



## Exploration of the environment to strengthen autonomy in early childhood education

### Exploración del medio para fortalecer autonomía en educación inicial

Dora Jeanneth Córdova-Cando  
jeanneth.cordova@unl.edu.ec

**Universidad Nacional de Loja, Loja, Loja Ecuador**  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9566-5659>

Elcy Viviana Collaguazo-Vega  
elcy.collaguazo@unl.edu.ec

**Universidad Nacional de Loja, Loja, Loja Ecuador**  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0589-9150>

Daisy Alicia Alejandro-Cortés  
daisy.alejandro@unl.edu.ec

**Universidad Nacional de Loja, Loja, Loja Ecuador**  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0458-1052>

Giovanna Patricia Reinoso-Castillo  
pattyjersa@hotmail.com

**Unidad Educativa Padre Julián Lorente, Loja, Loja Ecuador**  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4692-664X>

#### ABSTRACT

The objective is to analyze the exploration of the environment to strengthen autonomy in early education. The research was configured from the quantitative approach and a descriptive type with non-experimental design, the research population corresponds to 13 children of 4 years old belonging to the Initial Level of a private institution in Loja, Ecuador. In terms of acquiring levels of independence, the children were found to have 31%, and after the application of activities in contact with nature, they acquired 85%, improving 54% in activities of exploration with the environment. The execution of the micro curricular planning by learning experiences activating the transversal axis of environmental exploration, through well-planned and organized pedagogical outings, allows the acquisition of skills and abilities that lead to the optimal integral development of children at this level.

**Descriptors:** outdoor education; student organizations; parent teacher organizations. (Source: UNESCO Thesaurus).

#### RESUMEN

Se tiene por objetivo analizar la exploración del medio para fortalecer autonomía en educación inicial. La investigación se configuró desde el enfoque cuantitativo y un tipo descriptiva con diseño no experimental, la población investigada corresponde a 13 niños de 4 años pertenecientes al Nivel Inicial de una institución privada en Loja, Ecuador. En lo que corresponde a adquirir niveles de independencia los niños se encontraron en un 31%, los mismos que luego de la aplicación de actividades en contacto con la naturaleza adquieren un 85%, mejorando un 54% en actividades de exploración con el medio. La ejecución de la planificación micro curricular por experiencias de aprendizaje activando el eje transversal de la exploración del medio, mediante salidas pedagógicas bien planificadas y organizadas permite, la adquisición de habilidades y destrezas que lleva al óptimo desarrollo integral de los niños de este nivel.

**Descriptores:** enseñanza al aire libre; organización de estudiantes; asociación de padres y profesores. (Fuente: Tesaurus UNESCO).

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**Research articles section**



## INTRODUCTION

The exploration of the environment is a didactic strategy that allows children the possibility of demonstrating their taste for research from an early age; it helps them to explore and enjoy the beauty and diversity, enjoy contact with nature, allows them to be active and express themselves freely, learning to care for, respect and value the environment (Narváez-León et al. 2022).

Children's autonomy is a primordial learning skill and is fostered from the moment the child is in contact with nature and it is at that moment that the senses are activated to contribute to the acquisition of autonomy, being the parents the first teachers who support the integral development of their children, however, by culture or habits, parents in today's society overprotect their children, so states, (Ballesteros J, 2018) who attributes that taking excessive care of children limits the possibility that the child coexists properly being the protagonist of his own learning, acquiring significant experiences and learning from his mistakes.

The appropriate environment favors problem solving, generates own criteria, develops creativity and seeks to discover the world around him. In relation to this concept raised by Jerome Bruner, it is interesting that the child learns not only in the classroom, but also explores the natural environment and in this way learns to know the elements that will help him to solve inconveniences of daily life, which strengthens his autonomy through critical concepts appropriate to his age (Pinheiro, 2019; Wang & Hugo, 2023). In other words, the external environment that constitutes all the elements of the natural environment is important when contributing to children's autonomy, since growing up in freedom gives them security, even if there are protective attitudes on the part of parents and teachers you are will have a relevant influence on the child's present and future life (Lai et al. 2022).

