



Protective environments in strengthening parenting practices and children's holistic development

Entornos protectores en el fortalecimiento de las prácticas parentales y desarrollo integral de niños

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ABSTRACT

The current research aims to propose a training plan for parents, focused on the promotion of quality protective environments for the strengthening of parental practices that contribute to the integral development of 4 year old children at the Centro de Educación Inicial Fiscal Augusta Ugalde Alcívar (CEIFAU) in the city of Portoviejo, Manabí, Ecuador. The study was descriptive with a non-experimental design and feasible project modality. The activities aimed at achieving the results envisaged in the proposal, will require a deepening in new fields of teaching work, in order to execute them in a responsible manner, and if desired, measure the real impact on the collective, and finally, to promote the expected change in early education in the local and national context, as a way of complying with the postulates of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador.

Descriptors: family; family law; population education. (Source: UNESCO Thesaurus).

RESUMEN

La actual investigación tiene objetivo proponer un plan de formación para padres, enfocado en la promoción de entornos protectores de calidad para el fortalecimiento de prácticas parentales que contribuyan al desarrollo integral de los niños de 4 años del Centro de Educación Inicial Fiscal Augusta Ugalde Alcívar (CEIFAU) de la ciudad de Portoviejo, Manabí, Ecuador. De tipo descriptiva con diseño no experimental y modalidad proyecto factible. Las actividades orientadas a la concreción de los resultados previstos en la propuesta, demandarán profundizar en nuevos campos del quehacer docente, para así de manera responsable, ejecutarlas, y si se quiere, medir el verdadero impacto que en el colectivo genere, y por último, promover ese cambio esperado en la educación inicial en el contexto local y nacional, como una forma de cumplir con los postulados de la Constitución de la República del Ecuador.

Descriptorios: familia; derecho de la familia; educación a la vida familiar. (Fuente: Tesoro UNESCO).

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Research articles section



INTRODUCTION

The family has been and continues to be the first place where children develop, where they acquire their first skills, learning, values, and establish their first and most important interactions. In this environment, children develop physically, socially and emotionally; in other words, it is families that have a direct impact on the formative processes of children (Scorsolini-Comin, 2022). Therefore, the family is the ideal space for the personal, social and intellectual development of children and is called upon to prevent them from risks (Ramos-Morcillo et al. 2019). In the same vein, Bronfenbrenner's systemic ecological model emphasises the importance of the social context, as the family is the most relevant micro-system for children and has a direct impact on their development (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022).

Over the last decades, the family has been influenced by a number of social, economic, cultural, health, legal and technological changes; a fact that places parents in front of a great responsibility and challenge (Ayika et al. 2018). For this reason, positive parenting programmes are becoming important events in the governments of developed countries, where the importance of the role of the family and the need for parents to have sufficient support to fulfil the work involved in raising children is taken into account (Prime et al. 2023), (Cullum et al. 2022), (Jeong et al. 2021).

In the member states of the Council of Europe, there are various governmental parental education programmes that aim to encourage positive parenting, events that can help parents become more aware of the nature of their role. In Latin American countries, this type of programme, which could strengthen family nuclei and affirm the full fulfilment of the parental role in the integral development of children, is still not widely recognised (Torío-López et al. 2019), (Torío-López, 2019).

In Ecuador, initial education, in accordance with the provisions of Article 27 of the Organic Law on Intercultural Education, is divided into two sub-levels: sub-level 1 and sub-level 2. The latter is the first stage of formal education, which, despite not being compulsory, becomes the beginning of the school cycle attended by children aged 3 to 5 years, and therefore, this environment is incorporated into the new context of the children. During this period, it is not only the children who enter a different world, but also their parents, many of whom are first-time parents who have different expectations and questions regarding education and their roles in it (Chumaña-Suquillo, 2022).

As mentioned, it is the parents who are responsible for ensuring their children's right to education, in addition to offering all parental care related to the different variables related to integral development; However, it is striking that not all families fully comply with the commitment they make when the child enters the educational institution, a situation that is evidenced by irregular and unjustified attendance (children's daily attendance record), children with violent or impulsive attitudes (direct observation), inadequate food (school lunch box), poor routine habits (children falling asleep during the school day), among other facts, which reveal or could highlight the need for parents to receive support and guidance to promote parental responsibility as a way to achieve the realisation of children's rights and to foster the integral development and wellbeing of children. Taking into account that factors in today's society such as family interaction, time availability, education, the economy, among others, have a direct impact on the way in which parental roles are exercised (Cárdenas-Tapia, et al. 2022).

Also, some evaluations of family training and support programmes show that work with families should be aimed at strengthening parental practices that have a positive impact on the overall development of children. Therefore, this proposal arises from the need to create a space for orientation for parents that offers the necessary support to assist in this complex task of parenting, reaffirming the importance of early childhood in the life of an individual, since it has been proven that the brain architecture is established in this period; therefore, what happens or fails to happen at this stage will affect the life trajectory in health, behaviour and learning (Babarro-Velez et al. 2023), (Sepúlveda-Romero, 2023).



