

PEDAGOGICAL FACTORS OF LITERACY DELAY: A THEORETICAL REVIEW AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MEXICO

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Abstract: The purpose of this research study is to analyze the methodological theories—phonetic, synthetic, global, Troncoso, and eclectic—of literacy instruction and how pedagogical factors influence delays in literacy acquisition among elementary school students, using a qualitative approach to identify areas for improvement in teaching practice. From a pedagogical management perspective, delays in literacy acquisition do not merely represent a curricular gap or an isolated issue related to accreditation; rather, they become a barrier to accessing learning development processes or more complex content.

In Mexico, the delay in literacy acquisition in lower elementary school has shown that basic communication skills are not being mastered within the expected timeframe; as a result, the focus has shifted from functional learning to rote memorization, where students merely trace letters rather than making sense of their surroundings. Although there are extensive studies on the psycholinguistics of literacy, the knowledge gap lies in the disconnect between the official curriculum and teachers' actual classroom practices. Therefore, it is essential to understand specific pedagogical factors such as: the methods used, teaching strategies, use of materials, and classroom practice. These pedagogical factors must be categorized to optimize the teaching-learning processes in the acquisition of literacy in elementary school and to achieve improvements in teaching practice.

Keywords: Teaching and learning, instructional strategies, pedagogical factors, literacy, methods.

Abstract: This research paper aims to analyze methodological theories—phonetic, synthetic, global, Troncoso, and eclectic—of literacy instruction and how pedagogical factors influence the delay in literacy acquisition among elementary school students. Using a qualitative method, the study seeks to identify areas of opportunity in teaching practices. From a pedagogical management perspective, the literacy gap does not merely represent a curricular lag or an isolated statistic regarding accreditation; rather, it becomes a barrier to accessing more complex learning development processes and content.

In Mexico, the delay in literacy acquisition in the lower elementary grades has shown that basic communicative competencies are not consolidated within the expected timeframe. Consequently,

education faces the challenge of moving from mechanical teaching to functional instruction, where students do not just trace letters but produce meaning within their environment. Although extensive studies on the psycholinguistics of literacy exist, the knowledge gap lies in the disconnect between the official curriculum and actual classroom practices. Therefore, it is essential to understand specific pedagogical factors such as the methods used, didactic strategies, the use of materials, and classroom practice. These pedagogical factors must be categorized to optimize teaching-learning processes in literacy acquisition and achieve improvements in teaching performance.

Keywords: Literacy, methods, pedagogical factors, teaching and learning, teaching strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Learning to read and write is one of the most comprehensive life skills; acquiring these skills helps students build a solid foundation for learning across various academic disciplines and plays a crucial role in various aspects of a person's life: the construction of their identity and the development of their emotional, cognitive, and social thinking. In this vein, we began by examining reading methods: what they entail and their advantages or disadvantages when implemented.

Teachers are responsible for ensuring the effectiveness and ease with which the literacy acquisition process unfolds. Therefore, knowing which method and strategies to implement, which teaching materials to use, and how to adapt their teaching practices to encourage student participation and increase their interest in learning to read and write independently are pedagogical factors that influence efforts to address learning gaps.

The development of both oral and written language is a matter that concerns all teachers, because it is present in every moment of social and school life. In the social practices of language, using teaching materials for literacy acquisition, understanding them, adapting them to students' needs and interests, and allowing students to manipulate, explore, and make their learning experiential is essential for achieving literacy acquisition.

Finally, this study aims to conduct a theoretical analysis of the pedagogical factors that influence reading and writing delays, and to facilitate pedagogical management aimed at optimizing these processes and identifying areas for improvement in teaching practice; by emphasizing how reading and writing are taught,

read and write, we can make a difference in their interest and foster students' autonomy in reading and writing, thereby achieving the grade-level learning development processes.

