



Ciencia Latina Revista Científica Multidisciplinar, Ciudad de México, México.
ISSN 2707-2207 / ISSN 2707-2215 (en línea), mayo-junio 2025,
Volumen 9, Número 3.

https://doi.org/10.37811/cl_rcm.v9i1

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING STRATEGIES IN HYBRID ENVIRONMENTS: INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY AND FACE-TO-FACE INSTRUCTION

**ESTRATEGIAS DE ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS EN
ENTORNOS HÍBRIDOS: INTEGRACIÓN DE LA TECNOLOGÍA
Y LA ENSEÑANZA PRESENCIAL**

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.37811/cl_rcm.v9i3.18113

English Language Teaching Strategies in Hybrid Environments: Integrating Technology and Face-to-Face Instruction

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RESUMEN

Este estudio investiga las estrategias empleadas en la enseñanza del inglés (ELT) en entornos de aprendizaje híbrido en escuelas secundarias públicas ecuatorianas, centrándose en la integración de la tecnología y la instrucción presencial. Mediante un diseño cualitativo de estudio de caso múltiple, se recopiló datos de cinco escuelas secundarias en diferentes provincias, involucrando a 110 estudiantes y cinco docentes de inglés. Se utilizaron observaciones en el aula, entrevistas a docentes y cuestionarios a estudiantes para recopilar información sobre las prácticas de enseñanza, la participación estudiantil y los desafíos del aprendizaje híbrido. Los resultados revelan que la instrucción híbrida, cuando se apoya en una infraestructura adecuada y la capacitación docente, fomenta la participación estudiantil y facilita el acceso a materiales de aprendizaje auténticos. Sin embargo, desafíos significativos como la conectividad limitada, la falta de dispositivos digitales y la preparación desigual de los docentes dificultan una implementación consistente. Los estudiantes reportaron un mayor rendimiento académico y motivación durante las sesiones presenciales, mientras que la instrucción en línea resultó beneficiosa para el desarrollo de la autonomía y la alfabetización digital. Los hallazgos subrayan la importancia de las estrategias sensibles al contexto, el desarrollo profesional docente y el acceso equitativo a la tecnología para optimizar las prácticas híbridas de ELT. Este estudio ofrece implicaciones prácticas para la planificación curricular y el desarrollo de políticas destinadas a mejorar la enseñanza del inglés en formatos combinados en las escuelas públicas ecuatorianas.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje híbrido, enseñanza del inglés, escuelas públicas

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Estrategias de Enseñanza del Inglés en Entornos Híbridos: Integración de la Tecnología y la Enseñanza Presencial

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the strategies employed in English Language Teaching (ELT) within hybrid learning environments in Ecuadorian public high schools, focusing on the integration of technology and face-to-face instruction. Using a qualitative multiple case study design, data were collected from five high schools across different provinces, involving 110 students and five English teachers. Classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student questionnaires were used to gather insights into instructional practices, student engagement, and the challenges of hybrid learning. The results reveal that hybrid instruction, when supported by adequate infrastructure and teacher training, fosters student engagement and facilitates access to authentic learning materials. However, significant challenges such as limited connectivity, lack of digital devices, and uneven teacher preparedness hinder consistent implementation. Students reported higher academic performance and motivation during face-to-face sessions, while online instruction proved beneficial for developing autonomy and digital literacy. The findings underscore the importance of context-sensitive strategies, teacher professional development, and equitable access to technology in optimizing hybrid ELT practices. This study offers practical implications for curriculum planning and policy development to enhance English language education in blended formats across Ecuadorian public schools.

Keywords: hybrid learning, english teaching, public schools

Artículo recibido 05 mayo 2025

Aceptado para publicación: 30 mayo 2025



INTRODUCTION

The emergence of hybrid learning environments, combining face-to-face instruction with digital platforms, has reformed how English is taught in schools globally. In Ecuador, particularly within the public school system, this model was adopted rapidly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While hybrid education offers increased flexibility and accessibility, its effectiveness depends on the context in which it is implemented (Pokrovskaya, 2020). Based on Cango and Bravo (2020), Ecuadorian public high schools face specific challenges such as limited internet connectivity, scarce technological resources, and varying levels of teacher awareness, which significantly impact the success of English language instruction.

The English teaching process in Ecuador is guided by a national curriculum that engages communicative competence and digital literacy. However, the transition to hybrid learning has exposed gaps between curriculum goals and classroom realities. According to Hirata and Hirata (2008), teachers must often adapt their practices without adequate training or infrastructure, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. So, students face difficulties with online engagement, access to devices, and consistent participation. These challenges contribute to disparities in learning outcomes, raising concerns about educational equity (Papadima et al., 2016).