The relevance of this proposal is evident, since as mentioned in the operational manual *Estrategia Construyendo Juntos Entornos Protectores* (González-García, 2018), this type of proposal seeks to promote a proactive attitude of parents in the process of their children's education, motivating them to strengthen family ties and parental affection, in addition to providing them with tools to face the challenges that daily life demands. These facts will help to create the appropriate conditions that contribute to the comprehensive development of children in early childhood; thus, we would have families assuming the role of the main axis and responsible for the welfare of children who develop in their wombs, while the roles that should be assumed in the later stages of development would be revealed (Salvo-Garrido et al. 2021).

The Centro de Educación Inicial Fiscal Augusta Ugalde Alcívar (CEIFUA), in the city of Portoviejo, Manabí, Ecuador, takes in early childhood children between the ages of 3 and 5 years, belonging to families of different types and characteristics in their cultural, social, racial and economic spectrum; the total population is 184 children aged 4 to 5 years, whose parents and/or caregivers are to be trained and thus strengthen their parental competencies. The process we intend to implement is based on the theoretical foundations that consider that the family will always be a determining factor with profound consequences in the future of all people. In spite of the importance of the proposal, this interventionist action could encounter a series of edges or limitations that could affect its progress, such as the scarce collaboration of fathers, mothers or carers in the work sessions, as well as the segmentation of the family nuclei in the middle of the training process; however, it is considered that through motivation and the results that will become evident in the medium and short term, these limitations could be overcome or diminished.

Based on the theoretical considerations and the weaknesses that have been raised, the current research aims to propose a training plan for parents, focused on the promotion of quality protective environments for the strengthening of parental practices that contribute to the integral development of 4-year-old children at the Augusta Ugalde Alcívar Fiscal Initial Education Centre (CEIFUA) in the city of Portoviejo, Manabí, Ecuador.

METHOD

The present study is a descriptive research with a non-experimental design and feasible project modality. The objective is to propose a training plan for parents, focused on the promotion of quality protective environments, in order to strengthen parental practices that contribute to the integral development of 4-year-old children at the Centro de Educación Inicial Fiscal Augusta Ugalde Alcívar (CEIFUA) in the city of Portoviejo, Manabí, Ecuador.

The participants of the study will be the parents and/or caregivers of 4-year-old children enrolled in the CEIFUA in Portoviejo, Manabí, Ecuador. It is expected to have a representative sample of at least 80% of the parents of the children belonging to this educational institution.

A comprehensive training plan will be developed covering key aspects of parenting and child development, with a focus on promoting quality protective environments.

An awareness-raising campaign will be conducted for parents and/or caregivers of CEIFUA's 4-year-old children, informing them about the objective and importance of the training plan. Parents will be invited to participate voluntarily in the programme.

Face-to-face and/or virtual training sessions will be held, designed according to the needs and preferences of the parents. These sessions will address topics such as early stimulation, healthy eating, positive discipline and effective communication with children.

Regular follow-ups will be conducted to assess the impact of the programme on parents' knowledge, attitudes and parenting practices. Data will be collected on participation in the training sessions, as well as on observed changes in parenting behaviour and child development.



The proposal will be implemented respecting the ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy and justice. Informed consent will be sought from participants and confidentiality of the data collected will be guaranteed. In addition, additional information and resources will be provided to participants as needed to address any concerns or needs that may arise during the course of the study.

RESULTS

Based on the research process developed, the parent training plan proposal is presented, focusing on the promotion of quality protective environments:

Objectives of the proposal

To make parents aware of the importance of the early childhood stage in their children's lives.

To encourage parents and/or caregivers to improve their parenting practices and demonstrate a proactive attitude in their children's upbringing.

Analysis of the initial situation

Family dynamics are reflected in the educational centres in different aspects that are externalised in the educational institutions, such as the punctuality and attendance of the children at school, the presentation of the children in terms of grooming, eating habits, behaviour with their teachers and peers, the way they react to certain emotions and frustrations, among others.

As a director of CEIFAUA, the aim is to contribute to the fulfilment of children's right to a protective environment, which implies providing them with the necessary care so that they can develop in an integral and full manner; offering them stimulating environments according to their evolutionary stage; guaranteeing their right to receive health, education, to live in a family, without violence, to not be discriminated against and to participate in decisions that have to do with them and their environment; likewise, this right involves protecting them from any situation that could put their health and physical and emotional integrity at risk.

