REVISTA KRONOS

The rise of AI in language education: a game changer for teaching English as a foreign language in Ecuador

Jorge Quijano De la Rosa | iD Universidad Central del Ecuador (Ecuador)

Preparing for AI involves ensuring that all citizens are prepared for the possible impacts of AI on their lives, helping them to go beyond the hype in order to understand issues such as AI ethics, data biases, surveillance, and the potential impact on jobs.
Holmes *et al.* (2022).

ABSTRACT This paper discusses the rise of AI in language teaching and its impact on the teaching of English as a foreign language in Ecuador. The author shares his experience as an EFL teacher in an international graduate program and highlights the importance of critical thinking and higher order thinking in language learning. The use of AI, particularly ChatGPT, in the classroom is explored, as well as potential benefits and limitations. It also creates an insightful exploration through technical concepts that entail the meaning of a generative AI and its ramifications until today. The author emphasizes the need for well-trained teachers who can adapt and innovate with technology to provide meaningful learning experiences for students. The author explores in depth how teaching English in Ecuador has presented constraints to overcome in order to accomplish a well understanding of how it is actually learnt by the citizens and how AI could aid that task. The paper raises questions about the future of education and the role of teachers in an AI-driven world. It concludes by highlighting the potential of AI to dramatically enhance teaching and learning experiences, but also highlights the importance of using AI tools effectively and ensuring that they align with student needs and course objectives. The paper highlights that AI can make teaching more efficient and effective, but Teachers are not interchangeable. The use of AI in language education is still in its infancy in Ecuador, but promising initiatives are being developed, with the potential to equalize all students and improve the quality of education.

KEY WORDS AI in language education, English as a foreign language, Ecuador, ChatGPT, teaching English, Critical thinking skills, higher-order thinking skills, EFL teacher.

El auge de la IA en la educación de idiomas: un punto de inflexión para la enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera en Ecuador

RESUMEN Este artículo analiza el auge de la IA en la enseñanza de idiomas y su impacto en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera en Ecuador. El autor comparte su experiencia como profesor de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en un programa de bachillerato internacional y destaca la importancia del pensamiento crítico y el pensamiento de orden superior en el aprendizaje de idiomas. Se explora el uso de la IA, en particular ChatGPT, en el aula, así como sus posibles beneficios y limitaciones. También se realiza una exploración perspicaz a través de conceptos técnicos que implican el significado de la IA generativa y sus ramificaciones hasta hoy. El autor enfatiza la necesidad de profesores bien formados que puedan adaptarse e innovar con la tecnología para brindar experiencias de aprendizaje significativas a los estudiantes. El autor explora en profundidad cómo la enseñanza del inglés en Ecuador ha presentado restricciones que superar para lograr una buena comprensión de cómo lo aprenden realmente los ciudadanos y cómo la IA podría ayudar en esa tarea. El artículo plantea preguntas sobre el futuro de la educación y el papel de los profesores en un mundo impulsado por la IA. Concluye destacando el potencial de la IA para mejorar drásticamente las experiencias de enseñanza y aprendizaje, pero también destaca la importancia de utilizar las herramientas de IA de manera eficaz y garantizar que se alineen con las necesidades de los estudiantes y los objetivos del curso. El artículo destaca que la IA puede hacer que la enseñanza sea más eficiente y efectiva, pero los profesores no son intercambiables. El uso de la IA en la educación lingüística aún se encuentra en sus inicios en Ecuador, pero se están desarrollando iniciativas prometedoras, con el potencial de igualar a todos los estudiantes y mejorar la calidad de la educación.

PALABRAS CLAVE IA en la educación de idiomas, inglés como lengua extranjera, Ecuador, ChatGPT, enseñanza del inglés, pensamiento crítico, habilidades superiores de pensamiento, docentes EFL

INTRODUCTION

As educators, we certainly knew almost nothing on AI and its uses for our field, nevertheless, its blowing appearance in our daily contexts has undoubtably modified our perception of this now-living scenario. Now, our task seems to be addressed to explore and get as much information as possible about it, but it is not an easy business; there are constraints that we must take into account like inclusiveness, personalization, flexibility, and engagement (Schmidt & Strassner, 2022). As many others related to our local situations and how EFL is studied and taught. Let me show you then, my perception and experience, as my findings using these newbie functions for teaching English as a foreign language in Ecuador.

