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TEMA:

**COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING LANGUAGE BARRIERS IN
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A QUANTITATIVE CASE STUDY WITH A STUDENT
WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY**

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RESUMEN

La educación inclusiva busca garantizar la participación equitativa de todos los estudiantes; sin embargo, las barreras del lenguaje continúan limitando la participación comunicativa de los estudiantes con discapacidad intelectual en aulas regulares. Estas barreras suelen reducir las oportunidades de interacción social, participación académica y comunicación funcional. Por lo tanto, es necesario implementar estrategias pedagógicas que faciliten la comunicación y promuevan entornos de aprendizaje inclusivos. El propósito de este estudio fue analizar la efectividad de las estrategias comunicativas inclusivas para reducir las barreras del lenguaje y mejorar la competencia comunicativa en una estudiante con necesidades educativas especiales dentro de un contexto educativo inclusivo. La investigación adoptó un enfoque cuantitativo utilizando un diseño preexperimental de caso único tipo A–B con medición pretest–posttest. La participante fue una estudiante de octavo grado diagnosticada con discapacidad intelectual leve a moderada, matriculada en una institución educativa pública en Nueva Loja, Ecuador. El desempeño comunicativo se evaluó mediante un instrumento adaptado de evaluación de la competencia comunicativa que midió cuatro dimensiones: comprensión verbal, expresión oral, interacción comunicativa y uso funcional del lenguaje. La intervención tuvo una duración de ocho semanas e incluyó la aplicación sistemática de estrategias comunicativas como pictogramas, modelado verbal, refuerzo positivo, actividades de aprendizaje colaborativo y el uso de tecnología de apoyo. Los resultados mostraron una mejora significativa en el desempeño comunicativo. La puntuación de la estudiante aumentó de 12 de 40 puntos (30 %) en el pretest a 27 de 40 puntos (67,5 %) en el posttest, lo que representa una ganancia de 15 puntos y un incremento del 37,5 % en el desempeño general. Los registros observacionales también revelaron un aumento progresivo de conductas comunicativas durante el período de intervención. Estos hallazgos sugieren que las estrategias comunicativas estructuradas pueden mejorar eficazmente la competencia comunicativa y favorecer la inclusión de estudiantes con discapacidad intelectual en aulas regulares.

PALABRAS CLAVES

Educación inclusiva, estrategias comunicativas, discapacidad intelectual, barreras del lenguaje, aulas inclusivas

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education seeks to ensure equitable participation for all students; however, language barriers continue to limit the communicative participation of students with intellectual disabilities in mainstream classrooms. These barriers often reduce opportunities for social interaction, academic engagement, and functional communication. Therefore, it is necessary to implement pedagogical strategies that facilitate communication and promote inclusive learning environments. The purpose of this study was to analyze the effectiveness of inclusive communicative strategies in reducing language barriers and improving communicative competence in a student with special educational needs within an inclusive educational context. The research adopted a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental single-case A–B design with pretest–posttest measurement. The participant was an eighth-grade student diagnosed with mild-to-moderate intellectual disability enrolled in a public educational institution in Nueva Loja, Ecuador. Communicative performance was assessed using an adapted communicative competence evaluation instrument that measured four dimensions: verbal comprehension, oral expression, communicative interaction, and functional use of language. The intervention lasted eight weeks and included the systematic application of communicative strategies such as pictograms, verbal modeling, positive reinforcement, collaborative learning activities, and the use of assistive technology. The results showed a significant improvement in communicative performance. The student score increased from 12 out of 40 points (30%) in the pretest to 27 out of 40 points (67.5%) in the posttest, representing a gain of 15 points and a 37.5% increase in overall performance. Observational records also revealed a progressive increase in communicative behaviors throughout the intervention period. These findings suggest that structured communicative strategies can effectively enhance communicative competence and support the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

KEYWORDS

Inclusive education, communicative strategies, intellectual disability, language barriers, inclusive classrooms

