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**TEMA:**

**THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR TO ENHANCE ACCURACY AND FLUENCY IN EFL  
TEACHING**

**AUTOR:**

**LCDA. JOSCELINE MICHELL PEREIRA LOOR**

**TUTOR:**

**MSC. SOFÍA GUEVARA PEÑARANDA**

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## RESUMEN

El estudio examina el impacto de la instrucción explícita de gramática en la mejora tanto de la precisión como de la fluidez en los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en Ecuador. A pesar de los esfuerzos educativos nacionales, la competencia en inglés en Ecuador sigue siendo baja, particularmente en habilidades productivas como la expresión oral y escrita. El estudio sostiene que una combinación de enseñanza explícita de gramática y práctica comunicativa es necesaria para mejorar estas habilidades. Utilizando un enfoque de métodos mixtos, 50 estudiantes universitarios participaron en una instrucción gramatical durante un período de 14 semanas. Los resultados mostraron mejoras significativas en la precisión gramatical, como una reducción en los errores relacionados con la conjugación de verbos, los artículos y la estructura de oraciones. La fluidez también aumentó, con una producción escrita más coherente y natural. Estos hallazgos sugieren que la enseñanza de gramática integrada con la comunicación en contextos reales mejora tanto la precisión como la fluidez. El estudio recomienda continuar con el uso de este enfoque integrado para mejorar la competencia en EFL y solicita investigaciones adicionales con muestras más grandes y en períodos más prolongados..

## PALABRAS CLAVES

EFL, Instrucción Gramatical, Precisión, Fluidez, Enseñanza Explícita de Gramática, Adquisición del Lenguaje, Educación Ecuatoriana.

## ABSTRACT

The study examines the impact of explicit grammar instruction on enhancing both accuracy and fluency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Ecuador. Despite national educational efforts, English proficiency in Ecuador remains low, particularly in productive skills like speaking and writing. The study argues that explicit grammar teaching and communicative practice are necessary for improving these skills. Using a mixed-methods approach, 50 undergraduate students participated in grammar instruction over 14 weeks. Results showed significant improvements in grammatical accuracy, such as reduced errors related to verb conjugation, articles, and sentence structuring. Fluency also increased, with more coherent and natural written production. These findings suggest that grammar teaching integrated with real-life communication enhances both accuracy and fluency. The study recommends continued use of this integrated approach for improving EFL proficiency and calls for further research with larger samples and over extended periods.

## KEYWORDS

EFL, Grammar Instruction, Accuracy, Fluency, Explicit Grammar Teaching, Language Acquisition, Ecuadorian Education

## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN (OBJETIVO DEL ARTÍCULO)

The current state of English proficiency in Ecuador reveals a significant gap in language competence among EFL students. Despite efforts to improve language skills among the population, Ecuador still needs to work on achieving high levels of English fluency. According to the English Proficiency Index (EF EPI, 2023), Ecuador ranks among the countries with low English proficiency, with most students demonstrating only basic communication skills. This situation has been attributed to various factors, including the educational methods employed and the quality of English instruction in the country.

students' abilities across various language skills, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. However, results from these evaluations often reveal a considerable deficit in both accuracy and fluency, particularly in productive skills such as speaking and writing. The ongoing struggle to improve English proficiency in Ecuador emphasizes a key question: Are we focusing enough on the fundamentals of language learning, particularly grammar, to enhance students' communicative competence?

The Ecuadorian Ministry of Education has implemented Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which integrates language learning with subject matter instruction, and it has been recognized for its potential to make language learning more relevant and engaging as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which focuses on developing practical communication skills through real-life interactions and learner-centered activities. However, despite their theoretical advantages, applying both methodologies has not yet to produce the expected improvements in English proficiency.

Recent studies and evaluations suggest that students still need help with fundamental aspects of the language, particularly grammar, which is fundamental for achieving accuracy and fluency in communication. This study explores how effective grammar instruction can enhance the accuracy and fluency of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Ecuador. By mixing explicit grammar teaching methods with communicative practice, the study seeks to demonstrate that a solid grammatical foundation is essential for improving students' communicative abilities.