TEACHING EFL/ESL AS A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER IN ECUADOR

First, it is paramount to delineate my professional experience as a high school English teacher and lately discuss how that experience is contrasted with Ecuador's reality in the educational field, specifically for ESL and EFL teaching.

My career as an EFL/ESL teacher was focused on teaching English for the international baccalaureate program. The subject was English B Higher Level. This subject entails more than a traditional transmission of knowledge about grammar, and the famous four skills that every language learner must acquire in order to be a competent user of it (The European Council, 2023). In consequence, it works with those skills to transform the content delivery into a context where each individual produces the language to a major extent interacting with its peers and showing critical thinking, reflecting, and higher-order thinking capacities in the L2 (Dp-Language-B-Guide, 2020).

Let me set you into a deeper understanding of how this subject works and lately share the importance it had for my profession to know the huge incoming impact that the appearance of AI's had in the early stages of 2023.

First of all, it is needed to establish that according to (Dp-Language-B-Guide, 2020), «The Diploma Programme is a rigorous pre-university course of study designed for students in the 16 to 19 age range. It is a broad-based two-year course that aims to encourage students to be knowledgeable and inquiring, but also caring and compassionate». It means that the nature of the course is broadly based on a different basis if it is compared to the traditional language acquisition set ups where aspects like grammar, and vocabulary are the cores of teaching and thus, the objective for obtaining an international certification from Cambridge, The British Council, and so on. In consequence, it is also stated that «Language ab initio and language B are language acquisition courses designed to provide students with the necessary skills and intercultural understanding to enable them to communicate successfully in an environment where the language studied is spoken» (Dp-Language-B-Guide, 2020, p. 16).

After the previous introduction to the subject as the matter of experience for this article, it is highly important to state that this component of the IB curriculum, also has a collection of approaches to teaching and learning that are the basis of the course itself. Among them, and as (Dp-Language-B-Guide, 2020), states, we may find the upcoming list:

1. Empower teachers as teachers of learners as well as teachers of content.
2. Empower teachers to create clearer strategies for facilitating learning experiences in which students are more meaningfully engaged in structured inquiry and greater critical and creative thinking.
3. Promote both the aims of individual subjects (making them more than course aspirations) and linking previously isolated knowledge (concurrency of learning)

4. Encourage students to develop an explicit variety of skills that will equip them to continue to be actively engaged in learning after they leave school, and to help them not only obtain university admission through better grades but also prepare for success during tertiary education and beyond.

5. Enhance further the coherence and relevance of the students' Diploma Programme experience.

6. Allow schools to identify the distinctive nature of an ib Diploma Programme education, with its blend of idealism and practicality (p. 14).

These approaches are meant to highlight the learner as the center of the teaching-learning process and as a former instructor for this subject, I consider that it is paramount to be clear that not all the routines and repetitive actions that come from the traditional way an English teacher uses for its classes, actually, work. We have to imagine this class a moment for reflection over the content that is delivered and ask the learners to produce their thoughts using the L2. They may dive into interesting themes like identities, social organization, human ingenuity, sharing the planet, and experiences (Philpot, 2018) and also complementing them with even more sources of information like the ones found in Mc-Gowan, M., Owen Jung, H., & Deupree, A. (2019), Janning, P., & Mertin, P. (2019), Saa'd Aldin, K. & Morley, K. (2018). Furthermore, add these themes with different text-types as they learn how to write extensively. This may include how to prepare and write essays, news reports, letters (informal and formal), brochures, proposals, reviews, blogs, social media posts, and almost everything they may find nowadays (Owen, 2020).

On the other hand, keeping up with a content-driven class might become difficult to grasp and imagine, the challenge was to think out of the box and face different procedures to convey a communicative content which function could delineate a better outcome in the students' language performance. In this section, I must agree that as an EFL or ESL teacher, your cognitive knowledge, must be rich and understand a variety of voluble situations in the classroom that require your resourceful approach to solve them instead of repeating routines, actions, and moreover, traditional views on teaching and learning (Al-Seghayer, 2017).

