Polo del Conocimiento

El efecto de las prácticas actuales en la enseñanza de la pronunciación del inglés a los estudiantes de temprana edad

The effect of current practices in teaching pronunciation to young learners

O efeito das práticas atuais no ensino da pronúncia para jovens alunos

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Resumen

Aprender la pronunciación inglesa a una edad temprana tiene una gran importancia para los estudiantes de idiomas. La pronunciación es crucial para la comunicación efectiva y el dominio del idioma, y la exposición temprana a una pronunciación precisa puede tener beneficios duraderos. Este estudio de investigación tiene como objetivo investigar el efecto de las prácticas actuales en la enseñanza de la pronunciación en los estudiantes de temprana edad en una institución privada en Cuenca. Un diseño de encuesta, utilizando un enfoque cuantitativo, empleando dos encuestas para obtener la percepción de los padres y la información de los maestros en una institución privada en Cuenca, fue utilizado en mi investigación. Se utilizó dos encuestas una para obtener la percepción de los padres de familia y otra para obtener información de los profesores de inglés. La muestra de estudio de la primera encuesta está formada por cinco padres de familia del nivel inicial y la segunda por siete profesores de inglés de educación primaria de un instituto privado de Cuenca. Los resultados de este estudio se centraron en la comprensión de los enfoques, técnicas y materiales que los profesores utilizan para mejorar las habilidades de pronunciación entre los estudiantes de edad temprana. También se examinó las percepciones y actitudes de los profesores y los padres de familia hacia la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de la pronunciación en el aula.

Palabras claves: Pronunciación; Efectiva; Beneficios; Métodos; Temprana edad.

Abstract

Learning English pronunciation at a young age is of great importance for language learners. Pronunciation is crucial to effective communication and language proficiency, and early exposure to accurate pronunciation can have lasting benefits. This research study aims to investigate the effect of current practices in teaching pronunciation to early learners in a private institution in Cuenca. A survey design, using a quantitative approach, employing two surveys to obtain parent perception and teacher information at a private institution in Cuenca, was used in my research. Two surveys were used, one to obtain the perception of parents and the other to obtain information from English teachers. The study sample of the first survey is made up of five parents at the initial level and the second is made up of seven primary school English teachers from a private institute in Cuenca. The results of this study focused on understanding the approaches, techniques, and materials that teachers use to improve pronunciation skills among early learners. The perceptions

and attitudes of teachers and parents towards teaching and learning pronunciation in the classroom were also examined.

Keywords: Pronunciation; Effective; Benefits; Methods; Early age.

Resumo

Aprender a pronúncia do inglês desde cedo é de grande importância para os alunos de línguas. A pronúncia é crucial para uma comunicação eficaz e proficiência linguística, e a exposição precoce a uma pronúncia precisa pode trazer benefícios duradouros. Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo investigar o efeito das práticas atuais no ensino da pronúncia para alunos iniciantes em uma instituição privada em Cuenca. Na minha pesquisa foi utilizado um desenho de pesquisa, com abordagem quantitativa, empregando duas pesquisas para obter a percepção dos pais e informações dos professores em uma instituição privada em Cuenca. Foram utilizadas duas pesquisas, uma para obter a percepção dos pais e outra para obter informações dos professores de inglês. A amostra do primeiro inquérito é composta por cinco pais de nível inicial e a segunda é composta por sete professores de inglês do ensino primário de um instituto privado de Cuenca. Os resultados deste estudo focaram na compreensão das abordagens, técnicas e materiais que os professores usam para melhorar as habilidades de pronúncia entre os primeiros alunos. As percepções e atitudes de professores e pais em relação ao ensino e aprendizagem da pronúncia em sala de aula também foram examinadas.

Palavras-chave: Pronúncia; Eficaz; Benefícios; Métodos; Jovem.

Introduction

English proficiency is becoming increasingly important for personal and professional success as the world becomes more interconnected. Acquiring a foreign language is essential to achieve high levels of labor and social competencies, especially if it is English, for it is a widely used language given its nature of lingua franca.

For several decades, experts have been debating about the hypothesis that early language learners have an initial advantage over later learners. With the goal of supplying trustworthy and legitimate evidence to establish an ideal age of exposure to the target language for second language learners, the undiminished inquiry on whether and how the starting age affects a foreign language acquirer's

performance has been conducted repeatedly. One of the factors thought to be most important in language learning is age.

In the realm of neurolinguistics, Penfield and Roberts established the concept of a critical period initially Journal of Higher Education Research 110 | Fei Ji, but Lenneberg (1967) was widely regarded as the "father" of the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). A kid who is younger than this is considered a "specialist in learning to speak." The term "critical period for language acquisition" refers to a time period (often between 2 and 12) during which language abilities are typically acquired reasonably fast and with a high degree of success (Marinova-todd et al., 2000). (Burlbaw & Ozfidan, 2019).

Overall, this means that learning the language in their early stages allows children to sing, play, and repeat phrases and words, increasing their phonological development through playful activities and multisensory practices. Young learners will be able to acquire vocabulary in a dynamic way that they will never forget (Ozfidan & Burlbaw, 2019).

Teaching Pronunciation

Pronunciation is sometimes overlooked when teaching a language, especially compared to other language components like grammar and vocabulary. However, research on learning a foreign language has shown how important it is to educate students on phonetic and prosodic qualities. Hence, pronunciation plays a significant role in speaking abilities and language communication; language learners should be aware of sounds and pronunciation to speak a language appropriately and successfully (Atmaca & AKCA, 2022).

In the context of teaching pronunciation to young learners, Krashen's Input Hypothesis implies that providing them with spoken language that is clear and coherent is essential. It supports the idea that "young learners can acquire correct pronunciation skills through exposure to native-like pronunciation in meaningful and understandable contexts, as long as the input is at the appropriate level of complexity for the language development stage" (Gass & Mackey, 2014, p.196). This suggests that learners should be exposed to and immersed in a language-rich environment with clear and accurate pronunciation models. In this sense, teachers should be aware of the natural order of sound acquisition and prioritize teaching essential phonetic features first. For example, English learners may initially focus on mastering vowel sounds, consonant sounds, and syllable stress before moving on to more complex aspects of pronunciation. (Krashen, 1981).

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Thus, early exposure to English fosters linguistic flexibility, and cultural awareness prepares young learners to thrive in an interconnected, multilingual world (Genessee, 2011). In light of this, Vygotsky's social-cultural theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that a child's cognitive development can be enhanced through social interactions and guidance, which aligns with the idea that the brain's plasticity is adaptable through learning experiences, providing them with a vast advantage (Ozfidan & Burlbaw, 2019).

Chomsky, 2003 states that children acquire the language quickly and seem to have a natural understanding of grammar and syntax. In order to explain how children pick up languages so quickly, Chomsky claims that children are born with a language-learning instrument he refers to as a language acquisition device (LAD). In addition, he states that children may be born with the capacity to correctly detect and produce the sounds of their native language in his updated theory of universal grammar. This concept has a bearing on how young learners pronounce words. This inherent linguistic skill may help people improve their pronunciation since it provides a foundation for understanding the distinctive phonological features of their language (Chomsky, 2003).

This is the reason why English is a mandatory subject in both public and private schools in Ecuador; nevertheless, it starts only from the second grade, which refers to students who are seven years old. The above represents a challenge for educators teaching preschool since no curricular plan for this level of education has been developed by the Ministry of Education; however, we are clear that during this crucial preschool period, children further their communication skills, and their brains are ready to assimilate new knowledge that will benefit them throughout their personal, academic, and professional lives (Ocaña et al.,2022; Quinga et.al., 2022; Vega et.al., 2022).

Therefore, one aspect of communication that should be addressed is pronunciation. Teaching pronunciation to young learners establishes the framework for efficient communication. Early pronunciation skills are crucial for children to be understood by others and to improve their language abilities, as noted by Dr. Catherine Snow (2011), a prominent linguist and researcher in her book "Language and Literacy Development in Bilingual Settings."

Moreover, and interestingly enough, school settings in Ecuador do not include pronunciation as part of their primary syllabus; nonetheless, teaching pronunciation allows children to improve their segmental articulation, which is the process of distinguishing individual speech sounds or phonemes, physically or audibly in the stream of speech (Fuentealba et al., 2019). These phonemes

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can occur in a particular order since they are represented by consonantal or vocalic word segments, leading eventually to better language performance (Moreno, 2014).

Educational literature has long demonstrated the value of teaching suprasegmental qualities to young learners at an early age. Studies such as "Early Development of Suprasegmental Features" by Snow (1998) and "Suprasegmentals in Language Education" by Cutler and Isard (1988) show that a child's linguistic and cognitive development is greatly enhanced by early exposure to and instruction in intonation, stress patterns, and rhythm. Effective communication is essential in academic contexts, and these underlying components of spoken language play a crucial role. Early suprasegmental education equips students with the skills necessary to communicate meaning, improve language competency, and pave the way for future academic achievement. Teachers must acknowledge the importance of suprasegmentals in language learning and provide chances for young learners to explicitly practice these abilities through games, role-playing, choral speaking, and by giving them constructive criticism.

Pronunciation seems to be one of the factors that lead to language competence; therefore, one of the objectives of the curriculum is that learners become aware of the production of sounds as the basis for successful communication in the target language (Gil et al., 2017). Young learners of EFL grow up far removed from an English-speaking environment; therefore, it is vital to think of methods that significantly impact children's language acquisition.

The Role of Pronunciation in Young Learner's Language Acquisition

According to López (2004), students acquire language proficiency as they learn and understand the content, simultaneously developing academic and language skills. In order to achieve this, he recommends teaching techniques to improve classroom practices. These techniques include pictograms, which facilitate understanding by associating words' meaning with drawings' help. They accompany oral activities for repetition, which are key for memorization. It is consistent with memory and cognitive principles that have been investigated and debated by numerous academics and researchers in psychology that it is easier to memorize concrete words through visual images than abstract ones.

Storytelling refers to reading a story aloud, combining it with gestures and vocal techniques, and using visual support through illustrations, making it extra engaging. Most learning occurs through imitation and observation (Bandera, 1999). Songs reinforce the repetition of words that children

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need to remember. They also allow for dancing, moving, and gesturing, making the new learning experience holistic. Of course, not all children may participate initially due to fear of shyness, but consistency will give them confidence.

Therefore, teaching pronunciation to young learners is characterized by a focus on creating a supportive and engaging learning environment. "As educators, it is important to recognize the importance of phonemic awareness, encouraging children to recognize and produce individual sounds accurately" (Olii, 2021, p.16). In this sense, didactic techniques, such as storytelling, singing, and games, have become more popular since they make learning fun and efficient. Furthermore, it has become standard practice to use technology, such as interactive Apps and visual aids like VOKI, Chatter Kid, Easy Voice Recorder, and interactive PowerPoint slides, to improve pronunciation instruction.

In addition to the above, Total Physical Response (TPR) activities have gained popularity for tying actions to words and sounds and emphasizing the need for minimal pairings to help kids discern between adjacent sounds. To this end, young learners should be guided by consistency, patience, and positive reinforcement as they improve their ability to pronounce words clearly and accurately (Olii, 2021). Effective pronunciation teaching to young learners is crucial to English learning since developing accurate pronunciation skills early can significantly impact a child's language learning trajectory and overall communication abilities.

Research has consistently highlighted the significance of pronunciation in language learning, especially for young learners. Accurate pronunciation enhances communication effectiveness and improves learners' listening comprehension and language proficiency. Studies have shown that early exposure to native-like pronunciation in the target facilitates young learners' ability to develop phonological awareness and acquire natural pronunciation patterns Damayanti (2016).

At the beginning of language acquisition, young learners must develop the ability to differentiate between speech and non-speech sounds and between different speech sounds (Ilosvay, 2000). This process is crucial for their overall language development since they can effectively communicate and understand spoken language through accurately perceiving and producing these sounds.

Studies on language acquisition in infants have shown that they have the innate ability to distinguish and discriminate between the phonetic contrasts of various languages from birth (Gordon & McGregor, 2014). For instance, infants can differentiate between the speech sounds of their native language and those of other languages. This ability to discriminate between speech

sounds is a crucial foundation for language acquisition in young learners because it allows them to develop phonetic awareness and perceive the subtle differences in sounds that make up words in their native language.

Significance of Pronunciation in EFL Learning

It is now known that pronunciation refers to the accurate production of speech sounds, including the correct sounds of letters in words and the accurate accents and syllable structure (Olii, 2021). Thus, it is the physical production of speech sounds and an essential component of effective communication in EFL learning (Yusuf, 2019). Good pronunciation helps EFL learners to be understood by native speakers and to understand native speakers.

There are several reasons why pronunciation is important in EFL learning. Firstly, it allows EFL learners to communicate effectively with native speakers. When EFL learners have good pronunciation, native speakers are more likely to understand what they say, leading to more successful and enjoyable communication experiences (Kapranov, 2019).