The home, the school and the community are the environments in which children develop; for these spaces to be protective environments, each one must share the mission of protecting them and preventing them from risks; therefore, it is necessary to promote in families the development of skills such as self-esteem, assertiveness, resistance to pressure and management of emotions, as well as to strengthen habits and build healthy lifestyles, in addition to considering the need for recreation and play.

After reviewing the skills development reports, participating in the grade meetings, listening to the teachers and several mothers, as a director of the institution, we have obtained information that determines that a considerable percentage of children show warning signs that indicate the need to increase a programme for parents, with the characteristics described above, adding to this, the interviews that have been held with mothers, who have expressed their concern about the challenge of not knowing what attitude to take to the challenges that arise at the present time in raising their children.

Description of strategies and activities

In order to achieve the objective of promoting quality protective environments, it is proposed to implement in CEIFAUA, a training system for parents of children aged 4 to 5 years attending the institution, in order to empower the parents of the 184 children of this age group in issues related to good parenting practices, which contribute to this goal.



The intervention is expected to be carried out during the first months of the 2020-2021 school year and will focus on the 4-year-old group, starting with the application of a form to parents. The form will be applied at the time of enrolment data collection in order to determine the general characteristics of the families. Subsequently, the positive parenting scale will be applied. An interview with the children's parents will be carried out to obtain specific data on the children and the family context. Finally, a checklist will be applied during the adaptation period in order to record some skills in the living environment.

The instruments, such as the checklist, the parenting scale and the interview, will make it possible to detect the level of relationship between parents and children. The data collected will have a twofold purpose: 1. to find out, by means of statistics, each of the indicators surveyed, and 2. to later draw up the report that will be presented to the educational community.

After the conclusion of the first phase, scheduled for May, meetings will be held the following month (June) with parents or caregivers, who will first be made aware of issues related to the importance of early childhood in children's lives, the physical, cognitive, social and emotional development of children, protective and quality environments, and parenting practices, among others. In subsequent meetings, scheduled for July, workshops will be held using experiential methodology, aimed at strengthening parental competencies, which are defined as knowing how to know how to do.

In addition, positive parenting practices promote a proactive attitude in the development of their children, and get the most out of the time with their offspring, strengthening their parenting practices in order to provide everything necessary for the integral development of their children (Máiquez et al. 2019). The activities have been organised in three moments:

1. Socialisation of the proposal to teachers and collection of information on families and children.
2. Work with parents
3. Evaluation of the proposal

The guidelines to follow are described in table 1.

Table 1. Intervention proposal.

Modalidad	La modalidad de atención será la grupal, puesto que se atenderá a los padres en grupos de 60 personas.
Población destinataria	Padres y madres con hijos de 4 a 5 años.
Metodología	La metodología para utilizarse será la experiencial, puesto que se incentivará a la "construcción compartida de conocimientos", otorgando a los padres la posibilidad de ser sus propios artífices en el proceso de cambio, en base a sus propias experiencias y concepciones, siguiendo un proceso de meditación y análisis de las prácticas parentales y su influencia en el desarrollo integral de sus hijos, dando paso finalmente a que cada uno de ellos se fije los compromisos personales de cambio.



Activities to be carried out in the first stage: socialisation and information gathering (table 2).

Table 2. Planning of activities. First moment.

Objetivos	Actividades	Recursos	Responsables	Tiempo
Socializar la propuesta de intervención a la institución	Exposición de la intención de la propuesta. Ilustración de la metodología a emplearse	Proyector	Autora de la propuesta	1 hora
Determinar aspectos generales de las familias, mediante la aplicación de una ficha de matrícula a los padres y madres de familia	Aplicación de la ficha de matrícula a los padres y madres de familia	Fichas	Autora de la propuesta Docentes	1 semanas
Identificar las competencias parentales de los padres al relacionarse con su hijo	Aplicación de la Escala de Parentalidad Positiva (e2p) a los padres y madres de familia	Formato de escala de parentalidad positiva	Autora de la propuesta Docentes	1 semanas
Conocer aspectos específicos de las familias y sus entornos	Entrevista con los padres y madres de familia	Formato de entrevista	Autora de la propuesta Docentes	2 semanas
Visualizar el desarrollo social y emocional de los niños	Aplicación de una lista de cotejo de desarrollo de destrezas del ámbito de convivencia	Lista de cotejo de desarrollo de destrezas del ámbito de convivencia	Docentes	Mes de mayo

Actividades a realizar el segundo momento: Talleres con padres y madres (tabla 3).

Tabla 3. Segundo momento.

