

The development of communicative skills in early childhood education teachers: a systematic review

El desarrollo de competencias comunicativas en docentes de educación inicial: una revisión sistemática

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Received: 27-02-2025 Accepted: 26-05-2025

2026. V6. N 1.

Abstract

This article analyzes the importance of developing communication skills in early childhood teachers to foster effective learning environments. These skills influence children's holistic development, encompassing linguistic, cognitive, social, and emotional aspects. Through a systematic review based on the PRISMA method, 24 recent studies were examined that address key dimensions of teacher communication: verbal and nonverbal communication, conflict resolution, mediation, and active listening. The results highlight the importance of clarity in verbal expression to facilitate learning and the role of nonverbal communication in building trust and respect in the classroom. It also emphasizes that teachers' ability to mediate and resolve conflicts promotes an inclusive and collaborative environment, while active listening enhances understanding of student needs. However, theoretical gaps were identified, such as the paucity of research in multicultural contexts and developing countries, as well as limited exploration of the use of emerging technologies, such as the metaverse, to strengthen these skills. The study concludes that it is necessary to design more comprehensive teacher training programs that address these dimensions and to encourage future research to fill the identified gaps, in order to enhance educational practice in early childhood education.

Keywords: early childhood education, active listening, communication skills, nonverbal communication, teacher mediation.

Resumen

El artículo analiza la importancia del desarrollo de competencias comunicativas en docentes de educación inicial para favorecer ambientes de aprendizaje efectivos. Estas competencias influyen en el desarrollo integral del niño, abarcando aspectos lingüísticos, cognitivos, sociales y emocionales. Mediante una revisión sistemática basada en el método PRISMA, se examinaron 24 estudios recientes que abordan dimensiones clave de la comunicación docente: comunicación verbal y no verbal, resolución de conflictos, mediación y escucha activa. Los resultados destacan la relevancia de la claridad en la expresión verbal para facilitar el aprendizaje y el papel de la comunicación no verbal en la generación de confianza y respeto en el aula. Asimismo, se subraya que la capacidad de los docentes para mediar y resolver conflictos promueve un ambiente inclusivo y colaborativo, mientras que la escucha activa mejora la comprensión de las necesidades estudiantiles. No obstante, se identificaron vacíos teóricos, como la escasez de investigaciones en contextos multiculturales y países en desarrollo, así como la limitada exploración del uso de tecnologías emergentes, como el metaverso, para fortalecer estas competencias. El estudio concluye que es necesario diseñar programas de formación docente más integrales que aborden estas dimensiones y fomenten futuras investigaciones que llenen los vacíos detectados, con el fin de potenciar la práctica educativa en educación inicial.

Palabras clave: educación inicial, escucha activa, competencias comunicativas, comunicación no verbal, mediación docente.

Introduction

Effective communication serves as the cornerstone of early childhood education, and the development of communicative competencies among educators has emerged as a key factor in fostering conducive learning environments (Husnawati, 2020; Park et al., 2023). These competencies not only influence the quality of interactions between teachers and students but also significantly impact the holistic development of the child, particularly in linguistic and cognitive domains (Djabbarovna, 2021; Yang et al., 2021), as well as in enhancing social and emotional skills (Hamre et al., 2014) and increasing teacher-child interaction (Hu et al., 2017). In this regard, it is imperative to conduct a theoretical review that addresses relevant aspects in educational settings, such as the effectiveness of teacher-student communication (Rusu, 2021), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002), interaction and communication-centered teacher training models (Ibrahim et al., 2019), communication and diversity in education (Simonds et al., 2008), and the improvement of communicative competencies in initial training (Fuentes et al., 2017).

The current state of knowledge reveals that the communicative competencies of early childhood educators have been studied from multiple perspectives (Baraldi & Rossi, 2011; Nicmane et al., 2020). Recent research highlights that teachers' communication skills contribute to the establishment of a positive classroom climate (Edwards & Mullis, 2003), facilitate conflict resolution, and promote collaborative learning (Gillies, 2004). However, despite the existence of significant studies, much of the literature lacks a comprehensive approach that links communication theories with everyday classroom practice (Novitasari et al., 2023), underscoring the need for a more in-depth theoretical analysis that integrates these connections and their educational implications (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021; Friedman et al., 2022; Zhelyazkova, 2023).

