



Child development from 0 to 5 years old in a contemporary and reflective view

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Abstract

This article focuses on Integrated Child Development (ICD) from 0 to 5 years in Ecuador, aiming to reassess traditional evaluation methods and their interpretation from a social construction perspective, emphasizing diversity in ICD. Based on a critical and theoretical review of selected literature, a qualitative and hermeneutical methodology is employed to analyze relevant texts from Latin America, seeking to theoretically conceptualize ICD dynamically. The findings highlight the necessity to move beyond standard evaluations, proposing a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the complexity and individual variability of development. It concludes that ICD is a multidimensional process, influenced by an interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors, and that early education along with appropriate public policies are crucial to promote equitable and quality development.

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Desarrollo infantil de 0 a 5 años desde una perspectiva contemporánea y reflexiva

Resumen

Este artículo aborda el Desarrollo Infantil Integral (DII) de 0 a 5 años en Ecuador, con el objetivo de reevaluar los métodos de evaluación tradicionales y su interpretación bajo una óptica de construcción social, enfatizando la diversidad en el DII. Fundamentado en una revisión crítica y teórica de literatura seleccionada, se adopta una metodología cualitativa y hermenéutica para analizar textos relevantes de América Latina, buscando conceptualizar teóricamente el DII de manera dinámica. Los resultados destacan la importancia de superar las evaluaciones estándares, proponiendo un enfoque más inclusivo que contemple la complejidad y variabilidad individual del desarrollo. Se concluye que el DII es un proceso multidimensional, influenciado por una interacción de factores biológicos, psicológicos y sociales, y que la educación temprana junto con políticas públicas adecuadas son fundamentales para promover un desarrollo equitativo y de calidad.

Palabras clave: desarrollo infantil; proceso integral; reflexión; contemporánea.

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1. Introduction

This article aims to provide a critical review of the conceptualization of Integrated Child Development (ICD) from 0 to 5 years, incorporating a contemporary, theoretical, and bibliographic analysis perspective to reassess evaluation methods in Ecuador and their interpretation from a social construction viewpoint, emphasizing the importance of diversity in ICD. It highlights the crucial role of reviewing the literature to update the understanding of ICD, beyond traditional biological perspectives.

This article examines Integrated Child Development (ICD) in a Latin American context, highlighting its multidimensional nature from gestation to five years. It recognizes ICD not only as a sequential process of skill acquisition but also as a sum of unique progresses reflecting interaction with the environment and the diversity of development paces.

The State Federation of Early Attention Professionals Associations (GAT, 2005): considers that Early Child Development (ECD) is a complex process influenced by psychological, biological, and social factors, including abilities such as postural control and social interaction. Although traditionally the biological aspect has been emphasized, assessing ICD based on physical growth in standardized stages, this limited perspective could lead to considering variations in development as “deficits”.

Beyond biology, it is key to consider emotional, social, and affective aspects in child development, influenced by parenting practices, individual diversity, and an enriching environment provided by family members, caregivers, and professionals. It is crucial to adopt an integral view of development, using developmental milestones as a guide, but not relying exclusively on them to evaluate Early Child Development (ECD).

It is worth mentioning that since the 1990s, a new paradigm about childhood has been developed, considering children as protagonists and subjects of rights. In this regard, Valverde (2008): states that infants are unique



and unrepeatable beings, which the author refers to as the “social and cultural fabric”. Therefore, ECD should be contemplated from all spheres that influence the process and recognize the various events and heterogeneity. However, it is emphasized that the present research assumes that ECD occurs in a sequential and progressive manner.

Childhood is crucial for integral development, demanding attention beyond basics like quality sleep and healthy emotions. Early Child Development (ECD) is emphasized from an inclusive educational perspective that values diversity from an early age and sees ECD as a social construction. It promotes understanding the diversity in child development beyond standard evaluations for a more complete comprehension.

The article's goal is to provide an integral and reflective vision on Integrated Child Development (ICD) of children from 0 to 5 years, through the critical review of selected literature to theoretically conceptualize ICD, identify standard evaluation processes in Ecuador, and interpret the information from a social construction perspective. It seeks to propose a dynamic definition of ICD, highlighting its multidimensionality that includes physical growth, biological maturation, acquisition of cognitive and socio-emotional skills, and identity formation.

Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of constant observation and assessment of these processes, highlighting the need for comprehensive support to infants during their early years of life.

1.1. Child Development from a Critical Review: Theoretical Foundations

According to Arango, Rivera, and Olabarrieta-Landa (2017): child development is a rapid and evolutionary process that stimulates brain growth and maturity from conception, where children learn through sensory exploration and play, facilitating the consolidation of cognitive and social skills. It is a crucial dynamic ascending process in the early years of life for neural connections,



where early experiences can have a lasting positive impact.

Neuroscience contributes to understanding Child Development (CD) by linking brain and behavioral changes to genetic and environmental factors. On the other hand, Martins and Ramallo (2015a); and Santi-León (2019a): emphasize the uniqueness of CD, the interaction with the environment, and how this affects learning and personality formation. They highlight the individual variability of development, driven by social interactions and the importance of a safe and stimulating early educational environment, integrating biological, psychological, and social aspects in child growth.

1.2. A Look Beyond Standard Evaluation

Regarding the topic, Abellán (2019): proposes to improve the assessment of child development with tools sensitive to its complex dynamics, using the theory of Dynamic Systems. He introduces the Harmonic Development Scale (HDS), an instrument that allows for intraindividual monitoring through a matrix structure and two indicators, the Stable Development Quotient and the Harmony Index. These indicators measure order and control in development, contributing to the longitudinal research of child development.

The assessment of Child Development (CD) uses various tools to measure its age appropriateness. In the same vein, Jumbo, Salazar, Acosta, and Torres (2021): argue that CD, although with universal aspects, is complex due to changes in physical, cognitive, emotional, and social areas, influenced by culture, social context, and individual differences. They underline that standard assessments of psychomotor development do not fully capture CD and highlight the importance of considering a broad spectrum of factors and the child's social context for a comprehensive evaluation.



1.3. Interpreting Child Development as a Social Construction!

Child development, a process that includes physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes, has evolved from a focus on the biological and psychological to a broader understanding that links it to its social context. This new perspective recognizes that the social environment significantly influences development and has become relevant in research within Ecuador and Latin America, broadening the approach to the social construction of child development.

According to Amar (2015): human development is composed of three basic elements: speciation, individuation, and socialization. Speciation refers to meeting biological needs linked to the physical world according to a pre-established genetic code. Individuation involves the unique character of each person's development and their particular events. Socialization is the third element that makes up human development.

Socialization is essential for child development, influenced by culture, public policies, and social institutions, with variations in the valuation of independence and the focus of early education. Providing a suitable environment and understanding the diversity of development are key to healthy and complete growth. The family, community, and social environment play a fundamental role in the integral development of children through interaction with their surroundings.

The research by Santi-León (2019b): highlights how child development is influenced by contextual and cultural factors in rural areas of Ecuador and indigenous communities in Latin America, respectively. In Ecuador, resource limitations and access to basic services affect children's cognitive and socio-emotional development. In indigenous communities, development is understood through cultural practices and beliefs, underscoring the need to integrate these perspectives into policies and programs for inclusive and culturally sensitive child care.



The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2022): emphasizes the critical importance of public policies for equitable child development in Latin America, pointing out that quality services in education and health are key to overcoming social gaps and promoting integral growth in children. It stresses the impact of these policies to increase access to services and reduce inequalities, underlining the importance of studies like that of Santi-León (2019): on child development in rural contexts of Ecuador, showing how cultural and contextual factors influence this development.

1.4. Diversity in Child Development

Bronfenbrenner, through Monreal and Guitart (2012): emphasizes the importance of environments in child development through his bioecological model, which distinguishes three levels of environmental influence. The microsystem, which includes family, school, and community, is the level most directly connected to the child. This model highlights how the environment contributes to development, treating diversity as a value that enriches through varied interactions and growth opportunities, and emphasizes the importance of family and cultural dynamics in the child's adaptation and socialization.

