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Luglio 2025

Towards English for Specific Purposes in teacher education: A needs analysis of prospective preprimary teachers of English

Verso l'inglese per scopi specifici nella formazione degli insegnanti: Un'analisi dei bisogni dei futuri insegnanti di inglese in età prescolare

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Doi: https://doi.org/10.14668/QTimes_17354

ABSTRACT

This study explores the affordances of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in teacher education, in light of recent policy changes expanding English instruction in early childhood education across the Region of Madrid. Specifically, the language needs of a group of 25 preprimary student teachers at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid were analysed through a multilevel needs analysis based on mixed data-collection tools (focus group discussion and survey), with the aim of informing the design of an **684**

QTimes webmagazine - Anno XVII - n. 3, 2025

Anicia Editore

www.qtimes.it

ISSN 2038-3282

ESP course tailored to future preprimary English teachers. The findings offer a tentative profile of their linguistic competence and a replicable model for needs analysis, which may guide ESP course development in similar educational contexts.

Keywords: preprimary education, teacher education, english as a foreign language, ESP.

RIASSUNTO

Questo studio esplora le potenzialità dei corsi English for Specific Purposes (ESP) nella formazione degli insegnanti, alla luce delle recenti riforme normative che hanno ampliato l'insegnamento dell'inglese nella scuola dell'infanzia nella Comunità Autonoma di Madrid. Nello specifico, i bisogni linguistici di un gruppo di 25 studenti del corso di laurea in educazione della prima infanzia presso l'Università Autonoma di Madrid sono stati analizzati attraverso un'analisi multilivello dei bisogni, basata su strumenti di raccolta dati misti (focus group e questionario), con l'obiettivo di orientare la progettazione di un corso ESP rivolto a futuri insegnanti di inglese della scuola dell'infanzia. I risultati offrono un profilo provvisorio delle competenze linguistiche dei partecipanti e un modello replicabile di analisi dei bisogni, che potrebbe orientare lo sviluppo di corsi ESP in contesti educativi simili.

Parole chiave: scuola dell'infanzia, formazione degli insegnanti, inglese come lingua straniera, inglese per scopi specifici.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 20th century, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching has progressively shifted from involving upper-primary onwards to spilling profusely into lower education levels, to the extent that the onset age to start English at many European schools nowadays is preprimary education¹. For two decades, formal English provisions for very young learners (VYL)² have been mushrooming all over Europe (Birch *et al.*, 2023) and Spain is no exception (for a lucid account on EFL preprimary teaching in Spain see Andúgar *et al.*, 2019). Within Spain, the Region of Madrid is an eventful scenario in this respect. Madrid's regional authorities have very recently introduced a series of policy reforms whereby, from the year 2024-2025 onwards, half the population of Madrilenian children attending preprimary state education will receive four to six hours of English a week under pedagogic bilingualism and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL; Otto &

¹ Within Early Childhood Education and Care, preprimary (ISCED level 020; UNESCO, 2012) corresponds to early childhood education for children from ages 3 to 6.

² "Very young learner" refers to children learning a FL in a formal setting before entering primary education.

Cortina, 2023). This amounts to nearly 47,000 children taught by around 1,750 teachers. This scenario has raised discussion about the quality and appropriateness of teacher education for VYL. Experts express doubts as to the affordances of teacher education to accommodate the rapid changes in the world of EFL and often report discontinuities between EFL methodology and general early childhood programmes (Waddington, 2022). Given the situation, the one-size-fits-all strategy makes little sense. Rather, effective planning for teacher education must incorporate sociocultural and contextual factors: it is imperative to carefully define teachers' needs and rethink teacher education to align with them. In this context, applying English for Special Purposes (ESP) arises as a suitable course of action. A frequently cited definition of ESP is "an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, 19). This reason is tightly linked to the professional domain, in this case the teaching profession.