These kinds of classes work with a dynamic that is mostly understood as conversational and seek different ways of thinking from the learners' perspectives. Not all of them are developed using a proper and adequate level of English. According to the (Dp-Language-B-Guide, 2020), the optimal management of the language considering the CEFR for languages is B1 or B2, therefore, it is also another aspect to take into account when all the content comes to the moment of being studied and comprehended. According to De Angelis (2022), this aspect is an important paradigm that as English teachers we must know because in Ecuador, it is nationally spread the idea that most of the population has a low level of English (El Universo, 2019). And recalling my experience teaching this demanding subject, I agree on that claim. Nevertheless, it is also remarkable to position in our minds, that Ecuador has had a constant evolving process in this field and contrary to EF education first (2021a), the company that publishes these studies yearly; our country responds to a better qualification, however, the core of the methodological process which is used to measure this data, seems to be biased as De Angelis (2022) assures promoting that EF education first (2021a), is not taking into account many other factors that are more linked to our reality. De Angelis (2022) mentions «…the EF EPI does not distinguish between a total lack of language skill in English, the ability to use some basic expressions in the language, and the ability to adequately communicate about concrete topics in English, since all of these would appear as 'very low proficiency'. It is worth noting that the distinctions between pre-A1, A1, and A2 can be very significant in contexts like Ecuador». In the end, my position as an educator on this field, takes these last claims as truth, but conditioned for another reality that in the classrooms all over the country happens, and

that is that our students scarcely handle the language to a significant extent, and it brings the need to make a huge difference in the instructional methods we use as EFL/ESL teachers. Around this aspect, the AI created the first step for this change.

CHATGPT AND THE APPEARANCE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE EDUCATIONAL FIELD

This concept of AI appeared through a now well-known name, chatGPT. This name sounded harder when we started to know that it could handle different tasks using responsive human language based on prompts that the user could write easily asking for a text, chart, table, information, or a simple conversation and lately obtain an answer that was mostly well-driven and logically created. Students noticed it too and their work production upgraded in terms of readability, coherence, logical constructions, etc. This was something to be worried about, but mostly a shocking reality that none was prepared to face or even understand.

On the course of actions, it was necessary to comprehend first that AI was much more than chatGPT, it was a complex language structure that engineered constructions like learner-facing AI tools, teacher-facing systems, and system-facing AI tools (Schmidt & Strassner, 2022). Nonetheless, keeping up with the mentioned concepts is yet a constraint to depict and beat in the long term, thus it creates the need to contrast what we perceive as plausible using AI in the educational context and what could not be done.

One of the main understandings about AI in the educational practice, is its urgency for the users (students, teachers, and stakeholders). According to (Cardona *et al.*, n. d.), teachers are suggested to use AI for many different situations which aim to save time, reduce workload, help students, and furtherly, provide feedback for those in need. This situation is agreed by (Schmidt & Strassner, 2022), whose concept of AI implementation relies on three relevant pillars, adaptivity, assistance, and dynamism. Consequently, if we take into account that this new technology is shaping notably the way in which we attend to classes, it is not a surprise that our path as educators is now changing, and we must strive for creating new ways to implement AI in the near future and lastly innovate our lessons, test, materials, and authentic production for learners of EFL.

Besides all the knowledge you consider you have learned about AI and its functionalities; it is riveting to depict and review what is it and how we may use it properly as a result of our previous educational knowledge. Therefore, glance the map below about AI and its definitions as (Regona *et al.*, 2022) share (see Figure 1).

Grasping from the map presented, Artificial Intelligence appears to be more than what we appreciate at the first sight. It shows a wide range of possibilities for educators and students. One of those relies in the framework of automated planning and scheduling saving many hours a day, mainly by adjusting a content given instead of creating it from scratch. Online tools like chatGPT and Bard AI are magnificent on this task, however, they require from you a correct language presentation as they understand input delivered using texts or what we actually call, prompts. The very prompts that may enlighten you with more knowledge or lead you to confusion. It all depends on how you as the user may write properly and clearly. As an example, you may ask to a generative AI like chatGPT or Bard AI to write a lesson plan. If your prompt is just 'write a lesson plan', then your outcome given will be any lesson plan that the AI may grasp from its database, otherwise, if you write something more detailed like 'write a lesson plan for teaching comparatives to a group of twenty students whose age goes from 10 to 12 years old and their language skills stand for an A2 level according to the CEFR', you will for sure obtain a meaningful result. These essays are based on natural language processing and machine learning.

