



The Montessori method for developing listening skills in the English language

El método Montessori para desarrollar la capacidad de escuchar en el idioma inglés

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Resumen

El inglés es uno de los idiomas más hablados a nivel mundial, y su aprendizaje es crucial para el desarrollo personal en ámbitos académicos, profesionales y de comunicación. En un mundo globalizado, el dominio de una segunda lengua permite un mayor acceso a la diversidad cultural y mejores oportunidades laborales. La destreza de escuchar es esencial para comprender y procesar información auditiva, lo que facilita una comunicación efectiva. Sin embargo, desarrollar esta habilidad en las etapas tempranas de la educación puede ser un desafío significativo. Algunos autores sugieren que el método Montessori centrado en el niño y en el aprendizaje autónomo podría ser valioso para el desarrollo de habilidades lingüísticas. Ecuador, ubicado en el puesto 80 a nivel mundial en dominio del inglés, enfrenta desafíos significativos en la enseñanza de este idioma debido a la falta de una estructura nacional consolidada y déficits en la enseñanza-aprendizaje dentro de las instituciones educativas públicas. La presente investigación se centra en el aprendizaje del inglés mediante el método Montessori en niños de segundo grado, una etapa crucial para el desarrollo de habilidades lingüísticas. El objetivo de este trabajo fue identificar actividades didácticas del método Montessori que favorezcan el desarrollo de la destreza de escuchar en estudiantes de segundo grado de educación general básica de la Unidad Educativa Mariscal Sucre. Los resultados sugieren que la integración de elementos lúdicos y visuales en la enseñanza del inglés puede mejorar la adquisición del idioma en los primeros años escolares.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educación; idioma; aprendizaje; Montessori; escucha.

Abstract

English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, and learning it is crucial for personal development in academic, professional and communication settings. In a globalized world, mastering a second language enables greater access to cultural diversity and enhances job opportunities. Listening skills are essential for understanding and interpreting audit information, thereby enabling effective communication. However, developing this skill in the early stages of education can be a significant challenge. The Montessori method, which focuses on children's autonomy and learning, has proven valuable for developing language skills. Ecuador, ranked 80th in the world in English proficiency, faces significant challenges in teaching this language due to the lack of a consolidated national structure and deficits in teaching and learning within public educational institutions. This research focuses on understanding English through the Montessori method in second-grade children, a crucial stage for developing language skills. The objective is to identify didactic activities of the Montessori method that favor the development of listening skills in students of the second grade of basic general education of the Educational Unit Mariscal Sucre. The results suggest that integrating playful and visual elements into English teaching may enhance language acquisition in the early school years.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Education; language; learning, Montessori; listening

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INTRODUCTION: STARTING POINT

English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world; approximately more than 1.452 billion people speak this language in 110 countries. According to Chavarría (2022), English is an essential element of communication, so mastering it contributes significantly to personal development in academic, professional, and communication fields. For Bajaan and Amaya (2020), listening skills are essential in the process of learning this language, as they allow students to understand and process auditory information with the goal of achieving effective communication. However, developing this skill can represent a significant challenge, especially in the early stages of education (Alvear & Padilla, 2023).

In recent years, education has experienced one of its most transformative periods, driven by technological advancement and innovation in the education sector. This context has fostered the adoption of new methodologies that seek to improve learning effectiveness (Aghajani & Salehi, 2021). One of these innovations is the best practice known as the "Montessori Methodology in Language Teaching (MMLT)." This approach has previously proven effective and successful with children up to 16 years of age, as it personalizes educational methods and considers students' challenges (Siaviki et al., 2024).

According to Holly (2024), language teachers often face similar challenges, especially with university students. They must deal with resistance to learning new languages and early course dropouts, usually due to a lack of time or the perception that learning languages as an adult are more difficult. This is mainly due to an outdated and overly standardized approach to language teaching, which fails to consider adults' psychological blocks and individual learning rhythms.