This paper presents the preliminary results of a multilevel analysis of the needs of preprimary student teachers at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM), Spain, with the aim of collecting evidence to eventually select the objectives of an ESP course for prospective PpE teachers, as a continuation of UAM-based work on ESP in teacher education (Alonso & Fernández-Agüero, 2003; Garrote & Galetti, 2015; Fernández-Agüero & Alonso, 2017; Garrote *et al.*, 2018; Torres & Carrasco, 2020). At UAM, the degree in preprimary education is a four-year degree with two compulsory general English courses in Years 1 and 2, and a Major in EFL teaching, which is an elective pathway undertaken in Year 4 offering a combination of courses on instrumental English, EFL methodology and internships.

2. ESP AND ITS APPLICATION TO TEACHER EDUCATION

ESP is an approach to EFL teaching oriented towards a given occupational or vocational function in a scientific, technological, economic or academic area (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). It is centred on designing tailored courses to respond to the needs of students who, beyond learning to communicate in English, require using it in their profession and thus, need to be skilful when performing linguistically in a professional role. Survival English for immigrants, English for hotel management, and English for air traffic controllers are examples of ESP.

The origins of ESP are directly linked to the history of the 20th century. First, the economic, scientific and technological expansion of the US after World War II, as well as its privileged position in the commercial arena, made it possible for English to become a common *lingua franca* among professionals. From the 1960s, ESP was a timely response to the growing demand for instruction in English and the increase in professional mobility across Europe, triggered by European unification. This situation called for a more efficient way to teach languages adequate for busy working people, and run concurrently with the advent of the Communicative Approach (Wilkins, 1976), a general philosophy to foreign (FL) teaching-learning that consisted in placing communication at the core of the FL lesson and represented a watershed in FL teaching theory and practice. Since the early 1980s, the "coming-of-age" period of ESP, it has progressively evolved to become a consolidated discipline in the FL pedagogical landscape based on Communicative Language Teaching.

The driving principle of ESP is that English is not taught as separate from the students' real or future professional world (for in-service or pre-service ESP respectively). Instead, it is a context-bound type of teaching that combines English and content knowledge. As a matter of fact, working under ESP

often demands additional knowledge and skills from the part of the teacher or practitioner because it involves dealing with subject-specific oral and written texts from areas outside their primary area of expertise, provoking what is known as “the subject-matter knowledge dilemma” (Dudley-Evans, 1997). For students, though, subject matter boosts motivation and provides a backdrop to understand English.

The main difference between ESP and general English courses lies in the learners and their aims for using English. ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners –either at tertiary level, at a vocational school or in a professional environment– who already have some acquaintance with English and are learning the language in order to perform particular job-related functions (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

An ESP programme is built on a needs analysis to identify the purposes for which English is required. This analysis determines what language skills and contents are more necessary, and the syllabus is designed accordingly. In Belcher’s words “needs assessment is seen in ESP as the foundation on which all other decisions are, or should be, made” (Belcher, 2006, p. 135). Hence, practitioners design ESP courses mainly by identifying the motivations of the students to learn the language and the situations in which they will use it. For this, they tend to undertake a target situation analysis (Chambers, 1980) to establish the functions, forms and frequencies of communication that really occur in the corresponding professional setting. Asking learners what they ought to learn is an important part of this needs analysis, which can be combined with analysis of core language and learning requirements through desk research. At the same time, the process of learning must be carefully considered to work out exactly *what is needed* for students to reach the end target. For example, even though doctors may chiefly need to read journal articles from their field in English, it might be that medicine ESP students can reach that end by practising reading comprehension *and* by manipulating written sources and turning them into visual representations.

In the field of education, work on ESP is in short supply. In a recent study on the curricula of 60 Spanish official university degrees in preprimary education, Torres & Carrasco (2020) found that general English instruction significantly outweighs ESP in teacher preparation for the preprimary stage (82% vs. 18%). According to these authors, most curricula in Spanish faculties of education reveal a progression in instrumental language according to the six-level scale (A1 to C2) of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001) but not in terms of thematic content. Nonetheless, there are studies on teachers’ needs that can be taken as a reference point for the development of ESP syllabi. The empirical evidence reflects that student teachers prioritise the need to improve their English competence over methodological concerns, as they see language proficiency as one of the most important factors that prepare them for their jobs. For instance, Fernández & Fernández (2017) made a small but thought-provoking research on student teachers’ perceived teaching self-efficacy and found that this was lower among participants with poorer English skills who felt insecure in oral interaction, and preschool student teachers are even more insecure than primary ones (Crespo, 2013). These views prevail upon graduation too. In a large recent investigation in CLIL ambits, the practising teachers questioned reported that their training should be based, above all, on high linguistic proficiency in the target language and on methodological competence (Durán *et al.*, 2020). These results resonate with the findings of other studies about EFL preprimary in Spain (Fleta, 2016) and with needs-analysis surveys and other large studies in the European context (Sešek, 2007; Calabrese & Russo, 2016).

