

## Beliefs and Practices of Ecuadorian EFL Preservice Teachers About Teaching Speaking Skills

Creencias y prácticas de profesores ecuatorianos de inglés en formación sobre la enseñanza de la expresión oral

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This qualitative case study explores the beliefs and practices of five Ecuadorian English as a foreign language (EFL) preservice teachers about teaching speaking skills, as observed during their practicum. Data collected through classroom observations, interviews, and field notes over a semester show a complex relationship between the participants' beliefs and practices, with convergences in collaborative methods, games, technology, timing, and immersion strategies. However, divergences were found in repetition, immersion strategies, and timing. The results underscore the need for teacher education programs to address these discrepancies, thereby better preparing preservice teachers for the demands of contemporary EFL teaching. The study enriches the discussion on language education in Latin America, shedding light on the unique challenges and opportunities for Ecuadorian EFL teachers.

*Keywords:* beliefs, practices, preservice teachers, speaking, teaching

Este estudio de caso cualitativo investiga las creencias y prácticas de cinco profesores ecuatorianos en formación sobre la enseñanza de habilidades orales en inglés. A partir de observaciones en clase, entrevistas y notas de campo recogidas en un semestre, se identifica una compleja relación entre creencias y prácticas, que evidencian convergencias en el uso de métodos colaborativos, juegos, temporización, tecnología y estrategias de inmersión, pero divergencias en la repetición, las estrategias de inmersión y la temporización. Los hallazgos destacan la necesidad de que los programas de formación docente enfrenten estas discrepancias para mejorar la preparación de los docentes en formación ante las demandas de la enseñanza moderna del inglés. Este estudio contribuye al debate sobre la enseñanza de lenguas en América Latina, puesto que destaca los retos y las oportunidades para los docentes de inglés.

*Palabras clave:* creencias, enseñanza, habla, prácticas, profesores en formación

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How to cite this article (APA, 7th ed.): Santos, J. C., & Luque-Agulló, G. (2025). Beliefs and practices of Ecuadorian EFL preservice teachers about teaching speaking skills. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 27(2), 137–153. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v27n2.116833>

This article was received on October 2, 2024 and accepted on May 1, 2025.

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## Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Ecuador is a dynamic and expanding field that aims to integrate Ecuadorian students into a global society. Speaking proficiency is essential since it impacts communicative competence and the ability to engage in real-life English exchanges. Implementing the English language education policy in Ecuador has highlighted the importance of practical teaching approaches and practices that stress speaking skills, as reflected in the national curriculum. For the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, English classes should follow the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach with an emphasis on developing “learners’ understanding of the world, of other cultures and their own, and to communicate their understanding and views to others through English” (Cambridge University Press, as cited in Ministerio de Educación, 2016, p. 2). However, despite the government’s efforts, Ecuador has been ranked as the Latin American country with the lowest English proficiency (“Ecuador, peor país de Latinoamérica en dominio de inglés, según informe,” 2019). This standing serves as a wake-up call to Ecuador to reconsider and potentially reformulate its language policy.

Preservice EFL teachers, who are responsible for implementing the suggested methodology, hold beliefs and practices shaped by their teaching education, learning experiences, and the socio-educational context of Ecuador (Garcia-Ponce & Tagg, 2020). Understanding these beliefs and practices is crucial, as it can help identify the strengths and areas that need development in the current educational approach to teaching EFL speaking skills. For this reason, over the last decade, there has been a significant focus on studies examining teachers’ beliefs, particularly in relation to the relationship between beliefs and classroom practices (Wang & Lam, 2023). However, only some of these studies have investigated preservice teachers (Buss, 2016), and none have been conducted in Ecuador.

