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Artículos científicos

Expresión oral en inglés en niños de dos a cuatro años mediante la estimulación temprana

***Oral Expression in English in Children Aged Two to Four Years Using Early
Stimulation***

***Expressão oral em inglês em crianças de dois a quatro anos usando
estimulação precoce***

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Resumen

El aprendizaje de un segundo idioma resulta más fácil y divertido a edades tempranas ya que no existe presión alguna ni comparaciones con la lengua materna. Se adquiere dentro de un proceso natural tal cual como el idioma nativo. En la actualidad, sin embargo, todavía existe desconocimiento acerca de la estimulación intelectual temprana. El objetivo de este estudio de alcance descriptivo es determinar una serie de actividades adecuadas de estimulación temprana para el desarrollo de la expresión oral y el aprendizaje del inglés como segunda lengua. La investigación se desarrolló en el centro de estudios Yes Aprendo Inglés de la ciudad de Santo Domingo, Ecuador. La muestra considerada fue de ocho niños con edades comprendidas entre dos y cuatro años que han realizado actividades correspondientes a los niveles básicos I y II del programa de estimulación temprana. Los resultados muestran que la aplicación de estas actividades permite que los pequeños tengan un alto conocimiento del idioma inglés a corta edad, lo cual se contrapone a las creencias existentes de que son muy pequeños para aprender un nuevo idioma o que la adquisición de este puede interferir en la adquisición de la lengua materna. Se concluye que durante la edad temprana debe ser prioritario para los padres y madres de familia incentivar a sus hijos a aprender un nuevo idioma.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje de una segunda lengua, conexiones neuronales, estimulación temprana, expresión oral, inglés.

Abstract

Learning a second language is easier and more fun at an early age —without any pressure or comparisons with the mother tongue. It is acquired within a natural process just like the native language. With the practice of early stimulation activities neural connections called *synapses* are developed. The more connections there are, the more information the child can acquire and without much effort. At present, there is a lack of knowledge about the relevance of this stage. This research was developed at the Yes Aprendo Inglés Study Center in Santo Domingo, a city in Ecuador. The sample considered for this purpose was eight children between the ages of two and four who have carried out activities corresponding to basic levels I and II of the early stimulation program. The results show that the application of these activities allows children to have a high knowledge of the English language at a young age, which is contrary to the existing beliefs that they are too young to learn a new language or

that the acquisition of this can generate confusion. It is concluded that early age should be considered a priority by parents to encourage their children to learn a new language.

Keywords: second language learning, neural connections, early stimulation, speaking, English.

Resumo

Aprender uma segunda língua é mais fácil e divertido em tenra idade, pois não há pressão ou comparação com a língua materna. É adquirido dentro de um processo natural, assim como a língua nativa. No momento, entretanto, ainda falta conhecimento sobre a estimulação intelectual precoce. O objetivo deste estudo descritivo é determinar uma série de atividades de estimulação precoce adequadas para o desenvolvimento da expressão oral e o aprendizado do inglês como segunda língua. A pesquisa foi realizada no centro de estudos Yes Aprendo Inglés, na cidade de Santo Domingo, Equador. A amostra considerada foi composta por oito crianças de dois a quatro anos que realizaram atividades correspondentes aos níveis básicos I e II do programa de estimulação precoce. Os resultados mostram que a aplicação dessas atividades permite que as crianças tenham um alto conhecimento da língua inglesa desde muito jovens, o que vai de encontro às crenças existentes de que são muito novas para aprender uma nova língua ou de que a aquisição desta pode interferir na aquisição da língua materna. Conclui-se que desde a mais tenra idade deve ser prioridade os pais estimularem os filhos a aprender uma nova língua.

Palavras-chave: aprendizagem de uma segunda língua, conexões neurais, estimulação precoce, fala, inglês.

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Introduction

Statistics from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (cited in Rueda and Wilburn, 2014) indicate that English is the second most widely practiced language in the world (in the first place, there is Mandarin Chinese, due to the large number of native speakers; in third place, Spanish). And either as a cause or as a consequence of the above, English has long been positioned as the language to talk about business (Fiszbein, Consentino & Cumsille, 2016). Mastering a second language, whatever it may be, is essential to broaden the cultural horizons of any individual, but, in the case of English, it has also become a requirement for international communication, especially in the business world. .

