

RELIGACIÓN

R E V I S T A

Analysis of EFL teaching approaches for students with intellectual disabilities: case study of a student with cerebral palsy

Análisis de los enfoques de enseñanza de EFL para estudiantes con discapacidad intelectual: estudio de caso de un estudiante con parálisis cerebral

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education, as a matter of policy, in addition to making education accessible to all, is intended to foster a diverse and nurturing learning environment for learners with disabilities. This study explores English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching approaches for a 15-year-old eighth-grade student with cerebral palsy at Unidad Educativa 11 de Noviembre, Machachi, Canton of Mejía. Qualitative data collection involved surveys of teachers who had worked with Juanito (a pseudonym), along with insights from professionals supporting Juanito, including a Ministry of Education psychologist. Findings reveal Juanito thrives in collaborative settings but is prone to distractions, occasionally disrupting class. He generally enjoys group activities but sometimes prefers one-on-one instruction, posing instructional challenges. The student's motivation and energy levels are also affected by seizure medication. Data showed strategies include individual, paired, and group activities, along with the integration of technology. However, their success can be contingent on the student's emotional state. These results emphasize the urgent need for educational institutions to allocate resources and develop infrastructure conducive to inclusive education in the EFL class, accommodating the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Future research avenues include longitudinal studies, comparative analyses across different educational settings, the inclusion of family and student perspectives, exploration of assistive technologies, assessment of teacher training programs, and policy impact evaluations in inclusive education.

Keywords: Disabilities; Cerebral palsy; Strategies; Material; Students.

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<http://doi.org/10.46652/rgn.v9i39.1139>
ISSN 2477-9083
Vol. 9 No. 39 enero-marzo, 2024, e2401139
Quito, Ecuador

Enviado: septiembre 20, 2023
Aceptado: noviembre 25, 2023
Publicado: diciembre 11, 2023
Publicación Continua



RESUMEN

La educación inclusiva, como cuestión de política, además de hacer que la educación sea accesible para todos, tiene por objeto fomentar un entorno de aprendizaje diverso y enriquecedor para los alumnos con discapacidad. Este estudio explora los enfoques de enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) para un estudiante de 15 años de octavo grado con parálisis cerebral en la Unidad Educativa 11 de Noviembre, Machachi, cantón Mejía. La recopilación de datos cualitativos incluyó encuestas a profesores que habían trabajado con Juanito (seudónimo), junto con la opinión de profesionales que apoyan a Juanito, incluido un psicólogo del Ministerio de Educación. Los resultados revelan que Juanito se desenvuelve bien en entornos de colaboración, pero es propenso a las distracciones, interrumpiendo ocasionalmente la clase. Por lo general, le gustan las actividades en grupo, pero a veces prefiere las clases individuales, lo que plantea problemas de enseñanza. La motivación y los niveles de energía del alumno también se ven afectados por la medicación anticonvulsiva. Los datos mostraron que las estrategias incluyen actividades individuales, en parejas y en grupo, junto con la integración de la tecnología. Sin embargo, su éxito puede depender del estado emocional del alumno. Estos resultados ponen de relieve la urgente necesidad de que las instituciones educativas asignen recursos y desarrollen infraestructuras que favorezcan la educación inclusiva en la clase de EFL, atendiendo a las diversas necesidades de los estudiantes con discapacidad. Entre las futuras vías de investigación se encuentran los estudios longitudinales, los análisis comparativos entre distintos entornos educativos, la inclusión de las perspectivas de las familias y los alumnos, la exploración de las tecnologías de apoyo, la evaluación de los programas de formación del profesorado y las evaluaciones del impacto de las políticas en la educación inclusiva.

Palabras clave: Discapacidad; Parálisis cerebral; Estrategias; Material; Alumnos.

Introduction

Cerebral palsy is a complex neurological disorder characterized by diverse motor impairments that stem from brain injury or abnormalities during early development. These impairments, including spasticity, dyskinesia, and ataxia, affect muscle control, coordination, and movement, necessitating a nuanced understanding of their impact (Delobel et al., 2022; Tegler, 2020). Beyond physical challenges, cerebral palsy significantly influences communication skills and cognitive development, impeding speech production and facial expressions, which can hinder effective communication and social interactions (Anglin, 2021). The interplay between motor limitations and cognitive processing can lead to delays in fine motor skills development, affecting tasks like handwriting and typing, potentially diverting cognitive resources from academic content absorption (Gonçalves, 2021). To address these challenges, educators can create supportive, inclusive learning environments that accommodate motor limitations, utilize assistive technologies, and foster meaningful communication opportunities, aligning with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Sarmiento et al., 2022).

