

Erika Jessenia Delgado-Mero; Ashley Juliette Vera-Hoppe; Ninfa Sofía Guevara-Peñaranda

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## **The lack of a National English curriculum for preschoolers: Impact on language teaching**

## **Falta de un currículo nacional en preescolar: Impacto en la enseñanza de idiomas**

Erika Jessenia Delgado-Mero  
[erikamero98@gmail.com](mailto:erikamero98@gmail.com)  
Unidad Educativa Particular Americano, Manta, Manabí  
Ecuador  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9349-178X>

Ashley Juliette Vera-Hoppe  
[ashley.vera@ueisrael.edu.ec](mailto:ashley.vera@ueisrael.edu.ec)  
Unidad Educativa Particular Israel, Guayaquil, Guayas  
Ecuador  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9426-5125>

Ninfa Sofía Guevara-Peñaranda  
[nguevarap@unemi.edu.ec](mailto:nguevarap@unemi.edu.ec)  
Universidad Estatal de Milagro, Milagro, Guayas  
Ecuador  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6638-8851>

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Erika Jessenia Delgado-Mero; Ashley Juliette Vera-Hoppe; Ninfa Sofía Guevara-Peñaranda

### **ABSTRACT**

This study analyzes the current state of foreign language teaching in Ecuadorian preschools. A mixed-method approach was used and a survey was administered to collect comprehensive data on the implementation of an early English language curriculum in Ecuador's preschool education system. 100 participants involved in preschool education policy, from both private and public institutions, responded to the survey. As a result, the lack of a structured foreign language curriculum in Ecuadorian preschools presents significant challenges to early language acquisition and cognitive development. Likewise, the absence of clear guidelines and standardized methodologies hinders effective foreign language teaching at this stage. In conclusion, the potential benefits of implementing a comprehensive curriculum are explored in practice.

**Descriptors:** Foreign language curriculum; preschool; language teaching; English; bilingualism. (UNESCO Thesaurus).

### **RESUMEN**

Este estudio analiza el estado actual de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en los centros de educación preescolar ecuatorianos. Se utilizó un enfoque de método mixto y se aplicó una encuesta para recopilar datos exhaustivos sobre la aplicación de un plan de estudios para el aprendizaje temprano del inglés en el sistema de educación preescolar de Ecuador. 100 participantes involucrados en la política de educación preescolar, tanto de instituciones privadas como públicas, respondieron a dicha encuesta. Como resultado, la falta de un currículo estructurado de lengua extranjera en los centros preescolares ecuatorianos presenta retos significativos en la adquisición temprana del lenguaje y el desarrollo cognitivo. Asimismo, la ausencia de directrices claras y metodologías estandarizadas dificulta la enseñanza eficaz de lenguas extranjeras en esta etapa. Para concluir, en la práctica se exploran los beneficios potenciales de la aplicación de un plan de estudios integral.

**Descriptores:** Currículo de lenguas extranjeras; preescolar; enseñanza de idiomas; inglés; bilingüismo. (Tesoro UNESCO).

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, English teaching in Ecuador has gained considerable traction in private institutions. These schools view English as an essential second language in children's education. Some have even embraced bilingual approaches, acknowledging early language acquisition advantages. The importance of learning English at a very young age has been widely documented. Krashen (1982) highlights that early exposure to a foreign language foster learning due to children's brain plasticity. He states that second language acquisition during childhood is closely linked to early exposure and language use in natural contexts. The plasticity of a child's brain allows them to learn multiple languages without interference. Despite these findings, the Ecuadorian curriculum does not include a foreign language program for preschoolers. This absence engenders significant inquiries regarding its implications for children.

Preschool educators should integrate foreign language instruction due to its proven cognitive, social, and academic benefits. Not having such a curriculum in Ecuador impacts long-term language development and educational equality. Recent studies emphasize the importance of initiating language learning early when the brain is most receptive to new languages. According to (Vera et al., 2024), children are particularly skilled at acquiring native-like pronunciation and fluency in a second language. Additionally, research highlights that the development of early literacy skills in a second language enhances overall academic performance. In a study by García & Wei (2014), the authors outline the benefits of bilingual education on cognitive flexibility, working memory, and cross-cultural awareness in children. These benefits are important in a globalized world where English proficiency provides opportunities for future educational and professional success. Curriculum integration at the preschool level also ensures that children entering elementary school have foundational exposure to English, reducing disparities in learning outcomes. According to Ellis (2015), children who begin learning a foreign language earlier achieve greater long-term retention and proficiency.