During their English preservice program, Ecuadorian students must complete 400 hours of practicum, split into two components: observation (*prácticas*) and direct teaching involvement (*vinculación*). In the observation phase, students visit schools to observe teachers and understand the dynamics of the educational environment. In the direct teaching phase, the students assume the role of the principal teacher. These components allow students to develop practical skills and abilities in a natural professional setting, applying the knowledge they have acquired throughout their studies. The main objective of the practicum is to ensure that students engage in various activities that equip them with the necessary skills and abilities to excel in their future professional activities as English teachers. During this phase, students’ teaching approaches are shaped significantly by their beliefs about language education.

For this reason, by examining the context of Ecuadorian EFL education, this paper seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on English language teaching in Latin American contexts, offering insights into how preservice teachers perceive and approach the teaching of speaking skills. Given this and motivated by the scarcity of research on this area in Ecuador, this study examined the relationship between EFL preservice teachers’ beliefs and practices in teaching speaking skills during the practicum.

## Literature Review

### Beliefs

The term “belief” is central to various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, philosophy, education, and applied linguistics (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011). For this reason, its definition varies in congruence with each field. However, in all of them, beliefs are an “essential utility for decision makers and facilitate decision making” (Renshon, 2008, p. 822), influencing and guiding our actions. Regarding self-directed language learning, Navarro and Thornton (2011) established that beliefs are

not only influenced by but also shape learners' actions, highlighting the complex connections among beliefs, actions, and context in the development of language learning skills.

Beliefs are predispositions of our mind that we hold to be true. According to Lundberg and Brandt (2023), beliefs are "ideologies, attitudes, views, perspectives, perceptions, dispositions, judgments, conceptions, or preconceptions" (p. 2). Different theories offer varied perspectives on how beliefs are formed (Peng, 2011). For instance, De Costa (2011) argues that beliefs are socially constructed historical and political products. Barcelos and Kalaja (2011) compared several studies worldwide that approached beliefs, concluding that beliefs are dynamic, multifaceted, and shaped through dialogue. They are influenced by individual and broader political contexts and discourse, closely tied to emotions, oriented toward others, shaped by reflection and opportunities, and intricately linked to knowledge and action.

One continuing debate in the literature concerns whether beliefs are static or malleable and subject to change. For example, while cognitive consistency theorists like Deutsch and Merritt (1965) and Jervis (1976) argue that core beliefs are relatively stable over time since the human mind has a strong tendency to assimilate new information in a way that conforms to preexisting beliefs, Nilsson (2014) provides evidence that beliefs can change significantly in response to life events. On the other hand, Negueruela-Azarola (2011) affirms that beliefs are both static and changing. Hence, teachers need to identify their beliefs and reflect on them to determine whether they positively or negatively impact their teaching practices.

### Teaching Speaking Skills

Speaking is a crucial component of language education, aiming to enhance communicative competence and fluency. This skill, considered central to language learning, is defined as a process of verbal interaction where speakers attempt to construct meaning by pro-

ducing and receiving information (Luoma, 2004). It is a creative process (Underwood, 1989) that requires some abilities to be mastered (Richards & Renandya, 2002) such as "how to show that one has finished speaking, how to demonstrate to others that one is listening to them, and when precisely to ask for clarification" (Hughes & Reed, 2016, p. 5). Excelling at this skill depends on the ability to "understand listener needs and adapt speech in the light of this" (Hughes & Reed, 2016, p. 96). Also, speaking "involves underlying processes that are remarkably complex and that express both form or structure and meaning or content" (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 36).

Based on the particularities of this skill (e.g., it is usually unplanned, it requires considerable vocabulary, and it can be influenced by emotions), language teachers face numerous challenges in helping their students develop their speaking skills. Several approaches have been used for this purpose (for a historical account of approaches, see Richards & Rodgers, 2014). As mentioned above, the CLT approach is the one suggested by Ecuador's educational laws. Some of the features of this approach, relevant to the aim of our study, include interaction with a strong focus on meaningful communication (rather than repetition), alignment with technology, and the use of L1.