EFL teachers also oppose the generalist orientation of the current Spanish education degrees and believe that their training in English and pedagogy is insufficient and does not equip them to cope **687**

effectively with the requirements of the FL classroom (i.e. López, 2021 on Madrid's CLIL). Preprimary studies in higher education remain firmly entrenched in early childhood education subjects, the credits for EFL being very few in relation to the total amount of credits (e.g. 54 out of 240 at UAM). The failure to include more English-specific courses could partially be due to the fact that preparing for this education stage has traditionally been regarded as a technical area and to the assumption that PpE teaching necessities can be fulfilled by adapting general pedagogical strategies from mainstream instructional practice (Amengual, 2013). In a nutshell, the message from EFL teachers to teacher educators is that there is room for improvement, and that training in PpE teaching should put more emphasis on the development of communicative competence.

3. A NEEDS ANALYSIS OF PROSPECTIVE PPE TEACHERS

3.1 *Presentation and objectives*

This study is an interpretive mixed method case study aiming at undertaking a fine-grained multilevel evaluation of the demands of a group of prospective PpE teachers. More specifically, it inquires into student teachers' present and future interest and needs to lay out a target situation analysis (Chambers, 1980), focusing on the following criteria:

- Level of English competence of student teachers,
- Their experience and motivations,
- The professional context for which they are being trained,
- The communicative requisites of their future work setting.

The ultimate purpose is to gather the necessary information for selecting long- and short-term objectives to design an ESP course for PpE teachers at UAM. In general, this investigation seeks to contribute to understanding the social context of teacher education in the Region of Madrid to address practical problems and promote improved actions.

3.1. *The context: preprimary student teachers at UAM*

According to the official statistics³, the student population of UAM's degree in preprimary teaching is mainly composed of young women aged 19 to 24: 89% of students are female and the mean age is 22 years old. Around 16% of the students are older than 24, a percentage that has remained stable for the last few years. To be accepted in this degree, candidates must pass the customary procedures stipulated to access Spanish higher education. Most students come from upper secondary via the national university entrance examinations, a small number (around 10%) have entered through the quota for vocational training degrees on infant education and a few are already graduates in another university degree, e.g. social education.

Their level of English according to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001; 2020) is difficult to pinpoint. One of the most salient features of these class groups is their mixed ability in terms of communicative competence. Some have not been in contact with English for years –mostly among those coming from

³ Data from <https://www.uam.es/uam/oficina-analisis-planificacion/cifras> (year 2022-2023).

paths different to the national university entrance examinations— and even recount bad experiences as language learners that make them wary of English, whereas many others speak C1-C2 English, seldom as native or heritage speakers. This variability is especially acute in the first years' compulsory general English courses, and even though students' level of English is steadily improving, this is probably our biggest contextual challenge, along with the large number of students per class (45-50 in Years 1 and 2). The profile changes slightly in the Major in EFL teaching. Here, cultural backgrounds are diverse, classes are increasingly multicultural, and English competence tends to be remarkably good, way higher than B2 at times. This is partly because our courses are taught in English, which makes them attractive to mobility students.