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From an educational policy perspective, implementing structured early language programs aligns with global best practices. Studies conducted in high-performing educational systems, such as Finland and Sweden, demonstrate the positive effects of early foreign language education. For this, it has been necessary to count on well-trained teachers as Alvira & González (2023) affirmed, when teachers consider policies that incorporate language learning from the preschool years, they achieve measurable improvements in students' linguistic competence and confidence.

In the Ecuadorian context, the absence of a formal foreign language curriculum exacerbates educational inequality between private and public institutions. Private schools often introduce English at preschool, giving their students a competitive advantage. Public school students, however, learn English much later, limiting their exposure and development. Pinter (2017) says early disparities in language exposure create long-term inequities in language acquisition and proficiency levels. Therefore, addressing the absence of an English curriculum in preschool education is critical for promoting educational equity, cognitive development, and alignment with international standards.

According to Villagómez & Llanos (2020), a diagnosis and planning are necessary to build adequate educational policies in the curriculum. Policymakers must consider the proven benefits of early language learning and its long-term advantages to individuals and society. Studies have demonstrated the cognitive and social benefits of early language learning (Grover, 1978). Similarly, a study by Ardila (2012) found that bilingual individuals show greater development of cognitive functions, as well as greater problem-solving and creativity compared to their monolingual peers.

Early implementation of structured programs promotes long-term proficiency in the development of curriculum (Ferrer & Poole, 2018). Dzamesi & Van Heerden (2020) state that well-designed curricula for young learners should incorporate play-based methods that facilitate natural language acquisition. This finding has led to the development of an

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English curriculum for Ecuadorian preschools. The purpose of this study is to analyze, in what ways do teachers perceive the need for a foreign language curriculum in preschool education, and should the Ecuadorian government implement an English preschool curriculum?

## **METHOD**

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to gather comprehensive data on the role of implementing an early English language learning Curriculum in Ecuador's preschool education system. The methodology consists of the use of structured surveys administered to teachers and key members of the educational community to capture their perceptions regarding the importance of early English language instruction. The survey questions addressed awareness of the cognitive and academic benefits of early English learning, views on the lack of a preschool English curriculum in Ecuador, and suggestions for curriculum design and implementation.

Also, it uses a documentary analysis conducted between Ecuador's preschool curriculum and national and international best practices. This analysis focused on: The age at which English language instruction is introduced in different countries, pedagogical strategies such as play-based learning and immersion programs, and teacher training requirements for early language instruction.

The study used purposive sampling to select 100 participants directly involved in preschool education policy, ensuring a diverse representation from both private and public institutions. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the topic from various perspectives. Data was collected through surveys and semi-structured interviews, which were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes related to curriculum gaps, challenges, and potential solutions.

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Survey data was analyzed using statistical software to generate frequencies, trends, and correlations. Key focus areas included the levels of agreement regarding the importance of early English education, perceived impacts of the curriculum gap on students' transition to elementary school, recommendations for bridging the gap in early language instruction. Interviews were analyzed thematically to gain insights into the perceptions of educators and policymakers on early English education. The findings from these qualitative data were triangulated with quantitative survey results to ensure reliability and validity.

## **RESULTS**

In Ecuador, second language instruction officially begins in the second grade of basic education. This delay bypasses the critical period for language acquisition, typically identified as ages 3 to 6 when the brain is most receptive to learning new languages (Peralta, 2000). For instance, during this stage, children can easily internalize pronunciation patterns and phonological systems. In contrast, countries like Finland and Singapore introduce second languages during preschool, leveraging immersive and play-based methodologies that make language learning a natural part of a child's early education. In Singapore, for example, children are exposed to both English and their mother tongue from as early as age 3, ensuring bilingual competence by the time they enter primary school. By intertwining language learning with daily activities and cultural immersion, Singapore sets an example of how early and consistent exposure can yield exceptional linguistic outcomes. By delaying language introduction, Ecuador misses the opportunity to harness this critical developmental window, potentially putting its students at a linguistic disadvantage in a globalized world.