To improve the autonomy of preschool children, support is needed mainly from the family and teachers at this level; parents currently do not have the necessary time to take their children to live meaningful experiences in contact with nature, which is detrimental to the acquisition of autonomy. This leads to the overprotection of their children by their parents trying to make up for the quality time required by their children (Macías-Zambrano & Henríquez-Coronel, 2023).

Through the exploration of the environment, the social, affective and cognitive areas of the child are developed, that is to say, this strategy broadens the range of possibilities to improve their communication and independence, improving their autonomy and achieving mastery in all areas, having better opportunities to interact with their peers, activating their investigative part. Through the exploration of the environment, the social, affective and cognitive areas of the child are developed, that is to say, this strategy broadens the range of possibilities to improve their communication and independence, improving their autonomy and achieving mastery in all areas, having better opportunities to interact with their peers, activating their investigative part (Lip-Licham, 2022).

Based on the above, the objective is to analyze the exploration of the environment to strengthen autonomy in early childhood education.

## METHOD

From a methodological context, the research was configured from the quantitative approach and a descriptive type with a non-experimental design, which allowed observing and characterizing the object of study as it is performed in reality, without deliberate manipulation of it, allowing to make notes to measure the frequency of the occurrence of events in its natural space.

The investigated population corresponds to 13 children of 4 years of age belonging to the Initial Level of a private institution in Loja, Ecuador.

A survey was used and a checklist based on the Early Education curriculum in the area of identity and autonomy, focused on the three autonomy skills: i) practicing self-care, ii) developing identity, iii) acquiring independence.



The data collected were processed using descriptive statistics to measure frequency and percentage of occurrence of the event, supported by SPSS V25 statistical software.

It is stated that no experiments were performed on humans or animals and identity anonymity was maintained, using the data collected only for scientific purposes; permission was obtained from parents and representatives to conduct the research.

Phases of the research

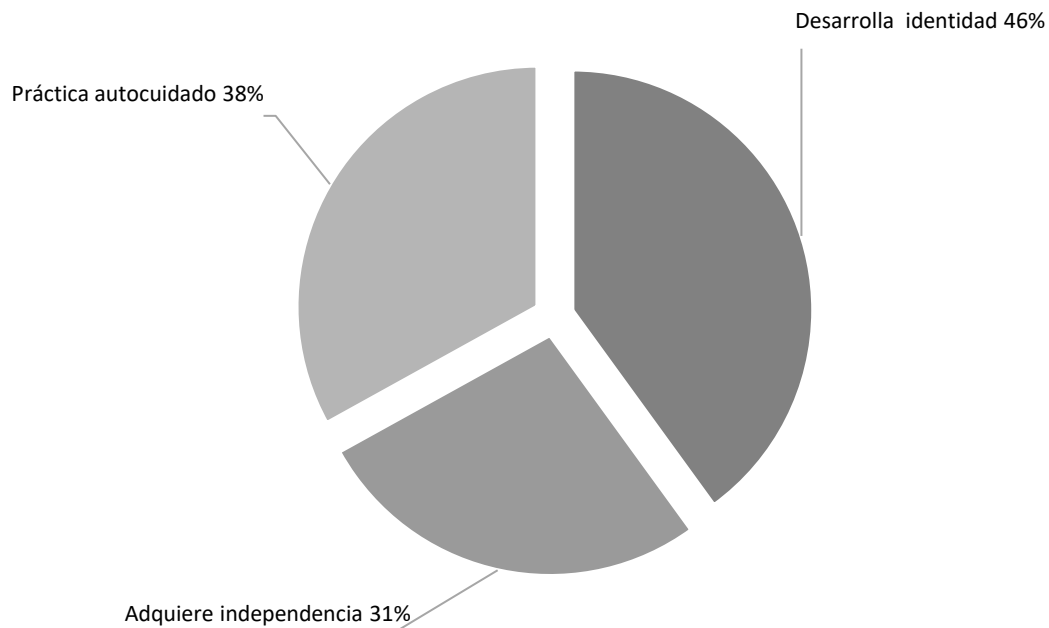
The infants were observed in their natural state and records were taken using the checklist.

Stimulating activities were carried out to promote the three autonomy skills.

The infants were observed after the application of the stimulating activities and a record was made using the checklist.

