

Ecuadorian efl teachers' experiences in fostering students' english-speaking skills: insights into strategies and challenges in public and private school

Experiencias de los docentes ecuatorianos de inglés en el fomento de las habilidades orales en inglés de los estudiantes: perspectivas sobre estrategias y desafíos en escuelas públicas y privadas


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ABSTRACT

This study explores Ecuadorian EFL teachers' experiences (challenges and successes) in helping students develop their English-speaking skills. The Ecuadorian context presents unique challenges, including limited instructional time, a focus on grammar and writing over speaking, a shortage of qualified teachers, and low student motivation. This research investigates the strategies teachers use to support students in developing English-speaking skills, the specific challenges they face, and the strategies that have proven effective in fostering confident and proficient English speakers. Data was collected through a survey of 44 English language teachers from public and private schools in Ecuador. The findings highlight teachers' challenges in promoting oral communication skills, including limited class time, insufficient teacher training, and unequal access to technological resources, particularly in public schools. Despite these obstacles, teachers employ various strategies, such as collaborative tasks and technology integration, to foster speaking skills. The study underscores the need for targeted teacher training, increased instructional time, and equitable access to technology to improve English-speaking instruction in Ecuador.

Keywords: EFL teaching, Speaking skills, Teacher challenges, Teaching strategies, Ecuador.

RESUMEN

Este estudio explora las experiencias (desafíos y éxitos) de los docentes ecuatorianos de inglés como lengua extranjera en el apoyo a los estudiantes para desarrollar sus habilidades para hablar inglés. El contexto ecuatoriano presenta desafíos únicos, incluido el tiempo de instrucción limitado, un enfoque en la gramática y la escritura en lugar del habla, la escasez de maestros calificados y la baja motivación de los estudiantes. Esta investigación indaga sobre las estrategias que utilizan los docentes para apoyar a los estudiantes en el desarrollo de las habilidades del habla en inglés, los desafíos específicos que enfrentan y las estrategias que han demostrado ser efectivas para fomentar estudiantes de inglés seguros y competentes. Los datos se recopilaban a través de una encuesta a 44 profesores de inglés de escuelas públicas y privadas en Ecuador. Los hallazgos resaltan los desafíos que enfrentan los maestros en la promoción de las habilidades de comunicación oral, incluido el tiempo de clase limitado, la capacitación insuficiente de los maestros y el acceso desigual a los recursos tecnológicos, particularmente en las escuelas públicas. A pesar de estos obstáculos, los maestros emplean diversas estrategias, como tareas colaborativas e integración de tecnología, para fomentar las habilidades del habla. El estudio subraya la necesidad de una formación docente específica, un mayor tiempo de instrucción y un acceso equitativo a la tecnología para mejorar la enseñanza del inglés hablado en Ecuador.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza de EFL, Habilidades de expresión oral, Desafíos del docente, Estrategias de enseñanza, Ecuador.



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Introduction

In today's globalized society, effective communication in English has become essential for academic achievement, professional development, and cross-cultural interaction. As a result, many educational systems have prioritized English within their curricula, emphasizing communicative competence over rote grammatical knowledge. In Ecuador, English has been formally integrated into the national curriculum, aiming for students to reach at least a B1-intermediate level of proficiency by the end of high school (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2016).

Despite these policy efforts, Ecuador continues to face persistent challenges in developing students' oral communication skills. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (EPI) (2024), Ecuador ranks among countries with very low proficiency in English, particularly in speaking. These outcomes reflect a range of systemic issues, including outdated pedagogical practices, limited classroom exposure to spoken English, a lack of qualified educators, and low student motivation (Orosz et al., 2021; Rosado & Vaca-Cárdenas, 2023).

Given this context, it is critical to explore the international strategies that have proven successful in enhancing English-speaking proficiency and the Ecuadorian educational environment's particular constraints and realities. This research explores English language teachers' experiences (challenges and successes) in helping students develop their English-speaking skills.

