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BEYOND GRAMMAR: THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN TRANSFORMING ENGLISH EDUCATION IN ECUADOR

**MÁS ALLÁ DE LA GRAMÁTICA: EL ROL DE LA
TECNOLOGÍA EN EL APRENDIZAJE DE INGLÉS EN
ECUADOR**

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Beyond Grammar: The Role of Technology in Transforming English Education in Ecuador

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the role of technology in English as a Foreign Language education in Ecuador, which is built on bibliographic review based on sixteen relevant studies and additional sources that serve as recommendations for autonomous learning. The study analyzes the current situation of the EFL learning in the country when the use of technological tools is limited. A qualitative research approach was adopted to describe, synthesize, and discuss data obtained from national and international investigations. The findings include the challenges faced by sectors in vulnerability when accessing to technology, a remarkable inequality in the educational system for public educations, particularly for rural schools, advantage in English learning in private institutions, educators and students' motivation, and possible alternatives to take advantage of the few possibilities to progress without being held back by conformism. It is concluded that as technology is one of the best ways to enhance English proficiency in Ecuador, it is necessary to apply strategies to reach all students with different social backgrounds, even when big investments are not possible, it certainly is the eagerness to transform the learning process. Students with one smartphone to download offline apps and videos to practice could develop in a significant change in the learning process. It all depends on the government support and the commitment from all educational stakeholders.

Keywords: informal English learning, digital learning, technology integration, EFL teaching, language acquisition

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Más Allá de la Gramática: El Rol de la Tecnología en el Aprendizaje de Inglés en Ecuador

RESUMEN

Este artículo investiga el rol de la tecnología en la educación del inglés como lengua extranjera en Ecuador. Se basa en una revisión bibliográfica de dieciséis estudios relevantes y fuentes adicionales que sirven como recomendaciones para el autoaprendizaje. El estudio analiza la situación actual del aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera en el país, donde el uso de herramientas tecnológicas es limitado. Se adoptó un enfoque de investigación cualitativa para describir, sintetizar y discutir datos obtenidos de investigaciones nacionales e internacionales. Los hallazgos incluyen los desafíos que enfrentan los sectores vulnerables para acceder a la tecnología, la notable desigualdad en el sistema educativo público, en particular en las escuelas rurales, la ventaja en el aprendizaje del inglés en instituciones privadas, la motivación de docentes y estudiantes, y las posibles alternativas para aprovechar las pocas posibilidades de progresar sin verse limitados por el conformismo. Se concluye que, dado que la tecnología es una de las mejores maneras de mejorar el dominio del inglés en Ecuador, es necesario aplicar estrategias para llegar a todos los estudiantes de diferentes orígenes sociales. Incluso cuando no es posible realizar grandes inversiones, sin duda es necesario el afán de transformar el proceso de aprendizaje. Los estudiantes con un solo teléfono inteligente para descargar aplicaciones y videos sin conexión para practicar podrían lograr un cambio significativo en su proceso de aprendizaje. Todo depende del apoyo gubernamental y del compromiso de todos los actores educativos.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje informal de inglés, aprendizaje digital, integración de tecnología, enseñanza de EFL, adquisición de lenguas

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INTRODUCTION

Literature review

English Language Education in Ecuador: Policy and Practice

In 2016, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education developed a new mandatory English as a Foreign Language curriculum designed for primary and secondary education students. It emphasizes two main core principles: the communicative language approach, which aims for interaction and real-life communication rather than merely learning passively; the second tenet is Content and Language Integrated Learning and focuses on acquiring the language through cultural and cognitive factors. Nevertheless, Galimberti et al. (2019) argue that in public institutions, teachers must use the textbook devised by the MINEDUC despite failing to foster national cultural awareness.

In light of the preceding discussion, Barragán et al. (2023), in their book section “English Educational Reforms in Ecuador”, outline that English education in the country suffers from a shortage of qualified educators, a lack of instructional resources, and ambiguous standards, particularly in public institutions, leading to unmet government expectations. However, there has been a gradual development in the Ecuadorian EFL education over the decades compared to twenty years ago; one noteworthy development is that MINEDUC currently requires English teachers to have at least a B2 international certification accredited by renowned institutions.