Another key difference lies in the pedagogical strategies employed. Ecuador's curriculum emphasizes holistic development and inclusivity but lacks explicit approaches tailored to second language acquisition (De Angelis, 2022). Teachers often rely on generalist methods, which, while beneficial for overall development, are not optimized for fostering

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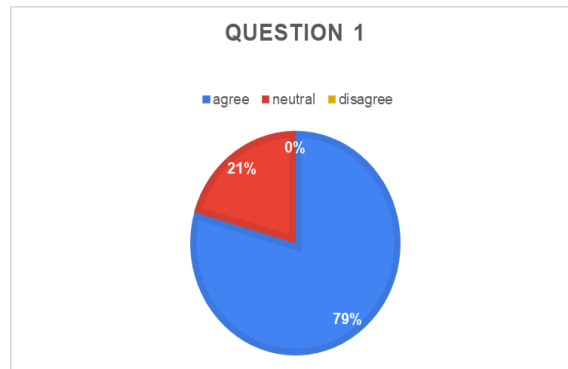
bilingual skills. On the other hand, international best practices emphasize play-based learning and immersion programs. For example, in Canada's French immersion schools, children as young as 4 are taught entirely in French, allowing them to develop fluency naturally through interaction, cooperation and daily activities (Yamo et al., 2024). Similarly, in Finland, play-based activities are used to introduce children to English, blending cognitive, social, and linguistic development seamlessly (Grover, 1978). These methodologies not only enhance language acquisition but also foster creativity and problem-solving skills. Incorporating such evidence-based practices into Ecuador's preschool curriculum could significantly enhance its effectiveness.

Teacher training presents another area where Ecuador lags. Current training programs for preschool educators focus on general child development without specific components for teaching a second language. This lack of specialized preparation limits the ability of teachers to effectively incorporate language instruction into their classrooms. In contrast, countries with robust early education systems prioritize targeted training for language teachers. For instance, in Germany, educators undergo specialized programs that equip them with the tools and methodologies needed to teach foreign languages to young children (Nikolov & Mihaljevi, 2006). Additionally, these countries often mandate ongoing professional development, ensuring that teachers stay updated on the latest research and techniques. Without similar investments in teacher training, Ecuador risks perpetuating a cycle where even well-intentioned curriculum changes fail to yield the desired outcomes.

## **Survey results**

A total of 78 respondents participated in the survey; they describe their perceptions of the early English teaching system, as well as their perceptions of the students they taught.

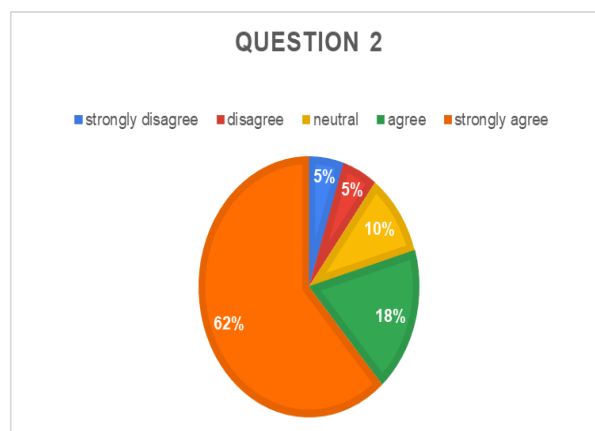
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**Figure 1.** Do you consider the English curriculum useful for teachers?

**Elaboration:** The authors.

According to figure 1 and compared to the 21% who remain neutral in the survey, the graph shows that 79% of the respondents agree that the English curriculum is useful for teachers, while the other 21% disagree.

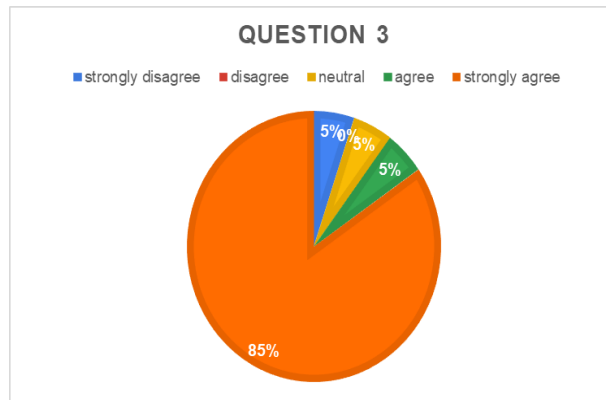


**Figure 2.** Do you think an English curriculum is necessary for preschoolers?

**Elaboration:** The authors.

According to the figure 2 shown above, you can see that a majority of respondents (62%) believe that a curriculum focused on English should be included in early childhood programs in order to meet the needs of the children.

