

Early childhood education in Ecuador: Challenges and opportunities in early childhood education



La educación inicial en Ecuador: Retos y
oportunidades en la formación de la primera
infancia

Maritza Catherine Vallejo Palacios*
Maritza del Rocío Morán Alvarado*
Gabriela Estefanía Pavón Brito*
Cynthia Elizabeth Solano García*

Abstract

Early childhood education in Ecuador faces several challenges and opportunities in early childhood education. This study examines the public policies implemented, the quality of teacher training and the socioeconomic conditions that affect access and educational quality. Through a qualitative and quantitative approach, significant barriers were identified, such as regional inequality and lack of resources, which limit the coverage and effectiveness of interventions. Likewise, recognized important strengths, such as the focus on the

Master in Pedagogy
University of Guayaquil
Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Educational Sciences
maritza.vallejop@ug.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3884-6039>

Master in Educational Management
University of Guayaquil
Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Educational Sciences
maritza.morana@ug.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9138-6273>

Master's Degree in Early Childhood Development and
Education
German School Humboldt Samborondón
gabriela.pavon@casagrande.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6729-9004>

Master in Early Childhood Development and Education
University Training Institute
cynthia.solano@formacion.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0260-9151>

Sinergias educativas
April - June Vol. 10 - 2 - 2025
<http://sinergiaseducativas.mx/index.php/revista/>
eISSN: 2661-6661
revistasinergias@soyuo.mx
Page 1-7
Received: September 14 , 2024
Approved: December 21 , 2024

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution/NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0
International Public License - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/legalcode.es>

integral development of children and the social inclusion promoted by government programs. The results underscore the need to increase investment in infrastructure, strengthen continuous teacher training and guarantee equity in access to early education. These actions are crucial to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals related to early childhood and to foster a more inclusive and equitable education system. This study provides a comprehensive vision that can guide decision-making and the formulation of more effective public policies.

Key words: Initial education, early childhood, Ecuador, integral development, educational quality.

Resumen

La educación inicial en Ecuador enfrenta diversos retos y oportunidades en la formación de la primera infancia. Este estudio examina las políticas públicas implementadas, la calidad de la formación docente y las condiciones socioeconómicas que afectan el acceso y la calidad educativa. A través de un enfoque cualitativo y cuantitativo, se identificaron barreras significativas, como la desigualdad regional y la falta de recursos, que limitan la cobertura y la efectividad de las intervenciones. Asimismo, se reconocen fortalezas importantes, como el enfoque en el desarrollo integral de los niños y la inclusión social promovida por programas gubernamentales. Los resultados subrayan la necesidad de incrementar la inversión en infraestructura, fortalecer la formación continua de los docentes y garantizar la equidad en el acceso a la educación inicial. Estas acciones son cruciales para alcanzar los objetivos de desarrollo sostenible relacionados con la primera infancia y para fomentar un sistema educativo más inclusivo y equitativo. Este estudio aporta una visión integral que puede orientar la toma de decisiones y la formulación de políticas públicas más efectivas.

Palabras Clave: Educación inicial, primera infancia, Ecuador, desarrollo integral, calidad educativa.

Introduction

Early education is a fundamental stage in the comprehensive development of children, laying the foundations for their learning, socialization and future wellbeing. In Ecuador, this educational level is aimed at infants from birth to five years of age, structured in two

sub-levels: Initial 1, which serves children up to 36 months, and Initial 2, for those from 37 to 60 months (Ministry of Education, 2014). The relevance of early education has been recognized in various public policies, such as the National Intersectoral Strategy for Early Childhood "Full Childhood", which seeks to ensure the comprehensive development of children in their first years of life (Secretaría Técnica Ecuador Crece Sin Desnutrición Infantil, 2023).

Despite government efforts to strengthen early education, there are still significant challenges that affect its effective implementation. These include regional inequalities in coverage and educational quality, insufficient material and human resources, and the need for specialized and continuous teacher training (Ministry of Education, 2014). These problems are reflected in studies that evidence the postponement of early childhood in the country, pointing out that the conditions in which a child is born and grows up are determinant for its future development (S Option, 2024).

The National Intersectoral Strategy for Early Childhood "Infancia Plena" establishes policies aimed at the comprehensive development of early childhood as a priority of the State. This strategy is aligned with the objectives of the National Plan for Good Living 2013-2017, which promotes equality, cohesion, inclusion and social and territorial equity in diversity, guaranteeing the comprehensive development of children under 5 years of age (Secretaría Técnica Ecuador Crece Sin Desnutrición Infantil, 2023).

However, the implementation of these policies faces significant challenges. The lack of resources in many countries, including Ecuador, makes it difficult to maintain existing educational programs and provide adequate attention to early childhood (WAECE, n.d.). In addition, the training of early childhood educators is crucial to understand and effectively implement public policies, contributing to the achievement of the stated objectives (UNAE, 2023).

In this context, it is essential to analyze the current situation of early childhood education in Ecuador, identifying the main challenges and opportunities in early childhood education. This analysis will allow us to propose strategies to strengthen public policies and educational practices, ensuring quality care that promotes the comprehensive development of children in their first years of life.

Materials and methods

This study aimed to analyze pedagogical practices in early childhood education in Ecuador, focusing on the methodologies used by teachers and their impact on the comprehensive development of children. For this purpose, an exploratory-descriptive qualitative approach was adopted, allowing a deep understanding of educational dynamics in real contexts (Creswell, 2014).