3.2 Method and sample

The study is based on two main sources of data:

- a) Two 15' focus groups in Spanish with $n=25$ pre-service PpE teachers, one with 7 subjects and the other with 18 (via Teams and in person respectively). The focus groups followed semi-structured guidelines, by which participants were prompted to discuss their linguistic and contextual needs as student teachers and future EFL professionals. During the in-person session, a fellow researcher took notes of naturally occurring talk while the author conducted the discussion; the online session was transcribed using Microsoft automatic speech recognition tool. Focus groups were chosen because their dialogic nature creates a supportive setting for reflective practice (Chong *et al.*, 2011, 52).
- b) A brief anonymous individual survey, also in Spanish, designed and distributed through Google Forms among the same 25 students after the focus groups, consisting of (1) a series of closed items on identification data –age, gender, self-reported level of English, linguistic background and teaching experience; (2) 1 multiple-option question on their reasons to pursue a career in English teaching; (3) 2 Likert-scale questions on their satisfaction with their studies and their level of English; and (4) 2 open-ended questions: “What is your most important need as a future PpE teacher?” and “Is there anything that you would like to add to what you said the focus group?”. 25 replies were collected, although only 18 contained answers to the open questions. Nevertheless, this yielded valuable information on respondents' views free of time or confidentiality constraints, and allowed for triangulation of data obtained through the focus groups.

The mean age of the participants was 21 years and 6 months ($Md=21$; $s=1.61$) and the sex distribution was 12% male and 88% female. The participants were studying the Major to become PpE teachers at UAM's Faculty of Education during 2023-2024. Concerning their linguistic and cultural background, 19 were Spanish nationals raised in central, monolingual Spain who shared a similar linguistic upbringing –they had sojourned abroad for a mean time of 4.2 months and spoke two FLs at different degrees of proficiency, normally English and French; 2 were Spanish nationals with Ecuadorian and Portuguese backgrounds; 2 were Chinese degree-mobility students; 1 was a British citizen based in Spain who had lived abroad for lengthy periods of time; and there was 1 Peruvian who arrived in Spain as a teenager. They all classified themselves as either independent (B2) or proficient (C1) English users, except for 3 who claimed that they used English at level C2. Finally, their teaching experience was scarce: mainly private English lessons and after-school clubs.

Running in parallel with data collection, complementary desk research was applied on secondary sources such as official reports, academic and technical documents and other publicly available resources. Among these, the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001; 2020) and the national and regional education laws in force stand out as core references.

4. STUDENT TEACHERS' SELF-REPORTED INTERESTS AND NEEDS

The preliminary analysis of the notes/transcription of the focus groups and the answers to the survey reveals that the profile of participants corresponds to the one portrayed in 3.2. in terms of satisfaction with their studies. For instance, many ($n=17$) replied that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the degree.

With regards to the contents in/about English within their degree, complaints boil down to the general English courses of Years 1 and 2, which are severely criticised for their large groups and lack of oral practice. This does not come as a surprise, as the size of these groups does hinder work on spoken skills. Other, more striking findings about these courses are:

- 18 participants agreed that the contents were not relevant for them. One even said that “the English classes of Years 1 and 2 were the same as in high school, only more boring and with more people”.
- In the online discussion, participants put these classes in contrast with the methodology of the EFL Major, where they do microteaching and class simulations.
- participants objected to doing projects in small groups: apparently, they found it unfair that, due to the professors' alleged lack of control, some classmates took advantage of others' work.

When asked about their reasons for choosing the Major, 76% answered that they thought it would “open the doors to the labour market”. They also chose the option “because I like English/learning languages” in 64% of the cases. They are generally satisfied with their level of English *for studying the Major* (70% are at least “satisfied”) but concerns were raised during the focus groups that this competence would not be enough *for their jobs*.

With respect to their current perceived needs in English, the majority ($n=20$) asked for more oral practice. Above all, they wanted more small-group interaction and appealing listening activities. Regarding their learning style, they claimed to learn best through visual and auditory means, which implies that their preferred methods of instruction involve multimedia materials: podcasts, audio and video files. For instance, several participants commented on the usefulness of watching authentic video clips on real experiences in education, for example from YouTube. Another suggestion for improvement was to read more about education in English-speaking countries or other parts of the world. Also, a group of 6 students coming from the same class in Years 1 and 2 recalled making oral presentations in English and finding this challenging but stimulating. Lastly, in one of the focus groups participants agreed that they liked trying out (or would like to try out) their English skills in authentic communicative settings. They acknowledged that travelling abroad was very beneficial but found it complicated for economic reasons.