Rationale

This research addresses the delay in the acquisition of literacy, which represents a barrier in the teaching-learning process; therefore, identifying pedagogical factors allows teachers to optimize their time and determine which teaching methods and resources are appropriate. In the context of the New Mexican School, addressing the reading and writing gap is a matter of equity. It is essential to understand that writing is humanity's ability to express thoughts and ideas; thus, the relevance of this study lies in providing a theoretical foundation for pedagogical management to optimize the processes of reading and writing acquisition within the teaching-learning process.

This study adopts a qualitative approach, as it is a theoretical and literature review; the objective of this research is to interpret and categorize meanings related to the pedagogical factors contributing to reading and writing delays. Since the data collection was conducted in repositories, selecting articles on literacy, communicative skills, teaching knowledge, etc., content analysis was used, and finally, the positions of classical authors were compared with current research. From this perspective, questions arise such as: How have methods for the process of literacy acquisition evolved? What methods and strategies are used to achieve literacy acquisition? What pedagogical factors influence improvements in teaching practice and reduce literacy delays among elementary school students?

DEVELOPMENT

Reading and writing have accompanied human beings since ancient times to express, understand, learn, and communicate their inherent ideas and needs. The communicative function performed by this aspect of language is fundamental to people's lives; studying its origins broadens the possibilities for constructing shared meanings. In this theoretical study, we will analyze the main stages of evolution in the teaching process of literacy acquisition in Mexico, with the aim of identifying the pedagogical characteristics that promote the teaching of this communicative skill according to the era and context analyzed below.

According to Mexican researcher and scholar Martín Muñoz Mancilla (2017), as has been widely documented by various historians in the Americas, there were great cultures

such as the Mexica, the Inca, and the Maya, to name just a few, which left behind great testaments to their grandeur and splendor in the form of pyramids and monuments. However, with the arrival of the Spanish, their inhabitants were conquered due to the use of metals in the manufacture and handling of their weapons, as well as the spread of various diseases, which decimated the general population. This conquest also extended to language; with the teaching of Spanish, the church played a central role, as it considered it important to teach reading and writing in order to spread the Catholic faith.

The strategy employed by the Franciscan monks was the use of prayer shawls and syllabaries, as noted by Mexican professor and politician Antonio Barbosa Heldt (1971). Catholic priest and educator Nicolás García de San Vicente is credited with creating one of the most widely used syllabaries for teaching reading and writing in the Spanish-speaking world, which became widely known as the San Miguel or San Vicente syllabary. They relied on memorization, repetition, and punishment, giving rise to phrases like “learning comes with a price.” Today, the New Mexican School adopts a fully humanistic approach, always prioritizing students’ emotional well-being; they must feel valued and safe.

During the colonial era in Mexico, the church was responsible for educating the population; it was the clergy who taught the people to read and write. However, the Enlightenment movement that emerged caused the church to lose power, and it began to be influenced by authors of the New School movement such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, Luis Vives, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, among others. (Mancilla, 2017) Among the contributions to literacy instruction was the shift away from viewing students as blank slates or vessels to be filled, a critique of traditional education that treated them as passive subjects.

In the case of Mexico, the formal introduction of the study of methodologies and methods for teaching and learning was incorporated through the establishment and official founding of the first normal school in Jalapa (Veracruz) in 1886. The pedagogue and educator Enrique Rébsmen (1973) selected words familiar to the interests of Mexican students. That is, he outlined the technical steps for developing the general plan for teaching standard words: 1) Engage or motivate students through a discussion highlighting the standard word to be taught, 2) Presentation of a picture related to the word, 3) Presentation of the standard word using a diagram broken down into syllables and sounds, 4) Writing by syllabic sounds, 5) Writing the standard word in the students’ notebooks, and 6) Grading the results.

These contributions to the teaching of literacy transformed education, and changes began to be noticed. During the Porfiriato era, driven by the social demands stemming from the principles of the Mexican Revolution and later with the enactment of Article Three of the 1917 Constitution, schools began to be established throughout the country, and the method of Mexican educator Gregorio Torres Quintero was widely adopted by educational institutions. According to Torres (1976), certain onomatopoeic sounds are used, with the aim of identifying those that help students become familiar with the sounds of letters, which reflects an onomatopoeic phonetic approach. That is, the sounds of the letters were emphasized when pronouncing and repeating them for writing, for example: the sound of the letter “i” as in “iiii,” and the sound of the letter “s” as in “eeee.”

According to Barbosa (1975), the onomatopoeic method, due to its characteristics, has been used for decades to teach reading and writing in Mexico. Unlike onomatopoeic phonetics, the global approach to literacy instruction focuses on motivating students through the relationship between the image and the whole word, which involved various teaching materials to support the technique of teaching consonants.

Over time, students began to take on a more prominent and active role in their learning process due to the epistemological trends of the time, such as constructivism as espoused by Piaget, Vygotsky, Ausubel, Bruner, and others. The process of literacy acquisition encouraged students to play an active role as builders of their own learning. According to the SEP (2011), beginning in 1993, the goal was to develop communication skills so that students could participate in communicative situations with specific purposes and specific interlocutors, thereby enabling, within the classroom, learning through interaction with society via a communicative approach. One of its goals is for students to be able to participate in situations where language is used.

In 2000, the communicative-functional approach adopted in 1993 was revised, and the communicative and functional approach was established to enhance communicative competence, based on the understanding that this competence is functional and constantly adapts to real-life situations. This approach is based on the premise that communication means giving and receiving information. Therefore, reading and writing are two ways of communicating—to engage in dialogue, improve listening skills, acquire knowledge, create texts, and recognize linguistic diversity—and they are functional both inside and outside of school.

Social language practices refer to the importance of student socialization, as well as the learning of written language. To this end, their application in real-life situations is essential, given the need to use what is taught, apply, and utilize what is learned in school within society to solve life's problems. The term "social practices" derives from the Latin *practice*, meaning "practice in accordance with its rules," and "social," also from the Latin *socialis*, meaning "companionship, sharing, and socializing," according to the Royal Spanish Academy (2026). Therefore, it refers to a practice of social interaction that takes place in a specific setting with shared characteristics and rules.

According to the Ministry of Public Education (2011), social language practices are regarded as guidelines or modes of interaction that shape the production and interpretation of spoken and written texts; in other words, by promoting the use of language and its constant practice, the aim is for students to make steady progress in strengthening their reading and writing skills. Therefore, social language practices are the various ways in which language manifests itself for its social construction, both orally and in writing. Through their experiences, students will not only decipher the written code but also understand it in order to put it into practice in their environment.

Currently, the Mexican Education System, in accordance with the 2022 curriculum for basic education, addresses the language learning domain, where the acquisition of literacy is based on learning through experiences and interaction with the world. Through the use of different languages, children and adolescents construct shared meanings and assertively communicate their interests, needs, motivations, emotions, and knowledge. The purpose of the language learning domain is outlined in the 2022 Synthetic Curriculum "This field is designed to enable children and adolescents to acquire and develop, in a gradual, reasoned, experiential, and conscious manner [...] a set of knowledge, understanding, and skills to use languages (oral, written, artistic, sign language, and indigenous languages) to communicate, express themselves, interpret, represent, and share their view of the world." Following this historical overview, we will explore the diversity of methods for literacy acquisition, as this helps teachers in the classroom to adopt a more open approach to their pedagogical practice and to utilize a variety of methods that may be useful with their students. The following methods are related to the historical context from which they emerged, and many of them continue to be applied today according to the characteristics and needs of the students and the teacher's practices.

The first method of literacy acquisition is called the phonetic-analytical-synthetic method, which is based on the smallest unit of a phoneme and breaks words down into letters (sounds). Almarales-Díaz et al. (2017) argue that this method allows children to break words down into their smallest components and then reconstruct them. This approach is relevant for enhancing teachers' methodological preparation and creativity in facilitating the educational process to guide instruction in the early grades. It progresses from the simplest to the most complex, starting with phonemes or letters, moving on to syllables, and culminating in words or phrases. Among its characteristics are word decoding, structured and rapid learning, as well as the reinforcement of phonological awareness; however, it can become repetitive and rote.

The second method for teaching reading and writing to elementary students in Mexico is the alphabetic method, which is based on the sequential teaching of the letters of the alphabet and their pronunciation, allowing students to learn to read and write by associating each letter with its corresponding sound. This approach, though gradual, fosters word recognition through spelling and the combination of sounds, facilitating the initial development of reading. The phonetic method, also known as the analytical phonetic method, is based on first learning simple sounds and then combining various sounds to progressively acquire reading and writing skills (Garrido 2023). Although this method is effective for decoding, it does not guarantee that students will develop a deep understanding of the text or acquire the ability to recognize words quickly. This can lead students to read mechanically without fully understanding the text's content.

The next method for teaching reading and writing is the eclectic method, which combines the best of different pedagogical approaches, adapting to students' individual needs. This approach allows for the flexible use of phonetic, global, synthetic, and analytical strategies, promoting a more comprehensive and personalized learning experience. Regarding the methodological flexibility that characterizes this eclectic approach, Nieves Muñoz Rincón (2024), a researcher and academic author specializing in pedagogy, argues that teaching reading and writing [...] requires breaking away from a repetitive, decontextualized, and rote-learning teaching system. Teaching requires an act of mediation and accompaniment, utilizing diverse didactic strategies that allow students to construct meaning. This comprehensive perspective fosters personalized learning

personalized, adapting to the group's needs and promoting the social construction of writing through the flexible use of various pedagogical resources.

The global method of literacy acquisition is based on teaching reading through the recognition of whole words, so that students learn to identify words as global units, without the need to break them down phonetically. Argentine researchers Emilia Ferreiro and Ana Teberosky (1999) warn that this methodology may leave students without a solid foundation for recognizing and forming words that have not been previously memorized, thereby limiting their autonomy in reading and writing new words.

The Troncoso Method is an approach focused on the acquisition and improvement of literacy skills; it is characterized by the use of adapted materials and familiar words from the student's environment, and is specifically designed for individuals with Down syndrome. Spanish educator María Victoria Troncoso emphasizes the potential of visual discrimination and memory skills, abilities that are often strong in individuals with both Down syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Regarding information processing, Troncoso and del Cerro (2005) explain that the method is based on the potential of visual discrimination and memory skills, taking advantage of the fact that students tend to process information they perceive visually better than they do aurally. The whole-word reading approach allows students to directly associate meaning with the image of the written word before proceeding to analyze its phonetic components, which reinforces their motivation and reduces the frustration associated with purely phonetic methods.

Mastering writing involves using written language effectively; therefore, we must implement learning strategies for the acquisition of literacy. But what is a strategy? Spanish educational psychologist Carles Monereo Font (2000) states that learning strategies are the set of sequences, procedures, and activities that facilitate the acquisition, storage, and use of knowledge. These actions involve a series of cognitive processes in which it is possible to identify cognitive abilities and skills, as well as study techniques and methods. One of the first strategies or actions that should be implemented in the teaching of reading and writing is phonological awareness, understood as the ability to identify and manipulate the sounds of language. Regarding the development of literacy-based skills, Muñoz Rincón (2024) notes that one of the first strategies or actions that should be implemented in the teaching of

The foundation of literacy is phonological awareness, defined as the ability to identify and manipulate the sounds of language. The development of this skill is a key predictor of success in learning to read and write, as it enables students to understand the phonetic structure of words, facilitating the transition to decoding and, subsequently, to the production of meaningful and coherent texts.

Spoken language is the fundamental basis for the development of literacy, providing the cognitive and linguistic structures students need to understand and produce written texts. Through speech, they acquire vocabulary, grammatical structure, and phonological awareness—all essential components for reading and writing. The development of phonological awareness can be enhanced through auditory discrimination activities, such as games involving the identification of sounds or syllables; for example, the use of games (such as clapping hands or tapping feet) and phonological activities contributes significantly to the recognition of sound units, thereby promoting reading.

Another approach to teaching reading and writing involves the use of educational resources and materials that teachers use or can use as support, supplements, or aids in their teaching. The use of visual teaching materials, such as flashcards with images and words, facilitates the association between sounds and letters. The use of teaching materials in the classroom in elementary education plays an important role in connecting with students through their senses; it helps us translate abstract knowledge into concrete knowledge so that students achieve the desired outcome of doing and being, (Manrique and Gallego 2012) By interacting with real, eye-catching, tangible, and varied materials, students experience what they want to learn, energizing their process of internalizing content while also feeling joy and enjoyment in what they are learning.

Wooden, plastic, magnetic, or block letters allow students to establish connections between sounds and letters, which is fundamental to their phonetic understanding. This association strengthens their ability to identify and manipulate sounds (phonemes) within words, which is essential in the reading decoding process. When students manipulate these materials, they also develop fine motor skills by turning or moving them to organize them; thus, seeing, touching, and arranging them leads to a more dynamic and active learning process, integrating auditory, visual, and kinesthetic understanding. The

opportunity to experiment with and manipulate letters gives them control over the process of forming words and sentences, facilitating the building of a solid foundation for future reading and writing skills.

Some factors that can lead to delays in the acquisition of literacy include: a lack of understanding of students' writing levels. According to Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979), the field of education draws on their theory regarding the stages of knowledge construction in the acquisition of reading and writing. This theory describes the sequential stages that children go through in their development of understanding the writing system. The authors mentioned above discuss the pre-reading stage, which is the initial stage; students do not yet understand the phonological nature of writing. There is no clear distinction between drawing and writing, and letters are not associated with specific sounds. The use of stories helps students become familiar with pre-reading; little by little, they recognize visual aspects of words they come to repeat, which allows the student to gradually identify the graphic system.

The next stage of literacy development described by Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979) is the syllabic stage. At this stage, students begin to understand that words are composed of smaller units; through exploration and experimentation with syllables, they start to grasp the relationship between speech sounds and their written representation. This process allows them to gradually progress toward more accurate and conventional writing, much closer to a real and subjective communication process.

At the alphabetic level in this stage, Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979) explain that a significant advance occurs in the understanding of the writing system. Students recognize that letters represent speech sounds and begin to apply basic spelling rules. Although they may still make mistakes, greater precision in writing and a better understanding of the written code are observed, and this undoubtedly translates into improved reading comprehension, written expression, and spelling development. Therefore, it is observed that students experience a qualitative leap in their understanding of the writing system. Unlike at the syllabic level, where letters were associated with sounds imprecisely, a precise correspondence between letter and sound is now established. This understanding allows students to segment words into their phonological units (phonemes) and represent them graphically more accurately.

According to Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979), mastery of basic literacy skills is not only crucial for immediate academic success but also has a significant impact on students' future careers. The ability to read and write fluently and accurately is a fundamental tool for success in any professional setting. That is why students who have mastered literacy skills will be better prepared to write reports, give presentations, communicate with colleagues and clients, and access information relevant to their work. Furthermore, the development of reading fluency facilitates learning in the exact sciences.

In this final phase, the advanced literacy level, children master spelling rules and writing conventions. They are also able to read and write fluently and accurately, using metalinguistic strategies to comprehend and produce complex texts. The earlier stages mentioned by the authors require a process of maturation on the part of the student; that is, it is a natural and gradual process. Therefore, understanding which stage of reading and writing development a student is in will allow teachers to adapt more precise pedagogical strategies, such as word games, story reading, playful activities, creative writing, etc. This supports the different learning styles each student exhibits in the classroom and advances their levels of literacy acquisition without forcing the natural development process, so that students experience a harmonious and active environment as they build their literacy skills.

One of the pedagogical factors contributing to delays in literacy acquisition is a lack of theoretical and methodological understanding regarding the application of literacy teaching methods; for their part, teachers often choose certain methods simply because they have access to materials that were shared with them, without understanding the authors' guidelines, which leads to a distortion of the method's purpose and a failure to achieve its goals, as explained by educator and researcher Claudia Romo Sabugal (2021).

Another of the most complex pedagogical factors is teacher intervention; it is of utmost importance to approach this intervention with enthusiasm, patience, and assertiveness so that each oral or written interaction by students stems from their experiences in their native language and engages with the world around them, enabling them to use their language communication skills assertively. This ensures that the learning objectives outlined in the 2022 curriculum—where students must share and communicate their interests, needs, and motivations within their immediate environment, in order to connect them to meanings of

The following diagram identifies the factors contributing to the reading and writing gap in Mexican elementary schools.

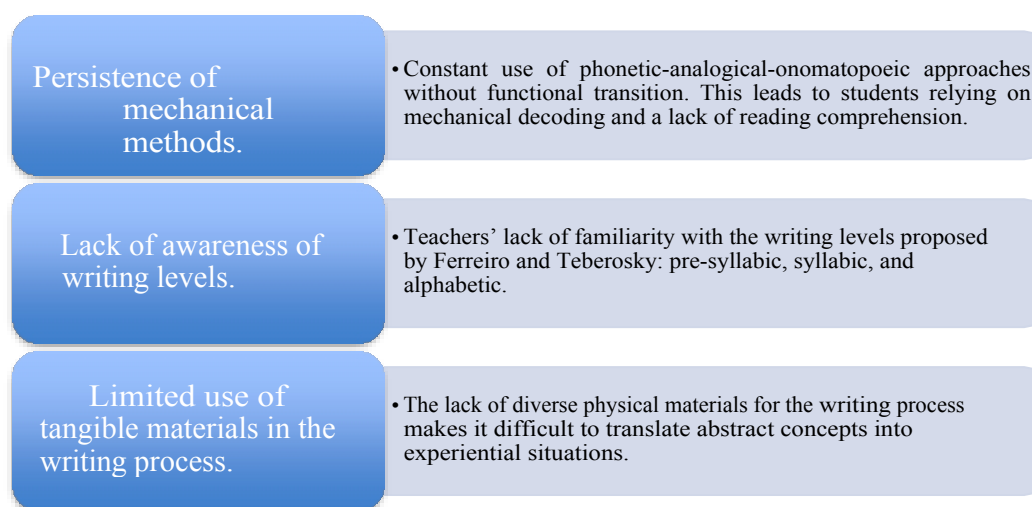


Figure 1. *Factors contributing to the reading and writing gap in primary schools in Mexico.*

Source: Author's own work.

As shown in the diagram above, the writing gap is a multifactorial problem; the teacher's role is crucial in this pedagogical context. The method used in this process, as well as the use of tangible materials and the recognition of each student's writing level, is essential to ensure that the writing process is better adapted to students' needs and to transition from a mechanical process to an experiential use of language.

CONCLUSIONS

This theoretical study demonstrates that the lag in literacy in Mexico is not due to a lack of interest or inability on the part of students; rather, it is the factors mentioned above that require our attention. This scientific article proposes breaking away from the paradigm of meaningless, mechanical teaching and connecting literacy with the student's reality, allowing them to develop their own ideas, emotions, and knowledge of their community, in order to achieve conventional literacy skills while respecting their initial attempts. I consider it of utmost importance in environments or contexts that lack literacy resources such as stories, magazines, books, unlimited internet access, etc., to employ the eclectic method because it allows for the flexible use of phonetic, global, synthetic, and analytical strategies, promoting

a more comprehensive and personalized learning experience, as it combines the best of different pedagogical approaches while always taking into account the levels of maturation mentioned by Ferreiro and Teberosky. One area for improvement in teaching practice is a deep understanding of the developmental stages of the writing system; this is an indispensable tool for teachers to provide timely support during students' literacy acquisition process. Research confirms that teachers are the key factor as assertive mediators between the method, their experience, and the teaching materials used in the literacy process; without their practical expertise and knowledge, it is difficult to foster students' interest and autonomy in learning to read and write.

FUTURE WORK

Based on the theoretical review, the aim is for teachers to create synergy in the near future to share their expertise in implementing literacy methods and to design a pedagogical intervention guide based on the method that has been most successful among their students.

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