The Ecuadorian context

Although the National Curriculum guidelines mandate English instruction from early education levels (MINEDUC, 2016), developing oral proficiency in Ecuador remains a persistent challenge. Instructional time is limited; of the 25 weekly class periods mandated by the 2022 Ministerial Agreement, only three are allocated to English (MINEDUC, 2022). Combined with a strong focus on grammar

and writing, this leaves little room for interactive speaking practice.

Another critical issue is the shortage of qualified English teachers. A policy change in 2022 now permits teachers-tutors to teach English (MINEDUC, 2022) without specialized language training, further weakening the foundation for communicative instruction). As Astudillo and Zavala (2021) note, such structural deficiencies significantly hinder the development of communicative competence.

Moreover, student motivation is deeply affected by the perception that English lacks relevance to their personal and professional lives. Rosado and Vaca-Cárdenas (2023) and Tamayo and Cajas (2020) highlight that many students view English as a compulsory subject rather than a valuable life skill. This lack of intrinsic motivation contributes to low engagement and missed opportunities for meaningful oral practice.

Pérez (2021) found that students in Guayaquil-Ecuador struggled with basic speaking tasks, such as initiating conversations and responding to questions. This aligns with Ecuador's continued low ranking in the EF English Proficiency Index (EF, 2024) and reinforces the need for targeted interventions to strengthen oral language instruction within a complex and under-resourced system.

Strategies to improve EFL speaking skills

Over the past two decades, EFL instruction has shifted from traditional grammar-translation models to more communicative, task-based, and learner-centered approaches. These pedagogical methods—grounded in constructivist, sociocultural, and cognitive-interactionist theories—prioritize authentic language use, student autonomy, and meaningful interaction (Bryfonski & McKay, 2017; Zheng, 2013).

Among the most widely endorsed instructional approaches are Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), emphasizing

spoken fluency and interaction over decontextualized grammar practice. Bryfonski and McKay's (2017) meta-analysis revealed the positive effects of TBLT on learners' oral fluency and interactional competence. Supporting this, Sholeh et al. (2020) found that task-based learning improved oral accuracy and confidence. Moreover, Khoram (2019) emphasized the benefits of pre-task planning and peer collaboration in enhancing grammatical control during spontaneous speech.

Technology integration into language instruction has emerged as a powerful tool for developing oral proficiency in recent years. Digital platforms, language learning apps, and virtual reality environments provide learners with immersive opportunities to practice speaking in low-pressure, flexible contexts (Le Thi Hoa, 2023; Razzakov, 2024). A growing body of research supports the use of AI-powered tools in particular. For example, Elsa Speak—a speech-recognition app—significantly enhanced learners' pronunciation in a seven-week study involving 12 EFL students (Al-Shallakh, 2024). Similarly, SmallTalk2Me, when integrated into university students' study routines in Ecuador, led to noticeable improvements in pronunciation, fluency, and speaking confidence (Celi & Bustos, 2025). Google Assistant has also demonstrated efficacy; learners who engaged with the tool made substantial gains in pronunciation, fluency, and interactive communication (Qassrawi et al., 2024). A comparative study of 78 participants further indicated that users of AI-based text-to-speech platforms, Listnr and Murf, achieved significantly higher pronunciation accuracy than those using traditional learning methods (Mohammadkarimi, 2024).

Collaborative digital tools are another key area supporting speaking development. Platforms such as EAP Talk (Zou & Wang, 2024) and WhatsApp-based peer discussions (Maulina et al., 2023) foster metacognitive awareness and promote learner-driven interaction. WhatsApp, in particular,

supports informal language use beyond the classroom, which has been shown to improve fluency and coherence (Akkara et al., 2020). However, some educators express concern that overreliance on digital communication may reduce opportunities for face-to-face interaction. Leonard et al. (2024) reported that more than 63% of individuals now prefer online communication, potentially signaling a decline in in-person conversational skills.