## RESULTS

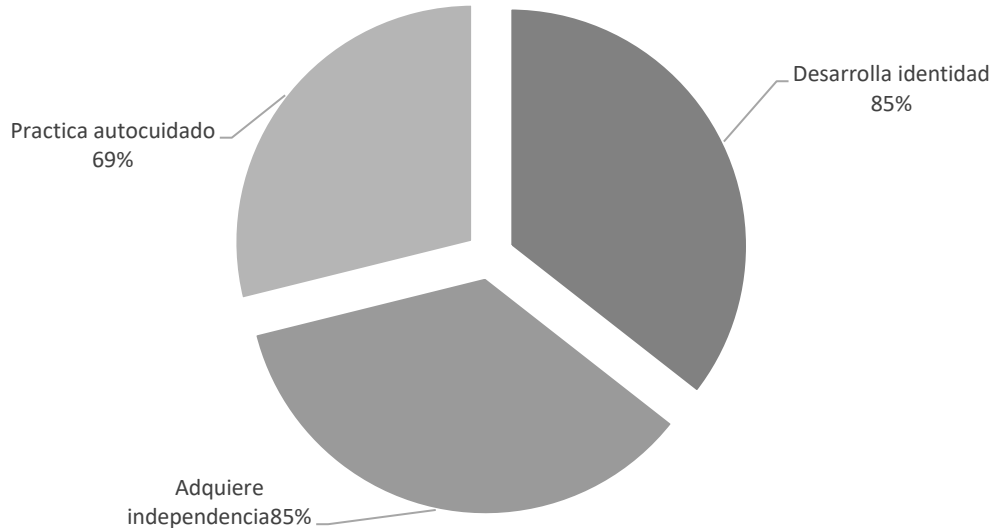
Based on the data collected, the results are presented:



**Gráfico 1**

*Observación en estado natural*

Fuente: Elaboración propia.



**Gráfico 2**

*Observación luego de aplicarse las actividades estimuladoras*

Fuente: Elaboración propia.

As can be seen in graph 1 and graph 2:

In the skill that corresponds to developing their identity the children were at 46%; after the application of the proposal they are located at 85% that is to say that 39% of children have improved their independence.

In terms of acquiring levels of independence, the children were at 31%, and after the application of activities in contact with nature, they acquired 85%, improving 54% in activities of exploration with the environment.

In the skill of practical self-care actions, at the beginning the children were at 38%, while after adequate stimulation they reached 69%, acquiring 31% in their self-care.

The activities of exploration of the environment favored the autonomy of the children from 38% to 80%, making it clear that the exploration of the environment develops abilities and skills, improving their autonomy by 42%, and the quality of life of the children at the initial level, by living together in a pleasant way, since learning is done with pleasure and enjoyment.

## **DISCUSSION**

Being autonomous is an indispensable skill in the development of every human being, especially one that should be stimulated from infancy. It is important to highlight that this work focuses specifically on Early Childhood Education as a starting point in the development of autonomy, as the first six years of life are a crucial moment at a neurological level (Gutiérrez-Duarte & Ruiz-León, 2018). To be autonomous is to analyze what you think you should do and ask yourself if you really should do it or are you fooling yourself. They are self-sufficient when they are rational and think about what to do with all the data at their disposal. In other words, autonomy empowers human beings to be self-sustaining and self-aware.



Promoting an environment that develops autonomy is fundamental to achieve intellectual, emotional and moral fulfillment. Autonomy enables critical thinking that allows adequate control of their behavior, with the assurance of satisfactorily fulfilling their daily needs. Without it, people would be continuously governed by their peers, having to receive orders and instructions to know what steps to follow and how to behave at all times, which affects their personal lives. To develop autonomous attitudes, the involvement of teachers and parents is necessary to facilitate a change of approach when educating children, making them more involved in the learning process. Autonomy is not a fixed or absolute capacity. It depends, first of all, on the competence of the person (cognitive, emotional, functional capacity), but also on the support provided by the environment (Hernández et al. 2022).

Where the person develops the success of succeeding in life depends on autonomy to achieve a high degree of self-confidence, having control of their emotions to develop skills to a high degree which will serve to ensure success in their present and future life. Autonomy in the child's life is a fundamental basis for solving daily problems in both personal and social life (Villoria-Nolla & Barroso, 2023).