Secondly, good pronunciation can help EFL learners to improve their listening comprehension skills. When EFL learners can produce English sounds accurately, they can also better perceive and understand those sounds when they hear them. This can lead to improved listening comprehension skills.

Thirdly, good pronunciation can help EFL learners develop a more positive self-image as language learners. When EFL learners can speak English well, they feel more confident and comfortable communicating in English. This can lead to a more positive learning experience overall.

Overall, various pedagogical approaches have been employed to teach pronunciation to young learners. Studies have explored the effectiveness of explicit phonetic instruction, phonological awareness activities, pronunciation drills, teacher modeling, interactive language games, and the integration of pronunciation into regular language lessons (Djigunović et al., 2015).

Techniques Used to Teach Pronunciation to Young Learners

Research comparing these approaches indicates that interactive and context-based techniques, such as games and communicative activities, positively impact young learners' motivation and

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engagement in pronunciation practice. Many different educational strategies have been used to teach pronunciation to young learners, each with its unique advantages.

Phonological Awareness Activities is a method that helps young learners develop an awareness of the sounds within words and their structure. Rhyming games, sound blending exercises, and segmenting exercises are some of these activities. Students who participate in these activities become more aware of the phonological features of their language, which helps them pronounce words correctly and read more fluently (National Institute for Literacy, 2009).

Pronunciation drills, which involve repetitive and controlled activities where students practice particular sounds, words, or phrases, are a very effective technique. These exercises give young students targeted practice and aid in improving their speech abilities. Students can significantly improve their ability to pronounce words clearly and accurately by methodically focusing on regions of difficulty (Pennington, 1989).

Another crucial method for teaching pronunciation is **teacher modeling**. In this approach, the teacher acts as a linguistic role model, exemplifying appropriate intonation, stress, and pronunciation. Young learners might acquire an accent that sounds more natural and native by listening to and imitating their teachers. Students' general language competency is increased by teacher modeling, which gives them real-world examples and encourages greater pronunciation and fluency (Derwing & Munro, 2013).

Interactive language learning and teaching tools are essential, especially for younger learners. These **interactive games** encourage active engagement and a greater comprehension of linguistic ideas in the students. Learning is made more pleasurable and encourages students to practice their language abilities in a fun setting with activities like word puzzles, language board games, and online language tests. According to Hartshorn and Ko (2001), these interactive language games are effective instruments for fostering language proficiency and retention.

Implication for Teachers

Teachers should carefully consider their students' backgrounds and unique needs when teaching pronunciation, as well as the context in which they are doing so. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for teaching pronunciation, so teachers should choose techniques and approaches most compatible with their students' language and cultural backgrounds. Teachers should focus on creating a fun, engaging learning environment where students can practice pronunciation in various

contexts. Using interactive context-based techniques, such as games and communicative activities, helps young learners improve their pronunciation and guarantees that students receive efficient and customized pronunciation teaching, boosting their overall language learning experience.

Research questions

The general objective of this research was to analyze the methodological practices used by primary teachers to teach pronunciation to young learners by applying surveys to teachers in charge of working with young learners and parents to see if the variables proposed in the questions influenced each other. To this purpose, the following research questions were addressed in the present study.
What methodological practices are teachers using to address pronunciation among young learners?
How do teachers' methodological practices impact students' pronunciation in EFL classes?
How do methodological practices affect young learners' independence and autonomy from their parent's perspective?

Methodology and procedures

The research employs a survey design, using a quantitative approach, utilizing two surveys to get the perception from parents and information from teachers at a private institution in Cuenca. The study sample of the first survey consists of five parents from the kindergarten level, and the second survey consists of seven primary school teachers from a private institute in Cuenca. The number of parents was determined by the willingness they had to take part in the present study. This, however, should represent a potential hindrance that future studies can avoid by making use of a formula in which the total universe of parents in the school is considered to work out the sample number with a margin of error of five percent and a confidence level of at least 95%. Two experts in pronunciation validated this methodological choice of the surveys applied in this study. After validating the surveys, they were piloted to see if any improvements were needed. In the pilot stage of the survey design study, a small-scale survey was conducted involving 3 teachers who were not part of the study and 2 parents from a different class. This was carried out so as to assess the clarity and relevance of survey questions. The main objectives of this piloting stage were to identify potential ambiguities and refine language. Based on the data obtained and the participants' feedback, certain questions were modified in order to improve comprehension. Furthermore,

challenges related to response variability were encountered. This prompted adjustment to response categories and the modification of some questions to be presented as Likert scales. Not only did this piloting enhance the survey as a whole, but it also informed crucial modifications that needed to be done before the actual surveys' implementations.

