Exploration of the environment to strengthen autonomy in early childhood education

Exploración del medio para fortalecer autonomía en educación inicial

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ABSTRACT
The objective is to analyze the exploration of the environment to strengthen autonomy in early education. The research was configured from the quantitative approach and a descriptive type with non-experimental design, the research population corresponds to 13 children of 4 years old belonging to the Initial Level of a private institution in Loja, Ecuador. In terms of acquiring levels of independence, the children were found to have 31%, and after the application of activities in contact with nature, they acquired 85%, improving 54% in activities of exploration with the environment. The execution of the micro curricular planning by learning experiences activating the transversal axis of environmental exploration, through well-planned and organized pedagogical outings, allows the acquisition of skills and abilities that lead to the optimal integral development of children at this level.

Descriptors: outdoor education; student organizations; parent teacher organizations. (Source: UNESCO Thesaurus).

RESUMEN
Se tiene por objetivo analizar la exploración del medio para fortalecer autonomía en educación inicial. La investigación se configuró desde el enfoque cuantitativo y un tipo descriptiva con diseño no experimental, la población investigada corresponde a 13 niños de 4 años pertenecientes al Nivel Inicial de una institución privada en Loja, Ecuador. En lo que corresponde a adquirir niveles de independencia los niños se encontraron en un 31%, los mismos que luego de la aplicación de actividades en contacto con la naturaleza adquieren un 85%, mejorando un 54% en actividades de exploración con el medio. La ejecución de la planificación micro curricular por experiencias de aprendizaje activando el eje transversal de la exploración del medio, mediante salidas pedagógicas bien planificadas y organizadas permite, la adquisición de habilidades y destrezas que lleva al óptimo desarrollo integral de los niños de este nivel.

Descriptores: enseñanza al aire libre; organización de estudiantes; asociación de padres y profesores. (Fuente: Tesauro UNESCO).
INTRODUCTION

The exploration of the environment is a didactic strategy that allows children the possibility of demonstrating their taste for research from an early age; it helps them to explore and enjoy the beauty and diversity, enjoy contact with nature, allows them to be active and express themselves freely, learning to care for, respect and value the environment (Narváez-León et al. 2022).

Children's autonomy is a primordial learning skill and is fostered from the moment the child is in contact with nature and it is at that moment that the senses are activated to contribute to the acquisition of autonomy, being the parents the first teachers who support the integral development of their children, however, by culture or habits, parents in today's society overprotect their children, so states, (Ballesteros J, 2018) who attributes that taking excessive care of children limits the possibility that the child coexists properly being the protagonist of his own learning, acquiring significant experiences and learning from his mistakes.

The appropriate environment favors problem solving, generates own criteria, develops creativity and seeks to discover the world around him. In relation to this concept raised by Jerome Bruner, it is interesting that the child learns not only in the classroom, but also explores the natural environment and in this way learns to know the elements that will help him to solve inconveniences of daily life, which strengthens his autonomy through critical concepts appropriate to his age (Pinheiro, 2019; Wang & Hugo, 2023). In other words, the external environment that constitutes all the elements of the natural environment is important when contributing to children's autonomy, since growing up in freedom gives them security, even if there are protective attitudes on the part of parents and teachers you are will have a relevant influence on the child's present and future life (Lai et al. 2022).

To improve the autonomy of preschool children, support is needed mainly from the family and teachers at this level; parents currently do not have the necessary time to take their children to live meaningful experiences in contact with nature, which is detrimental to the acquisition of autonomy. This leads to the overprotection of their children by their parents trying to make up for the quality time required by their children (Macías-Zambrano & Henríquez-Coronel, 2023).

Through the exploration of the environment, the social, affective and cognitive areas of the child are developed, that is to say, this strategy broadens the range of possibilities to improve their communication and independence, improving their autonomy and achieving mastery in all areas, having better opportunities to interact with their peers, activating their investigative part. Through the exploration of the environment, the social, affective and cognitive areas of the child are developed, that is to say, this strategy broadens the range of possibilities to improve their communication and independence, improving their autonomy and achieving mastery in all areas, having better opportunities to interact with their peers, activating their investigative part (Lip-Licham, 2022).

Based on the above, the objective is to analyze the exploration of the environment to strengthen autonomy in early childhood education.