When asked about the link between university and their future profession, it seems that they had not envisioned themselves as English teachers until the Major, so they insisted on the need to draw connections with the world of EFL teaching from the onset to help choosing their professional path. More specifically, the most frequently reported interests in both focus groups and survey were: characteristics and developmental features of their target age-group; EFL for VYL in contrast with

other age-groups; strategies to face real classroom situations; the use of literature as a cultural artifact; and knowledge about the world of education at European/international level. Interestingly, the survey revealed that addressing affectivity and dealing with diversity while using the FL were frequent sources of concern. Hence, another general interest could be interacting with VYL through the FL while acknowledging children's uniqueness and helping them thrive in a holistic way. As one of the participants stated, "children at this stage are so different to one another and my main interest as an English teacher is to be able to reach them all. What if they don't understand me? Having a good English will not be enough"⁴.

5. SKETCHING A PRE-SERVICE ESP COURSE FOR PPE TEACHERS

Based on the results presented above, this section presents a tentative outline of the contents of an ESP higher-education course for prospective preprimary teachers who will pursue a career in EFL teaching.

Firstly, the participants in this study seem to have a pragmatic view of language learning, which entails that instrumental motivation plays an important role in the shaping of their 'ought-to self' (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), and consequently, in their personal and professional choices. Thus, the first hallmark of pre-service ESP could be instilling an intrinsic motivation towards language learning *per se*, commonly associated to higher rates of persistence and personal satisfaction. On the other hand, participants are adamant that they require a hands-on approach to the teaching-learning process. To foster intrinsic motivation and meet the students' demands for practical authentic pedagogy, pre-service ESP should be clearly framed within the world of education and EFL instruction, optimally through experiential learning that builds up an informed but personal understanding of teaching and EFL-related contents.

The contents of the course should be oriented towards education and the use of English as an international global language without losing sight of the local meaningful personal experience of students. A non-exhaustive list of topics for an ESP course for PpE teachers could be:

- The foundations of EFL teaching and learning contextualised in the Region of Madrid, for example in relation to preprimary CLIL (Otto & Cortina, 2023).
- Pedagogical principles of preprimary education –i.e. the role of child-initiated free play to give scaffold for learning and help self-regulation– and VYL's linguistic, cognitive, emotional and physical characteristics such as their short attention span or preoperational reasoning (Piaget, 1968).
- Resources for the pre-school EFL class: games, songs and nursery rhymes, literary texts (tales and poems), and other cultural expressions both from a local and international perspective.
- Specialised vocabulary from the field, namely school routines and classroom language, schools around the world, or comparisons of national and foreign education systems (as in Garrote *et al.*, 2018).

These topics should be explored by following a methodological principled approach (Brown, 2002) revolving around two pivotal principles: (1) knowledge is socially constructed and negotiated (Szabó & Csépes, 2023), which implies doing collaborative, problem-based learning through projects and tasks; and (2) language is a system for the expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning, so

⁴ Translated from Spanish by the author.

real communication must be at the core of the class (Richards, 2006). Despite the participants' objections to group work, this is deemed necessary to provide opportunities for authentic negotiation of meaning.

Concerning language competence, English will be necessary for daily school life at least at CEFR's independent level. Everyday contact with colleagues will generally take place in Spanish but in an increasingly bilingual school setting, it will surely be beneficial for the children that all the staff are sensitive to the role of English in the teaching-learning process. Also, teachers will often forge links with English-speaking professionals within the school and outside it, in the context of mobility schemes, Erasmus+ projects, e-twinning, contacts with twin schools, guidance of language assistants, participation in communities of practice, etc. These encounters may take place face-to-face or online. At university, then, student teachers must get ready for holding informal conversations as well as formal discussions where participants must cooperate to achieve a goal in English at B2 level – perhaps B1 in the case of online gatherings, which can be scheduled and rehearsed in advance.