## 2. MARCO TEÓRICO

Grammar teaching is a core but complicated aspect of foreign language instruction (Ellis et al., 2002). While curricula have traditionally focused on meaning-based communicative approaches, research indicates that explicit grammar teaching also plays an essential role in developing student proficiency (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). This literature review aims to analyze the role of grammar instruction in enhancing accuracy and fluency in English as a foreign language (EFL). It will discuss different approaches to teaching grammar and examine empirical evidence of their effectiveness. The review also explores the relationship between grammar and language acquisition and best practices for teaching grammar.

### **Definition of Grammar**

Grammar, within the context of foreign language teaching, refers to the set of rules that govern the structure of sentences in a language, and its instruction is a key to developing students' linguistic competence. According to Chomsky (1986), grammar is the underlying system that defines how

sentences are built in a language, allowing native and non-native speakers to produce and comprehend linguistic structures coherently. In English as a Foreign Language teaching, grammatical knowledge provides students with the necessary tools to construct effective and correct sentences, enhancing their ability to communicate accurately and fluently. Grammar instruction has traditionally been a core part of the EFL curriculum, although its focus and teaching methods have evolved.

## **Historical Perspectives on Grammar Instruction**

Grammar has historically been a fundamental component of language teaching. During the Grammar-Translation era, grammar was the primary focus, aimed at fostering reading and writing skills. However, with the appearance of the Direct Method and later the Communicative Language Teaching approach, the emphasis changed towards communication over grammatical accuracy. Despite this change, recent research has re-emphasized the importance of integrating grammar instruction within communicative language teaching. (Tsulaia, 2022).

## **Definition of Accuracy and Fluency**

In language teaching, accuracy and fluency are fundamental for assessing students' linguistic proficiency. Ellis (2006) defines accuracy as grammatical correctness and adherence to language rules, implying that the speaker consistently uses grammatical structures correctly. Accuracy is particularly important in academic and professional contexts, where exactness in communication is a determinant. On the other hand, fluency, according to Skehan (2009), refers to the ability to produce language continuously and without excessive hesitation, enabling the speaker to communicate effectively and naturally. Fluency is essential in communicative situations where speed and ease of expression are valued more than grammatical correctness. In the context of EFL, instruction should aim to balance these two aspects, as both are important for students' overall communicative competence.

## **Grammar Teaching Methods**

Grammar teaching has been debated in foreign language education, with various approaches and methods emerging over the years. Traditional grammar, often associated with the grammar-translation method, focuses on memorizing grammatical rules and structures, allowing students to

learn the language systematically (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). However, this approach has been criticized for needing more connection to the practical use of language in real communicative situations. In contrast, the communicative approach, developed in recent decades, prioritizes the practical use of grammar within real communicative situations (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This approach suggests that grammar should be taught in context, allowing students to see how grammatical structures are used in everyday language practice. Despite these differences, both approaches agree on the importance of grammar for language acquisition, although they differ in how and when it should be taught.

## **Deductive vs. Inductive Approach in Grammar Teaching**

The debate between the deductive and inductive approaches in grammar teaching has been a central issue in language pedagogy. Traditionally used in grammar teaching, the deductive approach presents grammatical rules before students apply them in exercises or language production (Thornbury, 1999). This method is efficient regarding time and provides a clear structure for students. However, it has yet to be disapproved for its theoretical focus, which may be disconnected from actual communicative practice. Otherwise, the inductive approach allows students to discover grammatical rules from specific examples, promoting more active and participatory learning (Hedge, 2000). This approach is based on observation and inference, where students deduce the rules from their experience with the language, which can lead to more profound and more lasting learning. Although both approaches have pros and cons, the choice between one or the other often depends on the educational context and the specific needs of the students.

## **The role of grammar in language competence**

The significance of grammar in developing both accuracy and fluency in language learning can not be overstated. Grammar instruction provides a foundation for constructing correct sentences and understanding the variation of meanings in communication. The integration of grammar within communicative competence frameworks ensures that learners balance fluency and accuracy, which is crucial for effective communication in the EFL context (Tsulaia, 2022).



Research highlights the role of grammar in developing the four macro language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Without a strong grammatical foundation, learners may face difficulties in comprehending and producing language accurately, leading to potential fossilization of errors (Sugiharto, 2005). Additionally, grammar instruction supports learners in achieving greater syntactic accuracy, which is essential for academic success and effective communication (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Recent studies have shown that the inclusion of self-evaluation, teacher support, and L2 determination can significantly enhance the effectiveness of grammar instruction in EFL contexts. These factors contribute to learners' overall language development, including their grammatical accuracy and fluency.

