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Phonological-Based instruction to foster EFL kindergarten learners' phonemic awareness of fricative beginning sounds

INSTRUCCIÓN FONOLÓGICA PARA DESARROLLAR LA CONCIENCIA FONOLÓGICA DE SONIDOS FRICATIVOS INICIALES EN NIÑOS DE TRANSICIÓN MAYOR EN EFL

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Abstract: In the Chilean educational context, very young learners are in the process of developing emergent literacy through phonological awareness in their mother tongue, occasionally transfer these skills in the EFL classroom. Nevertheless, English teachers often lack proper methodical instruction and knowledge to foster these competences and successfully address the singularities of English phonemes. This exploratory action research investigates the use of guided phonological-based instruction on the phonemic awareness of fricative beginning sounds among kindergarten EFL students. Mixed methods (MMR) were used to collect and analyze the data. A convenience sample of twenty-five kindergarten students from a Chilean private school participated in the study, taught daily by the teacher-researcher. The study consisted of a pre and post intervention test and five teaching sessions based on six fricative sounds presented in minimal pairs by implementing phonological-based and multisensory strategies. Findings indicate that the strategies enhanced the participants' phonemic awareness of fricative beginning sounds in four areas: (1) identification and pronunciation of sounds in isolation, (2) identification and pronunciation of this sounds in vocabulary words, (3) sound-image association and (4) sound-letter association. This last phonemic awareness feature showed the highest level of achievement among the participants, who also expressed a positive perception towards the intervention experience.

Keywords: Very young learners; phonemic awareness; phonological based instruction; kindergarten; beginning sounds; emergent literacy.

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Resumen: En el contexto educativo chileno, los niños en edad preescolar se encuentran en pleno desarrollo de la alfabetización emergente mediante el desarrollo de la consciencia fonológica en su lengua materna, logrando en ocasiones transferir estas habilidades al aula de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). Sin embargo, los docentes de inglés suelen carecer de instrucción metódica y conocimiento adecuados para fomentar dichas competencias y abordar con éxito las singularidades de ciertos fonemas del idioma inglés. Esta investigación-acción de carácter exploratorio analiza el uso de la instrucción guiada basada en la fonología para promover la conciencia fonémica de los sonidos iniciales fricativos en estudiantes de nivel transición mayor en contexto EFL. Se utilizó un enfoque mixto (MMR) para la recolección y análisis de los datos. Participó una muestra por conveniencia de veinticinco estudiantes de kínder de un colegio particular chileno, quienes fueron enseñados diariamente por la docente-investigadora. El estudio consistió en una prueba pre y post intervención y cinco sesiones didácticas basadas en seis sonidos fricativos presentados en pares mínimos, mediante estrategias fonológicas y multisensoriales. Los resultados evidenciaron que las estrategias implementadas favorecieron la conciencia fonémica de los participantes respecto a los sonidos fricativos iniciales, en términos de: (1) identificación y pronunciación de sonidos aislados, (2) identificación y pronunciación en palabras de vocabulario, (3) asociación sonido-imagen y (4) asociación sonido-letra. Esta última fue la habilidad más lograda por los participantes, quienes además mostraron una percepción positiva de la experiencia de intervención.

Keywords: Niños en edad preescolar; conciencia fonémica; instrucción fonológica; educación parvularia; sonidos iniciales; alfabetización emergente

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Introduction

Through the years, EFL instruction from early age has been adopted by many countries and school systems, aiming to improve the learning of the foreign language. Considering the characteristics of very young learners (3/5 years old) and their cognitive development, kindergarten students are in the process of developing emergent literacy skills in their mother tongue, which addresses the knowledge, skills and dispositions that precede learning of how to read and write in primary school, such as phonological and phonemic awareness, letter and sound recognition, decoding, among others (Kennedy et al., 2012). Referring to the literature addressing literacy in both L1 and L2, it has been suggested that children are able to transfer literacy skills successfully between the two languages (Dlugosz, 2000).

Regarding the Chilean English teaching context, the Chilean Ministry of Education, through various policies and programs, explicitly designates English as a foreign language (EFL) as the main framework for English language teaching and learning in Chilean schools ((Unidad de Currículum y Evaluación, n.d.).). It also suggests the convenience of starting this process with very young learners and avoiding the use of

the first language in the classroom. The EFL policies for kindergarten students (NT12) proposed by the MINEDUC highlight the importance of using games and exploration at this age, as well as young learners' characteristics and cognitive development. Nevertheless, these educational policies do not directly address the progress of emergent skills. Moreover, in the Chilean EFL context, there is a general lack of proper instruction and knowledge for EFL teachers regarding not only systematic and consistent strategies to promote emergent literacy, but also to work with preschool levels.

To address this issue, it is essential to include methodical and diverse early literacy strategies and activities, so that these skills can be intentionally enhanced and prepare students for reading. Thus, the objective of this action research is to explore the use of guided Phonological-Based instruction to promote EFL kindergarten student's phonemic awareness of fricative beginning sounds particularly challenging for a group of students from a non-bilingual private school, in terms of identification and production, which are the sounds /f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /h/, /sh/.

1. EFL settings: The younger the better?

The statement that a very young age is ideal for learning a second language has been debated for several decades. Ozfidan et al, (2019) provide a full literature-based approach on age factors in second language acquisition (SLA), addressing the common assumptions regarding age, such as young learners becoming more skillful than older learners, less frustrated when not reaching learning outcomes or acquiring a native like pronunciation. Nonetheless, SLA differs from learning English as a foreign language (EFL). In this context, Muñoz (2006) points out the substantial differences between the two concepts. While in SLA the language is embedded in a large context of exposure and immersion and used in a daily basis, in EFL context the language is decontextualized and used only within instructional settings, with little possibility of interaction with the target language community, that means outside the classroom. Thereby, although EFL since nursery school has been adopted by many countries and school systems, the age factor is still new and the findings are not conclusive yet.

2. Teaching very young learners

Teaching a foreign language to very young learners is a very demanding process due to the specific instruction, strategies and actions required (Nikolov & Djigunović, 2006). Generally, preschool learners start nursery school at the age of 4-5 years old. At these ages, they are naturally active, enthusiastic, curious, and tend to learn about the world by exploring, therefore they need to be involved in hands-on experiences for effective learning. In this context, the use of concrete materials and a range of activities are necessary to maintain very young learners' attention and interest.

Referring to Asher (1977), the use of Total Physical Response (TPR) is an excellent way to introduce language related activities through physical movement. Additionally, fine motor activities, such as drawing, coloring, cutting and pasting might contribute

to better engage with their learning process. Very young learners greatly benefit from an authentic target language environment, sensorimotor activities and colorful instructional materials (Ozfidan et al, 2019). The use of songs, games and storytelling help involving learners' imagination and creativity into the classroom activities.