Inclusive education is a pedagogical approach that fosters a diverse and nurturing learning environment, valuing the uniqueness of each student, regardless of their abilities or disabilities (Robiyansah et al., 2020). This approach celebrates diversity, recognizing that it enriches the learning experience for all students by promoting empathy, tolerance, and open-mindedness, as well as it recognizes the different barriers and challenges faced for its implementation, which are related to attitudinal, social, infrastructural, educational, and economic domains (Chandrasaha, 2022). Particularly for students with cerebral palsy, inclusive education offers a supportive fra-

network that enhances their educational journey, primarily through social integration. Inclusive classrooms enable students with cerebral palsy to interact with their peers without disabilities, facilitating the development of social skills, empathy, and a sense of belonging (Muis, 2022). This aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, emphasizing the importance of social interactions in learning. Inclusive education encourages collaboration among students with diverse abilities, allowing them to support one another's cognitive development and create a supportive learning environment (Garrels & Arvidsson, 2018).

Education is a fundamental right of all people, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Inclusive education ensures that students with mental disabilities have equal access to educational opportunities. By studying techniques for teaching English as a foreign language to these students, it is possible to make education more inclusive and accessible. In the early 1990s, Ecuador began recognizing individuals with disabilities as rights holders, coinciding with UNESCO's research project on a new approach to disability care and the introduction of the term children with special educational needs. This marked the initial steps towards implementing an inclusive educational model (Vicepresidencia de la República del Ecuador & Ministerio de Educación, 2011).

In recent years, the concept of inclusion gained traction in both social and educational spheres due to the imperative to reduce exclusion rates (Robiyansah et al., 2020). However, integration efforts haven't fully transformed the entire educational system, prompting the need for a more comprehensive shift towards inclusion.

The Ecuadorian government's commitment to addressing disability-related issues is evident in its policies, most notably through the Decennial Education Plan approved in 2006 by the Ministry of Education [MINEDUC, by its acronym in Spanish]. The plan's eight policies are characterized by an inclusive focus that ensures educational rights for all, regardless of personal, cultural, ethnic, social, or disability-related conditions (MINEDUC, 2006). Current policies in Ecuador aim to establish inclusive education as a priority, in alignment with the country's constitution. The Constitution emphasizes the right to quality education for all, including those with disabilities. It underscores the importance of fully integrating individuals with disabilities into the regular education system and society at large (Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2008).

Furthermore, it holds significant importance to delve into the specific challenges that educators have faced when working with students with disabilities (Garzón & Goodley, 2019), particularly when their circumstances align with conditions such as cerebral palsy, as seen in the context of this case study. By openly addressing the complexities of managing a classroom consisting of many students, wherein one student presents unique needs due to cerebral palsy, within an educational environment lacking adequate training and support, the critical nuances of fostering inclusive education come to the forefront (Sandoval et al., 2021). The multifaceted intricacies of this scenario accentuate the urgency of the research at hand in its mission to advance inclusive practices. The many challenges, including varied learning styles, individualized requirements, and the dearth of comprehensive training for educators, serve as a compelling call to action (Sedláčková & Kantor, 2022).

In the realm of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to students with cerebral palsy, several pedagogical approaches and techniques have been devised to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment (Núñez, 2021). Recognizing the unique abilities and limitations of each student is fundamental, with individualized instruction at the core, involving tailored lesson plans and activities, additional time for tasks, simplified instructions, or alternative ways to demonstrate understanding, ensuring optimal learning outcomes (Bourke et al., 2018). Adapting teaching materials, including larger fonts, high-contrast visuals, and tactile elements, accommodates students with visual or motor challenges, while digital resources offer customization (Jansheski, 2022). Engaging multiple senses through visual, auditory, and tactile elements enhances comprehension, memory retention, and engagement (Hettiarachchi, et al., 2020). Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) methods are pivotal for students with communication difficulties, enabling active participation in language learning (Saturno et al., 2015). The Universal Learning Design (DUA) emphasizes technology's role in supporting students with disabilities, breaking down barriers and recognizing individual differences in learning styles (Nuñez, 2021). Finally, scaffolding, aligned with Vygotsky's theory, involves providing temporary assistance tailored to students' abilities and limitations, ensuring comprehensible instruction and meaningful participation (Tegler, 2020).