Despite advancements, significant gaps in current research have been identified (Rivera et al., 2023). For instance, Cao & Sarsenbayeva (2023) note that many studies focus exclusively on communicative competencies related to verbal interaction (Cuadrado et al., 2011), neglecting equally important aspects such as non-verbal competencies, active listening (Phillips, 1999), and conflict mediation in multicultural contexts (Baraldi & Rossi, 2011). Furthermore, most research is centered on specific educational contexts, limiting the generalizability of their findings (Neto et al., 2021). These theoretical gaps necessitate an updated review that delves into the multiple levels of communicative competence (Wilde & Sage, 2007) and its relationship with the educational environment and the unique characteristics of early childhood education (Conchado et al., 2017; Park & Kim, 2023).

The primary purpose of this theoretical review is to analyze, from an integrative perspective, the current state of the development of communicative competencies in early childhood educators (Padrón, 2023). This analysis will identify theoretical trends, clarify key concepts, and highlight areas where research presents divergences (Stamps & Biro, 2023). Additionally, it aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the competencies

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that educators must develop to facilitate learning and improve interactions in early childhood classrooms (Egert et al., 2020; Romo et al., 2022).

The significance of this review transcends the theoretical realm, as it has important practical implications (Raeff, 2020). A deep understanding of communicative competencies will facilitate the design of more effective teacher training programs aimed at improving educational quality from early childhood (Wangdi & Lhendup, 2022). Furthermore, this work will provide a solid foundation for the formulation of educational policies that promote more efficient and empathetic communication in classrooms, positively impacting teaching-learning processes and school coexistence (Menezes et al., 2021; Wynn et al., 2023).

Regarding the structure of the article, it begins with a detailed analysis of key theories related to communicative competencies in early childhood education. Subsequently, it presents the results of a review of studies published in Scopus, highlighting the advancements and limitations of current approaches. Finally, the practical implications of the findings are discussed, along with recommendations for future research and applications in the educational field.

Methodology

For the preparation of this study, an integrative theoretical review was chosen, as this approach allows for the synthesis, analysis, and connection of various concepts, theories, and empirical studies related to the development of communicative competencies in early childhood educators (Hadley et al., 2022). The integrative review is particularly suitable because it combines both theoretical and empirical studies, thereby facilitating a deep understanding of the current state of knowledge and its practical applications in the educational field (Kahn & Bullis, 2021). Additionally, this method is useful for identifying gaps in the literature and proposing new theoretical perspectives that can enrich educational practice (Mariegaard et al., 2022).