A Likert Scale survey was applied to primary school teachers all of whom were working with young learners in a private institution in Cuenca to better understand what teachers have been doing to address pronunciation among young learners. To achieve its purposes, the first survey was applied with a questionnaire of ten optional questions. The data collected were analyzed to understand parents' opinions better and assess their needs and preferences when it comes to EFL classes at the above-mentioned institution. The overall data from these two surveys was measured objectively and analyzed statistically. The results of this study will surely benefit any EFL teacher looking forward to updates on current practices to teach pronunciation in a context where students have little to no opportunities to use the target language outside the classroom.

Results

This study employed a survey design with a quantitative approach, utilizing two surveys to gather insights from parents and teachers at a private institution in Cuenca. Despite a sample size limitation in the parent survey, rigorous methodological validation and a meticulous piloting stage ensured survey clarity and relevance. The application of a Likert Scale survey to primary school teachers aimed to explore pronunciation teaching practices. The forthcoming results, objectively measured and statistically analyzed, promise practical implications for enhancing current practices in teaching pronunciation to young learners in contexts with limited language use outside the classroom. The results gathered are presented in three different tables and analyzed so as to answer the questions in the study and see how the independent variables in each one of them influence the dependent variables of each question. The first and second tables address parents' responses while the third one analyzes the data obtained from teachers.

Table 1: *Parents Survey*

Questions	Significant	Not significant	Confident	Not Confident	Native speaker	Non-native speaker
1. English language teaching at the UEPP's kindergarten level is…	5	0				
2. How did you feel when you first heard that all of the classes at the kindergarten level will be held totally in English?			5	0		
3. How did you feel at the end of the school year regarding the teaching process at the kindergarten level?			5	0		
4. The kindergarten teacher is….					4	1

Note: This table contains the results of the survey administered to five kindergarten parents from a private institution in Cuenca.

Table 1 presents a series of questions concerning English language teaching at a kindergarten level at a private institution in Cuenca. Along with other unique scales designed for each question, each one is accompanied by a response scale that goes from **significant** to **non-significant** in the first column and from **confident** to **non-confident** in the second.

The first question concerns the importance of teaching English at an early age. Most respondents believe it is **significant** (5), indicating a pronounced value attributed to teaching the target language in the early stages of education. The second question aimed to find out what parents thought when they first heard that English classes at the kindergarten level would be taught completely in English, to which most indicate that they feel **confident** (5), which suggests that they feel positive about this teaching strategy.

Subsequently, in the third question, parents' opinions of early English teaching are evaluated at the end of the school year. Most respondent's express **confidence** (5), implying that, throughout the year, they have maintained language teaching.

Regarding young learner's teacher's perception, the fourth question is relevant. Most parents give the kindergarten teacher a **native speaker** (4) rating, indicating that they value the teacher's fluency in the language.

Table 2: Parents Survey

Questions	Always	Sometimes	Never
5. Does the kindergarten teacher apply teaching methods that are appropriate for the student's age?	5	0	0
6. Kindergarten students take English homework home….	5	0	0
7. Are kindergarten students' homework motivating?	5	0	0

Note: This table contains the results of the other half of the survey questions administered to five kindergarten parents from a private institution in Cuenca.

In **Table 2** question five evaluates whether the teacher uses appropriate methodological strategies for the kindergarten students. Most respondents selected **always** (5), implying that the teacher employs current tactics and methods catered to the demands of her diverse classroom. Additionally, she offers creative ways to guarantee that English is not a tiresome, uninteresting, and unmotivating topic for young learners but rather a joyful and engaging subject for them to learn.

The sixth question refers to taking English homework home. The predominant response is **always** (5), indicating that this is a consistent practice within the subject. This creates a routine in students' homes, allowing them to frequently practice what they have learned in class with their parents at home. Learning a new language requires practice because many grammatical, phonological, and lexical tasks must be performed almost mechanically. The seventh question focuses on the motivation generated by homework sent home. Most respondents rated this question with **always** (5), indicating that the extra reinforcement makes students feel more engaged. This may be because

the games and tasks assigned are entertaining, useful, and, most importantly, include the entire family.

