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CAREER OF PEDAGOGY OF NATIONAL AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES

RESEARCH REPORT

**“ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING TO YOUNG LEARNERS
WITH AUTISM”**

Research report before obtaining the bachelor's degree in National and Foreign
Language Pedagogy, English Major

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AUTHORSHIP DECLARATION

Cevallos Pantoja Katherin Estefania, with citizenship ID No. 172798823-8, Villavicencio Zambrano Naomi Dominique, with citizenship ID No. 172377427-7, declare to be the authors of the present **RESEARCH PROJECT: "ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING TO YOUNG LEARNERS WITH AUTISM"**, with Mg. Gina Silvana Venegas Álvarez Ph.D. serving as the tutor of this work; and, we expressly exempt Technical University of Cotopaxi and its legal representatives from any possible claims or legal actions.

Furthermore, I certify that the ideas, concepts, procedures, and results expressed in this research work are solely my responsibility.

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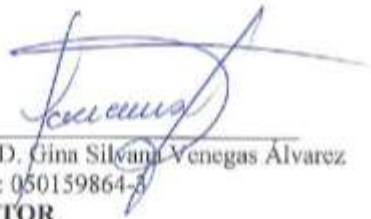
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ENDORSEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT TUTOR

As the Tutor of the Research Project titled:

“ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING TO YOUNG LEARNERS WITH AUTISM”, authored by Cevallos Pantoja Katherin Estefania; Villavicencio Zambrano Naomi Dominique, from the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages career, we consider that said Research Report deserves approval endorsement as it complies with the technical standards, translation, and formats provided, and has also incorporated the observations and recommendations proposed in the pre-defense.

Pujilf, March 2024



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TITLE OF APPROVAL FROM THE GRADUATION BOARD

As the Reading Committee, we approve the present Research Report in accordance with the regulatory provisions issued by the Technical University of Cotopaxi and the Faculty of Humanities and Education. This approval is granted to the applicants: Cevallos Pantoja Katherin Estefania; Villavicencio Zambrano Naomi Dominique, with the title of the Research Project: **“ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING TO YOUNG LEARNERS WITH AUTISM”** which has considered the recommendations issued in a timely manner and demonstrates sufficient merit to proceed to the defense of the graduation project.

Based on the foregoing, authorization is granted to record the corresponding files on a CD, in accordance with institutional regulations.

Pujili, March 2024

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GRATEFULNESS

First of all, we thank God for the life, health, and wisdom that he gave us to carry out this project and accomplish a new stage in our lives. We express our gratitude to our families for their constant love and support, for without their sacrifice, none of what we have achieved would have been possible. We also thank the Technical University of Cotopaxi, which has demanded so much from us, but at the same time has allowed us to obtain our long-awaited degree. We would like to thank each of the directors for their work and management, without which we would not have the basis and conditions to learn. Finally, we extend heartfelt appreciation to our friends and colleagues who contributed to this enjoyable journey.

Katherin & Naomi

DEDICATION

I dedicate this achievement to my parents, Rocío and Cenen, who have always given me unconditional support to achieve all my personal and academic goals. They are the ones whose love has always encouraged me to pursue my goals and never give up in the face of adversity. They are also the ones who have provided me with the material and financial support to be able to focus on my studies and never give up. Also, my advisor, Ph.D. Gina Venegas Álvarez, who, under her guidance and advice, contributed to the proper presentation of this research. Finally, I would like to thank all my colleagues, many of whom have become my friends. Thank you for the work we have done together and the stories we have lived.

Katherin

DEDICATION

I appreciate all the people who, in one way or another, contributed to the development of this thesis. Firstly, to God, our Lord, whose Will makes things possible. Secondly, to my parents, whose unwavering support allowed me to complete every semester until the end of this degree. Lastly, my advisor, Ph.D. Gina Venegas Álvarez, whose guidance and advice assisted in the proper presentation of this research. I wish success to the institution: “The Technical University of Cotopaxi”, which, through its academic organization, has enabled students to pursue their chosen careers until their completion.

Naomi

UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA DE COTOPAXI

EXTENSIÓN PUJILÍ

TÍTULO: “ENSEÑANZA DEL IDIOMA INGLÉS A NIÑOS CON AUTISMO”

Autoras:

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RESUMEN

En la actualidad, se ha observado un aumento significativo en los diagnósticos de Trastorno del Espectro Autista (TEA), lo que demanda una mayor integración de los alumnos afectados en entornos educativos convencionales. Este fenómeno subraya la necesidad imperativa de investigar y aplicar estrategias específicas para abordar las necesidades únicas de estos alumnos en contextos inclusivos. Por tanto, este estudio se centra en analizar en profundidad el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de los alumnos más jóvenes con autismo en la "NOVA ENGLISH ACADEMY" en la ciudad de Quito, Ecuador. Esta investigación, enmarcada en un enfoque cualitativo, involucró entrevistas semi-estructuradas con la profesora de inglés especializada en autismo y un psicólogo clínico con experiencia en diversos trastornos. Además, se llevó a cabo una meticulosa observación durante las clases para evaluar las interacciones y el desempeño de la profesora. Los resultados obtenidos revelaron la eficacia de utilizar tarjetas de comunicación del Sistema de Comunicación por Intercambio de Imágenes (PECS) y estrategias visuales en la enseñanza del inglés para alumnos con autismo. Se hizo hincapié en la importancia de captar la atención visual, adaptar las estrategias de enseñanza a los desafíos de la memoria de trabajo y dar prioridad al desarrollo del vocabulario básico. Además, se destacó el compromiso con la empatía, el fomento de relaciones positivas y el papel crucial de la aceptación parental en el proceso educativo. Asimismo, se abordó la colaboración entre psicólogos y profesores, así como la necesidad de una evaluación exhaustiva de los alumnos para adaptar las estrategias de enseñanza a sus necesidades individuales. En conclusión, este estudio describe detalladamente las estrategias de enseñanza para jóvenes alumnos con autismo, destacando especialmente el uso de estrategias visuales en un sólido marco teórico.

Palabras claves: alumnos jóvenes, estrategias, proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje, tarjetas didácticas, Trastorno del Espectro Autista

TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF COTOPAXI

PUJILI EXTENSION

THEME: "ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING TO YOUNG LEARNERS WITH AUTISM"

Authors:

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ABSTRACT

Currently, there has been a significant increase in diagnoses of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), which demands greater integration of affected students into conventional educational settings. This phenomenon underscores the imperative need to research and apply specific strategies to address the unique needs of these students in inclusive contexts. Therefore, this study focuses on thoroughly analyzing the teaching-learning process of younger students with autism at the "NOVA ENGLISH ACADEMY" in the city of Quito, Ecuador. This research, framed within a qualitative approach, involved semi-structured interviews with the English teacher specialized in autism and a clinical psychologist experienced in various disorders. Additionally, meticulous observation was conducted during classes to assess interactions and the teacher's performance. The findings revealed the effectiveness of using Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) communication cards and visual strategies in teaching English to students with autism. Emphasis was placed on capturing visual attention, adapting teaching strategies to working memory challenges, and prioritizing the development of basic vocabulary. Furthermore, the commitment to empathy, fostering positive relationships, and the crucial role of parental acceptance in the educational process were highlighted. Moreover, collaboration between psychologists and teachers was addressed, as well as the need for comprehensive assessment of students to tailor teaching strategies to their individual needs. In conclusion, this study provides a detailed description of teaching strategies for young students with autism, particularly emphasizing the use of visual strategies within a solid theoretical framework.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, flashcards, teaching-learning process, strategies, young learners

AVAL DE TRADUCCIÓN

En calidad de Docente de la Carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros de la Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi; en forma legal **CERTIFICO** que: La traducción del resumen al idioma español del proyecto de investigación cuyo título versa: " **ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING TO YOUNG LEARNERS WITH AUTISM**" presentado por: Katherin Estefania Cevallos Pantoja y Naomi Dominique Villavicencio Zambrano, egresadas de la Carrera de: **Pedagogía De Los Idiomas Nacionales Y Extranjeros**, perteneciente a la **Extensión Pujilí** lo realizaron bajo mi supervisión y cumple con una correcta estructura gramatical del Idioma.

Es todo en cuanto puedo certificar en honor a la verdad y autorizo al peticionario hacer uso del presente aval para los fines académicos legales.