This research focuses on English language learning using the Montessori Method from early ages 6 to 7, as infants, during their first years of life, have a greater capacity for learning and adapting to new environments. Therefore, the objective of this research is to identify the Montessori Method teaching activities related to the development of listening skills in second-grade students of basic general education at the Mariscal Sucre Educational Unit.

The Montessori method, known for its child-centered approach and emphasis on independent learning, has proven to be a valuable educational model for developing language skills. This method was a significant experience in the research conducted by Jared (2024), who evaluated the Montessori method to improve writing skills in seventh-grade students at the Otavalo School. The study focused on the use of Montessori teaching materials and techniques incorporated in the method to address physical, emotional, social, and cognitive aspects of children's development, with the goal of achieving the desired level of English. Data collection was carried out using an observation form and an emotional scale administered to the students. The results indicated a lack of playful interaction involving motor skills and relational characteristics. Therefore, the author designed activities based on the Montessori method, which uses teaching materials that strengthen writing skills through the development of fine and gross motor skills. In this way, students can comprehensively develop their learning at their own pace and according to their individual interests (Peñafiel, 2020).

Moreno and Romero (2023) focused their research on the evaluation of the Montessori method for the autonomous development of children in the initial sub-level II of the Pedro Pablo Egüez Baquerizo Educational Unit. The research used a quantitative approach, was descriptive, and had a non-experimental design. These workshops were held in the classroom through didactic activities of the Montessori methodology, the use of concrete and sensorial materials, and an adequate environment for children to develop their linguistic skills at their own learning pace (Moreno & Romero, 2023). The research made it possible to demonstrate the positive impact that the Montessori method has on the teaching-learning process in such a way that its application in the educational field contributes to the development of children's motor, intellectual and affective skills (Moreno & Romero, 2023).

On the other hand, the research work carried out by Caballero et al. (2022) aimed to use the Montessori method to strengthen English vocabulary in fifth-grade children of basic education. The research was carried out with a sample of 10 fifth-grade primary school children and their parents belonging to the province of Manabí, Ecuador. Furthermore, it had an action research design and a mixed approach. The researchers designed a lesson plan to adapt Montessori methodology activities to the social conditions of the second grade of primary school and English as a foreign language. The results of the tests administered to the children at the end of the educational intervention showed a 42% improvement in learning level with respect to English vocabulary (Caballero et al., 2022).

Learning English as a foreign language is essential in a globalized world, and listening skills are fundamental to this process. It should be noted that during the general basic education stage, students often struggle to develop listening skills in English. At ages 6 and 7, students are in the process of learning to read and write in their native language and learning a new language can create confusion in their learning.

For Holly (2024), innovative teaching methods are essential in Ecuador's public institutions since students lack motivation and fail to develop English language skills optimally, mainly listening skills, which will help them achieve good pronunciation. For this reason, there is interest in analyzing the Montessori method for developing listening skills in English language teaching. Through this educational model, the aim is to satisfy the needs of learners, providing them with an adequate environment to improve their language skills and achieve effective communication.

Sánchez (2022) mentions that the Montessori method is a viable alternative for learning English as a foreign language, as it allows students to acquire the language autonomously and constructively. Furthermore, it provides an excellent educational environment and uses different teaching materials in the classroom so that children can reach the desired level of English language learning.

This research focuses on English language learning using the Montessori method from early ages 6 to 7 since infants, during their first years of life, have a greater capacity for learning and adapting to new environments. The objective of this research is to identify the Montessori method teaching activities related to the development of listening skills in second-grade students of general basic education at the Mariscal Sucre Educational Unit.

Montessori Method

The Montessori method is an educational approach created by the Italian educator and physician Maria Montessori to help children with learning difficulties. Montessori believes that the most important period in

life is from birth to age 6 or 7, as this is when a person's intelligence develops. She also mentions that during their first years of life, children possess an absorbent mind and can learn more than one language if taught with the correct methodology. This method is characterized by developing independence and freedom within limits, respecting the child's natural psychology and physical and emotional development (Newman, 2024).

