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**Learning or Acquiring English? A Critical Reflection in an Ecuadorian Public
School**

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RESUMEN

Durante los últimos años, la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera ha sido una prioridad del sistema educativo ecuatoriano. A pesar de los esfuerzos curriculares recientes, existe aún una brecha importante entre los objetivos comunicativos propuestos y las competencias reales de los estudiantes. Este estudio se basa en la teoría de adquisición y aprendizaje de lenguas según Stephen Krashen, para analizar críticamente las prácticas pedagógicas actuales. Se aplicó un enfoque cualitativo, que incluyó entrevistas a siete docentes de una escuela pública ecuatoriana y una revisión de estudios recientes que tratan el tema a profundidad. Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes expuestos a ambientes de aprendizaje interactivos y emocionalmente seguros desarrollan mayor fluidez oral, confianza y comprensión auditiva. Se concluyó que la enseñanza del inglés en Ecuador requiere un cambio metodológico profundo, puesto que es necesario un tránsito de la memorización y la evaluación escrita hacia experiencias significativas de comunicación donde el idioma no solo se estudie, sino que también sea autentico y significativo.

PALABRAS CLAVES

Adquisición; aprendizaje; inglés

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the teaching of English as a foreign language has become a priority within Ecuador's educational system. Despite recent curricular efforts, a significant gap remains between the communicative goals set by the curriculum and students' actual language competencies. This study is grounded in Stephen Krashen's theory of language

acquisition and learning, aiming to critically analyze current pedagogical practices. A qualitative approach was applied, conducting interviews to seven teachers at a public institution and a review of recent studies that explore the topic in depth. The findings revealed that students exposed to interactive and emotionally safe learning environments developed greater oral fluency, confidence, and listening comprehension. The study concludes that English teaching in Ecuador requires a profound methodological shift, from memorization and written evaluation toward meaningful communicative experiences where the language is not only studied but also lived in authentic and purposeful ways.

KEYWORDS

Acquisition; learning; English

1. INTRODUCCIÓN (OBJETIVO DEL ARTÍCULO)

English as a second language has been a priority in Ecuadorian educational politics in recent decades. However, the results in the communicative skills in students and even in teachers are limited, which shows gaps between the curricular objectives and the reality in classrooms. This situation invites us to reflect on the methodologies we are applying in our classrooms.

In this context, the distinction between Learning and Acquiring a language becomes relevant. Understanding how these concepts have been addressed by several authors and how they relate to each other in the English teaching-learning process in contexts that are similar to the Ecuadorian, may offer valuable insights to enhance our teaching English process in Ecuador.

A critical review will allow us to identify the differences between theory and practice, as well as the pedagogical implications of selecting one approach or another. This analysis may also

contribute to the development of more effective strategies for the communicative skills in students.

2. MARCO TEÓRICO

During the last few decades, teaching English as a foreign language has become a key part of Ecuador's national education plan. Seeing how important global communication is, the Ministry of Education (2023) launched a new English curriculum, aiming to reflect Ecuador's special social and cultural background and prepare students with the personal, social, and intellectual skills needed to succeed in an increasingly connected world.

Motivated by the need to improve language skills, schools nationwide have adopted reforms and programs to enhance English teaching. Still, even with these good intentions, studies keep showing that students' ability to communicate in English is quite limited (Zapata, Almeida, & Guagchinga, 2025). This ongoing gap between what the curriculum aims for and what really happens in classrooms raises important doubts about how effective current teaching methods are and how well we understand the process of language learning and teaching (Cedeño & Zambrano, 2023).

In this situation, it's important to look again at what research says about English language teaching, especially focusing on two main ideas: learning and acquisition. Stephen Krashen's theory about second language acquisition still gives us a useful way to understand how languages are acquired, not just learned. His Input Hypothesis, which is a big part of his Monitor Model, says that acquiring a language happens when learners get exposed to language input that they can mostly understand, but it's a bit harder than their current level (i+1) so they can still figure it out from the context (Krashen, 2002). This process is

subconscious, intuitive, and driven by meaningful communication, contrasting sharply with traditional learning, which relies on conscious grammar instruction and memorization. This theoretical divide is especially relevant in Ecuadorian schools, where traditional practices tend to emphasize formal learning over contextualized acquisition (González, Castillo, Creamer, & Ramos, 2023).