Therefore, group work is fostered, as it facilitates interaction and creates supportive environments where learners feel comfortable practicing their speaking skills (Strauß & Rummel, 2020). Under these conditions, features such as correct classroom seat arrangement can be crucial (Correa et al., 2017). Another significant current development is the alignment of CLT with technology (Ho, 2020), which has changed the way speaking skills are taught and practiced (Binmahboob, 2020; Santos & Ramírez-Avila, 2023), providing learners with more opportunities to practice and allowing for personalized feedback, essential for improving pronunciation and fluency.

Finally, the use of L1 is generally minimized to encourage maximum exposure to and use of the target

language. Using learners' L1 in teaching speaking skills has been a topic of debate among educators. Some researchers favor this scaffolding strategy (Cook, 2001) while others (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002) state its adverse effects, as students are not sufficiently exposed to the target language. More recent accounts do not lean towards saying the benefits or drawbacks of using the L1; they mention its uses, such as clarification or giving directions (Bateman, 2008). Pavón Vázquez and Ramos Ordóñez (2018) suggest that teachers and students resort to their L1 when there is a struggle in communication. Therefore, Shabir (2017) concludes that not using L1 is almost impossible, especially when students and teachers have the same L1.

### **Preservice Teachers' Beliefs and Practices About Teaching Speaking Skills**

Studies have shown that preservice teachers' beliefs about teaching speaking skills are influenced by their own experiences as learners, their educational backgrounds, and the pedagogical approaches they have been exposed to during their education (Pajares, 1992). These beliefs shape their instructional practices, teaching methods, and their responsiveness to students' needs in speaking classes (Suárez Flórez & Basto Basto, 2017). Therefore, exploring these beliefs is crucial for understanding how they align with or diverge from effective pedagogical strategies recommended in the literature.

Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) investigated the impact of CLT on Japanese language teachers in Australia and how these teachers' beliefs influenced classroom practices. The findings confirmed a strong convergence between teachers' beliefs and practices, particularly in their emphasis on communicative activities that promote speaking and listening skills. The study also indicated that while these teachers were committed to the principles of CLT, they faced challenges such as institutional constraints and a lack of sufficient language proficiency, which sometimes led them to return to

more traditional, grammar-focused teaching methods. These findings suggest that while teacher beliefs can guide classroom practices, external factors and practical challenges may influence the consistency of these practices. Similarly, Farrell and Yang (2019) examined the beliefs and practices of one female teacher and found that her stated beliefs aligned with her classroom practices in teaching speaking skills.

On the other hand, Tleuov (2017) conducted a study to explore the congruence between the stated beliefs and practices of four Kazakh language teachers concerning teaching speaking. The author identified beliefs about speaking error correction, the use of L1, and the use of group activities. However, he found inconsistencies between stated beliefs and observed practices. Finally, Gandeel (2016) investigated the compatibility between the beliefs of five Saudi English language teachers and their classroom practices regarding teaching speaking skills. The results showed that some beliefs were reflected while others were divergent.

Buehl and Beck (2015) argue that the association between beliefs and classroom practices may not always be ideal, particularly when these practices are built on "maladaptive beliefs" (p. 73), which can affect the learning process of students. Therefore, preservice teachers require strong guidance during the practicum, an essential component of teacher education programs (Ralph et al., 2007), playing a critical role in developing and transforming preservice teachers' beliefs about teaching speaking skills. Through immersive, hands-on experiences in a real classroom context, the practicum allows preservice teachers to critically engage with their theoretical knowledge and preconceived notions (Collins et al., 1989). For instance, a study by Qiu et al. (2021) demonstrated that, over the course of a three-month practicum, Chinese preservice EFL teachers shifted their beliefs regarding student management, teaching evaluation, and student learning. The changes were attributed to direct interaction with students, reflective practices, and the influence of mentors.