The educational approach establishes the child as the protagonist, as they are considered unique individuals with their interests and capacity to build their personal and cognitive growth. It is achieved using manipulative materials in an organized and appropriate environment. The goal of the Montessori Method is to foster interest in learning, independence, and a balance between responsibility and freedom. Furthermore, the teacher plays an important role as a guide and facilitator, providing materials designed to be engaging, durable, and stimulating for students' senses (Jared, 2024).

Principles of the Montessori method

Montessori's educational philosophy is based on constructivism, a learning theory that holds that people learn most effectively through direct experience, practice, and discovery rather than direct teaching. According to this perspective, students construct their knowledge by interacting with their environment and actively exploring concepts. Maria Montessori, the founder of this educational method, firmly believed in children's innate capacity to learn and develop through self-exploration and the manipulation of concrete materials (Alquina, 2022).

The Montessori approach also aligns with the ideas of Jean Piaget, who argued that learning is an active process in which children construct mental schemas through interaction with their environment. Piaget emphasized the importance of practical experience and personal discovery in cognitive development (Piaget, 1952). Furthermore, Lev Vygotsky, another influential constructivist theorist, highlighted the importance of the social context in learning, suggesting that interaction with others and collaboration are essential for cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978).

The basic principles of Montessori are detailed below:

Discovery learning

Lev Vygotsky, another influential constructivist theorist, highlighted the importance of social context in learning, suggesting that interaction with others and collaboration are essential for cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky introduced the concept of the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD), which refers to the distance between what a child can do on their own and what they can do with the help of a more capable adult or peer. This concept emphasizes the importance of social interaction in the learning process.

Montessori's educational philosophy, founded on constructivism, promotes a learning environment where students are free to explore, experiment, and discover for themselves, allowing them to build meaningful and lasting knowledge. This approach is not only based on Maria Montessori's ideas but also finds support in the theories of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, who emphasize the importance of practical experience and social interaction in cognitive development (Montero, 2024).

Preparing the educational environment

The Montessori approach to education employs a "prepared environment," which implies that it must be designed and adjusted to the specific needs of students according to their age. It must also encourage movement and activities, be kept clean and orderly, and be visually appealing to students (Alquinga, 2022). The Montessori approach to education employs a "prepared environment," which implies that it must be designed and adjusted to the specific needs of students according to their age. It must also encourage movement and activities, be kept clean and orderly, and be visually appealing to students (Estrella et al., 2020). This concept of a "prepared environment" is fundamental to a child's holistic development, as it provides an environment that facilitates independent learning and exploration.

Maria Montessori believed that the environment should be an extension of the child, allowing them to develop their skills and knowledge naturally and autonomously. Montessori argued that a well-prepared environment should not only be safe and orderly but also stimulating and adapted to each student's individual needs (Montero, 2024).

Carol Dweck, in her work *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2020), highlights that a learning environment that encourages autonomy and active exploration can significantly impact students' development of a growth mindset. Dweck argues that when children can explore and learn autonomously in a supportive environment, they develop greater confidence in their abilities and a greater willingness to face challenges.

Use of sensory materials

One of the most essential elements of the prepared environment in the Montessori method is the incorporation of specific materials created by Montessori and her collaborators. The use of natural materials, such as wood and others, is recommended (Alquinga, 2022). These materials are designed to be attractive, durable, and functional and are intended to encourage independent learning and active exploration.

Maria Montessori firmly believed in the importance of well-designed teaching materials for children's cognitive and physical development. These materials are not only visually appealing but also carefully selected to stimulate students' interest and curiosity. Furthermore, natural materials like wood provide a rich sensory experience, which is crucial for children's sensory and motor development (Narváez & Jiménez, 2022).

Collaborative learning and play

Students will be able to work collaboratively with their peers. It fosters peer learning and, in relation to play, plays an important role in sociocultural development. Teachers should promote and encourage this practice (Siaviki et al., 2024). Collaboration among students not only improves academic learning but also develops social and emotional skills essential for their overall growth.

