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Methodologies and didactic approaches in teaching English as a foreign
language in Ecuadorian education.

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RESUMEN

En la actualidad, Ecuador y otros países de habla hispana no están obteniendo resultados positivos con sus estudiantes en el proceso de enseñanza – aprendizaje del idioma extranjero inglés, debido a la aplicación de metodologías o enfoques tradicionalistas, que ocasionan desinterés en los estudiantes. Otro factor negativo es la poca experiencia de algunos docentes en el área de inglés. El objetivo de este artículo es conocer las metodologías y enfoques didácticos usadas por los docentes e identificar cuál de esas metodologías y enfoques tienen mejores resultados en la enseñanza de la lengua extranjera. La presente investigación es cualitativa, ya que se analizó varias fuentes bibliográficas para recopilar y desarrollar la información. Se identificó que el mejor enfoque y técnica para ser utilizado en la enseñanza de un idioma extranjero es con el enfoque comunicativo, ya que los estudiantes aprenden a desempeñarse en actividades cotidianas de la vida real, y para hacer más dinámico y atractivo a los estudiantes se utilizan actividades lúdicas y la caracterización de personajes a través del role-play.

PALABRAS CLAVES

Idioma inglés, Lectura comprensiva, Role-play, Enfoque comunicativo, Actividades lúdicas.

ABSTRACT

Currently, Ecuador and other Spanish-speaking countries are not achieving positive results with their students in the teaching-learning process of the English language due to the application of traditionalist methodologies or approaches, which lead to student disinterest. Another negative factor is the limited experience of some teachers in the English language area. The objective of this article is to understand the methodologies and didactic approaches used by teachers and identify which of these methodologies and approaches yield better results in teaching the foreign language. This research is qualitative, as various bibliographic sources were analyzed to collect and develop the information. It was identified that the best approach and technique to be used in teaching a foreign language is the communicative approach, as students learn to perform in everyday real-life activities, and to make it more dynamic and engaging for students, playful activities and character characterization through role-play.

KEYWORDS

English language, Comprehensive reading, Role-play, Communicative approach, Playful activities.

1. INTRODUCCIÓN (OBJETIVO DEL ARTÍCULO)

Studies on methodologies and didactic approaches have been evolving in favor of education. Currently, there are several methodologies for teaching the English language, aiming to achieve an optimal teaching-learning process for students at all levels. However, through this research, it has been observed that in some South American countries, there is not a good management in the teaching process of the English language, and the methodology used is not yielding good results, causing great demotivation among students. This situation is concerning because nowadays it is important for a student to acquire knowledge of English due to globalization (Garavito de Archila & Gomes, 2021). The cause of this demotivation is that the majority of educators are not adequately prepared in knowledge and strategies to teach this foreign language. In this article, we will compare the way English language is taught in Ecuador with other South American countries and recognize the complications in achieving quality education, as according to Braslavsky, "quality education for all must be relevant, effective, and efficient" (Braslavsky, 2018).

Given all of the above, the objective of this article is to understand the methodologies and didactic approaches used by Ecuadorian teachers to teach the English language and compare them with other Latin American countries to identify similarities and differences. With this objective in mind, the following question arises: What would be the ideal methodology and didactic approach within classrooms to motivate students to learn a foreign language?

In a globalized context, proficiency in English has become a fundamental skill for international communication, business, and participation in various academic and professional spheres. Research on methodologies and didactic approaches seeks to optimize the English teaching process, thereby

contributing to enhancing the linguistic competence of Ecuadorian students in an increasingly interconnected world.

The selection of effective methodologies and suitable didactic approaches can improve the efficiency of the English teaching and learning process. Identifying strategies that maximize knowledge retention and the development of linguistic skills will help teachers achieve better academic results in their students, while also aiming to develop effective communication skills. Research in this area can offer valuable insights for designing activities and assessments that foster oral expression, listening comprehension, reading, and writing in English.

Research into methodologies and didactic approaches also benefits teachers by providing them with updated resources and knowledge. Ongoing training in these areas ensures that teachers are equipped with the most effective and modern tools for teaching English dynamically and engagingly. Given that teaching English in Ecuadorian education is crucial to addressing contemporary challenges and ensuring a more effective educational process adapted to local needs, preparing students for an increasingly globalized world.

2. MARCO TEÓRICO

According to the investigation, learning a new language poses certain difficulties due to the varied strategies, methodologies, and didactic approaches employed by teachers to teach. Each teacher has their own style, and naturally, each country does too. Unfortunately, we are still far from achieving quality education. In Ecuador, the English language education in public educational institutions is very deficient. A large number of teachers who teach English in schools' nationwide lack teaching degree in English, and some teachers don't even have knowledge in the field. This phenomenon has persisted for many years because the government used to not hire specialized English teachers; rather, they utilized the services of teachers from other areas to fulfill English teaching hours. Chile also faces this problem where its teachers have a low level of English proficiency (Glas, 2008). Although, today in Ecuador the teaching of English with teachers from the area is being normalized, there is still a long way to go.