Culture, defined as a dynamic set of knowledge and meanings, contributes to the diversity of skills and learning styles in child development (Oudhof, Mercado, and Robles, 2019). In this sense, Noriega and Fariñas (2015): highlight the importance of adapting educational environments to this variability, promoting individualized support and inclusion to allow children to develop their unique talents. This approach underlines the need to recognize and value individual differences in the educational process, facilitating more effective and personalized education.

The educational environment is vital for exploring and experiencing diversity, being a space where children with different learning styles, values,



interests, cultures, and identities interact. In accordance with Moya and Gil (2001), cited by Ayala (2020): this fosters the development of thought and enriches sociocultural relations.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020a): points out that inequalities in learning and child development start in early childhood, prompting reflection on the impact of Inclusive Education on children's biopsychosocial development. This education promotes the acceptance of differences, challenging standard approaches that generate exclusion. On this topic, Remorini and Rowensztein (2022): emphasize the importance of adapting education to diversity and social dynamics, seeking inclusive schools that recognize and value the varied individual experiences and abilities.

Inclusive education aligns with the biopsychosocial vision, focusing on learning that sees each child as unique, encouraging their active participation and personal development. For UNESCO (2020b): this approach not only prepares individuals to contribute effectively in society but also involves an active adaptation and monitoring of their development, involving the entire educational community, including teachers and school managers, in creating a diverse and enriching environment.

Interpreting Arciniegas (2019); and Booth and Ainscow (2015): they express the importance of appreciating and valuing diversity in its multiple forms, including cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and personal aspects, emphasizing the need to overcome deficit-centered models to foster enriching interactions in early education. They advocate for an inclusive education that views child development as a multidimensional process, where the family and the educational environment play crucial roles in promoting harmonious coexistence and respecting children's autonomy and natural rhythm.

On the other hand, Pikler (1969), cited by Gutiérrez-Ruiz, Martino-Ortiz, Barreto-Salinas, and Pacherez-Valladares (2021): highlights the relevance of



child-environment interaction and the individuality of the infant. It emphasizes creating stimulating environments that allow children to explore and develop their abilities autonomously, underlining the importance of observation and adaptation to individual needs for holistic and respectful development.

2. Methodology (Materials and Methods)

The approach guiding the researchers' perspective is qualitative, as Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista (2014): indicate that this approach involves the collection and analysis of data, with the aim of understanding the meaning of a reality and interpreting it.

The research method used is hermeneutic review and bibliographic analysis with an interpretive paradigm, which is based on subjectivities and allows understanding the world from appropriation. It focuses on the subjective understanding of reality, emphasizing the importance of interpretation and meaning in people's lives (Miranda and Ortiz, 2020).

In the same vein, Pérez (2011): asserts that, guiding a deductive analysis of the topic, through the technique of literature review, a critical exploration of the literature can be generated. The nature of the documentary evidence, in this case, were primary sources that allowed us to obtain data of interest on DII. To ensure the validity of the documentary review, it was necessary to use a rigorous and systematic approach in the controlled selection and analysis of the sources.

The research was conducted in three phases. The first was aimed at searching for and obtaining articles or texts from Latin America. The way they were selected was by considering the category of theoretical review of the DII concept during 2012-2022. Subsequently, the publications were organized by date and origin, applying the critical method to all documents and questioning: What does it say?; Who wrote it?; Why?; Does it have a definition of DII?; What is the perspective of the concept?. Finally, content analysis was performed,



and reflection and interpretation were recorded.

3. Results

Establishing a precise definition of child development is a complex challenge due to the diverse theoretical perspectives involved. From the biological-pediatric approach, the emphasis is on the progressive increase in more complex capacities, while neuropsychiatry focuses on the evolution of the nervous system. Psychology considers cognitive aspects and interactions with the environment, and psychoanalysis the relationships and construction of the psyche. On the other hand, the ecological approach highlights the interaction of environments and settings such as the community and family, influencing child growth and maturation.

The text presents two contrasting approaches to the perception of childhood and its relationship with time: the “anticipatory approach”, which is nurtured by developmental disciplines and focuses on anticipating future phases of the child; and the “experiential approach”, which prioritizes the immediate experience of children as a response to critiques in social sciences (De Grande and Remorini, 2019).