This approach aligns with Lev Vygotsky's theories, which argue that learning is a social process and that interaction with peers is crucial for cognitive development. Vygotsky introduced the concept of the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD), which refers to the distance between what a child can do on their own and what they can do with the help of a more capable adult or peer. This concept underscores the importance of collaboration and social interaction in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978).

Role of the teacher as guide and supervisor

In the Montessori educational approach, the teacher directs students' learning without interfering in their self-education process. Therefore, their roles focus on preparing the learning environment, observing children to encourage personalized learning, introducing new educational materials, and providing information (Narváez & Jiménez, 2022). This approach allows students to develop their autonomy and capacity for independent learning while the teacher acts as a facilitator and guide.

The Montessori method of teaching English

According to Sánchez (2022), students can learn to identify and produce English sounds from an early age, allowing them to establish a solid foundation in pronunciation and listening comprehension. For successful early English acquisition, children must have consistent and meaningful exposure to the language. This can be achieved through interaction with native speakers, listening to music and stories in English, participating in language immersion programs, and using age—and proficiency-appropriate learning materials.

It is important to note that Montessori materials for teaching English include vocabulary cards, movable letters, three-dimensional objects, books, and stories, among other resources. Furthermore, the Montessori method promotes interaction and collaboration among students, which contributes to the development of communication and social skills. In a Montessori environment, students can practice English in authentic communication situations, such as role-playing, presentations, and debates (Rivera & Rodríguez, 2022).

Stephen Krashen's theory of language learning

According to Villanueva (2021), Stephen Krashen's second language acquisition theory is one of the most influential theories in the field of language learning. It comprises several important concepts related to the acquisition of a second language, such as English. These include comprehensible input, acquisition-learning, the affective filter hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, and the monitor hypothesis.

Furthermore, Krashen argues that meaningful second language learning is a slow process, with speaking skills occurring after listening skills have been developed. He also argues that language is only adequately acquired when individuals understand the messages they receive and are provided with comprehensible communication materials (Alvear & Padilla, 2023).

Comprehensible Input Hypothesis

The input hypothesis in second language learning, such as English, suggests that successful learning depends mainly on the quantity and quality of exposure to the target language. It is worth mentioning that this exposure must be adapted to students' cognitive and socioemotional development, in addition to various sources, such as teachers, classmates, and teaching materials (Alvear & Padilla, 2023). Furthermore, Jared (2024) argues that the input hypothesis is fundamental for children at early ages (0–6 years) since, during this period, infants are receptive to new languages. Therefore, adequate language exposure can strengthen the foundations for lasting linguistic competence.

Listening skills

According to Medina and González (2020), listening skills are essential in the English language learning process. Listening skills are defined as the ability to understand and process spoken English, including sounds, words, phrases, and complete speeches. Furthermore, Bernal (2021) points out that listening skills are fundamental for effective communication in English, as they allow students to understand the meaning of what is being said to them and respond appropriately.

It is important to note that active and attentive listening skills can also contribute to the development of other language skills, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. To improve English listening skills, students must have consistent and varied exposure to the language. It can be achieved through listening to English music, movies, television programs, and podcasts, as well as participating in conversations and debates with native speakers or classmates (García, 2024).

Montessori method activities for developing listening skills

The Montessori educational approach is a practical methodology for teaching English, as it promotes the development of students' language skills (Peggy et al., 2021). To develop children's listening skills, it is essential to create a supportive environment, ensuring a quiet, distraction-free space with easily accessible learning materials. The use of listening materials, such as audio recordings, songs, stories, or podcasts in English, is fundamental to this process. Furthermore, it is important to design active listening activities where students must pay attention and respond to what they hear, such as finding an image that represents a word spoken by the teacher. Repetition and daily practice are essential, and students should be provided with daily opportunities to practice their listening skills through hands-on exercises, videos, and learning games. Montessori promotes both individual and group learning, allowing students to listen and respond individually to recordings, as well as participate in group listening games or conversation activities (Medina and González, 2020).