To be more precise, Krashen (2002) defines language acquisition as a subconscious process, much like the way children acquire their first language. It occurs when learners are immersed in meaningful communication, where the focus is not on the form of the language, but on the message being conveyed. In this view, grammar is not taught explicitly; it is absorbed naturally.

Acquisition thrives in environments rich in authentic interaction, emotional safety, and low anxiety. Learners acquire language when they are engaged, motivated, and exposed to input that matters to them. This is why Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis is so critical: if a student feels anxious, bored, or disconnected, the filter rises, and acquisition is blocked. But when students feel safe, curious, and involved, the filter lowers, and language flows in naturally (Krashen, 2002).

In contrast, language learning is a conscious process. It involves studying grammar rules, memorizing vocabulary, and practicing language forms in structured settings. According to Krashen (2002), learning results in explicit knowledge about the language, such as knowing that the past tense of "go" is "went," or that adjectives come before nouns in English.

While learning can support accuracy and refinement, Krashen (2002) argues that its role in actual communication is limited. This is where his Monitor Hypothesis comes in: the

"learned" system acts as a monitor or editor, helping the speaker correct or polish their output, but only under specific conditions. The learner must (1) know the rule, (2) have time to apply it, and (3) focus on form. In real-time conversation, these conditions are rarely met, which is why acquisition, not learning, is the true engine of fluency.

In Ecuador's educational system, however, the emphasis often falls heavily on learning. Students are evaluated through written exams, grammar exercises, and vocabulary tests. This creates a classroom culture where correctness is prioritized over communication, and where students may know the rules but still feel unable to speak or understand English in real-life situations. That is why many students struggle to use English communicatively despite years of instruction. It is not that they haven't "learned" enough, it is that they haven't truly acquired the language. Their exposure is often limited to textbooks and grammar drills, rather than immersive, meaningful use (Torres & Mendoza, 2022).

The present article's focus on critical reflection in an Ecuadorian public school makes this distinction especially urgent. If educators and policymakers continue to conflate learning with acquisition, they risk designing curricula that produce students who can pass tests but cannot hold conversations. Krashen's theory invites a shift from teaching English as a subject to facilitating English as a communicative tool.

Recent studies in Ecuador support this view. Zapata et al. (2025) found that students exposed to CLT-based instruction, rich in interaction and contextualized input, showed marked improvement in communicative competence. Meanwhile, Qasserras (2023) argues that Ecuador's school system, with its heavy reliance on numerical grading and written assessments, fosters a superficial grasp of language proficiency. This issue extends beyond students, affecting future English teachers as well; many perpetuate outdated pedagogical

methods due to limited exposure to communicative approaches.

By basing this study on Krashen's theory, it's not just a teaching model being looked at, but a more human and acquisition-focused approach that respects how students really learn to communicate. This means making classrooms where English isn't only studied, but actually experienced through stories, talks, projects, and shared moments (Whitake, 2024).

Also, recent studies have given new energy to Krashen's ideas. For example, Bailey and Fahad (2021) claim that the best input must be emotionally interesting and socially meaningful, showing that learning a language isn't just mental but also a social and emotional process. Their research in multilingual classrooms found that students who felt a sense of identity and belonging were more likely to naturally absorb the language. This idea fits well in Ecuador, where students often don't get real exposure to English and face motivation problems caused by social and institutional limits.

Maluleke and Mapindani (2022) revisited Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis, which says that conscious learning works like a monitor, checking and editing language output instead of creating it. Even though they admit there are limits to testing this idea, they stress the model's teaching importance: calm, low-stress environments and natural language exposure are still key to building good communication skills. Their results also support Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, meaning feelings like anxiety, motivation, and confidence can help or stop language learning.