This has generated debates about the impact of chronologizing life and has highlighted the interconnection of social factors. In this framework, child development is shaped by socioeconomic conditions influenced by cultural-historical aspects, encouraging a holistic and integrative approach that values historicity. Therefore, the current concept of child development is at the intersection of social, psychological, and biological dimensions, considering both organic changes and social relations for its full understanding.

In Ecuador, there are two guiding Ministries for educational care: the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES) serves children in two modalities, Growing with Our Children (CNH) with home visits and Child Development Centers (CDI) with intramural care. In these services,



development indicators are applied twice a year, this instrument was designed by the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES, 2019).

The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC, 2014a): defines evaluation as a qualitative and systematic process that facilitates informed decisions about educational actions and necessary interventions, emphasizing its permanent, continuous, objective, flexible, and comprehensive nature. This approach allows for the improvement of child learning and development, positioning evaluation as a tool to achieve educational objectives, rather than as an end in itself.

Evaluation in early education focuses on the acquisition of skills contemplated in the curriculum, with the purpose of developing capacities and skills that contribute to achieving the exit profile for the next sublevel. These evaluations are generally qualitative, although standardized instruments are applied in MIES modalities for children under 3 years old. Meanwhile, MINEDUC (2014b): with its offer for children aged 3 to 5 years, considers qualitative criteria that contribute to entry into the school level. The evaluation is not punitive, but seeks to develop skills framed in the Early Education curriculum.

Child development, which includes physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes, has traditionally been viewed from biological and psychological angles, focusing on the child's internal aspects. However, recent approaches broaden this view, highlighting the importance of the social context in child development. This perspective has gained relevance in research and academic studies in Ecuador and Latin America, highlighting the role of social construction in the growth of children.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model provides a solid theoretical framework to understand diversity in child development. The approach highlights the complex interaction between different environmental levels and how the environment influences the child's development. However, in practice,



the effective integration of this approach can be challenging.

Differences in children's abilities, interests, and learning styles contribute to the richness of development diversity. Although this diversity can be seen as a strength, it sometimes encounters resistance in educational systems that seek uniformity and standardization. Gaps in equity persist, as some children may receive more support and opportunities than others, highlighting the need for more inclusive approaches. It can be noted that, although diversity is seen as a source of enrichment, challenges in equity and in adapting educational systems to individual and cultural differences persist.

4. Discussions

Child development is influenced by both internal and external factors, with socioeconomic status being a key external factor that affects health and future opportunities. This link between child development and socioeconomic status, rooted in historical-cultural aspects, demands a holistic approach for its full understanding, highlighting the importance of considering historicity in the analysis of development.

Longitudinal research is key to understanding how social influences affect child development and the effectiveness of public policies for a healthy childhood. Development is seen as a process of continuous reconstruction, affected by culture, and neuroscience offers insights on brain and behavioral evolution. In line with this, Martins and Ramallo (2015b): highlight the importance of considering the uniqueness of each child, emphasizing the relevance of their interaction with the environment and internal relationships.

The psychological perspective highlights how the child understands and acts in their environment, emphasizing cognitive and socioemotional skills. In this regard, Santi-León (2019d): highlights the temporal variability driven by social interaction and the relevance of early education. Ultimately, the concept encompasses social, psychological, and biological dimensions, emphasizing



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the interconnection of systems and the importance of a holistic approach to appreciate its true complexity.

Although there are various theories on child development, they lack a holistic approach that integrates cultural, social aspects, and their interactions. This leads to interventions that do not capture the complexity of development, and research often misses a complete longitudinal view. It is necessary to reconsider these limitations to move towards a more inclusive and equitable approach.

Several studies have been conducted in Ecuador on the evaluation of child development in early childhood. For example, Espinosa-Guzmán (2020): identified in her research that public policy contributes significantly to comprehensive child development. The researcher concludes that there is a broad umbrella for early childhood care.

In the research conducted by Saquicela (2016): in a CNH of the MIES in the canton of Sigsig, it is identified that after the application of the instrument called Development Indicators, the most compromised development area is language. She proposes the development of a didactic guide for language stimulation, achieving favorable results with the use of play.