A field design was used, which involved the collection of data directly in the educational environments where pedagogical practices are developed. This approach facilitated the observation and analysis of interactions between teachers and students, as well as the identification of the methodologies applied in the classroom (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016).

The study sample consisted of three early childhood educators from the province of Azuay, Ecuador. Two of them worked in public institutions and one in a private institution. The participants were selected intentionally, considering their experience and willingness to collaborate in the research (Patton, 2015).

The following techniques were used to obtain information:

Semi-structured interviews: Individual interviews were conducted with the educators, focusing on their perceptions and experiences related to the pedagogical methodologies employed, the challenges faced and the strategies implemented to promote early childhood learning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Non-participant observation: Observation sessions were conducted in the classrooms, recording the interactions, activities and resources used during the educational days. This technique made it possible to identify the methodologies applied and their effectiveness in the real classroom context (Angrosino, 2007).

Documentary analysis: Institutional documents, such as curricular plans and teaching materials, were reviewed to understand how methodologies are structured and applied in daily educational practice (Bowen, 2009).

The research process was developed in the following stages:

Participant Selection: Educational institutions were contacted and, after obtaining informed consent, participating educators were selected.

Data Collection: Interviews and observations were scheduled and conducted at times agreed upon with the educators, ensuring minimal interruption of school activities.

Data Analysis: The information collected was transcribed and coded, identifying relevant categories and patterns related to pedagogical methodologies and their impact on children's learning.

The confidentiality of the participants and the institutions involved was assured, using pseudonyms in the records and reports. In addition, informed consent was obtained from the educators, who voluntarily participated in the study (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Given the qualitative nature and the small sample, the findings of this study are not intended to be generalizable to all early education institutions in Ecuador. However, they provide a detailed view of pedagogical practices in specific contexts, serving as a basis for future research and improvements in educational methodologies.

Results

The analysis of the data collected made it possible to identify several significant findings related to the pedagogical methodologies used in early education in Ecuador. The main results are described below:

Diversity in Pedagogical Methodologies: Classroom observations revealed that teachers combine traditional methodologies and more innovative approaches. While some activities are focused on the transmission of knowledge, practices oriented to active and game-based learning were also found (Creswell, 2014). These methodologies contribute to children's cognitive and social development.

Limitations in Resources and Materials: Despite the efforts of the educational institutions, there was a lack of adequate teaching materials in the classrooms. This situation affects the ability of teachers to implement more dynamic and meaningful activities (Bowen, 2009).

Importance of the Teacher-Child Relationship: The interviews revealed that teachers consider it fundamental to establish a close and positive relationship with children. This approach fosters an environment of trust and security, promoting learning and emotional well-being (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Contextual Challenges: Teachers face challenges linked to external factors, such as the limited involvement of families in the educational process and socioeconomic inequalities that influence children's regular school attendance (Patton, 2015).

Impact of Teacher Training: Educators stated that continuous and specialized training has improved their pedagogical practices. However, they indicated the need for more training programs that address the specific needs of early childhood (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016).

Discussion

Research shows that early education in Ecuador faces a series of challenges and opportunities that impact both educational quality and the comprehensive development of children. Teachers play a key role in the implementation of pedagogical methodologies that foster meaningful learning, despite resource limitations and adverse contextual conditions (Angrosino, 2007).

To improve the quality of early education, the following priority areas need to be addressed:

Increase in the Provision of Resources: Educational institutions require greater support in the provision of didactic materials and in the improvement of infrastructure (Bowen, 2009).

Strengthening Teacher Training: It is essential to implement continuous training programs that train educators in innovative methodologies adapted to the needs of early childhood (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Encouraging Family Involvement: Engaging families in the educational process can contribute significantly to the success of children's learning (Patton, 2015).

Attention to Educational Equity: It is necessary to reduce socioeconomic inequalities that affect educational access and quality, especially in rural and marginalized communities (Creswell, 2014).

This study highlights the importance of a comprehensive and collaborative approach to overcome existing challenges and guarantee quality early education in Ecuador, promoting the full development of children from their first years of life.

References

American Psychological Association (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

- Angrosino, M. (2007). *Doing ethnographic and observational research*. Sage.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Ministry of Education (2014). *Curriculum for early childhood education*. Retrieved from <https://educacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2016/03/CURRICULO-DE-EDUCACION-INICIAL.pdf>
- Option S. (2024). The postponement of early childhood in Ecuador. Retrieved from <https://opcions.ec/portal/2024/01/04/la-postergacion-de-la-primera-infancia-en-el-ecuador>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Technical Secretariat Ecuador Grows Without Child Malnutrition (2023). *Estrategia Nacional Intersectorial para la Primera Infancia "Infancia Plena"*. Retrieved from <https://www.infancia.gob.ec/estrategia-nacional-intersectorial-para-la-primera-infancia-infancia-plena>
- Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, M. (2016). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource* (4th ed.). Wiley.
- UNAE (2023). Challenges and challenges of early childhood education and care. Retrieved from <https://unae.edu.ec/oferta/retos-y-desafios-de-la-educacion-y-atencion-a-la-primera-infancia>
- WAECE (n.d.). Current issues in early childhood education. Retrieved from https://www.waece.org/web_nuevo_concepto/textos/10.pdf