Pujilí, marzo del 2024

Atentamente,


Ph.D. Gina Silvana Venegas Álvarez
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TUTOR



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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Theme: “English Language Teaching to Young Learners with Autism”

Starting Date: November 2023

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Place of Research: Ponceano, Distrito metropolitano de Quito, Quito, Pichincha

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Research Line: Education, communication, and graphic design for human and social development

Research Sub-line: Teacher professional development, school management and learning communities

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Nowadays, Autism Spectrum Disorder is characterized by difficulties in communication and social interaction, as well as repetitive patterns of behavior. These specific characteristics demand adapted and personalized pedagogical approaches to ensure meaningful English language learning. As it states Tuononen et al. (2014), the identification of autism is associated with impairments in mutual social communication and interaction, as well as the existence of restricted and repetitive behaviors, interests, or activities.

Despite advances in understanding the educational needs of young people with autism, there is a lack of comprehensive research on specific strategies that optimize English teaching in this context. The absence of a robust pedagogical framework contributes to the inadequate adaptation of existing methodologies to the cognitive and behavioral peculiarities of these students. This problem has been raised considering the following causes. The language learning environment, especially in a traditional classroom setting, can be overwhelming for students with autism due to sensory sensitivities. Bright lights, loud noises, and the presence of multiple stimuli may lead to increased anxiety and difficulties in focusing.

Experiences in the high school learning environment served as a foundation for comprehending the backgrounds, training, and overall philosophical perspectives of the study participants, who were high school teachers working with students diagnosed with ASD (Hasinger, 2021).

Another cause found in this problem is the topic of social interactions, where English language teaching often involves group activities and interactions with peers. For students with autism who struggle with social skills and forming relationships, these activities may cause stress and feelings of isolation, hindering their overall language-learning experience.

People diagnosed with autism exhibit fundamental challenges in social skills. In the absence of proper assistance and successful interventions aimed at improving these social skills, individuals with autism frequently face difficulties in developing social competence. This struggle may manifest in various aspects of their lives, including school, home, and community settings (Haïda et al., 2019).

Regarding the problem, there could be some solutions: for example, English language teaching can enhance the communication abilities of students with autism, enabling them to express their thoughts and needs more effectively. This improvement in communication can lead to better social interactions and increased confidence in verbal expression.

The Special Assistant Teacher (SH) excels in communication and interaction within Functional Psychiatric Assessment (FPA). This proficiency extends to interactions with both peers and teachers. FPA confidently initiates interactions, displaying courage in reaching out to teachers, extending invitations, or simply greeting with a friendly "hi" and a handshake (Ismiarti et al., 2019).

Another solution to this problem is cognitive development, where engaging in language learning can have positive effects on cognitive development for students with autism. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to create inclusive school-based interventions that involve neurotypical peers and foster the social and cognitive abilities of students with autism (Skokut et al, 2008).

The main objective of this study is to analyze the teaching-learning process for younger learners with autism at "NOVA ENGLISH ACADEMY", located in an urban, Ponceano Parish, Distrito Metropolitano de Quito, Pichincha, Ecuador. The relevance of this research topic is the contribution to the information on the teaching-learning process of the English language to children with autism. The study of this problem is important to know and analyze what the teaching process of English as a foreign language is like when it comes to a learner with ASD. Therefore, the following research questions have been raised to meet the objectives of this study.

Research Questions:

1. What are the strategies that can be implemented in English language teaching to young learners with autism?
2. How do psychologists contribute to the development of teaching English to young learners with autism?

3. OBJECTIVES

General Objective:

To analyze the teaching-learning process for young learners with autism at “NOVA ENGLISH ACADEMY”

Specific Objectives:

1. To establish the teaching process for young learners with autism
2. To describe the experiences of the English teachers during the classes with students with autism
3. To identify the strategies for English language teaching to young learners with autism

4. ACTIVITIES AND TASK SYSTEM CONCERNING THE OBJECTIVES PROPOSED

Table 1

Activities and Task System concerning the Objectives Proposed

Specific Objective	Activities	Verification Means
To establish the teaching process for young learners with autism	Look up information in books, eBooks, scientific magazines, institutional websites, and theses	Theoretical Framework
To describe the experiences of the English teachers during the classes with students with autism	Implement the research instruments Apply the semi-structured interview Apply the semi-structured observation sheet and field notes	Informed consent Records Transcription
To identify the strategies for English language teaching to young learners with autism	Analyze the teacher's and psychologist's opinions. Categorize the teachers' and psychologist's opinions	Transcription Extracts of the teachers' and psychologist's opinions and field notes on the class

5. JUSTIFICATION

The present research describes English Language Teaching (ELT) to young learners with autism, focusing on the insights and experience of the English teachers during the classes with learners with autism through the analysis of two instruments: a semi-structured interview and the observation sheet.

The practical contribution of this research is to have clearer information on how both English teachers and psychologists can participate better during the teaching process with students with autism. The educational relevance of this study emphasizes information about the experiences and opinions given by English teachers throughout their careers as educators, primarily teaching English to students with autism.

The main beneficiaries of this research are young learners diagnosed with autism, who may experience significant advantages by applying recognized strategies. These methodologies present a promising avenue for improving English language proficiency, both in academic and everyday life settings, by cultivating an environment conducive to competent language development. Personalized strategies aim to improve the educational pathway of students with autism. At the same time, teachers of English also benefit, as the findings and strategies offered are designed to help them provide effective and individualized second language instruction to learners with autism. In essence, the set of strategies identified presents a versatile toolbox adaptable to the different needs of each student, thus refining the instructional process and fostering a more comprehensive and supportive educational environment.

6. SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL FOUNDATION

6.1. Research Background

The topic under investigation has garnered attention in previous research due to its perceived significance. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the English language teaching to young learners with autism confronts a notable scarcity of specific and consolidated information, despite its recognized importance in the educational landscape. The present thesis aims to address this gap by contributing new perspectives and strategies to the existing body of knowledge, recognizing the need for tailored approaches in the pedagogical realm for this particular group of learners. Padmadewi and Artini (2017), this study aimed to explore effective strategies for teaching English to a 10-year-old student diagnosed with ASD in a grade 3 classroom at North Bali Bilingual School, where the student was included in a regular class of 20 students. The research, conducted as a case study, utilized observations and interviews for data collection. The findings highlight the effectiveness of implementing an Individual Education Plan (IEP) with visual media, co-teaching, differentiated instruction, and a "buddy program" to support the student's English language learning in an inclusive classroom program.

Sophya (2021), employed qualitative research methods to explore the implementation of English language teaching for learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) during the pandemic and to investigate the role of parents in assisting ASD learners in comprehending

English. The researchers utilized observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation for data collection. The findings indicated that, during the pandemic at RBA, the English language teaching process for ASD incorporated both offline and online learning modes. The instructional material was tailored based on the ASD diagnosis level, with teachers employing the direct method, Total Physical Response (TPR), and Lexical methods for offline learning. Conversely, for online learning, they utilized the Direct and Lexical methods, supplementing with worksheets and video calls instead of pictures or flashcards.

Along the same lines, Lasintia et al. (2021) used a descriptive qualitative methodology, this research was conducted at SMPLB of Curup, Bengkulu, Indonesia, grounded in a constructivist epistemology. With one English teacher instructing ASD students as the study's subject, data were obtained through interviews and document analysis. An interactive model guided the analysis, encompassing data collection, condensation, display, and concluding. The findings revealed the teacher's use of three strategies for teaching children with autism: enhancing oral language comprehension, incorporating echolalia, and improving communication skills through the PECS method. Furthermore, the teacher tailored the strategy's form based on the specific needs of students with autism.

Setiadi (2017), this study aimed to examine the communication style of an English teacher instructing students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an inclusive setting. The focus was on the teacher at SMPN 32 Surabaya, responsible for English instruction to students with ASD in an inclusive environment. The study sought to classify both direct and indirect teacher talk, explore the teacher's perspective, and describe students' responses. Data were collected through observations and interviews, revealing that the teacher employed three types of direct teacher talk—lecturing, giving directions, and criticizing/justifying authority—and four types of indirect teacher talk—accepting feelings, praising/encouraging, accepting/using students' ideas, and asking questions.

Finally, Pillajo and Taco (2023) developed this qualitative study with a descriptive approach aims to analyze the EFL teaching-learning process for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Data were collected through a semi-structured interview, observation sheet, and field notes. Two English teachers participated, sharing insights into challenges in the EFL teaching-learning process. Findings highlighted challenges for teachers, including the complexity of ASD, inadequate training, and material design. Students faced issues with socialization, communication, and negative teacher perceptions of the importance of teaching English.

