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# Rethinking Children's Socioemotional Learning in Vulnerable Contexts: What about EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions?

*Repensando el aprendizaje socioemocional infantil en contextos de vulnerabilidad: ¿Qué ocurre con las percepciones de las y los docentes de inglés en formación?*

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### ABSTRACT

Scientific evidence has shown that Chilean children in residential care homes have gone through several adverse childhood experiences, which significantly impact their socioemotional development. This article purports to explore EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of the connection between playful and multisensory teaching practices and the socioemotional development of children whose rights have been infringed. This qualitative exploratory and descriptive research is conducted at Universidad Austral de Chile. The study sample is composed of eleven EFL pre-service teachers who participated in the Project "Playing with my Senses in English". Data are collected through semi-structured interviews that were further studied using the content analysis method. The data analysis shows a direct relationship between playful and multisensory teaching practices and children's socioemotional development. Results show that playful and multisensory teaching practices, grounded in the foreign language as a new tool of communication, lovingness, motivation and a sense of community, foster children's socioemotional development.

**Keywords:** vulnerability, socioemotionality, multisensoriality, playfulness, English.

### RESUMEN

La evidencia científica demuestra que las experiencias adversas vividas por las niñas y los niños chilenos residentes en hogares de menores impactan significativamente su desarrollo socioemocional. Este artículo se propone explorar las percepciones de las y los profesores de inglés en formación sobre la relación entre las prácticas pedagógicas lúdicas y multisensoriales y el desarrollo socioemocional de las infancias vulneradas en sus derechos. La investigación cualitativa, exploratoria-descriptiva se desarrolla en la Universidad Austral de Chile, con una muestra de once profesores pertenecientes al Proyecto "Jugando con mis sentidos en Inglés". Los datos se recopilan mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas y son estudiados con el método de análisis de contenido. Los resultados evidencian que las prácticas pedagógicas lúdicas y multisensoriales, fundamentadas en la lengua extranjera como una nueva herramienta de comunicación, el amor, la motivación y el sentido de comunidad, promueven el desarrollo socioemocional de las infancias.

**Palabras clave:** vulnerabilidad, socioemocionalidad, multisensorialidad, ludicidad, inglés.

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## INTRODUCTION

In Chile, a significant amount of socially vulnerable children belongs to governmental organizations<sup>1</sup> in charge of providing care for children whose rights have been seriously threatened and who have therefore, undergone severe Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) throughout their lives (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia, 2022; Ward et al., 2022). Céspedes (2010) affirms that these lived experiences significantly impact young learners' socioemotional development, triggering unmet needs in their life cycles as individuals and learners. Under this scenario, residential care homes are responsible for protecting them and restoring their rights through damage repair and trauma resignification, seeking to prevent any situation that could endanger their rights (Mejor Niñez, 2023). Several pedagogical interventions are carried out in these homes in order to strengthen children's biopsychosocial development, one of them being the social action Project "Playing with my senses in English" (2017-2025), whose objective is to develop children's socioemotional and communicative competencies through playful and multisensory teaching practices. This Project has been implemented in different residential care homes in Valdivia, Chile by EFL pre-service teachers and two professors from Universidad Austral de Chile.

Research recognizes Socio and Emotional Learning (SEL) as an approach that effectively promotes integrated education and encourages the child's overall wellbeing, by addressing children's cognitive, socioaffective, motivational, physical and self-regulatory mechanisms (Greenberg et al., 2017; Osher et al., 2016). "It involves acquiring and applying knowledge, attitudes, and skills to understand and manage emotions, demonstrate empathy, set positive goals, foster relationships, and make responsible decisions" (CASEL, 2018, as cited in Yilorm & Guerra, 2025, p. 206). In methodological terms, authors recognize playful and multisensory teaching practices as effective tools that develop children's socioemotional competencies in English, since learning is experienced through the senses in a pleasant and innovative environment (Shapiro et al., 1997). This inclusive space motivates children to be part of a group and participate as subjects of human rights (Lancioni et al., 2002; Assman, 2013, as cited in Yilorm & Martínez, 2022). In this playful and multisensory setting, the English language becomes essential for students to reconstruct their identities impacted by social vulnerability and right infringement. In fact, it provides a new tool of communication that allows them to resignify their own life stories (Yilorm & Martínez, 2022).