Table 3: Teachers Survey

Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
7.3 Promote independent practice	3	4	0	0	0
7.4 They do not focus on student independence.	1	3	1	1	1
8. Do pronunciation changes occur after implementing the aforementioned methodological practices?	2	5	0	0	0
9.1 Do Teacher's teaching practices significantly impact students' pronunciation?	4	3	0	0	0
9.2 Does the individual effort of students significantly impact their pronunciation?	1	4	2	0	0
9.3 Both the teacher's teaching and the individual effort of the student have an equal impact.	4	1	2	0	0
10.1 Do you think increased training for teachers can contribute to improving English pronunciation teaching practices?	5	2	0	0	0
10.2 Do you think incorporating more games and playful activities can contribute to improving English pronunciation teaching practices?	4	2	1	0	0
10.3 Do you think promoting parent involvement in their children's learning process can contribute to improving English pronunciation teaching practices?	4	3	0	0	0

| 10.4 Do you think implementing regular pronunciation assessments can contribute to improving English pronunciation teaching practices? | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

Note: This table contains the results of the survey administered to seven primary school teachers at a private institution in Cuenca.

As observed in **Table 3,** the participants in this research provide information regarding the English language teaching process at a private institution in Cuenca. The results emphasize the methods used, how often they are used, and how teachers feel about their effectiveness. Below is a detailed analysis of the results found.

At this private institution, educators use various techniques to instruct young learners in teaching pronunciation, such as word and phrase repetition, multimedia resources and films, and pronunciation games. It's important to mention that most teachers focus on pronunciation **always** or **frequently** during their English classes.

Based on the findings, teachers feel these methods impact students' pronunciation favorably and help improve their motivation. Additionally, teachers affirm the importance of pronunciation-related skills in young learners, as indicated by most replies as **strongly agree** or **agree**. Furthermore, they think the methods encourage students' autonomy and independence while studying English. Teachers also mostly agree or entirely agree with the strategies that support students' independence and autonomy in pronouncing words correctly. This shows that the methods used to promote student autonomy in this area are strongly supported.

Conclusively, teachers at this institution in Cuenca generally are willing to consider measures to improve the teaching of English pronunciation by positively responding to suggestions for improving pronunciation teaching practices. Thus, the data points to a favorable attitude toward teaching pronunciation to young learners, supported by various strategies and a consensus regarding their beneficial effects on students. Teachers are also receptive to ongoing development in this area, which benefits the institution.

Discussion

The importance of learning English at an early age

In his study, the emphasis is focused on the value of early exposure to learning a foreign language, in this case, English, which is critical for success in both personal and professional competencies. Additionally, Moreno (2020) highlights the essentiality of achieving high levels of occupational and social competence due to the growing role of English as a lingua franca. These investigations provide high support for English pronunciation teaching in preschool, supporting the findings of the parental perception study in this regard. The high appreciation and confidence in the immersive approach indicate parents' understanding of the importance of early English language acquisition for their children's future.

However, in Ecuador, according to the curriculum established by the Ministry of Education, the English curriculum begins only from second grade, which refers to seven-year-old students, posing challenges for preschool educators. In this regard, Rebollo (2019) indicates that the lack of early exposure to English in early education may impede the development of solid linguistic skills in students. Moreover, preschool educators may face challenges in adapting their teaching methods to a foreign language when children are already accustomed to their mother tongue, in this case, Spanish.

Cognitive development in early ages

According to the notion put forward in this study, early exposure to English in an EFL classroom fosters linguistic flexibility and cultural awareness, thereby preparing students for a multilingual and interconnected world Genessee et al. (2004). Furthermore, Ozfidan and Burlbaw (2019) highlight Lenneberg's Critical Period Hypothesis, which suggests that the optimal time to learn a foreign language is between the ages of two and twelve. These hypotheses are supported by the opinions of teachers from a private institute in Cuenca who participated in the survey. They stated that the school's practices precisely start at an early age, as this benefits the learning acquisition of a foreign language. Also, the duration of the exposure fits with the variety of approaches, such as word and phrase repetition, multimedia use, and games, demonstrating the value of regular exposure in English teaching starting at a young age.