Beyond pedagogy and technology, affective and motivational factors are crucial in developing oral proficiency. Feedback enables learners to monitor their performance and adjust strategies, fostering autonomy and sustained progress (Anca, 2024). Emotional barriers—such as anxiety, low confidence, or fear of negative evaluation—can inhibit participation and limit speaking opportunities (Garcia et al., 2024; Ignacio et al., 2025). Research by Feng (2023) and Boonmoh & Jumpakate (2019) emphasizes the importance of scaffolding strategies that build emotional safety, including humor, peer validation, and encouraging feedback. This is particularly relevant in Ecuador, where students often perceive English as distant or irrelevant. In this context, classroom environments that foster emotional well-being and instruction contextualized through English can make English more meaningful and applicable (Riyadi et al., 2024). These strategies offer a comprehensive framework for enhancing EFL speaking skills.

Research questions

After reviewing the previous studies, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What do Ecuadorian EFL teachers do to support students in developing English-speaking skills?
- What specific challenges do Ecuadorian EFL teachers face when facilitating speaking practice in the classroom?

- What strategies have proven effective in helping students become more confident and proficient English speakers?

These questions guide the present research, exploring teachers' perspectives and experiences in overcoming the challenges of teaching speaking skills. The following sections will analyze the data collected from teachers, highlighting their strategies, challenges, and recommendations for improving English-speaking instruction in Ecuador.

Materials and methods

This work followed a Cross-sectional Design supported by a survey, meaning all data were gathered at a single point in time. It is valuable to understand teachers' experiences (challenges and successes) in helping their students develop their English-speaking skills.

Sampling

In this research, purposive sampling was used to select participants. They were English language teachers from public and private schools in Ecuador. Participants were anonymous and recruited through email. In total, 44 English language teachers responded to the calling for this research: 66,7% (30) of the respondents identified themselves as female and 33,3% (14) as male. It is important to note that the participants in this research are not representative of all EFL teachers in Ecuador. Therefore, the interpretation of the results should be restricted to the participants of this research. However, the gathered information is meaningful to be studied on a larger scale.

Instrumentation

The self-administered questionnaire, created on Google Forms, consisted of 18 questions. It was formatted as multiple-choice, open-ended, dichotomous, contingency questions, and Likert scales. Areas of focus included the instructional strategies used to develop speaking skills, perceived obsta-

cles, success stories, and the support systems available in teaching environments. All responses remained anonymous to ensure confidentiality. They were used for academic purposes only.

Data collection and analysis processes

Teachers were invited to participate in this research via email, and the self-administered questionnaire was distributed this way as well.

After the data were collected, they were exported into Excel and presented visually using bar charts to illustrate the distribution of responses across key teachers' instructional strategies, common challenges, and levels of student motivation and participation.

Data from open-ended questions were analyzed thematically and coded to identify emerging themes related to the focus of this research. This analysis helped provide deeper insights into the patterns observed in the quantitative data and teachers' illustrated examples of their lived experiences.

Results and discussions

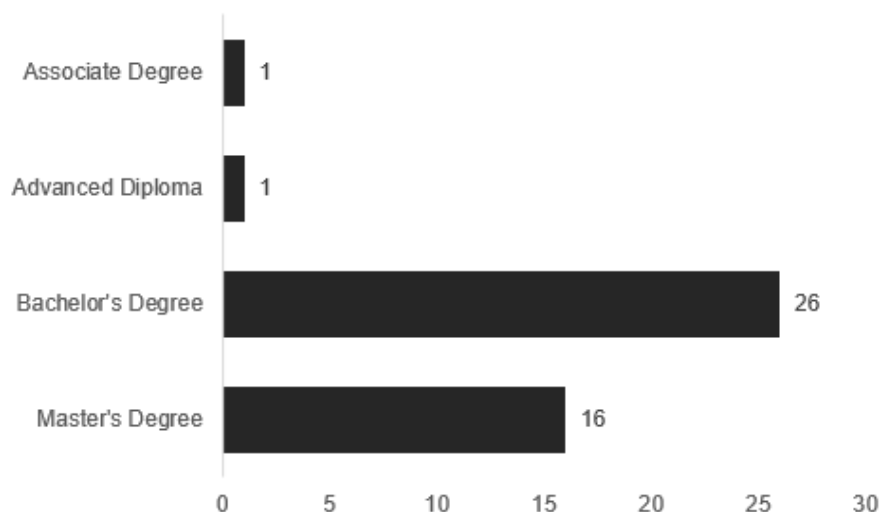
Through participants' responses, it was determined their challenges and success while promoting students' English-speaking skills. The findings are divided into sections.