In Ecuador, this language is officially taught in private and public educational establishments. The Ministry of Education has implemented several measures to improve their learning in the different educational units. The main one is the compulsory teaching of the English language from the second year of primary to secondary school. According to the Ministry of Education [MinEduc] (2014) in agreement 0041-14 it was possible for English to enter the formal curriculum with a 5-hour workload from the eighth year of basic education. In this way, the level of students' language skills is raised through teacher training in the area. The first activities to measure language skills was the application of the international TOEFL test to teachers. In addition, it establishes that teachers must handle the language at a high intermediate level (B2). With the renewal of the Peace Corps Teaching English as a Foreign Language Program, it is intended to increase the level of learning of the English language of students in the public education system, to optimize language skills through the combination of communicative activities and of teaching induced to the student, through a group of volunteers who accompany the teacher during the teaching-learning process (MinEduc, 2019). However, despite these efforts, according to the English Proficiency Index of Education First [EF] (2020), Ecuador is ranked 93rd out of a total of 100 countries regarding development in English proficiency, which obviously is not very encouraging.

Poor school performance refers to the poor grades that students obtain in different subjects, yes, but above all to the large gaps in knowledge they present, even in basic areas such as reading, reading comprehension and writing (Hinojosa, 2019). Students who perform

poorly do not study or show interest in learning. Many parents and teachers come to think that it is not a learning problem and that the child can improve if it is corrected in time.

According to Peña (2017), one of the most relevant educational changes in Ecuador took place in 2011, when the Ministry of Education undertook an update of the basic and high school curriculum reform that brought about transformations in the structure of all subjects. This update also included the launch of the "It's time to teach English" program, an attempt to improve the teaching of English as a foreign language that took into account "aspects of methodology and teaching skills" (p. 26). Additionally, the teaching of this language entered the formal curriculum with a five-hour workload from the eighth year of basic education (Peña, 2017).

This same author indicates that one of the first steps taken was the evaluation of the teaching staff through the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which measures skills and competencies in the English language. The evaluation was carried out on a group of 5022 teachers, of which 74% were classified as "basic users" (Peña, 2017, p. 26). Undoubtedly, the poor command of the language on the part of the teachers is an element that must be improved, because the student learns the language with the same errors as the one in front of the group: a perpetuation of transmitted grammatical or pronunciation deficiencies from the beginning of learning.

Infant development demands many actors. The main ones, of course, are the family members, who should be responsible for the upbringing and integral development in the first stage of their life until they reach an adequate psychomotor development (Barreno, 2015). And as is well known, early stimulation is a transcendental need in the educational field. The objective of early stimulation is to develop and enhance the cognitive, linguistic, motor and social functions of the child through the use of games, teaching materials, exercises, techniques and other resources (Esteves, Avilés y Matamoros, 2018).

The perfect period when a person's brain is ready for language acquisition is from zero to four years of age. This time is called the time window. Once this age has passed, the window closes, and language learning is subjected to greater efforts, except in the case of immersion in the specific linguistic environment.

Through various studies developed throughout the 21st century, it has been shown that handling two or more languages makes people more intelligent, helps the brain resolve small internal conflicts, especially at an early age where intelligence develops. Indeed, Ferres

(2011), based on cognitive tests carried out on children who know a second language, indicates that they have greater cognitive flexibility and understanding of concepts.

The acquisition of a second language is learned effectively at an early age, since it is the time when the brain of children is in its full capacity to absorb knowledge that will not be forgotten even in advanced age. Knowing a second language does not interfere with the acquisition of the mother tongue, but, on the contrary, makes the child more understanding, awake, intelligent and adaptable. Teaching should be accompanied by songs, games, motivational activities, among others, that allow the child to feel safe and that the learning process is fun. A child who knows English will surely have better opportunities in the future due to today's globalization (Medina, Melo and Palacios, 2013).

Several authors have proposed pedagogical models to deal with the complexity of the teaching-learning process. One of the most emblematic studies of this type has been Piaget and Sevillano's classification of "learning styles" (Macías, 2017). On the other hand, Neil Fleming and Colleen Mills proposed a model that evaluates the four sensory modalities: visual, auditory, textual and kinesthetic (hence it is known, by its acronym, as the VARK model); each individual can present part or all of their combinations as a learning style (González, Alonso & Rangel, 2012). Regardless of the methodological strategies that are applied for teaching a second language, the first years of children's lives are the most fruitful for it. Communicative competence is improved through learning a new language from an early age, as well as the learning process influences the development of cognitive and socio-personal functions that help the student both in their academic and personal training. (Álvarez, 2010).