### **Role of Grammar in Language Acquisition**

Second language acquisition research indicates some irregular structures can not be subconsciously acquired from input alone (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). Explicit instruction plays a role in internalizing these complex forms. Metalinguistic awareness developed through conscious grammar learning also aids important cognitive processes like contrasts between the L1 and L2 (Rutherford, 1987). This evidence supports integrating form-focused instruction for a subset of grammatical patterns.

### **Impact of grammar teaching on fluency**

The relationship between grammar instruction and fluency in language production has been a subject of debate among language learning theorists. Krashen (1982), in his affective filter hypothesis, suggests that excessive grammar teaching can hinder fluency, as students may become overly conscious of grammatical rules, preventing them from speaking naturally and spontaneously. According to this theory, fluency develops best in an environment where students are less focused on grammatical correctness and more on effective communication. However, other studies suggest that a solid understanding of grammar can facilitate fluency by providing students with the tools needed to formulate sentences quickly and accurately. This approach suggests that the key is finding a proper balance between grammatical instruction and communicative practice.



## **Grammar Teaching in the Communicative Approach**

The communicative approach to language teaching has revolutionized how grammar is addressed in the classroom. Larsen-Freeman (2003) argues that within this approach, grammar is not taught in isolation but is integrated into activities that simulate real communicative situations. This approach allows students to see how grammatical structures function in practice rather than simply in isolation; a teacher might design an activity where students narrate past events, using the past simply naturally. This method facilitates the acquisition of grammar and improves students' ability to use the language in authentic contexts, enhancing accuracy and fluency.

## **Use of grammar in oral and written practice**

Contextualized grammar practice in both oral and written activities is essential for effective language acquisition. Harmer (2007) states that students need to see how the grammatical structures they learn are applied to daily language practice. For instance, writing exercises that require different verb tenses can help students internalize grammatical rules more effectively than traditional grammar exercises. Similarly, conversation activities that emphasize the use of specific grammatical structures can improve both accuracy and fluency in students' oral production. This integrative approach not only reinforces the grammar learned but also boosts students' confidence in their ability to use the language in real situations.

## **Case Studies**

Case studies have explored how different educational context approaches to grammar teaching can provide valuable insights into effective practices. Shiman (2024) conducted a comparative analysis of how schools in Asia and Europe approach grammar teaching, revealing that cultural and pedagogical expectations play a determining role in how grammar is taught. In many Asian countries, where accuracy is highly valued, grammar instruction tends to be more formal and structured, while in some European countries, where fluency and communication are emphasized, grammar is taught more integratively and contextually. Their case studies highlight the importance of adapting grammar teaching practices to the specific cultural and pedagogical context of students

## **Challenges in Grammar Teaching in EFL Context**

Teaching grammar in EFL context presents numerous challenges, ranging from limited classroom time to students' resistance to learning complex grammatical structures. Thornbury (2005) notes that one of the biggest challenges is the limited time available to adequately cover both grammar and communicative activities in the classroom. This challenge is particularly relevant in settings where English is taught as a foreign language, as students often have fewer opportunities to practice the language outside the classroom. Additionally, grammar is sometimes perceived as boring or irrelevant, leading to a lack of motivation among students. To overcome these difficulties, it is essential for teachers to use pedagogical strategies that make grammar more accessible and relevant to students, integrating it into activities that are both educational and motivating.

## **Strategies to Improve Grammar Teaching**

To address the challenges mentioned above, pedagogues have developed various strategies to improve grammar teaching in EFL contexts. Hinkel (2016) suggested that integrating grammatical tasks into project-based learning is an effective strategy, as it allows students to see how grammar is applied in real and meaningful contexts. For instance, a project that requires students to write and present a report on a specific topic could include teaching the grammatical structures needed to draft formal statements. Additionally, the use of technology in grammar teaching, such as mobile apps and online learning platforms, can offer students additional opportunities to practice and reinforce their grammatical skills outside the classroom. These strategies improve the effectiveness of grammar instruction and empower students' motivation to learn.