2. METHODS: METHODOLOGICAL PATH

The research was conducted at the Mariscal Sucre Educational Unit, located in the Mariscal Sucre parish of the Huaca canton. This institution is a rural, fiscally supported, regular education center with 250 students and 21 teachers, two of whom teach English. The study population included two English teachers directly and indirectly and 30 second-grade students indirectly.

The research was designed using a descriptive and narrative design. It addressed the topic of early English language teaching, an area that, although researched, has not been exhaustively explored. The data collection instruments were interviews and field diaries. The sample included English teachers from an educational institution in the Mariscal Sucre parish, Tulcán canton.

The data were processed using a coding process based on Strauss and Corbin (2003). Once coding was completed, the codes were classified into categories and then grouped into discussion topics to explain the most relevant research findings. Permission was sought and obtained from the educational institution's authorities for the research, ensuring their support and participation in the study. Equity was considered in the selection of participants, as well as safeguarding the privacy and confidentiality of information.

3. RESULTS: INDICATIONS AND FINDINGS

For data analysis and interpretation, analytical categories were created based on data collected from the instruments administered to participants, interviews with teachers, and classroom observations conducted through field diaries. Table 1 presents the qualitative data categories focused on in this research.

Tabla 1. Qualitative research data categories

Categories
Methodology for teaching English
Activities related to the development of listening in the classroom

Interview and classroom observation application for English teachers in the educational unit

The research instruments (interviews and classroom observation) were conducted in the second grade of basic general education at the educational institution during a regular English class schedule, during which the teachers showed a willingness to conduct this research work. It is worth mentioning that the two English teachers at the educational unit were considered. Teacher 1 has English language training, and Teacher 2 is a computer science specialist. However, he has taken several English language training courses, which is why he was assigned English as part of his class load.

Below is an analysis of the results obtained during the application of the interview and classroom observation, which are classified into two categories:

CATEGORY 1

- Methodology for teaching English

The language teaching-learning process is subject to several factors that could determine its effectiveness, including the age of the students, the methodology used, and the level of training and years of experience of the teachers (Scrivener, XXX). In this sense, teaching a language to students just beginning school requires strategies and activities that contribute to the development of English language skills at an early age. When teachers were asked about the methodology used in the classroom, they mentioned recreational activities such as "...songs, tongue twisters, readings, educational alphabet, simple readings" (E1). In other cases, "...graphic

methods and invented songs are used to teach topics, for example, family members..." (E2). As can be seen, recreational activities are accompanied by various activities that are ideally suited to teaching English to young children.

Among the questions related to the Montessori method, participants noted that "I did not know it before, but now I do, since I have read about Montessori, and I understand that it refers to play, learning through playing..." (E1). On the other hand, another teacher noted that he did not remember precisely about this method but that it is related to games: "I honestly do not remember about the method, but I think it is related to games..." and concluded by saying that "...with the Montessori method, little is taught, but children learn" (E2).

CATEGORY 2

- Activities related to the development of listening skills in English classes

Regarding activities and challenges related to the Montessori method, participants mentioned that "...the ideal would be not to speak to the students in Spanish at all, and for them to understand the class topic, it is necessary to use pictograms and body language..." (E1). Although this method seeks to develop basic areas such as sensory, logical-mathematical, and science through experiments, exposing children to a foreign language using body language can promote the understanding of words and phrases (Espinoza & Eudaldo, 2022). Other teachers maintain that game-related activities are immersed within the Montessori method. They said this because "...Children first learn to pronounce, know the word, and then to write" (E2).

Regarding the results obtained from the observation through the field diary, the following categories were obtained: (1) start of class, (2) Activities related to the development of listening in class and (3) Activities related to the evaluation of listening in class.

During classroom observations, it was determined that teachers demonstrate a positive attitude when starting classes and beginning with songs. The use of the native language can occur, but it does not become a classroom habit. The greater the student's exposure to the foreign language, with word patterns expressed through body language, the better they will understand the instructions given. Therefore, the use of translanguaging is permitted and recommended when the moment warrants it in the classroom (Rivera & Rodríguez, 2022).

Regarding activities to develop listening skills, sometimes instructions were given in Spanish, and other times, the class began with the screening of videos related to the topic being taught. Generally, playful activities will be the most appropriate way to reach students who are just beginning to learn a language, particularly children, as they are at a stage where play is the key to developing the necessary skills of a foreign language (Gómez & Urraco, 2022).

4. DISCUSSION: MEANINGS IN DIALOGUE

The analysis of the qualitative data categories obtained in the research revealed significant patterns in early English language teaching. The categories identified included English teaching methodology and listening-related activities in the classroom. Teaching methodology showed significant variability among teachers, with some using more traditional approaches and others more innovative. Classroom activities related to listening development were diverse, including listening to stories, songs, and dialogues, as well as listening comprehension exercises. Students were observed to show greater motivation and participation in classes where interactive methods and varied activities were used. Furthermore, teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of these activities were overwhelmingly positive, although areas for improvement were identified, such as the need for more resources and ongoing training.

These results align with Krashen's (1982) theory, which emphasizes the importance of natural language acquisition and the need for an environment rich in comprehensible input. Krashen argues that students learn best when exposed to language that is slightly more advanced than their current level but is comprehensible and relevant to them. Furthermore, García (2024) points out the importance of language production and interaction in the learning process. García (2021) suggests that language production helps students internalize linguistic structures, while Villanueva (2021) highlights that interaction facilitates the negotiation of meanings and error correction. These arguments support the observation that interactive methods and varied activities, such as those related to listening development, are crucial for successful early English teaching. In this sense, variability in teaching methodology and the inclusion of diverse activities contribute to more effective and motivating learning for students.

Lesson plans for English teachers

Table 2 presents an analysis of the content of the lesson plans provided by the teachers of the Educational Unit under study. It was divided into two categories: methodology for teaching English and Activities related to the development of listening skills in the classroom.

Tabla 2. Analysis of English teachers' lesson plans

Category	Component analyzed		Lesson planning description	
			TEACHER 1	TEACHER 2
Methodology for teaching English	Teaching strategies implemented		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Game-based learning methodology• Basic English expressions and questions (hello, look, open your book, How are you?)	Using the ERCA (Experience, Reflection, Conceptualization, Application) method to teach English greetings
	Teaching resources used		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Songs and stories• Pre Book A1.1• Notebook• Teaching materials (Eye-catching graphics according to the class topic - Greetings in English)• Educational stamps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Graphics• Videos• Graphic organizers• Songs• Group activities
	Teacher-student interaction dynamics		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pair activities and execution of basic commands (look at this, listen to me, write in your book, open the door)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group activities.• Displays simple descriptions of objects and family members.• Creation of new songs with the collaboration of teachers and students.
	Active listening exercises		Listen and repeat basic phrases, identify simple words and phrases	Watching graphics and videos Replication of greetings in songs
Activities related to the development of listening	Methods of assessing listening comprehension		Oral lessons Questions and answers about the content heard	Lessons and oral tests Checklists Simple oral presentations
	Strategies to strengthen listening skills		Feedback and repetition of activities	Repetition of greetings in songs and oral presentations in pairs.

TEACHER 1

Teacher 1's lesson plan for teaching English greetings, focusing on "Hello," reveals a methodological approach that, although structured, presents opportunities for greater alignment with the Montessori Method. The teaching strategies implemented, such as the use of simple phrases and questions, encourage classroom interaction, an essential aspect of Montessori pedagogy. However, the reliance on traditional resources such as books and notebooks suggest that it could be enriched with manipulatives and visual materials that facilitate more active and sensorial learning. According to Jara, Zapata et al. (2021), the Montessori Method emphasizes the importance of students exploring and discovering concepts through direct experience, which could be enhanced with more interactive and tactile activities.