There is a wide series of activities framed within the learning of English as a second language that can help develop oral expression in children, of course through early stimulation and also considering the resources available, including pedagogical, technological and, above all, human resources, which undoubtedly constitute a fundamental factor to achieve the objectives and expectations raised at the beginning of the early stimulation of children in terms of learning English. Here are several of the most important ones.

According to Martínez (cited in Salas and López, 2017), taking into account that most people are attracted to music, the use of songs is one of the best resources. Teachers should consider the following aspects:

- They contribute to the achievement of language thanks to the repetition that they unconsciously entail.
- Some students have serious emotional deficiencies and songs are subtle allies to alleviate them.
- The two types of memory are worked: short and long term.
- They are part of our daily life, they are present in our day to day, which makes us feel familiar with them.
- We like to hear our own voice.
- They present simple texts, so listening to the songs does not require much effort on our part and it becomes a relaxing activity.
- Even if it is a text, it motivates students much more than reading without music and rhythm.

Children, for the most part, learn through songs and what better if it is complemented with colorful videos with children, drawings or people who dance them. One of the YouTube channels that is recommended and that draws the attention of children is Super Simple Songs, a series of children's songs in English that are of great benefit in teaching the language at an early and middle age.

Didactic games, according to Rodríguez, Moreno, Vásquez, Rodríguez and Ricardo (2015), should not only be fun or a break from the routine, but should also contribute to the use of language and allow students to use it in development of the activity. Games can be used to improve the student's mastery of any element or elements of language, for example: sounds, vocabulary, spelling, grammatical aspects or functions. These are adopted to provide repetition of a particular element or element within a pleasant context.

Children enjoy constructive games. Not only are they motivating and fun, but they can also provide excellent practice in improving pronunciation, grammar, and in short, the four language skills. Games help to make children feel safe and confident. But in order to fully exploit games, we have to carefully consider both the language learning benefits they can bring and any other educational or conceptual benefits. Teachers should be aware of the variety of elements of language and work of different skills that different games can promote.

It is then that teachers have a great responsibility in the learning of children and through the use of games the process of teaching a second language can be ideally enhanced. The games must be selected prior to the class and obviously based on the topic to be

discussed. The use of colored balls in the classroom will be very helpful, for example, if colors are to be taught in English; in the same way, the use of a tunnel to teach the meaning of crawl, 'crawling', since children retain words or actions better if they develop them while they are learning.

Definitely, the teaching-learning process of a foreign language has evolved in recent times with the help of technological means and with the inclusion of a more active role of students.

This study will allow parents to know the benefits of early stimulation in children with respect to teaching a second language, in this case English. The research was carried out at the "Yes Aprendo Inglés" teaching center, located in the province of Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Santo Domingo canton. Since 2017, prenatal stimulation classes in Spanish and English, early stimulation in English and permanent classes for children, youth and adults have been taught in person and online.

Early stimulation for the acquisition of a second language is a topic little addressed since the idea is maintained that the child at his tender age cannot assimilate another communication system since he is still in the process of identifying words and phrases of his language maternal. Thus, to counter this belief and to guide this investigation, the following questions were asked:

- Why is it important to learn English as a second language at an early age?
- What are the appropriate early stimulation activities for the acquisition of English as a second language?

And consequently, the following objectives were established:

- 1) Identify early stimulation activities for the teaching of the English language in ages between two and four years.
- 2) Evaluate learning through the application of early stimulation activities.

Methodology

The following hypothesis was established: early stimulation activities are complementary to the development of oral expression of English as a second language in children between two and four years of age. The design was transactional, since the data was collected in a single moment through individual oral lessons with the use of the Zoom platform. The sample considered for this purpose consisted of eight children between the

ages of two and four who have been students of early stimulation in English for one year in “Yes Aprendo Inglés”. The children performed all the activities corresponding to basic levels I and II of the early stimulation program and later participated in a test to measure their learning. The results are presented in tables accompanied by their respective analyzes to establish the discussion and conclusion.

Results

Identify early stimulation activities for the teaching of the English language in ages between two and four years

The early stimulation activities that help the learning of English as a second language within the “Yes Aprendo Inglés” learning program are taught in 10 levels.