When talking about evaluation in early childhood, other instruments that are not official have also been applied, but nevertheless provide valuable information. Thus, in a study conducted in a CDI in Chordeleg, the Battelle inventory was applied to children from one to three years old, and it was found that the motor area is the most affected with 45.7%, and the adaptive area is the best situated with 29.6%, as seen in table 1 (Chimbo and Zúñiga, 2020).

Table 1. Impact on Development Areas in Early Childhood according to the Battelle Inventory.

Development Area	Percentage Affected
Motor Area	45.7%
Adaptive Area	29.6%

Source: Chimbo and Zúñiga (2020).



Child development as a social construction has proven to be a crucial approach to understanding and addressing the complexities of growth and child development in Ecuador and Latin America. The importance of considering social, cultural, and contextual factors in child development has been evidenced. Some postulates highlight:

1. Social and cultural factors play a key role in the construction of child development. The doctoral thesis of Santi-León (2019e): points out that, in rural contexts in Ecuador, child development is influenced by socioeconomic conditions and the educational practices of families. This highlights the need to implement strategies and support programs that address social inequalities and promote a favorable environment for child development.
2. In Latin American indigenous communities, cultural practices and traditional upbringing systems play a crucial role in the social construction of child development. The importance of recognizing and valuing cultural diversity to promote an inclusive child development that respects the cultural identities of these communities is emphasized.

The diversity in Child Development (CD), as revealed in the results and reflections presented, is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses a wide range of aspects. The findings reflect the inherent complexity in the development of each child, from their abilities to their unique interests and learning styles.

Education must value diversity in abilities, interests, and culture, promoting the inclusion of each child as a unique individual. Although uniformity in education often marginalizes those who differ from the norm, inclusive education seeks to offer support to all students. It is crucial to recognize and embrace cultural diversity to create an educational environment where everyone feels valued and represented, despite the existing gap between the recognition of its importance and its effective implementation in the curriculum.

5. Conclusions

Child development is a dynamic and multidimensional process that encompasses physical growth, biological maturation, the acquisition of cognitive and socio-emotional skills, and the formation of identity in the early



years of life. This process is influenced by endogenous and exogenous factors, including biological, socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental aspects. Adopting a holistic perspective involves recognizing the constant interaction between biological, psychological, and social systems, as well as considering the importance of historicity and cultural practices in the developmental trajectory of each child.

It is essential to understand that child development does not unfold in isolated compartments but in a network of interactions. This perspective promotes the importance of addressing each child as a unique individual with distinct needs and contexts. By adopting this approach, it supports the promotion of a full and healthy development, improving not only the individual capacities of the child but also their ability to interact with and adapt to their environment.

Early education plays a fundamental role in this process by providing a safe, stimulating, and enriching environment for children. During this stage, sensory exploration, play, social interaction, and knowledge construction are encouraged. The intersection between child development and early education becomes a crucial space where educators and caregivers play an essential role in guiding and supporting the holistic growth of children.

Assessment is undoubtedly necessary, not only to mediate or assign a grade but also to understand how the process is developing, take corrective actions, and strengthen the teaching and learning processes. This is why quantitative tests are not conducted in early education. Instead, qualitative and formative assessment is favored so that students can master skills, turning them into competencies that will not only allow them to progress to the next sublevel but also develop throughout their lives. Reviewing assessment is a task for everyone, and the co-participation of all educational actors is essential to enhance integral child development.

Child development, as a social construction, is a valuable theoretical and



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practical framework for understanding and promoting the growth and development of children in Ecuador and Latin America. Research and studies have contributed to expanding our understanding of the factors that influence child development and the need to adopt a holistic approach that considers social, cultural, and political aspects. By recognizing and addressing these factors, more effective policies and programs can be implemented that promote equitable, inclusive, and quality child development in the region.

The diversity in child development presents both significant opportunities and challenges. Inclusive education is emerging as a valuable response to embrace and nurture this diversity, although its effective implementation requires profound changes in norms, policies, and educational practices. Critically reflecting on the relationship between theory and reality and questioning entrenched systems is essential to promote an education that truly responds to the unique needs of each child and fosters a more equitable and empowered society.

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