Objetivos	Actividades	Recursos	Responsables	Tiempo
Sensibilizar a los padres y madres de familia sobre la importancia de la etapa de la primera infancia en la vida de sus hijos	Conferencia sobre los siguientes temas: -La importancia de la primera infancia -Desarrollo integral del niño -Entornos protectores de calidad -Prácticas parentales positivas	Laptop Proyector Sistema de audio	Autora de la propuesta Experto invitado	2 horas
Ofrecer a los padres diferentes estrategias que permitan mejorar las prácticas de crianza para coadyuvar al desarrollo integral de los niños.	- Retroalimentación de los temas tratados en la sesión anterior, recalcando la importancia de prácticas parentales positivas - Reflexión y análisis sobre las experiencias vividas como padres y	Laptop Proyector Sistema de audio	Autora de la propuesta Experto invitado	2 horas



	madres de niños de 4 a 5 años				
	- Ofrecer estrategias de actividades familiares cotidianas que favorezcan el desarrollo y cómo ofrecer espacios enriquecedores				
Ofrecer a los padres diferentes estrategias que permitan mejorar las prácticas de crianza para coadyuvar al desarrollo integral de los niños	-Aplicación Pinterest como herramienta para conocer actividades que ayuden al desarrollo integral de los niños -Formar grupos de trabajo para compartir experiencias y plantear actividades de acuerdo a las necesidades de los niños. - Reflexión y análisis - Verbalizar los objetivos personales de cambio	Laptop Proyector Sistema de audio	Autora de la propuesta Experto invitado		2 horas

Activities to be carried out at the third moment: evaluation and socialisation of results (table 4).

Table 4. Third moment.

Sesión	Objetivos	Actividades	Recursos	Responsables	Tiempo
10	Evaluar la aplicación de los temas recibidos	-Aplicación de un cuestionario en línea sobre los temas recibidos -Aplicación de cuestionario en línea a docentes, sobre los cambios percibidos en la actitud de los niños	Formulario en línea	Autora de la propuesta	Actividad autónoma de 10 minutos
11	Socialización de resultados	Reunión informativa con padres y docentes	Laptop Proyector	Autora de la propuesta	1 hora

Table 5 details the human, material and financial resources required to carry out this proposal.



Table 5. Materials and budget.

Material	Cantidad	Precio en dólares
Material fungible		
Fichas de matrícula	184 juegos de copias	7.76
Escala de parentalidad	184 juegos de copias	15.52
Formato de entrevista	184 juegos de copias	11.64
Lista de cotejo	184 juegos de copias	7.76
Material audiovisual		
Computadora	1	500
Proyector	1	500
Material de evaluación		
Instrumento de evaluación a padres y madres de familia	184 juegos de copias	7.76
Instrumento de evaluación a maestras	10 juegos de copias	0.80
Recursos humanos		
Profesional en Desarrollo Humano Temprano	2 profesionales	4000
Total		5051.24

Strategies for evaluating the intervention

In order to evaluate the programme, four moments will be taken to evaluate: first, the programme as such, whose purpose is to know the effectiveness of the proposal; second, the implementation process, which will allow us to obtain information to improve future editions of the programme; third, the results of the application of the programme, this evaluation will allow us to check the validity of the programme; and, fourth, the institutionalisation of the evaluation, to implement cyclical periods of evaluation and improvement. See Table 6.

Table 6. Criteria of the general intervention evaluation model.

Componentes	Criterios	Descriptoros
Evaluación del programa	Eficacia	Fundamentación teórica Fundamentación metodológica Necesidades y expectativas Recursos Viabilidad
Evaluación del Proceso de Implementación	Calidad	Recepción del programa Metodología Operatividad Capacitación
Evaluación de Resultados	Importancia	Logros Efectos
Institucionalización del Programa	Relevancia	Políticas Generalización

Possible limitations

As this is a proposal aimed at parents, there is the probability of not having 100% acceptance in its implementation, therefore certain limitations could arise, such as lack of cooperation at the time of the interview, the fact that parents do not provide real data, poor attendance at the scheduled sessions and workshops, unpunctuality; on the other hand, the limited commitment to practice the suggestions given, showing insufficient interest in the topics covered.

In order to mitigate these limitations, we would try to encourage parents, even from the previous school year, by carrying out a continuous and systematic promotion of the influence of families



on child development, through each of the teachers, who through talks given at meetings held with parents and in personal interviews, consider the support that parents should provide to their children. Finally, a potential limiting factor would be the economic factor, which could be mitigated by carrying out self-management activities, which would constitute the economic support for the successful implementation of this intervention proposal.

CONCLUSION

The experience as a teacher at the beginning and as a director at the present time, led to the proposal which, as has been mentioned on several occasions, seeks as a primary goal that through good parental practices, children are offered quality protective environments that contribute to the integral development of the children of CEIFAUA and, if possible, of other institutions. It is worth mentioning that the activities aimed at achieving the results envisaged in the proposal, will require a deepening in new fields of teaching, in order to implement them in a responsible manner, and if desired, to measure the real impact on the collective, and finally, to promote the expected change in early education in the local and national context, as a way of complying with the postulates of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador.

FINANCING

Non-monetary

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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

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