During the practicum, preservice teachers apply the knowledge learned in their coursework and receive constructive feedback from mentors and peers, which is essential for reflective practice (Yunus et al., 2010). This reflective cycle often prompts a (re)evaluation and sometimes some changes in their initial beliefs about effective speaking instruction. Although a few studies have indicated that the practicum has little to no change in modifying preservice teachers' beliefs (Gutiérrez, 2015), many others have demonstrated that all teaching experiences influence and transform beliefs (Sheridan, 2016).

Thus, based on our literature review and experience as language educators, we believe that the practicum can influence preservice teachers' beliefs. For this reason, we formulated the following research question: What is the relationship between the participants' stated beliefs and their observed classroom practices regarding teaching speaking skills during the practicum?

## Method

This qualitative case study is part of a larger PhD project examining the pedagogical beliefs and practices of five Ecuadorian preservice teachers (Santos & Luque-Agulló, in press). The research adopted a case study approach (Merriam, 2001), characterized by its exploratory and descriptive qualities aimed at uncovering fundamental insights (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982). This methodology was selected because it fosters an exhaustive and detailed comprehension of the subject matter and navigates the complexities of modern real-world phenomena (Stake, 1995).

## Participants

The participants were five Ecuadorian preservice teachers (three women and two men) enrolled in the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages program at a public university in Ecuador. They were purposefully selected (Merriam, 2001) since they were students of the main researcher.

The researcher/teacher invited all students enrolled in the Practicum I subject to participate; however, only five met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate. These criteria required participants to (a) be preservice teachers enrolled in their fourth semester (when they start their practicum), (b) have no prior teaching experience, (c) participate voluntarily, (d) be Ecuadorian nationals, and (e) be between 18 and 24 years old. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants.

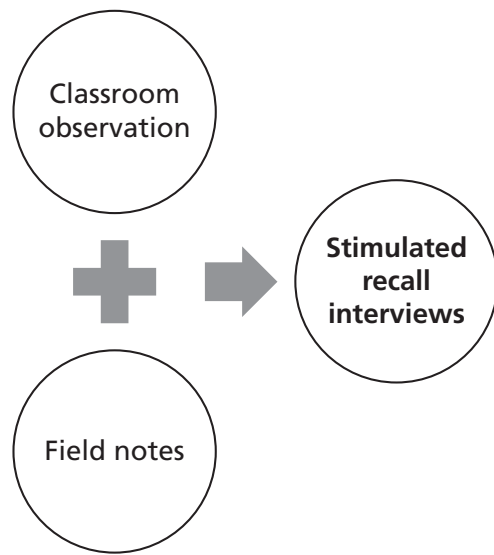
**Table 1.** Participants' Information

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Years of English study
Malena	20	Female	16
Francesco	19	Male	2
Rafaela	20	Female	5
Pepe	21	Male	5
Violet	19	Female	14

## Data Collection

Data collection was divided into two phases from May 2023 to September 2024. The initial phase focused on identifying participants' beliefs about teaching speaking skills, which was conducted over one semester during the first practicum. This study identified beliefs regarding (a) collaborative work, (b) games to teach, (c) technology use, (d) English immersion strategies, (e) repetition to teach pronunciation, (f) ways of correction, and (g) timing. The findings from this phase are detailed in the study by Santos and Luque-Agulló (in press).

The subsequent phase of the present study explored the connection between preservice teachers' stated beliefs about speaking skills and their teaching practices. Three instruments were employed for data collection to facilitate this comprehensive analysis. Figure 1 summarizes the protocol and instruments.

**Figure 1.** Data Collection Protocol

#### **Classroom Observation**

As this research aimed to investigate the relationship between the preservice teachers' stated beliefs about teaching speaking skills and their actual teaching practices, observations were a crucial data collection method (Adler & Adler, 1994). This instrument is essential because it "provides direct evidence of behavior, is (in theory) non-interventionist, and allows a large amount of descriptive data to be collected" (Borg, 2006, p. 227).