1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Inclusive education has become a fundamental principle of contemporary educational systems, aimed at ensuring equitable participation for all students, regardless of their cognitive, social, or physical conditions. In the case of students with intellectual disabilities, inclusion involves not only physical access to mainstream classrooms but also the elimination of communicative barriers that restrict active participation and social development (Moya López et al., 2022; Stárek, 2025). Several studies have shown that, despite advances in inclusive policies, significant challenges remain in the implementation of effective communicative strategies within mainstream classrooms (Hornby & Kauffman, 2024). Limitations in linguistic competence and adaptive skills may restrict social interaction, leading to isolation and reduced academic participation (Diaz Garolera et al., 2023). In this regard, inclusive education requires structured pedagogical interventions that strengthen communication as a central axis of the teaching–learning process. When systematically implemented, inclusive communicative strategies promote peer interaction and foster a sense of belonging. Recent research highlights that collaborative practices and school-based social networks enhance the social participation of students with intellectual disabilities (Diaz Garolera et al., 2023; Genovesi et al. 2024). Likewise, the perception of assertive communication directly influences self-esteem and the quality of interpersonal relationships within the classroom (Belmonte & Estupinan, 2024). Furthermore, the incorporation of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems and assistive technologies have demonstrated positive effects on the development of communicative competence in inclusive contexts. The review conducted by Iacono et al. (2022) indicates that AAC-based interventions promote functional expression and academic participation among students with developmental disabilities. Complementarily, Zambrano Villa and Vaca-Cárdenas (2024) emphasize that adapting specific linguistic strategies enhances communicative performance in curricular areas such as English language learning. Despite these advances, gaps remain in the literature regarding the systematic quantitative evaluation of the impact of specific communicative strategies in inclusive classrooms (Rua Angulo et al., 2025). Many studies focus on qualitative descriptions or perception-based analyses but lack methodological designs that allow statistical measurement of intervention effectiveness. From the perspective of inclusive Edu communication, there

is a growing need to integrate pedagogical approaches that combine communicative, technological, and the perspectives to ensure effective inclusion (Muñoz-Borja et al., 2021). This involves not only adapting content but also transforming interactive classroom dynamics. Within this context, the present study aims to quantitatively evaluate the effectiveness of various communicative strategies in reducing language barriers among students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Specifically, it seeks to: Determine the level of effectiveness of communicative strategies in reducing communication barriers. Analyze the effect of assistive technology use on communicative competence. Examine the relationship between collaborative learning and peer interaction. The relevance of this study lies in its empirical contribution to the field of inclusive education, providing quantitative evidence to support data-driven pedagogical decision-making and to strengthen educational practices oriented towards equity and full participation

2. METODOLOGÍA

This study adopts a quantitative approach aimed at objective measurement and systematic analysis of changes in the communicative performance of a student with an intellectual disability within an inclusive educational context. This approach allows numerical examination of the effectiveness of communicative strategies implemented to reduce language barriers through comparison of indicators before and after the intervention (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018). The research follows a pre-experimental single-case A–B design with pretest–posttest measurement (Kazdin, 2011; Ledford & Gast, 2018). During Phase A (baseline), the participant’s initial level of communicative competence was assessed without the application of specific strategies. In Phase B, a structured communicative intervention was implemented. A posttest was subsequently administered to identify changes following the intervention. This design is appropriate when analyzing a single case and determining the functional relationship between the applied intervention and observed variations in the dependent variable (Shadish et al., 2014). The study was conducted with an eighth-grade student diagnosed with mild-to-moderate intellectual disability according to an institutional psychoeducational report and enrolled in an inclusive mainstream classroom. The participant was selected through criterion-based purposeful sampling due to evident communicative barriers in academic performance and formally documented special educational needs. As a single-case study, the objective was not population generalization but in-depth analysis of intervention effects within a specific context (Kazdin,

2011). The independent variable consisted of the implementation of inclusive communicative strategies, including visual supports (pictograms), structured verbal modeling, guided collaborative learning, and systematic positive reinforcement. The dependent variable was communicative performance, operationalized through observable indicators such as frequency of oral participation, comprehension of instructions, and initiation of interactions, consistent with evaluation models in special education (Ledford & Gast, 2018).