Figure 3. Flash cards
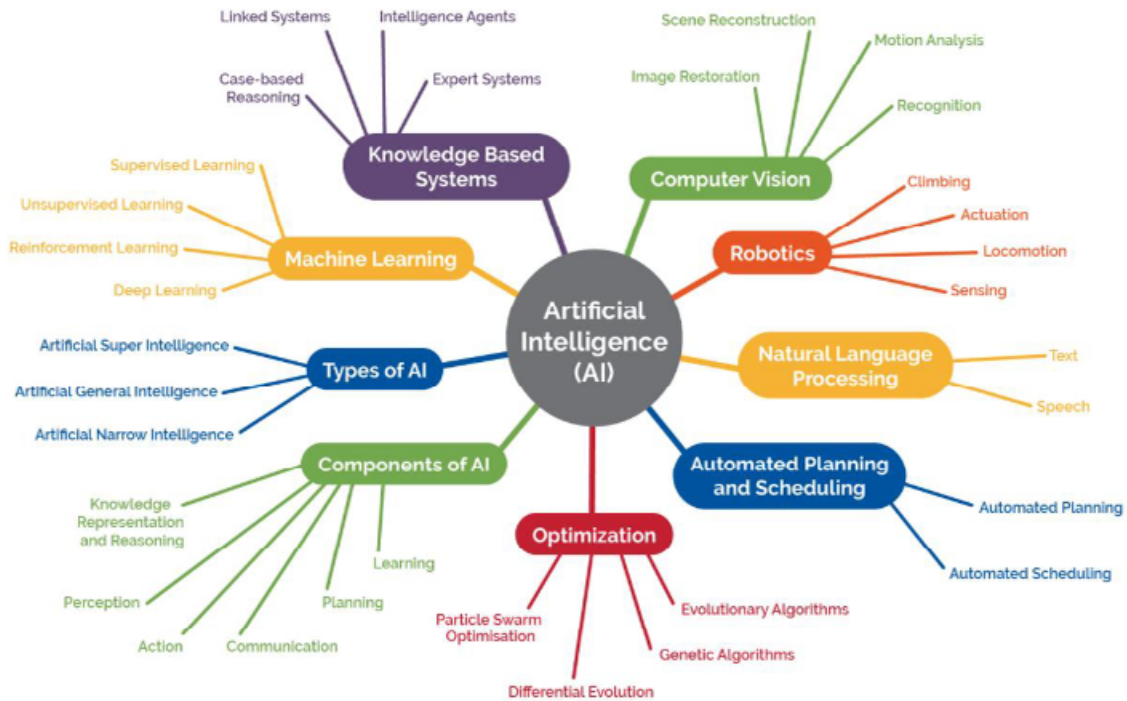
On this basis, teaching EFL is also a matter of understanding that generative AIS are not the solution for everything we are meant to do in our job as educators. Those might provide us with different and varied results, texts, charts, plans, evaluations, etc. Nevertheless, it is our duty to decode what is correct and what is not. Cardona *et al.* (n. d.) states that these software solutions do not have the needed 'common sense' and neither the same judgement that as humans we possess. Consequently, relying on them blindly is undoubtedly an error that will also prevent us from academic creation which will meaningfully help students to climb the ladder.

Following the aforementioned words, 'common sense' is the key besides judgment that clearly enhances the language production our learners might demonstrate lately with their teachers' instructions. In our solely Ecuadorian context, portraying this aspect is quite complicated and such a challenge due to our cosmovision and inherited way of thinking about life, discipline, and love for knowledge and learning. Apart from these constraints, teaching in a country like this, is also a source of challenging situations where you as an educator will learn and adapt yourself. Consequently, for me, after eight years of teaching, it is paramount to keep learning and discovering ways and methods to understand how our students learn and especially, how to reach their minds with meaningful experiences based on reasoning and not just on pursuing a certificate from Cambridge or any other company. On the other hand, it differs from other students around the globe, I mean, we could not expect to have ideal classroom settings as we perceive in most of the teaching books we learn along our professional formation. Our contexts, settings, experiences, political and cultural issues, make our labor even more complex and intricated, therefore, keeping up with AI tools will unequivocally support our work efforts substantially (Al-Seghayer, 2017).