Technology Integration: Private vs. Public Schools

English education in Ecuador is marked by a long-standing inequity. On the one hand, private institutions have greater access to technology resources; this availability is beneficial for professors to enhance their instructional processes and for students to have better language proficiency (Checa, 2021). Conversely, public schools lack infrastructure, teacher preparation, and face economic disparities in general, making technology implementation a complex undertaking.

In contrast, Cárdenas et al. (2024) highlight that not all public schools are subject to limited technology access; the conducted research shows that 135 of 150 students in an Amazonian public school have internet access at home, demonstrating a significant opportunity to improve the students’ language performance, but it is still notable that the remaining fifteen pupils depend on alternative resources. Thus, if access to technology in urban areas is challenging for some students, in rural schools this



phenomenon is substantially more severe. Salgado (2025) outlines that public education in Ecuador presents stark disparities if rural and urban schools are compared, driving rural institutions further behind their peers, prolonging the cycle of poverty and undermining the country's development.

Teacher Training and Digital Literacy

Mena et al. (2024) explored the incorporation of technology in Ecuadorian classrooms through a mixed-method study. Their findings showed that a significant portion of educators utilize technology inside or outside the classrooms; they concur that inadequate technological infrastructure affects their intentions to enhance their pedagogical practice.

Additionally, Hernández-Sellés and Massigoge-Galbis (2024) established a partnership between ProFuturo program and MINEDUC to enhance teachers' digital competence using a quantitative online survey. Their results revealed that the participant teachers were committed to the training process and significantly improved their technological skills, which indicated limited digital literacy; it also provided an opportunity to strengthen the limited large-scale teacher training system. Analytically, in Ecuador digital literacy might not be an issue for younger teachers, but it is likely to pose a challenge for many educators from previous generations.

Technology and Inequality in the Classroom

The promise to enhance students' English language skills through educational technology is an opportunity for some and a dream for many. Yunga et al. (2025) remarks that there are persistent challenges students endure daily across the country such as economic hardship, overcrowded classrooms, teacher-centered methods, and a curriculum not adapted to their reality. Building upon this, Proaño et al. (2025) interviewed specialists on how to overcome these difficulties; they are divided on whether technology is the best pathway to transform English education in Ecuador. However, it is noted as a pertinent strategy if there is enough government funding, willingness to change from both teachers and students and employ technological tools with contextual activities.

Ecuador international standing in English proficiency

Ecuador is one of the lowest-ranked countries when it comes to English proficiency; reports cite factors such as lack of digital literacy, students' dwindling motivation, and a demanding curriculum (Orosz et al., 2021). Nonetheless, Angelis (2022) believes that the Ecuadorian English proficiency is likely to be



low, but international rankings such as EF EPI portray it as an embarrassment among Latin American countries, revealing a superficial ideology with inconsistent data that do not reflect the reality of all citizens.

Student Motivation

Perhaps the best way to acquire a new language is to be exposed to it constantly. This becomes effective if the daily input is meaningful and comprehensible; it is the opposite of how many educators teach in schools through extensive lessons with passive grammatical drills; the aim is communication (Krashen, 1981). Nevertheless, this does not imply that grammar is unnecessary; it could be merely a complement rather than a primary method.

Castillo et al. (2019) studied the role of intrinsic motivation in English learning. Students report ludic activities, captivating multimedia, communication with native speakers, practical real-life topics, and empathetic teachers as encouraging reasons to learn the language. It is equally important for educators to be motivated and when they are inspired, better lesson plans can be developed (Barragán et al., 2019). In addition, a good attitude transforms the school environment and the entire educational process benefits.

Informal Learning - Use of digital platforms

The use of informal platforms to acquire or learn English has changed the lives of countless individuals worldwide; these platforms offer extensive material to engage the audience and they can be adapted to meet their interests and necessities. According to Zhu (2025), the impact of social media on informal language acquisition and learning is remarkable, learners around the world interact with each other in real time and they experience cross-cultural communication that enhances their skills.

Liashuk (2021) highlights that informal language learning is a captivating way to study, considering that traditional grammar classes can occasionally be frustrating for some students. Thanks to online platforms they learn at their own pace. However, even though they are effective, their purpose is to be a complement rather than a standalone form of study, particularly in early stages.