Data collection involved structured instruments and systematic observation. An adapted communicative competence assessment was administered as both pretest and posttest to measure changes in comprehension and verbal expression. Additionally, a weekly observational checklist was applied throughout the intervention to record frequency and types of communicative behaviors in the classroom. This procedure aligns with methodological standards in single-case research (Horner et al., 2005). The procedure was carried out in three stages: 1. Two-week baseline phase with pretest administration and observation without intervention. 2. Six-week systematic implementation of communicative strategies. 3. Post test administration and comparative data analysis. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, calculating frequencies, percentages, and levels of variation between pretest and posttest. Trend graphs were developed to visualize individual progress, following recommendations for single-case analysis (Shadish et al., 2014). Inferential statistics were not applied due to the sample size ($n = 1$). Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, and exclusive academic use of data, in accordance with ethical principles in educational research (Cohen et al., 2018).

3. ANÁLISIS DE RESULTADOS

The study was conducted with a student with special educational needs at Unidad Educativa Oriente, located in Nueva Loja, Sucumbíos Province, under a pre-experimental single-case A–B design with pretest–posttest measurement. Results are presented descriptively, considering the nature of the design ($n = 1$).

Pretest Results

In the initial assessment administered on January 5, 2026, the student obtained a total score of 12 out of 40 points, corresponding to 30% of the expected performance level, classified as low communicative performance.

Dimension-level results were as follows:

- Verbal comprehension: 3/10
- Oral expression: 3/10
- Communicative interaction: 2/10
- Functional use of language: 4/10

These findings indicated significant limitations in understanding complex instructions, limited communicative initiative, and difficulties structuring oral discourse. Frequent teacher dependence and low participation in group activities were also observed.

Table 1.

Pretest–Posttest Comparison

Assessed Dimension	Maximum Score	Pretest (Baseline)	Initial Level	Posttest (Week 8)	Final Level	Difference
Language Comprehension	10	3	Low	7	Medium	+4
Verbal Expression	10	2	Low	6	Medium	+4
Functional Use of Language	10	4	Low	7	Medium	+3
Communicative Interaction	10	3	Low	7	Medium	+4
Overall Total	40	12	Low	27	Medium	+15

Note: Author's data

Post-test Results

After eight weeks of systematic intervention, the posttest administered on February 20, 2026 yielded a score of 27 out of 40 (67.5%), corresponding to a medium level of communicative performance.

Dimension-level results were:

- Verbal comprehension: 7/10
- Oral expression: 7/10
- Communicative interaction: 6/10
- Functional use of language: 7/10

Notable improvements were observed in comprehension of both closed and simple open-ended questions, production of more structured sentences, and active participation in group activities.

The difference between measurements was 15 points, representing an absolute increase of 37.5% of the total possible score. In relative terms, communicative performance increased by 125% compared to baseline. The transition from a low to a medium level reflects a functionally meaningful improvement in communicative performance.

Table 2

Communicative strategies used with the student with special educational needs

Communicative Strategy	Objective	Example of Application
Use of pictograms	Facilitate comprehension and expression of needs and actions	The student points to pictograms and such as “eat,” “go to the bathroom,” or “help” to communicate independently.
Verbal modeling	Teach functional language structures and correct verbal production	The teacher says phrases like “What color is this object?” and the student repeats following the model.
Positive reinforcement	Motivate the student and reinforce desired communicative behaviors	Correct attempts are praised verbally (“Excellent work!”) or small incentives, such as stickers, are given.

Collaborative learning	Promote interaction and language practice	social and functional	The student works in groups to sequence story pictures or answer questions in an educational game.
Assistive technology	Provide communication and make learning engaging	additional channels	Use of a tablet with augmentative and alternative communication apps (interactive pictograms, vocabulary games).

Source: Own elaboration based on observations during the intervention (2026).

Table 2 summarizes the communicative strategies implemented with the student with special educational needs during the intervention period. Each strategy was selected to target specific aspects of language development and social interaction. The use of **pictograms** facilitated the student's understanding and expression of basic needs and actions, promoting greater independence. Verbal modeling supported the acquisition of functional language structures through repeated guided practice, helping the student to produce correct phrases and sentences. Positive reinforcement contributed to motivation and increased engagement, as the student was encouraged to participate actively in communication tasks. The collaborative learning strategy provided opportunities for peer interaction, allowing the student to practice language in meaningful social contexts and improve cooperative skills. Finally, the integration of assistive technology expanded the modes of communication, making learning more engaging and accessible while reinforcing vocabulary and functional language use.