As a quick literature review, the study by Vailant et al. (2022), research aimed to identify determinants of spoken language comprehension in children with cerebral palsy (CP) across different developmental stages. They found that 59% of the children exhibited below-average spoken language comprehension, with functional communication being a significant determinant in all stages. The study underscores the importance of early involvement in communication activities and ongoing assessment to address language-related challenges in children with CP. Additionally, Hettiarachchi et al. (2020), emphasized the use of multi-sensory stimuli to enhance communication and language skills in children with intellectual disabilities, showing positive improvements in vocabulary naming. Furthermore, et al. (2023), explored the integration of children with intellectual disabilities into English language teaching, highlighting the importance of customized materials, curricular adaptations, and family support in fostering inclusivity.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of inclusive education and equal opportunities for students with disabilities. By studying the techniques used in teaching English as a foreign language to students with mental disabilities, we can contribute to the goal of inclusive education and ensure that these students have the same opportunities to learn a foreign language as their peers. As such, the primary objective of this study is to examine a range of strategies and techniques that can establish an environment conducive to learning, specifically in the context of teaching English as a foreign language to a student grappling with cerebral palsy.

Methodology

Participants

The research was conducted within the confines of Mejia Canton, specifically at the Unidad Educativa 11 de Noviembre, Machachi, where the focus was directed towards Juanito (a pseudonym), a student enrolled in Eighth grade A. Juanito's diagnostic condition of cerebral palsy was confirmed by the Ministry of Health, with the diagnosis being provided by a neurologist. Over a period of three years, Juanito had been receiving therapeutic interventions, and he currently continues to engage with therapies. Despite being chronologically 14 years old, his cognitive comprehension level is that of a four-year-old at the Initial 2 stage.

A cohort of seven teachers directly involved in instructing Juanito were also included, as were two professionals from the DECE [Department of Student Counseling, for its acronym in Spanish] and the Student Wellbeing department, both under the purview of the Education Ministry. In total, the study involved the participation of ten individuals. The research methodology involved the use of an observation sheet for the student, while the seven teachers completed surveys, and the two DECE professionals participated in interviews to facilitate comprehensive data collection.

Approach

This study operated within the framework of a census process, which essentially signifies that the population and sample were synonymous, possessing identical quantities. This methodological choice was driven by the inherent constraints of the study's scope, primarily attributable to the limited and compact nature of the individuals under investigation.

A qualitative methodology was applied to obtain a deeper understanding of the strategies and techniques used in the classroom. The investigative process involved the administration of surveys among seven teachers from various subject areas responsible for instructing Juanito at the third-grade level. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were undertaken with psychologists who have direct involvement with the student. These interviews were complemented by a meticulously implemented observation sheet designed to systematically document and capture the intricate details of Juanito's developmental progress.

Data Collection

Survey

The survey was conducted among seven teachers at the Unidad Educativa 11 de Noviembre in Mejía canton, comprising a total of ten questions. These questions encompassed a mix of open-ended and closed-ended formats, including dichotomous (YES/NO), Likert-scale (ranging from frequently to never; excellent to bad), and others. The instrument was piloted, it became evident that these ten survey questions yielded invaluable data and insights for our research objectives. Notably, none of the questions were considered distracting or irrelevant, leading to the inclusion of all responses in our analytical process. Although there was initial contemplation of adding one or two potentially distracting questions, this notion was ultimately discarded to maintain the survey's adaptability and alignment with the respondents' preferences.

Significantly, during the pilot phase, the participating teachers actively engaged in providing a substantial volume of recommendations and suggestions for refining the survey questions. This collaborative effort was undertaken to bolster the precision of the survey items and ensure their relevance not only to this present study but also to prospective research endeavors. The survey's primary objective was to elicit insights into the strategies employed by teachers in Juanito's educational context and to identify those that have proven particularly beneficial. It aimed to gauge the overall classroom environment's effectiveness in facilitating Juanito's learning and to gather educators' perspectives on his academic progress across various subjects.