Conversely, it is important to address the challenges associated with learning through social media and other apps. One such challenge is finding trustworthy information, people regularly utilize informal language full of slang and possibly non-standard grammatical constructions (Wati et al., 2024). In



parallel, distractions are highly likely to occur, principally among young people, as they don't have an organized study plan to follow and they tend to resort to improvisation. There are also other complexities such as lack of real-life interaction, risk of privacy and security concerns.

On top of that, as all learning modalities have their benefits and drawbacks, technological tools offer distinct advantages in terms of language learning and acquisition; living in a high-tech era is part of modern life and should be leveraged, while accounting for its inherent intricacies.

Research gaps

Although there have been many studies regarding the access to technology and English learning in Ecuador, there is limited research available regarding teacher training, specifically for the area of English as a Foreign Language, and also research gaps in educational circumstances for students who live in zones affected by gang violence, an alarming issue in the country, particularly in the Coastal region.

Additionally, few studies have spearheaded participatory research in marginalized communities concerning the English language subject, precisely in institutions where English educators are not available and general education teachers have to improvise and teach an area of study that does not concern them, affecting the students' learning because they do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out such crucial duty.

METHODOLOGY

The present investigation entails a bibliographic review and analytical description of the latest studies regarding English as a Foreign Language education in Ecuador, centered on how technology plays a key role in student acquisition and learning beyond explicit grammar instruction and the challenges in leveraging these tools. In accordance with Ocaña-Fernandez and Fuster-Guillén (2021), a bibliographic literature review is a methodology that aims to observe and reflect on previous others' research experiences when there is no possibility of carrying through participatory research. Arizona State University (2025), endorses that a literature review is a systematic process that requires a selective analysis and time management given the multiple required steps.

The information to elaborate this paper was obtained from sixteen reliable documents divided into national and international studies. The Ecuadorian-context publications were found on databases such



as SciELO, ERIC, Dialnet, Neliti, Google Scholar, and other repositories from Ecuadorian Universities. Moreover, the international publications are available in Scopus; Web of Science, ScienceGate, ERIC, Google Scholar.

The information was analyzed and organized utilizing a qualitative approach to write a structural, synthetical, and thoughtful review. Kalpokaite and Radivojevic (2021) highlight that a literature review requires a reflexive process adapting a qualitative practice which starts from a plan, then building a conceptual framework to later analyze remarkable information through a qualitative coding that involves classification and categorization to finally synthesize a well-founded narrative that discuss a point.

This research was performed following consecutive stages. First, a relevant contextual topic was defined based on focused research about this specific matter. Second, the research was organized into categories such as: EFL teaching and learning in Ecuador, technology integration, teacher training, inequality, private vs public education, informal language learning. Third, relevant resources were found and selected and discussed, redundant information from past decades were excluded and the information was chosen based on recent studies principally from 2019 to 2025, with the exception of relevant information from previous years regarding the Ecuadorian English curriculum, self-directed English learning and acquisition recommendations, or transcendental contributions from Stephen Krashen's theory.

DISCUSSION AND OUTCOMES

The review was framed to explore how technology could transform English education Ecuador, and it outlines the importance of motivation and resources. By examining various influential topics, this review discerns overarching contexts and analyzes areas in need of further investigation.

Across the literature review, divided opinions emerge. Barragán et al. (2023), Checa (2021), Galimberti et al. (2019), and Salgado (2025) concur that English education in Ecuador has long been marked by disparities influenced by economic barriers, inadequate curriculum reforms, a lack of government support in public institutions: rural schools are the most affected, while private institutions hold an advantage. Conversely, Cárdenas et al. (2024) state that these findings may not generalize to all public schools. Nevertheless, it is necessary to highlight that a significant number of Ecuadorians do not have the English proficiency expected by MINEDUC.