Overall, the combined application of these strategies resulted in measurable improvements in the student's communicative performance, both in terms of quantity and quality of interactions. The systematic and multimodal approach helped overcome language barriers, enhanced participation in classroom activities, and supported the development of functional communication skills in an inclusive educational setting.

Observational Record Results

Weekly analysis of communicative behaviors revealed a progressive upward trend throughout the eight-week intervention.

Seven communicative behaviors were recorded in Week 1, increasing to 27 behaviors in Week 8—an overall gain of 20 additional communicative behaviors during the intervention period.

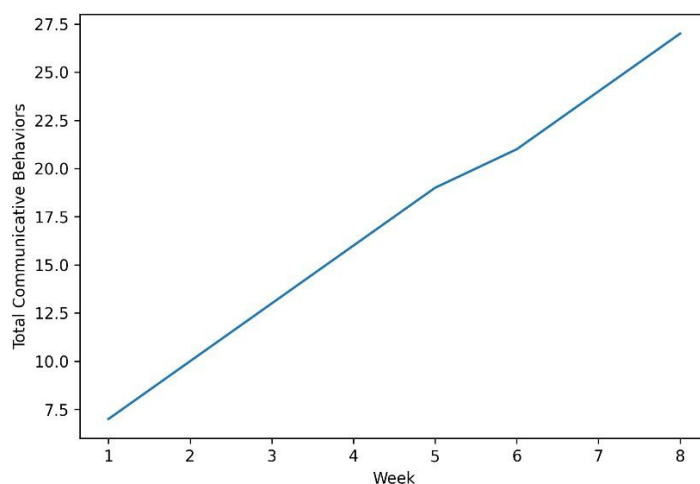
The growth was gradual and sustained, with no significant regressions. The most consistent improvements were observed in:

- Spontaneous oral interventions
- Correct responses to academic questions
- Initiation of peer interactions
- Verbalized requests for help or clarification

Figure

1

Weekly Progression of Communicative Behaviors



Source: Author's data

Descriptive Statistics (RCCA – Weekly Totals)

- Mean ($\bar{x}$): 17.13
- Median: 17.50
- Mode: 7 (not representative; all values were distinct)
- Sample standard deviation: 6.92

The mean indicates that the student performed approximately 17 communicative behaviors per weekly session on average. The media confirms a relatively symmetrical distribution of progress. The standard deviation reflects moderate variability, consistent with a progressive improvement process. The absence of a meaningful mode indicates continuous growth without stable repetition of value

4. DISCUSIÓN

The results of the present study demonstrate a substantial improvement in the student's communicative performance following the implementation of a systematic intervention over eight weeks under a pre-experimental A–B design. The 15-point increase from the pretest (12/40) to the posttest (27/40), equivalent to an absolute gain of 37.5% and a relative gain of 125% compared to the baseline, suggests a significant functional impact on the evaluated communicative competencies. The transition from a low to a medium level not only reflects quantitative progress but also qualitative transformations in participation, autonomy, and communicative interaction within the school context.

These findings align with recent evidence supporting the effectiveness of structured interventions in language development for students with special educational needs. Various studies have shown that teacher-mediated interventions, based on explicit modeling, progressive scaffolding, and guided practice, produce significant improvements in communicative skills within inclusive environments (Sutherland et al., 2020). Consistent with these perspectives, the observed increase in verbal comprehension and oral expression in the present study suggests that methodological systematicity and explicit instruction facilitate the progressive acquisition of functional linguistic structures.

Additionally, the results coincide with the assertions of Cedeño Calda and Sánchez Cruz (2024), who argue that the application of structured communicative strategies, adapted to the individual characteristics of the student, strengthens school inclusion and active social participation. In this sense, the progressive improvement evidenced in communicative interaction and functional language use confirms that the intervention influenced not only linguistic performance but also social integration within the classroom.