In ESP for PpE teachers, competence in oral skills is a “make-or-break” requirement. Future PpE teachers need to master orality for striking up and maintaining a conversation with their children, listening to audios or videos, and making themselves understood using the right verbal and non-verbal cues while in control of classroom management. In particular, the subskill of sustained monologue, so frequent in teaching (for giving information, describing experiences and narrating) should be performed at a very high level of competence. For these language activities, prospective PpE teachers should aim at no less than C2. Therefore, in teacher education oral production and interaction should prevail over other skills.

Besides, although this did not come up in the data, all preprimary teachers –be it English specialists or not– need to keep up to date with the state of the art in their field, as the main Spanish laws on education establish that continuing professional development is both a right and a duty of all teaching staff. English will most likely play a role in this process so an ESP syllabus should accommodate the following work on the reading and writing skills, probably at intermediate-user level: reading manuals for detailed information, searching through EFL-teaching webpages at speed to decide whether they are relevant for the age-level of one's classes, scanning for specific data in European official documents, perusing story books to decide on their suitability for classwork, and writing reports and essays for an international readership. Reading and writing could be carried out for pleasure too: reading children's and young adults' literature as a leisure activity, or creative story-writing could be interesting language activities for student teachers of an ESP course.

Additionally, ESP for PpE teachers must take into consideration the mediating skills. Mediation can take many forms. In the case of the EFL preschool classroom, teachers mediate when they express a personal response in English to children's artistic productions, explain conceptual knowledge about the environment through CLIL, relay specific information from written texts to oral language, or facilitate collaborative interaction among children. To carry out these tasks, they will need a very good command of English, especially to make their naturally egocentric pupils collaborate. Mediation will also be necessary to construct meaning in cooperation with children, but in this case, children's genuine eagerness to communicate can be an asset. At university, learning to mediate and deal with VYL's common developmental features could be based on observation, microteaching, simulations and case analysis.

To finish, an ESP course must prepare student teachers to face the linguistic demands inherent to their target age-group. PpE teachers must be capable of providing their students with a safe learning environment where affective filters are low and children are free to take part or step aside, expressing **692**

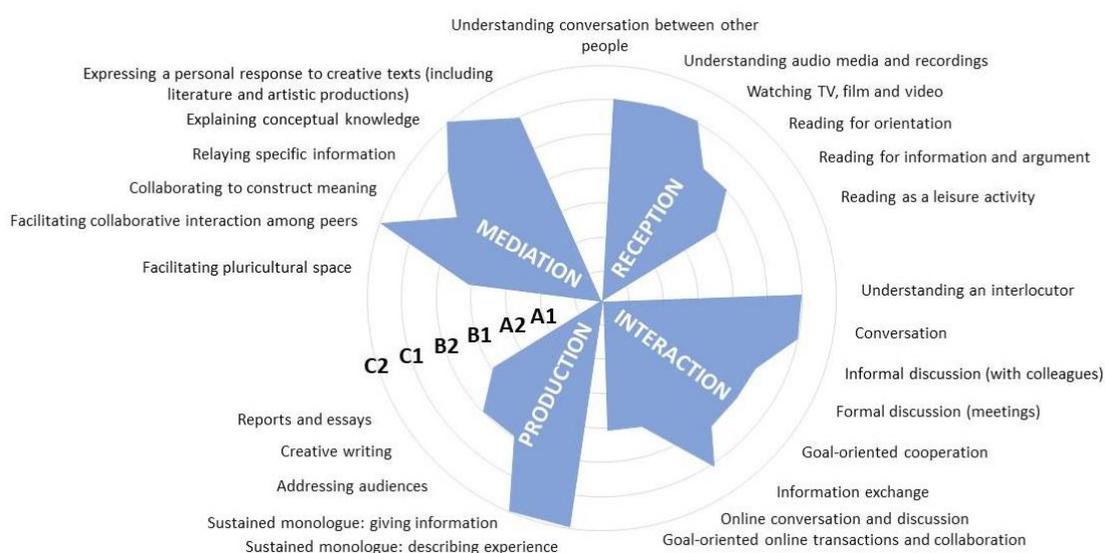
themselves in the FL or their first language. To be able to concentrate on children’s welfare, teachers should feel at ease when using their oral skills. That is, the overall target level to keep in mind should be effective operational proficiency or C1.

6. THE TARGET PROFILE FOR PROSPECTIVE PpE TEACHERS

The suggestions presented above are meant to help student teachers arrive at target situation where they can perform competently in their professional role as PpE teachers. To make it more achievable, this target situation can be “broken down into pieces” by drawing on the CEFR’s descriptor scale system (Council of Europe, 2001). Thus, this section puts forward a descriptive target learner profile of prospective PpE teachers’ communicative needs to be taken as the basis for an ESP syllabus. Taking CEFR’s C1 as a reference, this profile portrays the ideal level of English competence that the students of UAM’s Major on EFL teaching in preprimary should attain.

Figure 1 shows the profile in the shape of a circle graph, in line with the proposals of the companion to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020, 38ff). The four irregular blue shapes correspond to the language skills of reception, interaction, production and mediation, and within each language skill, the labels around the edge of the circle represent the communicative language activities of the CEFR’s descriptor scales (*op. cit.*, 47ff.) deemed relevant for prospective PpE teachers with very small adaptations: *reception* comprises activities for oral reception, and audiovisual and reading comprehension; *production* includes oral and written production; *interaction* involves oral and online interaction; and *mediation* makes reference to mediating communication, concepts and texts. Lastly, the concentric circles in grey resemble the CEFR’s six-level scale (A1 to C2). The blue shapes are formed by joining the different dots showing the proficiency level considered desirable for each descriptor scale.

Figure 1. Target learner profile for prospective PpE teachers.



Source: the author.

The profile sets a relatively high priority (C1) on oral reception and oral interaction –including understanding the interlocutor, conversing, and making sense of audio and video input. The highest priority (C2), though, is on spoken production in the context of the English class, that is, the descriptors for sustained monologue “describing experience” (which is associated with narration and description, in other words, with storytelling) and “giving information” (explaining information to a recipient in a long turn); and certain aspects of mediation: explaining conceptual knowledge and collaborating to construct meaning in class –through problem solving, brainstorming, etc.– because VYL’s characteristics can impose extra demands on teachers who must help them unravel the world around them.

On the other hand, language activities such as reading for orientation –skimming, scanning, etc.– or for information and argument –often associated with study and professional life– are regarded as less necessary for these student teachers to master (B1). Except perhaps for the C2 language activities, these seem realistic goals for future English teachers considering in-service training and sojourning experiences, in keeping with the principles of lifelong learning.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Being an effective PpE teacher requires a complex set of competences comprising English communicative competence and age-appropriate pedagogical competence among others. However, current provisions on English language pedagogy are claimed to be insufficient for the needs of PpE teaching professionals and Spanish pre-service preprimary teacher education programmes are constrained by a monolingual grip that tends to prioritise generalist training in disciplinary knowledge and competences for early childhood education. Ironically, this scenario is concurrent with a heightened social and professional awareness of the role of English as a global language, resulting in pressure on education systems and policy makers to yield good-quality EFL teacher education, and criticism because existing teacher education is not in line with this demand.

A possible response to this dilemma is ESP, a pedagogic proposal that can bridge the gap between language competence and subject-matter and make the most of the time allotted to English language instruction. As an example, this paper has portrayed a model for needs analysis and a tentative profile of PpE teachers’ linguistic aptitude and skills that can serve as a guide for the development of ESP courses in teacher education. This being a small interpretive case study, the small size of the sample ($n=25$) and the short duration of the focus groups (15’) are caveats that make it difficult to generalize the results to a larger population of future PpE teachers in contexts other than UAM. In any case, the tool proposed could be adapted to other teaching population, e.g. for preprimary non-English specialists in relation to the language activities required outside the EFL classroom and it is to be hoped that this line of inquiry will be of use for researchers, practising teachers and other stakeholders in education.

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How to cite this paper: Agüero, M. F. (2025). Verso l'inglese per scopi specifici nella formazione degli insegnanti: Un'analisi dei bisogni dei futuri insegnanti di inglese in età prescolare [Towards English for Specific Purposes in teacher education: A needs analysis of prospective preprimary teachers of English]. *QTimes webmagazine*, anno XVII, n. 3, 684-696.

Doi: https://doi.org/10.14668/QTimes_17354