## **Consequences of Grammar Teaching for Assessment**

Grammar teaching has significant implications for assessing students' performance in EFL. Brown (2012) argues that assessment practices should align with grammar teaching, valuing accuracy and fluency in students' linguistic productions. This means that exams and assessments should measure grammatical correctness and students' ability to use the language fluently and naturally in communicative contexts. A balanced evaluation might include traditional grammar tests and oral and

written production tasks that evaluate students' ability to apply grammatical structures in authentic contexts. This approach ensures that grammar instruction contributes to students' comprehensive linguistic competence development.

### **Curriculum Development**

Developing curricula that integrate grammar teaching with communicative activities is essential for maximizing the effectiveness of EFL learning. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), a well-designed curriculum should include a combination of explicit and implicit grammatical instruction. This might consist of lessons introducing new grammatical structures, followed by oral and written practice activities that allow students to apply what they have learned. In addition, curricula should be flexible, allowing adjustments based on students' needs and progress. Students can develop accuracy and fluency by integrating grammar into a communicative approach, essential for mastering the language.

### **3. METODOLOGÍA**

This study employs a mixed methodology with the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of explicit grammar instruction in improving accuracy and fluency in learning English as a foreign language. The study sample consisted of fifty undergraduate students who are in sixth semester of the Pedagogy for National and Foreign Language career, with a B1 English language proficiency level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

To measure the relevance of explicit grammar instruction, a previously validated questionnaire with 20 questions was used. This questionnaire is designed to assess accuracy and fluency in student's written production in the context of grammar instruction that combines communicative practices in real - life scenarios. The study was carried out during an academic semester, which allowed to apply at the end of the semester a new questionnaire with the same topics but different exercises to evaluate the understanding and acquisition of learners' knowledge.

The research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how the combination of explicit grammar instruction and communicative practices impacts the development of language skills in English language learning, as well as to offer recommendations for optimizing grammar instruction in similar educational contexts. For the present study, descriptive statistics have been used to characterize the study population. Taking as reference the participation of 50 participants, this, in turn, is distributed as follows. In Figure 1, 70% were female, while 30% were male.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of age of participation, with age with the highest participation being the age of 19, corresponding to 40%, followed by those who are 20, representing 50%, and the age with lower participation is 21+, representing 10%