Moreover, the findings can be interpreted considering contemporary challenges in inclusive education. Stárek (2025) emphasizes that one of the fundamental pillars for ensuring effective inclusive education for individuals with intellectual disabilities lies in implementing pedagogical practices that promote active participation, autonomy, and the development of social bonds in mainstream settings. The observed evolution in spontaneous oral interventions

and the initiation of peer exchanges reflects precisely this shift toward more autonomous and socially meaningful participation.

The sustained growth in communicative behaviors recorded weekly also aligns with studies highlighting that the consistent implementation of communicative strategies produces cumulative and stable increases in the frequency of student-initiated interactions (Kent-Walsh et al., 2015). In the present study, the absence of significant regressions and the continuous upward trend suggest a gradual consolidation process of skills, consistent with current models of communicative intervention based on repeated and contextualized practice.

Furthermore, recent research underscores the importance of natural and functional contexts in language teaching. Interventions implemented within the regular educational environment have been shown to favor the generalization of communicative skills and strengthen student autonomy (Odom et al., 2020). This perspective is supported by the results obtained, particularly in the increase of appropriate responses to academic questions and greater participation in group activities.

Similarly, contemporary studies in linguistic intervention emphasize that individualized support and progressive scaffolding allow students to progress from low initial levels to functional intermediate performance when the intervention is systematic and sustained over time (Ebbels et al., 2022). The more pronounced improvement observed from the fourth week could be interpreted as evidence of a gradual internalization process of the strategies worked on, suggesting a cumulative effect inherent to structured interventions.

However, it is necessary to acknowledge that single case design limits the generalizability of the results. While the descriptive data shows clear and consistent improvement, future research with larger samples and experimental designs would strengthen external validity and enable effect size estimations comparable with recent international studies.

In summary, the results support the effectiveness of structured, systematic, and contextualized communicative interventions for students with special educational needs within inclusive environments. Recent scientific evidence consistently indicates that explicit instruction, progressive scaffolding, and functional practice are key elements for communicative development, which is reflected in the significant improvement achieved in the present study.

5. CONCLUSIÓN

The present research conducted using a single-case study design with a student with special educational needs from a school in Nueva Loja, Sucumbíos, made it possible to analyze the impact of structured communicative strategies aimed at overcoming language barriers within an inclusive educational context.

The results demonstrated a significant improvement in the students' communicative performance. The score increased from 12 out of 40 in the pretest, corresponding to a low level of performance, to 27 out of 40 in the posttest, representing a medium level after eight weeks of intervention. This quantitative improvement was accompanied by qualitative progress, including a more functional use of language, greater communicative intention, increased participation in classroom activities, and improved comprehension of verbal instructions supported by visual resources.

The systematic implementation of strategies such as pictograms, verbal modeling, positive reinforcement, collaborative learning, and assistive technology proved to be effective in promoting functional communication. The incorporation of assistive technology facilitated alternative channels of expression and comprehension, allowing the student to reinforce vocabulary development and participate more independently in communicative exchanges within the classroom. Likewise, collaborative learning activities encouraged interaction with peers and created meaningful opportunities for the use of language in authentic communicative situations, strengthening both communicative competence and social participation in the inclusive learning environment.

Furthermore, the study confirms that even within a single-case research design, the rigorous use of assessment instruments such as pretests, posttests, and systematic observational records can provide valuable empirical evidence for monitoring communicative development. Continuous observation made it possible to identify gradual and sustained progress throughout the intervention, particularly from the fourth week onward, when greater communicative autonomy and more frequent interaction behaviors were observed.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings indicate that the reduction of language barriers in inclusive education depends not only on the individual abilities of the student but also on the

adaptation of teaching practices, the integration of multimodal communicative supports, and the promotion of inclusive classroom dynamics that encourage participation and interaction.

Although the results cannot be generalized due to the nature of the single-case design, the findings provide relevant contextual evidence that can inform educational practice and guide future research. Further studies involving larger samples and quasi-experimental or experimental designs are recommended in order to examine the long-term impact and broader applicability of communicative strategies for students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive educational contexts.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that a structured and systematic communicative intervention centered on the learner's needs can significantly improve communicative competence, increase classroom participation, and contribute to the effective inclusion of students with special educational needs.

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Y para que así conste, firmo la presente en la ciudad de Manta, a los 24 de marzo de 2026.



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