In their study, Romero et al., (2022) report that EFL teachers in training validate inclusive teaching practices, but also openly express that they require updated training to teach in socially vulnerable environments. In such a context, exploring their perceptions becomes crucial to improve the quality of inclusive education. The research question of this study is: How do Chilean EFL pre-service teachers perceive the impact of playful and multisensory teaching practices on the socioemotional development of children whose rights have been infringed, which sets the following objective: To explore EFL pre-service teachers of the relationship between playful and multisensory teaching practices and the socioemotional development of children whose rights have been infringed. This qualitative and exploratory study was conducted with eleven EFL teachers in training from Universidad Austral de Chile who participated in the above-mentioned Project (2017- 2019). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and studied using the content analysis method to identify categories and subcategories that emerged from participants' perceptions. Findings reveal that playful and multisensory teaching practices effectively boost the child's complete growth. As inclusive teaching practices, they positively respond to the needs and interests of young learners whose social situation of development is critical. They embrace diversity and promote equity through the creation of a safe and loving environment that ensures children's low affective filter and sense of community. In this context, the

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<sup>1</sup> Until 2021, the SENAME (Servicio Nacional de Menores) institution, which is linked to the judicial system and dependent on the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, was responsible for the promotion, protection and reconstitution of children and teenagers whose fundamental rights have been infringed (Servicio Nacional de Menores SENAME, 2016). However, nowadays, the Servicio Nacional de Protección Especializada a la Niñez y Adolescencia, known as "Mejor Niñez", is a new institution that aims to protect children's rights while SENAME is particularly in charge of juvenile delinquency cases (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia, 2021).

English language is perceived not only as a vehicle that motivates students to participate, but also as a pathway that leads children towards the development of socioemotional learning.

### **Social Vulnerability and Chilean Children's Rights Infringements**

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), every child has the right to grow up healthy in a safe environment, which implies having a home, being loved and cared about by a family, having access to education and participating actively in their communities, among other rights (United Nations, 1990; UNICEF, 2021). However, the amount of children's rights infringements reported at an international level (UNICEF, 2020; Bedregal et al., 2016) has evidenced the need to acknowledge the 54 articles the Children Rights Convention is composed of. In this particular case, Chile, that ratified the enactment of the Convention in 1990, is not an exception (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2018; Infancia Cuenta en Chile, 2020).

Because of the neoliberal economic model in Chile, a considerable amount of children's right violations is related to socioeconomic aspects (Lu et al., 2016, Kent et al., 2018). It is important to keep in mind that neoliberalism is observed as the practice of implementing an economic and political system mainly based on the principle of broadening privatization politics (Pozo, 2018). Thus, social rights such as social security services, health and education can be transferred from the State domains to private institutions (Aste, 2020), promoting social vulnerability and, as a consequence, perpetuating itself through inequality (Collins & Rothe, 2019). It is a fact that Chilean children living in disadvantaged contexts are affected by their socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, which could negatively impact their biopsychosocial and learning processes (Ramos & Aroche, 2011; Shonkoff et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2019; Yilorm et al., 2019).

In this context, the concept of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) acquires particular importance. Defined as developmental conditions that deviate from typical growth and overwhelm children's coping resources, ACEs include physical and sexual abuse, neglect, deprivation of basic needs, domestic aggression, family dysfunctions, along with broader adversities such as poverty, bullying and community violence (Finkelhor, 2020; Morris et al., 2019). ACEs disrupt stress-regulation mechanisms and generates deficits in executive functioning and self-regulation (Teicher et al., 2018; Su et al., 2019), increasing the probability of impulsive behaviors, anxiety, depression, emotional lability, limited motivational expectations and learning difficulties. These factors directly affect their ability to adapt and succeed in social and educational contexts (Adams et al., 2018; McCrory et al., 2017). As a result, it is possible to observe low recognition of the self and others (Yilorm & Martínez, 2022).

### **Multisensoriality and Playfulness for Socioemotional Development**

Socioemotional abilities strongly influence wellbeing and the capacity to face social challenges (Carrasco et al., 2021). Therefore, emotional self-regulation seems to be a requirement to communicate effectively with others and solve conflicts in a friendly and peaceful way (Bandura, 1982; Céspedes, 2010). "It is an important key to success in life, whether this is understood at the cultural level [social roles and signs of social approval] or at the biological one [harmony with one's environment]" (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004, p.xi). In this regard, Romagnoli et al., (2007) identify core elements of healthy interpersonal relationships such as effective communication, peaceful conflict resolution, responsible decision-making and the prevention of risky behaviors. Such abilities are complementary and permanently evolve throughout life. This highlights the importance of integrating them into education from early childhood (Arón et al., 2017).

These contributions confirm that education should integrate cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions to ensure children's biopsychosocial development (Spielman et al., 2020). In this context, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is recognized as a valid and necessary approach to accomplish well-rounded education supported by a considerable amount of lovingness required for teaching and learning to be effective (Greenberg et al., 2017; Yilorm & Guerra, 2025). According to Pita and Turner (2004), school environments should be built up through love, respect and empathy so that the teaching-learning process can aim at

developing young learners' personality as a main objective. Osher et al. (2016) define SEL as the process "by which children and adults acquire and apply competencies to recognize and manage emotions [self-awareness and self-management], set and achieve positive goals, [as well as] appreciate the perspectives [social awareness], establish and maintain supportive relationships [relationship skills], make responsible decisions and handle personal and interpersonal situations constructively [responsible decision making]" (as cited in Petón & Martínez-Alba, 2021, p. 645). On that account, educational institutions can be a space for children to learn how to interact and develop in society as subjects of socialization with proper abilities (Villalobos et al., 2021).

During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, teachers have increasingly embraced more humane teaching practices that spotlight lovingness and socioemotional issues; and thus, equity, inclusion and social justice (Maatta & Uusiatti, 2013; Penton & McNair, 2021). Within this context, it is worth indicating that "[i]n early childhood education, love based approaches are particularly effective in building strong emotional foundations that support long term learning" (Daaboul, 2024, p. 53). Local studies show that inclusive teaching practices such as playful and multisensory strategies foster safe and creative EFL classrooms, where learning integrates children's senses, emotions and affection. Teaching activities such as games, art, dance, magic, cultural experiences, rhymes, suspense, drama techniques, storytelling, arts and crafts, among others, increase self-esteem, demonstrate a permanent concern for students' wellbeing and evidence a profound sense of humanity (Yilorm, 2015; Yilorm & Martínez, 2022).

The Multisensory Approach is a teaching proposal that engages visual, auditory, and tactile-kinesthetic modalities grounded in neuroscientific evidence on sensory integration (Erazo, 2018; Naser, 2017). Within this study, play emerges as an innate and spontaneous activity that supports the development of psychomotricity, imagination, communication, memory, confidence, and socioaffective abilities; thereby sustaining later learning processes (Rosenkrantz et al., 2019; Zamorano et al., 2019). In English language learning, this approach promotes exploration and facilitates natural vocabulary acquisition through interaction with objects and contexts (Andrade, 2019; Daaboul, 2024; Pilaquina, 2020). Most importantly for this research, it enhances active engagement, motivation and identity formation.

Exploring pre-service teachers' reflections is crucial to enhance social responsibility and strengthen socioemotional development in children (Ellis et al., 2020; Maddamsetti, 2018). Existing research reports that EFL teachers in training perceive inclusive teaching skills and competencies as fundamental tools (Novera et al., 2024) and highly value opportunities to engage with diversity and inclusive environments where lovingness plays a crucial role (Carrillo & Karvelis., 2023). However, they feel unprepared to face social vulnerability in the classroom and believe that the methodologies acquired during initial teacher education are not easy to be implemented in real contexts (Romero et al., 2022; Ramos et al., 2021). This suggests that there is an urgent need to implement social action projects in which teachers in training can become agents of change (Bazán, 2017; Nauto, 2022).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative exploratory-descriptive study<sup>2</sup> was designed to explore the perceptions of EFL pre-service teachers regarding the connection between playful and multisensory teaching practices and the socioemotional development of children whose rights have been infringed. The research was carried out at Universidad Austral de Chile, in Valdivia, with a total of eleven participants enrolled in the English Language Teaching Program. The group was selected based on their voluntary participation in the Project *Playing with my Senses in English* (2017–2019). The sample consisted of four male, five female and two non-binary participants, with ages ranging from 24 to 28 years old.

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<sup>2</sup> This study derives from Maite Nauto's Undergraduate Thesis "Playful and Multisensory Teaching Strategies under the Social Pedagogy Approach: A Study of EFL Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions on the Development of SENAME Children's Socio-Affective Skills", Universidad Austral de Chile

The data collection process was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic through semi-structured interviews via Zoom platform. Interviews lasted between ninety and one hundred and twenty minutes and were administered in Spanish and subsequently digitally transcribed and translated into English. The interview guideline was composed of four sections with a total of twenty-one open-ended questions. Such sections were: (a) General questions (seven questions), (b) Socioemotional competencies (seven questions), (c) Playful and multisensory teaching strategies (four questions), (d) Social Pedagogy (three questions) and e) Complementary and extraordinary comments (one question). For this particular study, authors selected four questions from the interview guideline. The information was studied through the content analysis method, which allowed the identification of recurring patterns in participants' narratives (Kuckartz, 2019). The process was conducted through the qualitative software of data analysis ATLAS.ti 23. To guarantee anonymity and protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms were used throughout the presentation of results.

Figure 1 evidences the inter-systemic connection between categories and subcategories that provide a flexible analysis of EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions. The first one is entitled "Socioemotional Competencies" and includes two main subcategories: a) "Teaching through Lovingness", i.e., educating by tenderness, compassion, empathy and trust in order to address unmet needs and build up emotional bonds with children, and b) "Development of Communicative Skills through English Language", which highlights how the foreign language, as a new mode of communication, supports young learners in strengthening socioemotional competencies. The second category is named "Inclusive Teaching Practices" and points to didactic strategies that embrace diversity in EFL settings. It is divided into two subcategories: a) "Playful and Multisensory Teaching Strategies in English" meant to promote self-esteem, motivation and participation in language learning contexts and b) "Social Pedagogy and English Language", which refers to the role of EFL educators as agents of social awareness that drive transformation in the educational settings they are part of. This article considers the following subcategories of analysis: "Teaching through Lovingness" and "Inclusive Teaching Practices" under the "Socioemotional Competencies" category and "Playful and Multisensory Teaching Strategies in English" under the "Inclusive Teaching Practices" category.

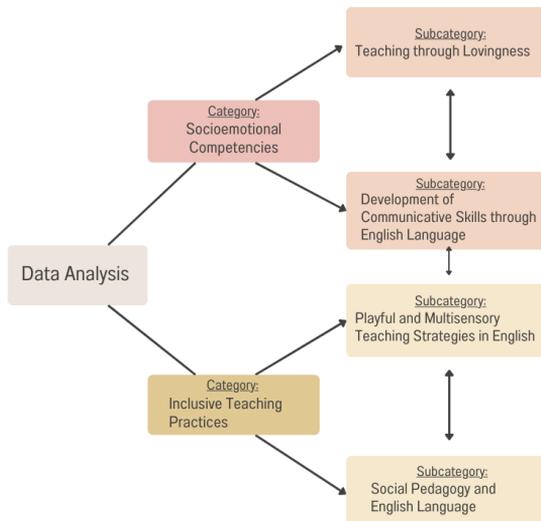


Figure 1: Analysis categories and subcategories.

## RESULTS

Based on three subcategories of analysis, this research provides evidence that there is a direct relationship between playful and multisensory teaching practices implemented in English-speaking settings and the socioemotional development of children whose rights have been infringed. First, under the "Socioemotional Competencies" category, authors have identified the following themes: a) Lovingness as a tool to address unmet needs and b) English as a pathway to socioemotional growth. Regarding the second category of analysis, known as "Inclusive Teaching Practices", it is possible to refer to two other themes: a) Multisensoriality and Playfulness in EFL contexts and b) Sense of belonging in the EFL community.

### a) Lovingness as a tool to address unmet needs

Results show that EFL student teachers seem to be very aware of the impact love can have on young learners who have faced unmet needs. These educators clearly understand it is essential to approach children's world in a compassionate way and help them heal their emotional wounds through the development of socioemotional competencies. Their perceptions show that the social pedagogue profile needs to be substantiated in inclusive values such as care, understanding, empathy, solidarity, cooperation, active listening and loving speech, among others. As David reports: "Pedagogy is meant for helping and for healing [...]. It is an educational paradigm that allows teaching and affection to happen simultaneously. You lower your students' levels of anxiety, their affective filter, and they learn because they feel comfortable and because they have undergone a meaningful experience. We came close to their reality and they learned about Lovingness". This final statement suggests that the experience of teaching through love benefits not only the child's growth and their identity construction, but also the EFL pre-service teacher's initial education process. Teachers in training have the opportunity to leave their comfort zone and implement the chosen teaching proposal in situ, by observing and exploring the new reality and by making pedagogical contributions, especially regarding problem solving when addressing young learners' unmet needs. In the same vein, Matías exemplifies: "Sometimes, we would walk with difficulty because the kids would hang on our legs and arms, which, for them and for us, was equivalent to 'I love you'". It is also necessary to mention that EFL pre-service teachers believe that lovingness is not only a matter of feeling and expressing love. They clearly perceive that the social educator designs and implements playful activities and creates multisensory teaching materials with a significant amount of affection. According to Juan: "[...] activities, teaching materials and the support provided were always planned and applied with love and time. You must know that creating teaching materials is not a task you can carry out rapidly; it requires time, and when investing time, you provide affection. I think that when you act out with love, you can impact people in a different way". As Viviana expresses: "Children would feel that we were worried about them, we would listen to them and we would love them". Finally, results establish that EFL teachers in training highly value the opportunity of participating in an educational experience that encourages them to get involved with children's socio-cultural contexts. "This moment was part of their life and it is now captured in our memories. We played together, we laughed, they cried and were hugged, we were there by their side, we shared a candy, they learned colors in English, numbers and animals. I do believe the impact was positive", reports Angélica.

### b) English as a pathway to socioemotional growth

In relation to the impact of the English Language on children's socioemotional growth, EFL pre-service teachers perceive that there exists a clear connection between the foreign language, playful activities supported by multisensory teaching materials and socioemotional learning. As mentioned by Juan: "I believe the real impact was socioemotional. There were so many emotions involved: they looked happy while playing and learning English and they were interested in the activities". These affirmations confirm that all of the above mentioned teaching components are equally necessary to reach children's biopsychosocial development. However, their beliefs particularly show that one important positive result was to approach young learners to a foreign language in a non-traditional way and enchant them with the process of learning it, which was essential to feel enthusiastic and interested during activity time. As explained by the same teacher, Juan:

“They would say English was hard, probably due to socio-cultural barriers. It didn’t make sense to them, but even so, we managed to bring them closer to it through games and materials. We changed their perceptions of what it means to learn a language [...]”. In relation to this point, Benjamin also expresses that: “When you introduce [children] to something new and to what’s new about learning a new language, it makes a difference. New names for the things they see every day, new ways of saying things”. They, in fact, conclude that children can become motivated and participate more actively when being exposed to a new language through new and innovative methodologies, especially when children’s familiarity with the foreign language has been limited. EFL pre-service teachers also highly value the opportunity to use English as a means of developing socioemotional competencies, an approach that requires to make important curricular transformations. In this regard, Natalie affirms that: “[w]e always went with something subtle, a sort of hidden curriculum, where what they got out of it wasn’t exactly what we were showing on the surface. [...] Still, I feel we offered them a kind of long recess, a break from their routine, something different”. In the same line, authors observe that, through this teaching experience, the participants could deepen their understanding of English Language Didactics to the point of acknowledging that EFL educators should not only teach linguistics skills, but should also provide young learners with a well-rounded education. To clarify this point, David notes: “As English teachers, we usually focus on [...] listening, speaking, reading and writing [...]. But there are other skills that matter [...] and that are just as important as teaching colors or numbers. A teaching approach aimed at lowering the affective filter is incredibly effective in reaching a child and actually delivering the content”. Another relevant aspect to mention is the validation EFL student teachers grant to motivation and participation in an environment that promotes positive teacher-student relationships, which allows unconscious learning in English to occur. In the words of David, “[a] well-structured pedagogy promotes participation and makes motivation easier. [...] You don’t even realize you’re learning, but you are. In that sense, I think these teaching practices really work, because they rely so much on building a connection with the student”.

### **c) Multisensoriality and Playfulness in EFL contexts**

All of the participants validate the role playful and multisensory teaching strategies have on children’s motivation and participation. As stated by Benjamín: “[...] If you bring pencils or toys, new things they can see, paint, touch and play with, children will really be encouraged to work”. The voices of teachers in training declare that children’s level of interest was very high. They liked all of the activities because they were fun, dynamic, creative and, as such, they responded to their own needs. In Angelica’s words: “[...] through didactic materials, you can get to know students better. [...] When you already know what catches a child’s attention, bringing them activities or audiovisual materials related to what they like, makes them more motivated”. In the same line, Javiera notes that: “[t]hey were motivated with all the activities. Who wouldn’t be? And all of the tasks were fully completed”. This perception shows that, in general, all the implemented playful and multisensory teaching strategies became powerful channels of expression for children. According to EFL pre-service teachers, young learners could focus on their work due to their evident motivation.

It is noteworthy that the testimonies of teachers in training prove that the teaching materials were diverse and encouraged the development of children’s creativity. In this respect, Vivivana states: “They were super motivated doing their things, they put all their effort into it, used all the glitter, all the colors available”. In addition, research participants stand out that children could learn in an environment where their capacities were validated despite the results. As a consequence, they felt secure and confident. To exemplify, Carla points out that: “[...] playful and multisensory teaching practices are meant to promote motivation; and therefore, participation. At that point, it doesn’t matter if my answer is right or wrong, what matters is that I can catch the wool ball”. EFL student teachers also acknowledge the connection between curiosity and participation, referring to the behaviour of children who were not willing to participate at first. According to EFL student teachers’ beliefs, being part of a group, laughing and having fun were actions that would captivate other children’s attention. Thus, David states: “So I think it was curiosity, or something that got their attention, or maybe the desire to learn, whatever it was, that’s what got them involved. And little by little, in the end, we had all the kids participating. None of them wanted to be left out”.

Another important aspect participants mentioned is that multisensory teaching materials helped children resignify certain thoughts and behaviours, giving them the chance to now react to external stimuli in a much more friendly way. As Matias states: 'There was the sound of the bell, which they knew meant the beginning or end of an activity, or that silence was needed'. In the same way, EFL pre-service teachers perceive that, through time, teaching materials became more relevant for children's lives. As affection grew up and relationships became stronger, they clearly understood that such materials stood for student teachers' concern for them: "Children started asking for materials and returning them when told they would be used in another class. They gave them back and helped to collect them. They didn't see the possibility of keeping them, because they knew they would get them back", Matias reports. Finally, researchers refer to EFL pre-service teachers' narratives that disclose the unique role of playfulness and multisensoriality in the process of constructing knowledge. As Ricardo points out: "Knowledge is built in an environment that's suitable, where there's no anxiety, where everyone wants to participate, where there's motivation, where there are games, where the scenario is playful and multisensory".

#### **d) Sense of belonging in the EFL community**

The voices of EFL teachers in training proclaim that the implementation of playful and multisensory teaching practices in the English language allowed children and their pre-service teachers to develop their socioemotional competencies. In a natural and fluent way, it became a collaborative learning process in which all members unified their commonalities and embraced their differences. Referring to the teaching practices used during the implementation of the Project "Playing with my senses in English", Angélica states: "the impact on the children was positive, and on us as well". EFL pre-service teachers also identified a sense of belonging in the community of children they worked with. It was observed that while learning was occurring, young learners felt accompanied and supported not only by their educators, but also by their own peers. "Children created a sense of community. Instead of arguing with their peers, all of them, at different rhythms of course, learned how to listen to each other and share materials, spaces and experiences", claims David.

It was also perceived that children could understand that the community all the members were creating was safe, showing them a new way of seeing and understanding the world. In relation to this, Ricardo states that: "[...] those feelings of happiness [...] make them realize that life is not horrible. And that not all people are horrible. [...] If they notice that the teacher sings, that the teacher dances, that the teacher is kind, does not shout at them, treats them as human beings, that also makes them realize that people are all different and that they can trust others. They can be themselves with that teacher". Participants definitely believe that this sense of community impacted children's self-esteem, self-confidence and self-security. As pointed out by Ricardo, "I myself [...] can also do many things. I have potential just like my teachers in here [...]". As identified by pre-service teacher participants, this teaching experience could help young learners resignify their own world. The inclusive teaching strategies utilized in an English-speaking setting gave them the opportunity to validate their own stories and build up new experiences born from their previous knowledge and socio-cultural backgrounds. "I also feel that the selected teaching practices helped the children see things in a different way. It was like their perspective on certain things that was transformed. But being honest, I think more than the activities themselves, it was the contact children had with us that helped them the most", says Benjamin. Finally, participants' perceptions evidence that, in spite of the positive impact this teaching experience had on young learners' biopsychosocial development, some limitations were also detected: As Angélica notes: "[W]e lacked time, we lacked more resources, and we lacked the commitment of other beings who should also be involved in a child's educational process", which suggests society itself is also responsible for children's wellbeing and healthy socioemotional development.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Prioritizing children's overall wellbeing is a requirement to build up an inclusive and just society where all children should be treated fairly and equally (UNICEF, 2021). In this respect, Adams and Bell (2016) and Johnston (2017), as cited in Yilorm and Martínez (2023), affirm that the purpose of inclusive education is to fight injustice and confront any practice that marginalizes human beings. In spite of the Chilean political policies that establish that children are considered subjects of human rights and democratic citizens that need to be raised in a caring coexistence, the amount of children whose rights have been threatened is highly significant (Consejo Nacional de la Infancia, 2018). This fact evidences that it is imperative to respond to their unmet needs by helping them develop their socioemotional competencies (Bedregal et al., 2016; Infancia Cuenta en Chile, 2020; MIDESO, 2022). As Oberle et al. (2016) and Greenberg et al. (2017) state, integrating SEL in socially disadvantaged educational contexts is crucial for children's well-rounded education. It is worth recalling that according to CASEL (2018), as cited in Yilorm & Guerra (2025), SEL allows the development of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills and responsible decision-making skills; thus, promoting children's identity construction. Playful and multisensory teaching practices implemented in the English language have proven to be valid teaching strategies to experience socioemotional learning (Petón & Martínez-Alba, 2021; Yilorm, 2015). Playfulness and multisensoriality are entertaining, dynamic and varied, and as such, they draw children's attention and engage them to be active citizens with high levels of self-confidence, self-security and self-esteem. Young learners can focus easily and learn in a meaningful and contextualized way. These actions evidence how cognitive, social, affective and motivational dimensions prioritize participation as an inclusive value (Yilorm & Martínez, 2022).

To respond to the research question of this study: How do Chilean EFL pre-service teachers perceive the impact of playful and multisensory teaching practices on the socioemotional development of children whose rights have been infringed? This, in turn sets that authors' findings clearly show that there exists a relationship between those two components. This conclusion arises from the analysis of the identified themes: "Lovingness as a tool to address unmet needs" and "English as a pathway to socioemotional growth" under the "Socioemotional Competencies" category along with "Multisensoriality and Playfulness in EFL contexts" and "Sense of belonging in the EFL community", grouped in the "Inclusive Teaching Practices" category. EFL student teachers' narratives refer to the importance of lovingness during the process of implementing teaching practices in charge of boosting children's socioemotional competencies (Carrillo & Karvelis, 2023; Greenberg et al., 2017). They evidence that through love expression, children feel in a safe place where they can trust teachers. The firm belief that people that surround you are honest, listen to you and care about you definitely encourages children to actively participate and build up emotional bonds on their own (Erazo, 2018; Naser, 2017; Zamorano et al., 2019). Love is powerful in education. It tells children you believe in humanity and that you will, therefore, treat them accordingly. Above all, it ensures that educators have a strong vision of the profession and, plan the teaching-learning process based on their children's personal, social, cultural and academic backgrounds (Pita & Turner, 2004).

Similarly, the findings of this investigation show that the English language itself plays a crucial role when implementing playful and multisensory teaching practices in socially vulnerable contexts where children's mother tongue is usually connected with ACEs. In such circumstances, English brings them a different form of communication; i.e., a new tool for recognizing ourselves, expressing our points of view as democratic citizens and solving problems out in a peaceful way (Rosenkrantz et al., 2019; Yilorm & Martínez, 2022). As pre-service teachers' voices point out, under this teaching experience, English can be seen as a pathway towards the development of socioemotional competencies. It provides children with opportunities to resignify adverse experiences and reconstruct their identities in a safe, calm and positive environment (Arón et al., 2017; Pilaquinga, 2020). Based on participants' perceptions, it is possible to affirm that English as a foreign language is now more accessible to children.

In terms of inclusive teaching practices, the analysis of the perceptions of EFL teachers in training reveals how much children appreciate and validate playful and multisensory didactic strategies such as games, arts, music, dance, multisensory experiences, arts and crafts and magic (Novera et al., 2024). Their narratives

show that they highly value how these practices promote diversity, embrace multiple ways of expression, and encourage children's wellbeing through the implementation of activities that respond to children's ages, needs, interests and sensory preferences, among other traits (Daaboul, 2024; Andrade, 2019). According to participants, these strategies contributed to improvements in emotional regulation and behavioral patterns, which they interpreted as indicators of socioemotional growth. Playful and multisensory teaching materials not only motivate students to be active members of a group that communicates through respect, empathy and affection, but also protect and guarantee their human rights (Villalobos et al., 2021; Yilorm & Martínez, 2022).

Finally, results evidence that the implementation of this inclusive teaching experience offers children the opportunity to belong to a community that is concerned about providing safe spaces and equitable opportunities for them to grow up biopsychosocially healthy (Novera et al., 2024). Testimonies refer to this community as a group of educators and children that is concerned about lovingness, socioemotional learning, values, welfare and sound growth. Pre-service teachers recognize the importance of collaborative work and celebrate the fact that all the members of such a team lived a socioemotional experience characterized by understanding, empathy, solidarity and cooperation, which reinforced in all of them a strong sense of belonging (Bazán, 2017). Results indicate that this sense of community offered children a safe environment where people had the possibility to be themselves and freely but respectfully express their feelings and points of view, participate democratically, enjoy, learn from mistakes and share in a peaceful and friendly way (Ellis et al., 2020; Maddamsetti, 2018).

It is possible to conclude that participants became more conscious of the multidimensional nature of right violations and social exclusion (Gallardo, 2020). Their voices demonstrate that exclusion is expressed not only in material deprivation but also in emotional, social, and cultural dimensions, echoing Spielman et al. (2020), who highlight the need to understand children's realities comprehensively. In contexts of social vulnerability, such perceptions acquire particular relevance, as they can offer renewed perspectives on the socio-emotional development of children whose rights have been threatened (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004; Céspedes, 2010). This reinforces Bazán's (2017) argument that Chile still struggles to incorporate inclusive pedagogical perspectives into teacher education programs. In this regard, this socio-educational experience allowed EFL pre-service teachers to deeply reflect on their teaching practices as future educators and the impact they could have on children's growth, giving light to the construction of their own teaching philosophy in spite of having been invited to participate in a social project with an already established teaching methodology. The findings provide relevant insights that confirm and extend current knowledge on inclusive practices such as playfulness and multisensoriality and the role of the English language in the process of resignifying adverse childhood experiences and constructing personal and social identity (Yilorm & Martínez, 2022).

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