Interviews

Two professionals from the Psychology and Wellbeing Department at the school were interviewed onsite to provide insights into Juanito's profile. During a one-hour session, they shared their expertise and strategies. Initially, they provided a clinical overview of Juanito, which served as background information. Subsequently, they addressed each query related to their familiarity with Juanito, his academic progress, and his specific limitations. To optimize the interview experience and prevent any undue fatigue or information dilution, every effort was made to keep the interview concise, ensuring it did not overburden the participants.

Observation

The selection of the direct observation technique and instrument for this study was primarily driven by the unique intellectual characteristics of the student under examination. Given that traditional methods such as exams, interviews, or surveys would not be suitable for Juanito, direct observation emerged as the most fitting approach. This observational process took two weeks during the months of September and October 2023 and involved the documentation of various parameters.

The cornerstone of these observations was the observation sheet, a tool used to capture and record Juanito's interactions, behaviors, and educational progress within his specific learning environment. Tailored to accommodate his distinctive needs and traits, the observation sheet played a pivotal role in comprehensively understanding Juanito's educational journey. Through systematic observations, this sheet was deployed to unveil insights into Juanito's engagement, communication, motor skills, social interactions, emotional responses, overall classroom participation and independence and self-care.

One of the aspects firstly evaluated was engagement and interaction. This segment delved into Juanito's propensity to initiate interactions with both peers and educators, as well as his capacity to respond positively to such engagements. Furthermore, attention and focus were monitored to gauge his ability to sustain concentration on tasks and the level of distraction he encountered.

Active participation and communication constituted one of the components of the observation sheet. Observer was able to document Juanito's involvement in classroom activities, his preferred modes of communication (whether verbal, gestural, or through sign language), and his expressions of thoughts and emotions. The assessment also extended to fine and gross motor skills, evaluating his proficiency in handling writing and drawing implements, as well as his mobility and engagement in physical activities.

In Juanito's educational journey, the observation sheet placed considerable emphasis on social interaction and emotional responses, recognizing their pivotal roles. Within its framework, ample space was provided to document Juanito's interactions with peers, his aptitude for interpreting social cues, and his proactive engagement or responses in conversations. Furthermore, the observation sheet tracked his emotional responses, encompassing indicators of emotional regulation, expressions of both frustration and joy, and any discernible influence on his overall learning experience.

Equally integral to the assessment were considerations of independence and self-care. This section of the sheet evaluated Juanito's progress in autonomously completing tasks, the extent to which he requires assistance in self-care activities, and the development of his personal autonomy, which is an essential aspect of his growth.

To ensure a comprehensive record, the observation sheet was complemented by a dedicated section for notes and comments. This space empowered the observer to furnish contextual information, detail specific incidents, and offer additional insights pertaining to Juanito's behaviors and progress. This qualitative dimension augmented the quantitative checkboxes, offering a perspective of Juanito's daily experiences within the classroom.

It's worth noting that this observation sheet was thoughtfully developed by the researcher to best suit the study's objectives and the unique needs of Juanito. It was administered on three separate occasions, each spanning a two-month period, with consistent timing across all three cases—commencing in September and concluding in October 2023.

Results

Survey results

The surveys were conducted in the Unidad Educativa 11 de Noviembre in two distinct phases, spanning from April to May. The first phase occurred during the week of April 24 to 30, 2023, and transitioned into the second phase, covering the week of May 1 to 7, 2023. Following data collection, a thorough analysis was performed, resulting in the subsequent findings.

Pedagogical tools

A consensus was reached among seven teachers who emphasized the significance of creating an accommodating pedagogical environment that aligns with Juanito's unique requirements. Their recommendations included the use of concrete materials like flashcards and posters as beneficial teaching aids. Additionally, they highlighted the value of integrating audiovisual techniques and utilizing computer-assisted instructional technology (CIT) to enrich Juanito's learning experience.

However, a prevailing concern among the teachers was the inadequacy of the classroom setting itself. Most teachers observed that the existing classroom infrastructure did not align with Juanito's educational requirements. The presence of 36 other students in the classroom compounded this challenge, making it considerably arduous to provide Juanito with the individualized attention necessary for his skill development.