Additionally, the previous government reduced the pedagogical hours for the English subject. Previously, both primary and secondary schools taught five hours per week. Nowadays, there are only 3 hours per week, with each pedagogical hour equivalent to 40 minutes (*MINEDUC-MINEDUC-2023-00008-A.pdf*, s. f.). Chile faces a similar problem, where there is also limited time to develop all the required skills in English language teaching (Morales Rios & Ferreira Cabrera, 2008).

Similarly, the didactic resources used are outdated, or the use of technological tools is almost nonexistent within public entities. This is due to the lack of technological equipment in public institutions, such as audio and video devices, which are necessary for listening activities, a skill closely linked to speaking. As a result, English language teaching is reduced to learning vocabulary, basic grammatical structures, and some short readings. Consequently, students do not learn comprehensively because there is no good teaching methodology and no good didactic resources, leading to demotivation among students, who perceive the subject as useless or boring.

Due to the aforementioned factors, Ecuador is identified as one of the Spanish-speaking countries with a very low level of English proficiency, along with Mexico, Colombia, and Panama (*El nivel de inglés de los ecuatorianos está entre los más bajos del mundo*, s. f.). It seems that adequate teaching is not being developed due to the limited knowledge and experience of teachers, as well as methodologies and didactic approaches that are not yielding optimal results. For many years, a traditionalist approach and methodology have been used, indicating that students must learn grammatical structures in order to form sentences, and once grammar is mastered through repetitive sentences, the application of the four skills is introduced (Branda, 2017). However, nowadays, the focus is on implementing new strategies and methods to effectively engage students. Alternative methodologies subtly enhance language acquisition and maintain students' interest without them realizing it, through the use of poems, stories, movies, newspapers, and books (Anburaj, 2014)

According to Anburaj (2014), stories or tales play a vital role in English language teaching because students can engage in many interactive and creative activities, such as dramatization, changing the end of the story, participating in story-tellings, etc. Through these activities, students can increase their

vocabulary, overcome their fear of communication, and thus, teaching becomes more comprehensive. Regarding writing skills, it is suggested to encourage students to be creative and to write poetry, stories, games, etc. (Carvajal-Portuguez, 2013)

On one hand, Ecuador works different. The books provided by the government are structured with small stories, and the instruction for the student is to extract vocabulary, translate the story, and then present it to the teacher. This process can be tedious due to the extensive vocabulary and lack of motivation. On the other hand, in Spain, reading stories or tales plays a vital role in language teaching. Through reading, students can acquire comprehension skills, activate memory, imagination, and creativity (Delgado-Ortega, 2014), maintaining students' interest activated. It is perceived that stories stimulate the creative part of the brain, fostering imagination as readers visualize the events of the narrative. The key is not only to teach languages but also to encourage the generation of more creative content.

An alternative and more enjoyable method for learning English is through role-plays. This encourages students to personally engage with the stories, fostering motivation as they bring characters to life through their interpretations. It is crucial for students to understand the characters and empathize with them, as this active participation stimulates creativity and develops a comprehensive set of skills. Additionally, this method helps to assimilate information more effectively and quickly, and it also encourages group participation in the classroom (B8_2022_UNU_Educacion_Secundaria_T_2022_Milkar_Vela_V1.pdf, n.d.), promoting constructive conversations and facilitating learning. According to authors Alcedo and Chacón, a positive strategy for teaching any foreign language is through a playful approach; that is, incorporating all kinds of games into the teaching process, whether it's using puppets to narrate stories, coloring or pasting images, doing crafts, etc., all with the aim of encouraging students to learn and making the subject interesting and fun (Alcedo & Chacón, s. f.); a strategy that should be adopted both in Ecuador and in other Latin American countries.

Colombia, another Latin American country that, like Ecuador, also faces a low level of English language acquisition, and is far from achieving its goal of being a bilingual country, as its students fail to graduate

even at the B1 level, standardized by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. So, nowadays, their didactic approach to improving English language teaching is through the use of Problem-Based Learning (PBL), as it is a methodology that encourages students to have active participation, helping them develop communicative competence, as well as improving their initiative to solve real-life problems (Díaz et al., 2023).

