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**CHALLENGES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING EFL IN PUBLIC**  
**ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF ECUADOR: A LITERATURE**  
**REVIEW**

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## **RESUMEN**

El propósito de este trabajo es identificar los retos que pueden estar afectando el proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje de ELF en escuelas primarias y secundarias del Ecuador. Con este objetivo en mente, se ha llevado a cabo una revisión literaria. Los trabajos seleccionados para este análisis fueron: 8 artículos académicos, 1 reporte del British Council, y 1 capítulo de un libro. Los resultados indican que a pesar de que ha habido una mejoría en términos de la enseñanza-aprendizaje de EFL en aulas Ecuatorianas y que, aún existen muchos retos plagando nuestro sistema educativo los cuales son: falta de capacitaciones para maestros de inglés, falta de recursos físicos y material didáctico, impacto socio cultural e inadecuada infraestructura.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** Retos, EFL, escuela primaria, escuela secundaria, Ecuador.

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this work is to identify the challenges that may be affecting the teaching and learning of EFL in elementary and secondary schools of Ecuador. With that goal in mind, a literature review was conducted. The works selected for this analysis were: 8 academic articles, 1 report from The British Council, and 1 book chapter. The results indicate that while there has been an improvement in terms of teaching-learning ELF in Ecuadorian classrooms, there are still many challenges plaguing our education system, such as lack of training for EFL teachers on special needs students, lack of physical resources and didactic material, socio-cultural impact and poor infrastructure.

**KEYWORDS;** Challenges, EFL, elementary schools, secondary schools, Ecuador.

## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN (OBJETIVO DEL ARTÍCULO)

The teaching of a language has been very important through the different times in human history because of the need to communicate whether it is for a job, a common purpose or just interloping with the culture. The wars, political and religious events have originated the need to learn and to teach another language. Although teaching a language began to be developed in the middle age, it was considered a science after the Second World War. Nowadays, due to globalization and technological advances, people around the world have to make use of a Lingua franca to communicate. Since English, among other factors, has been easy to learn, countries have adopted this language for international communication.

English in Ecuador has not been seen as an important subject in classrooms for a long time. Only since 2008 is when the government started to improve and modify the curriculum, English teaching has become more prominent in classrooms. Before then, English was only seen as a means to take on specific careers that had it as a requirement. Adult's English proficiency is weak in Latin America. Therefore, to know how this process took place is really important to understand the aspects that have interfered in the development and learning of this language, and the reasons why until now, learners have not achieved a high level of proficiency.

In this article, we are going to delve into the challenges for teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language in elementary and secondary schools of Ecuador. We will discuss education policies regarding EFL teaching in these levels, language acquisition, language curriculum application, the current training programs for educators of elementary and secondary schools, the adequacy and availability of resources and materials in the classrooms, as well as socio-cultural factors influencing attitudes towards English language learning in these education segments.

## 2. MARCO TEÓRICO

### **Literature Review**

### **Language Policy and Planning.**

Statistics show that Ecuador has fallen in its position on the index of knowledge of English worldwide, going down from position 80 in 2011 to 93 in 2020 (EF, 2020). When the Ecuadorian government detected some weaknesses in the English teaching system, they

managed to implement better educational purposes that supposedly improved the quality of said teaching. Wang and Littlewood (2012) proved that motivated people tend to carry out their desired objectives starting from their own motivation to learn and improve. It is striking because after detecting weaknesses in the English teaching process in 2012, Ecuador implemented some educational policies that are supposed to improve the quality of teaching. Some factors have been assumed to cause the condition, one of them is the issue of learning motivation. At this point, the study of Wang and Littlewood (2021) showed that motivation for learning is a person's motivation to carry out the desired goal, starting from one's motivation to learn to be better than their enthusiasm results of learning activities.

Regarding the learning method, the government policies implemented in Ecuador for teaching English as a Foreign Language included the use of Content and Language Integrated-Learning methodology (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2016). The Ecuadorian academy expectation was CLIL helps create more meaningful EFL classes to provide more prosperous relations, communication situations, and opportunities that engage learners as stated by Karimi, Lotfi and Biria (2019) and Mayora and Gutiérrez (2019). The said methodology consists of two pedagogical principles: (1) making content understandable by providing comprehensible language input and (2) stimulating productive language for the students to use (Escobar-Urmeneta, 2019).

### **Language policies regarding the inclusion of English in the curriculum.**

According to King (2018), we live in a multilingual world. English is used as a lingua franca for all kinds of important matters like education and job hunting, it has become a very important skill to have to succeed as a professional in the modern days. English serves as the lingua franca for education, trade and employment, and is an essential skill for anyone wanting to succeed professionally or academically in the 21st century.

Therefore English offers a lot of opportunities and language policy rightly focuses on how to give more equitable access to high levels of English language proficiency so that these opportunities can be inclusive rather than exclusive, open to all socioeconomic groups. Properly managed language policy can help to ensure that English can be taught effectively and incorporated into society without having a negative effect on the first language, culture and local identity of the learners of English.

As proposed by Ministerio De Educación De Ecuador (2016), the Ecuadorian curriculum was built by taking into consideration the needs of multilingual and monolingual learners, also made to include people who may not have Spanish as a first language or have low proficiency in it, its whole purpose is to support the development of citizens in Ecuador so they fare better in a globalized world. This curriculum is built with monolingual and multilingual learners in mind, including those who speak Spanish and those who have little or no Spanish. It aims to support the policy of developing citizens in Ecuador that can communicate effectively in today's globalized world.

### ***Teacher Training and Professional Development.***

Although many institutes give training to the practicing teachers where they learn different methods of teaching. The purpose of this program is to improve teaching skills in general. The main goal of such a program is to enhance their teaching abilities. The in-service training

programs have got great importance all over the world. The in-service teacher training is important for long-term learning.

Training sessions for in-service teachers in dire need of an hour. Only the trained teachers are producing good results.

Based on a proposition by (Arslan, 2015), nowadays, these training programs are contributing their services to in-service as well as to preservice teachers. In their training session, many programs are included like classroom management, lesson planning, organizational service, strategy making, implementation of curriculum, methodology of teaching for the teachers, etc. So, all these aspects should be in trained teachers to have good results from learners. (p. 21)

Khan and Haseeb (2017) said the whole purpose of professional educators is sometimes hard to tell. In a world that is always changing and diverse. The goals of teachers are so hard to recognize in the world having so many varieties of patterns and beliefs. According to Al-Rodzalan and Saat (2012), there are three references in the teacher's educational process; the learner, the individual, and the national community. Reality as a whole is that both ethical and material belief play a powerful role in establishing the future and nature of society. According to Canada (2016), the point of the education of teachers is to turn something negative into something positive as the only outcome of amazing experiences while also offering opportunities and creating a path for students to develop their potential abilities into appropriate skills, knowledge, and potential to do something based on emotional as well as logical. Only quality teachers are nation-builders.

Zein (2012) stated "The education of teachers should be in such a way that provides master builders who should know that they have access to something that can be useful for them by keeping all the aspects in mind" (p. 116).

According to Moodley (2013), "there is always a desire to have a training session whether the institutions have all the necessary arrangements like syllabus, classrooms, setup of students sitting, labs and building, etc." (p. 707). The teaching setup will be unproductive and a waste of time if the teacher does not recognize his/her teaching responsibilities. According to Savolainen et al (2012) it is absolutely necessary to improve teachers' knowledge at a professional level so they are able to educate students in a more efficient way. "To improve teacher's professional knowledge by following their primary skill endorsements to educate children more effectively"

As stated by Aziz (2014), learning is a lifelong or lifetime process. In in-service education, teachers have to be able to participate and update their knowledge for a longer period of time. a teacher may participate to upgrade their professional knowledge, skills, and competencies in the teaching profession for a longer period. Khattak et al (2011) stated that most professional educators do need focused educational improvement to update their knowledge. in-service teachers also need professional educational improvement to upgrade them.

### ***Access to Resources and Materials.***

Linguistics teachers tend to use anything they can find online as resources for teaching their craft, any kind of resource would be really useful if it can help within the class context.

is convenient to divide these school and teacher characteristics into three broad types: 1. School infrastructure and pedagogical supplies; 2. educators in general including admin; and 3. School organization. In some specific cases, we could argue that certain characteristics belong to different categories interchangeably one could debate whether a particular characteristic belongs in one category or another (e.g. contract teachers could be thought of as a teacher characteristic or a school organization characteristic); in such cases, an admittedly somewhat arbitrary assignment is made, but of course, the conclusions drawn regarding any particular school or teacher characteristic do not depend on which of these three categories it has been assigned.

### ***Sociocultural factors influencing attitudes towards English language learning.***

In the foreign language learning context, various affective factors influence learning processes such as attitude and motivation (Gardner, 1960; Lehmann, 2006 cited in Shams, 2008). The matter of the learner's attitude is acknowledged as one of the most important factors that impact.

As Mr Gardner (1985) implied an evaluative reaction some referents based on certain biased opinions is called attitude. Attitude is an evaluative reaction to some referent, inferred based on the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent (Gardner, 1985). It is implied that certain people with bright attitudes tend to move forwards to their objectives faster. This also applies to EFL. It is believed that individuals with positive attitudes usually progress more rapidly in foreign language learning. Anastasi (1957) says something along the lines, like this attitude to learning languages is somehow a tendency of reacting to different kinds of stimuli. defines attitude as a tendency to react in a certain way towards a designed class of stimuli. Generally, it is believed that learners' attitudes, skills and strategies dictate whether or not they will be able to absorb the intricacies of language (Oxford, 1990; Nunan, 2000).

Learning of the language of the other community simply cannot be separated from the learners' social dispositions toward the speech community in question. The concept of meaning communication depends on context and includes huge amounts of social factors. The interpretation of meaning in all communication is dependent on context, which includes a vast myriad of social factors Long (2010).

Gardner (1988) demonstrates the importance and the status a language provides based on the mother tongue of the speaker, the main point of this exercise is to evaluate if certain social factors affect learning whether it is in a positive or negative way. illustrates the social status of the target language by relating it to the learner's mother tongue by way of illustration. Specifically, the main objective of this research is to evaluate the effects of social factors such as age, family and friends' encouragement and support, and social class on professors' attitudes toward successes or failures in English language learning. It is hoped that research of this nature will enlighten the depth and effects of problems encountered in

learning the English language as an academic language and also suggest ways of alleviating them.

Based on Adler (1973), social psychology is a science that aims to accurately, objectively, open-mindedly, and continuously research why and how people are in social settings. Social psychology safeguards experiments by using informed consent and meticulous debriefing. To conclude, this science is cutting edge and one of the major areas and subfields of its interest is attitude (Zhou, 2002). One hypothesis on how attitudes are formed, first advanced by Abraham Tesser in 1983, is that strong likes and dislikes are rooted in our genetic makeup. Baker (1988) believed that attitudes are not subject to inheritance because they are internalized predispositions.

Many studies have been conducted to explore the nature of learners' attitudes towards learning foreign languages in general and EFL in particular. The results show that the respondents' obvious negative attitude towards English may lead to the conclusion that they are not well aware of the importance of English and learn it as a compulsory subject.

Chalak and Kassain (2010) investigated the various socio-psychological orientations of Iranian undergraduates towards learning English. It focused on the attitude orientations of the students and their attitudes towards the target language and its community. The results revealed that these Iranian Non-native speakers of English learn the language for both "instrumental" and "integrative" reasons and their attitudes towards the target language community and its members were generally found to be highly positive.

Munoz (2010) indicated that the effects of age on second language acquisition constitute one of the most frequently investigated and debated topics in the field of Second Language Acquisition. In his study, he presented an analysis of symmetries and asymmetries that exist between a naturalistic learning setting and a foreign language learning setting concerning those variables that are crucial in the discussion of age effects in second language acquisition, among them ultimate attainment, length of exposure, initial age of learning, age of first exposure, significant exposure, aging effects, and maturation effects. Based on the differences observed, he argued that the amount and quality of the input bear a significant influence on the effects that age of initial learning has on second language learning.

Momani (2009) also investigated the learners' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language and their achievements in reading comprehension. The findings showed that the respondents had neutral positive attitudes towards learning English. Also, there was a strong correlation between the students' attitudes toward learning English and their performance in reading comprehension.