Improvements in the Teaching-Learning Process

Within this context, the Spanish teacher emphasized the potential efficacy of incorporating visual aids, particularly utilizing pictures to complement textual material, as an instrumental approach to enhance Juanito's learning experience. This visual support aids his comprehension of texts, aligning with his unique learning profile.

The consensus among the teachers revolved around the necessity for more substantial involvement from the Psychology department, particularly in providing guidance on optimizing Juanito's learning process. Simultaneously, they acknowledged the active role played by the UDAI department in working with students.

Some colleagues acknowledged that while Juanito may not have made significant strides in his academic journey, there has been notable progress in his social learning. His ability to engage and socialize with classmates and peers within the school environment has demonstrated remarkable development. Overall, the majority of teachers concurred that Juanito would benefit from specialized assistance by professionals who could collaborate in analyzing, strategizing, and sharing their expertise with educators.

Interview results

The interview was conducted with two DECE department professionals and the Spelling Support Teacher at Mejia Canton School. It involved nine questions to provide insights into Juanito's educational journey and support systems. Juanito is diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy, officially recognized by the Ministry of Public Health. He is also undergoing the qualification process for Intellectual Disability. The intervention protocol for disabled students includes introducing the case to the teaching staff, followed by steps such as socialization, curricular adaptation guidance (including microcurricular planning and DUA), promoting Positive Language, sharing strategic documents, counseling, and continuous support to teachers, including classroom visits, evaluations, exams, and implementing ABP (Active Based Learning). The process ends with ongoing monitoring of the student's academic progress.

Pedagogical Strategies

The interview provided insights into the pedagogical strategies employed to support Juanito's learning journey. These strategies are designed to address the unique needs of a student like Juanito, who has cerebral palsy and is undergoing assessment for intellectual disability. The respondent, serving as both a professional in DECE (Department for Students with Special Educational Needs) and an inclusion support teacher, outlines several crucial strategies for facilitating Juanito's educational progress.

One fundamental strategy highlighted is socialization. The process began with sharing information about Juanito's case with the teaching staff. This initial step ensures that all educators are well-informed about Juanito's distinctive requirements and the challenges he may face in his educational journey.

Curricular adaptation is another key strategy emphasized in the interview. The professionals stressed the importance of adapting the curriculum to align with Juanito's individual needs. This adaptation process involves meticulous planning at a microcurricular level and the implementation of differentiated units of analysis (DUA), which play a vital role in accommodating Juanito's learning requirements.

...As a Support Teacher for Inclusion, the intervention process begins with the socialization of the case to the teaching staff, followed by the provision of guidance and advice on the topic of curriculum adaptation (micro-curricular planning, Differentiated Units of Analysis–DUA), sensitivity processes (Positive language), the delivery of a strategic document, continuous guidance and support to the teaching staff (classroom visits, evaluations, exams, and Active-Based Pedagogies–ABP), and finally, monitoring the student's academic progress. (DECE professionals, personal communication, 2023)

Furthermore, the professionals highlighted the importance of sensibilizing sensitizing teachers on the student's needs. Educators are encouraged to use positive language and approach interactions with Juanito in a sensitive and inclusive manner. Additionally, the professionals emphasized the significance of continuous support. The pedagogical process doesn't end with the initial strategies' implementation but extends with consistent and unwavering support.

Communication and Social Skills

Despite Juanito's integration into the mainstream education system, the professionals noted that his articulatory language difficulties significantly hinder his capacity to express himself effectively, which, consequently, impacts his social interactions. Additionally, the professionals emphasized a significant disparity between Juanito's chronological age and his cognitive age.

The student does not have his articulatory language fully structured, and he will hardly be able to express himself; hence, his social relationships are affected. Furthermore, the student's chronological age is 15 years, while his mental age corresponds to 7 years old. Therefore, he does not fit into the ordinary education environment but rather into specialized education (DECE professionals, personal communication, 2023).

The professionals further emphasized the ongoing efforts in sensitization for transferring Juanito to an educational institution that can better accommodate his unique educational requirements. This perspective reflects a recognition that Juanito's current educational setting may not be optimal for fostering his communicative and social development.

Educational Resources

It is revealed that the classroom lacks the necessary didactic materials needed to effectively support Juanito's learning journey. Instead, the burden falls on teachers to create materials tailored to the curriculum.