- Level I and II: basic themes such as colors, numbers, body parts, animals are addressed; and informative questions about name, age, parents' names, and place of residence are answered.
- Level III, IV and V: vocabulary is studied regarding the days of the week, professions, verbs, daily routines, parts of the house and personal presentation.
- Level VI: children understand essential parts of sentences that the teacher reads or says in English. At this level, children practice role plays using information they know and adding sentences, questions and phrases in English that are required.
- Levels IX and X: the child expresses in all its magnitude the acquired learning; the goal is for him to be able to understand when the teacher speaks in English, use sentences and ask questions to maintain a basic and intermediate dialogue.

Listening and speaking

- Listening skills are developed.
- The meaning of words, phrases or questions is understood in context (input).
- The theme is assimilated, it is practiced until the child uses the established word, phrase or question and expresses it naturally (output).

Warm up

- After the greeting, in the first minutes of the individual demonstration class, the children are asked questions to determine whether or not they know the words in English that will be explained later.
- Classes are initially developed with a dynamic (warm up), be it a welcome song, a game or a short dance, always taking into account the taste of each student, since this time serves to attract her attention; on many occasions it is also used to take lessons from past classes while having fun with the game.

Explanation

- The topics to be studied in class are addressed with an explanation by the teacher.
- The topic is supported with songs, question and answer games, use of flashcards, videos, among others.
- Once the topic is seen, the meaning of some words is explained through gestures; after that, the student is encouraged to imitate the teacher and repeat the words in English.
- The activity can take approximately 15 minutes.
- They should listen to the song again.

Repetition

- It is usually used after application.
- Questions are asked using "Can you say ...?" or "Can you repeat ...?"
- The answers are evaluated with the proposed evaluation criteria.

Custom class

- Teaching is based on personalized classes even within the same group.
- Not all students are required to do the same activity, especially if it is not to their liking.
- There may be a difference in activities within the same class, as long as the learning objective of this class is achieved.

Use of virtual platforms

- The study of the topics also becomes more practical and dynamic through the use of online children's platforms and YouTube channels (which are available to everyone), among which are: Games to Learn English, Duolingo, English Sing Sing, Super Simple Songs, among others.

Assess learning by applying early stimulation activities

After putting the above into practice with the sample, a post-test was applied through the Zoom platform. Thus, the children were asked a series of questions with the theme corresponding to basic levels I and II (colors, numbers, body parts, animals, informative questions about the name, age, parents' names, place of residence) .

The evaluating teacher identified each of the evaluation criteria (response, security, pronunciation, fluency, assertiveness), which made it possible to measure the performance of the children when responding to the questions posed. The test scheme is shown in Table 1, which is suggested to be applied as an assessment of levels I and II.

Tabla 1. Postest de aprendizaje sugerido para el nivel I y II

Test de aprendizaje				Criterios de evaluación (5 = Excelente; 4 = Muy bueno; 3 = Bueno; 2 = Regular; 1 = Deficiente)			Total	
N°	Preguntas	Responde		Seguridad	Pronunciación	Fluidez		Asertividad
		Sí	No					
1	What's your name?	()	()	()	()	()	()	()
2	What's your mother's name?	()	()	()	()	()	()	()
3	Where do you live?	()	()	()	()	()	()	()
4	What's your favorite color?	()	()	()	()	()	()	()
5	Do you like bananas?	()	()	()	()	()	()	()
6	Please sing The ABC Song	()	()	()	()	()	()	()
7	What's the color you see on the screen? (5 colors)	()	()	()	()	()	()	()

8	Count the numbers from 1 to 20.	()	()	()	()	()	()	()
9	Say the action according to the pictures: /play/jump/stomp/sleep.	()	()	()	()	()	()	()
10	Describe the faces you see: /angry/happy/scared/sleepy.	()	()	()	()	()	()	()

Fuente: Elaboración propia

In Table 2, on the other hand, it is possible to see that the evaluation criterion related to safety indicates that 50% of the study population identifies what is being asked without any misgivings. Regarding the pronunciation criterion, most of the children can speak English correctly. With regard to fluency, it can be seen that everyone manages to interact easily with the teacher. Finally, the assertiveness criterion indicates that the children know the subject to which the teacher refers.

Tabla 2. Evaluación de aprendizaje-actividades de estimulación temprana

Criterios de evaluación	Criterios de valoración				
	Excelente	Muy bueno	Bueno	Regular	Deficiente
Seguridad	50 %	25 %	25 %	0 %	0 %
Pronunciación	38 %	62 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Fluidez	50 %	50 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Asertividad	88 %	12 %	0 %	0 %	0 %

Fuente: Elaboración propia

Discussion

Learning a second language from an early age is recommended since the process is easier and more fun for young children, they are not subject to any pressure nor do they tend to compare between their mother tongue and the second language, they do not translate between languages, unlike most young people and adults. For children, it is a natural process of acquisition, just as their native language was.

Thanks to the activities of the first levels proposed by the study center specified above in which basic topics such as colors, numbers, parts of the body and animals are addressed, children can answer informative questions about the name, age, names of the children, parents and place of residence.

Learning a second language should preferably take place in parallel with your mother tongue. This does not create confusion, as many people think, or that it may lead to a waste of time and money; On the contrary, children can be polyglot easily, and without creating difficulties when speaking and expressing themselves. In fact, the millions of neurons that children have in their brain will be properly exercised to form connections (synapses), pathways that seek to fill up with information, and what better way to speak of other languages.

When asking questions in English to children who have been encouraged from a very young age by the existence of another language, the answers can be evaluated taking into account criteria of safety, pronunciation, fluency and assertiveness. And here it has been evidenced that they respond without suspicion to questions in another language, that is, they manage to understand and interact with the questioner.

Early stimulation and your activities create these neural connections. Of course, the more neural connections that are formed, the more information a child can safely receive. Successfully, the use of songs, games, dynamics in the classroom, use of virtual platforms, role plays, among others, constitute appropriate early stimulation activities for the teaching of the English language in children between two and four years of age.

Children who receive early stimulation classes in English are mostly confident, intelligent, able to respond quickly to questions that are asked in this language, and, above all, they are very consistent when expressing themselves. Based on the experience of the researchers, it is indicated that the variety of activities that take place within the early stimulation classes in English attracts the attention of the little ones, and arouses their curiosity about what they are studying and what to come. in later classes. So the process does not become monotonous or boring for them, an important point to take into account, since children must have fun and learn at the same time.

Furthermore, it is recognized that every child is different. Without a doubt, each person has a different way of learning, not just a second language, but all new information. Thus, there is no meaning in teaching "to all in the same way." The learning process must be

varied and be based on the needs and tastes of each individual, provided that the objectives set by the teacher initially are achieved.

However, the role of the teacher is fundamental in the process, since he constitutes a guide and a mediator between our environment and the child. To work with children, the teacher must have a lot of teaching capacity, patience and above all love for what he does, knowing that children are intelligent beings, noble by nature, very moldable, and the future heads of families of our society.

Conclusions

Appropriate early stimulation activities for the acquisition of a second language focus on the development of listening skills, understanding the meaning of words, phrases or questions in context (input), developing interaction with dynamics (warm up), explain the meaning of some words through gestures, encourage the student to imitate the teacher and repeat the words in English. These activities proposed by the Yes Aprendo Inglés study center are developed according to the proposed planning and according to the child's level. Throughout the entire process they interact with the help of songs, dynamics, children's games, repetition, use of virtual platforms and role plays.

The application of early stimulation activities and the fusion with the teaching of English shows that the children who were part of the sample were able to hit the theme raised by the evaluating teacher, so it is possible to affirm that they do not have difficulty when listening words in another language and are not afraid to answer the questions posed.

Future lines of research

Considering the importance of learning the English language and the difficulty that students have in mastering skills during the school period, it is considered essential to develop activities that follow a post-stage sequence of early stimulation by the time the child begins school.

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Escritura - Preparación del borrador original	IGUAL: Jeanine Liset Benavides Marín IGUAL: José Javier Ortiz Rodríguez IGUAL: Ana Verónica Reza Segovia.
Escritura - Revisión y edición	Ana Verónica Reza Segovia.
Visualización	IGUAL: Jeanine Liset Benavides Marín IGUAL: José Javier Ortiz Rodríguez IGUAL: Ana Verónica Reza Segovia
Supervisión	Ana Verónica Reza Segovia.
Administración de Proyectos	Ana Verónica Reza Segovia.
Adquisición de fondos	IGUAL: Jeanine Liset Benavides Marín IGUAL: José Javier Ortiz Rodríguez