Shams (2008) conducted a study attempting to investigate learners' attitudes, motivation, and anxiety towards the learning of English. The findings underlined the learners had affirmative attitudes and high enthusiasm towards English. De Serf (2002) researched the effects of family, social, and background factors on children's English educational attainment. He suggested since the results of his study showed that background, family and social factors affect children's English educational attainment, the government should explore developing



policies to improve background and socioeconomic factors and to lessen the educational gap among different racial groups.

### ***Assessment and Evaluation Practices.***

Formative evaluation, along with alternative assessment practices are now given as much or even more importance than summative final examinations. This is in line with the idea of continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) which is being seen as important in educational contexts. Tests and assessments are seen as pedagogic tools, integral to teaching and learning. The shift is from system-oriented examinations to teacher-managed tests (Durairajan, 2015).

There is a parallel move from the assessment of learning (whether students have successfully achieved their objectives) to assessment FOR learning, as a teaching and learning device. The focus has shifted to valuing student responses and the genuine pedagogic feedback provided by the teacher. Instead of worrying about reliability in marking in large scale public examinations, there is an attempt to see whether tests and examinations can genuinely be made learner-centered. Students are asked to reflect on their own capabilities through the use of 'can- do' descriptors. This has added a third preposition to the "of" and "for", assessment as learning.

### ***Multilingualism and Code-Switching.***

The reality of the multilingual and multicultural society is that languages overlap and collide. The work on translanguaging and code-switching demonstrates the often messy practice in our multilingual families, schools and cities. From this lived experience we need to learn how to prepare people with the language skills they need for a multilingual society, and how to train people to develop the necessary sensitivity towards the cultural and linguistic needs of their fellow citizens.

Since we know that code-switching involves changing languages back and forth it is a very common and widespread phenomenon across bilingual subjects. Code-Switching has raised a common interest between academic outlets, therefore not surprising that a great proportion of research on bilingualism focuses on this topic (Riehl, 2005). It was found that code-switching is a quite normal form of bilingual interaction, requiring a great deal of bilingual competence (Muysken, 1995). Most researchers in language research use the term 'bilingual' for users of two languages, and 'multilingual' for three or more (e.g. McArthur, 1998).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research approach used in this study is qualitative. It is based on a review of 8 academic articles, 1 report from The British Council, and 1 book chapter.

All the works selected for this investigation were obtained from Google Scholar.

The selection of the works used for this investigation was based on the following criteria:



- Content of the work: the works selected either explicitly investigated the challenges for teaching and learning English in Ecuador (as indicated in its title or purpose of the study) or implicitly or explicitly reported these challenges in their findings.
- Language: the works were either published in English or Spanish.
- Timeframe of the publication: research published between 2009 and 2023.
- Accessibility: The works were open access publications.

For the analysis of the selected literature, a table was generated. The table included names of the authors, title of the articles, purpose of the works, methodology used, findings, and type of work. Then the information of each work was summarized to be reported in the results section.

### 3. RESULTS

The purpose of this work is to identify the challenges for teaching and learning English in Ecuador. To achieve this, we took a look at different sources to reach an understanding of the many challenges that EFL educators and students face on a daily basis as it is detailed next.

***Teaching Foreign Languages: A Challenge to Ecuadorian Bilingual Intercultural Education by Marleen Haboud (2009).***

This article discusses the rights that minoritized peoples in Ecuador have to learn other languages while reinforcing their own. In this article, the author used a qualitative method, literature review. The results of this research indicate that one of the most important challenges in the teaching of a Foreign Language is to find ways to teach the foreign culture while reinforcing the students own culture and identity.

One of the challenges found in this article, talk about how difficult it is for indigenous schools to get dedicated trained english teachers, since many are not willing to move permanently to those communities. This also creates another problem which is non english teachers to take those places which creates a gap in technical knowledge that only a trained EFL teacher would know.

***English in Ecuador: An examination of policy, perceptions and influencing factors by The British Council (2015).***

This is a report created with the purpose of analyzing the factors that contribute to a challenging teaching/learning of English in the country, such as: policy, cultural perception, accessibility, among others. The findings of this report highlight the following challenges:

- The greatest barriers to English language learning are a lack of access to government-funded programmes and the high cost of study. Current obstacles to English scholarship uptake - which has been low - include the high English language requirements and low awareness.
- The current shortage of high-quality English teachers and the general English language skills deficit among the wider population have been attributed to the late age at which English is introduced in the school curriculum.

- Almost half of Ecuadorian employers use English externally, but only 17 per cent offer opportunities for English language training and development.
- Ecuador's English language policy currently aims to have English as an optional language from Grade 2 and a mandatory language from Grade 8, with the aim that all secondary graduates should be at B1.

***English Language Teaching in Ecuador: An Analysis of its Evolution within the National Curriculum of Public Primary Schools by Soto et al. (2017).***

This study aims at portraying the gradual change in the status of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) subject within the Ecuadorian National Curriculum for public primary schools since it was introduced in the curriculum in 2000. The results of this work indicate that EFL teaching in Ecuador has seen several challenges but specifically from the way the education policies used to work and how English was always excluded and not taken seriously thus creating a big gap in the learning process.

***Challenges of the basic education system in Ecuador; the voices of the future teachers by Villafuerte et al. (2018).***

This study aims to identify, in the voice of future teachers, poor teaching practices that are required to be worked to improve the current quality of the Basic Education system of Ecuador. This work regards the need to analyze the current teaching practices, to transform the education system to a sustainable approach as it identifies challenges related to pedagogy methods and teacher attitudes towards working on ethnic and inclusive fields. It also identifies problems like relationship between teacher-student in terms of class behavior and corrective means, that seem to be more harmful than helpful, totally killing mutual trust and respect in the classrooms.

***Challenges And Opportunities Of English Language Teachers In Ecuador by Sarmiento and Rodriguez (2018).***

This study was conducted with the objective of highlighting the challenges and opportunities as well as the growing need for the study and learning of the English language in the world and also directs the need to offer an increasingly holistic teacher preparation that guarantees both the linguistic preparation and the professional culture of the population.

This challenge is closely related to the preparation of English language teachers, who in the case of Ecuador come from diverse backgrounds. The growing needs of English teachers in Ecuador demands just like in other countries of the region educators with no pedagogical training which creates a challenge in the classroom, such as:

- Very limited training centers for English teachers.
- Insufficient use of linguistic skills to favor audio-oral communication with independence and security.
- Limited relation between language, attitude in the teaching-learning process of future teachers.

***Factors Affecting English Language Teaching in Public Schools in Ecuador by Sevy-Biloon et al. (2020).***

This paper will identify base findings for what impedes and aids EFL learning and teaching from an Ecuadorian perspective compared to the international realm to have a better understanding of the reality of EFL and ELT in Ecuador and ultimately give a basis for transforming English language teaching and learning to increase the proficiency in the country.

For this reason, the researchers conducted exploratory qualitative approach research practices such as, observations in public schools and round table discussions with EFL teachers. The information has been grouped into five categories that seemed to affect language learning the most. These categories are pedagogy related factors, use of Spanish, perceptions and status of ELT, infrastructure and educational policies including professional development.

- Pedagogy related factors

Pedagogy related factors discuss various areas of ELT such as teaching methods and strategies. The authors of this paper found varying factors related to this subject mentioned by public school teachers in Ecuador. These teachers believe pedagogy in ELT to be made up of the different areas mentioned above. Teachers 1,4,7 and 8 commented, “some teachers simply fill the book and that is all”. Another factor that affect EFL and ELT related to pedagogy is planning and teaching lessons according to the mandated Ecuadorian curriculum.

- Use of the L1

Based on the literature review found in this article, the use of the L1, Spanish in this case, in an L2 language classroom is controversial. Some feel it is a necessary tool to use in specific instances, while others see it as a crutch to use in a language teaching classroom.

- Perceptions and status of EFL and ELT

Based on the teachers' experiences this category shows that perceptions teachers have about student language barriers, overall perceptions of language acquisition in Ecuador, perceived notions of a student's socio-economic background can affect their language learning abilities, and a student's intrinsic motivation to learn English. It was made clear in the focus group that neither parents nor school authorities consider English as an important subject.

- Infrastructure

An important variable in ELT that was considered by the teachers is the infrastructure that is available or not available in the public schools where EFL is taught. In the round table discussions, many teachers complained about having small classrooms for too many students and they said that this did not allow them to conduct group and pair work activities to put CLT into practice and the lack of technology such as projectors, screens, internet access, and whiteboards. It can be seen that many teachers see the infrastructure available in public schools inadequate, but they do not look at what is available, only what is not.

- Educational Policies

It was found in terms of policies that since they are mandated this could have a negative or positive impact on EFL. These policies affect promotion of students, specifically the

leniency of students' promotion to the next year or level, teacher qualifications needed or not needed for ELT, the 2016 English language curriculum, includes the mandated use of textbooks, and general policies teachers must follow in various areas of ELT and methodologies and strategies teachers should use in planning their classes.

### **Visually Impaired Students' and Their Teacher's Perceptions of the English Teaching and Learning Process by Cando et al. (2022).**

This study aims at identifying the challenges that occur while working with visually impaired students. The methodology used to do the bibliography research was systematic qualitative. Results indicate that two main difficulties associated with their disability are no availability of a trained teacher in Braille and limited special needs student performance with respect to group work. This obviously causes a negative impact on English learning because it doesn't let learners keep up at the same pace as other students.

### ***English language education in a rural school by Lucero et al. (2023).***

This study focused on identifying realities of English language education in a rural school of Latacunga. This research was a qualitative descriptive study that used semi-structured interviews and observation as data collection methods. Participants reveal that motivation is a significant element that helps students to learn language; however, the English teacher alludes that many students lack motivation, which affects their learning.

The challenges found in this article are: a lack of a specialized trained English teacher and teaching resources, the poor application of teaching methodologies, and a decontextualized and inapplicable curriculum have caused the low level of learning in this rural school.

### ***Teachers' professional development: active approach and meaningful learning in the instruction in English as a foreign language by Manzano et al. (2023).***

This study aims to contribute to the professional teacher's development by proposing the use of active and meaningful learning to improve English Language instruction. The research team used qualitative and quantitative educational research approaches to collect information. The participants were 76 people among high school students, trainee teachers, and teachers in service in Manta, Ecuador. The results show the following challenges:

- During the review of this article it was made clear that a lot of participants for the study showed a low interest for students in learning English as Foreign Language (EFL).
- Students reach low scores in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills linked with the acquisition of the English language.
- They finish high school without reaching the EFL knowledge required by the government policy (Intriago, Villafuerte, Bello, et al., 2019). It is a problem that implies a limitation of global communication and access to information in the current global society.

## 4. CONCLUSIÓN

Based on the review conducted of our chosen academic pieces of literature we have managed to reach a higher understanding about the challenges Ecuadorian teachers and students face in the classrooms while teaching/learning EFL.

These challenges have been summarized below:

Since its introduction, English was only taught as an optional subject, only schools who had the infrastructure and teachers could afford to teach ESL, so that reduced the amount of hours to 1 or 2 weekly, not putting a big emphasis on the subject. Thus reducing impact and motivation to teach/learn English since it was not seen as an important matter.

Another factor that creates a challenge for students and teachers also includes the lack of instruction or training from teachers' perspective on teaching students with certain physical or mental disabilities, delaying or neglecting the learning process specifically when approaching ESL.

There's also a lack of English teachers in some primary schools especially rural ones where the only English they get is from the head teacher of the class and just for an hour each week, this also implies an inferior interest in educators to specifically teach English since they don't think they are prepared enough to fulfill this role.

One of the many problems ESL instructors face as well is the lack of didactic material dedicated to English formation, most teachers have to download material from the internet because the government can't or hasn't provided the resources, and the materials are often shared between teachers, students cannot afford to have books of their own since they are too expensive, this occurs in primary as well as high schools.

Ecuadorian students have a positive view of English in the classroom even though it often becomes one of the hardest subjects in high schools due to the very few hours dedicated to it during school years, however, most students find English as an endearing subject since it is refreshing and a sign of high cultural education.

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