The student is enrolled in Upper Basic education; therefore, the classroom does not have didactic material. The teacher is the one who creates didactic material according to the topic to be developed. Furthermore, there is support and guidance from the Inclusion Support Teacher, who provides pedagogical strategies to adapt the learning of Upper Basic education to the student's educational needs (degree of adaptation and level of competence) (DECE professionals, personal communication, 2023).

While teachers do their best to adapt their teaching methods and materials, the interviewee, a professional in inclusive education, underscores the importance of more comprehensive support. This support includes guidance on how to adapt the learning experience to meet Juanito's specific needs.

Observation sheet results

The observer noted that during the English class, Juanito displayed effective collaborative work when paired with a classmate, as he felt at ease with the support of his friend. Over the course of two weeks, the Observation sheet was employed during English lessons to assess various aspects, including interaction, classroom attentiveness, participation, communication, and motor skills. Notably, Juanito's learning approach appeared diverse, with some days showing eagerness to work, while on others, he exhibited reluctance, necessitating improvised activities to maintain engagement. Furthermore, it was observed that Juanito exhibited sociability with his peers; however, his friends did not consistently exhibit the patience required for collaborative work, as sometimes they avoid doing teamwork with him.

In terms of the teaching-learning process involving Juanito, the observer reflected on the valuable experience gained. Patience, creativity, respect for Juanito's limitations, and adaptability were highlighted as essential qualities developed through this experience. Despite encountering limitations in Juanito's retention of learned material, the observer learned to appreciate his English language progress and leverage it to introduce new concepts. The observer acknowledged the invaluable support provided by Juanito's mother in facilitating the implementation of new teaching strategies. Due to the school's lack of internet access, technology-based teaching methods (TICS) were not feasible. Instead, the observer relied on tangible resources such as cards, paper sheets, and stickers to effectively engage Juanito.

An anecdote of note involved fostering inclusion within the class. The observer mentioned assigning an activity to the entire class, and, in Juanito's case, adapting the task to accommodate his abilities. In this instance, Juanito surprised the class with an outstanding presentation, describing his dog as his best friend, albeit in Spanish due to his communication limitations. The coherent presentation received applause from his classmates, highlighting the success of the inclusive approach employed in the classroom.

Discussion

This study identified multiple barriers to inclusive education across attitudinal, social, infrastructural, educational, and economic domains portrayed by Chandrasahsa (2022). Within attitudinal barriers, issues such as teacher skill gaps, negative attitudes, and stereotypes were prevalent, while social barriers encompassed discrimination, cultural influences, and parental misconceptions, similar to the ones reported to be common in this environment by Garzón & Goodley (2019). Infrastructural challenges were linked to inadequate facilities and resources, and educational barriers involved curriculum rigidity, language difficulties, and challenging examination systems. Economic barriers were tied to factors like poverty, limited infrastructure, and financial constraints.

Robiyansah et al. (2020), suggest that this comprehensive identification of barriers underscores the challenges in delivering inclusive English language education to individuals with CP, emphasizing the urgent need to address these issues. To promote effective inclusion and learning, enhancements in pedagogical tools, teaching methodologies, communication skills, and educational resources are imperative, particularly for students with disabilities like Juanito.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of scaffolding can be applied here. Educators can provide the necessary support and guidance to students with CP, building on their existing skills and gradually increasing the level of challenge. As mentioned by Garrels & Arvidsson (2018), this scaffolding approach is essential for creating a supportive learning environment and ensuring that students can progress effectively in EFL. Similar to Juanito's case, the study developed by Tegler (2020), states that it may be challenging for educators to provide individualized attention, as scaffolding can be frustrating when there is a lack of experience on instructional approaches and partner strategies, as it was mentioned by the DECE professionals, as the burden falls on teachers to create materials tailored to the curriculum, underscoring the importance of more comprehensive support. This support includes guidance on how to adapt the learning experience to meet Juanito's specific needs. However, adopting inclusive strategies, such as peer support or student mentors, can help distribute support more effectively. The participation of shadow teachers could be another strategy to advance with this group of students.