Regarding listening development, listening and repetition activities are essential, but assessment could be complemented with visual and association methods. Feedback and repetition are key in the Montessori Method, and the use of visual aids during these processes could increase their effectiveness. Villanueva (2021) reports that greater integration of Montessori principles, such as a prepared environment, the use of songs, and direct exposure to the target language, could significantly improve the development of listening skills in students.

TEACHER 2

Teacher 2's plan for teaching English greetings, such as "Hello" and "Goodbye," uses the ERCA (Experience, Reflection, Conceptualization, Application) method, which aligns well with the Montessori Method's experiential approach. This method promotes active and reflective learning through viewing graphics and videos, followed by reflection and practical application. However, while the plan includes diverse resources such as songs and partner activities, it could benefit from greater integration of manipulative materials to encourage more sensorial and tactile learning, characteristic of the Montessori Method.

Regarding listening development, active listening activities, such as repeating greetings in songs, are effective and aligned with the practical approach of the Montessori Method. Assessing listening comprehension through oral and written tests is appropriate but could be complemented with visual and kinesthetic activities for a more comprehensive approach. Feedback and repetition of activities are essential in the Montessori Method, and although they are present, the use of visual aids during these processes could increase their effectiveness.

Maria Montessori, in her work "The Secret of Childhood," emphasizes that children learn best through active exploration and manipulation of concrete materials. This approach is reflected in Teacher 2's plan, which uses the ERCA Method to encourage observation, reflection, and practical application. However, Montessori also advocates the use of manipulative materials that allow students to interact with the concepts they are learning physically. It suggests that, although Teacher 2's plan is sound, it could benefit further from the integration of tactile and visual resources that facilitate multisensory learning.

Furthermore, Montessori argues that the learning environment must be carefully prepared to support student autonomy and exploration. In this sense, active listening activities and feedback in teacher planning are steps in the right direction but incorporating more visual and kinesthetic activities could enrich the learning process, aligning it more closely with Montessori principles.

Therefore, by more fully integrating Maria Montessori principles, such as the use of manipulative materials and the creation of an interactive learning environment, teacher planning two could further enhance the development of students' listening skills, providing a richer and more effective educational experience.

Comparative analysis between classroom observation and plans presented by teachers

Table 3 presents a comparative analysis of the classroom observation carried out through the field diary and the lesson plans provided by the educational unit's English teachers.

Tabla 3. Analysis of English teachers' lesson plans

Category	Component	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
Methodology for teaching English	Planning	Game-based learning Using basic instructions and Wh-questions for interaction in English.	Using the ERCA Method (Experience, Reflection, Conceptualization, Application)
	Observation	The teacher began the class with an English greeting and a song, to which the students responded enthusiastically.	The teacher greeted in English and showed a video about greetings in English.
	Comparative analysis	The initial greeting in English was fulfilled; however, although the song was not planned, it caught the students' attention.	The English greeting video was successful in capturing the students' attention; however, half of the class did not actively participate.
Activities related to the development of listening	Planning	Listen to and repeat basic phrases, and identify simple words and phrases related to greetings in English. Activities related to game-based learning to achieve a better understanding	Observing graphics and videos, replicating greetings in songs. Creating songs in English related to the subject of study (greetings in English)
	Observation	The students listened to a song about greetings in English, but some students were restless and did not pay attention to the video. There was no evidence of adherence to the game-based learning method during the class; instead, the behaviorist method was observed.	The students showed interest in the video, as it featured eye-catching animated puppet characters, but two students were engaged in playing games. There was evidence of successful songwriting related to the class topic (greetings in English). However, most students lacked collaboration. Only 3 of 30 students participated in the activity.
	Comparative analysis	The song planned in class was carried out; however, it did not attract the students' attention because it was not attractive to them. The game-based learning methodology planned in class was not followed, as the use of behaviorism and rote learning was evident.	The video planned for the class was completed, and the use of puppets engaged the students. The activity of creating songs in accordance with the class theme was completed. However, not all students collaborated.

TEACHER 1

Regarding the English teaching methodology, Teacher 1 planned to use game-based learning, basic instructions, and Wh-questions to encourage interaction in English. During the observation, it was noted that the teacher began the class with an English greeting and a song, which captured the students' attention. Although the song was not planned, it was effective in capturing the students' attention.