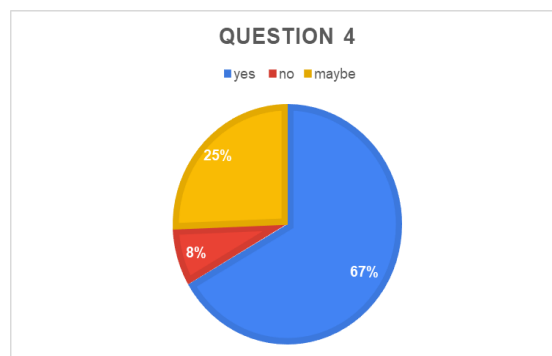
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**Figure 3.** Do you believe that learning English at a young age benefits children's cognitive and academic development?

**Elaboration:** The authors.

The figure 3 demonstrates that 85% of respondents strongly agree that learning English at a young age adds benefits to cognitive and academic development in children, in contrast with the 5% of respondents who strongly disagree with this statement.



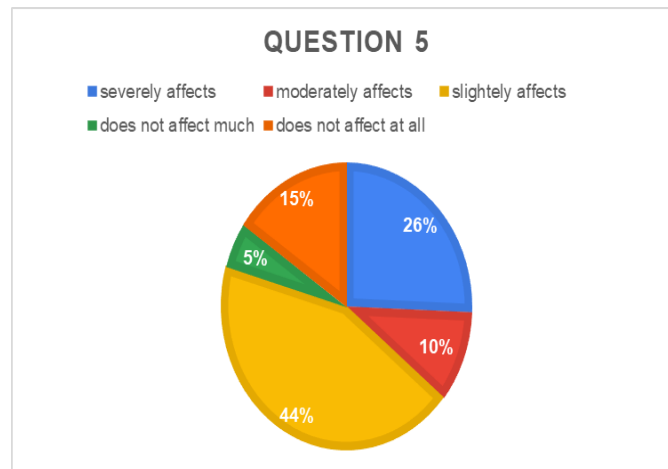
**Figure 4.** Are you aware of studies highlighting brain plasticity in young children as a factor for language learning?

**Elaboration:** The authors.

This figure 4 demonstrates that 67% of the respondents, being involved in English education, are aware of studies that highlight brain plasticity in language learning, 25% of

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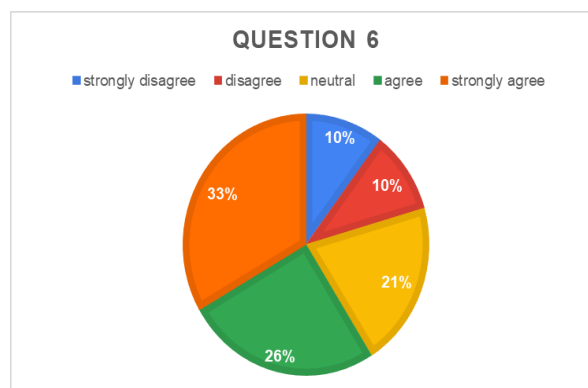
the respondents are not sure if they have encountered this information and 8% of them deny having been in any way aware of this kind of studies.



**Figure 5.** How does the absence of English instruction at the preschool level affect students entering elementary school?

**Elaboration:** The authors.

In this figure 5, we can see that most respondents believe that the lack of early English instruction has at least some negative impacts on children (80%).

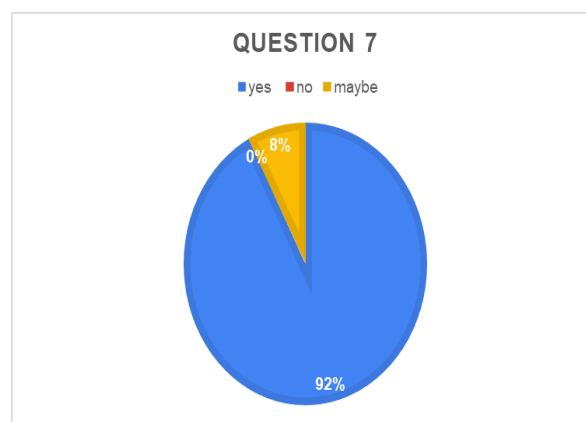


**Figure 6.** Do you think public school students face disadvantages compared to private school students due to this gap?