In consideration of obtaining keys to independence, self-esteem, security to do things well and full confidence in routine actions, making the world a welcoming and pleasant space in such a way that contact with nature and exploration of the environment are prioritized as transversal axes to improve their quality of life. The development of autonomy related to their peers allows children to raise the critical concept and assert their ideas, enhancing their personal self-esteem by being considered as a leader who works for the welfare of their peers (Prins et al. 2022).

Personality is the result of genetic and environmental factors. It is a unique outcome. Some aspects of personality are present from birth; they are temperamental. But personality is much more than temperament; it includes the sense of self. the individual's view of self, feelings of autonomy and independence, confidence in one's ability and self-control of behavior, sexual identity, are those traits that define the self, and that make one see oneself as a reality in the social environment (Johnstone et al. 2020; Johnstone et al. 2022).

During the early years, the child develops various skills and abilities that help him/her to be autonomous, allowing him/her to achieve security, self-esteem and responsibility, supporting him/her to grow as a person, creating a better, reliable and stable school environment characterized by respect, cooperation and freedom to choose those actions that in the future will become habits that identify his/her personal identity. Another crucial aspect is the attachment of the child to his parents, dominating increasingly complex levels that influence the cognitive and emotional, showing their independence in activities such as walking, playing, choosing their clothes, choosing what to eat and other activities according to their interests and needs.

At this stage, the child is able to reach capacities that strengthen his autonomy in daily actions such as dressing, hygiene habits, choosing meals and making decisions about any matter that indicates an adequate personal development. The development of the child's autonomy is directly related to intellectual, social and emotional maturity, that is, in this area children learn to find solutions to their problems, improving their coexistence. These interactive actions give them the opportunity to control their emotions and develop social and emotional skills that will mark their present and future life. Cooperative games or school projects provide the opportunity to communicate effectively and achieve teamwork to achieve a common goal (Villalobos-López, 2022).

### **Appropriate environments for contact with nature**

Teachers should know how to take advantage of the wonderful spaces that surround educational centers and that offer a slightly more natural environment, whether in a rural or urban area, thus, students breathe fresh air, as well as helping them to get out of the classroom, understood as their comfort zone. Applying this in early childhood education students is very



enriching, since this change of scenery will cause the child to feel neither insecure nor afraid when leaving the classroom, in this way, they will get used to seeing and going through new spaces and, with this, getting to know the real world (Corcuera et al. 2019).

One of the elements that is directly related to emotional health and autonomy is contact with nature, as this allows them to explore the environment in a motivated way, where they feel safe to enjoy and enjoy what contributes to the development of their independent life, strengthens in themselves to learn to be responsible for the care of nature, making them aware of their contribution to the conservation of the environment.

In the developmental stages, most children show a great interest in getting to know nature and this offers the opportunity to develop not only a relationship of respect and mutual benefit, but also learning skills and competencies for the future, since this contact provides an experience of freedom and responsibility, giving way to creativity and initiative, so that nature is a strategy that provides several possibilities to learn while enjoying and experimenting (Yang, 2024).

At the early childhood level, field trips are a methodological strategy that guarantees learning in an active, participatory and motivating way, for which the classroom teacher starts from the micro-curricular planning developed by learning experiences, which after having been worked on for three or four weeks, are concretized with a well-organized field trip. In order to carry out the outing, authorization must be requested from the school authorities, and then the parents are informed, making the family reflect on the importance of learning through the exploration of the environment; the outing includes transportation, destination, refreshments and economic resources (Villamizar-Cañas, 2021).

These well-planned pedagogical outings are an opportunity to increase their learning through experiences in contact with the real world, these visits are usually to places such as: museums, natural parks, zoos, farms, among others in these environments children can learn in a practical way in real situations thus reaching their educational process properly (Mohamed et al. 2017).

## CONCLUSION

The execution of the micro curricular planning by learning experiences activating the transversal axis of the exploration of the environment, through well planned and organized pedagogical outings allows, the acquisition of skills and abilities that leads to the optimal integral development of children at this level, in the first instance to the acquisition of autonomy, through the exploration of the natural world, as well as forming values: respect and love towards their inner self, to later accept their peers and reach the care to nature, awakening social awareness, and then nature presents diversity of elements that lead to the acquisition of concepts that help the child to solve problems in their daily lives.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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

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