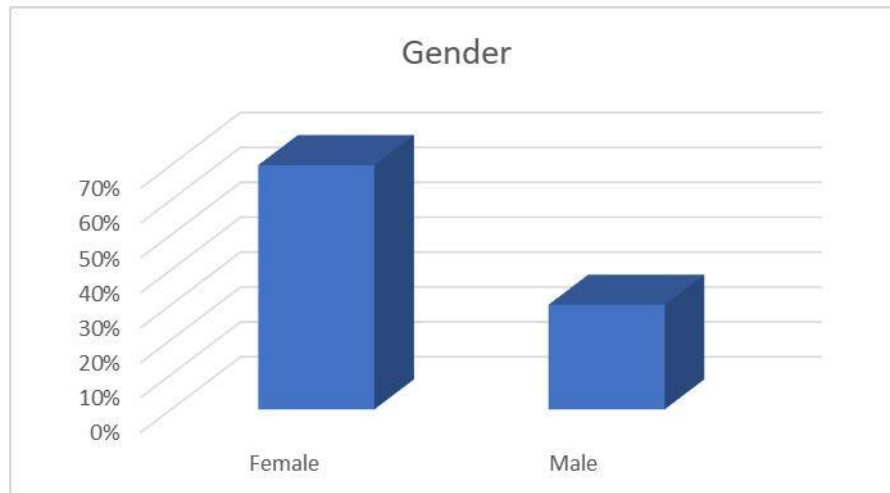


Figure 1: Percentage according to gender

Source: Pre-test applied to students

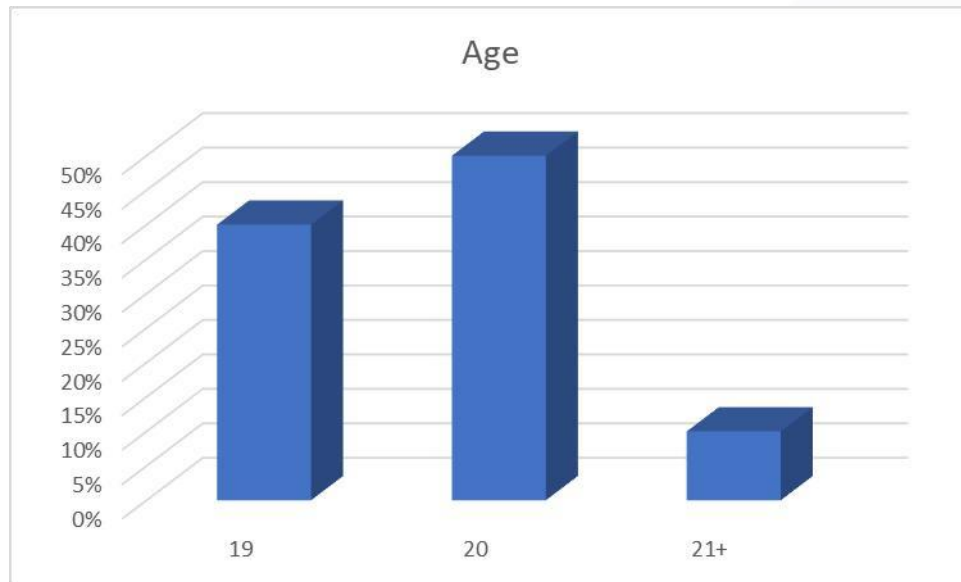


Figure 2: Percentage according to the age of the participants

Source: Pre-test applied to students

Table 1 and Table 2 show gender participation between the ages of 17, 18, and 19 years. The female sex accounted for 70%. In contrast, in the male sex, it represents 30%. Students who are 19 years of age (25 people – represent 50%), 20 years (20 people – 40%) and those of 21 or more years (5 people – 10%).

#### 4. ANÁLISIS DE RESULTADOS

The purpose of this analysis is to evaluate the impact of a grammar instruction intervention on the accuracy and fluency in written production of university students of English as a foreign language (EFL). The intervention consisted of a semester-long series of grammar classes lasting 2 hours per week for 14 weeks. Data were collected through an evaluation questionnaire before and after the grammar instruction.

The pre-test questionnaire, administered at the beginning of the semester, consisted of 20 questions designed to measure accuracy and fluency in written production. Initial results showed that students had a level of grammatical competence and fluency in written production corresponding to level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Areas identified as critical included frequent errors in verb conjugation, use of articles and prepositions, and sentence structure consistency. During the semester, students participated in a series of sessions that combined explicit grammar instruction with communicative practice in real-life contexts. Instructional planning was based on the pre-test questionnaire data, and focused on the areas identified as critical. Activities included grammar practice exercises, text writing, and conversation activities that integrated the grammatical structures learned

	Grammar	Punctuation	Verb Conjugation	Present Simple Tense	Past Simple Tense	Present Progressive Tense
Student 1	11	14	13	12	11	11
Student 2	13	12	12	11	11	10
Student 3	10	12	11	10	10	12
Student 4	12	13	12	13	13	13
Student 5	13	12	14	10	11	14
Student 6	11	12	11	13	11	13
Student 7	13	12	10	14	13	11
Student 8	12	11	13	10	13	13
Student 9	10	13	11	11	10	11
Student 10	11	11	13	12	10	12
Student 11	10	13	13	13	11	13
Student 12	11	13	12	13	13	12
Student 13	11	13	12	10	11	12
Student 14	10	12	11	12	14	13
Student 15	11	10	10	10	11	12
Student 16	11	12	11	12	11	12
Student 17	10	10	13	11	10	12
Student 18	11	10	10	10	11	13
Student 19	12	10	10	11	13	11

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Student 20	11	13	13	12	12	14
Student 21	11	13	14	11	11	11
Student 22	12	13	12	11	12	11
Student 23	13	10	12	12	11	12
Student 24	12	14	12	11	10	10
Student 25	13	12	12	10	11	11
Student 26	11	12	11	10	14	12
Student 27	12	13	12	14	13	13
Student 28	13	12	11	10	10	13
Student 29	10	13	13	13	10	10
Student 30	10	10	10	14	10	12
Student 31	11	11	12	13	11	11
Student 32	13	10	11	12	13	13
Student 33	10	12	11	13	10	14
Student 34	10	14	10	14	14	11
Student 35	13	12	10	11	11	13
Student 36	11	10	12	13	12	10
Student 37	11	13	13	14	13	10
Student 38	10	13	12	11	11	12
Student 39	11	10	14	13	13	10
Student 40	13	10	14	12	13	11