Long-term benefits of early language exposure

Similarly, Fuentealba et al. (2019) report that their study's findings imply that learning a foreign language in school positively impacts students' long-term academic and cognitive development. In other words, the parents at this institution are conscious of the advantages of learning a foreign language for their children's future, as they understand the consequences that this can bring in different aspects of their children's lives. It also fosters the development of social interaction, facilitating its acquisition naturally and fluidly.

Regarding teaching strategies and methods, parent's perspectives and the surveyed English teachers agree that games, multimedia, and word and phrase repetition help deviate from the traditional language teaching approach of mechanical repetition and abstraction of grammar, semantics, and lexicon. In this regard, the strategies implemented in this institution have produced positive results that support the importance of social interaction in English teaching at a young age. In this same sense, according to Del Rocío Carbo Silva et al. (2023), their research indicates that Krashen's Input Hypothesis supports the significance of exposure to native-speech-like pronunciation in meaningful and understandable circumstances. As a result, the educators at this private institution base their pronunciation teaching strategy on Krashen's theory and encourage students' independence and autonomy by using techniques including songs, kid-friendly programs, gestures, and commands.

The relevance between the theory and the survey results highlights the importance of early exposure to English in early education- kindergarten level. New result categories that show promise for enhancing future research and offering a more thorough knowledge of the efficacy of English teaching at a young age at these educational levels include "Adaptability of Teaching Strategies" and "Perception of Long-Term Benefits." Theory and practice must work together to create essential solutions to develop effective strategies and continually enhance English teaching.

Conclusion

This study provides insight into the methodological strategies teachers at this private institution in Cuenca use to teach pronunciation to young learners starting from kindergarten. Whose objective was to analyze these practices, with three crucial research questions thoroughly investigated, revealing significant findings that impact students' pronunciation, independence, and autonomy.

Consequently, it has been noted that the teachers use a wide range of methodological techniques at the above-mentioned institution to teach pronunciation to young learners. The use of games and multimedia and the repetition of words and phrases demonstrate innovation and diversity in approach. Given the variety of learning demands and learning styles found in the classroom, the tactics employed must be as flexible as possible.

This study also concentrated on how these practices affected the students' pronunciation. The findings indicate that teachers who utilize strategies like games, multimedia, and repetition can successfully help children pronounce words correctly. These strategies have a consistently favorable and significant impact. This finding supports the effectiveness of the implemented strategies and suggests that diversity in methods contributes to comprehensive and sustainable learning.

Lastly, methodological approaches affect young learners' autonomy and independence. As evidenced by the data collected, these techniques help students become more independent and self-sufficient while improving their pronunciation. Using techniques that engage students in an active manner, such as games and interactive exercises, helps them become more independent learners. Engaging students in active learning builds students' self-esteem and gives them the confidence to take an independent approach to learning English.

In this sense, the study advances our knowledge of methodological approaches to pronunciation instruction in certain settings and emphasizes the value of adaptability and innovation in teaching. The positive impact on pronunciation and promoting students' independence suggests that these approaches can apply to other educational institutions in Ecuador.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, which examined methodological practices in teaching pronunciation among young learners at a private institution in Cuenca, three key recommendations are suggested to enhance the quality of education in this specific context, considering the sampling numbers and making use of more rigorous techniques to determine the number of participants.

Promote continuity and coherence in methodological practices

Given that teachers showed a wide range of methodological practices, creating a more formal and cohesive framework for choosing and implementing these tactics is advisable. Eventually, with time, creating an educational curriculum for the kindergarten level that incorporates the most effective teaching practices and aligns teaching methods with long-term learning objectives could offer educators a more consistent guide. This will help to optimize the beneficial effects on students' autonomy and pronunciation.

Enhancing Innovative Strategy Training for Teachers

According to the findings, methodological diversity and originality are beneficial elements; however, providing educators with continual professional development is crucial. Implementing professional development programs that focus on innovative strategies and the effective adaptation of these strategies to the changing needs in each classroom is recommended. Another suggestion is to create workshops to guide teachers and help them improve pronunciation with young learners. These recommendations will guarantee that educators have the resources and know how to implement strategies successfully, optimizing their influence on students' learning. Overall, it's important to mention that this research serves as a valuable starting point for future studies on the effectiveness of teaching strategies in similar contexts and provides a solid foundation for the continuous improvement of educational practices in teaching English as a foreign language among young learners. If future research is done in the same field with the same research design, an instrument validated in a bigger scale research could be used for better findings.

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