D'Souza and Padmanabha (2024) go beyond that, saying Krashen's five big ideas, Acquisition-Learning, Natural Order, Monitor, Input, and Affective Filter, should be seen as a complete theory, not separate parts. They suggest changing classroom methods to focus more on interactive, low-pressure settings, especially in places like Ecuador where old-style

teaching is still common.

Even with big changes in the curriculum, classrooms in Ecuador still mostly use traditional, teacher-led methods. The Ministry of Education's goal to improve students' speaking skills hasn't really been put into practice fully. Zapata, Almeida, and Guagchinga (2025) did an experimental study in a public high school comparing students taught with a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method to those with usual lessons. The results were clear: students in the CLT group showed much better oral fluency, listening skills, and confidence, based on tests before and after that matched the Cambridge A2 Key exam.

But there are still big problems. Salcedo-Viteri et al. (2021), after surveying more than 300 English teachers across the country, found that although teachers know oral communication is important, the teaching methods don't really encourage real interaction. Teachers mentioned strict testing systems, lack of proper training, and not enough materials as main problems. Many felt forced to "teach to the test," focusing more on grammar exercises and vocabulary than on actual conversations.

Qasserras (2023) criticizes Ecuador's heavy focus on grades and written tests, saying that these methods promote memorizing without real language acquisition. His ethnographic research showed that students often just learn isolated phrases by heart instead of developing real skills to use English. This gap between what the curriculum aims for and what happens in class highlights the need to shift from seeing language as just content to seeing it as a way to communicate.

Álvarez and Van Ha (2022) studied teachers' opinions about the national curriculum changes. While many were excited about CLT ideas, they also mentioned challenges like big classes, lack of training, and not enough real materials. Their findings suggest that just

believing in CLT is not enough; teachers need actual support to put acquisition-focused methods into action.

The research clearly supports using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to connect Krashen's theory with real classroom practice. CLT focuses on real communication, student interaction, and tasks that make sense in context, which fits well with Krashen's idea of understandable input.Campoverde Hidalgo et al. (2024) studied CLT principles in Quito's A1-level classrooms, finding that collaborative activities, role-plays, and peer work significantly increased students' speaking time and engagement. Drawing on Vygotsky's social interactionism, the study emphasized learning as a co-constructed process, where students build meaning through dialogue and shared experiences.

Recino (2024) pointed out important factors that affect teaching English in public schools, like problems with infrastructure, how teachers see things, and mismatches in policy. He supports moving toward acquisition-based methods that focus on interaction, learner independence, and emotional involvement. His suggestions include more flexible ways to assess students, training teachers in CLT, and using digital tools to help create immersive learning experiences.

Soto et al. (2025) did a meta-review of 20 studies about motivation and learning English as a foreign language in Ecuador, concluding that student motivation goes up when teaching is personalized, culturally relevant, and focuses on communication. They recommend long-term research to understand better how acquisition develops, especially in schools lacking resources.

Guerrero and Moreira (2025) looked into teachers' experiences boosting speaking skills, showing how tech-based teaching and group tasks help. Their results suggest that

even in tough situations, creative approaches can work, but only if teachers have the freedom to try new things and adjust their methods.

Salazar (2025) looked into language immersion techniques used in urban schools in Ecuador, finding that both partial and full immersion helped students improve their speaking and listening skills measurably. The study highlights how important real-world interaction, mixing subjects, and using mobile learning tools are for helping language acquisition.

The research reviewed shows a clear tension between what policies say and what actually happens in classrooms, between learning and acquiring, and between old methods and new ideas in teaching English in Ecuador. Krashen's theory, backed up by recent studies, offers a strong basis to rethink teaching. But theory by itself is not enough. What's really needed is an approach that respects students' identities, feelings, and real experiences in their contexts.

This study adds to these efforts by critically checking if current teaching really helps acquisition or just promotes rote memorization. By focusing on interaction, motivation, and understandable input, it aims to encourage reflection and inspire change, not only in a single school but across the whole country.

This study is important because it critically looks at the current teaching methods in an Ecuadorian public school, aiming to encourage thinking about how English teaching can be better across the country. It tries to discover if the methods actually help students acquire the language or just make them do mechanical, out-of-context learning.