METHOD

From a methodological context, the research was configured from the quantitative approach and a descriptive type with a non-experimental design, which allowed observing and characterizing the object of study as it is performed in reality, without deliberate manipulation of it, allowing to make notes to measure the frequency of the occurrence of events in its natural space.

The investigated population corresponds to 13 children of 4 years of age belonging to the Initial Level of a private institution in Loja, Ecuador.

A survey was used and a checklist based on the Early Education curriculum in the area of identity and autonomy, focused on the three autonomy skills: i) practicing self-care, ii) developing identity, iii) acquiring independence.
The data collected were processed using descriptive statistics to measure frequency and percentage of occurrence of the event, supported by SPSS V25 statistical software.

It is stated that no experiments were performed on humans or animals and identity anonymity was maintained, using the data collected only for scientific purposes; permission was obtained from parents and representatives to conduct the research.

Phases of the research

The infants were observed in their natural state and records were taken using the checklist.

Stimulating activities were carried out to promote the three autonomy skills.

The infants were observed after the application of the stimulating activities and a record was made using the checklist.

**RESULTS**

Based on the data collected, the results are presented:

**Gráfico 1**

*Observación en estado natural*

Fuente: Elaboración propia.
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As can be seen in graph 1 and graph 2:

In the skill that corresponds to developing their identity the children were at 46%; after the application of the proposal they are located at 85% that is to say that 39% of children have improved their independence.

In terms of acquiring levels of independence, the children were at 31%, and after the application of activities in contact with nature, they acquired 85%, improving 54% in activities of exploration with the environment.

In the skill of practical self-care actions, at the beginning the children were at 38%, while after adequate stimulation they reached 69%, acquiring 31% in their self-care.

The activities of exploration of the environment favored the autonomy of the children from 38% to 80%, making it clear that the exploration of the environment develops abilities and skills, improving their autonomy by 42%, and the quality of life of the children at the initial level, by living together in a pleasant way, since learning is done with pleasure and enjoyment.

DISCUSSION

Being autonomous is an indispensable skill in the development of every human being, especially one that should be stimulated from infancy. It is important to highlight that this work focuses specifically on Early Childhood Education as a starting point in the development of autonomy, as the first six years of life are a crucial moment at a neurological level (Gutiérrez-Duarte & Ruiz-León, 2018). To be autonomous is to analyze what you think you should do and ask yourself if you really should do it or are you fooling yourself. They are self-sufficient when they are rational and think about what to do with all the data at their disposal. In other words, autonomy empowers human beings to be self-sustaining and self-aware.
Promocionar un entorno que desarrolla la autonomía es fundamental para lograr el desarrollo intelectual, emocional y moral. La autonomía permite un pensamiento crítico que permite el control adecuado de su comportamiento, con la seguridad de cumplir satisfactoriamente con sus necesidades diarias. Sin él, las personas estarían constantemente gobernadas por sus iguales, recibiendo órdenes y instrucciones sobre lo que deben hacer y cómo deben comportarse en todo momento, lo que afecta sus vidas personales. Para desarrollar actitudes autónomas, la implicación de los profesores y los padres es necesaria para facilitar un cambio de enfoque en la educación de los niños, involucrandolos más en el proceso de aprendizaje. La autonomía no es una capacidad fija o absoluta. Depende, en primer lugar, de la competencia del individuo (competencias cognitivas, emocionales, funcionales), pero también de la soporte proporcionado por el entorno (Hernández et al. 2022).

El éxito en la vida de la persona depende en gran medida de la autonomía para lograr un alto grado de autoconfianza, para controlar sus emociones y desarrollar habilidades con un alto grado que asegure el éxito en su vida actual y futura. La autonomía en la vida del niño es un fundamento para resolver problemas cotidianos en ambientes personales y sociales (Villoria-Nolla & Barroso, 2023).

Debido a que el objetivo es obtener las llaves para la independencia, la autoestima, la seguridad para hacer las cosas bien y un completo confianza en sus acciones diarias, convirtiendo el mundo en un espacio acogedor y agradable donde la interacción con la naturaleza y la exploración del entorno son prioridades axiales para mejorar su calidad de vida. La autonomía se relaciona con sus iguales que le permiten elevar el concepto crítico y defender sus ideas, potenciando su autoestima personal considerándolo como un líder que trabaja por el bienestar de sus iguales (Prins et al. 2022).