6.2 Theoretical Framework

Inclusion and Diversity in Education

According to Danau (2021), diversity encompasses the spectrum of human dissimilarities and variances, whether they are inherent (by birth) or acquired. These distinctions can serve as the foundation for various forms of exclusion and may lead to diverse manifestations of discrimination. Societies that are increasingly intricate and diverse necessitate more focused efforts to address all forms of discrimination, aiming to enhance equality and leverage diversity as an asset. This is particularly crucial in the realm of education, given its status as a fundamental human right, where every individual is entitled to education. Furthermore, education is a public good that should be accessible to all, irrespective of the student's gender, sexual orientation, abilities and educational needs, economic status, ethnic origin, language, religion, and migratory or citizenship status.

However, the pursuit of inclusion and diversity in education stands as an indispensable endeavor, charting a course toward an educational landscape that values the richness of differences, fosters equity, and strives to create an inclusive environment where every learner is afforded equal opportunities for growth and development. Moreover, inclusive education is grounded in the principle that schools ought to cater to every child, irrespective of any perceived distinction, disability, or other variations in social, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds (Jelas, 2010).

In the educational and developmental context, we encounter disorders such as the following:

Intellectual Disability (ID)

From the point of view of Purugganan (2018), intellectual disability (ID) is a

neurodevelopmental disorder identified by impairments in intellectual and adaptive capabilities, manifesting during the developmental phase. In that case, it is distinguished by the decline of specific functions at every developmental stage, which collectively contribute to the overall intelligence level, encompassing cognitive, linguistic, motor, and socialization functions. In this anomaly, adaptation to the environment is consistently impacted (Katz & Lazcano, 2008).

Individuals with Intellectual Disability (ID) may face challenges in reasoning, problem-solving, communication, and independent living, requiring different levels of support depending on severity, ranging from mild to profound. Causes include genetics, brain injuries, environment, and birth complications. While not curable, early intervention, education, and therapy can improve quality of life. Despite stigma and social barriers, with support from families and professionals, individuals with ID can lead fulfilling lives and participate in their communities.

Communication Disorders

Communication disorders encompass a broad category of conditions that affect an individual's ability to comprehend, produce, or use verbal, nonverbal, and graphic symbols for communication. These disorders can manifest in various forms, impacting speech, language, voice, and fluency. Communication disorders can be developmental or acquired and may result from genetic factors, neurological conditions, trauma, or environmental influences.

According to information provided by Bilingualistics (2014), a communication disorder encompasses various conditions that impede an individual's capacity to communicate effectively. These disorders span difficulties in articulating specific speech sounds to an incapacity to convey desires and necessities through verbal or non-verbal means. It is important to understand that individuals with communication disorders may face challenges in both receptive and expressive aspects of communication.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

According to Lee (2022), “attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a clinical diagnosis in pediatrics and adults. It was initially thought to be a hyperkinetic reaction of childhood but is now recognized as a neurodevelopmental condition” (p. 7).

Also, the disorder is traditionally distinguished by inattention, impulsiveness, and

hyperactivity. ADHD is commonly believed to be initiated during early childhood, with diagnosis typically established in the years of schooling (Matthews, 2014).

In addition, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) poses challenges in both clinical and educational settings. Therefore, the diagnosis typically involves a comprehensive evaluation conducted by a healthcare professional, which considers symptoms, medical history, and behavioral observations. Treatment approaches may include medication, behavioral therapy, parent training, and educational interventions aimed at managing symptoms and improving functioning in daily life. Although ADHD presents challenges, many individuals with this disorder can lead successful and fulfilling lives with appropriate support and strategies.

Motor Development Disorders

Motor Development Disorders encompass a spectrum of neurodevelopmental conditions that adversely affect an individual's motor functioning and coordination. These disorders manifest early in the developmental trajectory, impeding the acquisition of fundamental motor skills.

As determined by the Virginia Commission on Youth (2021), the onset of motor disorders occurs in the early stages of development, introducing difficulties in motor functioning. Children affected by these disorders frequently encounter significant delays in achieving crucial milestones such as stair navigation or shoelace tying. Observable behaviors may include repetitive and driven movements, such as rocking, and the manifestation of physical or verbal tics. Like other disorders, these behaviors lead to functional impairments, contributing to unfavorable physical and social repercussions that underscore the importance of early identification and intervention to address these challenges comprehensively.

Learning Disorders

Learning disorders, also commonly referred to as learning disabilities, encompass a diverse spectrum of conditions that impede the typical acquisition and utilization of cognitive skills essential for effective learning.

As mentioned by Samarathanam (2018), individuals grappling with learning disabilities encounter challenges in acquiring and honing various cognitive skills. These disorders are not confined to childhood; rather, they persist into adulthood, impacting the individual's ability to

engage in effective learning throughout life.

Launching a series of community-based support groups for adults with learning disabilities, providing a safe and understanding environment where individuals can share experiences, learn coping strategies, and access resources tailored to their unique needs. These support groups would foster a sense of belonging and mutual empowerment, enabling participants to navigate life's challenges and pursue their educational and personal goals with confidence.

Consequently, *learning disabilities* is a broad term encompassing a diverse array of disorders characterized by notable challenges in acquiring and employing skills related to listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities (Hammill et al., 1981).

Similarly, establishing a holistic learning center model that caters to diverse learning disabilities, providing personalized support in listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, and math. This approach integrates educators, therapists, and specialists to craft tailored intervention plans, incorporating adaptive techniques and assistive tools. The center doubles as a community hub, offering workshops and advocacy services to promote inclusivity and empower individuals and families affected by learning disabilities.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

In agreement with Earl et al, (2017), ASD, or autism spectrum disorder, is a multifaceted condition involving the development of the brain. It is marked by challenges in social communication and the presence of repetitive and limited behavioral patterns.

ASD is a complex neurological condition characterized by diverse developmental challenges that affect the brain's functioning. Central to ASD are difficulties in social communication and interaction, alongside the manifestation of repetitive behaviors and narrow interests. This multifaceted nature of ASD underscores the importance of tailored interventions and holistic support to address the diverse needs of individuals with the condition.

Individuals with autism spectrum disorders often face challenges in social interactions and communication. They might show a preference for solitary activities and engage in repetitive behaviors or interests (World Health Organization, 2019).

Recognizing and embracing the unique strengths and interests of individuals with autism spectrum disorders can pave the way for innovative approaches to support their social and emotional well-being. By creating inclusive environments that cater to diverse preferences and providing opportunities for self-expression through activities tailored to their interests, we can empower individuals with autism to thrive and contribute meaningfully to society.

People with autism might display atypical responses to sensory stimuli, where any of their senses—sight, sound, touch, taste, or smell—could be affected. These sensory challenges often manifest in their behavior, leading individuals with autism to relate to people, objects, and events in their environment in non-conventional ways (Barua & Daley, 2018).

In summary, ASD is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by impaired social communication and repetitive behaviors, ranging from mild to severe and typically present in early childhood. This underscores the challenges individuals with ASD encounter in social interactions and communication, coupled with a propensity for solitary interests and repetitive activities.

Levels

To clarify individual needs and necessary support, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) introduces severity levels summarized as the following:

- Level 1: Requiring support, where deficits in social communication are noticeable without assistance. There may be difficulty initiating social interactions and inflexibility affecting functioning.
- Level 2: Requiring substantial support, characterized by marked deficits in social communication (even with support), limited initiation of social interactions, and frequently restricted behaviors impacting functioning.
- Level 3: Requiring very substantial support, indicating severe deficits in social communication, resulting in significant impairments. This level involves minimal initiation of

social interactions, extreme inflexibility, and substantial difficulty coping with changes affecting functioning (Fuentes et al., 2014).

Characteristics

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) encompass challenges in social interaction, communication, and behavior. These include difficulties engaging socially, intense focus on specific interests, a need for routine, varying abilities, sensory sensitivities, repetitive actions, and atypical emotional expressions (AboutKidsHealth, n.d.).

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are intricate neurological conditions that present challenges in social engagement, communication, and behavior. They manifest as distinctive patterns, including struggles in social interaction, a heightened focus on specific passions, a strong reliance on routines, diverse skill sets, sensory sensitivities, repetitive behaviors, and unique emotional expressions.

Types

Over the past two decades, there has been growing support for the conceptualization of a range of autism-related conditions, such as childhood disintegrative disorder, Asperger's disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). These conditions all exhibit deficiencies in social behavior and communication, with backing from long-term studies, epidemiological data, and research involving affected families (Lord et al., 2000).

To rephrase, research over the last 20 years has solidified the concept of a spectrum of autism-related disorders. Conditions like Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Asperger's Disorder (CDD), and PDD-NOS share deficits in social behavior and communication, supported by extensive longitudinal and epidemiological studies involving affected families.