Research in this area often says that communicative skills grow best in environments full of meaningful interaction, real communication, and input that learners can understand, things that are usually missing in traditional classrooms. Like Krashen (2002) pointed out,

language acquisition happens through exposure to language that is both understandable and interesting, instead of just memorizing. More recently, Qasserras (2023) stressed that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) improves students' ability to use English in real situations, helping their fluency, cultural knowledge, and independence, while warning that old-fashioned methods usually don't promote these skills well.

This article fits within the field of foreign language teaching, focusing especially on second language acquisition theory. More specifically, it looks at how learning and acquisition ideas affect teaching in an Ecuadorian public school. Main themes in the study include English teaching, second language acquisition, communicative skills, teaching methods, and Ecuador's educational context.

The main goal is to carefully analyze how English is taught and learned in an Ecuadorian public school by reviewing academic sources and gathering teachers' views. It especially focuses on the difference between learning and acquisition and how this affects students' ability to communicate. The study hopes to help create better teaching strategies that truly support students' growth in English communication skills.

3.   METODOLOGÍA

3.1. Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design focused on a critical reflective approach to deeply analyze how English as a foreign language is taught and learned in a public school in Ecuador. This kind of approach is really useful for exploring in detail the thoughts, beliefs, and practices of participants within a specific setting. Qualitative research works well when trying to understand complex social things like education, because it gives rich, detailed info

about people's real experiences. The main goal was to look into teachers' opinions on their teaching methods while also reviewing academic work that differentiates language learning from language acquisition. This difference is very important since it affects how well students develop communicative skills. By combining teacher insights with theory, the study tried to clarify how these elements shape the overall experience inside the EFL classroom.

The research was carefully designed to be both descriptive and interpretive. Descriptive research aims to give a full overview of a phenomenon, while interpretive research tries to understand what meanings people give to their experiences. Using both approaches, the study not only describes how EFL teaching is done in Ecuador but also interprets the complexities that influence teachers' methods.

3.2. Participants

The participants in this study were seven English teachers from a selected secondary school. They were chosen through purposeful sampling, aiming for diversity in years of experience and a basic understanding of key concepts in language acquisition versus language learning. The inclusion criteria were:

- A minimum of three years of experience teaching English at the secondary level
- A basic grasp of the distinction between language acquisition and language learning
- Active involvement in teaching during the data collection period

Teachers who were not directly teaching English or who were on extended leave during the study were excluded.

Selection was not based solely on availability, but rather on ensuring a meaningful diversity of professional trajectories, in line with qualitative research principles that prioritize information-rich cases. The following table details each participant's years of experience:

Table 1

Sample

Teacher	Years of experience teaching English
T1	3 years
T2	5 years
T3	7 years
T4	10 years
T5	12 years
T6	15 years
T7	20 years

Note: This distribution allowed for the collection of perspectives from both young and highly experienced teachers, enriching the analysis with a range of pedagogical approaches, institutional experiences, and theoretical positions. The diversity in teaching experience also helped identify common patterns and significant differences in practice, thereby strengthening the interpretive validity of the findings.

3.3. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 1) were picked as the main way to gather data because they are flexible and allow deep exploration. This style lets researchers dig into topics closely while giving participants space to share their thoughts openly. In-person interviews were held in quiet spots inside the school to reduce distractions and help people feel safe and relaxed, which is important for getting honest answers. There were interviews that were conducted online as well.