La personalidad es el resultado de factores genéticos y ambientales. Es un resultado único. Algunas aspectos de la personalidad están presentes desde el nacimiento; son temperamental. Pero la personalidad es mucho más que el temperamento; incluye la autoconciencia, el sentido de uno mismo, la confianza en su capacidad y la autocontrol del comportamiento, la sexualidad, son aquellas que definen la autenticidad, y que hacen que uno se vea a sí mismo como un hecho en el entorno social (Johnstone et al. 2020; Johnstone et al. 2022).

Durante los primeros años, el niño desarrolla varias habilidades y habilidades que le permiten ser autónomo, permitiéndole alcanzar la seguridad, la autoestima y la responsabilidad, apoyándolo para crecer como una persona, creando un entorno estable y confiable en el que se caracteriza por la respeto, la cooperación y la libertad para que el niño decida las acciones que el futuro le identificará como hábitos que definen su identidad personal. Otro aspecto crucial es la adopción del niño por sus padres, dominando niveles cada vez más complejos que influyen en el pensamiento crítico y emocional, mostrando su independencia en actividades como caminar, jugar, elegir ropa y otras actividades según sus intereses y necesidades.

Al respecto, el niño es capaz de alcanzar capacidades que fortalecen su autonomía en sus acciones diarias, como vestirse, métodos de higiene, opciones de comidas y decisiones sobre cualquier tema que indique un desarrollo personal adecuado. La autonomía del niño está directamente relacionada con el desarrollo intelectual, social y emocional, que es, en este momento, el que los niños aprenden a encontrar soluciones a sus problemas, mejorando su coexistencia. Estas acciones interactivas les dan la oportunidad de controlar sus emociones y desarrollar social y emocionalmente lo que marcará el presente y el futuro de su vida. Los juegos cooperativos o proyectos escolares ofrecen la oportunidad de comunicarse de manera efectiva y alcanzar el objetivo común (Villalobos-López, 2022).

**Appropriate environments for contact with nature**

Los profesores deben saber cómo aprovechar los espacios maravillosos que rodean a los centros educativos y que ofrecen un ambiente natural agradable, ya sea en un entorno rural o urbano, sin que los estudiantes inspiren aire fresco, así como ayudándolos a salir de la sala de clase, entendida como su zona de confort. Aplicando esto en la educación inicial, los estudiantes son muy
enriching, since this change of scenery will cause the child to feel neither insecure nor afraid when leaving the classroom, in this way, they will get used to seeing and going through new spaces and, with this, getting to know the real world (Corcuera et al. 2019).

One of the elements that is directly related to emotional health and autonomy is contact with nature, as this allows them to explore the environment in a motivated way, where they feel safe to enjoy and enjoy what contributes to the development of their independent life, strengthens in themselves to learn to be responsible for the care of nature, making them aware of their contribution to the conservation of the environment.

In the developmental stages, most children show a great interest in getting to know nature and this offers the opportunity to develop not only a relationship of respect and mutual benefit, but also learning skills and competencies for the future, since this contact provides an experience of freedom and responsibility, giving way to creativity and initiative, so that nature is a strategy that provides several possibilities to learn while enjoying and experimenting (Yang, 2024).

At the early childhood level, field trips are a methodological strategy that guarantees learning in an active, participatory and motivating way, for which the classroom teacher starts from the micro-curricular planning developed by learning experiences, which after having been worked on for three or four weeks, are concretized with a well-organized field trip. In order to carry out the outing, authorization must be requested from the school authorities, and then the parents are informed, making the family reflect on the importance of learning through the exploration of the environment; the outing includes transportation, destination, refreshments and economic resources (Villamizar-Cañas, 2021).

These well-planned pedagogical outings are an opportunity to increase their learning through experiences in contact with the real world, these visits are usually to places such as: museums, natural parks, zoos, farms, among others in these environments children can learn in a practical way in real situations thus reaching their educational process properly (Mohamed et al. 2017).

CONCLUSION

The execution of the micro curricular planning by learning experiences activating the transversal axis of the exploration of the environment, through well planned and organized pedagogical outings allows, the acquisition of skills and abilities that leads to the optimal integral development of children at this level, in the first instance to the acquisition of autonomy, through the exploration of the natural world, as well as forming values: respect and love towards their inner self, to later accept their peers and reach the care to nature, awakening social awareness, and then nature presents diversity of elements that lead to the acquisition of concepts that help the child to solve problems in their daily lives.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest with persons or institutions related to the research.

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