Forms of Intervention in the Classroom

There are two major approaches of cognitive interventions that are commonly used for children with ASD. The first approach, called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), is skill-oriented and focuses on adaptive behaviors reinforced by rewards. The second approach gathers cognitive-process-oriented interventions, focusing on the cognitive capabilities underpinning the task performance. (Fage et al., 2018, p. 2)

Creating a comprehensive intervention model for children with ASD involves blending Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and cognitive-process-oriented strategies, integrating skill-building with a focus on adaptive behaviors and underlying cognitive capabilities.

Several intervention approaches have demonstrated efficacy in clinical or home-based settings where research staff, trained to high levels of implementation fidelity, implemented the intervention. (Wilson and Landa, 2019, p. 1)

A variety of intervention strategies have proven effective in both clinical and home environments, where dedicated research personnel, equipped with extensive training and committed to maintaining fidelity to the intervention, have successfully implemented these approaches.

Possible Treatments

The primary treatment approach has focused on medications affecting serotonin and dopamine. While studies with adults showed conflicting but partially positive outcomes for fluoxetine and fluvoxamine among selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) antidepressants, there are insufficient data to firmly recommend SSRI use in managing repetitive behavior in both children and adults with ASD (Mandic-Maravic et al., 2022).

Traditionally, treatment for ASD has centered around medications that impact serotonin and dopamine. However, when considering selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) like fluoxetine and fluvoxamine, studies with adults have shown mixed and inconclusive results. Additionally, there remains a lack of substantial data to confidently advocate for SSRI usage in addressing repetitive behavior among both children and adults with ASD.

Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language

Teaching language is shaped by concepts about language (language theories) and the learning circumstances that enable learners to acquire language (learning theories). Variances in language theories can impact the choice of instructional materials, while variations in learning theories can influence teaching approaches (Setiyadi, 2020).

To repeat, the effectiveness of language teaching can be enhanced by integrating diverse language theories into instructional practices. By considering how different language theories perceive language acquisition and the role of learners' environments, educators can tailor their teaching methods and materials to better suit the needs and learning styles of their students. This approach promotes a more holistic and adaptable language learning experience, fostering greater engagement and success among learners.

According to Mehdiyev (2020), recent advancements in educational technology, the internet, and virtual learning environments have laid a robust groundwork for the implementation of modern methodologies, such as promoting learner autonomy, within the realms of foreign language learning and teaching.

To put it simply, the integration of emerging technologies and online platforms into foreign language education has created new opportunities to empower learners and personalize their language learning experiences. By leveraging tools such as educational apps, online language communities, and virtual reality simulations, educators can foster greater learner autonomy and engagement. This shift towards personalized, technology-enhanced language learning environments holds the potential to revolutionize traditional teaching methods and improve overall language acquisition outcomes.

Methods of teaching and learning English

Muñoz et al, (2018), indicate that methodology refers to the instruments employed to acquire knowledge, select teaching materials, and utilize resources. Understanding the evolution of the methodological process over time allows one to comprehend what needs to be altered and how those changes should be implemented.

In detail, Adaptive Education Methodology: A dynamic framework integrating artificial intelligence to analyze individual learning patterns and recommend personalized teaching materials, ensuring a responsive and effective educational experience tailored to each student's needs.

As educators gain more experience, they feel less compelled to enhance their knowledge and skills in content and become more inclined to explore novel teaching methods and tools, engaging in collaborative exchanges with their peers along the way (Ávalos-Bevan & Bascopé, 2017).

To put it differently, as teachers accumulate more experience, they often find themselves more open to innovation in their teaching approaches and the incorporation of new tools. This increased openness can lead to collaborative exchanges with colleagues, emphasizing a shift from a focus on individual skill enhancement to a more dynamic and experimental teaching environment.

In line with Intarapanich, (2013), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) prioritizes teaching communicative competence over linguistic competence, focusing on functions rather than forms. Typically, students engage in communicative activities in small groups using authentic materials.

To reiterate, in CLT, students learn by engaging in real-life conversations and activities within small groups, using genuine materials. Emphasis is placed on functional communication skills rather than rote grammar, fostering practical language use and cultural understanding.

Application of Methods

According to Roell (2019), employing case studies necessitates thoughtful planning and preparation, yet it is an exhilarating strategy in the language-learning classroom. Students demonstrate greater involvement when addressing a problem than simply reading a text and responding to questions.

Certainly, crafting “Language Dilemma Challenges” demands careful planning, yet proves to be an exciting strategy in language-learning classrooms. Students engage more actively as they navigate authentic linguistic and cultural scenarios, fostering language skills and critical thinking.

Kawinkoonlasate (2019) states that implementing a flipped classroom technology approach enhances learners' engagement and motivation in the learning process. It maximizes the utilization of classroom time and resources while also enhancing overall teaching efficiency.

To put it another way, integrating a flipped classroom technology approach revolutionizes the learning experience by heightening learners' engagement and motivation. This method optimizes the effective use of classroom time and resources, ultimately resulting in improved teaching efficiency and a more dynamic educational environment.

Linguistics Skills

Numerous educators lack awareness regarding the significance of comprehending and articulating diverse language skill activities and methods to attain the intended goals of their lessons. In this context, numerous studies on language skills have been conducted, aiming to underscore the relevance of these skills in the context of teaching foreign languages (Darancık, 2018).

To repeat, many teachers may not fully recognize the pivotal role of integrating various language skills and methods to achieve targeted learning outcomes in their lessons. Exploring the significance of language skills in the realm of foreign language education remains a subject of ongoing research and study.

Kacetl and Klímová (2019) mention that creating, strategizing, and deploying mobile learning (m-learning) should be done carefully, taking into account the needs of students. The goal is to provide various language skills within genuine learning settings.

In other words, it is advantageous to approach the design, planning, and execution of mobile learning (m-learning) thoughtfully, aligning it with the specific requirements of students. The objective is to impart a range of language skills in environments that closely mirror real-world learning experiences.

Productive Skills

Wijaya (2022) points out that in developing productive language skills, learners are required to put forth more deliberate efforts to master the target language, as they are encouraged to generate information that can be effectively conveyed to others. Productive language skills in

English encompass both speaking and writing.

To explain, productive language skills demand learners' committed endeavors to achieve fluency in the target language. They are motivated to produce information that can be communicated effectively to others. The domain of English language proficiency encompasses both articulate expression in spoken form and the written craft of conveying ideas.

Speaking is acknowledged as one of the challenging aspects of English language acquisition, requiring learners to communicate in real time. Given that learners need to offer impromptu responses to speakers, a solid grasp of vocabulary and grammatical structures is essential (Rao, 2019).

In other words, mastering spoken English can be quite challenging for language learners due to the need for real-time communication and the requirement to respond quickly to speakers. A strong foundation in vocabulary and grammatical structures is crucial for learners to effectively convey their thoughts and ideas in conversation. Additionally, practicing speaking regularly, engaging in conversations with native speakers or language partners, and seeking feedback can greatly aid in improving spoken English skills.

Equally important, Yüce and Ataç (2019) remark writing necessitates a deep comprehension of the textual process because obtaining immediate feedback to establish a framework for writing may not always be feasible. Language users may need to create texts that are understandable, lucid, appropriate, and informative.

That is to say, writing demands a nuanced grasp of the textual process, as immediate feedback for framing may not always be available. Language users must create texts that are clear, appropriate, and informative.

Receptive Skills

In the context of learning the English language, the cultivation of receptive skills emerges as an essential pillar, where the ability to actively comprehend and assimilate the language stands as the crucial foundation for robust and meaningful linguistic competence. As believed by Fadwa (2010) receptive skills encompass the methods through which individuals derive significance

from the spoken or written discourse they encounter.

Listening and reading are both receptive language skills that involve receiving and processing information through distinct sensory channels. In the opinion of Mohammed (2015), listening is receiving language through the ears, identifying speech sounds, and processing them into words and sentences. Proficient listening requires focus and attention. Reading is the cognitive process of extracting meaning from written symbols. Our eyes receive letters, punctuation marks, and spaces, and our brain converts them into words and sentences, conveying significant information. Both listening and reading are vital receptive language skills, engaging distinct sensory channels for comprehension and communication. In addition, the refinement of receptive skills necessitates the enhancement of both listening and reading proficiencies. The learner can attain maximum receptive skills by demonstrating a vested interest in the subject matter and actively pursuing knowledge acquisition (Sreena & Iankumaran, 2018).

Grammar

Grammar refers to the set of rules and principles governing the structure and use of language. It encompasses the study of syntax, morphology, semantics, and phonetics, providing a framework for the correct formation of sentences and the conveyance of meaning within a linguistic system. According to Oluwadare (2016), the term "grammar" is polysemous, exhibiting multiple interconnected senses, and its application has been expanded to encompass various facets of language. Given this broadening of significance, certain linguists consider grammar ambiguous and challenging to encapsulate succinctly in the description. However, grammar is frequently delineated as the set of rules governing a language; however, it is equally beneficial to conceptualize it as a tool for conveying meaning (Lynch & Anderson, 2013).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary, within the context of language acquisition, pertains to the comprehensive repository of words and expressions that an individual possesses in a particular language. Susanto (2017), proficiency in lexical knowledge is frequently regarded as a pivotal facet for individuals learning a foreign language, given that a restricted lexicon in a secondary language hinders the attainment of effective communication. Recognizing the significance of acquiring an extensive vocabulary. By the research Scholars and professionals concur on the necessity for L2 learners to acquire a substantial vocabulary, encompassing thousands of words, to attain

functional proficiency in a language. Nevertheless, there is a lack of empirical evidence from researchers regarding the specific quantity of words that L2 learners must master to achieve advanced language proficiency in particular languages (Watzinger et al, 2019).

Teaching English to Students with Autism

Teaching English to students with autism requires a tailored approach to address challenges in executive functions, theory of mind, and sensory processing. Strategies involve using visual aids, and technology, and fostering collaboration between English language and special education professionals. Ongoing teacher training is crucial for effective language instruction aligned with the unique cognitive and sensory profiles of students with autism. According to the perspective of Mohammed (2022), individuals diagnosed with ASD encounter challenges in various domains, including executive functions, theory of mind, and central coherence. Additionally, difficulties arise in sensory processing, where stimuli such as loud sounds, potent odors, discomfort from seating arrangements, and intense lighting can serve as significant distractions, detrimentally affecting the learning experience.

Strategies for Teaching English to Students with Autism

Implementing effective strategies for teaching English to students with autism involves personalized approaches, sensory-friendly methods, and collaborative efforts between English language and special education professionals. According to Kaffemaniene and Kulese (2021), the instruction of children with ASD relies on integrating diverse educational strategies and contexts, considering the distinct social, academic, and individual characteristics of each student. Environmental factors, encompassing the location and manner of educational interactions, the circumstances under which they occur, and the manifestation of the student's skills and behaviors, are also taken into account.

Individualized Instructional

Individualized education pertains to teaching methods where the speed of learning and the instructional methodology are tailored to suit the requirements of each learner. Learning goals, teaching strategies, and the organization of instructional content may all differ according to the individual needs of the learner (Hughey, 2020). In addition, for educators specializing in special education, the primary focal points of tailored instruction include: 1) establishing a secure learning atmosphere and 2) adjusting the intensity and objectives of learning to align with the student. Both aspects contribute to cultivating learning capabilities that align with the distinct

abilities and requirements of a student with ASD (Kaffemaniene & Kulešè, 2021).

Visual Supports in Language Instruction

Based on Irvin et al (2023), incorporating visual support into digital applications is crucial for aiding children with ASD in performing daily tasks across different environments. Designing visual support should adhere to essential guidelines to ensure it aligns with their characteristics and requirements.

By all means, integrating visual support seamlessly into digital applications is paramount to assisting children with ASD in navigating their daily activities across diverse environments. The design of visual support must meticulously follow fundamental guidelines to guarantee its alignment with the distinctive characteristics and specific needs of these individuals.

Additionally, numerous individuals with Autism exhibit strengths in visual processing, often learning through visual thinking. Visual supports play a crucial role in enabling them to use language for communication, social interaction, and understanding how to meet expectations. These supports contribute to creating structure by organizing their space and facilitating the learning of routines (Elwell, 2019).

To be sure, many within the Autism spectrum showcase a proficiency in visual processing, frequently engaging in visual thinking as their primary mode of learning. Visual supports serve as indispensable tools, empowering them to harness language for effective communication, navigate social interactions, and comprehend and meet expectations. These supports not only foster structure by organizing their physical environment but also act as aids in the assimilation of routines.

Structured Teaching Methods

Conforming to Suprihatin and Tarjiah (2019), the inception of the structured teaching approach stems from this conviction. This approach advocates that each instructional element for students' learning should be organized and accompanied by symbols, icons, writing, pictures, or objects, tailored to the developmental level of each child.

Certainly, the genesis of the structured teaching approach arises from a fundamental belief. This innovative approach champions the idea that every facet of instructional content in students'

learning should be meticulously structured and enhanced with symbols, icons, writing, pictures, or tangible objects. The customization of these elements is specifically geared towards the unique developmental level of each child, fostering a more personalized and effective learning experience.

ICTs in Education for Young Learners with ASD

The integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) fosters inclusive participation among all students in the educational system, thereby equipping them for real-world challenges beyond the school environment. The utilization of ICTs and assistive technology within educational processes is expected to yield favorable outcomes, particularly in the inclusion of children facing learning difficulties. This approach not only aids in reinforcing newly acquired knowledge but also contributes to the development of their awareness (Anagnostopoulou et al., 2021).

Indeed, leveraging Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in education promotes inclusive participation, preparing students for challenges beyond school. The use of ICTs and assistive technology is anticipated to have positive effects, especially in the inclusion of children with learning difficulties, fostering knowledge retention and enhancing their overall awareness.

Papageorgiou (2020) reports that within the realm of special education, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) emerges as a potent tool, aiding both the educational process and students grappling with disabilities and learning challenges. The provision of suitable education for students with disabilities has persistently surfaced as a recurring concern within educational discourse.

Notably, in the specialized domain of special education, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) stands out as a powerful asset, playing a pivotal role in enhancing both the educational journey and the learning experiences of students facing disabilities and learning hurdles. The consistent challenge of delivering tailored education for students with disabilities remains an enduring focal point in educational discussions.

Learning Styles of Students with ASD

Understanding the learning styles of students with ASD is a nuanced endeavor. These individuals often exhibit diverse preferences, ranging from visual stimuli to tactile or kinesthetic methods. Sensory sensitivities further contribute to the complexity, requiring tailored approaches in the learning environment. By embracing individualized learning styles and incorporating evidence-based practices, educators can create more inclusive and effective English language instruction for students with ASD. As they mention it Friedlander (2010), educators must delve into the learning styles of every student, with a particular focus on those requiring special attention and facing challenges in traditional teaching approaches. It is essential to maintain a keen awareness of each child's uniqueness, irrespective of any diagnosis, and actively seek the most effective instructional methods tailored to individual needs. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of diverse learning styles and contributes to the development of suitable strategies for successful teaching, especially for students with specific needs such as ASD.

Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (VAK) Learning Styles

The VAK learning styles model is a framework that categorizes individuals into three primary learning modalities: Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic. Understanding these styles is crucial for educators to tailor their teaching methods to match the diverse preferences of students. In the words of Koifman (2017), the VAK learning styles model assists educators in developing instructional approaches and learning experiences that align with the preferences of learners.

Visual

Visual learning constitutes a pedagogical approach wherein concepts, ideas, data, and various forms of information are linked with images and visual techniques. This method aligns with one of the fundamental learning styles categorized in the popular Fleming VAK/VARK model, which identifies three primary styles of learning (Sreenidhi & Tay, 2017). Also, Visual learners, as identified in the VAK learning styles model, exhibit a predilection for processing information through visual stimuli. These individuals thrive when presented with graphic representations such as charts, diagrams, and images. The utilization of visual aids plays a pivotal role in enhancing their comprehension and retention of academic content. Educators catering to visual learners often incorporate visual elements into lessons, creating a more engaging and effective learning experience. By acknowledging and leveraging the visual learning style, educators can

optimize instruction and ensure that the educational content resonates more profoundly with this specific group of learners.

Auditory

According to Agape et al. (2015), individuals who are inclined towards auditory learning styles demonstrate a higher capacity for recalling verbal instructions. They tend to retain information more effectively when engaging in discussions about a particular subject, and in general, their understanding and retention are optimized when information is verbally communicated. Children embracing this learning style typically acquire the necessary knowledge during class sessions; however, they may dedicate a substantial amount of time to independent study. Consequently, individuals with ASD, facilitating structured and supportive conversations can help them develop communication skills and build social connections while respecting their unique communication preferences and challenges.

Kinesthetic

As indicated by Surjono (2011), these learners excel in understanding and retaining information through tactile and kinesthetic experiences. They exhibit a preference for laboratory activities or field trips over traditional classroom lectures. Engaging in physical experiences, such as touching, feeling, holding, and doing, resonates strongly with them. Practical, hands-on experiences form the cornerstone of their preferred learning approach. Then, many individuals with ASD are kinesthetic learners, meaning they learn best through hands-on experiences and physical activities. Incorporating movement, tactile materials, and interactive tasks into learning activities can enhance engagement and comprehension for these individuals.

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Approach

This qualitative research project was developed with a descriptive approach, through which the researchers collected and analyzed opinions and experiences about the teaching process and strategies for English language teaching to young learners with autism.

According to Copley (2023), qualitative research involves exploring how individuals comprehend their tangible and genuine experiences, both within their thoughts and through their expressions. These interpretations are then subjected to analysis.

Qualitative research appropriately seeks solutions by investigating diverse social contexts and the groups or individuals present in these contexts. Researchers employing qualitative methods are primarily concerned with the organization of human interactions and environments and how individuals interpret their surroundings using symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and similar elements. The primary tools used for conducting descriptive research include observation sheets and interviews (Lune & Berg, 2017).

7.2 Research Context

Naderifar et al (2017) emphasize that Snowball sampling is a non-probability technique that entails randomly selecting initial subjects. This approach proves particularly useful when population members are challenging to reach, such as homeless individuals, illegal immigrants, and addicts. The researcher initially identifies a group of individuals, collects data from them, and then requests them to suggest similar cases for inclusion in the study.

The researchers used snowball sampling to select the participants due to the reality that they are not easy to find because most teachers do not have adequate preparation for teaching English to students with autism. To get the informed consent, the researchers asked the participants to sign them to make the process formal (see Annexes 1 and 2).

The location was in Ponceano parish, Distrito Metropolitano de Quito, Pichincha, Ecuador in an urban location and a private school called “NOVA ENGLISH ACADEMY”. There were two participants: one English teacher and one clinical psychologist. The teacher is 43 years old, with and experience of 10 years teaching English to students with autism and the previous trajectory has taught neurotypical individuals. The clinical psychologist is 33 years old and has 8 years of work experience, during which almost two years have been spent working in a specialized school where he dealt with children with various disorders

7.3 Data Collection Procedure

The instrument used to get to know the opinions and perspectives of the English teacher and the clinical psychologist was a semi-structured interview, adapted from Reppond (2015), and a semi-structured observation sheet exactly for the English teacher. As the first step, the researchers interviewed one English teacher and one clinical psychologist.

The semi-structured interview (see Annex 3) consisted of two sections of questions. The first one focused on collecting information about the experience of the English teacher with educational questions, student-oriented questions, District questions, and professional opinions. The second section of questions collected opinions of the clinical psychologist related to personal experience, student-oriented questions, assessment questions, and professional opinions.

As the next step, the researchers used an observation sheet (see Annex 4) to identify the process of teaching English to young learners with autism. The observation sheet was divided into two parameters, the first one was classroom management, which included: presentation in the personal aspect of the teacher, capacity for teamwork, and the development of values, communicating effectively in the classroom and your educational environment, organizing and applying activities that promote student participation, observing and analyzing students' work in learning situations, and executing activities in the classroom and their relationship with the students. The second parameter consisted of applying methodological strategies to consolidate the topic according to the student's need, capacity for reflection, critical systematization of knowledge, appropriate teaching material for each student with ASD, providing feedback during the teaching process, and evaluating qualitatively or quantitatively. At the end of the observed class, the researchers wrote a field note (see Annex 5) detailing the teaching process.

8. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

8.1 Data Analysis

The data analysis that was used was thematic analysis since according to Kampira (2021), thematic analysis is a method of analyzing data that revolves around the recognition, portrayal, clarification, validation, and connections of themes. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data and address the related research questions.

The first step consisted of transcribing the interviews with the English teacher and the clinical psychologist. These transcriptions were then color-coded (see Annexes 6 and 7) and used to define themes to analyze them in-depth and, based on this, to respond to the research objectives.

After doing that, the researchers created three themes, each divided into three subthemes. The first theme was labeled: Techniques of teaching young learners with autism, and its three subthemes were: Visual Strategies, Rote Learning, Basic Vocabulary. The second theme is Well-being of the young learners with autism, with subthemes: Empathy towards students, Acceptance from parents, Collaboration between psychologists and teachers. Finally, the last theme created is Educational realities of young learners with autism, from which the following subthemes were derived: Evaluation, Teachers' Instruction, Resource Constraints. With all of these themes and subthemes, it must be said that was created a contribution.

To obtain the strengths of the use of authentic materials for teaching culture-based lessons, the researchers analyzed excerpts from teacher's, peer's, and students' reflections. The main strengths identified were as follows:

Theme 1: Techniques of teaching young learners with autism

a) Visual Strategies

Extracts from the English teacher's Interview

Communication cards. Those are the most effective PECS communication cards. (T.)
Children with special needs and children in general are very visual. So, anything that can catch my visual field, that grabs my visual field, catches my attention. (T.)

Extracts from the Clinical psychologist's Interview

“Una estrategia visual es un dado el cual consiste en ponerle una esponjita, pero tiene que estar con un papel transparente para colocar los dibujos ya tú le das al niño, no que lance, sino le das para que le dé la vuelta y él va viendo a sus rutinas en el dado”.
[A visual strategy is a die that involves placing a small sponge on it, but it has to be covered with transparent paper to place the drawings. Instead of having the child throw it, you give it to them to turn, and they can see their routines on the die.] (Psych.)

“Si nosotros hacemos una pose, mira, dime esta frase lo repiten tal como es y que entienda mediante gráficos que estamos en este caso estás trabajando a la profe ya va como decir a adaptarse a ese tipo de aprendizaje visual.” [If we strike a pose, look, tell me, repeat this phrase as it is, and make her understand through graphics that we are in this case working with the teacher, guiding her on how to adapt to this type of visual learning.] (Psych.)

Extracts from the Observation file data

The teacher communicated very effectively with the students, using images. (Obs. 1)

The teacher used suitable flashcards for the students. (Obs. 2)

The provided extracts underscore the effectiveness of PECS communication cards and visual strategies in teaching English to students with autism. Both the teacher and the clinical psychologist acknowledge the importance of capturing children's visual attention through tools like cards and a visual strategy involving a die with drawings. The clinical psychologist suggests visual strategies, such as using a die with drawings and incorporating poses with verbal repetition, to facilitate adaptation to visual learning. Additionally, observers highlight the English teacher's effective communication using images and the appropriate selection of flashcards. As expressed by Nickerson (2010), individuals diagnosed with autism often demonstrate heightened observational skills, particularly in visual details. Their perceptual acuity extends to subtle changes in object positioning or paint deterioration. Furthermore, their attention is drawn to sensory intricacies, such as the brightness of reflected light, auditory nuances from a fan, or tactile sensations associated with specific fabrics.

b) Rote Learning

Extracts from the English teacher's Interview

When you're going to teach anything else to a person with autism. It takes time, dedication, and a lot of repetition, and you have to focus on the main thing, which is speaking. (T.)

Working memory is what allows you to, okay, I read this. Ta ta ta ta, okay, I'm going to present it and explain it, okay? Like all the things I'm telling you, that's stored in my working memory. When a person has an affected working memory, they don't store information or store very little. (T.)

Extracts from the Clinical psychologist's interview

“La limitación más grande que tienen es comunicar, comunicarse y si tú le dices una palabra, ellos van a repetir, repetir, repetir, repetir, repetir”. [The biggest limitation they have is communicating, and if you say a word to them, they will repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat.] (Psych.)

Extracts from the Observation file data

The teacher consistently spoke about the subject of the class. (Obs. 2)

The analysis of the provided excerpts underscores key considerations for teaching individuals with autism. The teacher emphasizes the importance of dedicating substantial time and consistent, repetitive approaches to facilitate learning, particularly in verbal communication. The discussion on working memory highlights its critical role in information processing, revealing potential challenges for individuals with autism. Adapting teaching strategies to address these working memory challenges is deemed crucial. The clinical psychologist interview emphasizes that the primary limitation for individuals with autism is in communication, with a focus on repetitive behaviors in word repetition. Recognizing and addressing this repetition is fundamental for effective communication strategies. Observational data further highlights the teacher's sustained focus on the class topic, reinforcing the significance of maintaining a structured and repetitive teaching approach for individuals with autism. According to the organization Autism Speaks (2023), it is pertinent to explore methods that involve repetition as a key strategy for student comprehension. This repetition extends beyond the auditory sense, encompassing the integration of visual stimuli such as images, maps, diagrams, and patterns. Furthermore, there is an advocacy for the incorporation of hands-on activities and movement, enabling students to learn through direct experience. Verbal expression, through guided repetitions (e.g., "repeat after me").

c) Basic Vocabulary

Extracts from the English Teacher's Interview

So, how do we focus? We focus exclusively working on basic vocabulary. (T.)

A vocabulary, usually vocabulary books where we teach, okay. And we teach commands in Spanish. We teach commands like "espero" (wait), like, uh, "my turn."

We teach the same in English. "What's my turn, this, that?" Okay. Why? Why do you want this? What do you want that? Okay. And we ask. "What's your name?" (T.)

Okay, that's already consolidated, can communicate needs, then we include more and expand the vocabulary, we expand the vocabulary in that sense. (T.)

Extracts from the Observation file data

The teacher began with a basic greeting and a small question in English. (Obs. 1)

Throughout the class, the teacher provided feedback to the students using a very basic and comprehensible vocabulary. (Obs. 2)

The extracts provide insights into a strategic approach to English language teaching, emphasizing the foundational role of basic vocabulary. The teacher highlights an exclusive focus on essential words and commands, employing vocabulary books to teach commands in both Spanish and English, such as "wait" and "my turn." The teacher adopts a progressive strategy, starting with a consolidated basic vocabulary to address communication needs and subsequently expanding the vocabulary. Observational data supports this approach, revealing that the teacher initiates the class with a basic greeting and a small question in English. Throughout the lesson, feedback is consistently provided using a very basic and comprehensible vocabulary. This deliberate emphasis on simplicity and clarity aligns with the overall goal of establishing a strong linguistic foundation for effective language learning. Conforming to Yunus & Norman (2022) the initiation of language acquisition commences from the moment of birth. The primary mechanism for a child to learn language is through internalization, which involves associating sounds with corresponding images. As the child grasps the grammar of a language, they transition from internalization to interpretation. By the end of the initial 48 months, the child will have cultivated foundational language abilities and a vocabulary predominantly shaped by their personal experiences.

Theme 2: Well-being of the young learners with autism

a) Empathy towards students

Extracts from the English teacher's interview

I think this is for life, is to try to be empathetic. What do you like, and based on what you like, I'll come to you, I'll get close to you, I'll try to find that in you. (T.)

But empathy with the parents, empathy, talk to them strongly, talk to them clearly, tell them it depends on you that your child improves because it depends on the parents that their child improves. But being empathetic, giving them a little love because, well, it's their child. (T.)

Extracts from the Clinical psychologist's interview

“Entonces darle ese tiempo para que él se adapte, observar qué es lo que le molesta, qué es lo que le gusta, qué es lo que no le gusta, cuáles son sus cosas favoritas, sus pasatiempos favoritos.” [So, give him that time to adapt, observe what bothers him, what he likes, what he doesn't like, what his favorite things are, his favorite pastimes.] (Psych.)

Extracts from the Observation file data

The teacher was empathetic to the student in the sense that she used the things he was interested in throughout the class. (Obs. 1)

The extracts revolve around the theme of empathy towards students, showcasing a shared commitment from the English teacher and clinical psychologist to establish profound connections. The English teacher emphasizes a lifelong dedication to understanding students based on their preferences, advocating for empathetic communication with parents. The clinical psychologist underscores the importance of giving students time to adapt and understand their interests. Observational data confirms the teacher's empathetic approach, integrating student interests into the class. In summary, the extracts collectively highlight the crucial role of empathy in fostering positive teacher-student relationships and creating a supportive learning environment.

In agreement with Aldrup et al. (2022), teachers who possess empathy understand that students with autism may experience anxiety when faced with demanding tasks or feel embarrassed and frustrated when unable to answer questions repeatedly. Upon identifying these negative emotional states in their students, teachers' emotional empathy should prompt them to respond with sensitivity to their students' emotional needs. This involves offering comfort and encouragement to help alleviate the emotional challenges these students may be facing.

b) Acceptance from parents

Extracts from the English Teacher's interview

That's why I always tell them what the need is, and I focus everything on the need. But sometimes you have to be empathetic with the dad, you have to be empathetic, beyond the fact that in my case, I'm the one who has to tighten the screws. (T.)

Extracts from the Clinical psychologist's interview

“Entonces con los papitos se trabaja en lo que es la sensibilización, la información, porque muchos de de los papitos, bueno en mi caso le diagnosticaron con autismo.”

[So, with the parents, we work on awareness, and information, because many of the parents, well in my case, were diagnosed with autism.] (Psych.)

“Se les orienta a los papitos que es una condición permanente y diversas cosas que ellos tienen que seguir adaptándose a esa realidad y también comunicarles.” [They

are guided to understand that it is a permanent condition and various things that they have to continue adapting to that reality and also communicate.] (Psych.)

When analyzing the data provided, an important theme emerges regarding the crucial role of parental acceptance in the context of teaching English to people with autism. The English teacher highlights the importance of communicating specific needs to parents and emphasizes the need for empathy, recognizing that understanding extends beyond the teacher's responsibility to enforce structure. At the same time, the ideas of the clinical psychologist shed light on the vital aspect of raising awareness among parents, offering them information about the diagnosis of autism and guiding them to understand the permanence of the condition. The psychologist highlights the continuous process of adaptation and effective communication as integral components for parents to navigate the reality of their children's autism. This highlights the intricate interaction between educators and parents to foster an inclusive and supportive environment for people with autism.

In agreement with Simangunsong et al. (2023), the acceptance of parents plays a crucial role in the educational journey when it comes to children with autism. The impact of parents accepting their child's situation extends beyond acknowledging the child's condition. It involves the parents actively engaging in self-development efforts and progressing through stages of self-acceptance, enabling them to not only accept their child but also adapt to challenging circumstances. This parental acceptance significantly influences the child's overall developmental process.

c) Collaboration between psychologists and teachers

Extracts from the English teacher's interview

The speech pathologist is responsible for ensuring that there are no difficulties, whether at the cerebral or physical level. They have to look into that. The general education teacher, who is their regular teacher, has to make sure to have strategies and knowledge about their student on hand so that they can integrate them. (T.)

Extracts from the Clinical psychologist's interview

“Las recomendaciones que le hace el psicólogo, el psicopedagogo, la maestra docente. Entonces todo eso en conjunto para realizar el trabajo que se necesita para el chico. También hay la participación de la maestra Sombra.” [The recommendations made by the psychologist, the educational psychologist, and the classroom teacher. So, all of that together to carry out the work needed for the child. There is also the involvement of the Shadow teacher.] (Psych.)

“Realmente creo que es muy satisfactorio trabajar de manera conjunta.” [I truly believe that working together is very satisfying.] (Psych.)

The excerpts discuss collaboration between psychologists and teachers. The English teacher emphasizes the role of a speech pathologist in addressing cerebral and physical difficulties, while the general education teacher focuses on strategies for student integration. In the clinical psychologist's interview, collaborative efforts involving psychologists, educational psychologists, and classroom teachers are highlighted, along with the positive acknowledgment of the effectiveness of working together.

In Testa's view (2023), effective interprofessional collaboration occurs within a culture marked by a commitment to an ethic of care. It thrives in educational settings where there is clarity regarding interprofessional roles and referral processes. Success is further ensured when staff dedicated to well-being are actively committed to fostering interprofessional collaboration and partnerships.

Theme 3: Educational realities of young learners with autism

a) Student's Evaluation

Extracts from the English teacher's interview

I assess based on his development, not on his disability, not on having autism, not on having Asperger's, not on having Down syndrome. (T.)

I evaluate all their areas of development, everything related to motor skills, autonomy, language, cognition, and social. (T.)

Extracts from the Clinical psychologist's interview

“Mediante la observación del de sus pares, que quiere decir de sus compañeros, determinar si el aprendizaje está acorde a su nivel y a su edad cronológica.” [Through the observation of their peers, meaning their classmates, to determine if learning is in line with their level and chronological age.] (Psych.)

“Luego de eso podríamos hablar de un filtro más eh simplificado en donde se le deriva al psicólogo, donde le hace una evaluación y al psicopedagogo que sí existe aquí en la institución para que le tome un test de ver cuáles son sus aprendizajes y su nivel de competencia.” [After that, we could discuss a more simplified filter where they are referred to the psychologist, who conducts an evaluation, and to the educational psychologist, who does exist in the institution, to administer a test assessing their learning and level of competence.] (Psych.)

“Tenemos el área motriz, el área de motricidad fina, motricidad gruesa, lenguaje, comprensión verbal, matemáticas, lectoescritura, todo eso lo evalúa para ver si está de acorde con el nivel de competencia que tiene.” [We assess the motor skills, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, language, verbal comprehension, mathematics, and literacy. All of these are evaluated to determine if they align with the individual's level of competence.] (Psych.)

Extracts from the Observation file data

The teacher always walked around the classroom, monitoring. (Obs. 2)

The teacher assessed each activity both quantitatively and qualitatively. (Obs. 1)

The excerpts explore the educational experiences of young learners with autism, focusing on student evaluation. In interviews with the English teacher and clinical psychologist, a student's development is emphasized over their disability, with assessments covering various areas such

as motor skills, autonomy, language, cognition, and social aspects. The clinical psychologist describes a process involving observation of peers and referral for further evaluation by both the psychologist and the educational psychologist. The evaluation encompasses motor skills, language, comprehension, mathematics, and literacy, aiming to align with the individual's level of competence. Observers note the teacher's active monitoring and both quantitative and qualitative assessment of student activities.

Merry (2019) states that while professionals bring significant contributions in emotional and educational support, such as administering care, if there is a clash between professional care and parental values or preferences, the latter should be given precedence. This becomes especially crucial when there is clear evidence that a child's well-being is at risk within the institutional environment. It's important to note that prioritizing parental decisions doesn't imply that parents are infallible in determining what is in their child's best interest at all times.

b) Teachers' Instruction

Extracts from the English teacher's interview

The main thing, having trained staff, having the classrooms visually filled with information, and dedicating ourselves to understanding each disability, seeing how you learn because the learning channel is the four. We are quite similar in everything, but the learning channels can be different. (T.)

In the curriculum of Integral Education and special education, there is nothing that teaches you to work with children with disabilities. (T.)

Extracts from the Clinical psychologist's interview

“Porque son docentes que de pronto tienen un contrato ocasional y no tienen los estudios adecuados a la necesidad sin embargo les ponen de maestra sombra y muchas veces recién están aprendiendo cómo coger el hilo del asunto y todo lo demás.”

[Because they are teachers who may have a temporary contract and lack the appropriate qualifications for the need. Nevertheless, they are assigned as shadow teachers, and often they are just learning how to grasp the essence of the matter and everything else.]
(Psych.)

The provided excerpts reveal the challenges within the realm of teachers' instruction for children with disabilities. The English teacher underscores the necessity of trained staff, visually enriched classrooms, and a nuanced understanding of each disability, acknowledging the diversity in learning channels. However, a notable concern emerges as the teacher laments the absence of specific training in integral and special education in the curriculum. The clinical psychologist sheds light on a practical dilemma, pointing out that teachers with temporary contracts, despite lacking appropriate qualifications, are often assigned as shadow teachers, grappling with on-the-job learning. This exposes a potential gap between qualifications and roles, emphasizing the need for more comprehensive teacher education programs and ongoing support to ensure effective and inclusive education for children with disabilities.

Kistoro et al. (2021) point out that special education holds a paramount position, recognizing that teachers serve as the primary fount of knowledge for autistic children. It is imperative for educators to exhibit a heightened level of creativity and possess an open-hearted approach when delivering services to children with autism. Furthermore, providing ample resources is crucial to support teachers, enabling the actualization of their creative potential in the educational support of autistic children.

c) Resource Constraints

Extracts from the Clinical psychologist's interview

“El Ministerio de Educación tiene presupuesto limitado e igual número de profesionales es limitado porque necesitaría el Ministerio en este caso tener una persona que sea una educadora especial con el perfil para ocupar eso de maestra sombra.” [The Ministry of Education has a limited budget, and the number of professionals is also limited. In this case, the Ministry would need to have a special education teacher with the qualifications to fill the role of a shadow teacher.] (T.)

“Depende del presupuesto, del número de profesionales de los que determine el distrito y nosotros en la medida que podemos, damos el acompañamiento a los chicos y el seguimiento.” [It depends on the budget and the number of professionals determined by the district. We provide support and follow-up to the children to the extent that we can.] (Psych.)

The excerpts highlight resource constraints within the education system, as discussed in interviews with a clinical psychologist and an educator. The clinical psychologist points out that the Ministry of Education operates with a limited budget, resulting in a shortage of professionals. Specifically, the need for special education teachers with the qualifications to serve as shadow teachers is emphasized. This limitation is further reinforced by the psychologist, who explains that the extent of support and follow-up provided to children depends on budgetary considerations and the number of available professionals determined by the district. The interviews underscore the challenges posed by financial constraints and the consequent impact on the availability of qualified professionals, potentially hindering the provision of necessary support for students in need.

In compliance with Jaffal (2022), General Education (GE) teachers do not receive adequate training on effectively interacting with students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) within their general education classrooms. Moreover, there is a deficiency in opportunities for collaboration between GE teachers and their special education counterparts, hindering the enhancement of support for students with ASD. Additionally, schools and programs do not allocate sufficient resources to enable GE teachers to establish a suitable inclusive environment in their classrooms for students with ASD.

9. RESEARCH IMPACTS

This research project has significant and potential for both educational and social impact. This is due to the information provided on the characteristics of ASD, the strategies in English language teaching as a foreign language to young learners, and the experiences provided by the English teacher and the Clinical psychologist. Furthermore, the perspectives of both the English teacher and the clinical psychologist regarding the modifications necessary for enhancing this educational process are presented. This project has the potential to offer assistance and direction to educators instructing English as a foreign language to students with autism, facilitating their educational and social development.

Moreover, the project study has the potential to contribute to future research related to English language teaching to students with autism. Given the limited investigation within the city and country where the research was conducted, there is a clear need for longitudinal studies to depend our understanding of this topic. Such a studies could uncover unique insights and

patterns over an extended period, serving as a valuable foundation for future research, policy development, and educational practices.

Finally, this research encourages educators of English as a foreign language to acquire extensive knowledge about students with autism and effective teaching strategies by promoting inclusive education practices, the project aims to create supportive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of all students, ultimately contributing to their academic and social growth.

10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Conclusions

According to the research questions, the first that is: What are the strategies that can be implemented in English language teaching to young learners with autism? And the second is: How do psychologists contribute to the development of teaching English to young learners with autism? The researchers achieved answer these questions through the application of the instruments. In the first question, the strategies found were Visual strategies, Rote Learning and Basic Vocabulary. The first type of strategies are the most appropriate to be applied when teaching English to young learners with autism. In addition, to respond the second research question, Psychologists provide a significant contribution to the process of teaching the English language to children with autism through various guidelines to be followed by both the children themselves and their parents and teachers. One of these guidelines found was having empathy towards students, in the same way having collaboration between teachers and the psychologists themselves.

In conclusion, the researchers have successfully achieved the objective of describing the teaching process to young learners with autism, and it is crucial to emphasize the primary role played by our theoretical framework in attaining this accomplishment. The theoretical framework provided the conceptual foundation and essential guidelines that steered our in-depth understanding of the teaching process for this specific group of students. By thoughtfully integrating and applying relevant theories, the researchers have achieved a comprehensive and effective description of the teaching process, thereby making a valuable contribution to the educational field and adaptive pedagogy for young learners with autism.

As a final point, the researchers have capably accomplished our goal of identifying the experiences of English teachers during classes with students with autism, and it is crucial to highlight the invaluable contribution of the insights provided by the two participants. The perspectives shared by both participants have played a pivotal role in enriching our understanding of the challenges and successes encountered in the classroom setting. By incorporating diverse experiences and viewpoints, the researchers have achieved a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the teaching dynamics, shedding light on effective strategies and areas for improvement. The collaboration with the participants has significantly enhanced the depth and relevance of our findings, ultimately advancing our knowledge in the realm of English language teaching for students with autism.

10.2 Recommendations

This thesis recommends exploring the integration of visual strategies, rote learning, and basic vocabulary reinforcement in English language instruction for young learners with autism. Additionally, it advocates for the incorporation of psychologists' guidance, emphasizing empathy and collaborative frameworks, to enhance language development for children with autism. By investigating the effectiveness of these approaches, educators can create inclusive learning environments tailored to the unique needs of young learners with autism, fostering language acquisition and overall well-being.

The researchers would recommend considering further exploration of the practical implications of the research. It would be fundamental to focus on how the findings and recommendations from the study might be implemented in real educational settings. Additionally, it is necessary to explore the possibility of conducting further studies to assess the effectiveness of the identified strategies in teaching English to young learners with autism. The extension of this research could further contribute to the ongoing improvement of pedagogical practices and the adaptation of inclusive approaches for students with specific needs.

The profound insights gleaned from the experiences of English teachers and their students with autism underscore the importance of incorporating these perspectives into targeted professional development for educators. By directly integrating the voices of participants, it is recommended to create modules that offer practical strategies and authentic narratives to enhance teachers' understanding and inclusive teaching practices. Collaborative efforts with educational institutions and advocacy groups can ensure the sustained impact of these findings, fostering

ongoing professional development and support networks for educators. Additionally, advocating for policy changes to integrate inclusive teaching practices into broader educational frameworks will contribute to a more inclusive and effective English language teaching environment for students with autism.

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