In all of these aspects mentioned previously, there is a question that immediately pops up to our minds, of course, if you dedicate your life to elaborate on educational purposes. This interrogation stands for the usefulness teachers have in the future of education. Will our continuity be affected by AI development? Or are we going to be replaced by robots,

androids or even different generative tools that could help students to learn faster and better without our onsite assistance?

For better answering this question, let me recall some information mentioned by (Schmidt & Strassner, 2022), whose statements acknowledge the need of teachers in a utopia they set in the year 2040 where most of the materials used by our learners will be interactive, multimedia settled, able to be connected to internet everywhere they go and decide to work on, adapted to the needs they could face, like onsite or online classes. This need comes from reflecting over the concept of well-trained teachers. Instructors which main purpose would be to know, evolve, innovate, adapt, use technology and moreover, set scenarios where individuals might learn significantly from the critical thinking skill their teachers show.

In addition, we do not only possess information about AI and its full range of advantages and disadvantages spread all over the web. As educators, it is our responsibility to answer some important questions and reflections over the application of them in our specific contexts of teaching and learning. Let's bullet point them for a better understanding of their implications:

- Is our learning system able to use AI and learn about it?
- After deciding on using AI, is the tool(s) chosen aligned to students that have specific educational needs?
- How our students are able to interact with others if any AI is included in their curriculum? (Cardona *et al.*, n. d.).
- Is all the information shared on the web through AI's save and secure? And moreover, how our students are protected? (Cardona *et al.*, n. d.).
- How could teachers interact with AI's so that they could feel it as an advantage and not as their replacement?
- How willing are our teachers for learning and adapting themselves to the new loops of teaching and learning that AIs bring within them?
- Is our context ready for this transition?

As complex as it seems to be, it also brings opportunities for enhancement and improvement. We might then infer that our educational system has to evolve as new tools do every day and consequently offer teachers a new perspective for sharing knowledge, content, experiences, methods, approaches, practices, and even more; to center their efforts on students as always. This new comprehension of AI should break the wall and bring calm to those who consider that their jobs are running in danger, because it is far from the current reality. Instead, we perhaps change people's mindset and show them how resilient we might become and teach them too that we could design, create, and evaluate, prepare and reflect on our teaching, and actually do our teaching (Cardona *et al.*, n. d.).

HOW AI CHANGED MY OVERVIEW OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

In the last months using different tools related to artificial intelligence and its plugins; it has been really impressive how the time management now goes around the concept of 'saving' instead of 'consuming'. What I mean is that before knowing the existence of different AI's capable of solving routinary activities, like planning, creating exercises, or merely a PowerPoint presentation, the teachers' duties were complicated and time 'consuming' due to the long hours needed to think, process, and later produce the content needed for each class session. Consequently, having a great base of information and a program to solve it based on a generative algorithm, is actually a game changer and precisely talking, it moved

from using ChatGPT to alternatives that based on this language, they sort the information to set a really useful outcome. In this list of alternatives, I have found apps like Gamma ai, that works creating documents, presentations, and even landing web pages based on the same concept of writing a prompt that fits the needs of the user. Another of the endless apps there found on the web, we have Diffit for teachers ai, and what makes special the use and application of this website, is the capacity it has to make a differentiation and adaptation of the content and texts you input in order to lower the vocabulary complexity it has and moreover the tone, style, aim, and even the text-type. In addition, here my favorite by far, Twee ai, this artificial intelligence is basically something different, but keeping the same fundamentals as the core. Using this AI, any EFL or ESL teacher may create using generative text and a predefined bot, to create activities like fill in the gap, word formation, YouTube video exercises, summaries, and many others that are found in the standardized tests of English.

In the overall, using these tools, makes the administrative and lesson planning hours, more adequate to fulfill them with more analysis, reflection, and critical thinking exercises. It has, in my opinion, all the assets that I need to make the teaching-learning process easier and more complete, meaningful, and fostering the feedback time for more students. In the end, it even helps each one of my students to be assessed faster and with more information embedded in the process.