Section 1: English language teachers' background education

Based on the responses, participants with a Master's Degree are equally distributed between private and public schools. In contrast, teachers holding a Bachelor's Degree are more commonly found in private schools than in public ones. Furthermore, all holders of Advanced Diplomas and Associate Degrees are employed exclusively in private schools, with no representation in public ones.

Figure 1.

Highest level of education completed



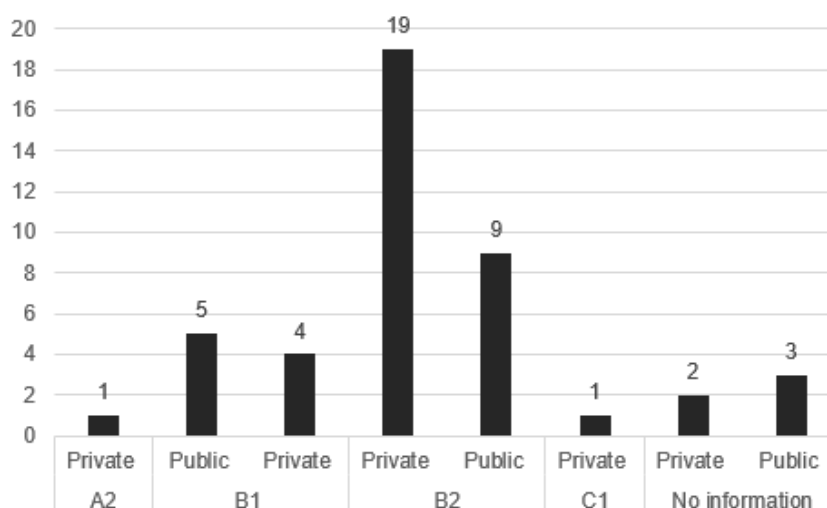
Section 2: English language teachers' proficiency level

English is the primary tool for EFL teachers. The minimum required to work as an EFL Teacher in Ecuador is a B2 level (Upper intermediate) (Reference). Even though the results indicate that most EFL teachers meet this requirement, advanced proficiency remains limited. Notably, the only teacher with an English C1 level holds only a Bachelor's Degree.

Besides, the contrast in proficiency variation—particularly in private institutions—hints at a difference in training access and preparation between teachers in the two sectors. It is important to remark that there is still a need to support teachers in improving their English proficiency level, especially those only holding an A2 (beginner) or B1 (intermediate) level. It is essential not only for enhancing classroom instruction but also for designing effective, targeted training programs that align teacher competencies with curriculum expectations.

Figure 2.

Teachers' English Level



Section 3: Challenges teachers have observed in students

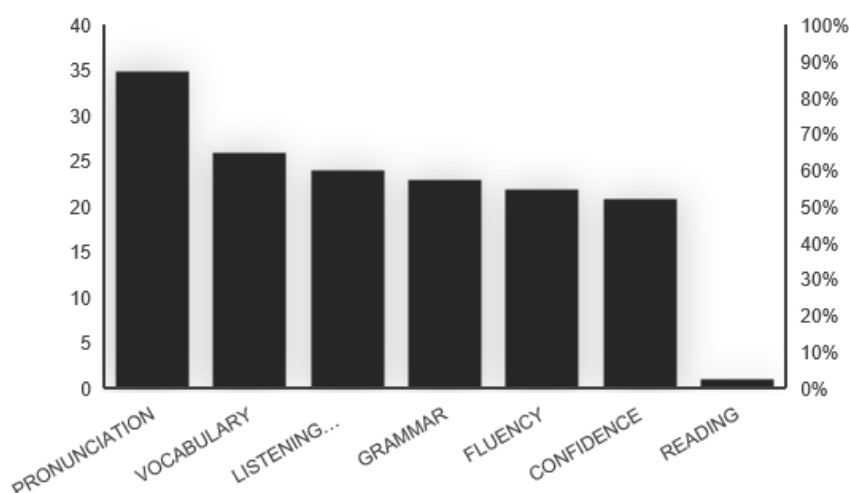
EFL teachers have observed that students face significant challenges in several sub-skills essential for effective spoken communication (see Figure 3). While issues exist across multiple areas, pronunciation stands out as the primary concern in both public and private sectors. Clear and accurate pronunciation is vital for ensuring that spoken

language is easily understood by others (Zhang, 2024) and for building speaker confidence (Almusharraf, 2024).

Consistent practice is important to address these challenges. Besides, strategies such as expanding students' vocabulary, encouraging them to take risks when speaking, and meaningful and interactive communication activities can support students' speaking development.

Figure 3.

Challenges students face when practicing speaking



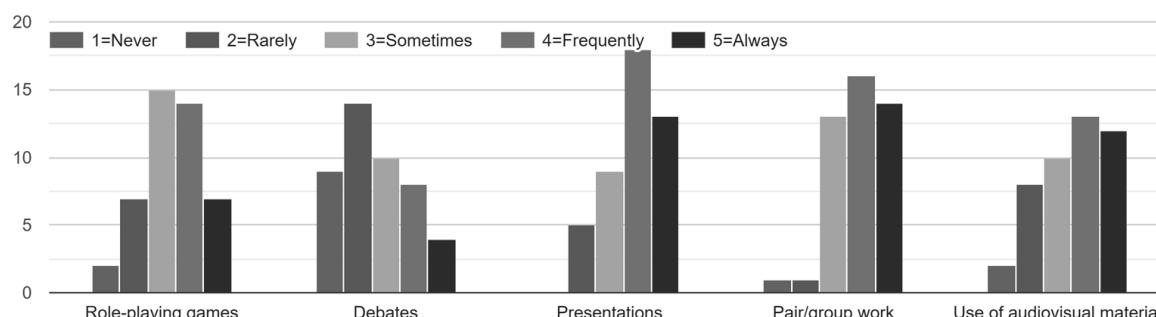
Section 4: Strategies used by teachers to encourage speaking practice among their students

The findings indicate that although teachers value interactive and communicative approaches, they favor more practical and versatile approaches in fostering classroom speaking practice. Presentations and pair/group work are the most used approaches. This suggests that teachers favor highly structured and collaborative formats that necessitate active involvement. These are followed by audiovisual aids, which are likely used as supportive materials to model

language and discussion. Role-playing games and debates are used less, possibly due to practical reasons such as classroom control, time, or students' language level.

Figure 4.

Strategies used by teachers in their classrooms



Section 5: Use of technology to promote speaking skills

Figure 5 compares the implementation of technology in private and public EFL classrooms. The data shows a significant difference between the two educational settings.

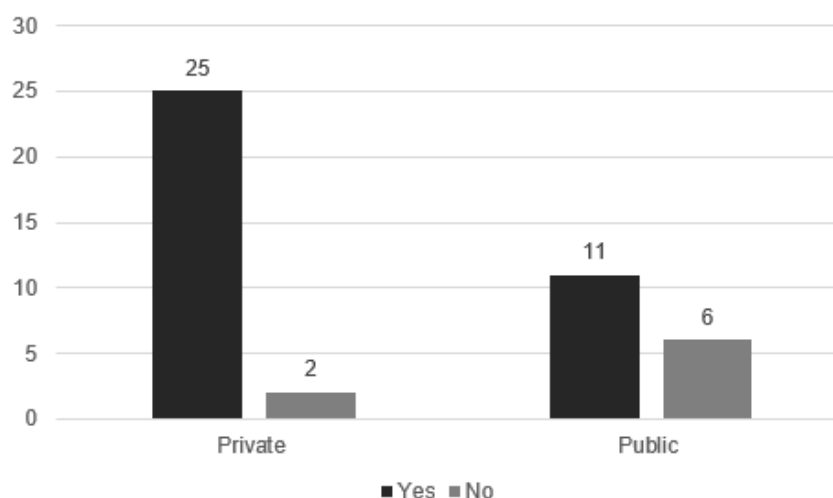
In private institutions, the use of technology is much more prevalent, with 25 teachers reporting that they implement technology in their classes and only two indicating that they do not. This suggests that private schools are either more resourced or more

willing to engage with digital technology in their pedagogy. In contrast, only 11 teachers utilize technology in public schools, and six do not. Although there is some utilization of technology in public schools, the lower numbers suggest potential limitations, such as a lack of resources, infrastructure, or training.

This disparity may reflect broader differences in funding, access to resources, and institutional priorities between private and public education sectors.

Figure 5.

Implementation of technology in classes



EFL teachers were asked to provide a rationale to their answers on the use of the technology to promote speaking skills. The

open-ended responses (Table 1) reinforce the disparity shown in Figure 5.

Tabla 1.
Comparative analysis of teachers' justifications for using technology to promote speaking

Aspects	Private schools	Public schools
Access to technology	Widespread use of projectors, computers, internet, apps	Limited or no access to tools and platforms
Attitudes toward technology	Very positive; seen as essential and engaging	Also positive, but frustrated by institutional limitations
Purpose of use	Focus on pronunciation, fluency, participation, and feedback	Expressed desire to use tech, but constrained by systemic barriers
Integration into curriculum	Regular and varied use across different media and platforms	Infrequent or dependent on specific conditions (e.g., lab access)

While both sets of teachers recognize its pedagogical value, those in private schools are empowered to use it, whereas those in public schools face limitations that prevent full implementation. Bridging this gap requires institutional investment, teacher training, and infrastructure support in public schools.

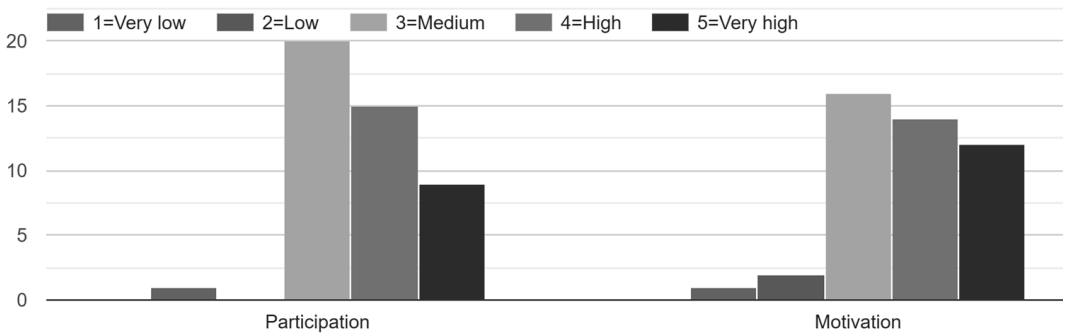
Section 6: Students’ participation and motivation during speaking activities

Most teachers perceive student participation as being at a medium level, with a more minor but significant group rating it as high. However, many still view participation as low, indicating inconsistency across classrooms or student groups.

In terms of motivation, the responses are slightly more optimistic. More teachers rated motivation as high or very high, suggesting that students may not always actively participate but are often interested and willing. This points to a possible gap between student enthusiasm and verbal engagement, potentially influenced by confidence, language proficiency, or classroom dynamics.

While motivation appears stronger than participation, the data reflects a need to foster more active involvement to match students’ interest levels.

Figure 6.
Students’ level of participation and motivation



Section 7: Successes in helping students develop their English-speaking skills

Even though there are challenges, EFL teachers have experienced rewarding moments in fostering speaking skills that extend beyond academic success and involve emotional, social, and personal growth (See Table 2).

A common reward is that students change from hesitant speakers to more confident speakers. This growth often comes from practice, exposure to authentic contexts, and integration of technology. These experiences confirm the impact of their teaching and the value of establishing a supportive, interactive classroom. Lastly, the table illustrates how language learning empowers students and confirms the teacher's work in doing so.

Tabla 2.

Rewarding successes in developing students' speaking skills

Aspect	Description	Examples from responses
Confidence and reduced fear	Students become more comfortable and less afraid to speak.	"Students have lost the fear of speaking"; "They now engage in conversations"; "They're not afraid of presentations or role-plays."
Real-life use of English	Students apply English in daily situations and outside the classroom.	"Use of English phrases in daily life"; "Greeting and asking questions"; "Talking with native speakers"; "Using songs for routine expressions."
Pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency	Little by little improvement in pronunciation and vocabulary.	"Improved pronunciation through songs and apps"; "Vocabulary growth"
Communication and expression	Students express ideas clearly in English during various tasks.	"Short conversations"; "Explaining ideas in expositions"; "Improved oral performance."
Motivation and initiative	Students show interest, take initiative, and practice independently.	"Students practice without being told"; "Use of YouTube, apps"; "Motivated to improve and participate."
Gratitude and teacher fulfillment	Emotional reward for teachers through student progress and appreciation.	"Gratitude from students"; "Most gratifying success is seeing them succeed"; "Watching them grow over time."

Discussion

The results of this study illustrate the complex realities Ecuadorian EFL teachers face in promoting students' oral communication skills. Despite national curriculum goals emphasizing communicative competence,

challenges such as limited class hours, insufficient teacher training, and inadequate access to technological resources continue to impede progress—especially in public schools. These systemic issues align with Astudillo and Zavala (2021), who argue that

structural deficiencies severely hinder communicative competence, and with the 2022 Ministerial Agreement (MINEDUC, 2022), which permits teachers without specialized English training to teach the language and limits English instruction to just three periods per week.

Teachers' English proficiency levels also emerged as a key factor influencing the quality of instruction. Although most meet the national minimum B2 level, some still operate at A2 or B1 levels. This is concerning, as teachers with limited proficiency may struggle to model accurate language and lack confidence in implementing interactive, student-centered speaking tasks. Similar concerns have been raised by Orosz et al. (2021), who highlighted disparities in training and preparation among Ecuadorian EFL teachers, particularly in public schools.

Pronunciation stood out as the most frequently mentioned student challenge, confirming findings from Zhang (2024) and Almusharraf (2024), who both emphasize pronunciation as a cornerstone of intelligible and confident speech. Teachers in the study favored structured strategies such as presentations and pair/group work, which are consistent with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approaches supported by Bryfonski and McKay (2017) and Sholeh et al. (2020).

Technology emerged as a powerful but unevenly implemented tool. Private school teachers were far more likely to use digital platforms, apps, and AI-based tools, echoing findings by Al-Shallakh (2024), Qassrawi et al. (2024), and Celi and Bustos (2025), who report positive outcomes when students engage with technology to improve speaking performance. However, public school teachers cited lack of access as a significant obstacle, reinforcing the need for technological infrastructure and training investment.

Student motivation was generally perceived as moderate to high, but participation lagged—pointing to a potential mismatch be-

tween interest and actual engagement. Emotional and affective factors such as fear of judgment, low confidence, and anxiety likely play a role, as supported by Feng (2023), Garcia et al. (2024), and Ignacio et al. (2025), who advocate for emotionally safe learning environments and scaffolding strategies like peer support and constructive feedback.

Encouragingly, many teachers described successes in helping students evolve from shy or disengaged learners to confident speakers. These qualitative insights reflect the power of consistent practice, technology integration, and supportive classroom dynamics in fostering communicative competence, as also emphasized by Riyadi et al. (2024) and Boonmoh and Jumpakate (2019).

Conclusions

This study provides insight into Ecuadorian EFL teachers' challenges in fostering students' English-speaking skills within a resource-limited system. Despite national efforts to promote communicative competence, public schools, in particular, struggle with limited class time, uneven teacher proficiency, and restricted access to technology.

Still, teachers show strong commitment, using collaborative tasks and presentations to promote speaking. In better-resourced settings, technology supports pronunciation, fluency, and engagement. Yet, due to infrastructural barriers, such innovations remain out of reach for many public educators.

While students are generally motivated, participation is often hindered by fear of mistakes and low confidence. Teachers highlight the value of supportive environments that reduce anxiety and encourage risk-taking in speech.

Improving oral proficiency in Ecuador requires targeted teacher training, increased English instruction time, and equitable access to educational technologies. In this study, teachers' voices reflect the realities on the ground and offer direction for creating a more inclusive and effective EFL system.

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