Additionally, more intricacies emerged among students and teachers when it comes to access to technology, as Mena et al. (2024), Proaño et al. (2025), and Yunga et al. (2025) highlight that undertrained teachers or an unwillingness to change are slowing factors too. Despite the inconveniences presented, having at least a smartphone is quite common even among impoverished families; Liashuk (2021), considers that taking advantage of digital informal language learning is a great alternative to learn real-life English from native speakers; its main benefit is that learners are exposed to meaningful input because they decide the timing what to watch according to their interests, Zhou (2025), adds that social media is a remarkable tool, individuals not only acquire and learn the language, but they discover new information and experience cross-cultural communication. However, Wati et al. (2024) warn about the safety and reliability when using these platforms.

Building on Krashen's theory on Second Language Acquisition and Learning (1981), a proven effective way to learn a second language is to be exposed to comprehensible input. If there are few possibilities to pay for courses, digital tools offer unlimited materials for autonomous learning, as recommended by Cambridge English (n.d.) and Newcastle University (2019): watching videos with subtitles to learn common phrases, listening to music and singing along as much as possible enhances the vocabulary and pronunciation, or using free apps for practice depending on the level. Nonetheless, the success of these methods depends on having discipline, as suggested by Barake (2024) from Colegio Buen Consejo, the results will depend merely on how much effort and interest are dedicated.

Subhan-Brewer in collaboration with Oxford University Press (2015) advises that young individuals specifically need more supervision; they might not take it seriously, and choose vain entertainment over entertaining learning. On this regard, Barragán et al. (2019) and Castillo et al. (2019), consider intrinsic motivation as a key factor to thrive in the journey of learning English outside the classroom. This points out the necessity of commitment and the aspiration of becoming bilingual individuals who might be offered better opportunities in the future.



ILLUSTRATIONS, FIGURES, TABLES

Table 1 Literature review matrix

Author(s) and year	Title	Research category	Key findings	Key challenges found
Angelis (2022)	EF English Proficiency Index e inglés en Ecuador: Suposiciones inciertas del ranking internacional	English proficiency in Ecuador	The EF English proficiency index does not reflect the full reality because of inconsistent data, and it may not be pertinent to rank Ecuador as the worst country in the region in English proficiency merely based on a few samples.	Commercial bias and misleading comparisons influence public perception of a country and lead to superficial solutions and increased inequity.
Barragán et al. (2023)	English Language Education in Ecuador: Assessing Opportunities for Teaching and Learning in a Developing Nation Section: English Educational reforms	EFL teaching and learning in Ecuador	Over the decades, English curricula have been reformed according to the “demands of a developing country”. The latest general reform was in 2016 that remains in demand nine years later centered on a communicative pedagogy (theoretically).	- Uneven qualifications among teachers; many whom have not reached a B2-level proficiency in English. - Urban-rural disparities are a perennial issue. - Ambiguity in the curriculum design.
Cárdenas et al. (2024)	Use of technology to learn English in Ecuadorian classrooms: a case study in Morona Santiago province	Technology integration	Not all students from public institutions in Ecuador have limited access to the internet and technological devices, which is a valuable way to learn “outside the classroom”.	The majority of students rely on mobile devices and do not have access to other equipment; while 10% still have limited access.
Checa (2021)	The Integration of ICTs in EFL Teaching in Ecuadorian High Schools: One Country, Two Realities	Technology integration in public/private education	The differences between private and public schools are concerning. Private institutions outperform public school peers. Consequently, students there are at an advantage in learning English.	For public schools: - Public schools have infrastructure gaps and lack ICT tools. - There is a deficiency of technical skills among reluctant teachers. - Many students cannot access technological tools at home due to economic means.
Galimberti et al. (2019)	Adapting English lessons to raise culture awareness in an EFL classroom	EFL teaching strategies. Cultural awareness in Ecuador	Cultural awareness is essential in a multicultural and multiethnic country like Ecuador to preserve identity, gain background knowledge, and learn English simultaneously.	- The division between Bilingual and Hispanic education remains pronounced in some sectors. - There is insufficient teacher training to instill cultural identity in adapted lessons. - The English curriculum fails to include activities promoting the value of traditions, contrary to its intended objectives.