CONCLUSION

The rise of AI in language education has the potential to be a game-changer for teaching English as a foreign language in Ecuador. AI-powered tools can help to personalize learning, provide students with immediate feedback, and automate tasks such as grading and lesson planning. This can free up teachers to focus on more strategic aspects of teaching, such as providing support to students who need it most.

However, it is important to note that AI is not a silver bullet. It is important to use AI tools in a thoughtful and intentional way, and to ensure that they are aligned with the specific needs of students and the learning objectives of the curriculum. Additionally, it is important to be aware of the potential biases that can be embedded in AI tools, and to take steps to mitigate them.

In Ecuador, the use of AI in language education is still in its early stages. However, there are a number of promising initiatives underway around the world that promise to make this educational change a reality that will start on teachers later in the upcoming years to a huge amount of students.

As a professional educator with experience teaching English as a foreign language in Ecuador, I am excited about the potential of AI to improve the quality of education for all students. I believe that AI has the potential to level the playing field and give all students the opportunity to succeed in learning English.

Here are some specific ways that AI can be used to improve language education in Ecuador:

- Personalized learning: AI can be used to create personalized learning plans for each student. This can be done by tracking student progress and identifying areas where they need additional support. AI can then provide students with targeted instruction and practice activities to help them improve their skills.
- Immediate feedback: AI can provide students with immediate feedback on their work. This can be especially helpful for students who are struggling, as it can help them to identify their errors and make corrections quickly.
- Automated tasks: AI can automate tasks such as grading and lesson planning. This can

free up teachers to focus on more strategic aspects of teaching, such as providing support to students who need it most.

- Adaptive learning: AI can be used to create adaptive learning materials that adjust to the student's individual needs and learning style. This can help to ensure that all students are challenged and engaged in their learning.

I believe that AI has the potential to make a significant positive impact on language education in Ecuador. By using AI tools in a thoughtful and intentional way, teachers can create more personalized and effective learning experiences for their students.

REFERENCES

Al-Seghayer, K. (2017). The Central Characteristics of Successful ESL/EFL Teachers. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 8*, 881. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0805.06

Cardona, M. A., Rodríguez, R. J., & Ishmael, K. (n. d.). *Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Teaching and Learning.*

De Angelis, A. (2022). EF English Proficiency Index and English in Ecuador: Uncertain assumptions of the international ranking. *Revista Andina de Educación, 5*(2) (2022) 005211. https://doi.org/10.32719/26312816.2022.5.2.11

Dp-language-B-guide (2020). International Baccalaureate Organization. Language B guide of studies for the first call 2020.

El Universo. (2019, December 30). Ecuador, peor país de Latinoamérica en dominio de inglés, según informe. *El Universo.*

EF Education First. (2021a). Company Fact Sheet 2021.

Holmes, W., Persson, J., Chounta, I.A., Wasson, B., & Dimitrova, V. (2022). *Artificial intelligence and education: A critical view through the lens of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.* Council of Europe.

Janning, P., & Mertin, P. (2019). English B for the diploma. *Coursebook.* Pearson. *Second edition.* ISBN: 9781292270814.

McGowan, M., Owen Jung, H., & Deupree, A. (2019). English B for the IB diploma. *Coursebook.* Hodder education. ISBN: 9781510446571.

Owen Jung, H. (2020). English B for the IB diploma. *Grammar and skills workbook.* Hodder education. ISBN: 9781510447639.

Philpot, B. (2018). English B for the diploma programme. *Cambridge University Press Coursebook. Second edition.*

Regona *et al.* (2022). *Components, types, and subfields of AI based on Regona et al.* (2022).

Saa'd Aldin, K. & Morley, K. (2018). *English B for the IB diploma.* Second edition. Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780198422365.

Schmidt, T., & Strassner, T. (2022). Artificial Intelligence in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching. *Anglistik, 33*(1), 165-184. https://doi.org/10.3375/ANGL/2022/1/14

The European Council, C. (2023). *The CEFR Levels. The CEFR Levels-Framework.* https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions