REVISTA
Kronos
The Language Teaching Journal

REVISTA KRONOS

KRONOS-The Language Teaching Journal, es una revista científica del Instituto Académico de Idiomas de la Universidad Central del Ecuador de frecuencia bianual, que publica en los meses de febrero y agosto. Su objetivo es la divulgación científica, cuyos campos de investigación se concentran, pero no se limitan, a la búsqueda de metodologías alternativas y novedosas en los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje de lenguas, así como en la investigación y crítica del corpus teórico y práctico alrededor de la pedagogía, didáctica, tecnología y cultura. Kronos está dirigida a investigadores, docentes, estudiantes, profesionales, y público interesado en el quehacer educativo.

TABLA DE CONTENIDO
Vol. 5, N.o 2 (agosto 2024 - enero 2025)

CARTA EDITORIAL

La revista científica *Kronos* «*The Language Teaching Journal*» pone a disposición de sus lectores el volumen cinco, número dos de su revista en formato digital. Esta publicación incluye 8 artículos relacionados al uso de estrategias y técnicas utilizadas para un mejor aprendizaje del idioma inglés, sin dejar a un lado investigaciones con resultados positivos en el ámbito educativo que nos invitan a reflexionar acerca de la enseñanza de otro idioma.

En el primer artículo «**Efecto *de la narrativa de historias en las habilidades de comprensión lectora de estudiantes de EFL en la educación básica superior***» su autora presenta un estudio que evaluó el impacto de la narrativa de historias en la comprensión lectora de estudiantes de octavo grado. Utilizando un enfoque mixto que aplicó pruebas antes y después de la intervención mostrando una mejora moderada en la comprensión lectora tras la implementación de la técnica logrando percepciones positivas del uso de la narrativa de historias en las clases de inglés.

En el segundo artículo «**La influencia de la evaluación por pares en la mejora de las habilidades orales en estudiantes B1**» sus autoras investigan cómo la evaluación por pares mejora las habilidades orales de estudiantes de inglés nivel B1 mediante un análisis de cuatro semanas con estudiantes universitarios utilizando un pre y post test, que visualiza una mejora en factores como gramática y pronunciación, concluyendo en sus resultados que la evaluación de pares influye significativamente en el desarrollo oral de los estudiantes.

El tercer artículo «***El estudio de lecciones como catalizador de la innovación en las aulas de inglés ecuatorianas: experiencias y desafíos de los docentes***» sus autoras examinan el uso del *Lesson Study* (LS) como enfoque innovador en la educación ecuatoriana, a través de entrevistas a docentes de inglés que participaron en un taller de LS, analizando cómo esta metodología colaborativa promueve el trabajo en equipo y el aprendizaje compartido destacando como hallazgos que la innovación puede lograrse no solo con tecnología, sino también con nuevos enfoques de enseñanza.

En su cuarto artículo «**Factores que inciden en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera en la Educación Básica Superior**» las autoras analizan los factores que afectan el aprendizaje del inglés como idioma extranjero en la educación básica superior mediante la utilización de un enfoque mixto los resultados indican que, aunque la mayoría de los estudiantes disfruta aprender inglés, diversos factores obstaculizan un aprendizaje efectivo.

En el quinto artículo «**Análisis de errores en la producción escrita a nivel universitario**», sus autoras estudian las dificultades de los estudiantes de Pedagogía en Lenguas al redactar sus Proyectos Integradores de Saberes. A partir del análisis de 25 trabajos, identificando errores en organización de párrafos, puntuación, elección de palabras, uso del Estilo APA y contraargumentación. Los hallazgos resaltan la importancia de fortalecer estrategias para mejorar la escritura argumentativa en el ámbito académico.

En el sexto artículo «**El uso de *Escape Rooms* para promover la colaboración en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés entre estudiantes de séptimo grado**», se analiza la manera en la que la estrategia fomenta la colaboración y participación en el aprendizaje del inglés y mediante el uso de pruebas, encuestas y observaciones, se evidenció que los Escape Rooms aumentan la motivación, facilitando la práctica del idioma en contextos reales y fortalecen el trabajo en equipo.

En el séptimo artículo «**Enseñanza de Fonética a Jóvenes Estudiantes de Inglés como Idioma Extranjero**», sus autoras analizan el impacto de la instrucción fonética en la pronunciación, lectura y comprensión auditiva de estudiantes universitarios en Ecuador. A través de un enfoque cuasi experimental con alumnos A2.2, se evidenció que la pronunciación mejoró significativamente tras siete semanas de talleres resaltando la importancia de integrar la fonética en los planes de estudio para fortalecer la competencia lingüística.

El octavo artículo «**Mejora de las habilidades de expresión oral en inglés mediante la herramienta basada en inteligencia artificial SmallTalk2Me**», resalta la utilización de esta tecnología en la fluidez y pronunciación en estudiantes de nivel A2. Y concluye que, tras su uso, los alumnos muestran mayor confianza y participación en actividades orales, generando un aprendizaje más dinámico destacando de esta manera el potencial de la IA para optimizar la enseñanza del inglés de manera efectiva e inmersiva.

EDITORIAL LETTER

The scientific journal *Kronos*: *The Language Teaching Journal* presents to its readers volume five, number two, in digital format. This edition features eight articles focused on strategies and techniques for enhancing English language learning, along with research yielding positive outcomes in the educational field. These studies encourage reflection on the teaching of a second language.

In the first article «**Storytelling effect on reading comprehension skills of EFL learners in upper basic education**» the author presents a study that evaluated the impact of storytelling on the reading comprehension of eighth grade students. Using a mixed approach that applied pre- and post-intervention tests showing a moderate improvement in reading comprehension after the implementation of the technique, achieving positive perceptions of the use of storytelling in English classes.

In the second article «**The Influence of Peer-Assessment in Improving Speaking Skills in B1 learners**» the authors investigate how peer assessment improves the oral skills of B1 level English learners through a four-week analysis with university students using a pre- and post-test, which visualizes an improvement in factors such as grammar and pronunciation, concluding in their results that peer assessment significantly influences students' oral development.

The third article «**Lesson Study as a Catalyst for Innovation in Ecuadorian English Classrooms: Teacher Experiences and Challenges**» examines the use of Lesson Study (LS) as an innovative approach in Ecuadorian education, through interviews with English teachers who participated in an LS workshop, analyzing how this collaborative methodology promotes teamwork and shared learning, highlighting as findings that innovation can be achieved not only with technology, but also with new teaching approaches.

In their fourth article «**Factors that affect the learning of English as a foreign language in Superior Basic Education**» the authors analyze the factors affecting the learning of English as a foreign language in higher basic education by using a mixed approach the results indicate that, although most students enjoy learning English, various factors hinder effective learning.

In the fifth article «**Error analysis of written production at university level**», the authors study the difficulties of Language Pedagogy students when writing their Knowledge Integrating Projects. Based on the analysis of 25 papers, identifying errors in paragraph organization, punctuation, word choice, use of APA Style and counter-argumentation. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening strategies to improve argumentative writing in the academic environment.

The sixth article «**The use of Escape Rooms to promote collaboration in English Language Learning among seventh graders**», examines the way in which the strategy promotes collaboration and participation in English language learning and through the use of tests, surveys and observations, it was shown that Escape Rooms increase motivation, facilitating language practice in real contexts and strengthen teamwork.

In the seventh article «**Teaching Phonics Effectively to Young Adult EFL Learners**», the authors analyze the impact of phonics instruction on pronunciation, reading and listening comprehension of university students in Ecuador. Through a quasi-experimental approach with A2.2 students, showing that pronunciation improved significantly after

seven weeks of workshops, highlighting the importance of integrating phonetics into the curriculum to strengthen language proficiency.

The eighth article, «**Improving English Speaking Skills using the SmallTalk2Me Artificial Intelligence-Based Tool: An Innovative Approach in Secondary Education**», analyzes how this technology boosts fluency and pronunciation in A2 level students. After its use, students showed greater confidence and participation in oral activities, generating more dynamic learning. The study highlights the potential of AI to optimize the teaching of English in an effective and immersive way.

REVISTA KRONOS

Storytelling effect on reading comprehension skills of EFL learners in upper basic education

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ABSTRACT This study aims to examine the effect of storytelling on reading comprehension skills and students' perceptions of this technique. It involved thirty-four eighth-grade students in upper basic education and used a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. The students were given both a pre-test and a post-test focusing on specific reading comprehension sub-skills: skimming, scanning, and deducing meaning from context. The pre-test was conducted before implementing the storytelling technique, and the post-test was administered after the intervention to assess its impact and measure the learners' progress. Additionally, a questionnaire was used to gauge the students' perceptions, supplemented by field notes taken by the researcher to enrich and reinforce the information gathered during the intervention. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The initial pre-test results indicated low performance in reading comprehension skills among the students. However, following the intervention, the post-test results showed a moderate improvement in their reading comprehension skills. These findings demonstrate the effect of storytelling and the positive perceptions of students regarding this technique in EFL classes.

KEYWORDS storytelling, reading comprehension, students' perceptions.

Efecto de la narración sobre las habilidades de comprensión lectora de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera en educación básica superior

RESUMEN Este estudio tiene como objetivo examinar el efecto y las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre la narrativa de historias en las habilidades de comprensión lectora. El estudio involucró a treinta y cuatro estudiantes de octavo grado de educación básica superior y utilizó un enfoque mixto que incorporó métodos cualitativos y cuantitativos. Se les administró a los estudiantes tanto una prueba inicial como una prueba final centradas en habilidades específicas de comprensión lectora: ideas principales, detalles específicos y deducción de significado del contexto. La prueba inicial se llevó a cabo antes de implementar la técnica de la narrativa de historias, y la prueba final se administró después de la intervención para evaluar su impacto y medir el progreso de los estudiantes. Asimismo, se aplicó un cuestionario para evaluar la percepción de los estudiantes, complementado con notas de campo tomadas por el investigador para enriquecer y reforzar la información recopilada durante la intervención. Los resultados fueron analizados mediante estadísticas descriptivas. Los resultados iniciales de la prueba indicaron un bajo rendimiento en las habilidades de comprensión lectora entre los estudiantes, pero después de la intervención, los resultados de la prueba final mostraron una mejora moderada en sus habilidades de comprensión lectora. Estos hallazgos demuestran el efecto de la narrativa de historias y las percepciones positivas de los estudiantes sobre esta técnica en las clases de EFL.

PALABRAS CLAVE narrativa de historias, comprensión lectora, percepciones de los estudiantes.

INTRODUCTION

Reading stands out as a vital skill in the pursuit of English language proficiency. It holds significant importance among the four core English language skills, contributing profoundly to both academic and personal growth. Mastery of reading enables individuals to access diverse perspectives and knowledge while enhancing communication (Levlin & Waldmann, 2020).

Recognizing the significance of this skill, the curriculum emphasizes the development of reading skills. That is why (Ministerio de Educación [Mineduc], 2019) established that at the end of the eighth grade, students are expected to reach an A1.1 English level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), enabling them to derive significance from texts by using contextual clues and linguistic cues.

Alvarez and Ha (2022) note that Ecuadorian EFL teachers tend to prioritize teaching vocabulary and grammar in their curriculum. However, this traditional approach neglects the use of modern and innovative teaching methods, which limits students' exposure to active learning strategies during reading activities. This lack of engagement with innovative techniques may contribute to the persistently low levels of English reading comprehension among learners. As a result, there is a growing recognition of the need to enhance reading skills by adopting more dynamic and inventive teaching techniques. In response to these challenges, teachers require an effective approach to help students understand what they read and find enjoyment in the learning process.

Consequently, storytelling has been identified as a convenient solution because it strengthens comprehension, encourages the use of imagination and creativity, and helps students consider new ideas (Dvalidze & Shota, 2022). In this context, storytelling is seen as a valuable educational tool to enhance students' foreign language reading comprehension skills. Stories present a unique opportunity to address these obstacles by providing uninterrupted narratives, diverse vocabulary, and exposure to various grammatical structures (Bettering Youth Team, 2021).

Similarly, storytelling plays a key role in fostering social and emotional development. Through shared stories, individuals establish meaningful connections, fostering feelings of comfort and joy. This connection not only motivates language learners to persevere in their studies but also cultivates a positive attitude towards foreign language education (Bala, 2015). Thus, storytelling serves as a bridge to both academic success and emotional well-being in educational settings.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Numerous studies have investigated the impact of storytelling on improving reading comprehension. For instance, research conducted by Satriani (2019) aimed to examine the advantages and difficulties of incorporating storytelling into literacy education. The findings indicated numerous benefits of implementing a teaching program, including using two languages as the medium of interaction, providing appropriate learning materials and various media, using dramatization to convey character expressions, assessing moral values as an evaluation tool, developing students' literacy skills, sparking imagination, enriching vocabulary, and enhancing students' reading comprehension and interest.

Similarly, the study conducted by Hà and Bellot (2020) sought to evaluate storytelling as a technique for enhancing reading comprehension in the primary EFL classroom.

It involved 44 eight-year-old students, divided into two equal groups. They were Catalan/ Spanish native speakers, and their English level was pre-A1. The findings indicated that storytelling aids children in recalling, comprehending, and applying vocabulary related to specific topics and grammatical structures featured in stories. Similarly, storytelling was found to be equally effective as other teaching techniques, such as games and exercises, in enhancing students' comprehension of separate sentences.

Likewise, another study was carried out by Hazliana et al. (2023) aimed to analyze the effectiveness of the storytelling method to improve reading comprehension. An experimental research design was used to measure the difference between the experimental group, who received treatment, and the control group, who received a conventional me-thod. The research results showed that before the test phase, the control group of students exhibited superior reading comprehension levels. However, in the post-test phase, the experimental group, which received the storytelling as a treatment, surpassed the control group in terms of reading comprehension performance. Nevertheless, the outcomes revealed that there was a slight distinction between the control and experimental groups in both the pre-test and post-test phases. This suggests that storytelling could potentially assist students in enhancing their reading comprehension.

Finally, Yulianawati et al., (2022) study aimed to examine how elementary students engage with storytelling for reading comprehension. Storytelling, an ancient communication form, is found to be effective in language teaching due to its engaging nature. The research, employing a qualitative case study, involved 31 elementary students and utilized classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews. The results show that students actively engage with storytelling, which positively influences their attitudes and behaviors during English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading activities. From an educational standpoint, the study proposes storytelling as a valuable method for enhancing reading comprehension in elementary education settings.

Previous studies show that using storytelling can be a positive support in students' reading comprehension skills, at the same time as storytelling plays a role in motivating language learners to persevere in their studies. It has a positive impact on students' attitudes towards foreign language education.

METHOD

The study employed a mixed-method approach to gather data, utilizing both numerical and narrative formats. This integrated quantitative and qualitative methods to capture detailed insights, explore participant experiences, and formulate hypotheses for future exploration (Molina, 2016).This combination strengthens the information needed for the study and provides a better understanding of the variables of the research (Proudfoot, 2022).

The research used an action research model called Exploratory Action Research (EAR), which actively contributed to problem-solving by being an integral part of the issue, following two stages: exploration and action proposed by Smith and Rebolledo (2018).

PARTICIPANTS

This research was conducted at a public institution in Loja, Ecuador, in the academic year 2023–2024. Thirty-four eighth-grade students aged 12–13 participated in the present action research study. The participants were chosen through convenience sampling, which involved selecting individuals from the target sample based on practical criteria. These

criteria included easy accessibility, geographical proximity, and availability to the research-
er at a specific time (Gay et al., 2012).

INSTRUMENTS

The primary tools used were a pre and post-test administered before and after the inter-
vention to measure students' reading comprehension, as well as a questionnaire to under-
stand the students' perceptions about the use of storytelling, and field notes taken by the
researcher to complement and support the information collected during the intervention.

RESULTS

This study aimed to examine the effect and students' perceptions of storytelling on read-
ing comprehension skills.

PRETEST AND POSTTEST RESULTS

Before implementing storytelling, a pretest was administered to measure the initial learners'
reading comprehension skills regarding three reading comprehension sub-skills: skimming,
scanning, and deducing meaning from the context. Participants' pre-test results showed a
mean score of 4.87 (out 10). In addition, the post- test results indicated a mean score of
6.97 in the post-test (out 10), with a difference of 2.10 points, indicating a moderate im-
provement after the intervention.

Table 1. Mean score differences between reading comprehension pretest and posttest

Indicators	Score	NS	Pretest	Posttest	Difference
Skimming	3/3	34	1.41	1.79	0.38
Scanning	3/3	34	1.84	2.46	0.62
Deducing Meaning from the Context	4/4	34	1.62	2.72	1.10
TOTAL	10/10	34	4.87	6.97	2.10

Note: This table presents the average results of the pretest and posttest in each of the evaluated indicators.

As shown in Table 1 the first reading comprehension sub-skill, called skimming and refer-
ring to the identification of main ideas, presented an average score of 1.41 in the pre-test,
which increased to 1.79 in the post-test, showing a difference of 0.38 points. Likewise,
scanning (identification of specific details), obtained an average score of 1.84/3, while in
the post-test it experienced an increase of 0.62 points, reaching an average score of 2.46.
Finally, regarding deducing meaning from the content, the pre-test yielded a score of 1.62,
which increased to 2.72 in the post-test, reflecting a moderate increase of 1.10 points.

Figure 1. Changes pretest and posttest
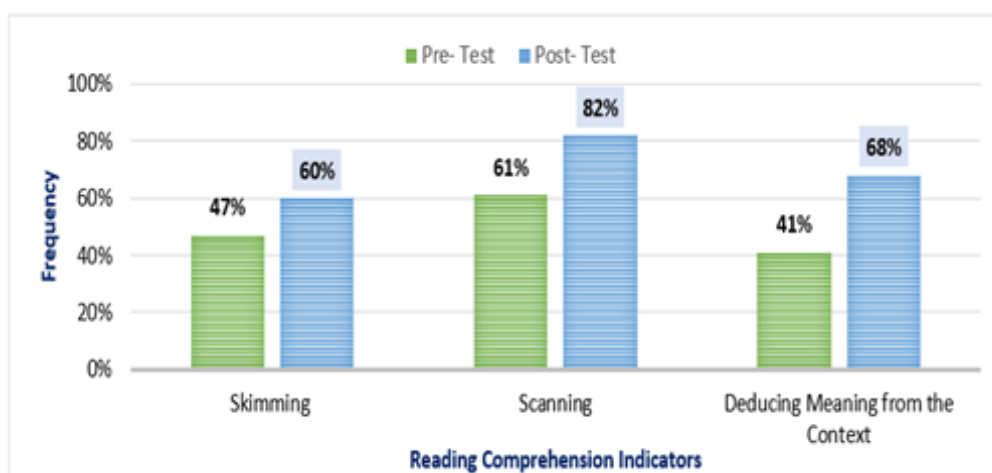
Note: Comparative bars of the percentage of reading comprehension indicators during the pre-test and post-test

Given that the variable indicators do not have an equal value, therefore, a proportional adjustment is implemented to ensure equitable weighting of the components, expressed in percentages, and to highlight the variance in the change of each indicator between the pretest and post-test.

Firstly, concerning the first sub-skill evaluated, skimming, there was an increase in the percentage before and after the intervention. Before the intervention, the percentage was 47%, and after the intervention, there was an increase of 13%, resulting in a post-test percentage of 60%. On the other hand, scanning showed an increase of 21%, rising from 61% in the pretest to 82% in the posttest. Finally, deducing meaning from the context increased from 41% to 68% after the use of storytelling, showing a difference of 27%.

Overall, there was a moderate improvement observed regarding the use of storytelling to enhance reading comprehension among students. The data reveals an increase across all three indicators, with scanning demonstrating the most significant improvement in percentage, followed by deducing meaning from the context and finally skimming.

QUESTIONNAIRE AND FIELD NOTES RESULTS

The information collected through the questionnaire aims to understand students' perceptions of the use of storytelling. The questionnaire consists of seven questions divided into three categories: engagement in language learning, storytelling genres, and reading comprehension. Along with the field notes taken by the researcher to support and contrast the information, they are represented in the following tables.

Table 2 illustrates that the students responded positively to the first statement regarding whether storytelling activities motivated them to participate actively during classes. This is reflected in 59% of students who answered strongly agree and 38% of participants who selected agree, indicating that this teaching technique was attractive to the participants, even though 3% disagreed. Furthermore, when students were asked if storytelling increased their interest in engaging with classmates during class activities, 50% strongly agreed, while the other 50% agreed, indicating a mostly positive and balanced response. Regarding item 3, which indicates that storytelling contributed to creating a positive atmosphere in English classes, a considerable percentage 68% strongly agreed, and 32% agreed.

Table 2. Students' perception on engagement in language learning

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	The storytelling activities motivated me to actively participate during classes.	59 %	38%	3%	0%
2	Storytelling increased my interest in engaging with classmates during class activities.	50%	50%	0%	0%
3	Storytelling contributed to create a positive atmosphere in English classes.	68%	32%	0%	0%

Note. SA= Strongly Agree, S= Agree, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree

Several students highlighted the qualities that made them appreciate a positive environment through the use of storytelling, mentioning that classes were interesting and amusing.

Figure 2. Perceived usefulness of storytelling genres for reading comprehension
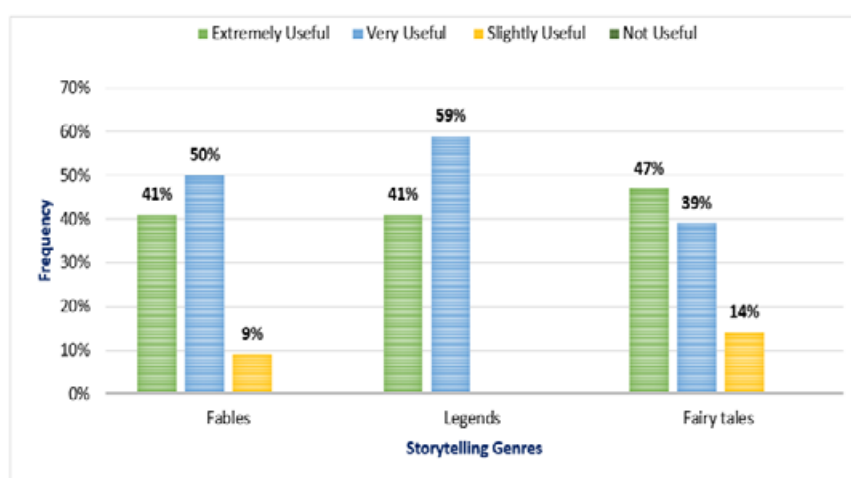
Note: Comparative bars of storytelling genres on reading comprehension.

Item number 4, which corresponds to the category of storytelling genres and their perceived usefulness for reading comprehension, features a distinct scale that considers the following aspects: extremely useful, very useful, slightly useful, and not useful.

Firstly, fables known for their concise narratives and moral lessons received considerable praise. Specifically, 41% of respondents deemed them extremely useful, while 50% considered them very useful. Only 9% found fables to be slightly useful.

Likewise, legends, with their rich cultural and historical contexts, also garnered positive feedback. A significant 41% of students rated them as extremely useful, while 59% found them very useful. Notably, no students indicated that legends were either slightly useful or not useful.

Moreover, fairy tales, celebrated for their imaginative elements and universal themes, also received appreciation. Nearly half of the respondents (47%) regarded them as extremely useful, while 39% found them very useful. Additionally, 14 % considered fairy tales slightly useful.

As seen in Table 3, considering students' perception regarding the effect of storytelling on reading comprehension, two items stand out: 5 and 6. They detail that, regarding the use of legends, fables, and tales, 35% of the students strongly agreed, while 65% chose to agree. Similarly, for understanding words and phrases, the majority responded positively, with 56% of participants strongly agreeing and 44% selecting to agree.

Table 3. Students' perception of storytelling effect on reading comprehension

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
5	Storytelling with legends, fables, and fairy tales helped me increase my reading comprehension.	35%	65%	0%	0%
6	Storytelling helped my understanding of English words and phrases.	56 %	44%	0%	0%

Note. SA= Strongly Agree, S= Agree, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree

Figure 3. Perceived usefulness of storytelling regarding reading comprehension.
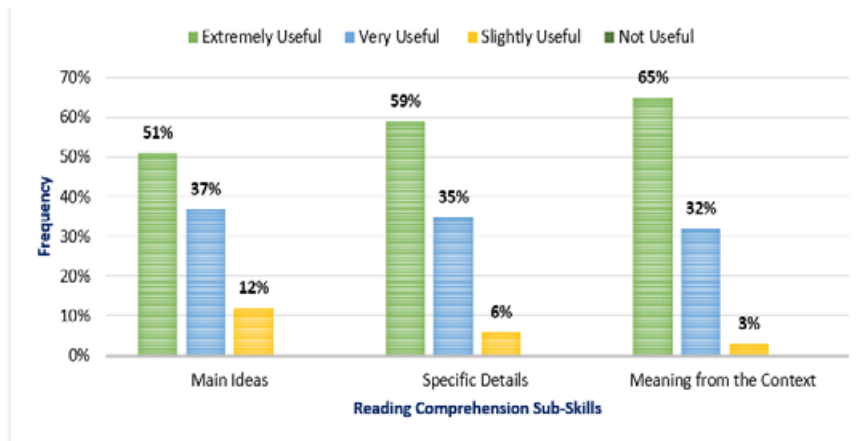
Note: Comparative bars of reading comprehension sub-skills with the use of storytelling.

The analysis of Figure 3 indicates the perceived usefulness of storytelling on reading comprehension among students, with varying degrees of effectiveness noted across different sub-skills. Firstly, regarding the main ideas, 51% of students found it extremely useful. Additionally, 37% considered it very useful, while 12% perceived it as only slightly useful. Moving on to the specific details, 59% of students found it extremely useful, with 35% finding it very useful, and 6% regarding it as slightly useful. In terms of the ability to deduce meaning from context, 65% perceived it as extremely useful, while 32% found it very useful, and only 3% found it slightly useful.

DISCUSSION

The present study found that storytelling helped improve the reading comprehension skills of eighth-grade students who were learning English as a foreign language (EFL). This was evident from the variation in the mean scores before and after the implementation of storytelling, showing a moderate change of 2.10 points. The results were in accordance with the main research objective, which aimed to examine the effect of storytelling on reading comprehension skills among upper basic education students at a public institution in Loja during the school year 2023-2024.

The results showed that eighth-grade students who were exposed to storytelling demonstrated an improvement in their English reading comprehension skills. Following the introduction of storytelling, a significant positive difference in scores between the pretest and posttest results was observed. These findings align closely with those acquired through Hàand Bellot (2020) and Hazliana et al. (2023) who suggested that storytelling

improves students' reading comprehension skills and creates a dynamic learning environment. Likewise, through storytelling, students can express their social experiences and gain insight into diverse perspectives. Particularly, young learners demonstrate a strong interest in hearing stories repeatedly, facilitating the subconscious absorption of language elements (Huang, 2006). Moreover, they actively engage in narratives, allowing teachers to introduce or reinforce vocabulary and sentence structures within a varied, memorable, and familiar context (Atta, 2012).

In addition, students reported enjoying storytelling, citing that diverse narrative genres captured their attention and interest. Furthermore, they felt motivated to participate and showed improved accuracy in answering questions. Overall, the use of storytelling helped students practice the content and prevented them from having comprehension problems. These findings corroborate those reported by Satriani (2019) and Yulianawati et al., (2022) in their studies. For example, Satriani (2019) highlighted that storytelling incorporates bilingual interaction, diverse teaching materials, dramatization for character expression, evaluation of moral values, enhancement of reading and writing skills, stimulation of imagination, expansion of vocabulary, and cultivation of comprehension and interest in reading.

According to Yulianawati et al. (2022), for instance, they argue that storytelling contributes significantly to student motivation and engagement with reading activities. They contend that incorporating storytelling into the classroom can enhance student behavior and attitudes toward English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Therefore, by using storytelling as a teaching technique, student reading comprehension can be promoted. The findings of the present study indicate that the introduction of storytelling in English classes will benefit Ecuadorian upper basic education students by improving their reading comprehension skills.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of storytelling's effect on the reading comprehension skills of eighth-grade students demonstrated its positive impact, particularly using fables, legends, and fairy tales. The results revealed a moderate improvement in reading comprehension scores between the pretest and posttest. Specifically, students showed the most significant progress in the "scanning" indicator, followed by "deducing meaning from the content." However, some challenges remained in the "skimming" indicator, highlighting difficulties in identifying main ideas. Addressing these challenges in future interventions could further enhance comprehension outcomes.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that most students perceived storytelling as a highly engaging and beneficial tool for reading comprehension. They appreciated the activities, particularly those involving legends, which were the most favored genre. The use of storytelling not only increased students' motivation and participation but also fostered a positive and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, making the learning process more effective and appealing. These conclusions underscore the value of storytelling as an educational technique in EFL classrooms, while also pointing to areas for further exploration and improvement, such as tailored strategies for enhancing skimming skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this research work, the time frame of the intervention plan was a limitation, constraining the depth and sustainability of the intended effects. In this situation, it is essential to

consider that the nature of the research requires extending the duration of the intervention by at least one term in order to assimilate and internalize the research. This extension will allow researchers to gain a clearer understanding of the impact and effect of the research, which would help achieve more concrete and favorable results.

Therefore, the post-test and questionnaire to find out the students' perceptions had to be carried out online, using google docs documents. For this reason, it suggests implementing repetitive measures throughout the period of time to analyze the progress of the students to measure their advancement. These repeated measures could provide more reliable data on the effectiveness of storytelling over time.

CONTRIBUCIONES DE LA AUTORA

Mabel del Cisne Palacio Guerrero: conceptualización, investigación, redacción – borrador original, análisis de datos, revisión y edición.

IMPLICACIONES ÉTICAS

Los autores declaran que no existen implicaciones éticas.

CONFLICTO DE INTERÉS

Los autores declaran que no existen conflictos de interés financieros o no financieros que podrían haber influido en el trabajo presentado en este artículo

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REVISTA KRONOS

The Influence of Peer-Assessment in Improving Speaking Skills in B1 learners

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ABSTRACT This action research explores how peer-assessment can enhance the speaking skills of B1 English learners. The participants of this study are university students, and they have previously studied English at a language school in Samborondon, Guayas. The project was carried out online within a time frame of 4 weeks, a four-hour lesson per week. This is a pre/posttest design study, which evaluates students' improvement of oral production skills by implementing the peer-assessment technique. The aim of this study is to answer the questions: 1. To what extent does the use of peer assessment improve speaking in B1 level students? For which quantitative data collection methods were applied. On the other hand, a survey was used to answer the qualitative question: What are students' perspectives regarding peer-assessment and their speaking? The research revealed that peer-assessment does have a significant influence on B1 learners' speaking skills, as their grades in the posttest raised and some factors such as grammar and pronunciation were enhanced. Therefore, the current study should be used as a guide for teachers whose aim is to get their students to be fluent in English.

KEYWORDS Peer-assessment, Speaking Skills, Fluency, English as a Foreign Language..

La influencia de la evaluación por pares en la mejora de las habilidades orales en estudiantes B1

RESUMEN Este estudio de investigación explora cómo la evaluación de pares mejora las habilidades orales de estudiantes de inglés de nivel B1. Los participantes de este estudio son estudiantes universitarios quienes previamente estudiaron en una academia de Idiomas en Samborondón. El presente proyecto fue llevado a cabo en modalidad en línea, en un periodo de cuatro semanas, teniendo una clase de cuatro horas cada semana. Este estudio está diseñado por el análisis de la mejora de las habilidades orales de estudiantes a través del uso de la técnica de evaluación de pares, mediante la implementación de un pre y post test. El propósito de este estudio es responder a las preguntas: 1. ¿En qué medida mejora el uso de la evaluación de pares las habilidades orales de estudiantes de nivel B1? 2. ¿Cuáles son las perspectivas de los estudiantes acerca de la evaluación de pares y sus habilidades orales? La investigación reveló que la evaluación de pares sí influye significativamente en las destrezas orales de estudiantes de nivel B1, ya que sus puntajes en el post test se elevaron y mejoraron algunos factores como el uso de gramática y la pronunciación. Por lo tanto, este estudio debería servir como guía a docentes cuyo objetivo sea que sus estudiantes alcancen fluidez en inglés.

PALABRAS CLAVE Evaluación de pares, Habilidades orales, Fluidez, inglés como idioma extranjero.

INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of speaking skills in a second language is necessary for students to communicate in today's globalized society. However, students whose L1 is not English have most of the time struggled with the development of oral production skills. For instance, Prastika (2020) conducted an action research with 25 students from Mataram, Indonesia, who had problems such as lack of confidence, and mispronunciation of words, which held them back from speaking in English in a more fluent way. Thanks to the use of the peer-assessment technique, students saw a notable improvement in their overall speaking skills.

In addition, Caicedo (2016) carried out a study with 22 students in Chia, Colombia, who struggled to maintain an outgoing speech, mainly because of their poor English level, and little participation in class due to their fear of making mistakes in front of their teachers. As a way to tackle this problem, peer-assessment was a very useful tool that could help those students improve their oral production skills.

It is noticeable that the development of speaking skills is a struggle for most EFL learners. Ecuadorian students are not the exception. Recent observations carried out in a language school in Samborondon, Guayas Province, have revealed a concerning issue among a group of learners. They show notable lack of confidence when it comes to speaking in English, paired up with other challenges such as tense confusion, word mispronunciation, and direct translation from their first language (L1). As a result, these students have been struggling to get a desired level of fluency in English, which motivated this study.

According to MINEDUC (2019), students who finished high school should have a B1 level of English, which would mean that they are able to communicate in basic daily life situations. Still, these students cannot even construct full sentences. In light of this challenge, this research aims to explore an approach to address these linguistic problems: the integration of peer- assessment methods.

PEER- ASSESSMENT

As a way to tackle the problem of the lack of innovative techniques being used to teach English in Ecuador, peer assessment could be a tool in the classrooms. ''Peer assessment is a pedagogical strategy that requires students to evaluate their peers' efforts within an educational context" (Power & Tanner, 2023, p. 629). It can be stated then that this technique fosters a dynamic and participatory learning environment. This approach implies changing the traditional teacher-centered model of assessment, placing the responsibility of evaluation and feedback in the hands of learners themselves (Seifert & Feliks, 2019).

This process encourages students to assess their peers' work, which, in turn, cultivates essential skills such as critical thinking, communication, and self-reflection. The use of peer-assessment would assure that all of the students have an active role in the learning process (Musfirah, 2019). It seems that this shift of roles makes students feel more motivated, engaged, and cultivates their desire of acquiring new knowledge, developing new skills and mastering the ones they already possess in order to review their peer's work (Samouni, 2023).

However, the peer assessment technique has disadvantages as well. Most of them are related to the fact that some students may not be objective when it comes to giving feedback to their close friends, and not all of them possess the necessary skills for effective assessment (Divjak & Maretic, 2017). There is also the possibility that students may feel

overwhelmed or reluctant because of their fear of not being competent enough to grade their partners, so they would not want to take that responsibility (Stancic, 2021).

Despite these possible limitations, Ndoye (2017) considered that it is possible to use the peer assessment technique successfully if teachers set objectives, criteria, and even share a rubric with students before starting the process. This way, they can have a deeper and more meaningful insight of the strategy that is being used, and how it can help them consolidate their knowledge and learn from their partners' mistakes. If this process is not done correctly, some problems such as confusion when grading their peers.

In addition, Brown (2015) claimed that in order to get all of the benefits that the use of peer-assessment can provide, students' confidence on themselves and on their classmates should be built. This way, they would understand that the grade they got is an objective reflection of the work they did.

The implementation of peer-assessment can be also useful for learners to get new strategies, set new goals, and learn to use the resources they already have. This way, they can improve their language skills by learning from their assigned peer's work (Meletiadou, 2021). As students are able to identify others' weaknesses and strenghts, they start comparing themselves to their peers, resulting in them getting to a self-regulation status, which will eventually end up in the improvement of their previously not-so-well developed skills (Yan et al., 2022).

SPEAKING

Through the speaking skill, individuals are allowed to articulate their ideas and thoughts (Fauzan, 2014). Moreover, the ability to speak proficiently serves as a clear indicator of one's mastery of the language. According to Rao (2019), among the four key skills needed for acquiring a foreign or second language, speaking is deemed the most critical one to master. There are some factors that can affect the development of speaking skill, such as students' lack of confidence, lack of knowledge or simple unwillingness to leave their mother tongue behind, that makes it the hardest skill to be enhanced to the highest level (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

When trying to get students to reach speaking competence, it is paramount to take into account the role that some factors such as grammar, the use of vocabulary, pronunciation, and coherence play in this journey. To begin with, if students know grammar structures, they will be able to communicate diverse ideas, to express themselves in several scenarios, and to make sure they will not be misinterpreted (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022).

However, those grammar structure should be practiced in real-life scenarios, and for this matter, students also need to have enough and appropriate vocabulary. Mastering a second language does not only mean to understand and process information, but also to produce it; and for both aspects, knowing the meaning of words is mandatory (Jambari et al., 2021).

Even though grammar and vocabulary knowledge are fundamental factors to develop speaking skills, they could be overshadowed by students' pronunciation problems. A wrong pronunciation of words could lead to misunderstandings in real-life contexts. This is why, activities that allow students to practice the right way of saying words should be included in the classroom. (Alfonso, 2021).

Undoubtedly, the factors mentioned above are of greatest importance when striving to enhance oral production skills, however, as isolated components they will not be enough for students to sound fluent and proficient. It is the ability of students to express their ideas in a cohesive and coherent way which will determine whether they succeed in oral profi-

ciency or not, because those factors are the ones who will make the message sound clearer, more concise, and therefore, easier to be understood (Zhussupova & Shadiev, 2023).

PEER-ASSESSMENT OF SPEAKING

It is important to take into account that, in order to grade other students, the one who assesses the other should have enough speaking proficiency to be able to identify mistakes and provide adequate feedback (Hyoung, 2016). Nevertheless, peer-assessment does serve as a valuable tool when it comes to enhancing students' speaking skills because it helps to understand their language goals. (White, 2009). As they are conscious that they are following some criteria, and that a person other than their teacher is going to evaluate their work, they really make an effort to do it the best they can.

In addition, Li et al. (2022) claimed that peer-assessment has positive effects on learners' speaking skill development mainly because they can learn from their classmates once they are able to use the rubric and identify their mistakes. When applying peer-assessment technique, both students enhance their skills while giving and receiving feedback, and as a result, they will stop making the same mistakes over and over again.

On the other hand, Hasnani and Mubarak (2020) argued that peer-assessment is a functional tool to improve speaking due to the fact that it allows students who speak less or do not speak at all to gain the confidence they need to start trying to practice the language. It provides learners the opportunity to interact and give mutual help to progress. Besides, it also makes students develop some soft skills. For instance, they can enhance their teamwork skills since they need to constantly be in touch with their assigned peer, and they create their new knowledge together. They can also gain patience, as sometimes, their partners would continue making the same mistakes they had previously corrected.

Despite the fact that Prastika (2020) and Caicedo (2016) recognized peer-assessment's effectiveness in improving speaking skills, Quimi (2024) considered that peer-assessment should be used as a formative tool, rather than in a summative way. The main reason is that it may have the contrary effect on students, as they will be afraid of making mistakes and getting a bad final grade.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is action research, which was defined as "a process involving researchers and practitioners acting together on a particular cycle of activities, including problem diagnosis, action intervention, and reflective learning." (Avison et al. 1999, p. 96) Action research is known by its problem-solving orientation in educational and professional settings. In this context, the present research aims to identify the problems regarding students' speaking skills development and suggest a possible solution. This study answers these research questions: To what extent does the use of peer-assessment improve speaking in B1 level students? What are students' perspectives regarding peer-assessment and their speaking?

PARTICIPANTS

The group that participated in the study was made up of twenty-five students, from 18 to 20 years old, who took a placement test in an English Academy. The results indicated they

all have a B1 level. Most of the group are first-year university students, meaning that they just finished high school. There are twelve female students and thirteen male students. All the students are Ecuadorian and have similar cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

They were in the same classroom at the English Academy, until the eighth level. Each level lasted 2 months, where B1 level contents were covered. All of the students completed the activities of the Action Research.

INSTRUMENTS

Within this investigation, the independent variable is peer assessment, and the dependent variable is speaking. To address the first question, a pretest and posttest were applied. In the pretest, students had to talk for 1 minute about their plans for the weekend, using future simple (will) and first conditional tense. In contrast, the posttest required students to talk for one minute, about their goals, dreams, and plans for the five upcoming years, using future simple, first conditional, connectors and transition words and time expressions for the future. To evaluate these pretest and posttest, a rubric was used including criteria like pronunciation, fluency, coherence, and accuracy.

Pronunciation: This criterion assessed the accuracy and clarity of students' pronunciation of individual sounds, stress patterns, and intonation in spoken English.

Fluency: Fluency evaluated the smoothness and how natural students' spoken English sounded, considering factors such as rate of speech, pausing, and hesitation.

Coherence: This criterion assessed the logical organization in the students' spoken responses, as well as the use of connectors and transition words to put their ideas together.

Accuracy: Accuracy focused on how students used grammar when speaking, including aspects such as verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and article usage.

To address the second research question concerning the students' perspective about peer assessment, a survey was administered to the participants. This survey consisted of a google form with 5 questions using the Likert scale, in order to know students' insights about this technique, and an open-ended question at the end, to know their individual comments or perceptions about the study they took part in.

Since the aim of this project was to evaluate the impact of peer-assessment in speaking improvement, a rubric was used as a way to help students assess their assigned peers. Having the criteria that needs to be evaluated, students found the process of peer-assessing easier and more objective. Students' training to use the rubric in an accurate way took 2 of the 4 hours of the first lesson.

The criterion included in the rubric were grammar, which focused on how students use the simple future and first conditional structures to talk about their future goals and dreams. Vocabulary, focusing on the time expressions students incorporate to their speech. Pronunciation, which revises how well students sound, since they were used to read the words as they were written, just like they do in L1 (Spanish), and Organization, which is oriented to how fluent they sound by using connectors and transition words to express their ideas.

RESULTS

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

To answer the first research question: "To what extent does the use of peer-assessment improve speaking in B1 level students?" a pretest and posttest were applied to the participants, and the results are indicated below:

Table 1: Pretest and Posttest Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

	N	Min	Max	M	SD	$P(T<=t)$ two-tail
Pretest	25	10	17	14.24	1.85	p < 0.001
Posttest	25	14	20	17.00	1.63	

The results shown in Table 1 demonstrate how the grades that the 25 volunteers obtained in the pretest improved in the posttest. To get to this improvement, students needed to practice a lot, and assess their partners. Students learned from their partner's mistakes, so they did not repeat them.

Table 2: Descriptive and Inferential Statistics per category

		Pretest				Posttest			
	N	Min	Max	M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD
Grammar	25	2.5	5	3.64	0.654	3	5	4.46	0.660
Vocabulary	25	2.5	4	3.6	0.520	3	5	4.3	0.595
Pronunciation	25	2.5	4	3.52	0.586	3.5	5	4.18	0.430
Organization	25	2.5	4	3.48	0.586	3	5	4.06	0.441

Table 2 shows the statistics per category. These criteria were taken from the rubric that students used to evaluate their peers. In the pretest, the average grade on the 'organization' criteria was 3.48 being students' weakest skill, meaning that they were not able to express their ideas in a coherent and cohesive way through the use of connectors and transition words. In the posttest, it went up to 4.06 but continued being the lowest grade that students got in their rubric. This is mainly because they were only focusing on getting the right structure of the tenses while expressing their ideas, however, they did not try to make them sound connected. They expressed everything sentence by sentence. On the other hand, 'Grammar' was the criteria with the highest average grade on both the pretest (3.64) and posttest (4.46). These results lead to the inference that students may know the structures for future simple and first conditional, since they may have memorized them, however, they are not able to apply them to talk about real-life situations. In addition, they do not possess the required amount of vocabulary to express what they want in a fluent way.

The results of the *t*-test (0.00) and the *p*-value (0.00) for two tails is lower than 0.001. It is therefore, demonstrated that the right implementation of the peer-assessment technique improved the oral performance of B1 students.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

A survey was run to answer the second research question: "What are students' perspectives regarding peer-assessment and their speaking?" The survey consisted of a google form with 5 questions, which aimed to know students' perspectives about the influence of the peer-assessment technique on their speaking skills. A Likert scale and an open-ended question were used to know students' points of view about the intervention.

Table 3: Questions 1-5: Students' perspectives about the use of peer-assessment and speaking

QUESTIONS	M	SD
The activities done in class and as homework were completely oriented to develop oral production skills.	4.90	0,31
Assessing my partner allowed me to develop and improve my oral production skills.	4.83	0,38
The feedback I received from my classmate allowed me to improve my oral production skills.	4.93	0,26
Using the rubric allowed me to evaluate my peer's performance in an objective way.	4.83	0,47
I think my oral production skills highly improved thanks to the use of peer-feedback technique.	4,90	0,31

The answers to questions 1 to 5 were codified as the following: Totally agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), Totally disagree (1). For all the questions, the mean was close to 5, which proves that students agree that peer-assessment was a useful tool to enhance their speaking skills.

For the last question, which was open-ended, the collected data revealed that regarding peer-assessment, students' attitude was reluctant at first, as they did not want their partners to watch their recordings *"At first I was embarrassed to record myself, I felt even worse when I knew my partners and not my teacher would see it..."* (*Participant 8*) However, once they started having their lessons, their perception changed in a good way and at the end, they recognized it had helped them to improve their oral production abilities and learn from their mistakes: *"I think that peer-feedback really helped me learn from my partner's mistakes and my own."* (Participant 17) as well as gain confidence: *"Now I feel more confident because I could understand things I didn't before, and I can speak in a better way."* (Participant 12)

On the other hand, when it came to speaking, one of the biggest struggles students faced during this intervention was that they could not use L1 to communicate. The instruction given was to always use English, even when giving feedback to their partners, and they were being constantly monitored to see if they were actually using L2. They admitted it was hard at first, but they had no other option, so they ended up getting used to it *"Having to speak*

English all the time was something I was afraid of, and I almost back up, but I got used to it sooner than I expected." (Participant 23), and at the end of the intervention, they recognized how much their oral production skills had improved: "*Now I am able to have small conversations with my friends completely in English, I know I still need to practice, but it is definitely an improvement*" (Participant 5)

DISCUSSION

The results obtained in the present research highlight the use of peer-assessment in improving the speaking skills of B1 English learners, aligning with the findings shown by (Li et al. 2022), who reported peer-assessment was effective because students could learn from each other's' mistakes. The enhancement observed from pretest to posttest grades indicates a positive impact of peer-assessment on various aspects of speaking, including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and organization.

The findings demonstrating that peer-assessment can create a more dynamic and participatory learning environment (Power & Tanner, 2023). The enhancement in the students' speaking skills, as evidenced by the pretest and posttest scores, supports the idea that peer-assessment can reduce the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The positive outcomes observed in this study are consistent with previous research. For instance, Ndoye (2017) claimed that peer-assessment, when structured with clear objectives and criteria, can be successfully implemented to enhance learning outcomes. This study supports those findings, as the use of a rubric and defined criteria facilitated a meaningful peer-assessment process, leading to improvements in students' speaking skills. The improved grades in grammar and vocabulary, as well as reduced performance variability, reflect the effectiveness of the structured approach. An insightful aspect of this research is the emotional and motivational impact of peer-assessment on students. The qualitative feedback from the participants reveals an initial reluctance, which transformed into positive engagement and motivation as the sessions progressed.

This transformation highlights an affective dimension of peer-assessment. This research agrees with Hasnani and Mubarak (2020), as it suggests that peer-assessment boosts learners' confidence and cooperative work, opening new avenues for further exploration into the emotional and psychological benefits of peer-assessment in language learning.

CONCLUSIONS

This research was carried out as a way to tackle B1 level students' problems regarding speaking skills outlined in the introduction, such as: lack of confidence, confusion between tenses, mispronunciation, or high reliance on their L1 or native language. Through the application of the peer-assessment technique, these problems were reduced in a significant way.

The main goal of this study was to evaluate how peer-assessment could improve speaking skills and to get an insight of students' perspectives on this method. The quantitative data showed a meaningful improvement in pretest and posttest scores regarding criteria, such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and organization.

The average of the grades obtained were 14.24 in the pretest and it rose to 17.00 in the posttest, and the standard deviation decreased, which is an indicator that there was a reduction in the knowledge gap between the participants. In addition, qualitative feedback demonstrated that even though students were reluctant at the beginning, by the end of

the study conducted, they felt more motivated and confident, positively impacting their engagement, and learning outcomes.

This study encountered some limitations such as collecting all of the data required, since it demanded a lot of time for the researcher, due to the fact that it was necessary to make sure all of the students participated. In addition, the participants are university students, they rarely had free periods at the same time, therefore, it was hard to coordinate a session in which all of them could be present. Moreover, the researcher had to deal with students' reluctance at the beginning, since most of them were ashamed of their pronunciation, so they were not willing to have their recordings watched by their assigned peer. Therefore, new researchers on this subject should make sure students feel comfortable from the beginning, letting them know that they are in a safe environment where making mistakes is totally accepted and an important part of the learning process.

 At the end of the action research, there were also technical difficulties like unstable internet connection, which made it difficult to have online sessions and this problem was worsened by the blackouts. For future research, it is recommended to find a period of time in which all of the students are available to have face-to-face classes as way to not get the study stopped due to connectivity or electrical problems.

Another recommendation is to plan some time (an entire lesson, if possible) only for students to practice how to use the checklist, and for them to get familiarized with the peer-assessment technique. Furthermore, better results will come off if students know when they have to record themselves at least with one week of anticipation so that they will be able to find some time to do it.

To sum up, the aim of this study was to prove peer-assessment's impact on improving B1 students' speaking skills. In order to get even better insights, teachers should constantly remind students to participate in the peer-assessment intervention on the required time, so that they can all be part of the examined sample, and they can find out on their own how the use of this technique not only helps them improve oral production skills, but also boosts their confidence and allows them to learn from others, and take the lead of their learning process.

CONTRIBUCIONES DE LOS AUTORES

Dayana Rosa Torres Castro: Implementación de la innovación, aplicación de la metodología de investigación, recolección y análisis de datos, redacción del documento.

María Rossana Ramírez Ávila: Diseño de la metodología de la investigación, Revisión y edición.

IMPLICACIONES ÉTICAS

Los autores declaran que no existen implicaciones éticas. Los participantes de la encuesta dieron su consentimiento y participaron voluntariamente en la misma.

CONFLICTO DE INTERÉS

Los autores declaran que no existen conflictos de interés financieros o no financieros que podrían haber influido en el trabajo presentado en este artículo.

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REVISTA KRONOS

Lesson Study as a Catalyst for Innovation in Ecuadorian English Classrooms: Teacher Experiences and Challenges

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ABSTRACT This study explores the implementation of Lesson Study (LS) as an innovative approach within the Ecuadorian educational context, where innovation is an emerging concept. With limited prior exposure to collaborative methodologies, many Ecuadorian teachers have yet to engage in practices that promote shared learning and professional growth. The researchers aim to investigate how LS, as a collaborative model, can foster innovation among educators by enhancing teamwork, shared responsibility, and a cooperative culture. Using a qualitative methodology rooted in narrative inquiry, two volunteer English teachers who participated in an LS workshop were interviewed in depth to capture their reflections and perceptions of LS as an innovative tool. The collected data were analyzed through content analysis, allowing themes and categories to emerge around the teachers' understanding of innovation and the role of technology in education. Key findings indicate that while technology is commonly viewed as a potential driver of innovation, the teachers also recognize that innovation can be achieved through new teaching approaches aside from technology. LS was perceived as a beneficial collaborative method that strengthens professional relationships and introduces sustainable change in teaching practices. In conclusion, the study suggests that LS has significant potential as an innovative asset for Ecuadorian educators, offering a non-technological pathway to improve teaching and learning practices and encourage a shift toward a more collaborative educational culture.

KEYWORDS Innovation, Education, Lesson Study, English Teachers.

El estudio de lecciones como catalizador de la innovación en las aulas de inglés ecuatorianas: experiencias y desafíos de los docentes

RESUMEN Este estudio explora la implementación del Lesson Study (LS) como un enfoque innovador en el contexto educativo ecuatoriano, donde la innovación es un concepto emergente. Con una exposición limitada a metodologías colaborativas, muchos docentes ecuatorianos aún no se han involucrado en prácticas que promuevan el aprendizaje compartido y el crecimiento profesional. Las investigadoras tienen como objetivo indagar cómo el LS, como modelo colaborativo, puede fomentar la innovación entre los educadores al fortalecer el trabajo en equipo, la responsabilidad compartida y una cultura de cooperación. Utilizando una metodología cualitativa basada en la investigación narrativa, se entrevistó en profundidad a dos docentes voluntarias de inglés que participaron en un taller de LS para captar sus reflexiones y percepciones sobre el LS como herramienta innovadora. Los datos recopilados fueron estudiados mediante análisis de contenido, lo que permitió que surgieran temas y categorías en torno a la comprensión de la innovación y el papel de la tecnología en la educación por parte de las docentes. Los hallazgos clave indican que, si bien la tecnología se percibe comúnmente como un posible impulsor de la innovación, las docentes también reconocen que la innovación puede lograrse mediante nuevos enfoques de enseñanza independientes de la tecnología. El LS fue percibido como un método colaborativo beneficioso que fortalece las relaciones profesionales e introduce un cambio sostenible en las prácticas docentes. En conclusión, el estudio sugiere que el LS tiene un potencial significativo como un recurso innovador para los educadores ecuatorianos, ofreciendo una vía no tecnológica para mejorar las prácticas de enseñanza y aprendizaje y promover un cambio hacia una cultura educativa más colaborativa.

PALABRAS CLAVE Innovación, Educación, Estudio de Lecciones, Profesoras de Inglés.

INTRODUCTION

Lesson Study is the English equivalent of *jugyou kenkyuu* in Japanese, which is a teaching-learning model used to enhance education at different levels. LS was first developed in Japan and involves teacher-led research in order to improve classes. According to Lewis (2009):

> 'Lesson study' is a professional learning approach in which teachers work together to: formulate goals for student learning and long-term development; collaboratively plan a 'research lesson' designed to bring to life these goals; conduct the lesson in a classroom, with one team member teaching and others gathering evidence on student learning and development; and discuss the evidence gathered during the lesson, using it to improve the lesson, the unit, and instruction more generally (p.95).

The LS approach can be adopted as an innovative method to boost education at different levels as a creative answer to applying pedagogical innovations. LS "is a collaborative process in which teachers observe, analyze, and evaluate each other's actual classroom lessons mainly with the objective of improving their lessons" (Pérez et al., 2010). LS has been extensively applied in Japan, and, even when it is a relatively new technique for the USA, Canada, and some countries in Europe, it has been cataloged as one of the most effective and relevant strategies to foster collaboration among teachers (Pérez et al., 2010).

The LS approach typically follows a cyclical process that involves several key stages, as illustrated in the following diagram. This process ensures continuous improvement and reflective practice among educators.
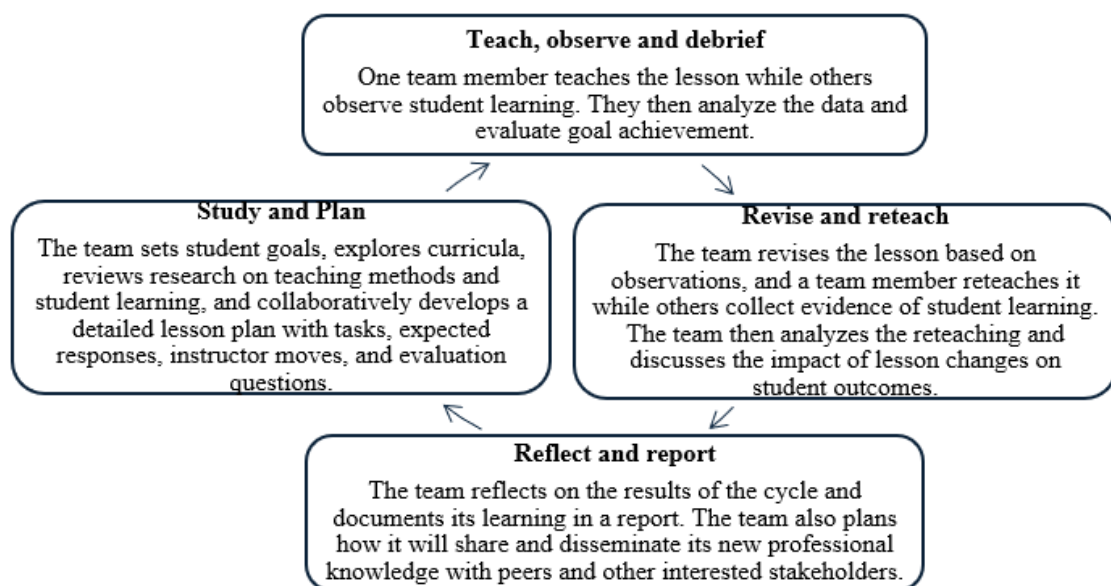
Fig. 1. Lesson Study Process. (Taken from Leong et al., 2021).

The image outlines the cyclical process of the Lesson Study (LS) approach, emphasizing continuous improvement and reflective practice. This process begins with collaborative planning and goal setting, followed by the teaching and observation of the lesson. Insights gained lead to lesson revision and reteaching, with further observations to assess the impact of these changes. The cycle concludes with reflection and documentation of outcomes, fostering ongoing professional development and knowledge sharing among educators. This iterative process enhances teaching effectiveness and promotes a culture of collaborative teaching-learning processes.

Consequently, this constitutes a convenient tool for Ecuadorian teachers since one of its principles is that it fosters collaboration. This is a very weak skill in Ecuadorian educational contexts where educators were even considered "unlikely collaborators" since they

prefer to work autonomously (Serrano et al., 2015). This issue needs to be addressed, and LS proposes an accurate methodology as it is not only about collaboration but "emphasizes co-learning within the teacher group" (Nesusin et al., 2014). Thus, using the strategy of LS constitutes collaborative work, which means it is potentially beneficial for Ecuadorian educational environments. In addition, we can say that LS also represents innovation, since studies state that "LS is a teachers' tool to study and improve their practice, implement curriculum reform, build school-based curriculum innovations and develop their professional knowledge and the teachers themselves in the process" (Tan-Chia et al., 2013).

Along with this, the term 'innovation' has been pushing education to face imperative changes and the adoption of new institutional forms in response to the rapid pace of technological enhancements. Therefore, it is no secret that we must include innovation in education and, as mentioned by (Gulden et al., 2020), "it is worth to note the significance of innovation management to quality assurance of education." In this light, it is compulsory for educational actors to take action and implement new techniques and approaches that last and transform the educational landscape; however, not any ideas, but "new ideas or practices that are impactful and valuable to individuals or communities" (Fenwick & Vermeulen, 2016), which need to be taken into account at the time of implementing innovative resources to the classrooms.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, innovation responds to technological progress and implementation. In fact, some studies state that leveraging technology is crucial for any study mode in that it should be applied to any curriculum plan to ensure a better education (Sarker et al., 2019); that is why it has been seen as a potentially useful asset. Nonetheless, the authors also point out that the use of technology has not always been effective when it comes to providing students with meaningful learning and that implementing it in institutions may involve complex situations regarding variables such as people involved, context, and technical issues (Koc, 2013). Consequently, educational stakeholders ought to explore alternative approaches in order to foster innovation in instances where the integration of technology poses challenges.

With this in mind, we can talk about how necessary it is to implement pedagogical innovations, which means "to introduce innovations into the pedagogical system, to update the progress of educational processes, to have a positive impact on its results" (Shuhratovich, 2020) even if we do not use technology when implementing them. By introducing these novelties, we can evidence that innovation is not always about technology, but about guiding positively the results of any of the processes influenced by innovative resources, being these new methods, techniques, resources, etc. This concept leads us back to the LS approach, which presents a novel alternative for incorporating innovation into conventional classes, even in the absence of technological resources, since LS "could be an innovative model of professional development that is effective in enhancing teachers' pedagogical content knowledge through peer collaboration"(Mon et al., 2016)

Based on the information above, this study was carried out with the aim of describing the perceptions of two teachers who participated in an LS workshop facilitated by the writers' research group. This was a four-week workshop in which the facilitators explored the basis of LS, its cycle and process, and how to apply it to real contexts by asking the participants to apply the approach in their classes. For this, attendants needed to plan, teach, and record a class, analyze it in small groups, and build on that collaboratively to highlight each other's practices and weak or strong points. The present paper will use the narrative inquiry methodology to explore the participants' insights about the workshop and the use of LS as an innovative tool for their teaching-learning processes. This approach allowed the researchers to explore the participants' points of view and experiences after the workshop, which were expressed in their own narratives with the objective of framing a better understanding of the inquired topic.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

How do Ecuadorian English teachers perceive the implementation of Lesson Study as a tool for fostering innovation, collaboration, and professional development in their teaching practices?

METHODOLOGY

The writers followed a qualitative methodology with a narrative inquiry approach. This approach blends the view of specific sets of people's experiences and how the author inquiries into these experiences by setting them in definite contexts and circumstances to reach an insightful interpretation of the data (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). According to Savin-Baden & Niekerk (2007), "when using narrative inquiry, it is important that the researcher is not only able to ask questions that elicit stories but also that she/he is able to position her/himself so that stories can be analyzed effectively." The utilization of narrative inquiry allowed for an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences and perspectives, providing a rich and nuanced understanding of the topic under investigation. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that narrative inquiry was chosen over other qualitative methods because it allows for a deep exploration of participants' personal experiences, beliefs, and reflections within their specific contexts. By delving into the narratives and personal accounts of the participants, this study aimed to construct a comprehensive and meaningful interpretation of the data.

To ensure an effective analysis of the narratives, it was essential for the researchers to not only ask questions that encouraged the participants to share their stories but also to position themselves appropriately to facilitate a thorough analysis. The researchers aimed to create a safe and supportive environment that encouraged participants to openly express their experiences, thoughts, and reflections. Considering the aforementioned method, this study was carried out with two volunteer English teachers who were aware of the use of LS as a potential tool for their practices. To select the suitable participants, we took into account the people who agreed to be contacted after the aforementioned LS workshop ended.

From the list of those volunteers, researchers contacted four female teachers from public schools who were actively participating during the training sessions and that showed themselves confident and interested in learning about LS. Finally, two of them accepted to be part of the study due to time and availability considerations. Both teachers have substantial experience in the field of English teaching, with over 10 years in Ecuador's school system. Their schools are situated in urban settings with limited access to resources for professional development. Despite these limitations, both teachers have previously participated in occasional workshops and training sessions but had minimal exposure to innovative, collaborative methodologies like LS. This background makes them ideal candidates for exploring how LS might be perceived and implemented within their professional settings.

DATA COLLECTION.

An in-depth interview was prepared for two English teachers who participated in a 4-week workshop in which they met the generalities of LS, practiced with their colleagues who were also attending the workshop, and were asked to transmit their knowledge to their co-workers. The participants, both female English teachers aged between 30 and 60, also had administrative responsibilities and were leaders of English groups within their

respective institutions. After the workshop, the two participants were asked to be involved in individual interview sessions to explore their insights and perceptions about the use of LS as an innovative resource. The subjects were provoked to tell their own stories and observations about their experiences derived from the workshop they attended, how they linked it to innovation, and how it affected their teaching-learning practices.

Participants were prompted to talk about their understandings related to the workshop and include any information they considered relevant to illustrate their insights about LS and how it is related to innovation. The interviewer met the participants and talked to them for around ten minutes to prepare them for the interview and explain the dynamics of it. Later, participants talked for 2 hours and 5 minutes and 3 hours and 15 minutes, correspondently, to express their thoughts and perceptions about the given issue. The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, and they were asked to use their mother tongue (Spanish) to allow them to express their ideas freely and with no restrictions.

Participants were required to talk first about their conception of innovation, their perception of it, and the usage of this concept in their classes, the relationship between LS and innovation, and real examples from their contexts. However, as the instrument used was an in-depth interview, participants added some important insights that provided a profound understanding of their perceptions. Researchers could tell when participants exhausted their answers because they started being repetitive and redundant; subsequently, the data collection ended. The obtained information was transcribed and coded using the MAXQDA software, chosen for its robustness in handling qualitative data and coding complex narrative structures. MAXQDA enables systematic coding and organization of themes, making it well-suited for narrative inquiry where the goal is to identify recurring themes and patterns across participants' stories. The choice of this software was based on its features that allow for deep analysis of narrative data, providing tools that support categorizing and linking ideas across multiple interviews. After the coding ended, only the relevant information for this study was translated into English to be included in the analysis that will be described in the following section.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The analysis of the data started with the transcription of the data and the selection of the codes based on the procedure proposed by (Lieblich et al., 1998) who believe the researcher can obtain data from the participants but then analyze the gathered information by separating only the relevant contributions and organizing the information to obtain different topics and categories. The aforementioned method is known as "content analysis", which is part of the narrative analysis that takes into account the content that is relevant to the research but not the form or the timeline of the told stories. (Lieblich et al., 1998)

The transcripts were read numerous times to identify stressed and repeated ideas expressed by the participant teachers to be assembled as codes. This coding was handled using the MAXQDA software by highlighting the relevant ideas that were found in the obtained testimonies. Once the codes were identified, they were separated from the original text using the content analysis method; subsequently, similar pieces of information were compared and evaluated. After the comparison, it was remarkable that both partakers experienced alike situations related to their participation and experiences.

Iterative reading and deep examination of the gathered data constituted the methodological approach to derive codes that started as Innovation Concepts, Perceptions of collaboration, LS and Innovation, Technology, etc. Subsequently, they were organized into wider themes for comprehensive discussion and analysis. This systematic analysis allowed

the researchers to assign relevant codes to the collected information which encapsulate the participants' perceptions: Innovation in education; Technology versus Innovation; and LS as an Innovative Tool. These codes facilitated a detailed exploration of diverse aspects regarding teachers' utilization of LS as a transformative instrument within their pedagogical practices. The aforementioned issues are presented in the following paragraphs.

INNOVATION IN EDUCATION.

It is important to mention that innovation in education is a relatively new concept due to the limited information and exposure that teachers have had to this topic. For instance, one of the institutions created to promote innovation and new ideas in Ecuadorian education is the Secretaría de Educación Superior, Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación (SENES-CYT), which was founded in 2007 as an attempt to bring the concept of innovation into the educational landscape (Balbachevsky, 2020). As Balbachevsky notes, the establishment of such institutions in Latin America is part of a larger effort to close the gap in awareness and implementation of educational innovation. Nevertheless, according to the participants in this study, innovation is not a concept they had previously analyzed deeply due to its relative novelty and limited dissemination in educational settings.

Supporting this idea, the background knowledge that teachers have about innovation tends to develop gradually through experience and exposure. For example, Participant A mentioned, "Back then, when we had some workshops about English, they helped us to grow, improve our teaching-learning process, and innovate, even when at that time we did not know the word innovate" (Participant A, personal communication, May 19th, 2023). This aligns with Hargreaves and O'Connor's (2018) perspective that teachers often engage in innovative practices informally through collaborative learning experiences, even if they don't initially identify these practices as "innovation." As they explore solutions and improve their teaching incrementally, their understanding of innovation grows organically.

Participant B added to this understanding by describing innovation as "being a nitpicker, to take a look at places nobody wants to look at because you know there is something extra to do to look for a solution to a problem" (Participant B, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023). This perception resonates with the findings of Freeman et al. (2017), who emphasize that innovation in education often requires a mindset shift toward active problem-solving and a willingness to seek novel approaches. In this sense, both participants highlight a foundational concept of innovation as not solely about new technologies or methods but as a proactive approach to improve educational practices through curiosity and collaboration.

With this in mind, we found different conceptions after we explored deeply into their knowledge, and some of the concepts that they were able to build during the interview related to how they conceive innovation based on their own experiences were the following ones:

"To innovate is not to discover something new, but to add something new to what you already have (…) it is to be willing to change and improve." (Participant A, personal communication, May 19th, 2023).

"Something is innovative because it goes against what everybody does everywhere. It is to break the mold. To be different." (Participant A, personal communication, May 19th).

After analyzing these concepts, we can say that teachers explored basic notions of innovation. which "consists of the generation of a new idea and its implementation into a new product, process or service" (Kogabayev & Maziliauskas, 2017), or it is seen as "an outcome of a process, rest on two defining characteristics, a degree of newness of a change

and a degree of usefulness or success in the application of something new" (Granstrand & Holgersson, 2020), which is not far from some of the ideas that participants expressed themselves. Based on this, we can conclude that they have an upright idea of what innovation is because of their personal reflection.

TECHNOLOGY VERSUS INNOVATION.

In addition to what teachers expressed about innovation, the participants also shared noteworthy insights on the role of technology in creating an innovative environment in their classrooms. Some authors, such as Findikoglu & Ilhan (2016) suggest that the integration of technology can enhance educational practices, particularly when it aligns with curriculum goals and improves instructional quality. They argue that technology, when used meaningfully, can indeed drive innovation in education. However, this perspective also acknowledges that technology alone does not constitute innovation; rather, it is the pedagogical impact of its use that matters. This aligns with the participants' reflections on how technology, while potentially valuable, is not essential for fostering innovation in their classrooms.

As Participant B observed:

"Technology, platforms, and computers can be tools, but not the only thing. We need to look forward. Some people can turn the use of technology into something shallow and say 'Yes, I use the lab' but for what? Sometimes just as the make-up of something that is not meaningful. We need to make something meaningful to innovate" (Participant B, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023).

This sentiment resonates with Selwyn's (2021) critique, which highlights that the implementation of technology in education is often superficial, lacking a genuine focus on enhancing learning experiences. Selwyn argues that technology should be thoughtfully integrated to add pedagogical value, rather than merely serving as an aesthetic addition.

Similarly, Participant A shared:

"It is not necessary for me to use technology to improve my teaching practices: I can come up with a new way to teach my students and make them conscious that learning is easy, then I am innovating. By adding something new to my classes, I am innovating. I have a coworker who is really good with technology because he is an engineer. You can see he uses technology, but his classes are very linear" (Participant A, personal communication, May 19th, 2023).

This perspective aligns with the work of Rajiani & Ismail (2019), who emphasize that non-technological forms of innovation—such as management and pedagogical adjustments—are also critical in education. Their study points out that meaningful innovation often involves restructuring teaching practices and fostering dynamic learning environments, which can be achieved even without technological tools.

In summary, while the participants acknowledge the potential benefits of technology in education, they also emphasize that innovation is not solely dependent on technological tools. Their perspectives align with research that highlights the importance of meaningful integration and thoughtful pedagogical strategies as essential components of innovation. This understanding suggests that teachers are aware of both the advantages and limitations of technology in education and recognize that innovation can be equally effective through non-technological means. This has prompted them to adopt a broader perspective on innovation, leveraging the advantageous factor of interviewing educators who hold positions of influence within their respective institutions. This advantage allowed for an exploration of their perceptions regarding the application of innovation, not only within

their own classrooms but also throughout the entire institution, including the potential for implementing learner-centered strategies within their specific contexts.

LS AS AN INNOVATIVE TOOL.

We already defined LS and highlighted its collaborative nature. Therefore, this section will explore the participants' perceptions of the usage of this potentially innovative tool in their institutions. We will start with Participant A, who stated the following:

> "LS is presented as a tool, as a project for teachers to innovate, improve, and develop themselves in order to reach students more effectively. Of course, LS is part of innovation, and that is what we have learned now. We learned that because LS taught us to cooperate, but why? Not just for ourselves but to improve and make changes so that students can also see a light at the end of the tunnel, saying, 'Finally, the classes are different." (Participant A, personal communication, May 19th, 2023).

This aligns with the findings of Ronda & Danipog (2022) who conceptualize LS as an encounter at the boundaries of research and practice, examining teacher-academic collaboration for its potential to shape teacher research identity. Their study reports that teachers engaged in LS were able to present their work at conferences, indicating a significant development in their professional practice.

Similarly, Participant B emphasized that LS promotes shared responsibility and teamwork, stating that "responsibility is shared... it becomes a team effort." This perspective is supported by Chenault (2017), who discusses how LS fosters a collaborative pedagogy in higher education, encouraging faculty to work together, share expertise, and collectively improve instructional practices. Furthermore, Participant B noted that LS creates "a kind of culture that is no longer punitive but collaborative." This observation resonates with the study by Ronda and Danipog (2022), which found that LS facilitates problematizing instruction based on evidence from practice, using research-informed frameworks, and sharing lesson studies, all of which contribute to a supportive and collaborative teaching environment. These studies corroborate the participants' views, demonstrating that LS serves as a powerful tool for fostering innovation, shared responsibility, and a collaborative culture among educators.

Additionally, the revealed vision of LS that the participants have reiterates that this methodology can be used as a tool for innovation in the educational field. This non-technological type of innovation reveals a new path to introduce novelty into teaching-learning practices in Ecuadorian contexts. Moreover, collaboration plays a crucial role in this process. In fact, some authors claim that "to foster innovation, the public sector is required to create and implement a strong innovative culture, develop collaboration with other institutions and sustain adequate resources in promoting innovativeness" (Ab Rahman et al., 2018).

The previous appreciation brings us to another crucial advantage LS possesses, which is collaborative and cooperative work. LS promotes shared responsibility, teamwork, and a culture of cooperation. Hence, this emphasis on collaboration not only enhances the effectiveness of the methodology but also nurtures a sense of collective growth and development among educators. In that light, participants have their opinions on how collaboration can make this tool a valuable addition to their team:

> "Yes, I feel that it is more feasible, more real, and more collaborative. It's no longer just me coming and judging you. Now we sit down, talk, plan, identify problems, and seek solutions. We review, provide feedback, and discuss what went well and what didn't. It's a constant cycle of feedback and improvement." (Participant B, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023).

Participant A, on her side, explained it with an example of how collaboration helped her and her colleagues to start learning from each other:

> "I invited a teacher to my class to observe and I told him 'Come to my class and judge me. Judge me all you want, whether I'm doing well or poorly. If I'm doing poorly, it's better that you judge me. Your judgment won't affect me anymore or any less. Come to my classroom and see what I do, see for yourself.' I understand, I'm telling you, the day he entered my class, he was amazed." (Participant A, personal communication, May 19th, 2023).

The previously stated ideas support the claim that any "teacher must be a person who has a collaborative spirit, who can share their knowledge, who can unlearn to learn again, and who can work as a team with teachers and administrators to transfer this knowledge to their students"(Ramírez-Montoya et al., 2021)critical thinking, and problem-solving in educational environments linked to real-world scenarios. Therefore, teachers have been challenged to develop new methods and resources to integrate into their planning in order to help students develop these desirable and necessary skills; hence, the question: What are the characteristics of a teacher to consider within the framework of Education 4.0? This study was conducted in a higher education institution in Ecuador, with the aim to identify the teaching profile required in new undergraduate programs within the framework of Education 4.0 in order to contribute to decision-making about teacher recruitment, professional training and evaluation, human talent management, and institutional policies interested in connecting competencies with the needs of society. Descriptive and exploratory approaches, where we applied quantitative and qualitative instruments (surveys. LS serves as a powerful tool for fostering these qualities in teachers. Through LS, educators engage in collaborative planning, problem-solving, and continuous feedback, creating a culture of shared learning and improvement. By actively participating in LS, teachers become examples that students aspire to, embodying the values of collaboration, open-mindedness, and lifelong learning.

Nonetheless, it is also worth mentioning the possible obstacles regarding LS. When talking about potential setbacks, many factors have been mentioned by other authors because they represent a palpable reality in our country. For instance, Alvarez & Guevara (2021) stated that "EFL teachers may still have negative perspectives towards these new materials because of time constraints, lack of training, uneven activities among language skills and learner strategies, lack of destination culture and contextualized activities."

Linked to this, the participating subjects also have uncertainties because collaboration is not one of the strengths in Ecuadorian educational contexts. In fact, there are some authors who recognize that collaborating is not a problem that was originated individually but collectively, making it part of a culture. Thus, they suggest that "it only requires a drastic change in the mentality of the oligarchies and of the faculty and will involve a breaking down of the walls that separate academics, schools and colleges within the institutions" (Feyen et al., 2016). Hence, it is no surprise that the participants in this study mention collaboration as a potential threat at the time of applying LS. To illustrate this, participant A talks about the potential disadvantages of using LS in her context:

> "The way that person will perceive it (collaboration) is crucial because when you engage in group planning, they might expect their ideas to be accepted. If you present an idea and they don't agree with what you're thinking, you may think, "Why should I do this if I believe that this other approach is better? Perhaps, this is the potentially negative aspect of collaboration" (Participant A, personal communication, May 19th, 2023).

Furthermore, the concern of the participants about the potential problems of collaboration also includes the willingness to be part of the project because of the time it would take to apply the whole process of working together. Participant B, in that regard, states that,

"LS implies a lengthy process that can take a month, two months, or even the entire year, requiring consistent collaboration with my partner. My partner needs me, as I mentioned at the beginning, right? The question is, are people always available and willing to engage? Or is it more like the less they bother me, the better? Just let me have my free hours and that's it. Therefore, the fact that we now have to sit down, talk, plan, and take some of my free hours to do this becomes part of the problem." (Participant B, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023).

Based on that, we can imply that one of the challenges teachers can face during the implementation of this innovative tool is the lack of interest in collaborating or the little time that people may have to sit down and reflect together about their practices. However, the participants that were interviewed showed a vast interest in applying the whole process in their institutions since they consider that would be a step to introduce innovation into their educational contexts and even proposed the researchers apply the tool in their group of teachers:

"LS is something that I would like to do in the long term, and I was mentioning that I would like to see if there is an opportunity to demonstrate this to the authorities and create a kind of pilot program. Yes, let's start with my area. Let's begin with one trimester since they don't want to commit to the entire year. We can start in the first trimester, identify the problems that we already know exist, and try to improve upon them" (Participant B, personal communication, May 23rd, 2023).

"Since I am in the mindset of change, improvement, and being judged, I believe that it won't affect me negatively at all. In fact, it will help me improve and become more creative. Maybe in my class, in my subject, or in the topic I am teaching, I can search for better strategies or techniques to enhance the learning experience. Why not? There's nothing to lose in trying to improve" (Participant A, personal communication, May 19th, 2023).

In conclusion, this study sheds light on Ecuadorian teachers' perspectives regarding Lesson Study (LS) as a tool for innovation and professional growth. Participant A viewed LS as a means to innovate and enhance instructional practices, aligning with recent studies that highlight LS's role in fostering reflective and evidence-based improvements in teaching (Vermunt et al., 2019). Participant B emphasized LS's collaborative benefits, including shared responsibility and problem-solving, which are also supported by recent literature that underscores the capacity of LS to build a cooperative culture among educators (Cajkler et al., 2013). Together, the participants recognized LS as a valuable approach to introduce meaningful innovation and improve the learning experience for students through collaboration and mutual support.

Teachers identified challenges in implementing Lesson Study (LS), notably time constraints and the need for a collaborative mindset within Ecuadorian education. These concerns align with findings from recent studies. For instance, Takahashi & McDougal, (2016) however, is a challenge, since they require significant changes in how mathematics is taught. Lesson study (jugyou kenkyuu highlight that time constraints and the necessity for a collaborative culture are significant barriers to LS implementation. Similarly, (Dudley et al., 2019) emphasize that institutional support and dedicated time are crucial for successful LS adoption. In contexts like Ecuador, where collaborative practices in education are still developing, fostering a collective mindset and providing sufficient time and institutional support are essential for LS to succeed.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis and discussion provide valuable insights into Ecuadorian English teachers' perceptions of Lesson Study (LS) as a tool for fostering innovation, collaboration, and professional development. Although innovation in education is a relatively new concept for the

participants, they exhibited a growing understanding of it, recognizing that innovation involves introducing new elements to traditional methods and remaining open to change. They realized that while technology can enhance innovation, it is not essential; instead, purposeful and meaningful approaches in teaching can drive impactful changes in the classroom. This finding reflects the participants' emphasis on the need for teaching methods that actively engage students and enhance learning, aligning directly with the study's research question on how LS supports innovative and collaborative practices in the Ecuadorian educational context.

Regarding LS specifically, participants perceived it as a valuable, collaborative approach that fosters professional growth, enhances teaching practices, and improves classroom experiences. They highlighted LS as a means to shift institutional culture from punitive to supportive by encouraging problem-solving and continuous improvement. Despite recognizing challenges—particularly in terms of time constraints and the need for commitment from colleagues—the participants expressed a strong interest in implementing LS within their institutions and were even willing to advocate for it as a pilot program. Their enthusiasm underscores the potential LS has for cultivating a collaborative and supportive culture within Ecuadorian schools, paving the way for sustainable educational innovation.

This study contributes to existing literature by expanding our understanding of LS as an innovative tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly in Ecuador, where collaboration and innovation are emerging practices. The findings suggest that LS not only offers a practical framework for professional development but also promotes shared responsibility and collaboration, essential for meaningful educational reform. By linking LS with innovation in a non-technological sense, this study underscores that innovation in EFL can stem from methodological approaches, not just technological advancements, thus enriching the global dialogue on how LS can drive change in diverse educational settings. Overall, this study indicates that LS holds significant promise for advancing innovation and enhancing both teaching and learning in Ecuadorian schools, providing a foundation for future research and practice in similar contexts.

LIMITATIONS

Despite the valuable insights gained from the analysis and discussion of the results, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The study was conducted with of only two participant teachers. While their perspectives and experiences provide valuable insights, it is crucial to recognize that the findings may not be representative of all teachers in Ecuador or other educational contexts. Furthermore, the analysis and interpretation of the data in this study were subjective processes. The researchers' personal biases and perspectives may have influenced the coding and categorization of the data, potentially leading to a subjective interpretation of the participants' response. Efforts were made to mitigate bias through multiple readings and discussions among the research team, but it is essential to acknowledge that subjectivity may still exist to some extent. Finally, the data collected in this study relied on self-reported accounts from the participant teachers. Researchers strained to ensure confidentiality and encourage open and honest responses, self-reporting introduces the possibility of response bias and inaccuracies. Participants may have unintentionally omitted or misrepresented information, leading to potential limitations in the accuracy and completeness of the data.

FURTHER WORK

Future studies could investigate the long-term effects of LS on teacher practice and student learning outcomes. By conducting longitudinal research, researchers can track the sustained impact of LS on teachers' instructional practices and student achievement over an extended period of time. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits and limitations of LS as a long-term professional development strategy.

This article was written as part of the project called *Creación de espacios de cooperación docente entre los profesores de inglés a través de la estrategia de Lesson Study: un estudio de investigación acción exploratoria*, which was funded by the National University of Education, located in Azogues, Ecuador.

CONTRIBUCIONES DE LOS AUTORES

Sofía Marcela Egüez Carrión: Investigación, redacción, edición, revisión, creación de instrumentos de recolección de datos, recolección de datos cualitativos, reunión con participantes, análisis de datos, transcripción de entrevistas

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REVISTA KRONOS

Factors that affect the learning of English as a foreign language in Superior Basic Education

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ABSTRACT In recent years, English has increased its influence in most of the world because it provides great opportunities to improve the quality of life of people who practice it. The teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is of significant importance within the basic education curriculum in Ecuador. However, the learning of this foreign language is a difficult task for teachers and students. Therefore, the objective of this research is to identify the factors that affect the learning of English as a Foreign Language in Superior Basic Education. This research had a mixed approach (quantitative and qualitative). The techniques for data collection were a survey directed to 50 students of Superior Basic Education and an interview directed to 2 teachers and 3 parents, who belong to two public educational institutions located in the city of Portoviejo, Manabí, Ecuador. The main results showed that most students perceived dissatisfaction with learning English. It also gave evidence on how the linguistic, social, economic, cultural, and emotional factors, lack of resources, and teacher training affect the learning of English as a foreign language in students of Superior Basic Education. Therefore, all the education stakeholders must collaborate to find solutions to mitigate the affections.

KEYWORDS Factors affecting learning, EFL, Superior Basic Education, Ecuador, Portoviejo, foreign language acquisition.

Factores que inciden en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera en la Educación Básica Superior

RESUMEN En los últimos años, el inglés ha incrementado su influencia en gran parte del mundo debido a que brinda grandes oportunidades para mejorar la calidad de vida de las personas que lo practican. La enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) tiene una importancia significativa dentro del currículo de educación básica en Ecuador. Sin embargo, el aprendizaje de esta lengua extranjera es una tarea difícil para docentes y estudiantes. Por lo tanto, el objetivo de esta investigación es identificar los factores que inciden en el aprendizaje del inglés como Lengua Extranjera en la Educación Básica Superior. Esta investigación tuvo un enfoque mixto (cuantitativo y cualitativo). Las técnicas de recolección de datos fueron una encuesta dirigida a 50 estudiantes de Educación Básica Superior y una entrevista dirigida a 2 docentes y 3 padres de familia, pertenecientes a dos instituciones educativas públicas ubicadas en la ciudad de Portoviejo, Manabí, Ecuador. Los principales resultados mostraron que la mayoría de los estudiantes percibían insatisfacción con el aprendizaje del inglés. También se evidenció cómo los factores lingüísticos, sociales, económicos, culturales y emocionales, la falta de recursos y la formación del profesorado afectan al aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en estudiantes de Educación Básica Superior. Por lo tanto, todos los agentes educativos deben colaborar para encontrar soluciones que mitiguen las afecciones.

PALABRAS CLAVE Factores que afectan el aprendizaje, EFL, Educación Básica Superior, Ecuador, Portoviejo, adquisición del lenguaje extranjero.

INTRODUCTION

The whole world has become accessible and familiar to all countries around the world, as English is used as a common language. Even though there are some variations in habits, cultures, and traditions, English has served as the global language for several decades (Mahu, 2012). In the contemporary era of globalization, acquiring proficiency in English holds significant relevance. The fundamental literature across various academic disciplines is predominantly in English, and essential information on the Internet is also presented in the English language (Chávez, Saltos & Saltos, 2017). Tram (2020) states that English is recognized as a global language and finds extensive application in various domains, including business, science, politics, and media worldwide. Nowadays, the integration of English as a foreign language (EFL) is a way to understand the diversity of cultures, to know in-depth important details of each one of them, and to have access to international work topics (Bobykina, 2015).

According to Moeller (2015) EFL is the acquisition of a foreign language mostly within a classroom and not practiced or applied in real life. The teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) holds significant importance within the curriculum of elementary education in Ecuador. Decharotchanawirun (2015) mentions that English has emerged as a pivotal element in the realm of business and the global workplace. The increasing **need** for international collaboration has led to English becoming the most commonly utilized language. In the constantly evolving contemporary landscape, the English language has gained significance as a crucial means of communication and stands as the primary instructional language in education. Qi (2016) states that English became a mandatory subject in China, starting from the third year of primary education in 2003; it is progressively being incorporated into the curriculum at even earlier stages in numerous schools. Before 1912, the teaching of the English language in Ecuador's secondary schools was completely foreign. It was after that year that this language began to be taught in many schools in this country. It became mandatory throughout Ecuador in 1950, under the government of Galo Plaza Lasso (Cifuentes et al., 2019). Among the **problems**, Ubaydullayeva (2022) mentions that teaching the English language to non-English speakers is a difficult and tedious task for teachers. Riadil (2020) states that in real life, learning English is a challenge for Indonesian students even after ten years of learning English and the reason is that their first language is the local language and their second language is Bahasa Indonesia. Thai people cannot understand the message of a long and complex conversation as they can only understand simple phrases and common expressions, but often cannot communicate fluently and adequately in writing and speaking (Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwat, 2021).

Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope's (1986) research on foreign language classroom anxiety highlights the significant role of self-efficacy beliefs in EFL learning contexts. Swan & Smith (2001) analyze various linguistic backgrounds and highlight the interference patterns, structural differences, and other challenges that contribute to errors in learners' English production. Van (2008) states that Vietnamese students who embark on English language studies often encounter challenges when it comes to grasping English grammar, specifically in handling English aspect. This difficulty may arise due to the absence of tense and aspect markers on verbs in the Vietnamese language. Johari & Jamil (2014) mention that the relationship between personal problems and English teaching practice is not educating the current generation well.

In Ecuador, some factors that affect the learning of EFL include the lack of preparation of teachers, and the continuity and lack of dynamism required to master a new language (Merino et al., 2019). The age at which children begin learning another language is not early. Factors like birth order, gender, personality, aptitude, and preferred learning methods influence how children acquire languages (Cabrera et al., 2019). According to

Sevy et al., (2020), other factors are; inadequately trained teachers with limited English proficiency, unmotivated students, overcrowded classrooms, excessive teaching loads, insufficient hours allocated to EFL classes, and inadequate infrastructure collectively contribute to the demotivation of students, hindering their progress and learning in EFL.

Even though there is research about the learning of EFL, more investigation is needed on the factors that affect EFL learning in younger generations. Specifically, in Basic Education, at Portoviejo city, Manabi Province, Ecuador country. Therefore, the **objective** of this research was to identify the factors that affect the learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) in students of Superior Basic Education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL)

Learning English as a foreign language is a common practice worldwide. In many countries, English is not the primary language of communication but is instead taught in schools as part of the curriculum. While it may be widely taught, it typically does not hold the same level of importance in national or social contexts as it does in English-speaking countries. As a global language, English instruction is just one component of foreign language education. Consequently, the majority of English learners outside of English-speaking regions often have instrumental motivations for acquiring the language. These motivations typically revolve around practical purposes such as travel, intercultural communication, or gaining a deeper understanding of the language itself. The teaching of English and other modern languages in schools serves an educational purpose, catering to learners who consciously choose to pursue language acquisition with specific objectives in mind, whether it be exploring other countries, interacting with foreign individuals, or expanding their linguistic proficiency (Rustamov, 2022). Cronquist & Fiszbein (2017) mentioned that proficiency in English is becoming more and more essential for business and global interaction, closely tied to opportunities for economic competitiveness and expansion in the worldwide market. Across **Latin America**, interest in acquiring English skills is on the rise leading to increased accessibility to English learning opportunities for its residents. Muñoz et al., (2018) argued that in contemporary Latin American societies, mastering English has evolved into a necessity for various aspects of daily life, particularly for those aiming to enhance their career prospects and personal growth. Consequently, the **Ecuadorian** government has adopted policies and regulations to enhance the quality of English language instruction. Moreover, significant investments have been made in resources, teacher training, and educational initiatives, alongside providing scholarships for students, to further support English language learning endeavors.

BASIC EDUCATION

According to Adepoju (2007), Basic Education has the following objectives. Developing a conscientiousness for education for education involves cultivating a strong sense of responsibility, diligence, and attentiveness toward learning and academic pursuits. Reducing drastically the incidence of dropping out of the school system. Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of English in Basic Education. Lauwerier & Akkari (2015) mention that in

sub-Saharan Africa the low level of teacher training hinders any improvement in the quality of basic education improvement in the quality of basic education. In another way, Ninlawan (2015) defines teachers as important people in student´s life but they have to improve periodically to teach with better visions. Mąkosa (2013) mentions that without the existence of digitized media, education could not have advanced as far as it has. The use of technologies does not always bring benefits as untrained teachers often use them without knowing the risk they could have to the learning of students and themselves (Negoescu & Boştină, 2016).

FACTORS AFFECTING EFL LEARNING

From cultural and socio-economic contexts to individual learner characteristics and instructional methods, numerous elements play pivotal roles in shaping the process of English language acquisition. Examining these factors provides insight into the challenge's students face, the diversity of approaches required to meet different needs, and the dynamic interplay between language, social, and cognitive processes. Immersing oneself in this diverse context provides a comprehensive framework for optimizing English language teaching and language skills development in a variety of global contexts. Several factors may influence the acquisition of EFL such as: linguistic, social, economic, cultural, emotional, resources, and teacher training.

LINGUISTIC FACTORS

Underhill (2005) said that English phonetics and pronunciation can be challenging due to differences in sounds and intonation. Speaking proficiency is often considered one of the most challenging facets of language acquisition, posing obstacles for many learners who struggle to articulate their thoughts fluently in a foreign language (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) mention that although EFL learners are proficient in their language, they usually have a lot of problems with reading skills.

SOCIAL FACTORS

Gholami et al., (2012) argued that language acquisition often occurs through active engagement in social interactions with native speakers. Beyond being merely a place for intellectual pursuits, students perceive the classroom as a multifaceted environment encompassing social, emotional, and physical dimensions. In an educational setting, disruptive behavior by students can significantly impact the atmosphere and emotional well-being of both teachers and their peers, impeding progress toward educational objectives and reducing the overall effectiveness of learning for everyone involved in the classroom (Lugrin et al., 2016).

ECONOMIC FACTORS

Students from economically disadvantaged families tend to exhibit lower intellectual abilities, with a slower pace of work and lower levels of concentration when completing tasks. The lifestyle, values, attitudes, and standard of living of families can be defined or delimited

by studying the economic characteristics of the environment surrounding them leading to a decrease in academic performance (Serrano, 2013). Cummins (2000) dictates that the socioeconomic environment can act as a facilitator or barrier to language learning, affecting educational opportunities and access to resources. Individuals with lower incomes often find contentment with the educational opportunities provided by low-quality private or public schools, primarily due to financial constraints that prevent them from accessing higher-quality educational options or providing private English tutoring for their children (Salameh, 2012).

CULTURAL FACTORS

According to Wang (1993), it is essential to uphold the strong connection between culture and language to ensure students attain a comprehensive understanding of language meaning. She asserts that discrepancies in values and attitudes pose primary challenges in foreign language acquisition. Byram (1997) points out that cultural differences between students and the target culture of English can influence attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors related to language learning. Pedagogical practices should consider linguistic and cultural barriers to facilitate effective learning, promoting the integration of cultural and contextual elements in the teaching process (Canagarajah, 2006). In Saudi Arabia, obstacles to English learning arise from both domestic and educational environments. Only a small number of parents oversee their children's homework, leading to minimal review of classroom material by the students themselves (Ahmad, 2015). Al (2008) mentions that in this context, cultural obstacles impact the learning environment and the overall dynamics of the classroom.

EMOTIONAL FACTORS

Feelings hold significant sway over individuals, impacting their choices regarding the pursuit of learning a new language and their perseverance in language classroom activities (Méndez Lopez & Pea Aguilar, 2013). Ismail (2015) suggests that to cultivate a harmonious classroom environment and diminish negative emotions, English educators must acknowledge and address the academic emotions of their students as integral to the educational process. Generally, negative emotions impact students' motivation, attention, and utilization of learning strategies (Zeidner, 1998). Similarly, Goleman (1995) argued that students who are anxious, angry, or depressed do not learn; people who are caught in these states do not take in information efficiently or deal with it well. For instance, anxiety is the most extensively researched emotion in academic contexts (Pekrun et al., 2002). Motivation is a driving force that directs and sustains behavior toward the achievement of specific goals, such as learning a foreign language (Gardner, 1985). Self-efficacy refers to individual beliefs in the ability to organize and execute the actions necessary to achieve specific goals, such as learning a foreign language. Learning styles influence how individuals perceive, process, and respond to information, which can affect their ability to learn a foreign language effectively (Kolb, 1984). Emotions are integral to the learning process overall, and this holds especially true for foreign language acquisition. Despite the increased focus on the affective domain in language learning due to humanistic approaches, the emotional experiences of EFL learners regarding listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills have not received sufficient attention (Pishghadam et al., 2016).

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

Tomlinson (2003) defines that the availability and adequacy of teaching resources, such as textbooks, technology, and audiovisual materials, can affect the quality and effectiveness of teaching EFL. Instructional resources play an important role in language teaching and learning, facilitating access to meaningful content, practices, and experiences for learners (Tomlinson, 2012).

TEACHER TRAINING

Freeman (2002) argues that continuous and reflective teacher training is essential to develop pedagogical, methodological, and didactic competencies in language teaching. Ricento (2006) argues that education policy can significantly influence language teaching and learning by establishing standards, curricula and resources for EFL program.

METHODOLOGY

This research had a mixed method approach because quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were applied in a descriptive and exploratory way. This approach allowed for the identification and analysis of specific factors that hinder the learning of EFL within the context of basic education. A qualitative approach to research delved into phenomena through subjective understandings, emphasizing rich, non-numerical data to gain a profound understanding of participants' experiences (Vaca-Cárdenas et al., 2017). Quantitative research involves collecting and analyzing numerical data to identify patterns, make predictions, test causal relationships, and generalize results to a larger population. It differs from qualitative research, which focuses on non-numerical data such as text, video, or audio.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The methods used in this study are interviews and surveys, the interview tool is a questionnaire that is recorded and transcribed. The interview questions were focused on the factors that teachers think hinder the learning process (Fontana & Frey, 2005) said that the utilization of interviews for gathering information in qualitative research has brought about an awareness that interviews are not neutral instruments for data collection. The survey's instrument was a questionnaire, which was answered manually. Data collection in this research was a structured questionnaire which the participants were had.

PARTICIPANTS

This research was conducted in two public schools in Portoviejo City, located in Manabí province. The survey was conducted on thirty students in the 8th, 9th, and 10th years of superior basic education. The interview was conducted with two English teachers of Superior Basic Education, and four parents of this level. The participants volunteered to take part in this study to share their opinions and perspectives about the topic.

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Students' Survey	Be students of 8th, 9th, and 10th year of basic education	Students from other levels different from the 8th, 9th, and 10th years of basic education
Parents' Interview	Parents of 2 students of 8th, 9th, and 10th year of basic education with high performance Parents of 2 students of 8th, 9th, and 10th year of basic education with low performance Parents who wish to collaborate voluntarily	Parents of students on other levels Parents who do not wish to collaborate voluntarily
Teachers' Interview	Teachers of students 0f 8th, 9th, and 10th year of basic education. Teachers who wish to collaborate voluntarily	Teachers of students on other levels. Teachers who do not wish to collaborate voluntarily

RESULTS

STUDENTS' SURVEY

SATISFACTION ABOUT THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS OF EFL

60% of Superior Basic Education students expressed dissatisfaction with the learning English process. On the other hand, 36% of students like it very much, followed by 4% who like it little. These results suggested that six out of ten students of Superior Basic Education do not like to learn English, while only four out of ten students like it; suggesting that most students do not like to learn English.

ACTIVITIES FOR LEARNING ENGLISH

52% of students stated that their favorite activities for learning English were songs, followed by 38% who said games. Two percent of students expressed that their favorite activities were speeches, followed by 2% who liked roleplays, and finally 6% of students mentioned other activities such as (Crosswords, Letters soup, Movies, and Series). These results suggested that six out of ten students claimed that playing games was the best

activity for learning English. Three out of ten students mentioned songs; this is because through games they can express their abilities while they enjoy the environment.

IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH

40% of students mentioned that English is important because it provides better opportunities for jobs, followed by 20% who stated that English is important for communicating with foreign people. Eighteen percent expressed that English is important for studying in foreign countries. Likewise, 18% of them said that English is important for traveling to foreign countries. Finally, 4% of students mentioned that English is not important to them. It can be interpreted that four out of ten students showed that English is important because through it they can obtain better job opportunities.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

44% of students indicated that linguistic factors affect their English language learning. On the other hand, 30% of students stated that the factors that affect their English language learning were emotional factors, followed by 8% who said social factors. Also, 6% of them expressed that lack of resources was the factor that affected their English language learning, likewise, 6% of students mentioned teacher training. In addition, 4% of students said that cultural factors affect their English language learning and finally, 2% of students stated the economic factors. It can be interpreted that four out of ten students considered that emotional factors such as motivation affect their English language learning (See Figure 4).

Table 2. Teachers' Interview key points

	QUESTION	TEACHER 1	TEACHER 2
1.	In your opinion, do your students like to learn English? Why?	"I comment that yes, there is a high group of students who are interested and find it attractive to hear a new language"	"I think that most of them like to learn English, with certain exceptions, I think they like it because they like to resolve the exercises and activities that I gave them"
2.	What activities do your students like to do to learn English?	"They like many activities where they develop the exercise. For example, they like songs very much, they like to work on worksheets, they like that very much"	"The students like drawing activities or joining lines, also when there are songs with a lot of rhythms where they can move a lot, they like to do that a lot"
3.	How do linguistic factors (speaking, reading, listening, writing, pronunciation, phonics, vocabulary) affect your students' English language learning?	"It affects them a lot especially because of the fear they feel when developing these skills, especially the acquisition of materials"	"That is the main problem we have since in most of the courses we find students with SEN, mainly when they do not know how to read or write it is very difficult to carry out a class with them even though they have a didactic material such as a book"

4.	How do social factors (classroom environment, peer behavior) affect your students' English language learning?	"Yes, it affects their development because they feel too shy to develop with the rest of their classmates because there is always someone who wants to interfere in the class"	"It affects a lot because there are always two, three or even more in the classroom who are quite undisciplined, who talk, yell, and get up, so this often makes you lose the thread of class and get unfocused, you have to be calling attention to be able to resume the class and regain order in the classroom"
5.	How do economic factors (lack of family financial resources for educational expenses) affect your students' English language learning?	"It affects a lot since you know that the ministry does not provide all the instruments, resources, and didactic materials and it is up to us to work on that, even so, the students are never denied a material and yes, it affects a lot, especially in the acquisition of materials"	"Yes, because there is a lack of support from parents because they cannot only hire private courses but there are many digital tools, there are worksheets, there are online courses that are free where children can listen"
6.	How do cultural factors (cultural barriers, cultural differences such as language, traditions, customs) affect your students' English language learning?	"I commented that we don't have many foreign students now, but when it was our turn it was quite hard for them mostly because it was not common for them to receive the subject, but the kids here have been receiving the language for the last few years, so they are already familiar with it"	"I have only been teaching for a few years and in the previous years I have not encountered foreign students, so far, I have not had any problems in this area but I think it could be a problem because of the jargon used in each city or country but one always tries to understand the meaning of a phrase or word through an image or a narration"
7.	How do emotional factors (lack of motivation, anxiety, embarrassment or insecurity) affect your students' English language learning?	"It does affect them a lot because the students feel self-conscious on many occasions"	"It affects a lot, since there is a lack of motivation on the part of the students and parents because they consider that English is not an important subject and therefore do not give it due attention. Regarding embarrassment, or insecurity, every time the school year begins"
8.	How do lack of resources or materials (inadequate classrooms, lack of books, computers or notebooks, lack of internet or libraries) affect your students' English language learning?	"It affects a lot because we have to work with what we have and sometimes the lack of resources and materials limits us"	"The ideal would be for each institution to have an English lab where there could be a computer for each student or headphones so that they can perform other types of practices that cannot be done in a normal classroom"
9.	How do teacher training factors (subject-related degrees, training) affect your students' English language learning?	"We usually train intending to obtain meaningful learning and lately the ministry has not focused on the area, only two years ago it sent a program that did not meet the expectations of the English teachers"	"If it affects something, it is very important to know to be able to transmit it to the students, to have the necessary training more than anything in the pedagogical area to be able to know what to give to the students and if you do not have the degrees you can manage with self-training to improve the quality of the classes and how you reach the students"

10. Why is it important to learn English?	"It is important because we must remember that most of the information in the world is written in English, so in all fields, in all instructions, in all areas of development we usually communicate in English, it is also very important that the children have to understand, they understand that if they have a video game or a new device, everything comes in English, so it is very important"	"English opened the doors to other opportunities and sources of work that with my profession it has been complicated for me to get a job in that area"	

PARENTS' INTERVIEW

	QUESTION	PARENT 1	PARENT 2	PARENT 3
1.	In your opinion, does your son/daughter like to learn English? Why?	"Yes, he likes it because it is a language that is not ours and it is always good for children to learn something more than what they already know"	"No, because I see that he does it out of obligation and as one more task of the subject"	"Yes, he likes to learn because he thinks English is very important in his academic development in school, then he likes to learn English"
2.	What activities does your son/daughter like to do to learn English?	"Watching videos to know how to pronounce unfamiliar words"	"None other than what the teacher tells her to do and do the homework"	"Watching educational videos about English, to learn the words that are most likely to be used"
3.	How do linguistic factors (speaking, reading, listening, writing, pronunciation, phonics, vocabulary) affect your child's English language learning?	"Yes, it affects because English is a complicated language because Spanish as it is written is read and English is not, so that affects"	"It doesn't affect her at all because she has a good voice and I don't see her having any problems with pronunciation"	"I think that it can affect him in the sense that sometimes there are words that sound the same when they are mentioned in English, so it would affect his learning in that area"
4.	How do social factors (classroom environment, peer behavior) affect your child's English language learning?	"If it affects because even though there are kids who have the intention to learn and there are classmates who are bothering them, it makes it difficult for them to learn"	"Both affect her because currently the classrooms are not suitable for studying and the noise from classmates also affects her"	"It affects in the sense that when the other classmates do not pay attention to the class, they play, they distract the students who do want to learn, in that sense it affects a lot because the students are not able to concentrate"

5.	How do economic factors (lack of family financial resources for educational expenses) affect your child's English language learning?	"It affects a lot when you don't have it but that's where the responsibility of the parents has to appear to give the children what they need, even so, there is no excuse because nowadays on Google you can search for any topic you need to know"	"I think the parent should find a way to give her all the books and everything she needs to learn because if you send your children to study you have to have a way to pay for the expenses"	"It affects a lot because access to English courses is expensive, so families often do not have enough money to cover these costs, which are of great importance because English is seen in-depth"
6.	How do cultural factors (cultural barriers, cultural differences such as language, traditions, customs) affect your child's English language learning?	"Maybe because not in all countries certain words mean the same thing, so when translating it may be a little complicated because all the words do not mean the same thing"	"I don't think it affects anything because English is a universal language that everyone learns and it is taught in schools all over the world"	"It could affect them in the sense that perhaps since they are 10th grade students, it could be very confusing for them, but if it is handled in a better way with basic things, they would receive the information better"
7.	How do emotional factors (lack of motivation, anxiety, embarrassment, or insecurity) affect your child's English language learning?	"Maybe embarrassment, fear of being judged, that if you don't know how to read or what a word means you will be made fun of"	"I think that in public institutions there is a great need to teach the methods correctly"	"It affects in the sense that by not being able to pronounce English words well they can be the object of ridicule by their peers and students are frustrated and that leads to their emotional state, even though they like this language, making them hesitate to study and learn it"
8.	How do lack of resources or materials (inadequate classrooms, lack of books, computers or notebooks, lack of internet or libraries) affect your child's English language learning?	"I think they shouldn't stop there and look for the most appropriate way for the kids to learn if the kids don't have books, make copies for them or on the internet look for a sheet where they can guide them and learn"	"This affects a lot because the classrooms are not adequate to receive classes"	"It affects quite a lot since nowadays many virtual environments are used more than anything else in the English language that you need to listen to many audios to understand and comprehend many things such as phrases, words, verbs, then it also affects the sense that the institutions do not have such resources and there is no necessary support from the Ministry of Education to adapt classrooms with such needs"

9. How do teacher training factors (related degrees, training) affect your child's English language learning?	"That depends on each teacher because sometimes the kids are enthusiastic about learning the subject but it depends on how the teacher behaves with them and more so with English which is a complicated subject, maybe make the class more dynamic to increase their enthusiasm"	"I think that there is a great lack of teachers who are not prepared for this subject because everything should be in English and nothing in Spanish"	"I think that the foreign language is not easy for those who study it, learn it, and teach it" Therefore, a teacher must be constantly prepared to teach their classes"
10. Why is it important to learn English?	"It is important because English is a universal language that can open many doors in any part of the world, I think it should be an obligation to know English"	"It is the universal language, based on that, in any place, in any occupation, in any brochure or everything is in English"	"At the present, I think it is of great importance since there are many vacancies for people who speak this language". It is also important to get a permanent job"

DISCUSSION

SATISFACTION ABOUT THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS OF EFL

The majority of students perceived dissatisfaction with learning English. In turn, both teachers perceived that their students liked English subject, although Teacher 2 said that there were certain exceptions. Parents 1 and 3 agreed that their children like learning English while Parent 2 mentioned that their child does not like the subject. On the contrary, Sahlström & Nikula (2012) stated that students in 9th year of Basic Education have a positive attitude toward learning English.

ACTIVITIES FOR LEARNING ENGLISH

The majority of students perceived games and songs as their favorite options for learning. Both teachers agreed that activities such as watching videos, doing worksheets, or listening to songs are their students' favorite activities. Parents said that their children like to learn English by watching videos. Murillo & Vaca-Cárdenas (2022) said that gamification increases student engagement. Likewise, Kumar et al., (2022) mentioned that songs and music can certainly be regarded as effective language-learning tools that assist in teaching a second language without imposing excessive academic pressure on students.

IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH

In the same way, the majority of students perceived English like as important language for obtaining better job opportunities. Teachers mentioned that English is a universal language,

which is necessary in most countries whether in educational or work environments, and inspire their students to motivate themselves and achieve their goals. The three parents mentioned the global importance of English, recognizing the need for the language in various fields and the immense opportunities it offers if it is learned.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

Students, parents and teachers stated that the learning of EFL in Superior Basic Education is affected by the following factors:

Linguistic Factors. Teachers and parents argued that linguistic factors such as speaking, reading, listening, among others are affecting the learning of EFL in Superior Basic Education. Underhill (2005) said that English phonetics and pronunciation can be challenging due to differences in sounds and intonation. Speaking proficiency is often considered one of the most challenging facets of language acquisition, posing obstacles for many learners who struggle to articulate their thoughts fluently in a foreign language (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) mention that although EFL learners are proficient in their language, they usually have a lot of problems with reading skills. The linguistic factors affect the English language learning because is the lack of material, the short period of class, and because students are stressed with new words and their pronunciation.

Social Factors. The participants stated that social factors affect the students´ learning too, because always there is a group of students who participate more in class. In the classroom, even though there are students who want to learn, some others do not pay attention to the class, and it makes it difficult to understand. Gholami et al., (2012) argued that language acquisition often occurs through active engagement in social interactions with native speakers. Beyond being merely a place for intellectual pursuits, students perceive the classroom as a multifaceted environment encompassing social, emotional, and physical dimensions. In an educational setting, disruptive behavior by students can significantly impact the atmosphere and emotional well-being of both teachers and their peers, impeding progress toward educational objectives and reducing the overall effectiveness of learning for everyone involved in the classroom (Lugrin et al., 2016).

Economic Factors. Students, teachers, and parents argued that economic factors affect learning in a way that all students cannot afford to pay an extra English course. However, teachers and parents mentioned that if they want students to learn, parents should find solutions to help students. Students from economically disadvantaged families tend to exhibit lower intellectual abilities, with a slower pace of work and lower levels of concentration when completing tasks. The lifestyle, values, attitudes, and standard of living of families can be defined or delimited by studying the economic characteristics of the environment surrounding them leading to a decrease in academic performance (Serrano, 2013). Cummins (2000) dictates that the socioeconomic environment can act as a facilitator or barrier to language learning, affecting educational opportunities and access to resources. Individuals with lower incomes often find contentment with the educational opportunities provided by low-quality private or public schools, primarily due to financial constraints that prevent them from accessing higher-quality educational options or providing private English tutoring for their children (Salameh, 2012).

Cultural Factors. According to students, teachers, and parents, cultural factors do not affect learning because English is a universal language. It facilitates the acquisition of new words or phrases when sharing culture. According to Wang (1993), it is essential to uphold the strong connection between culture and language to ensure students attain a comprehensive understanding of language meaning. She asserts that discrepancies in va-

lues and attitudes pose primary challenges in foreign language acquisition. Byram (1997) points out that cultural differences between students and the target culture of English can influence attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors related to language learning. Pedagogical practices should consider linguistic and cultural barriers to facilitate effective learning, promoting the integration of cultural and contextual elements in the teaching process (Canagarajah, 2006). In Saudi Arabia, obstacles to English learning arise from both domestic and educational environments. Only a small number of parents oversee their children's homework, leading to minimal review of classroom material by the students themselves (Ahmad, 2015). Al (2008) mentions that in this context, cultural obstacles impact the learning environment and the overall dynamics of the classroom.

Emotional Factors. Teachers and parents agreed that emotional factors affect the learning of English because students feel afraid of making mistakes in front of the class and because the rest of the students laugh at them when this happens. Feelings hold significant sway over individuals, impacting their choices regarding the pursuit of learning a new language and their perseverance in language classroom activities (Méndez Lopez & Pea Aguilar, 2013). Ismail (2015) suggests that to cultivate a harmonious classroom environment and diminish negative emotions, English educators must acknowledge and address the academic emotions of their students as integral to the educational process. Generally, negative emotions impact students' motivation, attention, and utilization of learning strategies (Zeidner, 1998). Similarly, Goleman (1995) argued that students who are anxious, angry, or depressed do not learn; people who are caught in these states do not take in information efficiently or deal with it well. For instance, anxiety is the most extensively researched emotion in academic contexts (Pekrun et al., 2002). Motivation is a driving force that directs and sustains behavior toward the achievement of specific goals, such as learning a foreign language (Gardner, 1985). Self-efficacy refers to individual beliefs in the ability to organize and execute the actions necessary to achieve specific goals, such as learning a foreign language. Learning styles influence how individuals perceive, process, and respond to information, which can affect their ability to learn a foreign language effectively (Kolb, 1984). Emotions are integral to the learning process overall, and this holds especially true for foreign language acquisition. Despite the increased focus on the affective domain in language learning due to humanistic approaches, the emotional experiences of EFL learners regarding listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills have not received sufficient attention (Pishghadam et al., 2016).

Resources and Materials. Parents and teachers mentioned that lack of resources affects a lot the learning of EFL in Superior Basic Education because if the institution does not have the necessary resources to teach, the teaching and learning process will not be fulfilled. Tomlinson (2003) defines that the availability and adequacy of teaching resources, such as textbooks, technology, and audiovisual materials, can affect the quality and effectiveness of teaching EFL. Instructional resources play an important role in language teaching and learning, facilitating access to meaningful content, practices, and experiences for learners (Tomlinson, 2012).

Teacher Training. Finally, parents and teachers said that the lack of teacher training affects a lot the learning of EFL in Superior Basic Education because sometimes teachers do not create active classes, are not updated with modern methods, and are not patient with students. Esra & Sevilen (2021) argued that motivation plays a crucial role in determining the success and performance of foreign language learners. Additionally, Vaca-Cárdenas et al. (2020c) state that the students who are not involved in extracurricular activities view themselves as less successful. Freeman (2002) argues that continuous and reflective teacher training is essential to develop pedagogical, methodological, and didactic competencies in language teaching. Ricento (2006) argues that education policy can significantly

influence language teaching and learning by establishing standards, curricula and resources for EFL.

CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that:

• In general, the factors that affect the learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) in students of Superior Basic Education include: Linguistic, Social, Economic, Cultural, Emotional, Lack of Resources or Materials, and Teacher Training.
• The majority of students perceived dissatisfaction with learning English.
• According to the students, the factors that affect the most are Linguistic and Emotional because it is difficult for them to know new words and their meanings, and for that reason, they feel insecure about participating in class and make mistakes.
• According to the teachers and parents the factors that affect the most are Linguistic and Economic because students feel afraid of unknown words and do not have enough resources make that the learning process becomes more complicated.
• Understanding the numerous factors that influence the acquisition of EFL is vital in developing effective learning strategies and educational policies.
• Thus, all the education stakeholders must collaborate to find solutions to mitigate these factors.

CONTRIBUTION:

The two authors collaborated during the whole research process and in the writing of all the parts of the article.

CONTRIBUCIONES DE LA AUTORA

Angie Nicole Rivas Bermello: conceptualización, investigación, redacción – borrador original, análisis de datos, revisión y edición.

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IMPLICACIONES ÉTICAS

Los autores declaran que no existen implicaciones éticas.

CONFLICTO DE INTERÉS

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REVISTA KRONOS

Error analysis of written production at university level

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ABSTRACT Written production is a fundamental tool for writers to demonstrate the ability to convey ideas, opinions, and arguments through a text, paper, or project; then, the significance of written production cannot be overlooked. On that account, the objective of this study was to analyze the challenges 8th semester students from the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages career of a public university deal with when elaborating their Knowledge Integration Projects as the final paper of the Aproximación Diagnóstica subject. For this investigation, the error analysis method was applied as it refers to the process of deconstructing text and encompasses a holistic comprehension of the content. The researchers used 25 written versions of the Knowledge Integration Project for the analysis. The findings evidence that students' most common challenges are related to paragraph and sentence structure, punctuation, and word choice. In addition, it could be stated that students experienced difficulties with the utilization of APA Style, and the presentation of strong counterarguments. Therefore, it is concluded that this topic must be research in depth.

KEYWORDS written discourse, challenges, textual analysis, counterarguments, citation.

Análisis de errores en la producción escrita a nivel universitario

RESUMEN La habilidad de producir textos argumentativos es una herramienta fundamental que el escritor utiliza para demostrar la capacidad de transmitir ideas, opiniones y argumentos a través de un texto, tarea o proyecto escrito. Por lo tanto, no se puede pasar por alto su importancia. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar los retos que enfrentan los estudiantes de octavo semestre de la carrera de Pedagogía en Lenguas Nacionales y Extranjeras de una universidad pública al momento de elaborar sus Proyectos Integradores de Saberes como trabajo final de la asignatura denominada Aproximación Diagnóstica. Para esta investigación se aplicó el método de análisis de errores, ya que se refiere al proceso de deconstrucción del texto y abarca una comprensión holística del contenido. Para el análisis, los investigadores utilizaron 25 versiones escritas del Proyecto Integrador de Saberes. Los hallazgos muestran que los desafíos más comunes que los estudiantes enfrentan están relacionados con la estructura de párrafos y oraciones, la puntuación y la elección de palabras. Además, podría afirmarse que los estudiantes experimentaron dificultades con la utilización del Estilo APA y la presentación de contraargumentos firmes. Por lo que se concluye que existe la necesidad de seguir investigando sobre este tema.

PALABRAS CLAVE textos argumentativos, desafíos, análisis textual, contraargumentos, citación.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is in agreement with the findings and experiences gathered by the researchers of the project entitled «*Elaboración de una Guía Didáctica para Estudiantes de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (EFL): El Proceso de Contextualización de Palabras para Uso Académico en la Formación de Profesores*»

The main objective of this paper is to analyze what some of the challenges students face when writing their Knowledge Integration Projects are (Proyectos Integradores de Saberes) which is the final task they have to deliver as part of the "*Aproximación Diagnóstica* subject." This subject is connected to pre-service students' professional practicum activities which are developed in public and private schools of the Zone 6, Azogues and Cuenca. The participants of this study were 8th semester students from the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages Career of a public university.

The analysis was completed in three stages. First, the researchers collected all the Knowledge Integration Projects students delivered during an academic period (October 2023-March 2024). After that, the they performed a thorough literature review to know the type and characteristics of the written discourse students were producing to fulfill this task. Finally, the researchers identified the drawbacks students came across regarding their writing skills.

Once, a brief background of the study has been specified, it is necessary to start discussing some terms and understanding what written discourse involves from the point of view of pragmatics.

The term discourse is used in various ways. According to Adjei (2013) it could be broadly defined as language in its contexts of use. However, as a result of Chomsky's influence, language has been analyzed as a separate from context. The rationale for a contextualized consideration of language as stated by Flowerdew (2012) is based upon the belief that knowing a language is concerned with more than just grammar and vocabulary; it also includes how to participate in a conversation or how to structure a written text. In accordance with the author, the term discourse can also be used to refer to a particular set of ideas and how they are articulated. In this case, the term refers to a type of specialized knowledge and language used in a particular group, such us technical language.

Subsequently, written discourse according to Beacco et al. (2015) refers to the creation of meaningful sentences that display the extract intended meaning of the writer. It is considered the attempt to explain how we manage to communicate with written language. Written discourse is important for English Language Learners because it is a necessary tool to communicate in a formal setting. Moreover, written discourse involves the structure, coherence, logical development, and range of linguistic resources in a written text. Linguistic resources refer to grammar and vocabulary, and the variety of grammatical structures and vocabulary used correctly to gain maximum points in this area. In this context, it is relevant to speak briefly of writing hence non-English practitioners face a real challenge when writing in English.

To come up with a written product, English language learners rely on their prior knowledge of words and grammatical structures overlooking the socio-cultural factors involved in creating a written text. For that reason, writing has been and is still being researched by scholars from various areas like sociology, ethnography, rhetoric, computer and collaborative learning. Based on the aim and purpose, writing can be organized as a referential, persuasive, literary or expressive rhetorical discourse. A referential discourse emphasizes the matter; persuasive discourse puts an emphasis on the reader; literary discourse emphasizes the language; and an expressive discourse focuses on the writer. However, according to the purpose, the

discourse can also be of comparison/contrast, definition, and cause-effect; and the aim could be explaining, arguing, and exploring (Assadi, 2011).

Thus, the starting point is to identify the type and characteristics of the written tasks done by students as their Knowledge Integration Project, taking into consideration the relevance of the type and structure of language used to imply purpose and context within a specific subject matter; in this specific case the experiences and reflections students presented as part of their pre-professional practicums period.

Regarding the type; the four types of discourse are description, narration, exposition and argumentation. The description type helps the audiences visualize the item or subject by relying on the five senses. Whereas narration aims to tell a story through a narrator, who usually gives an account of an event. Exposition, on the other hand, conveys background information to the audience in a relatively neutral way; and argumentation aims to persuade and convince the audience of an idea or a statement (Berman & Nir, 2014). According to these definitions and reckon with the features and components of the Knowledge Integration Project, we are referring to an expository type of text.

Therefore, now it is pertinent to confer about exposition. There are two broad senses of the word exposition, two distinct terms that are useful in writing. The first one corresponds to a type of discourse, not similar to argument, description, and narration. The second refers to a component of plotting in narrative and dramatic works. Nonetheless, in this study the focus is on exposition as a mode of discourse (Varotsi, 2015).

Then, the term exposition denotes a set of discursive practices from some other families of discursive practices connected to argument, description, and narration. Exposition is explaining, and there are many kinds of explaining skills that we need to develop; for example: the steps and instructions to produce or create something, analyzing the grounds and consequences of a specific behavior, decision or action taken (Weiss & Wodak, 2003).

Hence, exposition represents a guide speakers of a Foreign Language can apply in their written discourse, as well as in the more technical specialized areas, such as education. The basic subtasks are all expository through the particular claims which almost always have to be supported by argument. Writers can follow these steps: first, demonstrate that there is in fact a problem or aspect which could be improved; then, diagnose the problem by clarifying its actual roots, sources and causes; after that, explain the possible actions by imagining the range of solutions eligible to be given serious considerations, deciding which solution or proposal best meet the criteria of success and focusing on the result (Labarta & Dolón, 2005).

In sum, the goal is to present clear and robust persuasive papers for the audience to understand the exposed points clearly; in this specific case, the format of a written report which includes students' experience. Subsequently, Knowledge Integration Projects belong to this type of discourse as the main purpose is for students to share their experiences and findings concerning every day teaching practices in a real context.

Regarding the categories, written discourse can be presented as poetic, expressive, and transactional. Therefore, writers must observe both the category and the type of paper. Now, what is the purpose of the three types of written discourse. The purpose of poetic discourse could be considered as informal, the perception of the writer about experiences, thoughts, dreams, or even imaginary situations. Whereas, the purpose of expressive discourse is to focus on the non-fictional to generate ideas and reflect the author's emotions, usually without presenting facts or arguments; expressive discourse is creative, but not fictional. Blog posts, diary entries, personal letters, and personal essays are examples of the expressive discourse. Otherwise, transactional discourse is an instructional approach that encourages action by presenting a clear, non-ambiguous plan to the reader and is usually written in active voice; then, the mail goal is to motivate readers to write (Allington,

2008). Accordingly, the Knowledge Integration Projects fulfill with the characteristics of the transactional discourse category.

Concerning the genres, transactional writing encompasses nonfiction pieces of composition which aims to communicate with others for a specific purpose. The purpose of each text can be defined as to persuade, to argue, to advice, and to inform.

- **To persuade. –** in the context of the Knowledge Integration Project, the purpose is for students to support their findings and points of view regarding a specific issue they could identify during their pre-professional practicum experience. Students combine their experience with data collected through observation, and in some cases intervention.
- **To argue.** – transactional texts that argue to get a point across often take the form a review or political flyer. A reviewer might drive a point that they made about a book or film and try to persuade the audience about the legitimate with an e-videnced argument. The language of argument may also be used in literature and posters for or against others' views or policies. Argumentative language can also be found in speeches, such as debates and essays.
- **To inform.** - informational texts include leaflets about services and products, newspapers, and magazine articles. Informational transactional writing also includes things like letters and emails that might be sent to friends, updating them about important information. There are other examples of informational texts; nevertheless, in this specific case, students inform their findings during their projects presentation' in a fair.
- **To advise. –** advisory transactional texts give the reader the knowledge they need to come to a decision on something. Advisory texts tend to give different options and are usually more balanced than persuasive texts. They take a lot of research to give the reader all the information they need to come to decide something themselves.

Some considerations when choosing transactional writing are to include plenty of facts to help convince the reader and show them that the writer is knowledgeable on the subject; give the reader a personal opinion to think about, opinions can help back up factual statements and give the text a personal feel; include numbers or true statements and figures where possible to support opinions on a subject (MacDonnchaidh, 2021).

Following the main topic of this study; once the main concepts and definitions have been presented, it is pertinent to emphasize the nature of the subject which is the purpose of this paper. *Aproximación Diagnóstica* is based on a research and data-driven approach. Students who are part of the pre-professional practicums have specifically three roles: observer, teacher, and researcher. The practicum activities start by applying an observation checklist related to the methodologies, strategies, techniques, and activities teachers implement in their classrooms; students-interns must be objective and critical at the same time; knowing the main goal of the observation is to significantly contribute to good practices. In some cases, students are given the opportunity to teach a complete lesson; however, that depends on the policies of the schools. Once, students have identified some difficulties or aspects which could be improved, they reflect on the data they collected through observation and start working on possible actions which could be recommended to pre- and in-service teachers.

One of the key points during this process is teacher-tutor monitoring and guidelines. The teacher of the subject is also in charge of monitoring students-interns during their practicums and the elaboration of the Knowledge Integration Project.

In conclusion, students need to write an expository transactional text in a format of a report which must include their experiences, data related to observation, and strategies

or activities teachers could implement in their practice in order to achieve their lessons' objectives as well as the desired students learning outcomes.

METHOD

The primary method considered was corpus linguistics which focuses on the analysis of both oral and written discourse from a qualitative approach based on error analysis. It was decided to work specifically with textual analysis since data was collected and analyzed from Knowledge Integration Projects which include introduction, justification, problem formulation, methodology, results analysis, and conclusions. On this regard, the researcher contemplated explicit and implicit messages necessary to interpret how pre-professional practicum students use the language to communicate their experiences based on the background, context, and culture of the beneficiaries, students from private and public schools (Jürgens et al., 2024).

The characteristics of textual analysis, which involve examining written messages, deconstructing text, themes, symbols, intention, and the writers' perspectives, justify the decision of the researcher to use this method. The goal of textual analysis is to go beyond a mere descriptive stance and explore the hidden structures and intricate relations within a text. It encompasses a holistic comprehension of the content, wherein the text is read, understood, and interpreted in context to its larger sociocultural historical, or political framework (Deane, 2020).

In today's interconnected and diverse world, textual analysis holds a significant position across several fields due to its ability to decode the complexities withing a text. In social studies, scholars use textual analysis to understand human behavior, societal trends, and cultural narratives. It enables them to draw conclusions based on the textual evidence available for study (Caldas & Coulthard, 1996).

Furthermore, textual analysis is a multidimensional research method that provides tools for researchers to gain deep insights into various types of texts. The core of textual analysis lies in the interpretation, comprehension, and contextual understanding of the text. It focuses on understanding the formation of the text, the language used, the delivery of information, the audience's interpretation, and the overall impact created by the text. In a nutshell, textual analysis entails capturing the essence of the text, separating the explicit form the implicit, the said from the unsaid, and uncovering the hidden layers of context and meaning contained within the text (Alejandro & Zhao, 2023).

In this specific study, it could be said that the researchers focused on a qualitative textual analysis. Qualitative textual analysis focuses on the quality rather than the quantity of the information present in the text. This approach is more interpretative and subjective in nature. It attempts to explore the text's meaning, themes, motifs, or symbols in depth (Khan, 2023).

With respect to the texts selected, this study considered 25 Knowledge Integration Projects which were assessed according to the following criteria: clarity of objective, feasibility, alignment with pedagogical principles, implementation strategies, evaluation and reflection. Therefore, the researchers decided to go deeper by analyzing paragraphs and sentences' structure, punctuation, and word choice. Besides the researchers worked on a general interpretation of the quality of the papers.

RESULTS

With the aim of providing well-organized data, the results are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Common threats students struggle coping with when writing their Knowledge Integration Project

Paragraph structure	
Main idea	One of the aspects students struggle with is staying focused on the main idea and avoid introducing information that does not contribute to the overall argument or exposition.
Connection of ideas	Absence of a focus is another challenge. Students fail to connect the ideas among paragraphs and do not consider the required length, topic sentence, and appropriate structure.
Logical arrangement of ideas	Students who are in the higher levels and take the *Aproximación Diagnóstica* subject have already approved six levels of English; nevertheless, when it comes to write they are unable to communicate their ideas clearly and logically.
Supporting sentences	Even though, 8th semester students have received the necessary tools to be able to communicate at least at a B2 level; however, they still encounter complications to stay on topic when writing a paragraph. It is common to see they get distracted and tend to change subjects in the same paragraph.
Sentence structure	
Subject-verb-agreement	It could be observed that there is a lack of balance in the sentences; considering that the subject and the verb of a sentence must agree with one another in number whether they are singular or plural. Surprisingly enough, the most common misused verbs are the ones related to third singular persons in simple present tense.
Sentence fragments	Students omit basic norms or rules when writing. For example, the subject or the verb.
Run-on sentences	This is one of the most common cases encountered when reading a piece of writing. Students often find it complex to join two independent clauses correctly.
Wordiness	Students use more words than necessary to convey meaning and this makes writing unclear. Besides, students fail to identify long phrases that can be replaced with a single word, and eliminate words that are weak, nonessential or have the same meaning.
Punctuation	
Semicolon	Regardless they B2 English Level, students still do not feel confident when selection the correct punctuation in their writing assignments. Hence, it is relevant to remember that semicolons are used to separate listed terms that are not just single words but already contain punctuation such as commas and dashes.

Comma before because	One of the most discussed doubts has been the use of comma before the subordinating conjunction because. Then, students must consider rules such as the use of comma before because when it connects two clauses in a sentence.
Colon	A colon is a stop in function and therefore can be used only at the end of a complete statement. Nonetheless, students tend to break up a verb and its object with a colon.
Placing end marks correctly	Regardless the simplicity of this punctuation rules, it is common to see that students place punctuation marks such as periods, commas, and question marks before the quotation marks. Then, students must follow the rules, all the above-mentioned punctuation marks must be placed inside the quotation marks.
Word choice	
Words with similar meanings but different connotation	When writing complete academic type documents, students have the tendency to select words wrongly. Some examples are inferred instead of imply, or between instead of among.
Translation errors and collocations	It is just understandable that non-native speakers think in their native language and translate words or phrases literally into English because they sound natural.
Using a pronoun readers cannot tell who or what it refers to	This type of confusion is mostly noticed between paragraphs. Students finish one idea and start a new paragraph with a personal pronoun, possessive adjective or demonstrative pronoun deducting that it is easy for readers to find the connection. Additionally, the demonstrative pronoun does not agree in number with its noun.

Note. – the table presents the most relevant findings as part of the analysis of the Knowledge Integration Project papers. Data was organized in an Excel spreadsheet and in the MAXQDA software.

Along with the aspects mentioned in Table 1, it could be identified that students find it complicated to choose the library or online resources for research; considering that if they want to produce a writing project that is well-researched, they need to search for the proper sources. This is aligned with improper use of citation and inadequate academic referencing (Borg, 2000). Despite the fact that the participants of this study belong to 8th semester and have been exposed to academic writing and the use of the APA (American Psychological Association) norms, they still do not find it easy to apply them in academic writing. Proper citation is a fundamental aspect of academic writing, and failure to cite sources correctly can result in plagiarism (Rezeki, 2018).

Equally, students' academic writing papers lack clarity and precision. They fail to express their ideas in a clear, concise manner which make it complicated to understand by the audience. Also, when it comes to address counterarguments, failing to consider alternative viewpoints weakens the overall argument and can undermine the credibility of the paper. Finally, reading some Knowledge Integration Projects gives the impression that students submitted a first draft without thorough revision since it is typical to detect grammatical errors, clarity of expression, and coherence of arguments; this evidence the absence of proof reading or peer-feedback (Mitra, 2024).

DISCUSSION

Academic writing is a formal style of writing used by university students, instructors, and researchers. It is different from everyday writing as it has certain features, a specific format, uses more academic words, and complex sentences, and the argument is logically progressed taking into consideration the audience for whom it is written. Moreover, the language used in academic writing should be clear and precise to ensure that the reader can easily understand the meaning and avoid any bias or ambiguity (Wilson, 2022).

In the study entitled "Academic Writing Difficulties Encountered by University EFL Learners," the findings revealed that both graduate and undergraduate students have some problems in academic writing choosing the appropriate academic words, difficulty in developing a thesis statement, organizing ideas, and writing coherent paragraphs were the most significant challenges; whereas, using grammar and mechanics of writing have a little negative impact in their academic writing. It can be inferred that the method of teaching which mainly focused on the end product and lack of practice were the main reasons behind those challenges (Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022).

Although, the study mentioned above was conducted in another continent, specifically at the University of Benghazi, in Libia; a certain number of coincidences can be remarked. The present study raises the drawbacks students face when writing their Knowledge Integration Projects as the final product of their pre-professional practicums and the Aproximación Diagnóstica subject; and certainly, teachers assume students already have the necessary competences in written discourse to compose a strong paper. Nonetheless, students still need to work on some basic aspects to improve their written discourse.

A previous study that stands out was developed in three public universities of Ecuador: University of Guayaquil, University of Cuenca, and Technical University of Machala. In the third chapter of the book, the authors analyzed data to identify the most common errors of the written discourse of beginning level Ecuadorian students. The results shown that the most common errors in the written production of students from the three universities were related to grammar: redundancy/word misuse/word order, and errors related to the formal aspect (Soto et al., 2020).

Some of the characteristics of the participants from the last study are similar to the ones of this paper as both studies were conducted in public universities in Ecuador. Unfortunately, it can be evidenced that students written discourse development requires extra attention so that students could not only present a satisfactory final product, but also demonstrate their competences as future teacher-researchers.

Finally, it is worth to mention the study "Identification of Challenges in teaching writing to Ecuadorian EFL Students," as it highlights the usefulness of the present one. After conducted structures interviews to ten Ecuadorian EFL teachers at higher level of education, the findings of the study suggested that challenges in teaching writing were student-related factors that include English language competency, Spanish language interference and students' lack of motivation to write in English (Tamayo & Cajas, 2020).

To sum up, written discourse corresponds to the skills necessary to structure a written text effectively; hence, considering that students from the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages career need to present their Knowledge Integration Projects as their final project for the *Aproximación Diagnóstica* subject, it was absolutely necessary to generate this analysis which will definitely make a contribution to students writing skills improvement and to teachers who can further research about possible strategies to be implemented in their lessons.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was based on the analysis of 25 Knowledge Integration Projects from 8th semester students belonging to the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages career of a public university. Thanks to the collaboration and support of the authorities, teachers, and students; the researchers were able to access to the written version of the projects. Subsequently, it was stated that the projects' type of discourse was exposition and the category corresponded to transactional discourse. Once a thorough literature review was completed, the researchers could identify that the most common concerns students experienced when writing their Knowledge Integration projects are related to paragraph and sentence structure, punctuation, and word choice. In regard to paragraph structure, students have difficulties with staying focus on the topic, connecting the ideas among paragraphs, communicating ideas clearly and logically, and changing subjects in the same paragraph. Concerning sentence structure, students get confused with subject-verb-agreement, sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and wordiness. With respect to punctuation, the most common difficulties are related to the use of semicolon, coma before because, colon, and incorrect use of end marks. In relation to word choice, it was found that students have dilemmas with the use of words with similar meaning but different connotation, translation and collocations, and use of pronouns.

Additionally, it was noticed that students need to be familiar to a greater extent with the APA Norms in order to avoid plagiarism and to be able to present a project with proper research sources which can support their statements, ideas, and points of view; yet with strong counterarguments to assure the credibility of the paper.

Finally, this paper opens the window to further studies as it presents a starting point of the current challenges students confront to demonstrate their written discourse skills; consequently, teacher-researchers can investigate and identify the most effective strategies to guide students during the elaboration of their Knowledge Integration Projects.

CONTRIBUCIONES DE LOS AUTORES

Martha Lucía Lara Freire: redacción de objetivos, introducción, recolección y análisis de datos, redacción de los resultados y discusión del manuscrito conclusiones, recomendaciones y resumen; revisión y edición del manuscrito. Envíos a la revista.

IMPLICACIONES ÉTICAS

La autora declara que no existe implicaciones éticas.

CONFLICTO DE INTERÉS

La autora declara que no existe conflictos de interés financieros o no financieros que podrían haber influido en el trabajo presentado en este artículo.

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REVISTA KRONOS

The use of Escape Rooms to promote collaboration in English Language Learning among seventh graders

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ABSTRACT The present study attempts to establish the effectiveness of escape rooms in achieving an improvement in English language learning among seventh grade students. The study further explores how escape rooms can be used to increase cooperation among students in the language learning process as well as their level of participation.

The action research study was conducted from a qualitative approach, benefiting from diagnostic testing, student surveys, an initiative composed of several escape room activities, teacher observation, and final reflection. The results showed that first and foremost, escape rooms have great potential and would act as a means of fostering the pedagogical process by stoking interest and motivation among students as they focus more on communication in the target language than on formal instruction. Escape rooms promote teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills, but also the actual practice of English, something that is sometimes difficult to achieve in a formal learning environment.

The results of the study inform the need to add techniques to foster motivation and collaboration among students. In this way, the use of escape rooms is a great example of techniques that can boost not only cooperation and motivation among students but also significantly improve English language learning, as they must use it to decipher clues and communicate among peers. Furthermore, by carefully considering the various learning styles in the classroom, teachers can design enjoyable and appropriate activities for students' needs and pedagogical goals, overcoming such barriers

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KEYWORDS Escape Rooms, collaborative learning, English language, middle school, EFL, Ecuador.

El uso de Escape Rooms para promover la colaboración en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés entre estudiantes de séptimo grado

RESUMEN La habilidad de producir textos argumentativos es una herramienta fundamental que el escritor utiliza para demostrar la capacidad de transmitir ideas, opiniones y argumentos a través de un texto, tarea o proyecto escrito. Por lo tanto, no se puede pasar por alto su importancia. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar los retos que enfrentan los estudiantes de octavo semestre de la carrera de Pedagogía en Lenguas Nacionales y Extranjeras de una universidad pública al momento de elaborar sus Proyectos Integradores de Saberes como trabajo final de la asignatura denominada Aproximación Diagnóstica. Para esta investigación se aplicó el método de análisis de errores, ya que se refiere al proceso de deconstrucción del texto y abarca una comprensión holística del contenido. Para el análisis, los investigadores utilizaron 25 versiones escritas del Proyecto Integrador de Saberes. Los hallazgos muestran que los desafíos más comunes que los estudiantes enfrentan están relacionados con la estructura de párrafos y oraciones, la puntuación y la elección de palabras. Además, podría afirmarse que los estudiantes experimentaron dificultades con la utilización del Estilo APA y la presentación de contraargumentos firmes. Por lo que se concluye que existe la necesidad de seguir investigando sobre este tema.

PALABRAS CLAVE Escape Rooms, aprendizaje colaborativo, idioma inglés, middle school, EFL, Ecuador.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers in English Language Learning (ELL) classrooms continually search for innovative ways to promote collaboration, engagement, and motivation in the class. Nowadays, many tools like AI, websites, and apps help teachers in their hard work. *Escape rooms* are an emerging tool that educators can use to increase collaboration, engagement, and motivation in English classes. This literature review explores the use of escape rooms in ELL classes and their potential to enhance student collaboration (Johnson, 2013). Given the increasing emphasis on collaborative learning and the need to prepare students for success in a globalized world. This research is vital for identifying innovative approaches such as Escape Rooms, that effectively address the unique needs of English language learners.

The main goal of education today is the development of some skills, such as Social skills, problem-solving, and resilience (Lathwesen & Belova, 2021). All of those skills can help students become independent thinkers, and the environments of collaborative learning provide an ideal way for their development. The advantages of collaborative learning have been demonstrated for decades, with theories such as Piaget's social constructivism and the theory of multiple intelligences. (Piaget, 1952, pág. 279).

Moula & Malafantis (2020) argue that collaboration and communication are closely linked to a stronger foundation in knowledge because they help develop complex thinking skills, such as expressing, formulating, discussing, and negotiating meaning. Group formation during activities and active participation are very important because students are involved in deeper information processing. The learner's participation also increases self-esteem and builds a positive attitude in their education.

Lathwesen & Belova (2021) acknowledge that research has progressively highlighted the importance of games for educational purposes, this helpful approach is known as Gamification. It can motivate learners and improve the knowledge-acquisition process; which consists of the application of game-like elements to learning, as a valuable approach to increase student motivation and collaboration in class. Moreover, games can transform the way educators teach, into engaging tasks that promote active participation of students and more understanding.

Games are nowadays part of people's lives. Not only are students starting to study gaming as part of modern society, but an increasing number of university degree programs have emerged like game design, game art, or video game programming and development (Oblinger, n.d.). Furthermore, games have transcended entertainment, becoming an educational tool and a field of academic study with innovative games like escape rooms to foster collaboration among students.

An escape room is a physical game where players can work together as a group to solve puzzles or challenges based on a theme. The teacher can consider a topic and give students clues to conduct research (Miller, 2021). Escape rooms can be recreated to provide learning, practice, or review past topics; this activity is useful for teachers because it can help students flourish their social skills.

Studies by (Rad, 2024) and (Heredia, 2024) have shown that escape room activities can significantly enhance students' vocabulary acquisition, particularly in the context of specific themes or topics. For instance, in a language learning escape room focused on the topic of "travel," students might need to decipher clues written in the target language and present their findings in a persuasive presentation, this requires them to actively use the target language for communicative purposes, leading to improved fluency, accuracy, and vocabulary.

According to (Elbæk, 2019) escape room activities were more effective than language learning apps in fostering student collaboration and improving communication skills due to

social interaction and collaborative problem-solving; this finding highlights the importance of face-to-face interaction as a crucial part of the learning process.

Existing research in Latin America suggests that escape rooms can effectively enhance student motivation and engagement in language learning. For example, a study by (Quichimbo Pesantez, 2023) in Ecuador found that students participating in escape room activities demonstrated significantly higher levels of intrinsic motivation and perceived learning compared to those receiving traditional instruction.

This research employed an Action Research methodology, characterized by an iterative cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Avison, 1999). The study involved implementing escape room activities in an English Language Learning classroom and observing student collaboration.

This research was carried out using reliable websites such as Edutopia, and Google Scholar. Google Scholar is considered the most adequate database where people can obtain quality journals that fulfill the criteria required to be recognized in the academic community (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2023).

Traditional ELL instruction tends to stimulate individual work, but real-world communication needs collaboration, because in most professional or social settings people interact with others, sharing ideas, and working together to achieve common goals. Figueroa, M. (2015) argues that an escape room is a good activity that focuses on teamwork; examining existing research is crucial to understanding how this can foster student collaboration. It is vital in education due to real-world communication needs collaboration.

The research is justified by a growing interest in educational games to promote students' motivation in ELL classrooms. Gómez López, A. (2019) acknowledges that understanding the use of Escape rooms in education can facilitate the role of teachers by providing them with a valuable pedagogical tool for creating dynamic learning experiences that promote student motivation and collaboration.

OBJECTIVES

This article aims to conduct a comprehensive literature review exploring the effectiveness of Escape Rooms as a Collaborative Learning Technique for English language learning, examining its potential benefits, challenges, and best practices for implementation.

Specific objectives of this work include:

- Analyze how Escape rooms help promote collaboration in class.
- Investigate the potential for Escape Rooms to enable motivation in students.

METHODOLOGY

Action Research is a cyclical process that aims to improve teaching and learning practices. It consists of identifying a problem or challenge, then planning and implementing interventions to address that issue, collecting and analyzing data on the impact of those interventions, and reflecting on the findings to inform future actions (Avison, 1999) (Almeida, 2022).

The methodology of this research is Qualitative, Action Research. The research employed Action Research by implementing Escape Rooms in the classroom and observing and analyzing the student's collaboration. Simple random sampling will also be carried out. The researcher applied the following techniques: a diagnostic test, a student questionnaire survey, and a final teacher reflection.

The study group consisted of 26 seventh-grade students who attended in the 2024–2025 academic year a private high school in Quito, Ecuador. The corresponding permission and informed consent were obtained from the institution and the students participating in this research. The data obtained by the researchers came from (1) diagnostic test results, (2) student survey, (3) observation of the performance of students in the activities, and (4) a final teacher reflection, the results of each test applied at the end of each stage during the application of the activities using the activity of Escape Rooms.

- 1st session: The researcher assessed the students' knowledge through a diagnostic test. This step was important for tailoring the escape room to match their abilities, ensuring a fair and meaningful experience for all participants, which was essential for the project's success.

- 2nd session: The researcher asked students to complete a short and quick survey about how they felt while learning English through games. Their answers helped us understand their strengths and preferences through their responses.

- 3rd session: Students played the escape room designed by the researcher. It helped students connect with what they already knew to the activity, following the scaffolding strategy of "show and tell" (Alber,2014). Groups must collaborate and contribute with their ideas and help each other.

- 4th session: The researcher conducted direct observations, focusing on student interactions, problem-solving strategies, and their use of English within the escape room context. Then, the researcher analyzed the surveys and observations, and by comparing the results to the diagnostic test, the researcher identified patterns and trends.

- 5th session: After looking at all the information collected the researcher pointed out areas that required improvement, and made some adjustments to the escape room, such as changing the difficulty of puzzles or providing more hints.

- 6th session: The researcher applied a second escape room session implementing some changes. During the activity, the researcher saw if those changes made a difference in how students worked together and learned.

- 7th session: The teacher evaluated the overall effectiveness of the strategy, identified both positive and negative aspects of the experience, and wrote a final reflection.

RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following results were observed and analyzed:

- 1st Session: Diagnostic Test and Adaptation

Result: A significant number of students demonstrated difficulty remembering vocabulary and sentence structure, the results showed that 10% of students achieved the skill, while 85% are in the process. Analysis: This finding suggests that the students forgot vocabulary and Use of English. Discussion: The teacher decided to follow the guidelines of the Ministry of Education where students have three weeks for leveling activities (Lineamientos-pedagogicos-Sierra-Oriente-2024-2025, n.d), and using simpler language was a strategic approach to address the identified weakness.

Figure 1. Results obtained from students' diagnostic test
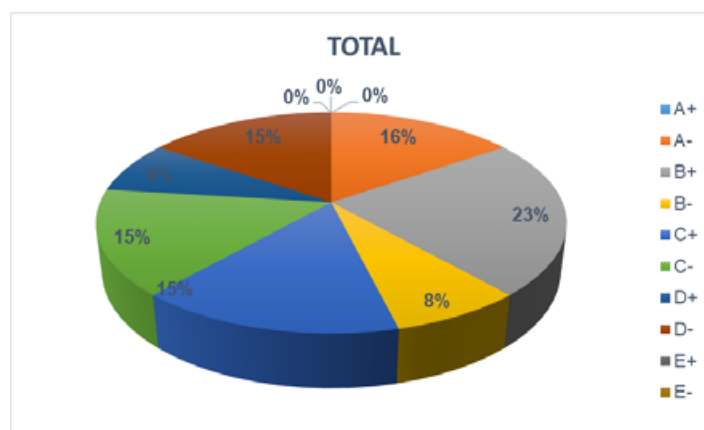
Source: Own elaboration.

• 2nd Session: Student Survey

Results: Regarding the first question asking students about the frequency, they consider they play games during English classes, 30% of students agree that they play monthly during English classes and 70% of students consider they play rarely. In this sense, most of the students affirm that they do not play games while they are learning English as a foreign language.

Concerning the second question asking students if they enjoy learning English through games, 100% of students agree that they enjoy games during the English class. Regarding this, all the students agree that playing games while they are learning is enjoyable.

About the third question asking students what they consider as benefits of using games in class, 100% of students agree that one benefit would be motivation during the class. At this point, all the students mentioned after the survey that they feel more motivated if they play games during their learning process.

Concerning the fourth question asking students about some challenges or difficulties they have encountered when using games in English class, 100% of students agree that one challenge they face is understanding the game instructions. In this regard, the whole class needs leveling activities to acquire or remember basic vocabulary.

Regarding the fifth question asking students if they have participated in an escape room activity in their English class, 100% of students mentioned that they have never participated in this type of activity.

The survey indicated a general preference for cooperative games and a positive attitude toward learning English through games. In the survey, we can see that students have a preference for learning through games during their English classes. It seems that the use of games may be an important strategy for learning another language because it can foster motivation in the classroom. However, there might be a challenge in understanding the game instructions because students might not have much experience with English language games. Discussion: The survey is so helpful for the research due to it offering valuable insights into the students' preferences and the challenges they face. In addition, the survey data also revealed important insights about student's interest in cooperative games and a positive attitude towards learning English through games.

Figure 2. Results obtained from students' survey
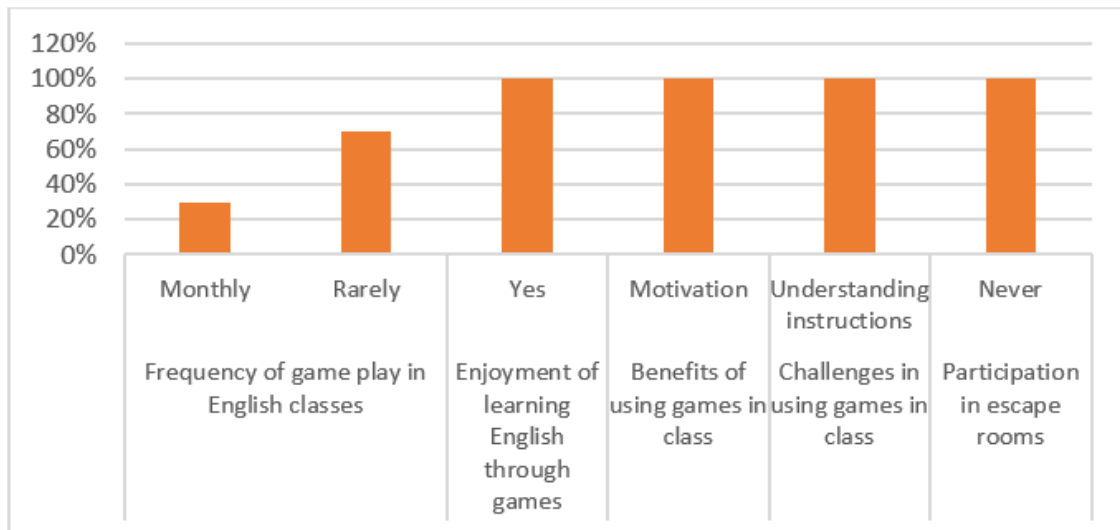
Source: Own elaboration.

- 3rd Session: Escape Room

In this study, an Escape room activity was designed and implemented for two groups of students. The theme of the Escape room activity was a fictional mystery. It incorporated a series of interconnected puzzles and challenges that required students to work together to solve problems.

Result: One group showed high levels of teamwork and effective communication, and another group struggled to achieve the task within the time limits. The differences could be because of different initial networks, including preexisting relationships within the in-group and the introduction of new students in the out-group. Moreover, different levels of language proficiency could have been relevant as well. Discussion: The results of this experiment imply that we should focus on teamwork inside the classroom to prevent students from becoming isolated. Those who struggle or covet extra advice and coaching shall be supported to face the challenges and grow profitably.

- 4th Session: Observation and Analysis

The observation method for collecting data was direct observation conducted during the escape room activity, this involved observing students' interaction, participation, and language use.

Result: It was shown that better language skills took on leadership roles, and there was a positive correlation between not sitting on English and taking an active part, so they had more leaders than the other group. Analysis: This could imply that language proficiency may predict higher self-confidence and willingness to undertake leadership roles among students. Besides, a positive attitude toward English has been reported as a factor enhancing voluntary participation in learning activities (*UNESCO,* n.d.). Discussion: The observations and survey data seem to underscore the potential helpfulness of fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment in which students feel that every interaction is valued, and where any student is willing and able to contribute. In this situation, providing leadership opportunities and individual recognition might help increase confidence and motivation among the students.

- 5th Session: Adjustments and Improvements

Outcome: The researcher decided to integrate more project-based learning tasks in the game where individuals must collaborate on their part, for example: The Museum Heist, The Lost City, and The innovation challenge; which are games where students work together to brainstorm ideas, solve problems and present a final solution. Analysis: Making this change shows that students are more confident to share their parts and are more open to the opportunity of collaborative learning instead. Discussion: The researcher tried to break apart the individualism of the group by allowing for personal but cooperative work, this can assist in boosting confidence and inspire increased participation.

- 6th Session: Second Escape Room

The researcher conducted a second escape room where students were divided into two groups, as in the previous activity. It was a fictional game which has some changes, for example, simplified puzzles that required only basic logic and observation; the instructions were concise with visual aids and step-by-step guidance; and students were assigned specific roles in their teams, such as scientist, communicator, etc.

Results: the researcher noticed increased engagement, motivation, participation, and group collaboration. Analysis: As an analysis, it can be mentioned that the positive changes may be because of the adjustments made based on the previous activity with its observations and analysis. Discussion: The success of the activity highlights the importance of periodic guidance and the adaptation of the activities to the students.

- 7th Session: Evaluation and Reflection

Result: The teacher concluded that the escape room strategy promoted language acquisition and enhanced students' collaboration. Analysis: The teacher's reflection is an all-round evaluation of the efficacy of the escape room strategy. Identifying particular areas to improve shows that the teacher is dedicated to continuous professional development in improving his or her practice. Discussion: The teacher's observations would be useful in making later instructional decisions and formulating other interventions for students with certain learning difficulties.

After introducing the Escape Rooms in the English class, the researcher assesses this didactic methodology by observing that it significantly increases students' collaborative behavior in lessons. The participating students responded to the activity implementation with high motivation and engagement. According to the analysis, three overarching themes were obtained: Escape Room as a strategy for (1) a motivational tool for language learning, (2) collaborative learning, and (3) different learning styles.

• Overarching Theme 1. Escape Rooms as a Language Learning Motivational Tool

The major theme that emerged from the data within this study is that Escape rooms can fall under an overarching idea; it is a motivational strategy of learning by acting to be immersed in reality where the teaching/learning process takes place. Perhaps the goal-directed nature of an escape room may be particularly appealing to students in spurring their curiosity and desire to learn. Escape rooms will depict the language learning journey as more than a difficulty, but some adventures need to be thrilling and exciting (Dornyei, Z., 2001) (Table 1).

Table 1: **Escape Rooms as a Language Learning Motivational Tool**

Theme	Category	Descriptor
Motivation	Intrinsic	Enjoyment and interest in the activity
	Extrinsic	Rewards and recognition
Engagement	Active participation	Contribution to problem-solving
	Task commitment	Completion of the activity
Difficulty	Challenge level	Complexity of clues
	Zone of proximal development	Challenge that promotes learning
Adaptation	Personalization	Modification of activities based on student needs
	Inclusion	Consideration of different learning styles
Feedback	Immediate feedback	Responses to student actions

Source: Own elaboration.

• Overarching Theme 2. How Escape Rooms Enhance Group Learning

The second major theme that was discovered is that focusing on the advantage of peer interaction, because of how students solve puzzles and figure out challenges with each other to escape using Escape Rooms to promote collaborative problems (Nunan, D., 1992). Encouraging one another from the students makes language learning less of a scary task to do, and more enjoyable overall in a collaborative environment. In addition, they also teach students how to interact with each other (a key element in all great escape rooms) and develop strong social connections. (Table 2).

Table 2: **How Escape Rooms Enhance Group Learning**

Theme	Category	Descriptor
Teamwork	Collaboration	Interaction and mutual support
	Effective communication	Exchange of ideas and conflict resolution
Leadership	Decision-making	Assignment of roles and responsibilities
	Problem-solving	Identification and solution of obstacles
Group dynamics	Group cohesion	Sense of belonging and trust
	Conflict and negotiation	Management of disagreements and search for consensus solutions

Source: Own elaboration.

• Overarching Theme 3. Escape Rooms for Various Types of Learners

The third theme as derived from the data showed that the problem was effective in being tailored to many different learning styles. The Escape room is a tool, but rapid feedback research has proven values of inquiry (Kolb, 2012). Using different elements and strategies like: levels of difficulty for puzzles, interactive whiteboards, educational games, or online platforms, teachers can introduce a variety of opportunities for students to interact with the content and perform.

Visual Escape rooms are also a great choice for kids who learn best with lots of visuals. Classrooms can be filled with plenty of visual cues and puzzles. Visual learners usually get the best out of these clear and organized presentations of information (Gardner, H., 1983).

Additionally, there is an aspect for kinesthetic learners as well. Since escape rooms are hands-on. Some of the common features of an escape room include looking for hidden clues, solving puzzles and riddles, and physical interactions with the objects in the room itself. Get moving: kinesthetic learners with activities; for example, creating opportunities for movement and interaction that serve as interesting (and likely memorable) ways to learn for kinesthetic students (Fleming, N., 2001) (Table 3).

Table 3 Escape Rooms for Various Types of Learners

Theme	Category	Descriptor
Learning styles	Visual	Use of images and diagrams
	Auditory	Use of verbal cues and sounds
	Kinesthetic	Physical and manipulative activities
Special needs	Accommodations	Modifications for students with learning difficulties
Cultural diversity	Inclusion	Representation of different cultures

Source: Own elaboration.

CONCLUSIONS

The current research explored and illustrated the effectiveness of escape rooms as a collaborative learning tool in improving the proficiency of the English language among seventh graders. The findings of this study showed that this type of activity helps the students to work in teams, communicate, and solve problems-that is, the students were motivated to be on task throughout the activity.

- Enhanced teamwork and collaboration: Escape rooms make it easier for students to cooperate with their peers, learn how to collaborate fruitfully, share ideas, and support each other.
- Improved language skills: The students who participate in this study had the chance to put into practice, in meaningful and valid contexts, their English language.
- Increased motivation: The game-like nature of escape rooms provided stimulus for the students to be active participants in learning.
- Positive attitudes: Through the engaging character of the activities, students developed positive attitudes toward the learning of the English language.

- Learning styles: By incorporating a variety of elements or challenges, escape rooms can cater to different learning styles, ensuring that all students have opportunities to demonstrate their understanding.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has some limitations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, which might limit the generalizability of results to other populations consisting of larger and more diverse students. Secondly, the research was carried out in one institution, so it may not be very representative of the different educational contexts and student demographics. In addition, it focused mainly on seventh graders, its findings have limited applicability to other age groups. Lastly, there is always some degree of research bias in observing and interpreting student interactions.

FURTHER STUDIES

Future research should explore the effectiveness of escape rooms across different subjects, grade levels, and learning contexts. Further studies are vital to examine the long-term impact of the escape room activity. Furthermore, exploring the potential of technology-enhanced escape rooms, like Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) can significantly increase student engagement and provide more immersive learning opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study demonstrates the significant potential of escape rooms as an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing English language learning. By implementing escape room activities, teachers can create dynamic and collaborative learning experiences that foster student motivation and communication skills.

- Incorporate Escape Rooms on a regular basis: Educators can incorporate Escape rooms as part of English activities that are used to refer for learning and teamwork.

- Customize assignments: Modify the Escape Rooms to fit with what students are most interested in and need help with, thus making learning easier for everyone.

- Directions and support: Having clear guidelines that are simple to follow and supplemental help for those who need it is necessary to make the activities work.

- Evaluate and iterate: Escape Rooms should be reviewed for their efficacy periodically based on observed impact, to make changes necessary with the overall goal of improving learning.

Contribuciones de los autores

Brigida Priscilla Bucciarelli Mena: redacción de objetivos, introducción, recolección y análisis de datos, redacción de los resultados y discusión del manuscrito, revisión y edición.

Evelyn Verónica Almeida García: redacción de objetivos, introducción, conclusiones, recomendaciones y resumen; revisión y edición del manuscrito.

Implicaciones éticas

Las autoras declaran que no existen implicaciones éticas.

Conflicto de interés

Las autoras declaran que no existen conflictos de interés financieros o no financieros que podrían haber influido en el trabajo presentado en este artículo.

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REVISTA KRONOS

Teaching phonics to EFL adult learners

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ABSTRACT Phonics instruction strengthens letter-sound connections and enlarges both learning abilities and meaning. While phonics training remains efficient in teaching literacy to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, a significant discrepancy in research on young adult training at a Language institute at a Public University in Ecuador is still present. The current research aimed to determine the outcomes of precise and discerned phonics comprehensive schemes on literacy attainment among EFL students. A mixed-method approach with a descriptive scope, and a quasi-experimental design was applied. Twenty-two A2.2 level students from The Academic Language Institute actively participated in a seven-week phonics workshop. For the data gathering, two main tools were used, a survey identifying ten challenging words reported by A2.2 teachers and a series of pre- and post-test based on the workshop content. The results showed a significant main effect on students' reading comprehension, pronunciation, and listening skills with pronunciation being the highest achievement. Therefore, these findings underscore the importance of integrating phonics acquisition into EFL curricula to encourage overall language competence.

KEYWORDS Literacy skills, Phonics instruction, Achievement, English language.

Enseñanza de fonética a jóvenes estudiantes de inglés como idioma extranjero

RESUMEN La instrucción fonética refuerza las conexiones entre letra-sonido, y amplía tanto las habilidades de aprendizaje como su significado. Si bien es cierto, la instrucción fonética se mantiene como necesaria para enseñar inglés como lengua extranjera, aún existe discrepancia en la investigación acerca de enseñar fonética a adultos jóvenes en un instituto de idiomas en una universidad pública del Ecuador. Con esta premisa, la presente investigación tiene como objetivo determinar los resultados de esquemas de fonética que ayuden a los estudiantes a entenderla de mejor manera. Empleando un enfoque de métodos mixtos con un alcance descriptivo y un diseño cuasi experimental, el estudio involucró a veintidós estudiantes de nivel A2.2 del Instituto Académico de Idiomas. Los participantes realizaron talleres de fonética durante siete semanas. La recopilación de datos se basó en dos instrumentos principales: una encuesta que identificaba diez palabras destacadas reportadas por los docentes de A2.2 y una serie de pruebas previas y posteriores alineadas con el contenido de los talleres. Los resultados revelaron un efecto significativo en la comprensión lectora, la pronunciación y las habilidades auditivas de los estudiantes, siendo la pronunciación el logro más sustancial. Estos hallazgos subrayan la importancia de incorporar la instrucción fonética en los planes de estudio de EFL para fomentar la competencia lingüística integral

PALABRAS CLAVE Habilidades lectoras y escritoras, Instrucción fonética, Logro, Idioma inglés.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English phonics to Hispanic young adults who are native Spanish speakers and currently learning English can be considered an advanced topic. If gamification is not common for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in Latin America. Etymologies are often seen by teachers as pedantic matters unrelated to teaching or learning vocabulary, it could seem like a shot in the foot to propose to carry out phonology development activities through etymologies with students that hardly understand what these are or where they come from in their own language (Nieser & Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020).

Ecuadorian students taking EFL at the university level are commonly facing difficulties with pronunciation, particularly with broad vowels. It can be compared with a pyramid in which sounds expand from simple to challenging. Despite different difficulties, this challenging journey is worthwhile as immersing oneself in captivating rhymes and verses that can foster a more profound comprehension of the ear's intricacies and decipher the mysteries of English pronunciation.

Surprisingly, this challenge can be conquered in a relatively short period of time. Metaphors, such as the one created by the mysterious Cagliostro, prove to be invaluable tools in helping young adult students, who are native Spanish speakers learning English, grasp the subtle details of sound descriptions. Despite the complexity, we have chosen to embark on this linguistic adventure with Hispanic teenagers and young adults, all of whom share Spanish as their first language (Cortina-Pérez & Andúgar, 2021).

Learning phonics has been demonstrated to be the most effective method to learning how to read and write in English; therefore, a strong phonics approach is recommended (Nieser & Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020).

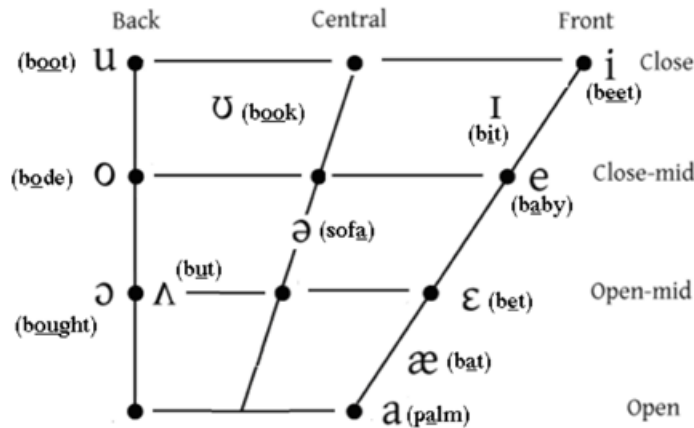The following chart is useful to understand how different sounds in our own language are produced.

Figure 1: Consonant Chart

Note. Adapted from The Speech Guide [Image], Copyright 2022, https://thespeechguide.com/place-manner-voice-chart/ Standard

Figure 2: Standard tongue position chart of English vowels

Note. Adapted from Standard tongue position chart of English, uploaded by Lan Wang, 2011. Research gate. Copyright b) standard tongue position chart of English | Download Scientific Diagram (researchgate.net)

Figure 3: Standard tongue position chart for English consonants
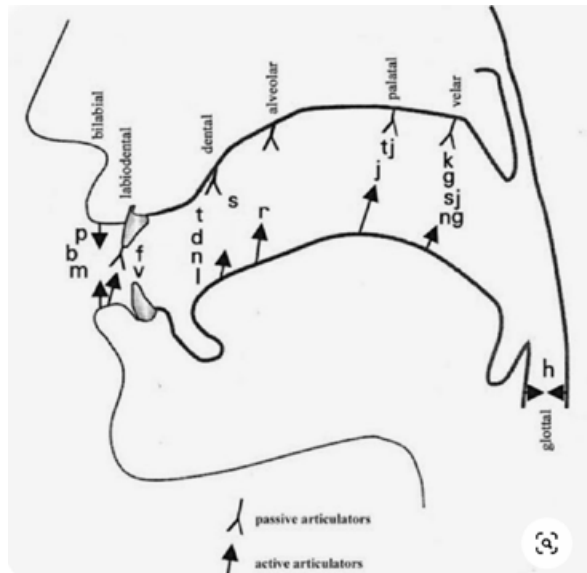
Note. Adapted from Standard tongue position chart of English, uploaded by Lan Wang, 2011. Research gate. Copyright b) standard tongue position chart of English | Download Scientific Diagram (researchgate.net)

METHODOLOGY

The present study aimed to determine the outcomes of precise and discerned phonics comprehensive schemes on literacy achievement among EFL students. This study employed a mixed-methods approach with a descriptive scope and a quasi-experimental design. The mixed-methods approach refers to combining both quantitative and qualitative data. According to Labaree (2020), quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and conducting statistical analysis, while qualitative research seeks to understand underlying concepts through descriptive analysis. This integration allowed for a more nuanced exploration of phonics instruction's impact on literacy achievement.

The target population was formed by 22 students at the A2.2 level enrolled in regular courses at the Academic Language Institute. Their age ranged from 19 to 37. This research utilized a convenience sampling method, choosing participants based on their availability and willingness to participate. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

1. Students registered at A2.2 level at the Academic Language Institute.
2. Students who agreed to be part of the research.

Table 1: Population

Level	Male	Female	Total
A2.2	11	11	22
	50%	50%	100%

Source: Direct Research

The intervention consisted of explicit and differentiated phonics instructional strategies implemented over a seven-week period. The instructional strategies included activities that focused on letter-sound relationships, phonemic awareness, and decoding skills. Differentiated instruction was used to customize learning experiences. Strategies varied according to learners' learning styles, including collaborative activities, individual feedback and even games. The workshops were conducted twice a week, each session lasting 60 minutes.

To assess the phonics instruction productivity, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The process was as follows. Firstly, it was necessary to identify troublesome words for learners. Then, an online survey was administered to A2.2 teachers so challenging words could be detected. Afterwards, a pre-test that consisted of dictating ten words to the students was executed to be able to evaluate students' abilities to accurately perceive and produce sounds. The intervention took seven weeks. Once it was completed, students were given the same evaluation as in the pre-test to notice any possible advances referring to phonics.

In addition, it is a must to note that students were always considered throughout the process since they were regularly interviewed, and valuable qualitative data about their phonics instruction were gathered. This was done through a process to evaluate their progress. Thus, students' pronunciation was analyzed to highlight areas of improvement or persistent difficulties. It helped to provide insights into typical difficulties with some specific sounds or phonics rules related to the ten words chosen for this research. This component showed how significantly students had improved their understanding of phonics.

To analyze the advance and the possible difference between learners' performance after and before the seven-week intervention, some statistical techniques like paired t-tests were used by examining data gathered from the pre- and post-tests. As reliability and accuracy are crucial in this type of research, the quantitative data were scrutinized with SPSS software while the qualitative used thematic analysis to determine insights about phonics such as efficacy and most importantly learners' engagement.

Following ethical procedures, students involved in this research were told not only about the study's aim but their right to drop out without any penalty along the intervention. Additionally, the Academic Language Institute Direction gave their approval.

Following the phonics teaching method proposed by Owl Tutors (2023), students first learn to identify the individual sounds of letters and then to combine those sounds to form words, as it can be seen below:

Step 1: Letter sounds: Students were taught to see a letter and say the sound it represents. At the same time students learned how to write these letters to form words using the correct formation. Some videos from YouTube were used for this purpose to support letter learning sound.

Step 2: Letter blending: to combine single sounds jointly to utter an entire word. They started with CVC (consonant, vowel, consonant), then CCVC and finally CVCC words. Examples: cut, sat, CVC; stop, plan CCVC; and milk, past CVCC respectively. Students arranged different combinations of letter to form words.

Step 3: Digraphs: once students checked individual letter sounds, they learned to read and write consonant digraphs like ng, sh, ch as well as vowel digraphs like ea, oo, ai. Right after students moved on to sounding out whole words such as blood, hair, schedule, glacier, etc. at the same time students were taught about common exception words, the ones that do not follow the normal phonics rules: example he, she, was, they, all, since, heart, among others.

Step 4: Alternative graphemes: Students also learned that one sound can be represented by graphemes. For example, 'eigh' for eight, "a_e" for take, 'ai' for rain. Alternative pronunciations for graphemes were also reviewed, e.g. 'ea' as in break, sea, head, heart. Students enjoyed using their phonics skills to decipher and try new words.

Step 5: Fluency and Accuracy: At the end, students spelled and read many familiar words in the right way. They became more fluent readers and accurate spellers. Moreover, they learned to develop speed, fluency and more importantly comprehension. (How to teach Phonics: A Step-by-Step Guide, 2023).

RESULTS

After detecting the learner's needs by conducting a survey with A2.2 teachers, some academic actions were put into practice to consolidate knowledge. This phase took seven weeks of intervention workshops focused on phonics, emphasizing reading comprehension, listening and spelling using worksheets during two hours per week within the normal schedule. These activities were engaging for learners and met their needs of improving pronunciation.

Seven professors participated in the survey which consisted of four specific questions which objective was to grasp A2.2 level teachers' opinion on problems related to phonics instruction in this level. Also, there were two open ended questions which allowed professors to give qualitative feedback and suggest additional problem areas, as well. The survey aimed to get the most troublesome words for A2.2 level learners. The feedback provided was key to choose ten most words used in both the workshops and later assessments. The table below summarizes the results gotten:

1. Pronunciation difficulties Frequency: Professors ranked how often students had problems with pronouncing some specific words.

Table 2: Frequency of pronunciation difficulties

Word	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
Since	0	2	1	4
Cut	2	0	3	2
Lettuce	0	1	1	5
Glacier	0	0	2	5
Stomach	0	2	1	4
Viral	0	0	4	3
Heart	1	3	3	0
Small	2	3	2	0
Bitter	1	2	3	1
Schedule	0	0	2	5

Words like "Since," "Lettuce," "Glacier," and "Schedule" were reported as consistently problematic for students, with most teachers marking them as "Always" challenging.

"Heart," "Small," and "Bitter" showed more variability in responses, indicating they were less consistently challenging.

Teachers also suggested other challenging words for students, such as "friends," "headache," "comfortable," "potato," "danger," "listen," "swum," "sung," "tomato," and "interesting."

Referring to difficult sounds of phonemes, teachers identified the most difficult phonemes for students, such as $/ʌ/$ as in "cut" and $/æ/$ as in "cat,"$/ɜː/$ as in "bird" which were marked by most teachers as challenging.

Finally, Strategies like Phonetic Drills, Minimal Pairs Practice, Visual Aids, Repetition and Drilling, and Peer Feedback. This question sought to identify best practices and inform the instructional strategies used in the phonics workshops.

A post-test identical in structure to the pre-test was given to students after the intervention to measure the success of phonics teaching methods on the learners' literacy attainment. The tests' purpose was to evaluate learners' ability to identify and correctly pronounce sounds related to the target vocabulary.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPPSS) was used to conduct a paired samples t-test to compare mean scores before and after the process of intervention. This helped to determine if it was significant in terms of showing improvement in students' phonics skills.

Table 3: Paired Samples T-test Results for Pre- and Post-test Scores

Measure	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Difference	95% CI for the Difference	t	df	p (two-tailed)	Effect Size (Cohen's d)	Effect Size (Hedges' g)
Mean (SD)	4.45 (2.483)	6.77 (3.085)	2.318	[0.580, 4.056]	2.773	21	0.011	0.591	0.570

The paired samples t-test revealed a significant improvement in the students' scores from the pre-test to the post-test. The mean score on the pre-test was 4.45 (SD = 2.483), while the mean score on the post-test increased to 6.77 (SD = 3.085). The mean difference of 2.318 (SD = 3.920) was statistically significant, t (21) = 2.773 t (21) = 2.773 t (21)=2.773, p=.011p = .011p=.011 (two-tailed), with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.580 to 4.056.

To further interpret the magnitude of this improvement, effect sizes were calculated. Cohen's d was found to be 0.591, indicating a moderate effect size, while Hedges'g, which accounts for small sample sizes, was 0.570. It means the intervention had a moderate and meaningful progress on the learners' phonics abilities.

The explicit and differentiated phonics teaching strategies used in this research produced significant improvements in the phonics skills of EFL learners. It was evidenced by the increased post-test scores and a moderate effect size. The study leads to conclude that it was not only significant in terms of statistics but showed practical implications on improving learning outcomes.

With the data obtained from the survey, the pre and post-test, an excel database was made that allowed the homogenization of the information. SPSS statistical software was used to analyze the results. A frequency and mean comparison were done to access the learner's performance before and after the intervention.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research indicate that explicit and differentiated phonics instruction is a helpful tool to develop literacy skills in EFL learners. A meaningful improvement in pronunciation challenges as well as in phonics skills were shown in the post-test, with gains in reference to specific phonemes. These results highlight the importance of teaching phonics to young adults learning EFL. It emphasizes the need for incorporating phonics-based instruction curricula that can help learners achieve fluency and accuracy in both spoken and written English as stated by Hanson (2022) and Almuslimi (2020).

It is important to mention that the survey applied to A2.2 professors showed that learners at this level usually struggle with /□□/ as in "bird." This information was shown in the pre-test results, where a need for focused pronunciation practiced was revealed. Having these challenging phonemes in mind, the phonics workshop was created and gave learners structured and repetitive practice, and according to the results it proved to be effective. And this was also corroborated in other studies made by Ortín & Simonet (2022).

Techniques such as repetition of sentence pairs as well as including sight word recognition showed effectiveness on enhancing reading and comprehension and listening skills since learners were more familiar with the sounds and rhythm of the language. Miranda

and Wahyudin (2023) stated that teaching phonics is key for improving reading, writing and pronunciation

As noted by Miranda and Wahyudin (2023), phonics instruction is crucial not only for reading and writing but also for pronunciation—a usually overlooked element of traditional EFL learning. This study further supports that explicit phonics instruction enhances sound-symbol association, fundamental for reading fluency and comprehension.

This also supports the use of contrastive analysis between English and Spanish phonologies to enhance pronunciation learning. Given the shared and distinct phonetic characteristics between the two languages, it is vital for EFL teachers to highlight these contrasts in their instruction. Previous studies, such as those by Andrä et al. (2020), suggest that adult learners can benefit from understanding these differences, as they help in adjusting their articulatory settings for English pronunciation.

Furthermore, this approach is further validated by the significant gains seen in students' pronunciation scores after the phonics workshops. What helped students to better understand and produce the target sounds was to focus on common and unique sounds. In addition, methods like minimal pairs and visual aids were also helpful during the intervention.

Despite the importance of phonics instruction, research in public universities on this topic remains limited in Ecuador since there are issues about limited use of technology as well as the use of traditional teaching methods. This study addresses this gap by demostrating that explicit phonics instruction can significantly enhance the pronunciation, reading comprehension, and listening skills of young adult EFL learners. Given the moderate effect size found in this study, it is recommended that similar phonics-based instructional strategies be integrated into the EFL curriculum across language institutes to see a better and higher impact.

In addition, some interactive activities like, Hangman, Bingo and free applications like Quizlet showed to be effective in the teaching of phonics to be able to cover the different ways students learn. As the focus of this study was to develop literacy skills, systematic phonics instruction was coring all the time.

The results of this study suggest that the teaching of EFL should incorporate strategies based on phonics for maximum effectiveness. The impact of context-specific phonic practices and long-term retention among learners should also be examined. It is recommended to expand this research to include a larger sample size with students from various regions of the country to provide more meaningful phonics instruction in different contexts.

In conclusion, the explicit and differentiated phonics instructional strategies employed in this work proved effective in addressing the pronunciation challenges faced by Spanish-speaking EFL learners. This highlights the need for more targeted phonics interventions in EFL curricula, particularly in regions where English exposure is limited. Moreover, early phonics instruction could also prove to help learners improve pronunciation skills and avoid problems when taking EFL classes at university.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study have a series of important implications for the future practice of teaching phonics regarding the improvement of pronunciation, reading-comprehension, listening and spelling. To begin with, it is key to recognize that students' pronunciation is a vital aspect that should be of interest for every EFL professor. When students feel confident in their pronunciation, and can make themselves understood, their confidence and empowerment increase notably.

This research has gotten the following conclusions:

• Educators ought to be aware of learners' challenges associated with achieving correct pronunciation, especially with problematic words and phonemes shown in this research.

• The authors suggest having teachers with expertise in phonics in the first levels of study to help learners be aware of their phonics skills to avoid error fossilization.

• The clear and customized phonics intervention resulted in meaningful improvements in learners' pronunciation, something that lets them reduce their affective filter and gain confidence on speaking the language. It is clear the intervention led to gain confidence while speaking.

• This research emphasizes the strong need for integrating phonics acquisition methods into EFL teaching to provide stronger overall language skills at university level.

• Similar studies with larger samples should be conducted to have an overall view of how positive it may be teaching phonics to university level students to get a generalized and definite sight of the impact on improving learners' skills.

CONTRIBUCIONES DE LOS AUTORES

Mirian Cleopatra Cuenca Fernandez: investigación, parte final de la metodología, recursos, resultados, borrador original redacción, curacion de datos, revisión y edición.

Mariela Teresa Herrera Bonilla: encuesta de investigación, metodología, conceptualización, discusión, conclusiones, resultados, validación estadística, análisis formal, redacción – curación de datos, revisión y edición.

IMPLICACIONES ÉTICAS

Las autoras declaran que no existen implicaciones éticas, y su participacion es voluntaria.

CONFLICTO DE INTERÉS

Las autoras declaran que no existen conflictos de interés financieros o no financieros que podrían haber influido en el trabajo presentado en este artículo.

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REVISTA KRONOS

Improving English Speaking Skills using the SmallTalk2Me Artificial Intelligence-Based Tool: An Innovative Approach in Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT Artificial Intelligence is covering all areas of science and English Language learning is not the exception. Therefore, this study examines how the AI-based tool SmallTalk2Me enhances English-speaking skills among A2-level secondary students in a private high school. Using an exploratory design, pre- and post-intervention assessments revealed significant improvements in pronunciation and fluency, highlighting the tool's potential for fostering interactive learning environments. Furthermore, students displayed increased confidence and engagement in speaking activities, which fostered a more dynamic learning environment. Therefore, these results highlight the importance of SmallTalk2Me artificial intelligence-based tools in helping to improve speaking skills in a more interactive way.

KEYWORDS SmallTalk2Me; AI-based learning tools; English Speaking Skills; Pronunciation and Fluency; English Language Learning.

Mejora de las habilidades de expresión oral en inglés mediante la herramienta basada en inteligencia artificial SmallTalk2Me: Un enfoque innovador en la educación secundaria.

RESUMEN La inteligencia artificial está abarcando todas las áreas de la ciencia, y el aprendizaje del idioma inglés no es la excepción. Por ello, este estudio examina cómo la herramienta basada en inteligencia artificial SmallTalk2Me mejora las habilidades de expresión oral en inglés entre estudiantes de nivel A2 en una institución secundaria privada. A través de un diseño exploratorio, las evaluaciones realizadas antes y después de la intervención revelaron mejoras significativas en la pronunciación y la fluidez, destacando el potencial de la herramienta para fomentar entornos de aprendizaje interactivos. Además, los estudiantes mostraron un aumento en la confianza y la participación en las actividades orales, lo que contribuyó a un entorno de aprendizaje más dinámico. Por lo tanto, estos resultados resaltan la importancia de las herramientas de inteligencia artificial como SmallTalk2Me para mejorar las habilidades de expresión oral de manera más interactiva

PALABRAS CLAVE SmallTalk2Me; Herramientas de aprendizaje basadas en IA; Destrezas orales en inglés; Pronunciación y fluidez; Aprendizaje del idioma inglés.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, the ability to communicate effectively in English is essential for academic success. The ideal situation for students in Ecuador is to achieve a high level of proficiency in English speaking skills, enabling them to engage confidently in classroom discussions, collaborate with peers on projects, and access a wide range of educational resources. In fact, Brown and Green (2022) state that this proficiency not only boosts students' learning experience but also prepares them for advanced studies and academic pursuits in a globalized educational environment.

Nevertheless, many Ecuadorian students struggle to develop these important speaking skills. Although the importance of English is widely recognized, students are often reluctant to speak in class, resulting in a lack of confidence and skills. In this regard, Creswell (2014) suggests the gap between ideal situations and current reality highlights the need for effective interventions to help students overcome language difficulties.

Research has demonstrated the potential of AI-based tools in language learning. For instance, De la Vall and Araya (2023) underscore that AI tools provide personalized learning experiences that address individual student needs. Similarly, Katsarou et al. (2023) state that AI-driven platforms boost engagement by offering real-time feedback and adaptive learning pathways. However, despite these benefits, these studies fail to account for challenges such as the digital divide, which limits access for students in under-resourced schools. Additionally, AI-based tools rely on pre-programmed algorithms that may not fully accommodate individual learning styles or cultural variations in language use (Rahimi & Zhang, 2020). Consequently, these limitations suggest the need for a more nuanced approach that integrates AI tools without over-relying on technology as a sole instructional method.

This research has relevance beyond the classroom because it addresses a critical issue that affects not only students, but also educators and policymakers. The results of this study will help improve the overall quality of education in Ecuador by improving English language skills, which will ultimately benefit students' academic and career futures (Creswell, 2014).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the SmallTalk2Me AI tool in improving the speaking skills of low-income students. Indeed, the research questions focus on how incorporating this tool affects students' confidence and proficiency in speaking English skills. Without intervention this situation shows little potential for improvement, highlighting the importance of this research in identifying effective strategies to support language development (De la Wall & Araya, 2023).

This research adopted a quantitative approach, utilizing descriptive statistical methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of SmallTalk2Me. The study is exploratory in nature, focusing on a specific group of 15 lower education students in a private school in Loja, Ecuador. It is necessary to point out that limitations may include the small sample size and the specific context of the study, which may affect the generalizability of the findings (Creswell, 2014).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This framework examines the efficacy of SmallTalk2Me, an AI-based tool, in enhancing English-speaking skills. It explores AI tools in language education, key components of speaking proficiency, and relevant studies. The first section focuses on SmallTalk2Me's application in language learning, its capabilities, and its pedagogical implications. The review also critically assesses the advantages of AI tools, including adaptive learning and real-time feedback,

while acknowledging challenges such as potential over-reliance on technology and accessibility gaps in different educational backgrounds.

The second section contains some aspects of speaking using the English language that go beyond the learning of the language structure and vocabulary. These include grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, discourse management, fluency and interactive communication, essential factors in effective speech delivery. There is therefore a need to know these factors to convincingly assess and explain how some AI devices, such as SmallTalk2Me may assist in skills acquisition and enhance students' performance levels. Overall, by integrating these components, this theoretical framework provides a comprehensive foundation for assessing the impact of SmallTalk2Me on improving English speaking skills among students.

USE OF AI-BASED TOOLS (SMALLTALK2ME)

AI-driven tools like SmallTalk2Me have transformed language instruction by providing personalized feedback and enhancing engagement (Vera, 2023). Nevertheless, despite these advantages, AI tools are not without limitations. Indeed, Katsarou et al. (2023) state that their effectiveness is contingent upon technological access and student digital literacy. Furthermore, while AI provides immediate feedback, it lacks the human intuition necessary for nuanced language instruction, such as recognizing contextual appropriateness and cultural variations in speech (Rahimi & Zhang, 2020). This calls for a balanced approach, where AI tools supplement rather than replace traditional teaching methods.

AI IN EDUCATION

AI technologies like machine learning and natural language processing have been used to enhance the learning process. They are personalized learning aids, task administration automation tools that have real-time feedback for learners. Katsarou et al. (2023) noted that AI technologies can improve student learning through personalized instructions.

Moreover, Zou et al. (2023) say recent advancements in AI have led to the creation of more sophisticated and effective educational tools. In the past, AI was only applied to rule-based systems and simple data manipulations that offered partial support alone. This is, however, now possible with machine learning and natural language processing which allows for conversational approaches involving students.

AI-BASED TOOLS FOR SPEAKING SKILLS

It is worth noting that AI-based tools aimed at improving oral communication skills focus on enhancing students' ability to communicate effectively in spoken English. These tools apply the latest technologies such as speech recognition and natural language processing for providing feedback (Ahmed et al., 2020). Thus, they aim to build students' confidence and competence in speaking by simulating conversational scenarios and offering targeted practice.

AI tools for speaking skills utilize speech recognition and natural language processing (NLP) to provide real-time feedback on pronunciation and fluency (Smith & Jones, 2022). However, these systems often struggle with accent bias, as their algorithms are trained on standardized pronunciations, potentially disadvantaging non-native speakers

with regional variations (Brown & Green, 2022). In addition, Suzuki (2021) mentions that while AI can analyze speech patterns, it does not foster spontaneous conversation or pragmatic competence, which are essential for real-world communication. Hence, AI should be integrated alongside interactive, human-led discussions to ensure comprehensive language development.

SPECIFIC AI TOOL: SMALLTALK2ME

"SmallTalk2Me" is an innovative AI tool which is specifically designed to help learners improve their spoken English skills. According to Manggiasih et al. (2023) this tool applies advanced AI technologies that render learning experiences interactive and adaptive, concentrating on speech improvement. "SmallTalk2Me," with its attributes like speech recognition and natural language processing, thus, holistically approaches language practice.

For Kim and Zhang (2021) the tool can be used by teachers for personalizing practice exercises, tracking student development, and providing focused responses. Therefore, this method of instruction aims at making language teaching more effective, while also helping students develop their speaking skills.

By and large, the effectiveness of "SmallTalk2Me" is determined based on how much it can boost students' fluency in speaking and participation in the various stages of instruction. In addition, Patel (2021) states that by giving feedback and interactive drills in real time mode this system assists learners to realize improved self-assurance and competence in spoken English.

OVERVIEW OF SMALLTALK2ME

SmallTalk2Me functions as a real-time personal tutor by using speech recognition to provide interactive conversation simulations and personalized feedback. In this regard, Nguyen et al. (2024) argue that this approach distinguishes "SmallTalk2Me" from others because it diversifies its activities depending on learner characteristics and provides online feedback. In fact, these researchers say that this AI tool has three main components that include an interactive conversation simulation: adaptive learning paths. However, while SmallTalk2Me offers valuable pronunciation and fluency support, it should be integrated with human-led activities to ensure well-rounded language development.

This tool on its part claims to be a supplementary e-learning tool meant for use alongside traditional teaching methodologies. Lee & Chen (2023) stand out that teachers can introduce this software inside their programs to add more opportunities for spoken practice in English. This made instruction better overall thus enabling students who use this program to reach their educational goals faster.

IMPLEMENTATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Incorporating " SmallTalk2Me " in the classroom, some necessary steps must be followed to ensure it is an effective tool in supporting language learning. To do this, teachers must incorporate the tool into their already existing plans and guide students on effective application. Ulinuha and Parnawati (2024) suggests this AI tool may help traditional language teaching by including interactive practice sessions and feedback for each student.

Moreover, by analyzing the performance of this tool, teachers can monitor students' progress and support them if necessary. This method helps reinforce learning objectives while meeting individual students' needs.

To prove SmallTalk2Me's overall classroom effectiveness, we must evaluate its impact on students' speaking skills and overall engagement in the educational process. According to Olinhoa and Binawati (2024), by incorporating such a resource into language teaching, teachers improve the quality of learning in classrooms which helps students acquire the speaking skills needed for their activities outside the classroom. Based on this scenario, this scheme aims to maximize the benefits of AI technology in language teaching.

ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS

English speaking skills are a crucial component of language acquisition, encompassing various elements such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and interactive communication. These skills are essential for effective verbal communication and are fundamental to achieving proficiency in the English language. According to Lee and Chen (2023), developing strong speaking skills is vital for students to succeed in both academic and social contexts.

Indeed, AI-based tools can help learners practice and get feedback on their English-speaking skill development. Learners have an opportunity to practice speaking through AI-based tools using interactive environments where they can receive feedback in real-time about their progress. The integration of Artificial Intelligence technology into teaching languages facilitates mastering these indispensable speaking abilities (Miller, 2022).

FLUENCY

Fluency is another essential component of effective English communication skills. Fluency refers to the ability to communicate smoothly and effortlessly, while accuracy involves using correct grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. (Brown, 2020). These aspects contribute to the overall proficiency and successful communication in the English language.

According to Peltonen (2022) the ability to communicate fluently, despite occasional grammatical errors, does not hinder effective communication. This notion aligns with Suzuki's (2021) assertion that fluency develops when speakers engage in meaningful and comprehensible interactions. In fact, the usage of AI tools might encourage students to employ communication techniques and compare their own progress, serving as indicators of fluency development. The author additionally underlines that these factors develop through practice and self-observation and suggests the necessity of being offered certain basic skills such as pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary for perfect imitation in learners.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

The role of AI in the process of language teaching has brought about a new age of learning by allowing learners with speaking skill deficits and problems to use the language in an active manner. Recently, there have been several works performed about technology and the usage of AI tools for the acquisition of a second and foreign language, which emphasize their effectiveness and scope of application in transformation of traditional forms of

teaching. As regards, these are devices such as SmallTalk2Me which have been shown to enhance the English-speaking ability of students through real time speaking practice, conversational rehearsals, and learner centered scenarios (Manggiasih et al., 2023).

AI tools also allow us to maintain a conducive learning space while meeting the unique lessons that are important for the satisfactory need of every learner. Also, in the work study conducted by Muthmainnah and Alsbbagh (2024) there was emphasis on self-regulated learning with the use of AI applications and their efficacy in the EFL classrooms. They can alter language task difficulty levels using AI tools which in turn ensure that each of the learners is involved with the proportion of their potential. This ability is essential for learning to speak, since every child can learn differently. This shows how AI tools such as SmallTalk2Me are capable of helping individual learners with their linguistic competence whilst also contributing to the motivations and participation of students.

To sum up, the existing literature on AI language tools for language learning, both as more or less compiled by Zhang and Zou (2022), Muthmainnah et al. (2024), and Limones (2024), highlights how this Further Plan resonates with students' speaking improvement goals in high school. SmallTalk2Me, for instance, integrates conversational practice with feedback and grammar support, which is a rare but highly useful combination in contemporary language classrooms. With the ongoing utilization of AI-based tools in educational institutions, the effectiveness of language learning subsequently improves with ease on the students' part in speaking out the language- in this case, English. Sooner or later, such processes of integrating these technologies into the work of educational establishments might raise the level of teaching foreign languages in the modern world.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at a Private High School in Loja, Ecuador, during the 2024-2025 academic year. The study uses a quantitative approach, in which descriptive statistical techniques were used to collect data. To evaluate the SmallTalk2Me AI tool aimed at improving English-speaking skills, the researcher used a pre-test and a post-test. Indeed, these tests were conducted considering parameters such as fluency, pronunciation, grammar vocabulary and interactive communication.

RESEARCH SETTING

During the academic period 2024-2025, a private high school in Loja, Ecuador was the setting for this research. This high school is well-equipped with essential resources such as computers, a stable internet connection, suitable headphones, and other technologies, all of which contributed to the project's effective execution. Overall, these tools facilitated the effective use of the SmallTalk2Me tool to improve students' English-speaking abilities.

PARTICIPANTS

The study comprised 15 tenth-grade students, an equal number of boys and females, aged 14 to 15 years. It is necessary to point out that convenience sampling was used to choose participants based on accessibility and availability. Besides, all participants had an A2 level of English proficiency, according to the Common European Framework of

Reference for Languages (CEFR). Indeed, parental approval was acquired to ensure ethical compliance while including students in this investigation.

RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

The investigation used a quantitative approach. This aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the AI tool's impact on students' speaking skills. The research design was based on an action research model, that according to Creswell (2014) underscores an iterative improvement of English-speaking abilities via cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. In this regard, given the objectives, the study used an exploratory approach to investigate the impact of SmallTalk2Me on students' willingness and ability to speak English.

DATA COLLECTION SOURCES AND TECHNIQUES

To examine the impact of the SmallTalk2Me tool on students' English-speaking skills, data were gathered using quantitative instruments. The testing strategy included both pre-tests and post-tests to assess the impact of the SmallTalk2Me tool on students' speaking skills. These exams were taken from the AI tool as they were carefully designed, measuring skills like fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, providing a direct quantitative comparison before and after the intervention (Brown & Green, 2022). It is worth noting that the pre-test and post-test allowed for an objective assessment of growth in English speaking abilities, revealing important information about the tool's usefulness.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analyzing the speaking performance was done by combining the results of two sets of data: descriptive and inferential statistics obtained from the pre-tests and post-tests. It was preferable to follow sequentially the normality test (using the Shapiro-Wilk test) to decide which statistical test to use on the data. Whenever the data from the samples were found to be normal distributions, the paired samples t-tests were carried out to check whether there were significant differences in the means of the pre-test and the meaning of the speaking post-test of the students who had received the interventions before. The software Jamovi served the purpose of both processing and analyzing the data effectively. These tests were chosen based on the recommendation of Creswell (2014) since it is important to conduct normalization tests to resolve the problems of how to use suitable statistical approaches in the research. By and large, thematic analysis provided insights into the students' attitudes and perspectives which added more context to the quantitative findings.

This quantitative approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of the objective improvements in speaking skills, ensuring a thorough evaluation of the intervention's effectiveness. As Brown and Green (2022) note, quantitative data provides a well-rounded assessment of educational tools, making it possible to draw meaningful conclusions from statistical trends.

PROCEDURE

To ensure that the AI tool was sufficiently scrutinized, the evaluation of the tool and the intervention were well planned and executed regarding the nature of the problem. To start with, in the observation phase, the researcher had noticed the students' unwillingness to engage in English speaking activities in classes. During this period, some of the causes of this unwillingness such as anxiety and lack of confidence were singled out. This initial ana- lysis formed the cut-off point for the intervention and gave an idea of how the students in this investigation viewed speaking in English.

The next step in the evolution of the study took the form of the planning phase – this is where the intervention developed the plans to incorporate the SmallTalk2Me AI tool. Teaching students to open lesson activities was constructed around the Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) model (Harmer, 2007). This lesson plan was chosen for its rigidity and at the same time flexibility, resulting in the most suitable one for the study. Besides that, the planning stage included formulating the aims of every lesson activity so that students were aware that speaking practice is possible in a safe and non-threatening environment. As well as during other stages of planning, detailed outlines of the lessons were also prepared that assigned role-plays, practice and feedback assisted by the AI tool.

The action phase began after the planning phase, in the form of classroom interaction for a period of eight weeks. The SmallTalk2Me tool was integrated into practice activities to allow students to participate in role-play activities as conversationalists. Indeed, students started with direct conversations to help them get used to the tool, after which they were encouraged to engage in speaking activities with less guidance. Thus, they began to speak with more confidence, beginning with highly structured practice to less dependent production.

There is no doubt that during each phase, feedback was obtained from students, and their progress was monitored during the reflection phase. This phase was underlying for adjusting the intervention when appropriate depending on the responses and difficulties the students experienced. If, for instance, a group of students had difficulties in some topics because of their pronunciation or fluency issues, they were given additional relevant exercises in the next sessions. This thoughtful action made sure that the intervention was targeted and effective for the participants and improved with every cycle.

Overall, this research came to an end with the analysis and reporting phase, which redesigned and organized all the relevant information with an intention of showing how SmallTalk2Me affected students' oral English. The quantitative data regarding learners' knowledge of the AI tool, pre-tests, post-tests, were evaluated together to assess the level of skill acquisition. These last steps were very useful when considering what the effects of the intervention in the language learning context were and what implications could be drawn regarding the usage of AI tools in language learning.

RESULTS

Correspondingly, within this section, the results of the intervention plan directed towards enhancing the speaking skills of the participants through the use of the AI Small-Talk2Me tool are presented. The results are viewed in the light of pretest and posttest results and statistical analysis producing an all-round assessment of the impact the tool had on the development of speaking ability. Moreover, this section also shows how the goals of the study have been achieved during the whole research. Thus, the results are illustrated by means of tables and with detailed accounts or interpretations portraying

the development in pronunciation, fluency and other components of speaking ability attained by the respondents.

<div style="text-align:center">

PRE-TEST AND POST TEST RESULTS

</div>

Objective one:

To assess the effectiveness of SmallTalk2Me artificial intelligence-based tool in improving English speaking skills among tenth grade students.

<div style="text-align:center">

PRE-TEST RESULTS

</div>

Table 1. Pre-test. Central measures of Speaking skills

	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Fluency (2.5 points)	15	1.35	0.43	1	2.5
Pronunciation (2.5 points)	15	1.35	0.43	1	2.25
Vocabulary (2.5 points)	15	1.43	0.44	1	2.5
Grammar (2.5 points)	15	1.30	0.37	1	2
TOTAL (10 points)	15	5.18	1.24	4	8.75

The research group performed qualitative content analysis using a pre-test to gather descriptive averages regarding the speaking ability indicators. The basic measurements of the various parameters which are as follows – mean, standard deviation (SD), minimum and maximum values are presented in Table 1. In the paragraphs below, there is an analysis and interpretation of each indicator's data.

However, since the results show that the average "fluency" score is 1.35 (SD = 0.43), with scores ranging between 1.00 and 2.50, then it is obvious that most of the students still had a slight level of concentration in performing a few tasks. It is apparent that some students had better communication skills as the highest score demonstrates quite a number who performed better with the speaking tasks. A standard deviation as low as this indicates little spread, which might indicate variability in experience in speaking and/or exposure to English.

Secondly, it was established that for "pronunciation" scores, the mean is 1.35 (SD = 0.43) with a minimum of 1.00 and maximum of 2.25, These findings suggest that most of the sample is able at least at basic level to pronounce words correctly, though there exists substantial variation across the sample. Hence, the limited range of results indicates that students' pronunciation abilities are comparable, and overall performance may necessitate targeted interventions to increase clarity and accuracy in spoken English.

The "grammar" scores average 1.30 (SD = 0.37), with a minimum of 1.00 and a maximum of 2.00. The mean suggests that most students have just a basic understanding of grammar, which may limit their ability to compose correct sentences in spoken English.

The comparatively low standard deviation indicates that students' grammatical abilities are more consistent than other indicators, suggesting that concentrated grammar education might improve the group.

Overall, the pre-test results show that learners have basic speaking abilities in all categories, with small strengths in vocabulary. However, all areas require underlying work to achieve higher English- speaking competence levels.

POST-TEST RESULTS

Table 2. Post-test. Central measures of Speaking skills

	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Fluency (2.5 points)	15	1.8	0.30	1.5	2.5
Pronunciation (2.5 points)	15	1.83	0.33	1.5	2.5
Vocabulary (2.5 points)	15	1.8	0.31	1.5	2.5
Grammar (2.5 points)	15	1.77	0.26	1.5	2.25
TOTAL (10 points)	15	7.2	1.2	6	9.75

This table shows the post-test results after the intervention plan was applied. The post-test statistics reveal that each indicator improved from the pre-test, demonstrating the intervention's favorable influence on students' speaking skills.

The average "fluency" score is 1.80 (SD = 0.30), with a range of 1.50 to 2.50. This shows a moderate degree of fluency across the group, with some students approaching the maximum limit. This improvement, compared to the pre-test mean of 1.42, suggests that students were able to communicate more freely and spontaneously by the end of the intervention. This large increase in fluency indicates that the post-test gave a clearer chance for students to practice uninterrupted speaking, resulting in improved expressiveness and comfort throughout their speech.

The "pronunciation" score is 1.83 (SD = 0.33), with a range of 1.50 to 2.50. This score is much higher than the pre-test average of 1.28. The enhanced pronunciation score indicates that learners made improvement in creating clearer and more precise sounds, with a few students receiving the highest possible score in this area. The increased consistency in pronunciation throughout the group indicates that students were able to understand more accurate pronunciation skills following the intervention, which was a major emphasis of the post-test.

On the other hand, the "vocabulary" average score is 1.80 (SD = 0.31), with values ranging from 1.50 to 2.50. This is somewhat higher than the pre-test means of 1.43, indicating improvement in the use of suitable and diverse language. The development in this area can be attributed to continual practice and exposure to a new language throughout the course. Although students' language use varied, the post-test findings indicated a greater capacity to incorporate taught terminology into their replies. Interestingly, vocabulary was the second highest-scoring factor, after only Pronunciation, emphasizing the significance of vocabulary development in total language ability.

With a range of 1.50 to 2.25, the average score for "grammar" is 1.77 (SD = 0.26). This is a modest increase above the pre-test mean of 1.27. While grammar application improved, it remained the lowest signal in the post-test, as it had been in the pre-test, indicating that students continue to struggle with consistent grammatical accuracy. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the positive change suggests that there was advancement in better sentence structure.

The post-test statistics show that the intervention significantly improved students' speaking skills across the board, with the most noticeable gains in Pronunciation and Fluency. Grammar made progress, but it remains a difficulty for many participants. The increase in vocabulary shows considerable progress; however, variability persists, suggesting that additional intervention might further enhance students' language skills.

STATISTICAL COMPARISONS OF PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST

Table 3 Normality test Shapiro Wilk of the pretest and posttest about Speaking skills

	Shapiro-Wilk	
	W	p
Pretest	0.899	0.025
Posttest	0.923	0.105

The Shapiro-Wilk test findings for the pretest and posttest data on speaking abilities provide underlying information about data distribution. The pretest (W = 0.899, p = 0.025) has a p-value of less than 0.05, suggesting that the data does not follow a normal distribution. This shows that the distribution of speaking skill ratings before the intervention was skewed or abnormal in some way. This might be due to factors such as a greater range in student performance or other variables that influenced the results at the start of the research.

In contrast, the posttest (W = 0.923, p = 0.105) has a p-value larger than 0.05, indicating that the data follows a normal distribution. This means that the speaking skills scores following the intervention are more equally distributed and follow a standard distribution pattern, with less skew. This transition from a non-normal to a normal distribution may imply a more consistent gain in speaking abilities because of the intervention under consideration.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of the AI tool SmallTalk2Me on the speaking abilities of A2-level students in an EFL setting. To investigate this, an action research technique was used, including pretests and posttests. The investigation took off with the main research question which was formulated as follows: How does the SmallTalk2Me artificial intelligence-based tool enhance English speaking skills among Tenth-grade students at a private high school, 2024-2025 academic year? Besides, the sub-question: How effective is the SmallTalk2Me artificial intelligence-based tool in assessing English

speaking skills among tenth grade students? was added to address some of the more specific aspects to the research.

First, the study's results offer a kind of evidence that can be adequately described as proof of SmallTalk2Me's ability to assist students in improving speaking abilities. In answer to the main study question, the data presented indicated that there was a noticeable improvement in students' overall speaking abilities which include pronunciation and fluency in the language. This aligns with studies like Zou et al. (2023), which state that AI technologies enhance articulation by providing immediate feedback.

Answering the first sub question, "What specific aspects of speaking skills are most improved by using the SmallTalk2Me tool?" The results clearly showed that pronunciation and fluency were the most improved indications. The tool's phonemic aid and preset recall retrieval cues were highly effective in pronunciation helping learners to achieve their phonetic correctness. Additionally, vocabulary improved somewhat, with findings comparable to those of Rahimi and Zhang (2020), who suggested that additional vocabulary enrichment techniques are necessary for AI systems to function well. However, grammatical growth was restricted, most likely due to the tool's conversational orientation, which prioritizes fluency over structural accuracy.

Despite these results, the apparent improvements, especially in fluency and pronunciation, may be explained by other causes. For instance, the organized practice sessions throughout the intervention may have had an equal impact on the results as the instrument itself. In this regard, Speech Recognition, which is a major element of SmallTalk2Me, earned moderate response in the questionnaire. This might be due to technological restrictions, such as difficulty distinguishing between different accents or pronunciation variances. Moreover, the comparatively low gain in grammar may reflect the tool's emphasis on conversation, which prioritizes communication flow above grammatical clarity.

The study was conducted as action research with a small sample of A2-level students from a private high school. As a result, the outcomes may only apply to a variety of populations. Besides, the study was based only on SmallTalk2Me and self-reported impressions, which might add bias. Nonetheless, the results are more credible on account of their consistency with previous investigations. Future research should use larger sample sizes and more AI technologies to produce more reliable data. Despite its limitations, the study demonstrates AI technologies' potential for boosting speaking abilities and provides significant insights for their use in EFL contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

This study underscores the potential of the AI-powered tool SmallTalk2Me in enhancing English-speaking skills among secondary students in an Ecuadorian private school. The results demonstrate the tool's effectiveness in developing key components of oral competency, such as pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary acquisition.

The greatest improvement was shown in pronunciation, where students received real-time feedback and speech recognition tools that improved their phonetic correctness. Similarly, fluency improved considerably, as the tool's conversational practice settings encouraged continuous speaking. These findings are consistent with data indicating that AI technologies boost meaningful language engagement.

Furthermore, the study highlights the tool's ability to foster interactivity and motivation in English language learning. SmallTalk2Me's engaging features, such as conversational scenarios and immediate feedback, created a dynamic learning environment that encouraged active students' participation. This interactive approach not only increased

students' confidence in speaking but also sustained their motivation to practice consistently, reinforcing their commitment to improving oral proficiency.

Teachers should play a central role in guiding students' learning experiences while using SmallTalk2Me to create meaningful opportunities for authentic communication, ensuring that students develop well-rounded speaking skills.

Future research should explore how AI tools like SmallTalk2Me can be integrated with communicative, teacher-led activities to enhance spontaneous interaction and pragmatic language use. In addition, studies with larger and more diverse samples across different educational contexts would provide deeper insights into the long-term effectiveness of AI in language learning. Investigating student perceptions and engagement over extended periods would also help refine AI-based language learning interventions.

CONTRIBUCIONES DE LOS AUTORES

Camila Alexandra Jiménez Iñiguez: investigación, redacción – borrador original.

Marcia Iliana Criollo Vargas conceptualización, validación, redacción – revisión y edición.

IMPLICACIONES ÉTICAS

Los autores declaran que no existen implicaciones éticas.

CONFLICTO DE INTERÉS

Los autores declaran que no existen conflictos de interés financieros o no financieros que podrían haber influido en el trabajo presentado en este artículo.

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Variable	xxx	xxx	xxx
Variable	xxx	xxx	xxx

Nota: Morbi dolor sapien, venenatis bibendum. Fuente: Morales (1995, p. 3).

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