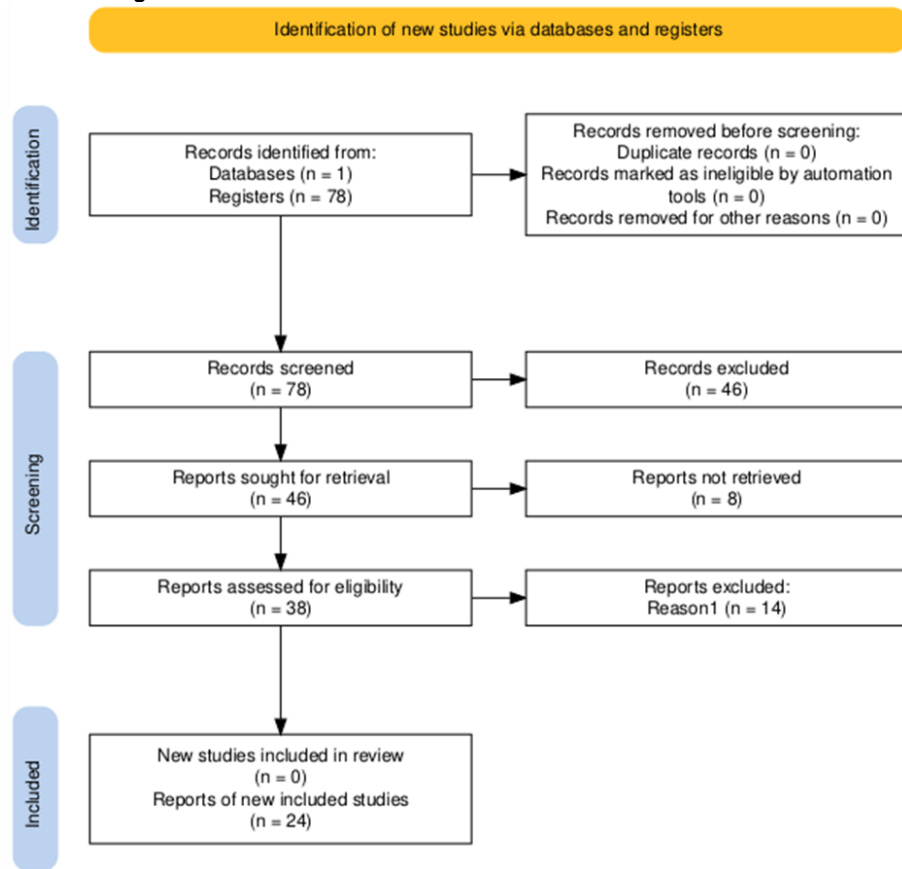
The selection of literature was conducted under rigorous criteria that ensured the relevance and quality of the included studies (Schumann et al., 2020). Articles published between 2018 and 2024 were considered to ensure the timeliness of the findings, although some classic studies were also included for their theoretical value. Research addressing the communicative competencies of educators in the context of early childhood education was prioritized. Keywords such as "teacher communicative competencies," "early childhood education," "development of teacher communication skills," "communication in early education," and "teacher-student interaction" were used, including works that related communication to school climate.

The review was supported by reliable academic databases, with Scopus being the primary platform used. Preference was given to high-impact indexed scientific journals to ensure the relevance and quality of the analyzed studies.

The search process unfolded in several phases. First, keywords were defined, and temporal filters were applied, limiting the search to publications from 1982 to 2024. Subsequently, articles were filtered by language, selecting only those written in English and Spanish, which dominate the educational literature. Afterward, abstracts were evaluated to determine the relevance of each study concerning the research topic. Finally, the selected literature was organized into thematic categories addressing different dimensions of communicative competencies, such as verbal interaction, non-verbal communication, and mediation skills in the classroom.

The flow of the study selection process is presented in Figure 1 (PRISMA Diagram), detailing the number of studies identified, evaluated, and ultimately included in the analysis.

Figure 1
Study selection process using the PRISMA method



Note. This process demonstrates that, from an initial total of 78 records, after screening, retrieval, and eligibility evaluation, 24 reports were included in the final review. The majority of records were excluded during the screening phases (46 records) and eligibility evaluation (14 records)

This diagram provides a clear and transparent view of the process by which studies were selected and filtered for the review, thereby ensuring the methodological validity of the analysis. The inclusion criteria focused on the theoretical relevance of each study, its methodological design, and the quality of the presented analysis. All research addressing the communicative competencies of educators in early childhood education, as well as those offering applicable theoretical and practical analyses to similar educational contexts, were incorporated.

For the information analysis, a thematic approach was adopted, which allowed for the organization of the selected studies into representative categories of different dimensions of communicative competencies: verbal communication, non-verbal communication, active listening, conflict resolution, and mediation. This method facilitated the identification of patterns, differences, and emerging trends in research on communicative competencies among educators. Additionally, a comparative analysis was conducted to establish the relationship between theoretical studies and their practical applicability in early childhood education contexts.

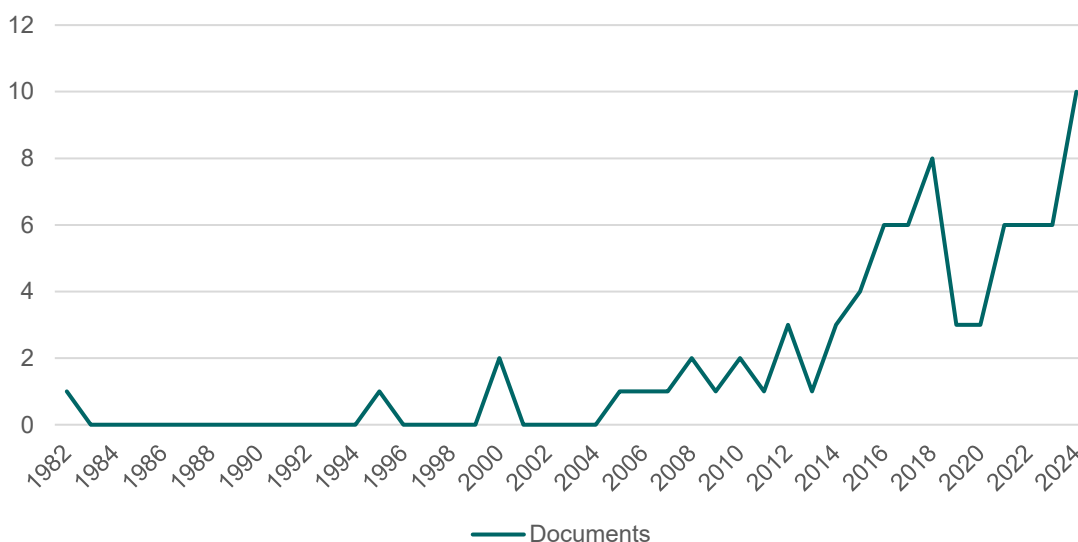
Among the identified methodological limitations, the scarcity of empirical studies addressing communicative competencies comprehensively in multicultural contexts stands out, which restricts the generalizability of findings on a global scale. Furthermore, most reviewed studies focus on educational contexts in developed countries, highlighting the need for deeper investigations into early childhood education in developing countries. To mitigate these limitations, studies with both qualitative and quantitative approaches were included, as well as literature in Spanish and English, to broaden the scope and diversity of the obtained results.

Results

Key information was gathered through a comprehensive review in the academic database Scopus, prioritizing studies and articles published between 1982 and 2024. This search specifically focused on early childhood education and the development of communicative competencies in educators, thus ensuring the relevance and timeliness of the analyzed content.

Figure 1

Trends in scientific production on the development of communicative competencies in early childhood educators (1982-2024)



Note. Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of trends in scientific production related to the development of communicative competencies in early childhood educators, spanning the period from 1982 to 2024. The graph reveals a clear upward trend in the number of published documents, with significant peaks in 2018 and 2024. These results indicate a growing interest in this field of study, reflected in a notable increase in publications over the last six years

Figure 2

Relevant studies on the development of communicative competencies in early childhood educators (1982-2024)

Author	Title of publication	Journal of publication
Langner, J., & Fukink R.G.	A Realistic Synthesis of Collaborative Interprofessional Practices in Early Intervention for Children with Speech, Language, and Communication Needs	International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders
Bochner, S., & Jones J.	Child Language Development: Learning to Talk: Second Edition	Child Language Development: Learning to Talk: Second Edition
Coelho, D., Andrade, A. I., & Portugal, G.	The "Awakening to Languages" Approach in Preschool Education: Developing Children's Communicative Competence	Language Awareness
Van der Wilt, Renske Bouwer, & Chiel Van der Veen	Dialogue in the Classroom during Early Education: Its Effect on Language Skills and Social Competence	Learning and Instruction

Vargas Pimentel, R., Mejía Janampa, M., & Huamancha Aguilar, M. (2026). The development of communicative skills in early childhood education teachers: a systematic review. *Revista InveCom*, 6(1), 1-13. <https://zenodo.org/records/15558658>

Cunningham, B. J., Hanna, S. E., Rosenbaum, P., Thomas-Stonell, N., & Oddson, B.	Factors Contributing to Preschool Children's Communicative Participation Outcomes: Findings from a Longitudinal Cohort Study in Ontario, Canada	American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology
Van der Veen, C., Van der Wilt, F., Van Kruistum, C., Van Oers, B., & Michaels, S.	MODEL2TALK: An Intervention to Promote Productive Conversations in the Classroom	Reading Teacher
Zukhairina; Wujiati; Sari S.R.; Yennizar; Zulqarnain; Pujiarto P.	Educators' Parenting Practices for Developing Communication and Critical Thinking Skills in Early Childhood: Case Studies	Journal of Critical Reviews
Green, K. B., Towson, J. A., Head, C., Janowski, B., & Smith, L.	Facilitated Playgroups to Promote Speech and Language Skills of Young Children with Communication Delays: A Pilot Study	Child Language Teaching and Therapy
Domeniconi, C., & Gràcia, M.	Effects of a Family-Focused Intervention Model to Promote Advances in Children's Language Development	Revista de Investigación en Logopedia
Smith, C., & Fluck, M.	(Re)constructing Prelinguistic Interpersonal Processes to Promote Language Development in Young Children with Deviant or Delayed Communication Skills	British Journal of Educational Psychology
Fortea-Sevilla, M. S., Escandell-Bermúdez, M. O., Castro-Sánchez, J. J., & Martos-Pérez, J.	Early Language Development in Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Using Alternative Systems	Revista de Neurología
Berciano, A., & Jiménez-Gestal, C.	Influence of Communication in a Cooperative Spatial Representation Task for Future Early Childhood Teachers	Formación Universitaria
Cárdenas, K., Moreno-Núñez, A., & Miranda-Zapata, E.	Shared Reading of Books in Early Childhood Education: Teacher Mediation in Children's Communicative Development	Frontiers in Psychology
Vasilyeva, V. S., & Nikitina, E. Y.	Case of Developing Educators' Communicative Competence within the Framework of the Methodological Work System in Preschool Education Institutions	International Journal of Engineering and Technology (UAE)
Van der Wilt, F., Bouwer, R., & Van der Veen, C.	Dialogue in the Classroom during Early Education: Its Effect on Language Skills and Social Competence	Learning and Instruction
Tan, K. H., Naim, M. K., Wahi, W., Arham, A. F., & Yunos, N.	Metaverse-Based Activities to Enhance Communicative Competencies Among Young Learners	International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies
Nurani, Y., & Utami, A.	Effective Teaching Skills Based on Communication for Early Childhood Students	International Journal of Higher Education
Robingatin, R., Malik, L. & Komariah, A.	The Capacity of Early Childhood Teachers in Communication Counseling in East Kalimantan	Southeast Asian Journal of Islamic Education
Jilink, L., Fukkink, R. & Huijbregts, S.	Effects of Early Childhood Education Training and Video Interaction Guidance on Teachers' Interactive Skills	Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education
Avari, P., Hamel, E., Schachter, R. & Hatton-Bowers, H	Communicating with Families: Understanding Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives	Journal of Early Childhood Research

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Brebner, C., Jovanovic, J., Lawless, A. & Young, J.	Understanding Early Communication by Early Childhood Educators: Application to Their Work with Young Children	Child Language Teaching and Therapy
Gita Swari, S., Tantra, D. K., & Pratiwi, N. P. A.	Communication in the Classroom in Early Childhood Education	Journal of Educational Research and Evaluation
Siller, M., Morgan, L., Fuhrmeister, S., Wedderburn, Q., Schirmer, B., Chatson, E. & Gillespie, S.	Understanding Early Communication by Early Childhood Educators: Application to Their Work with Young Children	Child Language Teaching and Therapy
Winship, M., Standish, H., Trawick-Smith, J. & Perry, C.	Reflections on Practice: Authentic Experiences with Families in Early Childhood Teacher Training	Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Training

Note. This table presents a compilation of key studies addressing the development of communicative competencies in early childhood educators and students, covering a period from 1982 to 2024. These works provide significant contributions from theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives, reflecting the ongoing evolution of this field of study. Additionally, they highlight innovative interventions implemented in various educational contexts

After reviewing the publications, a total of 78 articles and empirical studies addressing the development of communicative competencies in early childhood educators were identified. From this set, recurring patterns underscoring the importance of these competencies in early teaching-learning processes were detected. Aspects related to the theoretical relevance of each study, its methodological design, and the quality of the conducted analysis were also considered.

Organization of results by categories

The analyzed studies were organized into four key categories that reflect the most relevant dimensions of communicative competencies in the educational field.

First, verbal communication in early education is highlighted as a fundamental tool. The reviewed studies emphasize the importance of teachers using clear verbal expression, as this facilitates children's understanding of instructions and concepts. For example, Perrenoud (2014) notes that teachers who employ a clear discourse tailored to their students' levels tend to create more dynamic and participatory learning environments. Similarly, Cárdenas et al. (2020) explain that during shared reading in early childhood, verbal mediation practices by the teacher stimulate the production of communicative signs in children, fostering better vocalizations, words, and complex combinations. Coelho et al. (2018) also stress the importance of promoting linguistic diversity from an early age to stimulate receptive and expressive language, which drives communicative development through active interaction with adults and educational materials. Thus, the teacher's verbal language not only instructs but also contributes to the construction of meaning in playful and everyday contexts.

On the other hand, non-verbal communication complements and reinforces verbal messages. According to González & Salinas (2017), gestures, posture, and eye contact are essential elements in teacher-student interaction, as they strengthen the verbal message and create an environment of trust and mutual respect, which are crucial aspects in early education. In this context, the "Awakening to Languages" approach highlights how the use of multisensory materials, such as clay and other manipulative resources, fosters the comprehensive development of communicative competencies by stimulating children's receptive and expressive vocabulary (Langner & Fukkink, 2022). The combination of oral and gestural practices creates spaces where children not only listen but also explain and actively participate.

Moreover, conflict resolution and mediation emerge as essential communicative competencies for early education teachers. The literature highlights that a teacher with advanced communicative skills is more effective at mediating and resolving conflicts among students, promoting peaceful coexistence and respect (Rodríguez, 2019). Furthermore, Langner & Fukkink (2022) indicate that mediation takes on an interprofessional character by involving teachers and other specialists in seeking solutions tailored to each child's individual needs. These

practices allow conflicts to be addressed from a constructivist and participatory approach, promoting the development of social competencies in students.

Finally, active listening is presented as an indispensable tool for early education teachers. Studies such as those by López & Moreno (2020) emphasize that this skill is fundamental for teachers to better understand their students' needs and concerns, contributing to a more inclusive and personalized learning experience. In this regard, Bochner & Jones (2020) explain that the development of linguistic and communicative skills improves when children maintain effective verbal interaction with adults, making the dialogue established by teachers at this stage crucial for enhancing communication. Similarly, recent research in Finland, such as that by Van et al. (2024), highlights the importance of attending to early communicative initiatives from children—such as babbling, gestures, and eye contact—since these initial forms of communication are fundamental for language development. However, this study also identified that teachers with limited specialized training tend to overlook children with limited linguistic skills, underscoring the need to strengthen teacher training in active listening and adaptive response strategies.

Comparison of theoretical approaches

When comparing the theoretical approaches of the reviewed studies, a general consensus emerges regarding the importance of communicative competencies in the context of early education. However, divergences arise concerning the priority that should be given to verbal competencies versus non-verbal ones. On one hand, some authors, such as Pérez (2021), argue that verbal expression should be the central focus of professional teacher development due to its fundamental role in the clear transmission of knowledge. On the other hand, researchers like García & Martín (2020) advocate that non-verbal skills are equally crucial, as they significantly contribute to the formation of emotional bonds and the creation of a trusting environment with students. These differences highlight the need to integrate both dimensions—verbal and non-verbal—within teacher training programs to achieve a more comprehensive and effective development of communicative competencies in early education.

Trends and gaps in research

Among the emerging trends, there is a growing interest in mediation in conflict situations and the promotion of peaceful resolution within the classroom. However, the reviewed literature reveals significant gaps in the study of communicative competencies in multicultural contexts, as well as in the evaluation of their development among early education teachers. In particular, there is a need to expand empirical research in developing countries, where the sociocultural context may significantly influence how teachers communicate and relate to their students.

Practical implications

The results of the review suggest that teachers can strengthen their communicative competencies through the implementation of specific strategies, such as ongoing training in non-verbal communication techniques and active listening. Additionally, incorporating mediation and conflict resolution programs into teacher training has proven effective in improving classroom climate and fostering interaction among students. This practical approach aligns with the conclusions of recent studies that emphasize the need for training programs to be more comprehensive, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal competencies (Pérez, 2021; López & Moreno, 2020).

Discussion

The study conducted on the development of communicative competencies in early education teachers reveals both the complexity and relevance of this area within the educational context. The findings demonstrate that effective communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is fundamental for promoting inclusive and dynamic learning environments, significantly contributing to the holistic development of students. The review of research, such as that by Langner & Fukkink (2022) and Van der Wilt et al. (2024), highlights the importance of practices like interprofessional mediation and dialogue in the classroom, positioning them as essential pillars in teacher training.

However, despite advancements, theoretical gaps persist that limit a comprehensive understanding of communicative competencies. Some studies focus exclusively on verbal interaction (Cao & Sarsenbayeva, 2023), neglecting equally relevant aspects such as non-verbal communication and active listening (Phillips, 1999). Furthermore, the majority of research focuses on educational contexts in developed countries, making it challenging to generalize results to multicultural or developing environments (Neto et al., 2021).

Among the emerging trends, there is a growing interest in the use of innovative technologies, such as activities based in the metaverse, to enhance communicative competencies (Tan et al., 2024). These tools offer new opportunities to enrich the educational process and overcome the limitations of traditional pedagogical practices. However, their implementation requires adequate teacher training, which presents an additional challenge in educational systems with limited resources.

Another significant contribution of this review is its integrative approach, which organizes communicative competencies into key categories: verbal communication, non-verbal communication, conflict resolution and mediation, and active listening. These categories facilitate not only a better theoretical understanding but also serve as practical guidance for designing more effective teacher training programs.

Finally, from a methodological perspective, the study faces limitations, such as the scarcity of empirical research addressing the interaction between communicative competencies and multicultural dynamics in early education. This underscores the need for future research to explore these relationships in depth and across diverse contexts, thereby strengthening knowledge and educational practice in this fundamental area.

Conclusion

This article highlights that the communicative competencies of teachers are essential for fostering effective learning tailored to the individual needs of children in early education. The findings confirm that both verbal and non-verbal skills are crucial for building a positive classroom climate, facilitating conflict resolution, and promoting inclusion. Additionally, active listening emerges as an indispensable tool for identifying and responding to student needs, particularly in diverse and multicultural environments.

The review also identifies critical areas requiring attention, such as the integration of non-verbal competencies and mediation in teacher training programs, as well as the need to expand empirical research in early education contexts in developing countries. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of incorporating innovative technologies, such as the metaverse, to enrich communicative practices in the classroom.

Practically, the findings suggest that educational systems should prioritize the continuous training of teachers, focusing on mediation strategies, active listening, and the use of technological tools. These interventions will not only improve the quality of teaching but also contribute to building more inclusive and empathetic classrooms.

In summary, this theoretical analysis provides a solid foundation for advancing the design of educational policies and teacher training programs that respond to the contemporary demands of early education. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to communicative competencies will strengthen not only teaching practice but will also have a lasting impact on the holistic development of students, preparing them to face the challenges of the 21st century.

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