger off of the thumb [which] emulates the release of the tongue from the alveolar ridge when producing /t/*". (Montgomery, 2008, p. 177). The results of the study indicated that See the Sound/Visual Phonics may potentially serve as a tool to use with a variety of students to promote improved phonological awareness skills.

Various studies have explored the effectiveness of incorporating kinaesthetic elements in teaching pronunciation in the EFL classroom. One noteworthy example is the research conducted by Martinez (2020) on the pronunciation of consonant blends /sp/ among third graders in Ecuador. The study involved utilizing kinaesthetic methods such as clapping and standing up to reinforce the correct articulation of this sound. The research's outcomes revealed a significant improvement in pronunciation accuracy, indicating that the integration of kinaesthetic teaching strategies can optimize pronunciation instruction in EFL settings. This evidence underscores the value of incorporating physical movement and tactile experiences to enhance the learning of pronunciation skills among English language learners.

Furthermore, the author recommends teaching pronunciation explicitly through kinaesthetic techniques, as it provides a better learning context for students to improve English sound production. Although, some suggestions were made regarding the length of an intervention, implying that a longer intervention might lead to long term retention (Martinez, 2020).

2.4 EFL Teachers Perceptions on Pronunciation

The teaching of pronunciation is a challenge for EFL teachers due to the complexity of its nature (Ekanem et al., 2022). Therefore, studying teachers' perceptions and beliefs on it is a compelling topic. In this section, we will examine the definition of perception, teachers' perceptions on pronunciation in EFL, and finally teachers' perception of pronunciation teaching with VYL.

Perceptions are defined as the base of analysis of phenomena based on internal factors: need, suitability, knowledge, and experiences, and the external factor which is stimuli received from the environment. Although, internal factors seem to play a significant role in determining perception (Harwanasera, 2016). Due to the nature of perception, every person may have a different perception. Their importance in research lies in the insights they provide on how teachers view their own teaching contexts, students, and the approach that they use. These could also shed light on the gap between theory and practice in the EFL world.

For example, a study conducted by Jafari et al. (2022) explored the perceptions of Iranian EFL teachers regarding pronunciation instruction in the classroom. The findings revealed that a significant majority of teachers, totalling 57%, frequently incorporated the teaching of suffixes, word stress, and syllable structure into their pronunciation lessons. Despite the acknowledged importance of effective pronunciation instruction, the study uncovered a notable gap in teachers' self-perceived levels of competence in this area. Many of the EFL teachers surveyed expressed a lack of confidence in their proficiency and felt inadequately equipped to address pronunciation challenges in the classroom. Consequently, a prevailing feeling among the educators was the desire for additional training and professional development opportunities focused specifically on pronunciation pedagogy within teacher education programs (Jafari et al., 2022). This could suggest a recognition among Iranian EFL teachers for further support and resources to enhance their expertise in teaching pronunciation effectively.

Although most teachers integrate pronunciation activities in their regular lessons (Jafari et al., 2022), in some cases pronunciation is taught in a different class devoted to this area only (Quoc et al., 2021). In another study of Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions and practices on pronunciation (Quoc et al., 2021), teachers are allowed to focus on individual problems in pronunciation classes, using corrective feedback and explicit techniques. In this context, teachers state that the variety of materials, including audios and phonetic alphabet, enhances lesson content. Moreover, non-native speakers can serve as models for Vietnamese learners. Finally, most teachers mention that pronunciation presents unique challenges, requiring controlled practice before integrating with communicative activities (Quoc et al., 2021).

Regarding younger learners, in Baltanás (2018) research on the role of pronunciation with VYLs and teachers' beliefs and concerns, revealed positive beliefs about pronunciation. The study revealed that all interviewed teachers expressed that pronunciation is either "very" or "quite important" in their classes. However, only 75% of these educators reported having received formal training in pronunciation instruction. Interestingly, when asked about the appropriate age to begin teaching pronunciation, 80% of the teachers indicated that Nursery (ages 0-3) or Preschool (ages 3-6) is ideal. In contrast, 20% of them believed that Primary school students

(ages 6-12) or age has no impact on the timing of English language acquisition. This reveals a significant consensus among educators regarding the value of early pronunciation teaching (Baltanás, 2018).

Teachers' perspectives suggest a consensus regarding the significance of incorporating pronunciation instruction in the early stages of language learning. Despite the widespread recognition of this importance, many EFL educators have not undergone specific training in this aspect of teaching (Baltanás, 2018). Consequently, these viewpoints align closely with the requirements outlined in Chile's national curriculum, which underline the necessity of integrating pronunciation teaching practices into language education from an early age to ensure comprehensive and effective language development among students.

2.5 Listening to Children's Voices

The voices of children, especially when considering preschoolers learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are facing language lessons for the very first time. This section will deal with the reasons to listen to children's voices, some challenges, and techniques to explore them.

Children's voices are crucial in understanding their perspectives and their ways of learning in our EFL classrooms. The fact that pronouncing words is such a great challenge to the young learners means that there is a lot that they can share with adults in terms of their experience, materials and type of instruction. Implementing action research with preschoolers allows for them to be at the centre of their learning process. Most importantly, action research allows teachers to reflect on their pedagogy with the knowledge collected from the children are a part of the study (Burns, 2010). Another reason to explore their voices is for them to become aware of the learning process, as they practice reflection they can look and review their learning. As Mourao and Ellis (2020) state children's views on their learning experiences can and should be explored as they are much more aware than people expect.

Moreover, researcher Murray (2019) argues that recognizing children as active participants in their own lives leads to more effective educational practices and policies. She advocates for the implementation of age-appropriate, child-centered research methods to authentically capture children's perspectives, moving beyond traditional adult-derived approaches.

Since children's voices are often marginalised, studies suggest that placing them at the centred could allow for better policies and practices. Although the following figure (Figure 2) was originally centred around disabled children, Carpenter and McConkey (2012) emphasize that their schema has adaptability to all children, as it could be tested through empirical studies that explore whether its elements (e.g., the emphasis on children's voices, family and societal context, and policy influence) are true across diverse populations of children.

Figure 2

A Schema for Empirical Enquiry into Disabled Children's Voices.



Note. Reprinted from *Disabled Children's Voices: The Nature and Role of Future Empirical Enquiry*.

Despite this relevance, there are some challenges of listening to children's voices. While on one hand, there is clear belief that they do not have the degree of metacognitive knowledge to reflect; on the other hand, it is the difficulty to find tools that unveil their thoughts. According to Mourao & Ellis (2020) some of the tools that could help to access their voices are drawing pictures after being given some prompts, or the use of puppets to interact with students. Other authors (Cremin & Slatter, 2004) suggest the use of observation, interviews, and photographs to explore children's voices. Nonetheless, this complexity can add to a more nuanced and layered comprehension of their views, which can be achieved through using student-centred and creative methods.

Empirical studies on children's voices emphasize the relevance of including multiple student-centred techniques to collect the data. One study with four-year-olds in a nursery (Cremin & Slatter, 2004) included semi-structured interviews with both parents and staff, observation of children's choice of play activities, and asking students to take and choose photographs to explore their views on educational settings. The inclusion of three methods allowed for the triangulation of information. Another empirical study (Jadue-Roa & Whitebread, 2012), that was carried out with two children in Chile to explore their transition to first grade, used photograph interviews, a qualitative research technique that uses photos to help children share their experiences. The study revealed some emotional challenges for students as well as the development of their agency. Additionally, Inözü's (2018) study used drawings and informal interviews to explore children's narratives in the EFL classroom, revealing that students saw their learning experience as a formal subject, and with the teacher as a main subject in their drawings.

These studies underline the complexity of exploring perceptions and finding adequate techniques or the combination of methods to do research with young learners, as there

is not a one definite tool to explore their voices. These techniques offer different angles on the students' perspectives, for instance, using photographs might prompt answers in certain ways to allow for follow-up questions, whereas drawings can offer insights into the children's view of their world through colours, shapes, and other features of their creations.

CHAPTER III
METHOD

3.1 Type of research

The present study is action research as it calls for a planned intervention that purposefully implements specific strategies and procedures inside the study's context, which is the use of alliteration as a strategy in a pre-primary classroom. Therefore, it bears the following characteristics: it is a contextualized planned intervention, it could provide a deeper understanding of supporting young learners' pronunciation, as well as self-reflection of the teacher-researcher's practices in the classroom.

According to Burns (2010), action research is a systematic inquiry by teachers to gather information about schools, teaching methods, and student learning outcomes, aiming to gain insight, develop reflective practice, and improve educational practices. Pedagogical action research can inform educators about how various approaches can be used to investigate students' perspectives (Niemi, 2019), hence providing insights that could promote critical thinking and a deeper understanding, adjusting the teacher's practice. This action research could be incredibly beneficial in exploring teaching pronunciation to very young learners since studies focused on very young language learners in the EFL Chilean context are limited. Moreover, this type of research allows for the teacher-researcher's reflection throughout the intervention with audio diaries which are employed in two different contexts: in a contemplative sense, primarily as a means of awareness, and in an active sense, as a tool for change. (Luttenberg et al.2017).

3.2 Participants

The following action research was implemented in a private Nursery School from San Pedro de la Paz, Chile. It considered a convenience sample of 4 participants, 2 female and 2 male (3.5 to 4 years old) students from a multi-grade level Nursery and Pre-K (See Table 1). This is a type of non-probability sampling where participants of the target population meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, or availability at a given time (Etikan et al., 2016). In this case, the participants were selected based on their individual characteristics such as their age, first language proficiency, and availability to attend the sessions, as they took place in the morning and afternoon nursery hours.

Table 1

Participants' Characteristics (own authorship)

Participant	Age	Years of English Instruction	Hours of Exposure (Two 45 minutes lessons per week)
Child 1	4	1 year	54
Child 2	4	1 year	54
Child 3	4	0 year	0
Child 4	3 years old 7 months	1 year	54

Considering the students' developmental language, only students who were 3.5 years old and older were considered. The activities were part of the regular lessons, and all

students were encouraged to participate. Moreover, the majority have had one year of English lessons with the same teacher before, henceforth they were familiar with the structure and pace of the lessons.

3.3 Research Question and Specific Objectives (SO)

This study seeks answer the following research question:

How does the use of alliteration as a phonological awareness strategy to contribute to the pronunciation of words with initial /s/ clusters among Chilean EFL pre-school students?

Particularly, it aims to address three specific objectives:

- **Specific Objective 1:** To assess students' pronunciation of the initial /s/ consonant clusters /sk/, /sp/, and /st/ in different isolated lexical items when using the alliteration strategy,
- **Specific Objective 2:** to explore students' perceptions about the intervention and the use of multisensory materials, and
- **Specific Objective 3:** to examine the teacher researcher's self-perceptions of the intervention and the multisensory materials.

3.4 Research Problem

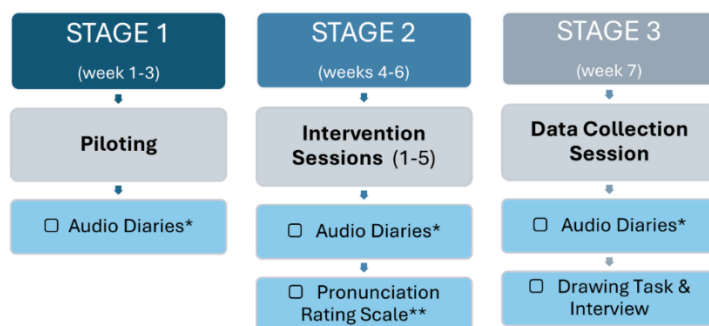
In 2022, the Chilean National Curriculum included for the first-time proposals for teaching English at pre-primary levels. The proposal for pre-k states students should be able to correctly produce sounds of the English language that could interfere with communication in key or frequent words (MINEDUC, 2022). In terms of young learners' speaking skills, young learners are deemed to develop their pronunciation skills in a foreign language better than older learners and adults (Caleffi,2023). Nevertheless, it was observed that in a private nursery school in San Pedro de la Paz, a group of pre-k mispronounced particular words with initial /s/-clusters, during choral repetition or vocabulary review activities. Children tend to add an additional sound at the beginning of an initial cluster, a phenomenon known as epenthesis (Crystal, 2008). The issue was particularly noticed since the lessons are focused on listening and speaking skills. Moreover, this could cause epenthesis to potentially become fossilized and cause intelligibility problems. According to Haslam's (2019) study regarding epenthesis, it has been shown that the addition of an /e/ sound before a cluster is one of the main causes of mispronunciation of English as a lingua franca. Additionally, there is a need to reinforce the limited pronunciation teaching resources provided by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC). To address this matter, the use of alliteration as a phonological awareness strategy to support students' pronunciation of words with initial /s/ cluster could provide insights on teaching pronunciation to very young learners.

3.5 Stages of the Action Research

In the span of about two months, there were three stages considered in this Action Research, namely piloting stage, intervention sessions (5), and the drawing task and interview session (See Figure 1).

Figure 3

Action Research Stages (own authorship)



Data Collection Techniques

*Audio Diaries were recorded after every session.

**The Pronunciation Rating Scale was used in sessions 1,3, and 5.

3.5.1 Piloting






In this stage, the three instruments were piloted with different participants of the same age group, as well as validated by other experts. The audio diaries guidelines, adapted from *Evaluating the audio-diary method in qualitative research* by Williamson et al. (2015), were piloted by the teacher-researcher, and not the participants, since this instrument is meant to gather data for the teacher-researcher's perceptions. The objective was to assess the accuracy and consistency of the instruments, and to make any necessary refinements. The rating scale which was meant to be used for on-the-spot assessment, was changed to a recording and later assessment of the students' production. The audio diaries guidelines were expanded with more detailed prompts, which increased the audios' length from 13 to 20 minutes each. The piloting of the drawing task evidenced the need of doing that session completely in the students' L1, Spanish. Moreover, the decision to purchase materials for each student was made instead of using the available supplies which are community supplies, and are shared by all students.

3.5.2 Intervention Sessions

The intervention plan included five sessions to promote the production of words with the initial /s/ consonant clusters /sk/, /sp/, and /st/ in different isolated lexical items when using the alliteration strategy with multisensory materials. A summary with the sessions and the multisensory materials used is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Intervention Sessions

Sessions	Procedure	Research Objective	Materials Sample
Week 1 - Session 1	Production of words with initial /s/ clusters using flashcards	SO1	
Week 2 - Session 2	Discrimination of words with initial /s/ clusters using flashcards (target and non-target words)	SO1	
Week 2 - Session 3	Production of words with initial /s/ clusters using a puppet	SO1	
Week 3- Session 4	Production of words with initial /s/ clusters through storytelling	SO1	
Week 3 - Session 5	Production of words with initial /s/ clusters through storytelling	SO1	

During the last week, the participants took part in a drawing task followed by an interview to assess their perceptions (**SO2**). The procedure is further described in the next section.

3.5 Data collection techniques

Three instruments were used in this action research study: a rating scale, audio diaries, and a participant drawing task followed by an interview. The rating scale was used to assess students' progress in their pronunciation of words with the target clusters during sessions 1,3, and 5. Audio diaries were recorded after each session (1-5) to examine the teacher-researcher's self-perceptions of intervention and the multisensory materials. Finally, there was a participant drawing task and interview in which the participants draw their perceptions after the intervention followed by a verbal interview to gain further insights on their experiences.

3.5.1 Rating Scale

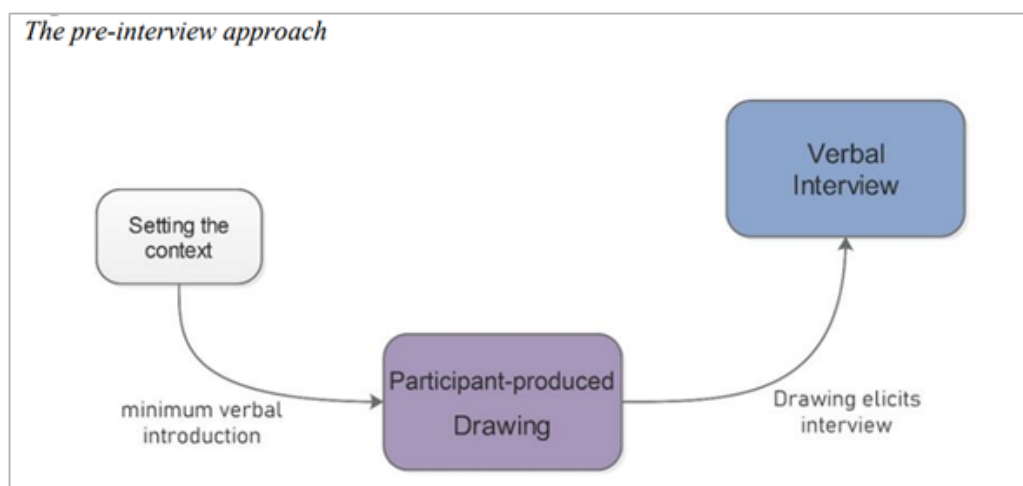
In terms of assessing pronunciation, the process can be done through audio recording and later assessment, or the assessment and scoring can be carried out at the same time by a human rater (Pennington, 2019). This study assesses pronunciation using the first method (audio recording and later analysis). When working with human assessors as opposed to speech recognition, as is the case of this study, rating scales can be used to evaluate pronunciation. The rating scale considered three dimensions (one for each cluster): the pronunciation of words with initial clusters /st/, /sk/, and /sp/. For instance, in the first session, students performed some choral and then individual repetition of the target words using alliteration. During the individual repetition, the teacher assessed the participants' pronunciation using the rating scale (See Appendix A). Each word uttered was assessed in terms of “expected pronunciation”, “other pronunciation”, “partially correct pronunciation”, and “no pronunciation”. These categories were devised to assess progress and students trying to pronounce the words throughout the intervention. Participants were familiar with most of the targeted lexical words as the English lessons was aligned with the content they see in Spanish. (e.g. They learn about family members after or at the same they learned about them in Spanish). The words were selected from this and previous years' units. This was because the focus was completely on pronunciation of the words, not on the teaching of new vocabulary.

3.5.2 Participant Drawing Task and Interview

A participant drawing task and interview were conducted to collect information on the students' perceptions. This pre-interview approach requires a minimal verbal introduction to prompt the drawing, followed by a verbal interview elicited by the drawing (Brailas, 2020). The sequence is the following: setting the context, participant drawing task, and verbal interview as illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 4

Drawing Task and Interview Process



Note: Taken from *Using Drawings in Qualitative Interviews: An Introduction to the Practice* by Brailas (2020, p. 4451)

After the intervention sessions, during the data collection session, students were given a set of markers and A4 pieces of paper each. They had 20-25 minutes to draw. Right after, the participants were asked some questions prompted by the drawing. It is noteworthy that the interview was carried out in Spanish, which is the students' L1. The interview questions were divided into three dimensions to explore students' perceptions related to the activities, themselves and others in the lessons, and finally the tools and materials used during the intervention (See Appendix B).

3.5.3 Self-Recorded Audio Diaries

Self-recorded audio diary entries were recorded after each session using a smartphone app (e.g Voice Recorder for Android devices) and following audio diary guidelines (See Appendix C), followed by a transcription and later analysis. There were two dimensions included, one focusing on the activities and one on the overall session. The value of these records arises from the process of recording audio diary logs as a direct representation of the researchers' unfiltered thoughts (Káplár-Kodácsy & Dorner, 2020). Furthermore, Káplár-Kodácsy & Dorner (2020) see self-reflection as a key element of action research that can prompt changes in the teacher's practice. Moreover, it has been shown in audio-diary methods that participants can provide more spontaneous, in-the-moment reports of their experiences, which reflect their priorities. The audio-diary technique often generates rich experiential data for interpretation. (Williamson et. Al, 2015)

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

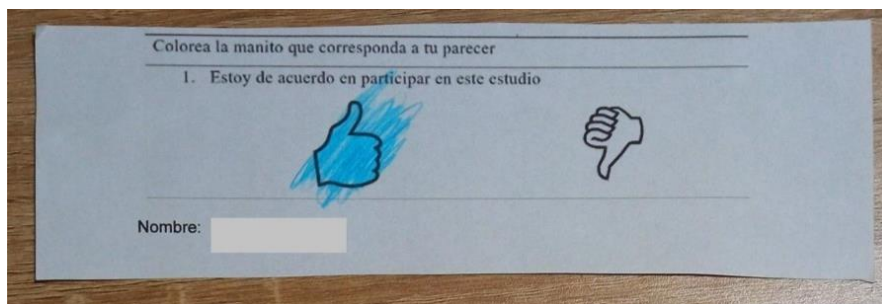
The study used a rating scale to analyze quantitative data on individual and group results, organized by initial cluster type. Numerical data was analyzed based on participants' global and individual production, and per cluster. A participant drawing task prompted interview provided qualitative data on students' perceptions of alliteration strategies to support pronunciation. Content Analysis was used to analyze interview transcripts, which can make replicable inferences from text to contexts. Hsu's approach (2015) was followed for drawing analysis, which involved preparation, contextual understanding, observation, structural and thematic analysis, color and form analysis, emotional and psychological indicators, narrative and storytelling, documentation and reporting, and integration with other data. Self-recorded audio diaries provided qualitative data on teacher-researcher's perceptions of teaching strategies used to support student pronunciation and reflections on their practices. This data was also analyzed through Content Analysis.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Informed written consent was obtained from the principal and parents, ensuring they were aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. To protect confidentiality, participants' identities were anonymised using letters (e.g. Participant A). An assent form was collected from the children in the study to take part in the intervention. After receiving an explanation of the study in their L1, they indicated their assent through colouring a picture of a thumbs-up or thumbs-down (See Figure 5). All data collected were securely stored and used solely for the purposes of this study.

Figure 5

Assent Form Sample



Adapted from Inostroza et al. (2024)

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this chapter, the qualitative and quantitative data collected is presented by each specific objective.

4.1 SO1: To assess students' pronunciation of the initial /s/ consonant clusters /sk/, /sp/, and /st/ in different isolated lexical items when using the alliteration strategy.

4.1.1 Pronunciation Rating Scale Results

A pronunciation rating scale was used to assess students' pronunciation of lexical words with initial /s/ consonant clusters /sk/, /sp/, and /st/. The scale was divided into "expected pronunciation", "partially correct pronunciation", "other pronunciation", and "no pronunciation". Each category was assigned a number from 0 (no pronunciation) to 3 (expected pronunciation), to facilitate the analysis; This scale was applied to examine the progress of the participants' pronunciation throughout the intervention, applied in sessions 1, 3, and 5.

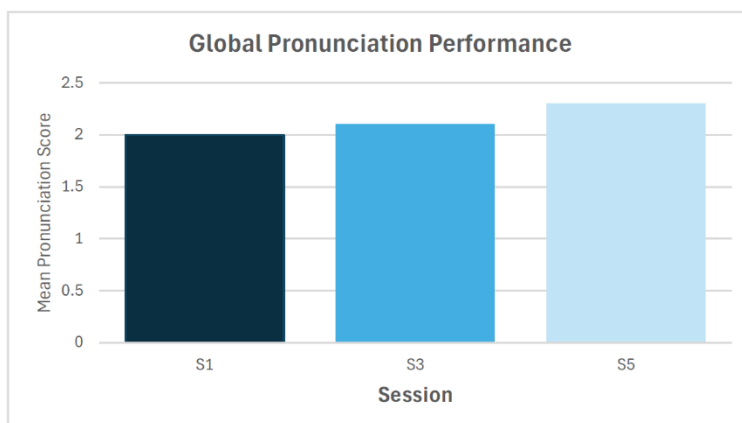
The scale included 9 lexical words (three for each sound cluster /sk/, /sp/, and /st/). Each student was asked to repeat a lexical word prompted by a flashcard with an image of the word. The participants' answers were audio recorded and later assessed by the teacher-researcher using the scale.

4.1.2. Global Pronunciation Results

The descriptive analysis below (Figure 6) exhibits the global score of the group during three sessions (S1, S3, S5). Moreover, the participants were assigned a letter for their identification (A-D). The mean pronunciation score of the lexical words with initial /s/ consonant clusters was 2 in session 1; 2.1 in session 3; and 2.3 in the last session showing that there was improvement in the group's pronunciation. Although there is a slight increase in the score, this upwards trend could indicate that the intervention was successful to some degree.

Figure 6

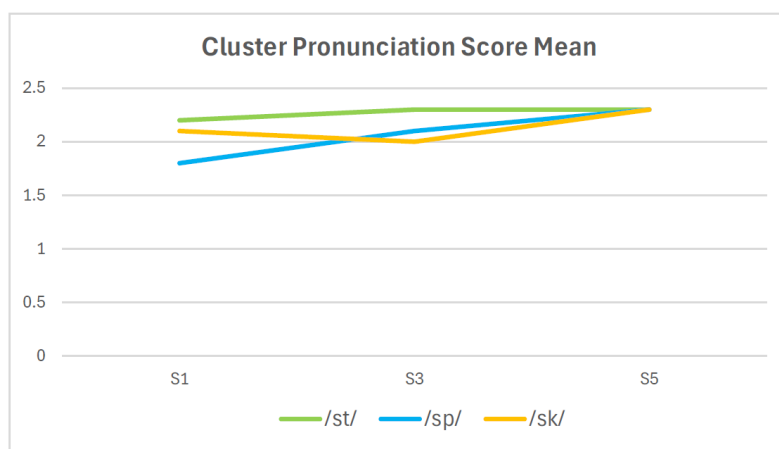
Global Pronunciation Performance



Furthermore, looking at the score per cluster in Figure 6 below, the pronunciation score means of the sound clusters reveals different progress per clusters. The pronunciation score means of the consonant sound cluster /st/ had a minimal increase from .2 to 2.3. The score means of the sound cluster /sp/ had a linear increase from 1.8 to 2.3. Finally, the score means of the sound cluster /sk/ had an irregular progression from 2.1 in S1 to a slight drop to 2.0 in S3 to a three-point increase in S5 to 2.3. This means that all three clusters' scores increased, being note-worthy the sound cluster /sp/ which exhibits the greatest improvement from S1 to S3.

Figure 6

Global Cluster Pronunciation Score Mean

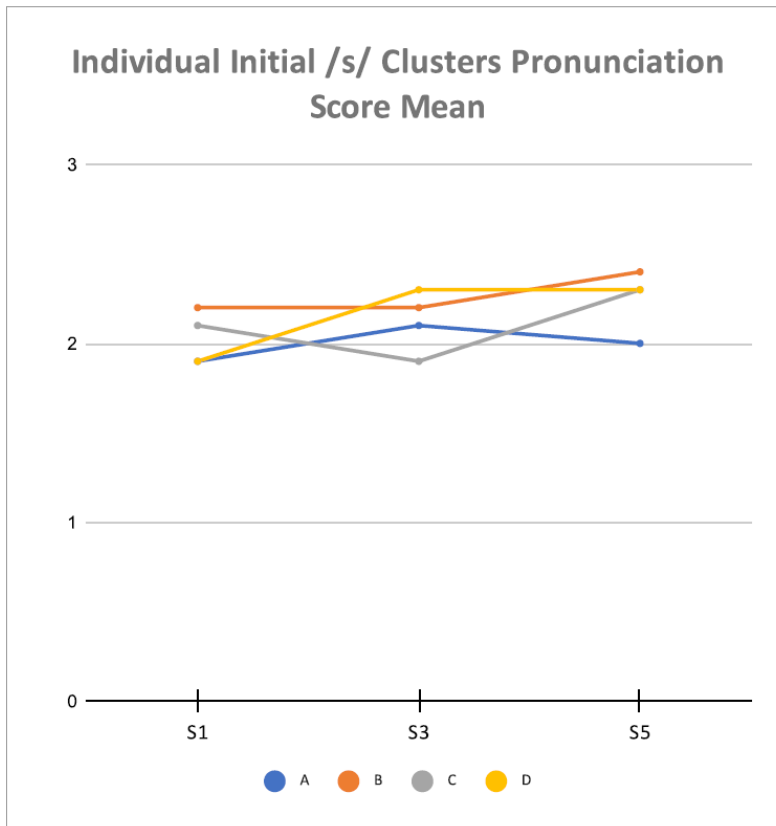


4.1.3. Individual Pronunciation Results

Figure 7 below illustrates the individual overall initial /s/ consonant cluster pronunciation score mean per session. It can be observed that all the participants show an increase in their scores from the first to the final session. Participant A increased two points in S3 and dropped one point in S5. Participant B had two points increased in the last session, but the same score in session 1 and 3. Moreover, Participant C had the greatest variation in scores from 2.1 to 1.9 to a final increase of four points in the last session. Lastly, participant D had a four-point increase from S1 to S3 and maintained the same score in the last session. It is noteworthy that no participant achieved the maximum score (3 - expected pronunciation).

Figure 7

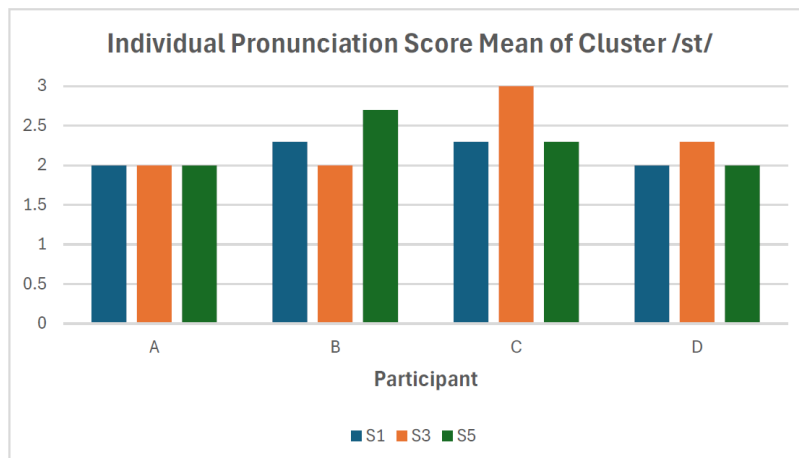
Individual Initial /s/ Clusters Pronunciation Score Mean



Furthermore, the individual results (Figures 8, 9, and 10) by cluster, evidence the variation of the students' progression throughout the intervention. For instance, Figure 8 illustrates the individual results of cluster /st/ where three participants (A, C, and D) maintained their scores from S1 to S5. Merely, Participant B increased his score in S5 although his score dropped in S3. This could be explained by the individual differences of each participant.

Figure 8

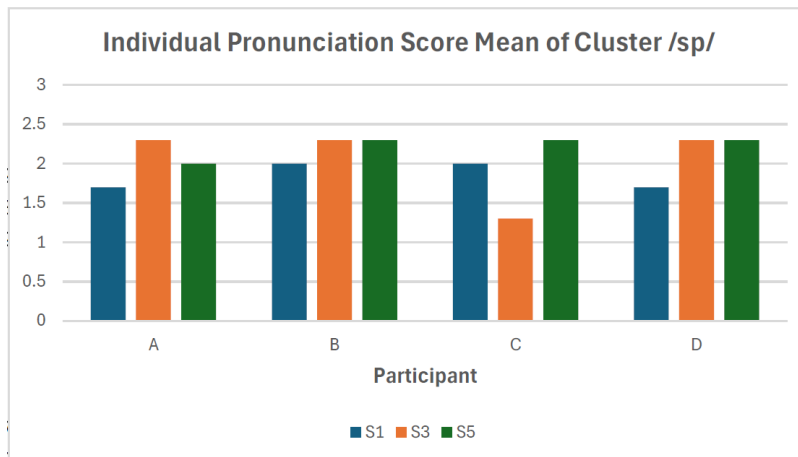
Individual Pronunciation Score Mean of Cluster /st/



In terms of the second cluster /sp/ (Figure 9), all the participants indicated an increase in their scores from the first to the last session (S1-S5). Two participants had irregular progressions, Participant A had an increase in S3, and Participant C had a decrease in S3. On the other hand, Participants B and D had similar scores in S3 and S5.

Figure 9

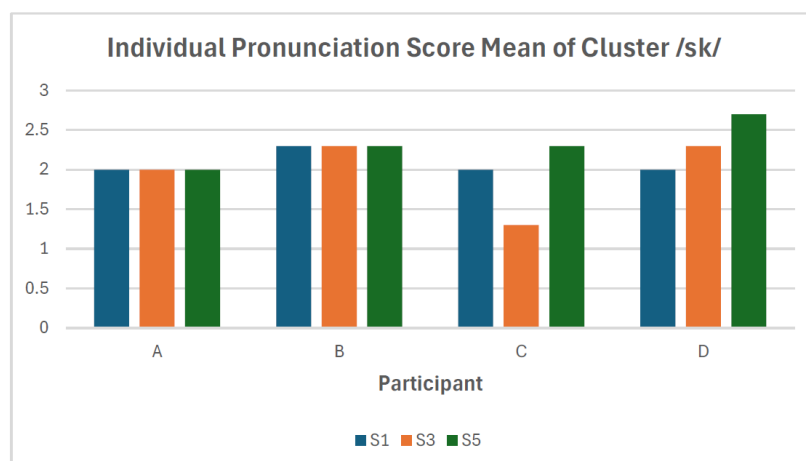
Individual Pronunciation Score Mean of Cluster /sp/



Regarding the third consonant cluster /sk/, the individual pronunciation score means are depicted below (Figure 10). These results showed that two participants displayed a static progression (Participants A and B). The other participants increased their scores with different development. Participant C dropped his score in S3, and Participant D had a linear increase in his score.

Figure 10

Individual Pronunciation Score Mean of Cluster /sk/



Overall, the global results evidence a slight increase in the pronunciation scores of words with initial /s/ consonant clusters which could suggest a positive contribution of the intervention. This increase was minimum in the global scores of clusters /st/ and /sk/, except for the global score of the cluster /sp/ which depicted an upward trend with a moderate increase. In terms of the individual pronunciation scores, the participants' scores progress vary from each cluster.

4.2 SO2: To explore students' perceptions about the intervention and the use of multisensory materials.

During the data collection session, after the intervention, three participants took part in a drawing task. Subsequently, an interview was conducted to explore their perceptions of the use of alliteration strategies to support their pronunciation (**See Table 3 below**). The participants were instructed to draw what they remembered from the intervention conducted in the previous weeks. Their drawings were analysed using qualitative Content Analysis, which has been used in other studies (e.g. Capurso et al., 2022; Kalaja et al., 2008) to explore EFL or ESL students' beliefs through visual narratives (drawings and/or pictures).

Table 3

Information sources to analyse students' perceptions

Sources	Detail
Individual Interviews Drawings	Interview Transcriptions Drawings Drawings Descriptions

Based on the data sources, three themes emerged: colour, represented activity, and subjects depicted in the images.

Table 4

Overview of the Coding Scheme Developed for the Drawings.

Theme	Code
Colour	Colours
Represented Activity	Storytelling (Book Scene)
Subjects	Participants/Classmates, Teachers, 'Stacy the Snake character', Sea Animals

These themes were adapted from the Capurso et al. (2022) study and they emerged from the analysis of the drawings and compared with the information collected in the interview after the drawing activity in this study.

4.2.1 Use of Colour

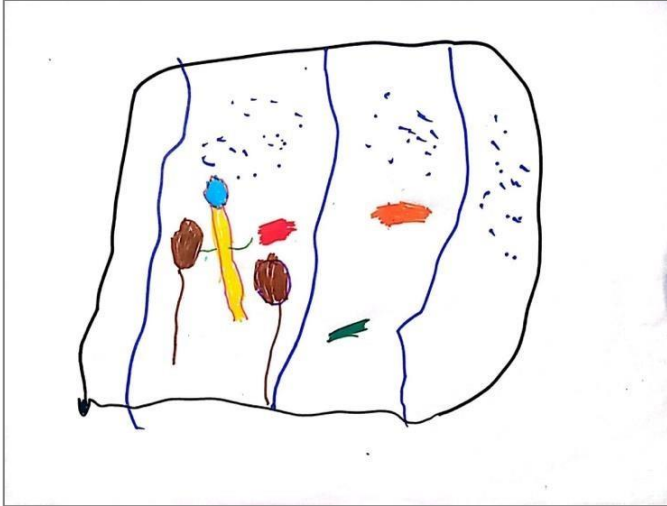
The three drawings illustrate the use of various colours to differentiate elements, rather than relying on a single-colour marker, which complements the participants' limited drawing skills.

It is noteworthy that 'yellow' and/or 'green' were consistently used to represent 'Stacy the Snake' in the three drawings (the colours of the character). Moreover, the participants coloured with 'blue' to represent the sea or water (in the form of dots or scribbles) as present in the storybook '*Stacy goes to the Aquarium*'. Participant B used colour for representing sea animals, a squid, starfish and shark. For instance, in Figure

11 below, the 'Starfish' was depicted in orange, 'Stacy the Snake' in yellow, and the blue dots represented the sea. Finally, both Participants A and B used a rectangular frame (in black and white) in their drawings to represent that the image was a scene or page from the story book.

Figure 11

Drawing by Participant B



To illustrate, sample extracts are exposed below. In the translated extracts from Spanish to English, R stands for researcher. Words in *italics* were originally produced in English. Here it is the translation:

R: Let's see, tell me, what did you draw on this sheet (of paper)?

Participant B: I drew Stacy...

R: Which one is Stacy? The one in yellow?

Participant B: Yes... I drew... *Shark*...

R: Great.

Participant B: Umh... *Starfish*... (pointing to the orange blurb)

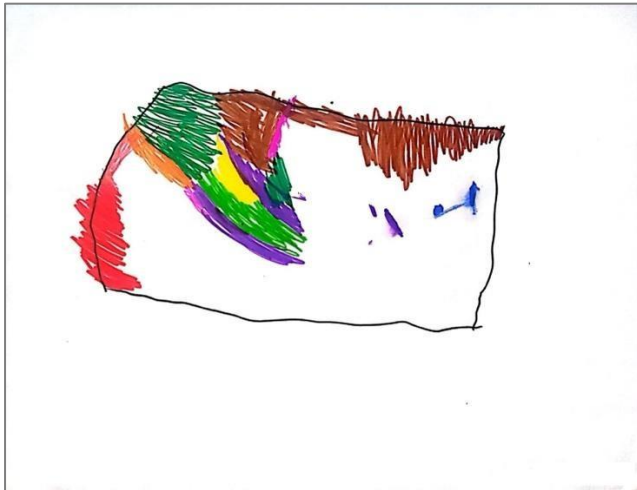
It is significant that the Participant B used some of the key words in English during the interview (*Shark* and *Starfish*) despite it being in Spanish.

4.2.2 Represented Activity

Two participants (A and B) drew a scene from the storytelling book which was used in sessions 4 and 5 of the intervention. In Figure 12, the participant depicted a scene from the book with 'Stacy the Snake' in yellow and green, the water in blue, and the page as a rectangle. Upon asking them what they drew, they included "Stacy the Snake" from a scene of the book.

Figure 12

Drawing by Participant A



R: ...and tell me, what did you draw on this sheet (of paper)?

Participant A: A book.

R: Which book?

Participant A: A book ... about Stacy.

Participant D drew Stacy, a shark, and some of his classmates. They are represented by faces in the drawing. The inclusion of a shark seems to be a personal reason for his love for the animal. To exemplify, sample extracts are included below.

R: And what do you like, Stacy?

Participant D: I like (the) shark...

R: The shark? Ah... the one from the story (...)

(...)

R: Great... and did you like Stacy's story?

Participant D: Yes...

R: What was your favourite part?

Participant D: Uhm... the shark.

4.2.3 Subjects

Regarding the presence of individuals or characters in the drawings, it is remarkable that all three participants included the character 'Stacy the Snake', and some sea animals. These were included as target words during the intervention in different media, with 'Stacy' being the central character guiding the intervention. For instance, 'Stacy the Snake' was present in flashcard form, puppet, as well as in the storybook. On the other hand, the sea animals were also depicted in the flashcards and the storybook (See Figure 13). Additionally, upon asking some follow-up questions about whether they liked Stacy, most of the participants replied with positive answers mentioning how they enjoyed interacting with the character, as can be illustrated in the following extract:

R: And do you like it when Stacy comes (to class)?

Participant B: Yes, I like that Stacy is real.

(...)

R: And what do you like about Stacy?

Participant B: Mm... that we give her the cards (flashcards)...

Figure 13

Book Pages Samples



Note: The pictures are scene samples from the storybook "Stacy the Snake goes to the Aquarium."

Conversely, individuals (their classmates) were exceptionally included in a particular drawing (See Figure 14). Nonetheless neither the teachers nor the participants were drawn in the pictures. For example, upon enquiring whether the teachers were present in the drawing Participant B answered that the teachers were not in the story, as evidenced by the following extract. Here is the translation:

R: And who did you draw?... Did you draw yourself (in the picture)?

Participant B: No...

R: And Stacy?

Participant B: Stacy is this one...

R: ...She's there... And am I there?

Participant B: No.

R: And Miss Cami and Miss Ita?

Participant B: No, they're not there... And in the story, Miss Ita is not in the sea...

R: Ah... you drew the story, great...

Figure 14 contains the only clear illustration of people. Participant D depicted a shark, and 'Stacy the Snake', as well as some people. The faces depicted are his classmates, as confirmed in the interview. It is the only drawing that depicted people, as all participants were asked whether they or the teachers or their classmates, were present in the drawing. To exemplify, sample extracts and the graphic representations (See Figure 14) are included below.

Figure 14

Drawing by Participant D



Here is the translation:

R: And are the teachers in this drawing?

Participant D: No.

R: Are your classmates in the drawing?

Participant D: Yes.

R: Really? Where are they?

Participant D: There. (pointing to the circles in the drawing)

These findings suggest that visual, auditory, and tactile methods seem to enhance pronunciation learning among very young EFL learners. The participants' positive response towards the materials suggests they are meaningful tools to use in this type

of interventions. Future research could investigate the long-term impact of these strategies and their adaptability across varied educational contexts.

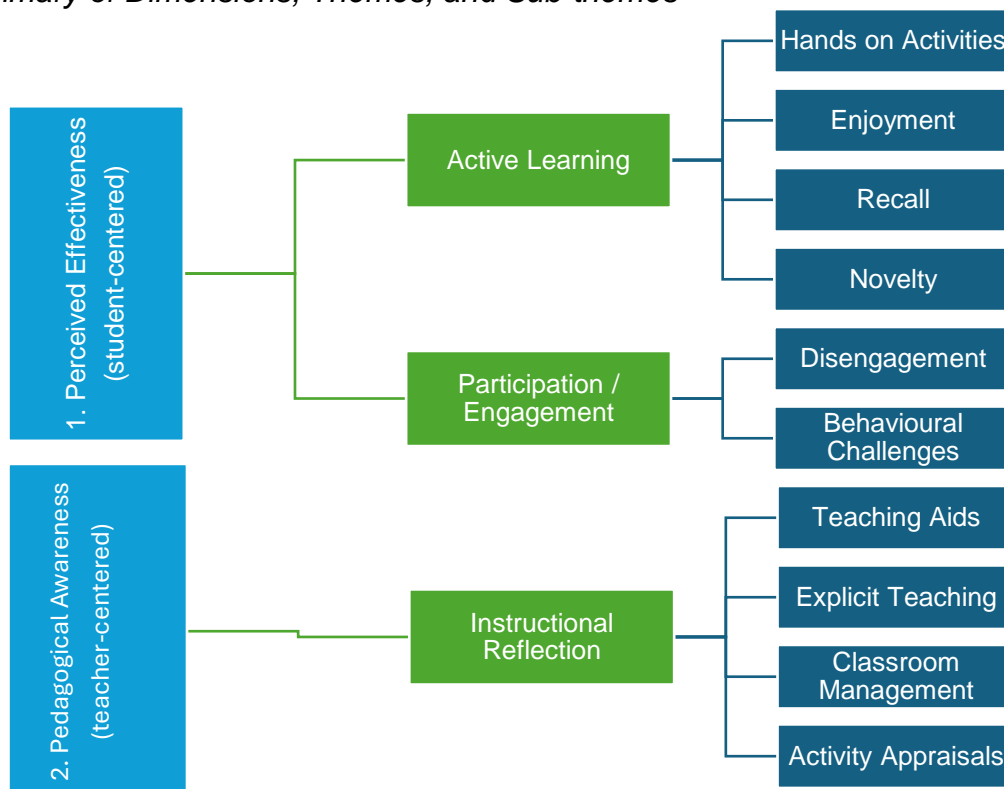
4.3 SO3: To examine the teacher researcher’s self-perceptions of the intervention and the multisensory materials

Throughout the intervention, the teacher-researcher recorded audio diaries after every session (S1-S5) using a mobile device to examine her own perceptions of intervention. The audio diaries are referenced with the acronym AD, followed by the session (e.g. session 1: S1) for the following analysis (e.g. AD-S1). Through content analysis, the data from the five sessions was processed into: recurring themes, sub themes, frequency, and specific examples of each session.

The audio diaries were recorded following guidelines to focus on the teacher-researcher's perception about the intervention with multisensory materials and the participants' response (See Appendix C). The themes that emerged were categorized into two dimensions: perceived effectiveness of the intervention and pedagogical awareness. The first dimension was categorized into active learning and participation/engagement, and the second one into instructional reflection and four sub-themes: teaching aids, activity appraisals, explicit teaching and classroom management. These are summarized in **Figure 15** below and described in the next section.

Figure 15

Summary of Dimensions, Themes, and Sub-themes



4.3.1 Perceived Effectiveness

Teacher reflections captured through audio diaries offer valuable insights into the perceived effectiveness of the intervention. By observing how students respond to various teaching methods, educators can evaluate the effectiveness of their approaches and make necessary adjustments (Hiver, 2021). The teacher-researcher gauged the reaction of the students to the games, activities, and multisensory materials used. Two themes emerged in the analysis: active learning, defined as participatory teaching methods that encourage student involvement and collaboration (Harmer, 2015), and participation / engagement defined as multifaceted construct that encompasses students' emotional, cognitive, and behavioural involvement in the learning process (Dörnyei & Ushioda (2021)). The sub-themes in these categories can be found on Table 5.

In terms of “Hands-on activities”, defined as engaging, interactive tasks that require learners to actively participate in the learning process (Scrivener, 2011). The teacher-researcher described that students were able to identify the target sounds in tasks which involved the physical act of organizing flashcards in different bags, and when they interacted with the materials (puppet, flashcards, and poster). The positive feedback towards the activities reflects that the material designed, and the activities planned were perceived as suited for the students, as they managed to perform accordingly. This is note-worthy, since the activities are student-centred and not-teacher centred, there is less teacher control (as opposed to traditional whiteboard activities) and uncertainty towards students handling the materials and behaving accordingly (as they have to move, handle material, repeat,...).

“Enjoyment” is described by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) as overall satisfaction and pleasure learners feel when they are actively involved in learning and building positive relationships within the classroom. The teacher-researcher reported that students enjoyed moving around during games and interacting with the puppet. This being highlighted by the teacher-researcher reflects its relevance for her to create favourable environment for learning and a positive attitude towards pronunciation related activities.

Another aspect underscored by the teacher-researcher is “Novelty” to support active learning. This contrasts with the familiarity and routine often established in lessons with preschoolers. In the diaries, the teacher described that students love and curiosity was sparked by some activities such as the river-bank game, and the book used for storytelling (Table 5).

Finally, “Recall” was described as the participants remember words and characters during the intervention, possibly noticed by the researcher due to the limited hours of English lessons students had (two 45 minutes lessons per week). From the teacher’s perspective this is evidence of learning, and shows some aspects of the lesson were memorable.

The aforementioned aspects describe perceived elements that are viewed as relating to active learning and effectiveness through the intervention. Conversely, some aspects could be related to ineffectiveness in some activities of the intervention. In the participation theme, the sub-themes disengagement, and behavioural challenges were noted. The examples can be seen in Table 6.

Table 5

Theme: Active learning: Sub-themes, Frequency and Quote Examples

Sub-theme	Frequency	Examples
Hands-on activities	9	<p>“So I just told them... which word starts with /s/ and they could identify it (using the flashcards). So that was good. Most of them effectively found the word.” (AD-S3)</p> <p>“...good for identifying and the physical thing... of putting the, the words in different bags so they know how.” (AD-S3)” (referring to flashcards activities with the puppet)</p> <p>“the (story) role-play (...) allows students to talk and interact.” (AD-S4) (referring to a role-play activity with flashcards)</p> <p>“They love the poster and placing back (...) the cards.” (AD-S2)</p> <p>“The book I think it was really engaging for some (...) Yes, a couple of students wanted to touch the book, so they would get up all the time.” (AD-S5)</p> <p>“... for the retelling everyone wanted to participate, so I made sure to include everyone, so at least one person everyone went once to the board”. (AD-S5)</p> <p>“They really like using props... whenever I bring up the pointer. (...) they love to be the one holding it and using it to identify words.” (AD-S1)</p> <p>“Everyone started, you know, trying it on...” (AD-S5) (the puppet)</p> <p>“Students loved using the flashcards during the retelling.” (AD-S4)</p> <p>“Luckily, most of them stayed on their seats. I was surprised because usually they want to touch everything.” (AD-S4). (during story telling)</p>
Enjoyment	4	<p>“That was a really fun activity they enjoyed.” (AD-S3) (referring to river-bank)</p> <p>“...river-bank at the beginning. They were very excited...(...) of jumping from one side to the other.”. (AD-S2)</p> <p>“They really loved to use the puppet. None of them were scared. Even the one kid that is very shy. He was like, super excited with the puppet, and I was surprised because (...) snakes are scary animals.” (AD-S3).</p> <p>“When I was calling them, or when Stacy was calling them. I think they really enjoy the (...) activities, especially the movement and the interaction with the puppet.” (AD-S3).</p>
Novelty	3	<p>“I think that they loved the river-bank activity over whack-a-card because they've done it before. I think it didn't have that, (...) novelty factor.” (AD-S2).</p> <p>“They were kind of curious about the book...because it's the first time we had used one.”(AD-S4).</p> <p>“I really like the book. It was the first time we(...) used storytelling with them. (...) I am really glad I used it at this time of the year (...)Despite the fact that the illustrations were not the best, but they got that we were talking about sea animals and Stacy, they understood most of it.” (AD-S4)</p>
Recall	4	<p>“She recognized the character right away...(AD-P2)</p> <p>“.... he remembered (Stacy in the poster)... he began counting the missing ones. (flashcards)” (AD- S2)</p> <p>“Well, one student (...) has a great memory. So she remembers names, animals, all of that.” (AD-S4)</p> <p>“I think (...) (the poster was) effective because they remember the character.” (AD-S2)</p>

Despite having perceived general positive feedback from the students, the teacher-researcher observed that some students were ‘lost’, ‘distracted’, or ‘bored’, in some activities. The reasons behind these issues varied according to the teacher-researcher: the weather, the students’ being hungry or thirsty, and the fact that some students were sitting down in an activity.

Table 6

Theme: Participation/ Engagement, Sub-themes, Frequency and Quote Examples

Sub-theme	Frequency	Examples
Disengagement	6	<p><i>"It was OK, but we have little engagement with the students that were sitting down." (AD-S2).</i></p> <p><i>"Some of them were kind of lost." (AD-S5) (referring to storytelling in the last session)</i></p> <p><i>"...Engagement was like 50% today, but today was a rainy day, so maybe the weather affected the lesson..." (AD-S5)</i></p> <p><i>"...because they get bored very quickly, I can see it in their faces." (AD-S2)</i></p> <p><i>"...one student was a bit distracted with the card he was playing with the card instead of focusing..." (AD-S3) (when using flashcards)</i></p> <p><i>"One particular student, who was very distracted, and another one was turning around. But I think it's because (...) at that point they, they get a bit lost and they're maybe hungry or thirsty, or they want to go on, break. (AD-S4)</i></p>
Behavioural Challenges	8	<p><i>"blurting is an issue (...) they love talking and participating but it's hard to control.." (AD-S1)</i></p> <p><i>"...the turn-taking can be an issue and students (...) they don't know how to manipulate the material (AD-S3).</i></p> <p><i>"...some students get restless because (...) they just wait for their turn. Even though everyone gets a turn (...)I might I need to change that. (AD-S2)</i></p> <p><i>"I forgot ...students are very rough at that age... so they ripped the (some) flashcards (from the velcro dots)" (AD-S1)</i></p> <p><i>"I used the painter's tape on the floor (for the river-bank game), but (...) some students started removing it." (AD-S2).</i></p> <p><i>"We have a small classroom (...). They need space to jump (...) that might be why (...) they get restless very quickly." (AD-S2)</i></p> <p><i>"...a couple of students (...) wanted to touch the book so they would get up all the time. But (...) I had no teacher helping me at that point." (AD-S5)</i></p> <p><i>"And at some point(..) They dropped a lot of pencils, so it was kind of messy. Everyone on the floor, two students under the table. (...)It was quite chaotic." (AD-S5)</i></p>

Additionally, behavioural challenges described included blurting, turn-taking issues, restlessness and problems with students handling the materials in a rough manner. Even though these challenges were faced by the teacher throughout their sessions, their identification could allow for them to be prevented in a future similar intervention.

Regarding the teacher's perception of his own practice, the pedagogical awareness dimension is described in the following section.

4.3.2 Pedagogical Awareness

Another theme that emerged was the teacher researchers' instructional reflections on the implementation of the activities. The sub-themes found were "Activity Appraisals", "Teaching Aids", 'Explicit Teaching', and "Classroom Management".

Table 7

Theme: Pedagogical Awareness, Sub-themes and Quote Examples

Sub Theme	Frequency	Examples
Activity Appraisals	6	<p>“... I thought the movements were gonna be more interesting for them but it, it wasn't (...) that interesting.... not all of them did it (*them)” (AD-S1)</p> <p>“The book I think it was really engaging for some (students).” (AD-S5)</p> <p>“(Whack-a-card) is a fun game but (...) if you use it more than. Two or three times it, it gets boring for them.” (AD-S2)</p> <p>“The pattern “Stacy saw...” was really good way to support the /s/ sound, “Stacy saw ...a squid starfish shark” ... Repetition of that pattern in the story was good.” (AD-S4).</p> <p>“I also ask them to repeat the words when we did the umh, they had to just repeat the flash cards before the musical flash cards activity. So that was (...) OK for pronunciation, but I think the patterns worked best in today's lesson.” (AD-S4)</p> <p>“They listened to the story very well and they understood the patterns, which is what I was, (...) expecting.”(AD-S4);</p>
Teaching Aids	5	<p>“I was searching (for) words (referring to the flashcards) with one hand, I could pretend that Stacy was doing something else (...) because she had a life of her own” (AD-S3).</p> <p>“You have to remember that the puppet is alive.” (AD-S3),</p> <p>“... the character maybe is, is good at (for) eliciting things because you have the (...) interaction.” (AD-S3)</p> <p>“It was a bit difficult to remember the, the card for sport (for the students) (...) Maybe the picture wasn't very clear, or they needed more practice with that word (AD-S3)</p> <p>“It's quite a hassle because on one hand I was holding Stacy, and I had to pretend that she was still alive” (AD-S3).</p>
Explicit Teaching	4	<p>“I told them to use their ears so that was a good strategy to point to my ears and say listen to the sound” (AD-S2)</p> <p>“Listen, like with your ears, so that that was a good strategy.”(AD-S2)</p> <p>“Perhaps I should have done more explanation of how you hold the flash cards...” (AD-S4)</p> <p>“Be very explicit with the way you want students to hold or treat things, even though it might be obvious, it's not obvious for them...” (AD-S4)</p>
Classroom Management	8	<p>“It's exhausting (referring to classroom management) because you have to explain every little movement, because they don't know how to do things, and I expected that they knew from their main teacher how to use crayons (*markers). But maybe they don't.” (AD-S5)</p> <p>“Everything (referring to behaviour) (...) you have to teach” (AD-S5)</p> <p>“It's easier to address them earlier with prevention before they start doing that. (misbehaving)” (AD-S5)</p> <p>“Could be I need to find a way. To deal with ...turn taking.” (AD-S4).</p> <p>“I had to say, OK, sit down, sit down, sit down like 1000 times,” (AD-S5)</p> <p>“You have to tell them (manage them), (...) but you cannot control all students (AD-S2).</p> <p>“There should be the rules for everything they do.” (AD-S2) “...Even though, (...) your instructions might be clear, and then you repeat (...) the instructions and most of them get it. (...) There will always be a one student or two that do whatever they want.” (AD-S1)</p>

In terms of the teacher-researcher's perceptions of the activities, the repetition of patterns was deemed as good to support the production of the target sounds. On the other hand, she mentioned that movement was not as engaging for students and that the repetition of some games might lower participation and excitement.

The concept of the “Teaching Aids” was another relevant sub-theme. For instance, the puppet, although comfortable, is described as challenging to use, since it needs to create the illusion that it is a live character. Moreover, there were some issues with the clarity of some flashcards as can be seen on the examples on Table 8.

On the sub-themes of ‘Explicit Teaching’, it can be observed that the teacher-researcher also emphasized that concrete instructions for participants to focus on the sounds, by asking them to point and listen with their ears, which is described as a ‘good’ strategy. Moreover, the teacher-researcher questions the clarity of her instructions in the use of sounds and movement, as a possible reason for the lack of engagement in that activity.

Lastly, there were some points made regarding the teacher-researcher’s own classroom management skills that describe her frustration of repeating instructions, importance of explicit rules, exhaustion, and need to work on preventing some behavioural issues. This described an evident potential area for improvement from her own perspective.

Overall, the audio-diaries provided insights into the reflective practice of the teacher-researcher after each session. The examples allowed to analyse the relevant elements of effectiveness, as well as reflections on the teacher-researcher’s own practice.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This intervention aimed to provide some insights into the contribution of alliteration through multisensory materials on a group of preschoolers on their pronunciation of initial /s/ clusters. The study focused on their pronunciation of the initial /s/ clusters /st/, /sp/, and /sk/; and the students' and teacher-researcher's perceptions on the intervention and the materials used. Three aspects were highlighted. First the positive influence of the intervention on the pronunciation of the /s/ clusters. Second, the contribution of the use of multisensory materials had on the preschoolers' perceptions. Third, the teacher-researcher's perceptions on the intervention. Finally, some implications for EFL teachers working with very young learners and incorporating sensory materials were noted.

5.1 SO1: To assess students' pronunciation of the initial /s/ consonant clusters /sk/, /sp/, and /st/ in different isolated lexical items when using the alliteration strategy.

In terms of the findings, the results revealed that alliteration, used as a phonological awareness strategy, supported the participants' pronunciation of initial /s/ clusters in lexical words. This is evidenced by the fact that all participants, although some to a small degree, showed improvement in their scores, suggesting that it might be beneficial for teachers to focus on pronunciation interventions and strategies, from an early age. The positive contribution could be credited to the use of multisensory materials and the participants' positive response to them, as described in the sections 5.2 and 5.3.

Although the results showed the participants improve their production of all three initial /s/ cluster, the one that showed the greatest improvement was /sp/ which might be explained by the familiarity of the words for the students. Another possibility being the fact that the second sound could be easier to produce in that position, as opposed to the other two clusters. Nonetheless, this should be further explored.

Additionally, despite being a short-term intervention these findings are consistent with previous studies that support the teaching of pronunciation at an early age. A study by Lasagabaster (2008) revealed found that preschoolers who received EFL instruction for 15 minutes a week showed significant improvement in pronunciation. This suggest that even short practice that targets pronunciation can have an effect on preschoolers' pronunciation. Additionally, that preschoolers who received explicit pronunciation instruction showed significant improvement in their pronunciation accuracy compared to those who did not, according to Richards, Burt, and Freeman (2017).

Overall, the quantitative results suggest that there is evidence that support the use of alliteration as phonological awareness strategy to support the pronunciation of initial /s/ clusters with multisensory materials with preschoolers.

In addition to analysing the qualitative data, this action research intervention also explored the participants' perceptions on the intervention which are described as follows.

5.2 SO2: To explore students' perceptions about the intervention and the use of multisensory materials.

Regarding the participants' perceptions, the use of multisensory materials including the character 'Stacy the Snake', was memorable to them. The materials designed for this pedagogical intervention (a puppet, large and small flashcards, a poster, and a story book) allowed the participants to actively take part in the activities by grabbing flashcards, moving during games, and complete a poster with removable flashcards.

Additionally, it allowed students to interacting with the puppet by repeating and handing her cards with target and non-target words, 'Stacy' was also used to guide the participants through the correct pronunciation and discrimination of sounds, as well as the main character of the storybook. This is supported by Ellis and Brewster (2014) who state that puppets are highly effective in engaging young learners by capturing attention, encouraging participation, creating a safe environment, lowering anxiety, stimulating dialogue, facilitating memory, and recall.

The participants' drawing task and interview analysis demonstrate the contribution of the puppet character, which is included in all three drawings and described by students as a likeable figure who they like to interact with (e.g. give her flashcards). The inclusion of a character in drawings goes in line with other studies that show the recurrency of fictional characters (referred to as mediational sources) as associated with learning English (Inözü, 2018). For instance, with the coursebook Teddy bear present in half of the drawings in Inözü's (2018) study, or, in this case, 'Stacy the Snake'. Additionally, studies in Chile (Toledo & Hoit, 2016; Bravo & Cisterna, 2020) support the benefits of using puppets for supporting speaking skills with very young learners and their motivation for learning English. Their findings revealing that their use improved students' confidence with them feeling more relaxed and helping draw their attention (Bravo & Cisterna, 2020), but it also lowered their anxiety and created a low-pressure environment for language practice (Toledo & Hoit, 2016).

This study's findings emphasize the central role of characters in facilitating language learning for very young children, implying their use is valuable for teachers working with very young learners. Furthermore, the exploration of perceptions, particularly with preschoolers allows teacher-researchers to further understand their learning process and the impact their response to the tools designed. Therefore, improving EFL teachers' practice and support students' learning of pronunciation with tools that are effective.

5.3 SO3: To examine the teacher researcher's self-perceptions of the intervention and the multisensory materials

The audio-diaries provided meaningful insights into the implementation of the intervention through observing and reflecting after each session. Reflection is an essential part of action research. This is supported by Elliot's (1991) idea that the cyclical nature of action research allows for a systematic reflection that can lead to meaningful changes in the classroom. The diaries provided an outlet for the teacher-

researcher to reflect upon finishing each intervention session and allowed for later observations on the success of the intervention. The analysis revealed that two main areas were emphasized in the diaries: perceived effectiveness, and pedagogical awareness.

In terms of perceived effectiveness, the audio diaries evidenced that active learning, student enjoyment, recall, and novelty were crucial factors in maintaining student engagement and participation, allowing learners to thrive in a supportive, interactive environment. For instance, the teacher-researcher described how students loved to move during games, or enjoyed interacting with the puppet. It seemed that for the teacher enjoyment was a relevant factor in the preschoolers learning experience. Supporting the idea that fun and play is considered key to learning in the early years, as it is part of a child-centred approach (Mourao & Ellis, 2020). Moreover, novelty increased students' curiosity and engagement in the new activities, from the point of view of the teacher. "Novelty" can capture students' interest and encourage them to participate actively in their learning. When students encounter new topics, methods, or materials, their curiosity is often piqued, which can enhance their willingness to engage with the content (Harmer, 2015).

However, the teacher also identified challenges such as student disengagement and behavioural issues. For example, she reflected that some students were bored and lost during some activities and thought about multiple factors that could have affected students including the activity itself, their needs, and the weather. Hadfield and Hadfield (2010) point out that educators frequently view disengagement as a complex problem, as they understand that students may get disengaged from courses due to a variety of reasons, including personal problems, a lack of interest, or an inadequate level of challenge. Therefore, the adjustments to prevent disengagement could be just as varied, involving lesson planning to external factors.

Regarding "Pedagogical Awareness", various issues were perceived by the teacher. Her activities appraisals revealed that while repetitive activities aided in reinforcing the production of target sounds, certain movement-based tasks were perceived to be less engaging over time. Furthermore, the examination of "Teaching Aids" highlighted the dual nature of their utility, particularly with puppets, which, despite their potential to enhance creativity and comfort, presented challenges in their use. This challenge arose because the puppet needed to appear 'alive,' as noted by the researcher. Additionally, reflections on "Explicit Teaching" emphasize the need of providing clear and concrete instructions in some activities with new teaching tools.

Moreover, the teacher-researcher's insights into "Classroom Management" also pointed to significant challenges, including frustrations related to the repetition of instructions and the imperative for establishing behavioural expectations, thus indicating areas for professional development. Understanding the root of these issues could provide deeper insights, enabling teachers to address them through effective classroom management strategies (Hadfield & Hadfield, 2010).

Overall, the use of audio diaries emerged as a mirror for the teacher-researcher to critically engage with her instructional practices, facilitating a deeper understanding of both effective strategies and areas for improvement. Reflective practice enables teachers to make informed, moment-to-moment decisions that promote engaging and supportive learning environments. (Hiver et al., 2021). By recognizing both the

strengths and areas for improvement within the intervention, the teacher-researcher has laid the foundation for improving her teaching practice.

5.4 Implications for EFL for Very Young Learners

Finally, some implications of this study are the benefits of using multisensory materials in this kind of intervention, for example the use of flashcards for hands-on activities that increase engagement, or a puppet to model and prompt interaction. Particularly, the inclusion of a relatable character seems to be meaningful for students in their learning experience, as was evidenced in the drawings. This mediational source could allow students to interact with each other to create meaningful and memorable learning experiences.

Additionally, it is relevant to mention that the creation of the materials was made completely by the teacher-researcher resulting in a time-consuming process, making sure the tools were suitable for preschoolers including colourful images, and made of durable materials that would allow for play and hands-on activities. This is substantial to consider as many teachers may not have the time or resources to create their own materials. Despite being a time-intensive process, the development of materials and/or adaptation of existing resources incorporating alliteration as a strategy to support pronunciation and their potential to enhance students' learning process makes them a valuable investment for educators.

Some implications for the teacher-researcher and her practice include a recurrent use of characters in the classroom, including the "Stacy the Snake" puppet but also the puppet of a dog. These characters are currently being used to interact with students and support the teaching of various topics including body parts, colours, and short conversations with key questions (e.g. What's your name?). Finally, the aftermath of the study revealed that the pronunciation of initial /s/ clusters continued ongoing revision. This aligns with the principles of the spiral curriculum, which applied to an EFL context, they mean revisiting and reinforcing linguistic concepts at increasing levels of complexity allows learners to build proficiency incrementally (Gesú & Quinteros, 2023). Nonetheless, there was a foundation to use as reference since the students remembered the intervention and the character, which facilitated the revisiting of the target sounds.

5.5 Limitations

While the intervention demonstrated clear benefits for phonological awareness and engagement, certain limitations must be addressed. In terms of the limitations of this action research study, two aspects were noted. First, the number of participants and length of the intervention (three weeks) were restricted by the school calendar and project design. This bears the question of retention of the results in the long term with a larger group of preschoolers. As Fernández-Otoya et al. (2022) emphasize, there is a need for long-term studies and larger participant pools to better assess the impact of phonological interventions in early childhood education.

Second, the data collected through the drawing task prompted interview was limited, since the answers obtained were short and monosyllabic at times, despite having guidelines to navigate the interview. This might be due to the challenges of collecting data with preschoolers; upon reflecting on it, it was concluded that providing options to students through pictures or drawings might have been a more precise tool for the target group. Other tools such as consecutive creative tasks (use of photographs, drawings, or storytelling) along with small group interviews, as these tasks encourage children to share their thoughts and feelings in a way that feels natural to them (Lonning & Malaguzzi, 2021). The use of the aforementioned tools might help gather richer data in future studies with this target group. Therefore, further studies are needed with very young learners and long—term interventions in terms of pronunciation to assess the effectiveness of alliteration and multisensory tools. Moreover, the use of multiple tools for data collection of participants' perceptions would have been enriching.

Overall, the study emphasizes the potential of multisensory materials and engaging characters in fostering phonological awareness among preschoolers. The inclusion of the teacher-researchers' perceptions through audio-diaries allowed for Further research with larger samples and longer duration is essential to see the impact of these types of interventions in other linguistic contexts.

CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of main findings

In general, the results of this action research project were beneficial, showing a positive impact on the use of alliteration to support the pronunciation of the initial /s/ clusters /sp/, /sk/, and /st/, of a group of preschoolers. The general results revealed that all the participants showed improvements in their pronunciation of the target sound in lexical words, from the first to the last session. Particularly the initial /s/ cluster /sp/ showed the greatest improvement. This goes in line with similar studies on phonological awareness interventions with preschoolers that reveal the benefits of this type of study using multisensory materials. Therefore, reinforcing the value of the implementing phonological awareness strategies in EFL early childhood classrooms

Moreover, this action research study aimed to explore the perceptions of the participants on the intervention and the multisensory materials used. These were inspected through drawing prompted interviews that allowed the teacher-researcher to use questions in their L1 (Spanish) based on the drawings the participants made. Findings show that students used colour to highlight elements of the intervention including the storytelling activity (drawing a scene from the book) and the characters (Stacy the snake, a shark, and a starfish). This information together with the one-on-one interviews revealed how students liked to interact with the character and how it was a memorable experience for their learning. Emphasizing the importance of including characters as mediators in EFL classrooms with very young learners.

A third objective was to examine the teacher-researcher's self-perceptions on the intervention and the multisensory materials used. The analysis revealed that for the teacher, she focused on the students' reaction to the materials and activities (perceived effectiveness) as well as on her own teaching practice (pedagogical awareness). These were the two dimensions analysed.

In the first dimension, the aspects that supported effectiveness and increased active learning were: hands-on activities, recall, novelty, and enjoyment. For instance, the teacher-researcher perceived as effective, the students' interactions in hands-on activities with them moving the flashcards or interacting with the puppet. Moreover, the students were described as having fun in these activities. The point of recall is highlighted as evidence of students learning from the teacher's point of view. Finally, novelty is mentioned as influencing participation and sparking curiosity in the participants. On the other hand, the teacher-researcher reflected on her observations on engagement, particularly on disengagement and behavioural challenges. Disengagement was discussed as evidence in some participants being 'lost' or 'bored', with the teacher-researcher mentioning various roots to that behaviour such as tiredness or adjustments in the activities. Some behavioural challenges mentioned were restlessness, issues with turn-taking, and blurting.

In the second dimension, aspects related to pedagogical awareness in terms of instructional reflection were: teaching aids, explicit teaching, classroom management, and activity appraisals. The teacher-researcher reflected on some difficulties manipulating the new teaching aids, including the puppet. She also emphasized the importance of clear instructions and how effective the repetition of patterns was to support pronunciation. Additionally, she evaluated her own activities based on the ones that were most engaging for students. Finally, she reflected on a particular area of improvement in her practice which is classroom management. This frequently mentioned sub-theme, describes how frustrating managing students can be and how instructions should be provided for all new activities.

In brief, Figure 16 represents the most frequent concepts mentioned by the teacher-researcher during the audio-diaries analysis.

Figure 16

Word Cloud of the Most Frequent Concepts mentioned in the Audio-Diaries



The word cloud reveals how the most frequent words were related to teaching aids and the students' reaction, with a later group of words focused on the enjoyment and interaction, and the less frequently but not less relevant are the words related to the difficulties analysed including words related to the classroom management issues.

Overall, the audio-diaries analysis reveal that the teacher-researcher reflected on the intervention focusing on the perceived effectiveness of the activities and her own teaching practice. The observation of the students as well as a critical view of her teaching will allow for future teacher improvement.

6.2 Personal Reflection

During the action research process, I learned to adapt to different changes which meant shifting from a fixed mindset to a more flexible one. For instance, there was a considerable drop in the number of students from the previous year, which meant adapting the action plan to a smaller sample of participants. This caused distress at thinking that I might not even have the necessary participants to carry out my research in the first place.

Moreover, the personal decision to do research with preschoolers meant finding specific tools for assessment and for perceptions. This task felt daunting at times and it generated doubts and comparison to my peers who worked with older students. The constant questioning of the difficulties of working with preschoolers meant adapting to them as a target group, who have not learned how to read or write, which limits the tools that can be used with them. Nonetheless, using drawings provided a window into their perceptions, and evidently using their L1 allowed me to ask further questions. Additionally, doing the intervention and data collection in their own classroom with me,

a familiar person to them, as a researcher, allowed me to get them to interact with me during the intervention.

Most critically, I realized that the potential of action research lies in constant reflection, and seeing uncertainty as a positive aspect. For example, viewing disengagement in students might not mean that the activity is proof of a failure from teacher's planning, but it is an opportunity to adjust it to increase engagement. Adjustments such as the length of an activity, or the type of teaching aids, could be made. It is this process that should be made constantly, trying to hone our skills as teachers to enhance our students' learning process.

Another key aspect of reflection is listening to our students and focusing on how to improve their learning based on the specific context we are working. The drawing task prompted interviews allowed me to understand what was memorable for the students, which in their case it was the pupate, this would allow me to use similar teaching aids in the future. On the other hand, the audio diaries analysis confirmed a professional area of improvement, classroom management. Therefore, the action research experienced not only allowed me to observe the effect of the intervention on their pronunciation, but it also enlightened me on areas of professional development.

6.3 Recommendations

Further research is needed to understand the effectiveness of phonological awareness interventions for older students, such as primary or high school students. Factors such as anxiety levels, emotional barriers, retention of skills, and the adaptation of multisensory materials to suit older learners' needs could influence the effectiveness of these interventions. Older students may have different perceptions of pronunciation and may be more sensitive to assessment. Retention of skills learned through these interventions could vary based on age, affecting the overall effectiveness of the program. Additionally, adjusting the multisensory materials to suit older students' interests and developmental stages could enhance their learning experience and improve outcomes.

Another recommendation would be to further expand the teaching of pronunciation at a curricular level at preschool. Since there are two EFL proposals for pre-k and kindergarten, teachers following them could integrate phonological awareness activities to support the activities recommended by the governments. This could be in the form of a booklet or similar intervention to support those books. The creation of these resources is beneficial for educators, contributing to the long-term success of language learning in young learners.

Effective teacher training on pronunciation is needed because it gives educators the necessary skills to teach it among very language learners. These programs should focus not only the concepts of phonetics, and phonology, but also provide strategies and techniques to approach these concepts. In addition, such training programs should consider the diverse linguistic background of the students and empower the teachers to customize their instruction to fit the needs of each individual learner.

Moreover, this study was implemented in a private preschool in Chile, with the support from the educators and the headmaster. The participants, whose parents come from

a high socio-economical background, have an interest in their children learning English, as many of them move on to first grade at private bilingual schools in the area. It would be compelling to implement or adapt this type of study to a public or subsidized establishment, a context that might present challenges such as large classroom numbers and diverse support systems for teachers. This context would be more representative of the reality of teaching EFL to preschoolers in Chile.

CHAPTER VII
REFERENCES

- Arellano, R., Masykar, T., & Almulhim, A. (2019). The rationale for a proposal for English language education: The experience of developing a curriculum to teach English for young learners. *Atlantis Press*, 179–185.
<https://doi.org/10.2991/agc-18.2019.27>
- Aros, K. (2021). EFL teaching strategies used by three teachers for the improvement of young learners' speaking skills (ages 5 to 7) in an online context from the Metropolitan Region of Chile [Undergraduate thesis, Universidad Católica Silva Henríquez]. *USCH Repository*.
<http://repositorio.ucsh.cl/handle/ucsh/2410>
- Baltanás Serrano, L. (2018). The role of pronunciation in Very Young Learners' classes. Teachers' beliefs and concerns. [Bachelor Thesis] Dspace.uvic.cat.
<http://dspace.uvic.cat/handle/10854/5586?locale-attribute=en>
- Bradbury, H. (Ed.). (2015). *The SAGE handbook of action research*. Sage.
- Brailas, A. (2020). Using drawings in qualitative interviews: An introduction to the practice. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(12), 4447-4460.
<https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2020.4585>
- Burns, A. (2010). *Doing action research in English language teaching: A guide for practitioners*. Routledge.
- Burns, A. (2010). *Doing action research in English language teaching: A guide for practitioners*. Routledge.
- Bustos Martínez, C., & Millar Zurita, M. (2020). Improving intelligibility and pronunciation through phonics instruction for 5th grade EFL learners of Chilean public schools. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 17(2), 43–57.
<https://doi.org/10.17265/1539-8072/2020.02.001>
- By artists and non-artists. *Journal of Vision*, 23(4), 1.
<https://doi.org/10.1167/jov.23.4.1>
- Cadierno, T., Hansen, M. T., Lauridsen, J. W., Eskildsen, S., Fenyvesi, K., Hannibal Jensen, S., & Aus der Wieschen, M. V. (2020). Does younger mean better? Age of onset, learning rate, and short term L2 proficiency in young Danish learners of English. *Vigo International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 17, 57–86. <https://doi.org/10.35869/vial.v0i17.1465>
- Caleffi, P. (2023). Teaching Pronunciation to Young Learners in an ELF Context An Analysis of Pronunciation Activities in English Coursebooks for the Primary School. *Educazione Linguistica Language Education*, 2.
<https://doi.org/10.30687/elle/2280-6792/2023/02/001>
- Capurso, M., Buratta, L., & Mazzeschi, C. (2022). Primary and middle-school children's drawings of the lockdown in Italy. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.982654>

- Carpenter, J., & McConkey, R. (2012). Disabled Children's Voices: The Nature and Role of Future Empirical Enquiry. *Children & Society*, 26(3), 251–261. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1099-0860.2012.00438.x>
- Carruth, L., & Bustos, C. (2019). Phonemic awareness: It's all in the sounds of language. *Texas Association for Literacy Education Yearbook*, 6, 55–58.
- Crowe, K., & McLeod, S. (2020). Children's English consonant acquisition in the United States: a review. *American Journal of Speech-language*
- Crystal, D. (2011). *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Damiano, C., Gayen, P., Rezanejad, M., Banerjee, A., Banik, G., Patnaik, P., Wagemans, J.,
- Derby, K. (2020). The Effectiveness of Visual Phonics to Promote Phonological Awareness in Preschool Children with and Without Speech Sound Delays. *Dissertations, Theses, and Projects*. <https://red.mnstate.edu/thesis/326/>
- Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 4(2), 237-274.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2021). *Teaching and Researching Motivation*. Routledge.
- Edwards, J., & Beckman, M. E. (2008). Methodological questions in studying consonant acquisition. *Clinical Linguistics & Phonetics*, 22(12), 937–956. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699200802330223>
- Ekanem, I. E., George, J. L., & Enang, V. S. (2022). *Pronunciation problems encountered by preschool learners of English as a foreign language*. *Shared Seasoned International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 3(1), 1-8.
- Elliott, J. (2015). Educational action research as the quest for virtue in teaching. *Educational Action Research*, 23(1), 4-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2014.994017>
- Ellis, R., & Fotos, S. (1999). *Learning a second language through interaction*. J. Benjamins.
- Enever, J. (2020). What can we expect of an early start to foreign language learning in Europe today? *Gyermeknevelés*, 4(1), 2–10. <https://doi.org/10.31074/gyntf.2016.1.2.10>
- Enever, J. (Ed.). (2011). *Early Language Learning in Europe (ELLiE): Research findings from the ELLiE study*. British Council. <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/B309%20ELLiE%20Book%202011.pdf>

- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Faez, F., & Karas, M. (2017). Connecting language proficiency to (self-reported) teaching ability: A review and analysis of research. *RELC Journal*, 48(1), 135–151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688217694755>
- Fernández-Otoya, F. A., Raposo-Rivas, M., & Halabi-Echeverry, A. X. (2022). A qualitative systematic literature review on phonological awareness in preschoolers supported by information and communication technologies. *Education Sciences*, 12(6), 382. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12060382>
- Gesú, G. D., & Quinteros, C. E. (2023). THE SPIRAL CURRICULUM IN THE TEACHING OF ADDITIONAL LANGUAGES: A PROPOSAL FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES COURSES IN ENGINEERING. *Traslaciones Revista Latinoamericana de Lectura Y Escritura*, 10(19), 22–40. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373011755_THE_SPIRAL_CURRICULUM_IN_THE_TEACHING_OF_ADDITIONAL_LANGUAGES_A_PROPOSAL_FOR_IMPLEMENTATION_IN_UNDERGRADUATE_ENGLISH_FOR_SPECIFIC_PURPOSES_COURSES_IN_ENGINEERING
- Goldsworthy, C. L., & Pieretti, R. A. (2012). *Sourcebook of Phonological Awareness Activities, Volume IV* (Vol. 4). Cengage Learning.
- Hadfield, C., & Hadfield, J. (2010). *Classroom management techniques*. Cambridge University Press.
- Harmer, J. (2015). *The practice of English language teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Haslam, M., & Zetterholm, E. (2018). The role of consonant clusters in English as a lingua franca intelligibility. *Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Proceedings*, 10(1). <https://www.iastatedigitalpress.com/psllt/article/id/15383/>
- Higgins, S., & Moseley, D. (2001). Teachers' thinking about ICT and learning: Baseline study. *British Educational Research Journal*, 27(1), 25-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920010009519>
- Hiver, P., Whiteside, Z., Sánchez Solarte, A. C., & Kim, C. J. (2021). Language teacher metacognition: beyond the mirror. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 15(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2019.1675666>
- Hsu, & Ya-Huei. (2015). *Analyzing Children's Drawings*. www.semanticscholar.org. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Analyzing-Children-%E2%80%99-s-Drawings-Hsu-Ya-Huei/f36edeec3e6fb78ef58541a010f25af97654433d>
- Huo, S., & Wang, S. (2017). The Effectiveness of Phonological-Based Instruction in English As a Foreign Language Students at Primary School Level: A

- Research Synthesis. *Frontiers in Education*, 2.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2017.00015>
- Inostroza, M. J. (2018a). Chilean young learners' perspectives on their EFL lesson in primary schools. *Actualidades Investigativas en Educación*, 18(1), 1–20.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.15517/aie.v18i1.31323>
- Inostroza, M. J. (2018b). Using language practice games to teach English in Chilean primary classrooms. In J. Copland & A. Burns (Eds.), *Voices from the TESOL Classroom: Participant Inquiries in Young Learner Classes* (pp. 85–90). TESOL International Association.
- Inostroza, M. J., Perez-Villalobos, C., & Tabalí, P. (2024). Chilean primary learners' motivation and attitude towards English as a foreign language. *Education Sciences*, 14(3), 262. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/educsci14030262>
- İnözü, J. (2018). Drawings are talking: Exploring language learners' beliefs through visual narratives. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 9(2-3), 177–200.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2016-1062>
- Jafari, S., Karimi, M. R., & Jafari, S. (2022). Beliefs and Practices of EFL Instructors in Teaching Pronunciation. *Vision: Journal for Language and Foreign Language Learning*, 10(2), 147–166. <https://doi.org/10.21580/vjv11i110812>
- Káplár-Kodácsy, K., & Dorner, H. (2020). The use of audio diaries to support reflective mentoring practice in Hungarian teacher training. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 9(3), 257-277.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/ijmce-05-2019-0061>
- Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Sage Publications.
- Kung, K. (2020). *Phonological awareness: A guidebook for parents*.
https://www.uwo.ca/fhs/lwm/teaching/dld2_2020_21/Kung_dld2.pdf
- Lasagabaster, D. (2008). Foreign language competence in content and language integrated courses. *The Open Applied Linguistics Journal*, 1(1), 31–42.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2174/1874913500801010030>
- Lonning, P., & Malaguzzi, A. L. K. (Eds.). (2021). *Researching young children's perspectives: Approaches and methods*. Routledge.
- Luttenberg, J., Meijer, P., & Oolbekkink-Marchand, H. (2017). Understanding the complexity of teacher reflection in action research. *Educational Action Research*, 25(1), 88-102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2015.1136230>
- Martinez-Garcia, M. T., & Tremblay, A. (2013). Perception of epenthetic vowels in English /s/ initial clusters by Spanish-speaking second language learners of English. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 134(5), 4248–4248.
<https://doi.org/10.1121/1.4831629>

- McKay, P. (2006). *Assessing young language learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McLeod, S., & Crowe, K. (2018). Children's consonant acquisition in 27 languages: A cross-linguistic review. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 27(4), 1546–1571. https://doi.org/10.1044/2018_ajslp-17-0100
- McLeod, S., Doorn, J. van, & Reed, V. A. (2001). Normal acquisition of consonant clusters. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 10(2), 99–110. [https://doi.org/10.1044/1058-0360\(2001/011\)](https://doi.org/10.1044/1058-0360(2001/011))
- MINEDUC. (2015). *Inglés 5º Básico*. Ministerio de Educación de Chile.
- MINEDUC. (2016). *Bases Curriculares Inglés - 5to Básico*. <https://www.curriculumnacional.cl/portal/Educacion-General/Ingles/Ingles-5-basico/>
- MINEDUC. (2022). *Idioma Extranjero Inglés Propuesta Curricular Pre-kinder*. <https://www.curriculumnacional.cl/portal/Educacion-Parvularia/Ingles-Propuesta-NT/Ingles-Propuesta-Pre-Kinder-NT1/>
- Ministerio de Educación (2016). *Bases Curriculares Inglés - 5to Básico*
- Ministerio de Educación (2022). *Idioma Extranjero Inglés Propuesta Curricular Pre-kinder*.
- Montgomery, J. (2008). Dave Krupke: What exactly is visual phonics? *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 29(3), 177–182. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525740108318413>
- Mourão, S., & Ellis, G. (2020). *Teaching English to Pre-primary Children: Educating very young children*. Universidade NOVA de Lisboa. <https://novaresearch.unl.pt/en/publications/teaching-english-to-pre-primary-children-educating-very-young-children>
- Murray, J. (2019). Hearing Young Children's Voices. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 27(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2018.1563352>
- Naeini, B., Adni, Z., Naeini, M., & Adni, Z. (2017). The impact of explicit vs. implicit instruction on pronunciation intelligibility among Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of Studies in Learning and Teaching English*, 12(6), 103–123. https://journals.iau.ir/article_546173_f54b793af228dfb0e383d6abc92547fa.pdf
- Nikolov, M. (2009). *Early learning of modern foreign languages : processes and outcomes*. Multilingual Matters.
- Nikolov, M., & Mihaljević Djigunović, J. (2019). Teaching Young Language Learners. *Second Handbook of English Language Teaching*, 577–599. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02899-2_31
- Oducado, R. M. (2020). Survey instrument validation rating scale. *Papers.ssrn.com*. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3789575

- Pennington, M. C., & Rogerson-Revell, P. (2019). English pronunciation teaching and research. In *Palgrave Macmillan UK eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-47677-7>
- Philominraj, A., Zuñiga, D. O., & Quinteros, N. (2019). ENGLISH AT PRESCHOOLS: A NECESSITY OR DUTY? A CHILEAN CASE STUDY. *Journal of Humanities and Education Development*, 1(4), 186–189. <https://doi.org/10.22161/jhed.1.4.7>
- Prošić-Santovac, D., & Savić, V. (2021). English as a foreign language in early language education. In S. Nikolaou & M. D. Pappas (Eds.), *International handbook of research on children's literacy, learning, and culture* (pp. 1–26). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47073-9_13-2
- Quoc, T. X., Thanh, V. Q., Dang, T. D. M., Mai, N. D. N., & Nguyen, P. N. K. (2021). Teachers' perspectives and Practices in Teaching English Pronunciation at Menglish Center. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, 1(2), 158–175. <https://i-jte.org/index.php/journal/article/view/62/19>
- Sadeghi, K., Richards, J. C., & Ghaderi, F. (2020). Perceived versus Measured Teaching Effectiveness: Does Teacher Proficiency Matter? *RELC Journal*, 51(2), 280–293, 003368821984593. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688219845933>
- Sapi'ee, M. R., & Tan, K. H. (2020). Multisensory Learning Approach: Impacts on Phonological Awareness among Young ESL Learners in a Rural Setting. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(12), 6692–6705. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.081234>
- Schwartz, M., & Springerlink (Online Service. (2018). *Preschool Bilingual Education : Agency in Interactions Between Children, Teachers, and Parents*. Springer International Publishing.
- Scrivener, J. (2011). *Learning Teaching: The Essential Guide to English Language Teaching* (3rd ed.). Macmillan Education
- Sila, A., & Lenard, V. (2020). The use of creative movement method in teaching foreign languages to very young language learners. *European Journal of Social Sciences Education and Research*, 7(1), 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.26417/ejser.v7>
- Soto, S. (April 2019) Effects of a Spanish Phonological Awareness Intervention on Latino Preschoolers' dual language emergent literacy skills. *USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/7952https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/7952>
- Walther, D. B. (2023). Anger is red, sadness is blue: Emotion depictions in abstract visual art

Werlinger B, L., & Inostroza A, M.-J. (2024). The contribution of board games to pre-kindergarten students' oral production. *HOW*, 31(1), 123–147.
<https://doi.org/10.19183/how.31.1.781>

Williamson, I., Leeming, D., Lyttle, S., & Johnson, S. (2015). Evaluating the audio-diary method in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research Journal*.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

Pronunciation Rating Scale

Day:	Time:	Session:					
Participant N°	Target Word	Initial /s/ Cluster	Pronunciation				Notes
1	<i>Scared</i>	/sk/	Expected Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Other Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially correct Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	No Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	
	<i>Squid</i>		Expected Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Other Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially correct Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	No Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	
	<i>Square</i>		Expected Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Other Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially correct Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	No Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	
	<i>Stop</i>	/st/	Expected Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Other Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially correct Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	No Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	
	<i>Stamp</i>		Expected Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Other Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially correct Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	No Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	
	<i>Star</i>		Expected Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Other Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially correct Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	No Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	
	<i>Spider</i>	/sp/	Expected Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Other Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially correct Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	No Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	
	<i>Sport</i>		Expected Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Other Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially correct Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	No Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	
	<i>Spin</i>		Expected Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Other Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	Partially correct Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	No Pronunciation <input type="checkbox"/>	

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. *Dime, ¿Qué dibujaste en esta hoja?*
2. *¿Qué actividades estamos haciendo en tu dibujo? / ¿Cuál actividad te gustó más? ¿Te gustó más repetir solo o cuando repetimos todas las palabras?*
3. *¿A quién dibujaste en este dibujo? ¿A tí? ¿A Stacy? ¿A las profesoras? ¿A tus compañeros? Muéstrame en el dibujo.*
4. *¿Dónde estás tú en este dibujo? ¿Qué estás haciendo en el dibujo (si es que aparece)? ¿Y cómo te sentías... (repitiendo, jugando, cantando)?*
5. *¿Te gusta cuando viene Stacy a las clases o no te gusta cuando viene Stacy a las clases? ¿Qué es lo que te gusta o no te gusta de ella?*
6. *¿Te gusta jugar con las tarjetas / flashcards? ¿Te gusta cuando usamos las tarjetas o no te gusta usar las tarjetas?*

**The interview was carried out in Spanish, the students' L1.*

***Follow-up questions can be made to encourage stud*

Participant Number:
Dimension 1: Students' Perceptions of the Activities
Questions: 1. <i>Tell me, what did you draw on this sheet?</i> 2. <i>What activities are we doing in your drawing? / Which activity did you like best? Did you like repeating alone or when we all repeated the words?</i>
Dimension 2: Students' Perception of himself/herself as a Learner of English
Questions: 3. <i>Who did you draw in this picture? You? Stacy? The teachers? Your classmates? Show me in the picture.</i> 4. <i>Where are you in this picture? What are you doing in the picture (if it appears)? And how did you feel...? (repeating, playing, singing)?</i>
Dimension 3: Student Perceptions of Educational Tools and Materials
Questions: 5. <i>Do you like it when Stacy comes to class, or don't you like it when Stacy comes to class? What do you like or dislike about her?</i> 6. <i>Do you like playing with the flashcards? What do you like or don't like about them?</i>

Appendix C

Guidelines for keeping the audio diary

It is important that you try to record your experience **as it happens or soon after**, rather than relying on remembering what happened and how you felt, later in the day/week. Record **whatever is important and relevant to you at the time**, however trivial it might sound. Take between **4 to 15 minutes** to make the recordings.

For each entry please record:

General information:

- What is the date and time?
- Where are you recording?
- What session was it? (1-6)
- What was the objective of the session?

Teacher's Perceptions of the Activities:

1. What activities did you carry out? Describe the process in detail.
2. How did you feel about each activity used?
3. Describe how effective each activity was to support pronunciation and provide examples.
4. What was the participants' reaction to each activity?
5. Would you use these activities again in the future?

Teacher's Perceptions of the Session:

6. What went right?
7. What went wrong?
8. How difficult were these points of the session and why:
 - preparation
 - implementation
 - instructions
 - classroom management
9. What can be improved in the following sessions?
10. Were there any other issues in this session? Describe the issue in detail.

Note: Adapted from Evaluating the audio-diary method in qualitative research by Williamson et al. (2015).