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**Elaboration:** The authors.

This figure 6 demonstrates that there is a majority of respondents (59%) who see a disadvantage for public school students due to the lack of early English instruction, which can point to equity concerns.



**Figure 7.** Should the Ecuadorian government implement an English curriculum for preschool education?

**Elaboration:** The authors.

The figure 7 demonstrates that the majority of respondents (92%) show agreement reflecting strong support for government action to introduce an English curriculum for preschoolers.

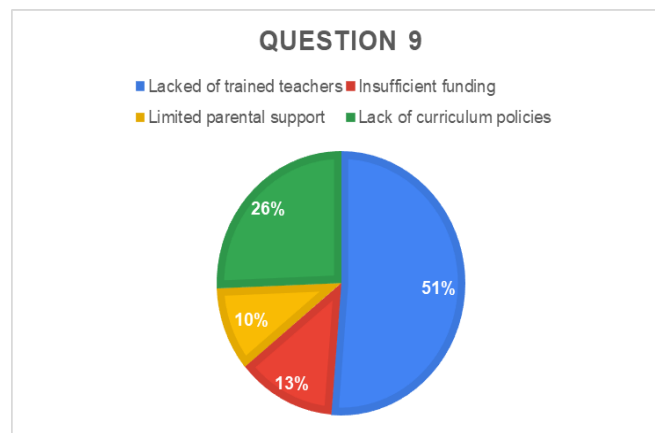


**Figure 8.** Which methods would you recommend for teaching English to preschoolers?

**Elaboration:** The authors.

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This figure 8 shows that there is a strong preference for interactive and engaging methods such as play-based learning and games, which demonstrate the importance of age-appropriate strategies for effective learning, as shown by this graphic.



**Figure 9.** What is the biggest challenge in implementing an English curriculum for preschool education?

**Elaboration:** The authors.

This figure 9 shows that 51% of respondents identify the shortage of trained teachers as the primary obstacle, followed by policy gaps (26%). Funding and parental support, while less significant, still require attention to ensure successful implementation.

## DISCUSSION

This analysis drives us to the conclusion that it is necessary to have a valuable tool like an English curriculum. This is to improve the English level at early educational stages in Ecuador. However, this wasn't considered before the changes the government made in 2016. This investigation has demonstrated that there is a need that demands teachers' attention. The instruments applied and the data collected show 92% support in implementing this as a national policy like at the other levels. Despite the analysis obtained and the positive results, we must consider that the surveys reflect broad agreement.

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However, these opinions may not fully account for the logistical, economic, and pedagogical challenges in the Ecuadorian context. Key factors such as regional disparities, limited resources, teacher training, and broader educational priorities must be carefully considered before advancing such a curriculum (Quintana et al., 2023).

Based on the results of this research, the people who work in the education system, such as: English teachers, principals and school authorities agree with the implementation of an English curriculum for preschoolers, but there are particularities; for instance, the responses from the participants might not consider whether the educational system is truly prepared to offer quality foreign language teaching in preschool. This is due to budget constraints, teacher training, or infrastructure issues. Remember that in the public system, there is a critical situation and the money required for implementation may not be available, which will be insufficient to meet the desire of teachers' participants in the surveys. Furthermore, the lack of adequate resources can hinder the development and execution of effective foreign language programs. As a result, despite the enthusiasm and willingness of educators, the quality of language instruction may suffer, ultimately impacting students' learning outcomes. That is why "in terms of the language teachers' role, they are required to master not only the linguistic knowledge, but also to possess the necessary academic capacities to teach the contents to be learned by their pupils" (Reinoso, 2023).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, our case study was well resolved. As the data presented indicate, this is a curriculum for teaching English language to young learners as well as tapping into children's second language acquisition skills. It has not been shown that teaching English at a very young age constitutes a critical phase where a person gains the most information due to plasticity as many authors concluded. There may be disadvantages to this research in not having dialogues with high-ranking authorities within the public education system;

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therefore, it would be necessary to obtain information from the principals and eventually fill this English proficiency gap. National authorities may read these findings and take them as a positive review to apply in the future.

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Erika Jessenia Delgado-Mero; Ashley Juliette Vera-Hoppe; Ninfa Sofía Guevara-Peñaranda

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