EFL educators should heed the advice of incorporating technology, such as audiovisual techniques and computer-assisted instructional technology (CIT), into their teaching methods as an alternative for specialized education suggested by some of Juanito's teachers through the survey. Saturno et al. (2015), explain that technology can provide flexibility and customized learning experiences, which are especially beneficial for students with CP who may require alternative methods of communication or interaction. Adaptive EFL software and applications can cater to individual needs, allowing students to engage with English language content at their own pace and in ways that suit their abilities. Interactive language learning apps, for example, can provide immediate feedback and adjust difficulty levels based on a student's performance. Hettiarachchi et al. (2020), state that this dynamic adaptation supports the principles of scaffolding, helping students progress in their language skills.

Furthermore, effective communication between all stakeholders, including formal and informal communication was generally agreed by teachers on the need for greater engagement from the Psychology department to enhance Juanito's learning experience, which was also highlighted within the study conducted by Bourke et al. (2018), which mention that communication between team members, such as teachers, aides, and allied health professionals, played a vital role in supporting students with CP. These authors emphasized the importance of communication devices like alternative augmentative communication (AAC) devices (e.g., PODD books, DynaVox) in classrooms, which unveils the need to secure public or private funding to enhance the school's infrastructure, enabling the implementation of these technological solutions. It's emphasized that a team approach was essential for the success of students with CP, and regular meetings (Student Support Group meetings) are crucial to set goals and monitor progress.

The concerns raised regarding the inadequacy of the classroom setting are highly relevant to EFL instruction for students with CP, as many educators noted that the current classroom facilities did not cater to Juanito's specific educational needs. Núñez (2021), proposed training and educating teachers to address diversity and continue with the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), as designed by the Vice Presidency of Ecuador and MINEDUC (2011). This process encompasses an initial awareness-raising phase to understand the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, followed by a second phase that fosters collaborative teamwork among educators and the adaptation of teaching methodologies. The third phase includes virtual seminars for instructors focusing on UDL application, leveraging technology as a tool. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on the significance of involving families in the educational journey of students with disabilities, with established agreements to ensure their attendance and support in assignments and assessments.

Conclusion

Regarding limitations on this study, as it was conducted within a specific educational institution in the Canton of Mejia, it may limit the generalization of its findings to diverse educational contexts. Moreover, the short observation period of Juanito's behavior and progress over just two months may not have captured his long-term development accurately. Finally, the study predominantly depends on teacher perspectives, lacking the direct input of the student and family, which could have provided a more comprehensive view of Juanito's educational journey.

It is necessary to emphasize the importance of creating a pedagogical environment within the EFL classroom that aligns with the unique needs of students with cerebral palsy, such as Juanito. Teachers recognized the value of employing concrete materials, visual aids, and technology to enhance Juanito's learning experience. However, a prevailing concern was the inadequacy of the classroom infrastructure, exacerbated by the presence of numerous students, which hindered the provision of individualized attention. This underscores the pressing need for educational institutions to invest in resources and infrastructure conducive to inclusive EFL education, recognizing the diverse requirements of students with disabilities. Addressing these challenges is vital to fostering effective language acquisition in an inclusive EFL setting.

While there were notable strides in Juanito's social learning, challenges in communication and attention were conspicuous during EFL. This underscores the significance of scaffolding and tailored support systems. Importantly, this study highlights a pronounced disjunction between Juanito's chronological and cognitive ages, for which some teachers recognize the necessity of specialized education. The pivotal role played by professionals from the DECE department in facilitating guidance on curricular adaptations, such as tangible tools like flashcards, posters, and audiovisual techniques to enhance language learning. These findings emphasize the critical need for holistic support structures, including specialized teacher training and collaborative efforts with professionals, to effectively address the multifaceted needs of students like Juanito.

To enhance the understanding of EFL experiences for students like Juanito with cerebral palsy, future research avenues could be explored. These include conducting longitudinal studies that track students' progress in language learning over extended periods, facilitating a more comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of strategies applied to enhance EFL. Comparative studies across diverse educational settings or regions could offer insights into varying outcomes. Moreover, involving family and student perspectives in research can offer unique insights into challenges and successes. Additionally, investigating the impact of assistive technologies on the educational experiences of students with cerebral palsy could be valuable. Evaluating teacher training programs and assessing policy implementation in inclusive education are also areas that warrant further exploration.

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Statement

Conflict of interest

I have no conflict of interest to disclose.

Funding

No financial assistance from parties outside this article.

Notes

This article is not the product of previous research.