Hernández-Sellés and Massigoge-Galbis (2024)	Strengthening Policies for Education, Innovation, and Digitization Through Teacher Training: Evaluating ProFuturo's Open Model in Ecuador	Teacher training in Ecuador	An alliance between Profuturo and the Ministry of Education notably boosted teachers' digital skills, leading to substantial adjustments in classroom instruction.	There are uneven training challenges due to demographic variations. Tailored programs can address this disparity.
Liashuk (2021)	Informal Language Learning Through Interactive social media Tools: Current Trends and Practices	Informal learning	Learning informally with software tools is engaging and less stressful; learners are responsible for their educational development.	The algorithms and multiple content types may compromise pedagogical rigor without adequate regulations.
Mena (2024)	Integración de la Tecnología Educativa en el Aula de Educación Básica en Ecuador	Technology integration	Dedicated educators use technology to plan and enhance their teaching practice, both teachers and students report improvements.	Schools lack essential ICT equipment such as computers or connectivity to the internet, so they have to manage with limited resources.
Proaño et al. (2025)	Perspectives and challenges of technology integration in English language teaching: an academic approach	Technology integration in EFL teaching	Students utilize technology more frequently than teachers do. Moreover, institutional support for digital learning remains neutral. Experts recommend adopting interactive apps to improve academic results and foster collaboration.	- There is a lack of information for identifying the best tools in each context. - Technology in practice is not as easy to implement as theory suggests.
Salgado (2015)	Educational inequality in rural and urban areas of Ecuador	Rural vs urban education	Rural education has long faced inequalities; the main factors include socioeconomic barriers and structural challenges. Conversely, urban education provides enhanced opportunities and greater prospects to thrive in life.	For rural schools: - Rural schools frequently lack access to education of quality. - Student dropouts persist. - The impact of COVID-19 exacerbated these challenges.
Wati et al. (2024)	Exploring the Benefits and Challenges of Social Media in English Language Learning: Insights from English Education Students	Informal learning	A majority of students regard social media as an effective and versatile medium for authentic English communication practice.	Without a rigorous approach, social media could become a distraction if it is not used responsibly.

Yunga et al. (2025)	Difficulties in learning English among Ecuadorian elementary students: causes and solutions	EFL teaching and learning in Ecuador	Many teachers have an inadequate proficiency in English, leading to a lack of confidence in speaking the language. Furthermore, teaching methods are passive and rely on memorization.	- Students' low motivation. - Limited exposure to spoken language - Underutilization of technological tools. - Insufficient family and community support.
Zhu (2025)	The Role of Social Media in Informal English Learning: A Case Study of Language Learning Communities	Informal learning	It is highly interactive, offering constant practice and feedback. Moreover, the cultural exchange is enriching.	There might be misinformation, technical barriers, or limited opportunities for spoken language practice.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the bibliographic review, this study concludes that integrating technology into English as a Foreign Language education in Ecuador is one of the most effective approaches for enhancing overall proficiency among young learners. In relation to this, technology assists as a valuable complement to traditional formal education. Despite the challenges faced by disadvantaged sectors, achieving the expected outcomes depends not only on external support but also on the internal motivation of both students and teachers. A single smartphone to download offline videos and apps to practice can essentially transform the learning experience. When used strategically, these tools have been proven effective in similar limited contexts, yielding noteworthy gains in speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills.

Although this article covers the main factors associated with the lack of resources and support to students in vulnerability, there is limited information about the gang violence faced in the country and the lack of English teachers for the EFL area. There is a necessity in assisting these types of situations, moreover in the rapid grow of the mainstream society which requires competent people, but when there is insecurity and little facilities, there is still a lot of work to do.

The evolving society of the XXI century requires competent individuals to solve daily-life problems who do not struggle with the universal English language, which rules the communication in the world, to achieve this, the Ecuadorian police makers should consider restructuring the current curriculum to be contextually aligned with the culture and socioeconomic backgrounds, aiming for empathy and achievable aspirations.



Educators should reflect on their pedagogical practice and enhance their digital skills; it is necessary to enroll in continuous training courses for professional development to improve the English education in Ecuador. Once there is a change in the teaching practice, they can motivate students to keep improving at home with tailored multimedia.

It is recommended further investigation about this topic due to the lack of empirical evidence in diverse EFL contexts. Hence, reporting standards and comparability across multiple targeted research could be transcendental.

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