In this context, identifying effective teaching strategies for hybrid English instruction is essential. The technology integration tools like Google Classroom, YouTube, and WhatsApp have introduced new ways to deliver content and interact with students. Nevertheless, these tools require teachers and students to develop new digital competencies and adjust their roles in the learning process (Ruday & Cassidy, 2021). Hybrid environments demand a reconfiguration of traditional methods, focusing on student-centered instruction, task-based learning, and flexible assessment practices (Zheng, 2021).

This study investigates the strategies employed by English teachers across five Ecuadorian public high schools to face the challenges of hybrid education. Danylchenko (2023), explores teaching practices, instructional materials, and student engagement. The research aims to provide insights about the effectiveness and feasibility of approaches in this setting. The findings are intended to support educational stakeholders in improving ELT practices, informing training programs, and fostering more equitable and sustainable hybrid learning models in Ecuador and similar contexts (Li, 2024).



METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research approach to explore the instructional strategies used in English teaching within hybrid learning environments (Barnhart et al., 2022). The qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of teacher practices, student engagement, and the application of technological tools in classroom instruction (Illahibaccus, 2023). The qualitative approach is a research methodology that focuses on understanding human experiences, behaviors, and social phenomena from the perspective of the people involved.

In words of Illahibaccus (2023), it emphasizes depth over breadth, using non-numerical data like words, images, or observations to gain insights into meaning, context, and underlying reasons. Rather than Lozano et al. (2020), seeks statistical generalizations, the research aimed to provide rich, contextualized insights into how hybrid teaching is implemented in Ecuadorian public high schools and the pedagogical implications of this model (Yuan, 2022).

The research was designed as a multiple case study, focusing on five public high schools located in diverse cities across Ecuador. The case study design enabled the researcher to examine ELT practices in diverse contexts, such as urban, semi-urban, and rural, with different levels of technological infrastructure and socioeconomic conditions (Lin et al., 2014). This approach provided the flexibility to compare and contrast teaching strategies across settings, revealing common trends and localized adaptations within the hybrid framework (Mirzaei et al., 2024).

The population included English teachers and students from public high schools in Ecuador. The sample consisted of five English teachers, one from each selected school, which means 110 students in total, ranging from 8th to 10th grade. Schools were chosen from Loja and El Oro cities to ensure the representation of various educational environments. An intentional sampling method was used to select institutions actively engaged in hybrid education, ensuring relevance to the study's objectives.

To gather data, the study employed multiple qualitative instruments. These included direct classroom observations, in-person and through online platforms, to document instructional techniques and classroom dynamics (Aydın & Genç, 2024). Semi-structured interviews with teachers provided insights into their pedagogical decision-making, challenges, and reflections on the hybrid model (Hamid et al., 2022).



In addition, student questionnaires were distributed to capture learner experiences, preferences, and perceptions about the strategies' effectiveness (Illahibaccus, 2023). The researcher also conducted document analysis of lesson plans, learning activities, and digital records such as Google Classroom assignments to triangulate the findings (Sánchez-Hernández & Barón, 2022).

The research was conducted for about four months, from April to December 2024. This time frame allowed for the observation of multiple instructional cycles, integration of diverse technological tools, and the opportunity to gather synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (self-paced) data. Conducting the study over several months ensured a more comprehensive and realistic picture of hybrid instruction and its outcomes in the selected public high schools (Klimova & Pikhart, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Participating Schools and Student Demographics

High School	Province	Setting	Students Observed	Grade Levels	Internet Access (%)
HS1	Loja	Urban	25	9th–10th	92%
HS2	El Oro	Semi-Urban	22	10th–11th	85%
HS3	Loja	Rural	21	8th–10th	52%
HS4	El Oro	Rural	20	9th–11th	47%
HS5	El Oro	Urban	22	10th–11th	90%

These demographics reflect variability in connectivity, which strongly influenced the effectiveness of hybrid learning strategies. Schools with higher internet access (HS1 and HS5) showed better online engagement and learning continuity outcomes

Table 2 Frequency of Technology Tools Used by Teachers

Tool	HS1	HS2	HS3	HS4	HS5
Google Classroom	5	4	2	2	5
Kahoot / Quizizz	4	4	1	1	4
YouTube videos	5	5	3	3	5
WhatsApp groups	2	3	4	4	2
Edpuzzle / Wordwall	3	2	1	1	3

Google Classroom and YouTube videos were the most frequently used tools, particularly in better-connected schools. In rural areas (HS3, HS4), WhatsApp was often used as a substitute for formal platforms, indicating adaptability but also limits in resource availability.