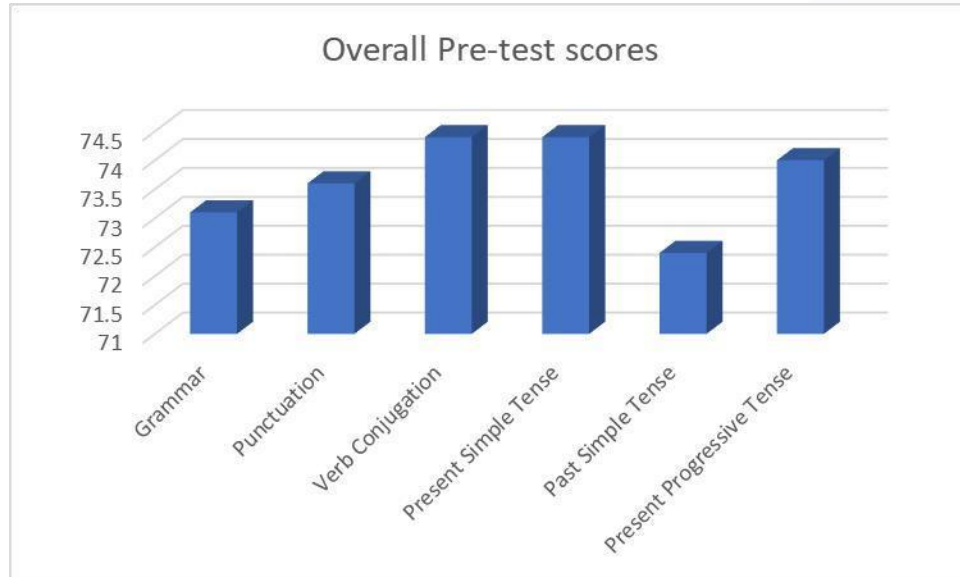
Student 41	10	11	11	14	10	13
Student 42	10	13	13	13	10	10
Student 43	13	12	11	10	11	10
Student 44	12	13	14	11	11	10
Student 45	13	10	13	12	14	13
Student 46	11	11	12	14	11	10
Student 47	10	13	10	11	13	14
Student 48	10	10	13	13	12	13
Student 49	11	10	12	11	13	13
Student 50	10	10	14	10	10	13

Table 1: Scores of students in pre-test. Source: Pre-test applied to students

<u>EVALUATION TOPICS</u>	<u>OVERALL SCORE</u>
Grammar	56.4
Punctuation	58.8
Verb Conjugation	59.6
Present Simple Tense	59.2
Past Simple Tense	58.1
Present Progressive Tense	59.5

**Figure 3. Percentage of the overall scores of students**

**Source: Pre-test applied to students**



**Figure 4. Chart of the percentage of the overall scores of students in the different topics evaluated.**

**Source: Pre-test applied to students.**

## 5. DISCUSIÓN

The results indicate that the intervention of explicit grammar instruction, combined with communicative practices, had a positive impact on students' accuracy and fluency in written production. The improvement in the critical areas identified in the pretest suggests that well-structured instructional planning, integrating grammar with communicative activities, can be effective in addressing specific deficiencies in students' language proficiency.

The combined approach enabled students not only to learn grammar rules explicitly, but also to apply them in authentic contexts, thus improving both accuracy and fluency in their written production.

## 6. CONCLUSIÓN

Grammar holds immense importance in EFL teaching. It serves as the key that unlocks linguistic fluency, enabling learners to explore the English language confidently. By embracing grammar as a dynamic and empowering tool, we can propel our students toward effective communication, self-expression, and ultimately, language fluency. Explicit grammar instruction, combined with communicative strategies in real-life contexts, proves to be an effective approach for improving accuracy and fluency in the written production of EFL students. The results of this study highlight the importance of comprehensive educational planning that addresses the specific needs of students and promotes the development of well-rounded language skills.

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## CONSTANCIA DE APROBACIÓN PARA PUBLICACIÓN

Por la presente, se hace constar que el artículo:

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De la autoría de:

- Josceline Michell Pereira-Loor
- Ninfa Sofia Guevara-Peñaranda

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