Regarding the development of communicative competence, the didactic approach, even standardized by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), is Communicative Language Teaching, which is widely used so that students can function in various everyday life contexts, such as: greeting, reading and understanding an advertisement, communicating in a store, writing a notification, understanding a conversation (Erazo, 2019). Similarly, the communicative approach is effective for developing the four skills and is currently applied at different educational levels internationally (Arán Sánchez et al., 2021).

3. METODOLOGÍA

The development of this work was framed within a documentary research, bibliographic information was gathered through databases endorsed such as Google Scholar, Scielo, Redalyc, and Latindex. Information has been obtained from scientific articles, undergraduate and postgraduate theses from different Latin American countries, as well as from other countries like India and Spain, which also, not having English as their native language, go through similar experiences in their teaching-learning process. This is a qualitative study, employing a descriptive documentary research approach, involving the exploration, analysis, and interpretation of bibliographic sources to gather, synthesize, and paraphrase relevant content and thus develop the present research.

4. ANÁLISIS DE RESULTADOS Y DISCUSIÓN

According to authors Alcedo and Chacón (n.d.), the use of a playful approach is more associated with teaching children, especially those aged between 5 to 12 years old, in primary education. So, how would this approach be applied to teach teenagers and adults? Nowadays, being immersed in technology, playful activities could be carried out through the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology), thus motivating adult students to acquire the new language (Ricoy et al., 2016).

Vela (n.d.) in her thesis indicates to us that the use of role play as an activity in the classroom to improve speaking skills is highly advisable, as it motivates students to develop communication, stimulating imagination and creativity. It is said that role play is a playful activity that allows the student to communicate without fear of making mistakes because the mistake is made by the invented character rather than the student. (Cuitiño Ojeda et al., 2019). Similarly, the role play activity allows students to practice and develop language functions, acquiring a good grammatical usage and correct pronunciation (Garcia Garcia et al., 2022).

Regarding the use of stories as a method of teaching the English language according to the recommendation of Anburaj (2014), in Latin America, it would entail a hard work to achieve a reading culture in students. On one hand, Ecuadorian education is far from achieving proficiency in reading; it must be considered that Ecuadorian students do not acquire proficiency in comprehensive reading in their own native language. This phenomenon becomes evident when teaching another language, as students do not understand the message provided in texts. Similarly, Peru faces the same reading deficiency among its students. Due to the lack of this proficiency, Peruvian students do not analyze and understand any problems presented in their academic life, and therefore, they do not develop adequate English language learning because students cannot discern the message of a text (Prado-Huarcaya & Escalante-López, 2020).

Likewise, Venezuelan university students have little to no knowledge of the English language, and this is because they have not acquired proficiency in reading skills in their own native language throughout

their academic lives, a situation that exacerbates the process of teaching and learning the English language (Moncada V., 2013).

The communicative approach so far proves to be the best option for a teaching-learning process with positive outcomes, as according to Erazo (2019), this approach enables the student to make everyday situations through communication. Through communication, the student develops oral comprehension and expression or written comprehension and expression, which will be used in real-life situations, thus becoming the protagonists of their learning, increasing their motivation to continue learning (Beghadid, s. f.). But unfortunately, this approach is not applied in Ecuadorian classrooms in several public institutions; mostly, teachers resort to teaching the foreign language with traditionalist approaches, emphasizing the grammatical aspect and without proper development of the four language skills (Calle et al., 2012).

5. CONCLUSIÓN

Based on all the aforementioned, it can be said that in many Latin American countries including Ecuador, there is a low level of English proficiency due to teachers not being adequately prepared or updated in methodologies that lead to meaningful teaching, coupled with students' lack of reading comprehension, which hinders the development of language skills.

According to all the research conducted, it can be concluded that one of the best approaches for acquiring a foreign language is through the communicative approach, as it encourages students to engage in everyday activities. It is worth noting that methodologies that yield better results in achieving this approach involve playful activities either conventionally or through technological tools, as well as role-play activities, which allow character portrayal without fear of making mistakes; all these activities motivate students to participate actively, fueling their desire to continue learning.

Adapting didactic approaches to the specific needs of Ecuadorian students is essential to ensure the relevance and applicability of English language teaching in their context. Considering cultural,

socioeconomic, and linguistic factors in the design of pedagogical strategies emerges as a crucial aspect for the success of this process.

Ultimately, research in this field not only addresses the need to prepare Ecuadorian students to face the challenges of a globalized world but also contributes to the construction of quality education focused on excellence and equity. The implementation of effective methodologies and didactic approaches not only transforms the way English is taught but also has a positive impact on the acquisition of essential skills for the personal and professional development of students. In this sense, research on methodologies and didactic approaches in English language teaching in Ecuadorian education stands as a crucial component for strengthening the educational system and preparing individuals capable of actively and successfully participating in the globalized society of the 21st century.

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