This approach, although not wholly aligned with the initial planning, demonstrates the importance of flexibility in the classroom. According to Martínez et al. (2020), adaptability in teaching is crucial to maintaining student interest and motivation. However, the comparative analysis reveals that, although the initial greeting in English was fulfilled, the planned methodology was not fully implemented, suggesting a disconnect between theory and practice. It may be due to contextual factors or the need for further preparation in game-based teaching techniques, as Moya (2024) points out.

Second, regarding listening activities, Teacher 1 planned activities such as listening to and repeating basic phrases, identifying simple words and phrases related to English greetings, and game-based activities to improve comprehension. During the observation, students listened to a song about English greetings, but some became restless and did not pay attention. Furthermore, the game-based learning method was not followed, and a behaviorist approach was observed instead. This finding suggests that, although the planned song was followed, it was not sufficiently engaging for all students. According to Krashen (1978), meaningful learning occurs when students are motivated and engaged in the activities. A lack of active participation may indicate a need to review and improve teaching strategies to make them more interactive and engaging. On the other hand, the use of behaviorism, although effective in specific contexts, may not be the best option to foster deep and lasting language understanding, as argued by Lightbown and Spada (2021).

TEACHER 2

Regarding the methodology category for teaching English, Teacher 2 planned to use the ERCA (Experience, Reflection, Conceptualization, Application) method. During the observation, it was noticed that the teacher greeted students in English and showed a video about English greetings, which captured the students' attention. However, only half of the class actively participated. This approach, although effective in capturing initial attention, failed to maintain the engagement of all students throughout the class. According to Richards (2020), it is crucial not only to capture students' initial attention but also to maintain it throughout the class through interactive and varied activities. The comparative analysis reveals that, although the planned use of the video was fulfilled, the lack of active participation from all students suggests a need for additional strategies to encourage participation. Moya (2024) argues that active participation is essential for meaningful learning and that teachers should be prepared to adapt their methods based on students' needs and responses.

On the other hand, regarding the listening activities, Teacher 2 planned the observation of graphics and videos, the replication of greetings in songs, and the creation of songs in English related to the topic of study. During the observation, the students showed interest in the video due to the presence of striking animated characters such as puppets. However, only three of the thirty students participated in the song-creation activity. This finding indicates that, although the video was engaging, it failed to translate into active participation in other activities. According to Krashen (1978), cited in Martínez et al. (2020), language learning is most effective when students are motivated and engaged in the activities. Lack of participation may indicate a need to revise the activities to make them more inclusive and engaging for all students. Lightbown and Spada (2021) suggest that using varied activities tailored to student's interests can improve participation and learning.

5. CONCLUSIONS: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Research reveals that the Montessori methodology, which focuses on playful activities and learning through play, is effective for developing language skills in early children. Teachers emphasized that the use of songs, tongue twisters, and simple readings, along with graphic methods and pictograms, significantly facilitates English language comprehension and learning. Integrating playful and visual elements into English teaching can enhance language acquisition in the early school years.

Teachers recognize the importance of developing listening skills from an early age, although they face several challenges in this process. It is crucial to minimize the use of Spanish and maximize exposure to the foreign language through body language and pictograms. Despite these challenges, teachers recognize that the Montessori method, with its focus on learning through play, can overcome these barriers and foster a deeper understanding of the English language in students.

English classroom observations reveal that teachers demonstrate a positive attitude and use songs to open lessons, aligning with Montessori principles. Although occasional use of Spanish is observed, greater exposure to the foreign language through word patterns and body language improves comprehension of instructions (Alvear & Padilla, 2023). Playful activities are considered the most appropriate way to teach children in the initial stage of language acquisition, highlighting the importance of play in the development of language skills.

6. DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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7. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1 Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Research, Methodology, Writing – original draft –, Writing – review and editing –

Author 2 Research, Methodology, Writing – original draft –

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