Table 3 Average Student Scores by Instructional Mode

School	Face-to-Face Avg.	Online Avg.	Overall Average
HS1	8.4	7.9	8.2
HS2	8.1	7.7	7.9
HS3	7.0	6.2	6.6
HS4	6.8	5.9	6.3
HS5	8.3	7.8	8.0

Face-to-face instruction consistently yielded higher average scores than online components, particularly in schools with limited connectivity. Overall performance was strongest in HS1 and HS5, which also had the highest internet access rates

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight both the potential and limitations of hybrid English language teaching in public high schools in Ecuador. Across the five case study schools, the technology integration with face-to-face instruction showed varying degrees of effectiveness, influenced heavily by context-specific factors such as connectivity, teacher preparedness, and student digital literacy. These results align with global research trends indicating that the success of hybrid learning hinges on more than just access to technology it requires strategic pedagogy, adequate training, and contextual adaptability (Dang, 2024).

One of the central findings was the reliance on digital tools like Google Classroom, YouTube, and messaging apps such as WhatsApp. While these tools facilitated continuity of instruction during online periods, their effectiveness was closely tied to infrastructure. In urban and well-connected schools (HS1 and HS5), these platforms were used more robustly, contributing to higher levels of student engagement and better academic outcomes. In contrast, rural schools with poor connectivity (HS3 and HS4) depended more on asynchronous communication, provoking reduced student performance and limited interactive learning. These findings reported that digital divides disproportionately affect rural and underserved students in Latin America (Fanni et al., 2005).

The comparative analysis of student scores revealed that face-to-face instruction consistently led to better academic performance than online sessions.



This underscores the enduring value of in-person interaction in language learning, particularly in developing oral communication and providing immediate feedback. While hybrid instruction enabled exposure to authentic materials and asynchronous review opportunities, it was not able to fully replicate the dynamism and interpersonal connection of the physical classroom. This confirms the conclusions drawn by Omar and Taib (2022) regarding the hybrid model's need for balance, not replacement, of face-to-face components.

Furthermore, the student survey results revealed that engagement was generally moderate to high, especially when teachers employed interactive and multimedia strategies (Cao, 2023). However, several challenges persisted: limited device access, shared internet resources within households, and a lack of self-regulated learning skills. These barriers highlight the critical role of socio-economic factors in shaping students' learning experiences. The emphasis on teacher innovation in overcoming these barriers is consistent with findings by Sana (2023), who stressed that effective hybrid learning requires more than delivering content, that requires thoughtful redesign of instruction (Khatib & Riady, 2023). Interestingly, despite challenges, students in all five schools showed resilience and adaptability in navigating hybrid learning. Deep expressed appreciation for online videos, interactive quizzes, and the flexibility of asynchronous learning. However, they also emphasized the need for more personalized teacher support and structured feedback, an area where hybrid models must continue to evolve. This duality reflects the ongoing pedagogical tension between autonomy and guidance in digital education contexts (Ngo, 2010).

This study also emphasizes the importance of professional development for teachers. Ruday and Jacobson (2021), the hybrid model was implemented with greater confidence and creativity in schools where teachers had prior training or institutional support for digital tools (Ilyas et al., 2023). This suggests that investment in ongoing teacher development is essential for current hybrid environments and building resilience in future educational disruptions. As Etac et al. (2017) observed, teacher readiness is a decisive factor in successful blended learning strategies, especially in resource-constrained settings.

Finally, the hybrid model offers valuable opportunities for enriching English language instruction, but it also exposes pre-existing inequalities in public education systems (Cechova et al., 2018).



While some students thrive in flexible, tech-supported environments, others face systemic barriers that limit their participation and achievement. The data from this study suggest that hybrid education should be pursued not as a one-size-fits-all solution, but as a flexible framework that must be adapted to local conditions, supported by robust infrastructure, and underpinned by pedagogical training (Hutchinson & Hadjioannou, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that hybrid English language teaching in Ecuadorian public high schools is shaped significantly by technological infrastructure, teacher adaptability, and student digital access. Teachers across all five institutions demonstrated resourcefulness by integrating digital tools, but their success varied based on the availability of reliable internet and institutional support.

Schools with better digital connectivity and more structured platforms (e.g., Google Classroom) showed higher student performance and more frequent use of diverse instructional tools. In contrast, rural schools often relied on informal methods such as WhatsApp messaging, which, while functional, limited the scope and interactivity of English instruction. Face-to-face sessions were crucial in maintaining student performance, suggesting that personal interaction remains a critical component in language acquisition.

Despite challenges, hybrid learning offered benefits, particularly in promoting student autonomy and access to authentic language materials. However, inequities in access to technology and support mechanisms continue to affect learning outcomes, underscoring the need for targeted policies and training that bridge these gaps.

To sum up, effective hybrid English teaching requires not only technical tools but also strategic planning, pedagogical innovation, and sustained investment in teacher development and infrastructure. These findings can inform future curriculum design, teacher training programs, and national education strategies aiming to enhance language education in blended settings.

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