Considering that young learners tend to be easily distracted, their attention span is shorter. Additionally, children are in the process to develop conceptual and language knowledge (Alexiou, 2015). It is advisable that each task focuses on a different skill while using individual, pair work, group work or whole class activities alternately. According to Shin and Crandall (2014), children learn a language through social interaction and need appropriate scaffolding, therefore, it is important to integrate activities in which the learners have the opportunity to learn not only by the teacher-student interaction, but also from each other.

2.1. Emergent literacy

When referring to very young learners, it is crucial to consider not only their characteristics and interests but also their cognitive development. At this stage (ages 3–5), *emergent literacy* arises as a significant concept. According to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2009),

> Emergent literacy is concerned with children developing a growing understanding of print and language as a foundation for reading and writing. Through play and hands-on experience, children see and interact with print as they build an awareness of its functions and conventions (p. 54).

Also known as pre-reading skills, they address an indicative of a shift from a readiness perspective in literacy to a developmental perspective. In the context of the EFL classroom, little evidence has been found, since more research is still needed in this area (Huo et al., 2017). Nevertheless, and according to Dlugosz, (2000), children might be able to transfer literacy skills successfully and bidirectionally between their L1 and L2, especially when they are exposed to a significant number of hours in the foreign language and with proper and guided instruction. Dlugosz (2000) also states that, "…including the teaching of reading in language programs will benefit all young beginners, including preschoolers i.e., children who have not yet been taught to read in their native tongue" (p. 285). Regarding approaches that may support the progression of these emergent reading skills, Papp (2020), states that a phonological based instruction in the early years and primary EFL classroom may be beneficial for the development of reading and writing skills of young learners. Likewise, the author suggests that phonics instruction can improve decoding, spelling, text comprehension and reading accuracy among emergent readers in their first language (L1), and is particularly beneficial for struggling readers and children whose first language is not English.

3. Phonological-based instruction

Phonological-Based instruction has become a trend in EFL classes (Hamilton, 2007). Phonological awareness (PA) is considered a foundational skill in early literacy and it must be explicitly taught rather than expected to develop naturally. As Phillips, ClancyMenchetti, and Lonigan (2008) emphasize, "phonological awareness … is not supposed to be developed naturally or by intuition, but rather may require explicit teaching and practice opportunities" (p. 5).

It is considered as an umbrella term that includes four developmental levels: word awareness, syllable awareness, onset-rime awareness and phonemic awareness (Adler, 2001). These levels or phonological skills come from most basic to advanced. In this context, phonemic awareness refers to the most sophisticated level of PA, also known as phoneme level.

According to the National Institute for Literacy (2001), phonemic awareness is "the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words" (p. 2). As students begin to develop their early literacy skills, they learn the relationship between a phoneme (sound) and grapheme (the letter(s) that represent the sound) in written language. Furthermore, and referring to an experimental study carried out with Chinese young learners, it was found out that phoneme awareness played a very important role in accuracy level of word-level reading and spelling (Bing et al., 2013). Moreover, Zhao et al. (2017) state that metalinguistic skills have an impact on literacy and vocabulary acquisition, since this growing ability of manipulating phonemes enables learners to form and create new words, increasing their vocabulary knowledge.

Rokhman et al. (2020) refer to the ability to identify English phonemes as a proven skill that supports EFL learners on their productive and receptive skills, since the ability to comprehend an English word comes firstly from the ability to identify that word. In the EFL context, difficulties are expected to occur for the non-native learner, mainly when there are important differences between the phoneme systems of both, the first language and the foreign one (Collins & Mees, 2013). Moreover, having a low level of phonemic awareness can result in language learning difficulties for many learners, especially in reading and spelling (Berg & Stegelman, 2003).

2.1 Problematic phonemes for EFL students

When learning English, Spanish speaking learners might face a challenging task in mastering pronunciation due to differences in both languages such as sound-to-letter correspondence, particular English phonemes, a variety of new isolated sounds and combinations and the difference in manner and articulation, since some sounds are inexistent in Spanish. Additionally, L1 interference, age, exposure and phonetic ability are also factors affecting pronunciation learning,

The chosen phonemes correspond to fricative sounds that tend to be among the most problematic features of the English language for the Spanish learners (Uribe-Enciso et al.,2019), Although the phonemic inventory of each language shares some

sounds, as /f/, /s/, some others, as z/, /s/, /v/, /θ/ are either different in manner or inexistent.

4. Reading process: Phase Theory of automatic word reading

Referring to the reading process, Ehri (2005) developed a phase theory which has been used as a framework to explain how word reading changes during initial stages to become fluent and automatic. In this theory, the author states four phases for the development of automatic sight word reading: pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic- full alphabetic and consolidated alphabetic. Whereas connections during the first phase are linked to the meanings of words, connections in subsequent phases are grounded in pronunciation. Based on this theory, and for the purposes of the specific context of the intervention, this action research will be centered on the transition from pre alphabetic to partial alphabetic phases, in which learners are able to form alphabetic associations and use letter-sound relationship, so that they can form connections between spelling and pronunciation of simple and similar words (Ehri, 2005).

5. The Study

5.1 Methodology

The following research corresponds to an action research study (AR). As Burns (2013) explains, AR relates to teachers taking actions, usually through a systematic intervention process to investigate a classroom issue in order to better understand or enhance an aspect of their teaching or learning. For this purpose, cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting are implemented to collect evidence to support understanding or improvements. In this context, the identified problem has been consistently observed across multiple years of teaching at the preschool level, so that it might be considered a broader phenomenon that needs further research. Exploring this issue aims to obtain a better understanding of instructional practices and potential improvements areas for teaching practices.

The purpose of this research is exploratory, as the topic has little existing research and the goal is to explore and gain insights on the area. Most of the related studies found were focused on the development of pre-reading skills in the first language or in an SLA context. To analyze the data, the use of mixed methods (MMR) is present, in order to combine elements of quantitative and qualitative research to gain a better understanding of the studied phenomenon, as well as to expand and strengthen the conclusions.

The research question attempted to be answered is the following:

How does the integration of a Phonological-Based instruction benefit EFL kindergarten students' phonemic awareness of fricative beginning sounds?

General Objective: To explore the use of guided Phonological-Based instruction to promote EFL kindergarten students' phonemic awareness of fricative beginning sounds.

Specific Objectives:

SO1: To describe students' ability to produce and identify beginning fricative *(/f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /h/, /sh/)* sounds as a result of the intervention.

SO2: To identify students' perceptions towards the use of the phonological based instruction.

5.2 Participants

The participants chosen for the study correspond to a class made up of twenty-two EFL kindergarten students from a non-bilingual private school in Concepción. Their ages are between five and six years old. There are 11 girls and 11 boys. Regarding their EFL experience, most of them have been exposed to English as a subject for 1-2 years (nursery school and pre-k). Nonetheless, there are 5 new students who have not been exposed to English before. This year, and after almost two years with online lessons, they are back to in-person classes. They have 5 hours of English per week, that means one hour a day. Although the school plan is not bilingual, it gives particular importance to the EFL. Regarding the selection of the sampling, it is non-probabilistic and by convenience, as the teacher-researcher was in charge of the class one pedagogical hour every day.

5.3. Instruments

To collect the data, pre – post intervention tests and an analytic rubric were used as quantitative instruments. Additionally, observation checklists, self-assessment, observation notes and a semi-structured interview were used as qualitative instruments. A draw-and-tell technique was selected as interview strategy to support the participants' insights towards the interview questions and enhance the student – teacher interaction (Driessnack, 2006, cited in Lin, 2016). Additionally, the interview sub-sampling is purposive, since it considers the students with the highest, lowest and average post-intervention test results.

5.3.1 Quantitative instruments

Pre – post intervention tests and analytic rubric: the tests consisted of four different items related to the identification and pronunciation of the six fricative beginning sounds *(/f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /h/, /**ʃ**/)* in isolation and in vocabulary words, the association of the same vocabulary words with their corresponding initial phoneme (sound / image association) and the identification of the six graphemes in isolation (sound / letter association). The same type of test was applied before and after the intervention sessions, but including minor changes, such as similar images and presenting the letters in a different order. In each test, students were asked to look and say specific fricative sounds, identify and mention specific vocabulary images related to the fricative beginning sounds, associate them with the corresponding grapheme and, finally point the sound or grapheme as they listened to them.

Analytic rubric: The tests were assessed by using an analytic rubric composed of four phoneme awareness features as main criteria: sounds identification and pronunciation, words identification and pronunciation, image association and letter association; and four levels of performance: excellent, very good, can do better, needs improvement, each of them scoring 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively. In total, the global score was 16. Friendly language and visual icons were included to help ensure that expectations were comprehensible to young learners (California Kindergarten Association, 2005).

5.3.2 Qualitative instruments

Observation checklists: each session was assessed by using an observation checklist. The first two teaching sessions were assessed with a similar checklist, but changing the minimal pairs, focusing on different sound discrimination (identifying the odd one) and the identification and production of the target sounds, in isolation and as initial sound in words. For the third teaching session, the discrimination criterion was replaced by the classification of sounds. The fourth teaching session checklist focused on tactile letters sound association and production. Since all teaching lessons were conducted in groups, group checklists were used.

Self-assessment form: after each session, the participants were asked to complete a self-assessment form that consisted of six statements referring to three particular dimensions: performance, identification and production (Table 1). The language used was simple and it was presented in the form of smiley faces measurement scale. It included the following statements:

Table 1:

Self-Assessment Organization and Dimensions

Statement	Dimension
1. I followed instructions.	Class performance
2. I completed all activities.	
3. I can identify the sounds reviewed.	Identification
4. I can identify the letters reviewed.	
5. I can say the sounds reviewed.	Production
6. I can words with the sounds reviewed.	

The first three sessions were intended to train the participants in self-assessment, since they had little experience with this format. Although they were able to complete some of the statements, there were still some misunderstandings regarding their comprehension and how to self-evaluate. For the purposes of instruments validity, only self- assessment forms 4 and 5 were used and analyzed.

Observation: each session was observed and registered by the teacher-researcher in the form of observation notes, including classroom events descriptions.

Interview: a draw-and-tell technique was selected as interview strategy, in which researchers interview young children while they are drawing (Driessnack, 2006). Based on the participants' drawings, a semi structured group interview was conducted with some of the students to deepen on their perceptions towards the use of the phonological based instruction. The interview consisted in eight questions, grouped in two main dimensions: the use of the phonological based instruction and the students' perception of the methodology.

Table 2:

Interview questions

Use of the phonological based instruction
1. De las actividades que hicimos ¿cuál fue la que más te gustó? ¿Por qué? 2. De las actividades que hicimos, ¿cuál fue la que menos te gustó? ¿Por qué? 3. ¿Te gustaron los materiales que usamos? ¿Por qué? 4. ¿Cómo crees que fue el trabajo de la Miss? ¿Por qué?
Perception of the methodology
5. ¿Cuál fue la actividad que te resultó más fácil? ¿Por qué? 6. ¿Cuál fue la actividad que te costó más? ¿Por qué? 7. ¿Cómo te sentiste trabajando en grupo con tus compañeros? ¿Por qué? 8. ¿Cómo sentiste que estaba la sala mientras trabajábamos? ¿Por qué?

The same interview was conducted in three different instances with three different groups, based on their scores in the post-intervention tests. The first one included the four students who obtained the highest scores, the second one included the four students who obtained the lowest scores and the last one, with four students who obtained average scores.

Since the teacher - researcher had created the pre and post intervention tests, the analytic rubric, checklists, self-assessment form and the interview, all instruments were validated by experts.

5.4 Procedure

This action research consisted of five consecutive teaching lessons related to particular strategies and activities to implement the phonological-based instruction of specific fricative beginning sounds (SO1). Two sessions were aimed at applying the pre and post intervention tests (SO1) and one session aimed at interviewing the participants to gather data regarding their perceptions towards the use of the phonological-based instruction (SO2). All the sessions were carried out by using the following the PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) lesson structure. The teacher presents the target language and then gives students the opportunity to practice moving from tight teacher control towards greater learner freedom.

Therefore, there was a total of eight sessions All sessions last 45 minutes. The stages are summarized below:

Table 3:

Intervention Sessions

Session	Session's objective	Activities and procedures	Assessment
Pre-intervention test	SO1 To evaluate students' initial ability to produce and identify fricative beginning sounds.	Participants answered the pre-intervention test.	Summative assessment
Teaching session 1	SO1 Minimal pairs /f/ and /v/. Students were able to produce the sounds /f/, /v/ based of their graphemes, and discriminate the different sounds after being exposed to specific instruction on articulation and phonics pictures.	Warm up: ▪ Learners watch an ABC video, dance and sing along. Presentation: ▪ Learners are introduced to the phonemes /f/ - /v/ and see examples of words with those specific beginning sounds. ▪ Learners listen to and watch a video song and reproduce the specific phonemes and vocabulary words related to each sound. Practice: ▪ With the aid of a visual expressive mask, the learners see how the lips move in order to produce the two different sounds. ▪ Learners identify the differences between the sounds and then play with the sounds by saying them exaggerating. Production: ▪ The class is divided in five groups and they receive four sets of pictures (2 sets for /f/ sound and 2 sets for /v/ sounds). Each set contains three same-sound pictures and one different sound picture. ▪ Learners say the words aloud and identify the odd one out. The teacher checks the groups answers and provide feedback. ▪ Learners complete a self-assessment form.	Assessment instance 1: Formative assessment – check list. Assessment instance 2: Self-assessment form

Table 3 Intervention Sessions (Continuation)

Teaching session 2	SO1 Minimal pairs /s/, /z/. Students were able to produce the sounds /s/, /z/ based of their graphemes, and discriminate the different sounds after being exposed to specific instruction on articulation and phonics pictures.	Warm up: ▪ Learners recall the words from the previous lesson by playing the "robot talk". Students say the words (/f/ and /v/ sounds) by sounding as a robot. Presentation: ▪ Learners are introduced to the phonemes /s - /z/ and see examples of words with those specific beginning sounds. ▪ Learners listen to and watch a video song and reproduce the specific phonemes and vocabulary words related to each sound. Practice: ▪ With the aid of a visual expressive mask, explain the learners how the lips move in order to produce the two different sounds. ▪ Learners identify the differences between the sounds and then play with the sounds by pronouncing them exaggerating. Production: ▪ The class is divided in five groups and they receive four sets of pictures (2 sets for /s/ sound and 2 sets for /z/ sounds). Each set contains three same-sound pictures and one different sound picture. ▪ Learners say the words aloud and identify the odd one out. The teacher checks the groups answers and provide feedback.	Assessment instance 1: Formative assessment – check list. Assessment instance 2: Self-assessment form
Teaching session 3	SO1 Minimal pairs /h/, / sh/. Students were able to produce the sounds /h, / sh/ based of their graphemes, and classify sight words by the beginning sounds after being exposed to specific instruction on articulation and phonics pictures.	Warm up: ▪ Learners recall the words from the previous lesson by playing the "quiet and loud talk". They say the words (/s/ and /z/ sounds) very quiet and very loud. Presentation: ▪ Learners are introduced to the phonemes /h - /sh/ and provide examples of words with those specific beginning sounds. ▪ Learners listen to and watch a video song and reproduce the specific phonemes and vocabulary words related to each sound. Practice: ▪ With the aid of a visual expressive mask, the learners see how the lips move in order to produce the two different sounds. ▪ Learners identify the differences between the sounds and then play with the sounds by pronouncing them exaggerating. Production: ▪ The class is divided in five groups. Each group receives a big piece of colored paper divided in two columns, one with the letters H and the other with the letters SH, and a set of 12 different images and their corresponding written form. ▪ Learners say the words aloud and classify the images by pasting them in the correct column, according to the beginning sound.	Assessment instance 1: Formative assessment – check list. Assessment instance 2: Self-assessment form

Table 3 Intervention Sessions (Continuation)

Teaching session 4	SO1 Tactile letters. Students were able to associate the beginning graphemes and sounds /f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /h/, / sh / with vocabulary pictures, reproduce and produce the graphemes after being exposed to specific instruction on tactile letters with concrete materials, being able to remember the shape of each letter and mention the corresponding phoneme.	Warm up: ▪ Learners see letter cards and practice the sounds exaggerating. Presentation: ▪ With the use of a wordwall game, learners identify the correct vocabulary image associated to the different beginning sounds studied before. Practice: ▪ The class is divided in five groups and they receive three plates containing different textures (salt, rice and cotton). ▪ In turns, learners use their fingers to trace the different letters (graphemes) as they mention the letter name and sound, in order to help them remember the shape of each letter. Production: ▪ Learners receive a piece of white paper (block size) and finger paint with different colors. ▪ Learners lay on the floor and use their fingers to reproduce the six different letters on the piece of paper. Each letter has to be in a different color. ▪ After that, learners decorate their letters as they want (glitter, draw faces, little pieces of colored paper). ▪ Learners share their posters with the class.	Assessment instance 1: Formative assessment – check list Assessment instance 2: Self-assessment form
Teaching session 5	SO1 Phoneme deletion and phonics hopscotch. Students demonstrated the ability to discriminate, identify, associate and produce specific beginning fricative sounds (/f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /h/, / sh / graphemes and sounds, after being exposed to beginning sound recognition instruction and playing phonics hopscotch.	Warm up: ▪ Learners activate knowledge regarding the written form of the studied words by playing a random wheel game (wordwall). Presentation: ▪ Learners are introduced to beginning sound recognition instruction: With the aid of a slide, learners see different simple words (seen and studied before) but without the beginning letter. ▪ Learners complete the words with the beginning sounds, guided by the teacher. Practice: ▪ With the aid of a wordwall game, learners see images of previous vocabulary words, but with the beginning letter removed. ▪ Learners identify the corresponding beginning letter / sound. ▪ Learners practice how the words would sound if the first sound were omitted (phoneme deletion). Production: ▪ Learners play a regular hopscotch game, but in this case, they jump on different letter sections, and once they land, they have to mention the letter, the sound and give an example word, before being allowed to move.	Assessment instance 1: Formative assessment – check list. Assessment instance 2: Self-assessment form

Table 3 Intervention Sessions (Continuation)

Post intervention test	SO1 To evaluate students' ability to produce and identify fricative beginning sounds after the intervention sessions.	Participants answered the post-intervention test.	Summative assessment
Semi-structured interview	SO2 To identify students' perceptions towards the use of the phonological based instruction.	Participants were interviewed.	Formative assessment Semi-structured interview (Draw and tell technique).

5.5. Data analysis techniques

Addressing the SO1, the quantitative data analysis shows the pre and post intervention tests results (as analytic rubrics) in a numerical form in order to gain a concise numerical picture of the issue (Burns, 2010). Consequently, descriptive statistics have been used to present quantitative descriptions in a comprehensible form and measures of central tendency have been used to analyze the tests results, focusing on the mean. Additionally, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied to assess whether results were statistically significant or not. Regarding the qualitative data addressing the SO2, Roller & Lavrakas (2015) state that qualitative content analysis is "the systematic reduction of content, analyzed with special attention to the context in which it was created, to identify themes and extract meaningful interpretations of the data" (p.232). Therefore, when analyzing the interview results, a thematic analysis has been used. These findings are supported by the observation data, categories and subcategories which have been helpful to identify different features, themes and the possible relationships between them.

6. Results

6.1 Quantitative findings – SO1

Referring to specific objective 1, which is to identify participants' ability to produce and identify beginning fricative *(/f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /h/, / ʃ /)* sounds because of the intervention, and based on each of the quantitative instruments and techniques, these are the findings:

6.1.1 Pre – intervention test scores results: global analysis

According to the rubric previously mentioned, the total possible score ranged from 4 (minimum) to 16 (maximum). The pre-intervention test revealed that participants' initial ability to produce and identify beginning fricative sounds was moderate. Table 4 shows the distribution of results, showing that nearly the 50% of participants obtained between 7 and 9 points. Additionally, 27,27% obtained 9 point, which was the most frequent result.

Table 4:

Frequency Values for Pre-Intervention Test

Value	Frequency	Frequency %
4	1	4.55
5	1	4.55
6	4	18.18
7	5	22.73
8	3	13.64
9	6	27.27
11	2	9.09

Table 5 supports the previous results. The mean score was 7.64, the median was 7.5, and the mode was 9, based on a sample size of 22 participants. The standard deviation (s = 1.79) indicates moderate low variability, suggesting that most learners scored within a similar range. These results reveal that while some students demonstrated an emerging awareness of fricative sounds, the students' general performance was average, which indicates that explicit and further instruction were needed to enhance and improve

Table 5:

Descriptive Statistics

Minimum	min = 4
Maximum	max = 11
Range	R = 7
Size	n = 22
Sum	sum = 168
Mean	$\bar{x}$ = 7, 63636364
Median	$\bar{x}$ = 7.5
Mode	mode = 9
Standard Deviation	s = 1.7874018

Table 6 shows the participants' scores by each rubric's criterion and levels of performance. At the criterion level, students demonstrated most difficulties in "sound/image association" and "word pronunciation," with the majority of results categorized as *Can do better* or *Needs improvement*. Only two participants obtained the highest (*Excellent*) level in the "Sound/letter association" criterion and none reached this level in "Sound pronunciation or Words pronunciation".

Table 6:

Pre-intervention Test Scores by Criterion and levels of performance

Pre-intervention criteria	Participants for Excellent	Participants for Very good	Participants for Can do better	Participants for Needs improvement
Sounds pronunciation	0 (0%)	3 (13.6%)	12 (54.5%)	7 (31.8%)
Words pronunciation	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.5%)	17 (77.3%)	4 (18.2%)
Sound / image association	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.5%)	12 (54.5%)	9 (40.9%)
Sound / letter association	2 (9.1%)	7 (31.8%)	11 (50%)	2 (9.1%)

6.1.2 Post – intervention test scores results: global analysis

After the implementation of phonological-based instruction, the post-intervention test results showed a significant improvement in learners' ability to identify and pronounce fricative beginning sounds. The same rubric was used, therefore, the total possible score ranged from 4 (minimum) to 16 (maximum). Table 7 shows that this time the minimum obtained score was 6 and the maximum was 16, obtained by 27.275 of the participants, which clearly indicates the intervention's effectiveness. One participant obtained the lowest score and six participants obtained the highest. The detailed descriptive analysis is the following:

Table 7:

Frequency Values for Post-Intervention Test

Value	Frequency	Frequency %
6	1	4.55
7	1	4.55
9	2	9.09
10	5	22.73
11	1	4.55
13	3	13.64
15	3	13.64
16	6	27.27

Table 8 supports the previous results. The mean score was 12.36, the median was 13, and the mode was 16, based on a sample size of 22 participants. The standard deviation (s = 3.26) indicates a level of variability, demonstrating that while most students improved, individual progress varied. The median being higher than the mean suggests that most participants performed at a satisfactory level, above the central value.

Table 8:

Descriptive Statistics for Post-Intervention Test

Minimum	min = 6
Maximum	max = 16
Range	R = 10
Size	n = 22
Sum	sum =272
Mean	$\bar{x}$ = 12.3636364
Median	$\bar{x}$ = 13
Mode	mode = 16
Standard Deviation	s = 3.25935218

Table 9 shows the detailed participants' scores by each rubric's criterion and levels of performance. At the criterion level, a clear improvement is observed: In sound pronunciation, 81.8% of participants achieved *Excellent* or *Very good* levels. In words pronunciation, 86.3% of participants achieved *Excellent* or *Very good* levels. The sound-letter association criterion concentrated the highest number of *Excellent*, with 59% of participants achieving this level. Nonetheless, sound/image association appeared to be more challenging, with 31.8% of participants still below the expected performance.

Table 9:

Post-intervention Tests Score by criterion and levels of performance

Post-intervention criteria	Participants for Excellent	Participants for Very good	Participants for Can do better	Participants for Needs improvement
Sounds pronunciation	8 (36.4%)	10 (45.5%)	4 (18.2%)	0 (0%)
Words pronunciation	12 (54.5%)	7 (31.8%)	3 (13.6%)	0 (0%)
Sound / image association	8 (36.4%)	3 (13.6%)	4 (18.2%)	7 (31.8%)
Sound / letter association	13 (59.1%)	2 (9.1%)	6 (27.3%)	0 (0%)

Overall, the quantitative data suggest that the instructional intervention had a positive impact on phonemic awareness of fricative beginning sounds among all the participants, as 95,4% of them increased their global scores while 4,54% maintained them.

6.1.3 Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied to assess whether the phonemic awareness of fricative beginning sounds improvement made by the participants had been statistically significant or not. Although there were twenty-two total number of score pairs compared, n = 21, since there is one pair that had an observed difference of 0 and was not included in the calculation. In this context, based on the global scores of pre and post intervention tests for the twenty-two participants, the test statistic value *W* obtained = 0. The critical value that corresponds to the significance level chosen (alpha level 0.05) and n = 21 is 58. Consequently, since the test statistic *W* is less than the value found in the critical values table (Figure 2), the result is considered statistically significant, indicating a meaningful difference between pre- and post-intervention performance.

Figure 1:

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test comparing Pre- and Post-Intervention Scores

Sample 1: Pre intervention scores
7, 6, 9, 9, 9, 7, 4, 11, 8, 6, 7, 9, 6, 7, 9, 8, 5, 6, 9, 7, 11, 8

Sample 2: Post-intervention scores
16, 6, 16, 15, 10, 15, 10, 16, 9, 13, 11, 16, 7, 13, 16, 13, 10, 10, 10, 9, 16, 15

W test statistic = 0

Number of non-tied pairs (n) = 21

Note. Test calculated using Statology's (n.d.) Wilcoxon signed-rank test calculator. Available at https://www.statology.org/wilcoxon-signed-rank-test-calculator/

Figure 2:

Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Critical Values Result

21	37	42	51	58	67

6.1.4 Self-Assessment results

As mentioned previously, for the purposes of instruments validity, only self-assessment forms 4 and 5 were used and analyzed.

Figure 3:

Session 4 Self-Assessment

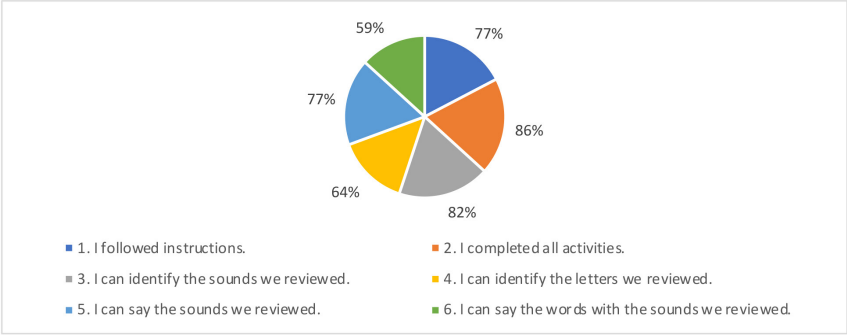


Figure 4:

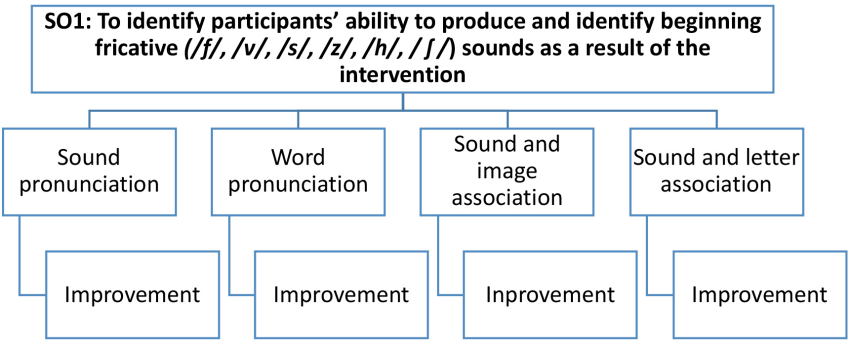
Session 5 Self-Assessment

In the last two sessions, as seen in Figure 3 and Figure 4, the participants were able to reflect on their own performance, identifying their own ability to complete the tasks, which means to identify the letters and souns reviewed and to produce the sounds in isolation and as beginning sounds. It is important to mention that, in statements 3, 4, 5, and 6, there were participants who did not provide an answer.

The results regarding SO1 can be summarized as the following:

Figure 5:

Specific objective 1: results



6.2 Qualitative findings – SO2

To achieve the second specific objective, which is to explore students' perceptions towards the use of the phonological based instruction a semi-structured interview was applied. It consisted of eight questions addressing two main dimensions: use of the phonological based instruction and perception of the methodology.

For this purpose, the same interview was carried out in three different instances with three different groups in their mother tongue, based on their post-intervention tests' scores. The first one included the four students who obtained the highest scores, the second one included the four students who obtained the lowest scores and the last one included four students who obtained average scores.

Referring to Lewis (1992), the use of group interviews with children involves many advantages, since they might be less intimidated by talking in a group than when talking individually, especially when they are not familiar with the interviewer. In educational settings, group interviews are considered practical since they allow children to feel more comfortable to ask for clarification or to express uncertainty.

Five major themes emerged from the participants' responses: activities, materials, teacher's guideline and support, group work and classroom environment. Also, the thematic analysis included a sample of the students' responses and the frequency for each sub theme.

Figure 6:

Word Cloud of the Most Frequents Words Used by the Participants About the Intervention

As seen in Figure 5, the participants were able to mention different concepts during the interview, being the most frequents the ones referring to multisensory activities and materials, such as sugar, rice, paintings, the use of fingers and *wordwall.* It can also be observed that the participants valued the opportunity of working cooperatively with their classmates and felt good about the intervention process (Table 10).

6.3 Interview thematic analysis

Most of the students agreed on how they enjoyed the activities, the innovative materials, and the achievable level of difficulty. In this context, a considerable number of participants mentioned that they enjoyed challenges and activities with a certain level of difficulty, since they feel a higher level of achievement once they finish. It should be mentioned that the answers did not vary from the three interviewed groups. Nevertheless, the group with the lowest scores mentioned some struggles with the difficulty to identify the sounds, the letters, and their own motor skills, particularly in activities such as tracing and jumping. Regarding group work, most of the students mentioned it was helpful, particularly when they needed help with a specific activity. Referring to classroom environment, most of the students mentioned that, although it became noisy, they enjoyed the opportunity of playing in the classroom. Moreover, some themes that were not originally considered in the interview emerged, such us their interest and liking for the English class and the importance given to the English learning by the families, since some of the students have a private tutor at home to reinforce the language.

Table 10:

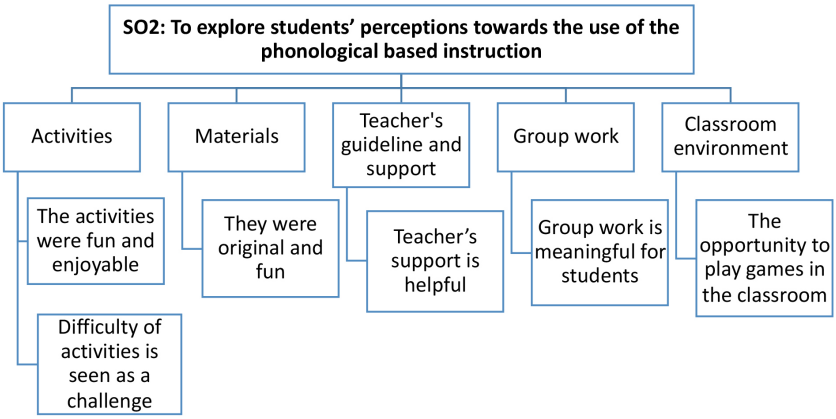
Interview Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub theme	Frequency	Example
Activities	1.- The activities were fun and enjoyable	31	"La que más me gustó fue la de trabajar pintando con los deditos"
			"Me gustó la de la ruleta y la de escribir con los dedos en el arroz y el azúcar"
			Fueron muy entretenidas y novedosas"
			"A mí me encantaron todas las actividades!"
			"No me gustó mucho la de la pintura porque me manché mucho"".
	1.1. Difficulty of activities	20	"No me costó ninguna" "Me gustan los desafíos"
			"Me costó la de pegar las imágenes con las letras"
			"Me costó la de pintar con los dedos porque me manché mucho y no me gusta"
Materials	2. The materials were original	26	No había trabajado antes con el arroz y el azúcar"
			"El juego de la ruleta estaba muy divertido, no lo conocía"
Teacher's guideline and support	3. Teacher's support is helpful	11	"La Miss nos guiaba y nos ayudaba".
			"Si, nos ayudabas cuando Cno entendíamos". "Te acercabas y nos veías"
Group work	4. Group work is meaningful for students	10	"Se siente bien trabajar con mis compañeros"
			"En la de pegar las letras, a veces nos ayudamos".
			Me gustó porque a veces no sabía y preguntaba".
Classroom environment	5. Games in the classroom	11	"Me gustó jugar en la sala"
			"Había mucho ruido".

A summary of the participants' conclusions regarding the main emerging five topics during the interview and addressing SO2 can be summarized as the following:

Figure 7:

Specific objective 2: results



7. Discussion

The first specific objective aimed at assessing the effectiveness of integrating phonological-based instruction to benefit EFL kindergarten students' phonemic awareness of fricative beginning sounds, by using a pre and post intervention test. Four dimensions arose from this first objective: sound pronunciation, word pronunciation, sound and letter association and sound and image association. The findings showed that there was an improvement in all of them, as 95,4% of the participants increased their global scores while 4,54% of the participants maintained their scores. The analysis of the results for each dimension are explained below.

Concerning sound pronunciation, previous studies agree on the difficulties EFL learners might find when dealing with sounds which are inexistent in their first language (Ehrlich & Avery, 2013). In this context, it can be concluded that the specific instruction on articulation of sounds and the presentation of these by minimal pairs supported the participants to improve their ability to identify and produce the letter sounds in isolation. This statement is supported by Hayes-Harb (2007), who claims that the use of minimal pairs has been proven to be an effective strategy to increase children's PA especially in contrasting phonemes and, therefore, improve their pronunciation.

Referring to word pronunciation, it can be claimed that the selection and practice of vocabulary words supported this improvement, since many of the selected words were already known by the students or easy to relate to the Spanish translation, such as *vampire, shorts, violin, zebra, helicopter, zombie*, among others. Therefore, cognate familiarity had enhanced the participants' comprehension and pronunciation. In this context, De Anda and D'Coster (2012) found that Spanish–English cognates were significantly easier for young learners to understand and pronounce than non-cognates.

The sound and image association dimension seemed to be the most difficult for the participants, since this is the only criterion in which the lowest level of performance was obtained in the post intervention test, by 31,8% of the participants. Additionally, two participants obtained lower scores than in the pre-intervention test. This indicates that associating fricative beginning sounds with visual support and representations still remains a challenge for a significant number of participants and may require further reinforcement or instruction. Especially considering the benefits of visual support, such as pictures or labels to enhance vocabulary learning (Moore & Calvert, 2000 cited in Phillips 2016).

Finally, the sound and letter association was the most achieved criterion among the four mentioned, with 59.1% of participants achieving the highest level (*Excellent*) and none of them fell into the *Needs improvement* category. These results might be explained considering that Spanish and English are both alphabetic languages, thus, the process of learning how to read and acquiring pre-reading skills is essentially similar. A study by August et al., (2002) examined the transfer of skills from Spanish to English in young learners within a bilingual context. Their findings revealed a significant relationship between Spanish and English performance, particularly related to the transfer of emergent reading skills. Thus, the effect of Spanish letter identification word reading on English letter identification and word reading emerged only for students who had received formal instruction in Spanish reading. In light of these findings, a similar correlation might be inferred in the present study, since the participants with highest scores in this dimension were those already developing emergent reading skills in their own language, which suggests a possible transfer of foundational phonemic awareness from Spanish to English.

Moreover, the qualitative data provided by the observation checklists and self-assessment support the statement of improvement. Referring to the students' performance by the end of the sessions, the results show that there were some variations between the identification and production of sounds. In this context, the production of phonemes /f/, /v/, /s/ /h/ was the most accomplished by the students, with 100% achievement. The production of phonemes /s/ and /z/ was highly accomplished, obtaining 95% of achievement, and the production of the digraph /sh/ was accomplished by 91% of the participants.

In terms of sound association, the phonemes /s/ and /sh/ were accomplished by 100% of the participants. The phonemes /h/, /v/ and /f/ were accomplished by 95% of the participants and the phoneme /z/ was accomplished by 86% of the participants, being the lowest score. This might be explained considering that the phoneme /z/ in English differs from the phoneme /z/ in Spanish.

Referring to the selection of sounds, it has been stated earlier that this selection was not random. The minimal pairs chosen correspond to sounds whose grapheme form is known by the participants, since those graphemes exist in the Spanish alphabet. Nonetheless, the characteristics of the phoneme as well as their articulation might differ significantly. Thus, the use of specific articulation instruction and exaggeration for letter sounds was found to be a useful way to enhance young learners' PA according

to their age, which means in a fun way that implies laughter, fun and experimentation (Yopp & Yopp, 2009).

Regarding the participants' perceptions, a semi-structured interview was applied to a purposive sampling of twelve students. Most of them agreed on how they enjoyed the activities, the achievable level of difficulty and the innovative materials. The variety of activities, mixing technology in the form of wordwall games and videos with concrete materials and multisensory activities allowed the participants to better identify and acquire the specific sounds, not only in isolation, but as beginning sounds of different vocabulary words. Furthermore, the self-assessment instrument provided information regarding the participants' perception towards their own performance for each criterion. The learning aspects of self-assessment in ESL and EFL have gained substantial attention in several educational settings (Butler, et al., 2010), so that children can be encouraged to take an active role in their learning and take responsibility for it and assess themselves as part of a learner-centered approach. Most of them stated that they understood the instructions and were able to complete the required tasks. According to Phipps (2011), teaching phonics through explicit play based activities, such as using picture books, rhymes and dramatic play, support the learning of letter sounds, since they add fun and make sounds easier to remember for the learners.

The results support the main research question since the integration of phonological-based instruction benefited EFL kindergarten students' phonemic awareness of fricative beginning sounds. In line with these results, it is important to mention that there is much evidence regarding the effectiveness of Phonological-based instruction, PA and phonics instruction in English speaking countries or in bilingual contexts (Thorius & Sullivan, 2013; Stephens, 2014; Richards-Tutor et al., 2016). Nevertheless, its effectiveness in EFL settings is still being investigated.

Furthermore, these results build on the evidence of Huo & Wang (2017), who presented a study reviewing fifteen experimental and quasi-experimental studies published between 2000 and 2016, on the topic of the effectiveness of phonological-based instruction in the EFL context in primary levels. Even though it was found to be effective among primary school EFL students, particularly on reading's underlying skills, such as phonemic awareness and non-word reading, the median value of the effect size was moderate. considering the limitations of oral and written exposure to the language.

Referring to Phonological-Based instruction in EFL contexts, Shen, (2003, cited in Huo & Wang, 2017) highlights the need of explicit instruction of English literacy foundations, such as phonemic awareness, since it is not acquired spontaneously. In this context, the use of multisensory strategies, which involve visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic activities, benefits the learning process by providing a self-exploratory element, stimulating many cognitive processes (Gorjian et al, 2012).

Additionally, and based on the findings and methodology of similar studies, this action research study provides new insights into the relationship between the use of specific phonological instruction with struggling readers who have trouble

learning how to read and EFL learners. Costenaro et al (2014) presented new teaching material focusing on the use of PA to enhance Italian young EFL learners suffering from dyslexia. The authors focused on selected sounds particularly challenging not only for these students, but also for the whole class and that were inexistent in the Italian phonetic system, as well as different in articulation. The authors implemented a Sound Pathway with the /h/ sound alone, plus other seven pathways including a sound pair, such as /θ/ and /f/, /p/ and /b/, /k/ and /tʃ/, or /æ/ and /ʌ/. /f/ and /th/ and their corresponding graphemes. Each pathway is divided in five stages, which are presenting, identifying, and reproducing the sounds, matching sounds and letters and ending with multisensory activities.

These stages are corresponding to the ones designed and implemented in this action research and have been proven to fulfill a playful methodology and a multi-sensorial stimulation, which are strongly suggested when teaching very young learners (Schneider & Crombie 2003; Nijakowska 2010).

8. Limitations

The methodological choices were constrained by some factors worth mentioning. Firstly, the generalizability of the results is limited by the size of the sample, belonging to a particular educational context. Secondly, the wide variety of instruments, qualitative and quantitative, delayed the process of gathering and analyzing the data. Due to the age and level of the participants, plus the pandemic context and Covid related symptoms, some of the students were absent during the class semester, which delayed the beginning of the intervention process.

Finally, the age of the participants was a challenge in terms of metacognition, particularly when applying the self-assessment instrument. Very young learners are in the process of developing meta-cognition and self-awareness, so that their reflections are still guided. Nonetheless, after a couple of rehearsals and specific instruction regarding evaluating their own performance during the sessions, most of them were able to understand the statements and reflect on them, providing coherent and honest answers, which contributed significantly to the second objective of this action research.

7. Conclusions

Despite many well-known assumptions regarding learning a second language at a young age (Ozfidan et al, 2019), age as a factor is still being debated. Thus, the belief that children learn better at an early age has led many education systems to start their ESL or EFL instruction in preschool levels. Nonetheless, age is certainly not the only factor or variable. The amount of exposure, cultural background, and teaching strategies, to name a few, are fundamental to consider when teaching EFL to young learners and very young learners. As teachers, there are many skills required, not only in terms of mastering the language, but also of being aware of how our students learn better, their characteristics and needs.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of data, and regarding the first specific objective, SO1: to describe students' ability to produce and identify beginning fricative (*/f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /sh/, /h/*) sounds as a result of the intervention, the findings showed that there was an improvement in all the four analyzed criteria: sound pronunciation, word pronunciation, sound and letter association and sound and image association, as 95,4% of the participants increased their global scores while 4,54% of the participants maintained their scores. Additionally, observation checklists and self-assessment during the last two sessions provided evidence regarding the positive learners' performance, who were able to understand instructions, performed the required tasks and work cooperatively with classmates. Therefore, it can be concluded that using specific and systematic phonological based strategies in the form of a PPP structure class and working with the sounds through minimal pairs and using multisensory activities had a positive contribution in the participants' phonemic awareness.

The main conclusions regarding the first specific objective are the following:

- A positive contribution of the intervention on the participants' ability to identify and produce beginning fricative sounds.
- The sound and image association criterion was the highest achieved by the participants.
- Presenting the sounds by minimal pairs had a positive effect on developing phonemic awareness of fricative beginning sounds.
- A positive contribution of explicit English articulatory movements instruction on the participants' ability to produce beginning fricative sounds.
- The / *z* / sound was the hardest sound to produce.

This last conclusion might be due to the L1 interference, phonetic ability, and articulatory differences (Uribe-Enciso et al, 2019), how to instruct students in these English articulatory movements.

Regarding the second specific objective, SO2, to identify students' perceptions towards the use of the phonological based instruction, it can be concluded that those participants had a positive perception towards the variety of implemented strategies during the intervention. Based on their self-assessment responses and semi-structured interview, there was a general tendency to value the activities, materials, teacher's guideline and support, group work and classroom environment. In terms of activities, the participants mentioned that *"they were fun" and "challenging"*. Referring to the materials, they found them *"innovative and fun"*. They also considered the teacher's support as *"useful"*, since the teacher was available to answer questions, monitor and guide them through the activities. Group work was particularly valued by the participants in terms of *"helping each other", "have fun together"* and making the teaching and learning process more meaningful. Referring to the classroom environment, even though the participants mentioned that "*it was noisy and distracting at some points"*, they valued *"the opportunity to play games within the classroom and have fun".*

The main conclusions regarding the second specific objective are the following:

- A positive perception towards the use of phonological-based instruction.
- A positive perception towards the contribution of multisensory strategies.

Referring to the last conclusion, the use of multisensory strategies allowed my students to incorporate other senses and better recalling the sounds and letters. A review of the literature suggests that these strategies, such as tactile letters, are commonly used with children with learning disabilities, as dyslexia, to enhance PA and particularly phonemic awareness in English as an L1. Nonetheless, in the present EFL classroom these strategies were proven to be suitable and enjoyable for all kind of learners, in spite of their particular characteristics, fine motor skills and learning preferences.

Based on these conclusions, practitioners should consider the challenge of teaching very young learners as an opportunity to acquire new teaching skills, to adapt to new teaching contexts and, most importantly, to grow as a professional. Teaching English in the EFL Chilean context is not an easy task. Furthermore, bilingual, and private schools provide a more developed teaching and learning context, helping to increase the inequality in education in terms of the English language. This action research was carried out within a private school context, where the teaching conditions, resources and the amount of exposure to the English language is above the one considered by the national curriculum, yet below the one provided by bilingual schools. Additionally, students from private schools own a richer background knowledge, which provides them with several opportunities to be surrounded by the foreign language and their families give particular importance to the learning of English. Considering the benefits of developing phonemic awareness, PA should be part of our teaching instruction in any level or context as a way of supporting our students' pronunciation and reading skills. Therefore, it would be interesting to implement these strategies in other levels or contexts, such as rural or vulnerable ones.

Hopefully, this action research study will contribute to the yet little research in the area and benefit preschool teachers interested in English and EFL teachers struggling with young and very young learners to obtain useful tools to enhance the teaching and learning of English.

Finally, further research is needed to establish the instruction of pre-service teachers regarding EFL in preschool levels, specifically in terms of PA instruction and phonemic awareness.

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