Besides these interviews, a detailed review of 15 recent studies on language learning and acquisition was done, including works by Lightbown and Spada (2019), Krashen (2002), Ellis (2020), Qasserras (2023), and others. Using both interviews and academic research made the study's findings stronger through triangulation—helping to confirm and support the results by comparing different data sources. Reviewing earlier studies not only gives context to new findings but also improves the research's trustworthiness and accuracy

Table 2

Instruments used

Instrument	Description	Purpose
Semi-Structured Interviews	In-depth interviews lasting 45-60 minutes, allowing for open-ended responses.	To gather comprehensive insights into teachers' pedagogical practices, beliefs surrounding language acquisition vs. learning, and challenges faced in enhancing communicative competence.
Literature Review	Systematic analysis of academic sources related to language acquisition and learning.	To contextualize empirical findings within established research, ensuring a robust theoretical foundation for the study.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis works really well in qualitative research because it helps find patterns and themes inside the data collected. The study used a careful, step-by-step process including getting familiar with the data, coding, spotting themes, and reviewing them, following the recommended methods in qualitative research. So, the transcripts from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed thoroughly. This included several stages: first, the researchers got familiar with what the participants said to deeply understand the details in their answers. Then, coding was done to pick out important parts related to the study's goals.

After that, themes were developed by grouping the codes into patterns, followed by checking the themes again to make sure they truly reflected the data's meaning. This way of analyzing is very useful in qualitative studies because it can reveal both obvious and hidden meanings. The thematic analysis focused mainly on key topics like different teaching approaches teachers used, how they saw students' involvement, the challenges they faced in improving communication skills, and the ways they tried to solve these problems.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns were very important all through the research. Permission was obtained from the right people in the school, like the administration and an ethics review board, making sure all rules were followed. Every participant had to sign a consent form before taking part, which explained the study's purpose, stated their rights clearly, and assured them that joining would not harm their jobs. Also, data privacy was carefully protected; all info collected was anonymized and safely stored to keep identities safe. Importantly, participants could leave the study anytime without any trouble, showing the strong commitment to ethical

research.

4. ANÁLISIS DE RESULTADOS

The interviews, conducted both face-to-face and online, revealed nuanced understandings of language learning and acquisition. Teachers consistently distinguished between the two: learning was described as a conscious, structured process focused on grammar and vocabulary, while acquisition was seen as spontaneous and rooted in real-life exposure.

One teacher explained:

"Learning is what we do with textbooks and exercises. Acquisition happens when students start using English without thinking too much about rules" (Teacher 4).

Another added:

"It's like how children learn their first language, by listening and repeating, not by studying grammar" (Teacher 2).

Although most teachers understood the theoretical distinction, several noted that in practice, both processes often overlap in the classroom.

Regarding teaching strategies, most agreed that formal learning dominates due to curriculum constraints. However, communicative activities were seen as more effective for acquisition.

"When we do role-plays or games, students forget they're in class and just speak. That's when real learning happens" (Teacher 3). "Songs help them repeat structures without realizing it, and later they use those phrases in conversations" (Teacher 5).

This tension between structured learning and spontaneous communication reflects broader challenges in Ecuador's education system, where English is mandatory but not taught immersively.

Teachers identified several techniques that fostered acquisition: storytelling, project-based learning, mnemonic devices, and student-created materials.

"Storytelling lets them connect emotionally with the language. They remember the vocabulary because it's part of a story" (Teacher 6). "Even when we use simple games, they get excited and start using English naturally" (Teacher 1).

Despite limited resources, teachers showed resilience and creativity.

"We don't have much tech, but I use my phone and a speaker to play audio. It makes a big difference" (Teacher 7).

In terms of methodology, communicative approaches were preferred: task-based learning, pair work, and real-life materials were common.

"When we talk about things they care about, like music or social media, they speak more and feel confident" (Teacher 2).

Assessment practices also reflected this duality. Learning was evaluated through written tests and drills, while acquisition was observed through spontaneous speech and interaction.

"I use rubrics for oral presentations, but I also watch how they speak during group work. That tells me more than a test" (Teacher 5).

Finally, teachers highlighted systemic barriers: large class sizes, lack of exposure to English outside school, and minimal access to technology.

"We try to make it interactive, but with 40 students and no internet, it's hard" (Teacher 4).

Still, their responses revealed a commitment to meaningful learning and a strong belief in the power of creativity and student engagement.

Table 3

Patterns in teacher interviews on English language learning and acquisition

Category / question	Main pattern identified	Relevant variations	Representative examples
1. Definition of language learning and language acquisition	Learning: a conscious and structured process. Acquisition: a natural and spontaneous process.	Some teachers mentioned that both processes often overlap in practice.	"Language learning is when students consciously study grammar and vocabulary."
2. Most prevalent process among students	Formal learning predominates due to curriculum structure.	Some teachers observed acquisition during communicative activities.	"Students mostly learn through textbooks, but they acquire better when they interact."
3. Activities that promote acquisition	Games, role-plays, songs, storytelling, and project-based tasks.	Use of mnemonic strategies and bilingual instruction in some cases.	"Role plays and storytelling help students use the language naturally."
4. Strategies to develop communicative competence	Task-based learning (TBL), pair/group work, and authentic materials.	Relevant topics like technology or personal relationships increase motivation.	"I use podcasts and real-life tasks to keep students talking."
5. Assessment of progress	Learning: written tests and structured exercises. Acquisition: observation of oral performance.	Use of rubrics and informal checks during presentations.	"I assess acquisition by observing how they perform in speaking activities."
6. Challenges in promoting acquisition	Limited exposure to English outside the classroom, large class sizes, and lack of technology.	Some teachers used personal resources to compensate.	"Students don't get much exposure to English outside school."
7. Resources and teacher training	Use of textbooks, photocopies, simple games, and visual materials. Participation in Ministry-organized workshops.	Creativity to overcome technological limitations.	"I create flashcards and posters with my students to make lessons more visual."

Note: This table summarizes the main findings, compares responses among teachers, and helps to better understand the phenomenon under discussion.

5.   DISCUSIÓN

The findings of this study reveal that Ecuadorian EFL teachers draw a clear conceptual line between language learning and language acquisition. Learning was described as a conscious, rule-based process centered on grammar and vocabulary, while acquisition was seen as spontaneous and rooted in meaningful exposure. As Teacher 2 explained, "Learning is what we do with exercises and rules. Acquisition happens when students just start speaking without realizing it." This perception aligns with Krashen's (2002) theory,

which posits that acquisition occurs subconsciously through comprehensible input. It also echoes Ellis's (2020) view that second language development often blends formal instruction with experiential learning.

However, teachers also acknowledged that in practice, both processes coexist. Teacher 5 noted, "Even when we teach grammar, students pick up expressions from each other or from songs we use." This reflects Ellis's critique of rigid theoretical boundaries and reinforces the idea that classroom realities are more fluid than models suggest.

While most teachers agreed that formal learning dominates due to curriculum constraints, they expressed concern about the lack of space for acquisition. Teacher 6 stated, "We're told to use communicative methods, but the materials and tests still focus on grammar." This tension mirrors Álvarez and Van Ha's (2022) criticism of Ecuador's textbook-heavy curriculum and González et al.'s (2023) findings on the incomplete implementation of educational reforms. Although national policies promote communicative competence (Ministerio de Educación, 2023), teachers face institutional barriers that limit their ability to apply these principles.

Despite these constraints, teachers showed strong commitment to communicative strategies such as task-based learning, role-plays, and storytelling. Teacher 3 shared, "When students act out scenes or tell stories, they use English more naturally and confidently." These practices reflect the core principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes interaction and learner autonomy (Campoverde et al., 2024; Qasserras, 2023).

The use of real-world materials, podcasts, videos, and discussions on topics like technology or relationships, also supports Bailey and Fahad's (2021) argument that motivation and identity are central to language learning.

Teachers' assessment practices revealed a nuanced understanding of learning and acquisition. Written tests were used to evaluate formal learning, while acquisition was gauged through spontaneous speech and participation. Teacher 1 explained, "I watch how they speak in groups or during presentations. That tells me more than a grammar quiz." This approach aligns with Lightbown and Spada's (2019) recommendation to assess communicative skills through performance. However, several teachers expressed concern about the lack of standardized tools. Teacher 7 noted, "We need clearer rubrics. Otherwise, it's hard to be fair when evaluating speaking." This supports Guerrero and Moreira's (2025) call for more reliable and consistent assessment frameworks.

The study also highlighted persistent structural challenges: limited exposure to English outside the classroom, large class sizes, and scarce technological resources. These issues are not isolated. Recino (2024) and Salazar (2025) document similar barriers across Ecuador's public schools. Teacher 4 remarked, "We try to make it interactive, but with 40 students and no internet, it's tough." Teachers often compensate with personal devices, handmade materials, and creative strategies, but the lack of institutional support remains a major obstacle.

Still, their resilience and innovation stood out. Teachers used visuals, songs, student-created materials, and low-cost resources to foster engagement. Teacher 5 shared, "Even with simple games, students get excited and start using English naturally." This supports Whitake's (2024) view that vocabulary learning should be meaningful and memorable. Their participation in ministry workshops and short courses also reflects a strong commitment to professional growth, even in low-support environments.

Overall, this study offers valuable insights into how communicative competence and language acquisition interact in Ecuadorian classrooms. While Krashen's theories remain

relevant, their practical application depends heavily on curriculum flexibility, teacher autonomy, and resource availability. The findings also resonate with Soto et al. (2025), who emphasize the role of motivation and emotional connection in EFL learning, especially in Latin America, where English often feels disconnected from students lived experiences.

Future research could explore the long-term impact of CLT-based strategies, as suggested by Zapata et al. (2025), or examine how digital tools, apps, online platforms, and virtual exchanges, might expand acquisition opportunities in under-resourced schools. Comparative studies between urban and rural contexts could reveal disparities in access and outcomes. Additionally, investigating how teachers' beliefs and identities shape their use of communicative methods would build on work by Salcedo et al. (2021) and Maluleke and Mapindani (2022).

The findings underscore both the promise and the limitations of current English teaching in Ecuador. They call for stronger alignment between curriculum goals, teacher training, and classroom realities, so educators can move beyond rule-based instruction toward fostering authentic, meaningful communication. Prioritizing interaction, creativity, and relevance to students' lives could better prepare learners not just to pass exams, but to participate confidently in a global, multilingual world.

6. CONCLUSIÓN

This study critically examined how English is taught and learned in a public school in Ecuador, offering not just a diagnosis of familiar challenges, but a nuanced understanding of how teachers navigate them with creativity and agency. The findings revealed that while the national education system continues to prioritize memorization and written evaluation, there are educators who, through resilience and pedagogical ingenuity, create meaningful spaces

for language acquisition. Their use of communicative tasks, real-world topics, and low-cost materials reflects a shift toward experiential learning that emerges not from abundance, but from necessity.

These insights challenge the notion that innovation in English teaching must stem from top-down reforms. Instead, the study highlights the teacher as a transformative agent, capable of reinterpreting curricular demands and adapting methodologies to fit local realities. This perspective adds a valuable layer to existing research by showing that methodological change in Ecuador is already underway, driven from within classrooms, not just from policy documents.

The study also underscored the urgent need for more consistent and context-sensitive assessment tools that recognize both the formal and communicative dimensions of language development. Teachers' reliance on informal observation to gauge acquisition reveals both their intuitive understanding of language growth and the institutional gaps that leave such efforts unsupported. Addressing this issue could lead to more equitable and meaningful evaluation practices that reflect the complexity of communicative competence.

By reframing systemic challenges, such as limited exposure to English, overcrowded classrooms, and technological scarcity, through the lived experiences of teachers, the research moves beyond deficit narratives. It portrays educators not as passive recipients of policy, but as active problem-solvers who persistently seek to make English instruction relevant, engaging, and humanized.

Scientifically, this study contributes a localized, qualitative lens to the broader literature on EFL teaching in Latin America. It bridges theory and practice, foregrounds the emotional and cultural dimensions of language education, and opens new avenues for inquiry in teacher training, resource development, and digital integration in low-tech environments.

Ultimately, the study achieved its goal of critically analyzing the teaching-learning process by revealing not only pedagogical patterns but their deeper implications. It calls for educational policies that listen to teachers, respect their contextual knowledge, and support their efforts to foster real communication in English. In doing so, it offers a more grounded, empathetic, and forward-looking vision of English language education in Ecuador, one where transformation begins in the classroom.

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