This study followed the observation procedures stated by Cohen et al. (2018). We utilized semi-structured observations, with the focus determined by each participant's stated beliefs. Nonetheless, this approach did not confine our observational process; we remained open-minded, aiming to explore the situation as naturally as possible. The lead researcher assumed the role of "nonparticipant observer" (Creswell, 2013, p. 213), maintaining descriptive and reflective field notes to write details that could not be audio recorded, such as teacher nonverbal communication.

#### **Stimulated Recall Interviews**

Cohen et al. (2018) argue that interviews are a potent tool for delving into intricate and profound

issues. This type of interview "elicits teacher's verbalizations while [he or she] looks at a replay of herself/himself performing a task" (Fang, 1996, p. 57). Rahman and Singh (2023) used this tool to confirm the relationship between oral corrective feedback beliefs and practices.

We conducted a round of stimulated recall interviews (SRI) with each participant at the end of their classes. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, and, with the participants' written consent, they were audio-recorded, resulting in more than five hours of recorded data. The questions were based on the participants' performance and the activities conducted in class. The objective of employing SRIs was to gain insights into the participants' decision-making processes, instructional strategies, and reflective practices, thereby providing a deeper understanding of their pedagogical approaches and developmental needs.

#### **Field Notes**

We maintained field notes while observing the participants' classes, following the protocol proposed by Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018). Field notes enabled us to capture the behaviors, activities, events, and various aspects observed (Schwandt, 2015), thereby ensuring a rich empirical basis for analysis.

Additionally, field notes helped us gather our own insights and reflections, thereby enriching the data for lucid interpretation and comprehension. Field notes followed the checklist suggested by Spradley (1980), with an emphasis on

space (the physical setting), actors (the people in the situation), activities (the sets of related acts that are taking place), acts (the specific actions that participants are doing), events (the sets of activities that are taking place), time (the sequence of acts, activities, and events), goals (what people are trying to achieve), and feelings (what people feel and how they express this). (p. 79)

Table 2 summarizes the data collection procedure.



**Table 2.** Data Collection Procedure

Methods	Time for each participant	Total time
Classroom observation	Nine lessons for each teacher, 45 minutes for each lesson	34 hours
Interview	Once for each teacher, lasting one hour	5 hours
Field notes	Once for each observed class	45 reports

### Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted following grounded theory methodologies (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), adopting a content-based and inductive approach to the data (Creswell, 2013; Nguyen & Hung, 2021). This approach was predicated on the premise that the participants' beliefs were pre-identified (for more details, see Santos & Luque-Agulló, in press). Initially, we transcribed the interviews verbatim and performed thematic analysis to uncover the participants' beliefs. Then, we read the data from the classroom observation and field notes to identify the relationship between the preservice teachers' stated beliefs and observed classroom practices regarding teaching speaking skills. We further contextualized this multifaceted analysis by gathering ideas from a comprehensive review of relevant literature.

To enhance validity and reliability, the data were sent to two experienced EFL teachers for their review to identify areas of consensus and divergence. Moreover, to ensure the integrity of the findings, participants were engaged in transcript verification and preliminary data analysis, thereby contributing to the accurate

representation of their perspectives. The researchers analyzed the field notes and interviews through a multi-step iterative procedure (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

This study adhered to the expected ethical guidelines in research, and therefore, participation was voluntary. Participants were informed about the nature of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identities.

### Results and Discussion

The qualitative data analysis demonstrated that the five participants understood the purpose of language, which is communication. They remarked that communicatively employing the target language should be the principal objective of foreign language acquisition. This illustrates that their beliefs align with the Ecuadorian EFL curriculum. However, this study found that some preservice teachers' practices were not congruent with their stated beliefs about teaching speaking skills. The data are presented and discussed in accordance with the beliefs outlined in Table 3. Initially, we explore beliefs related to the methodologies for teaching speaking skills.

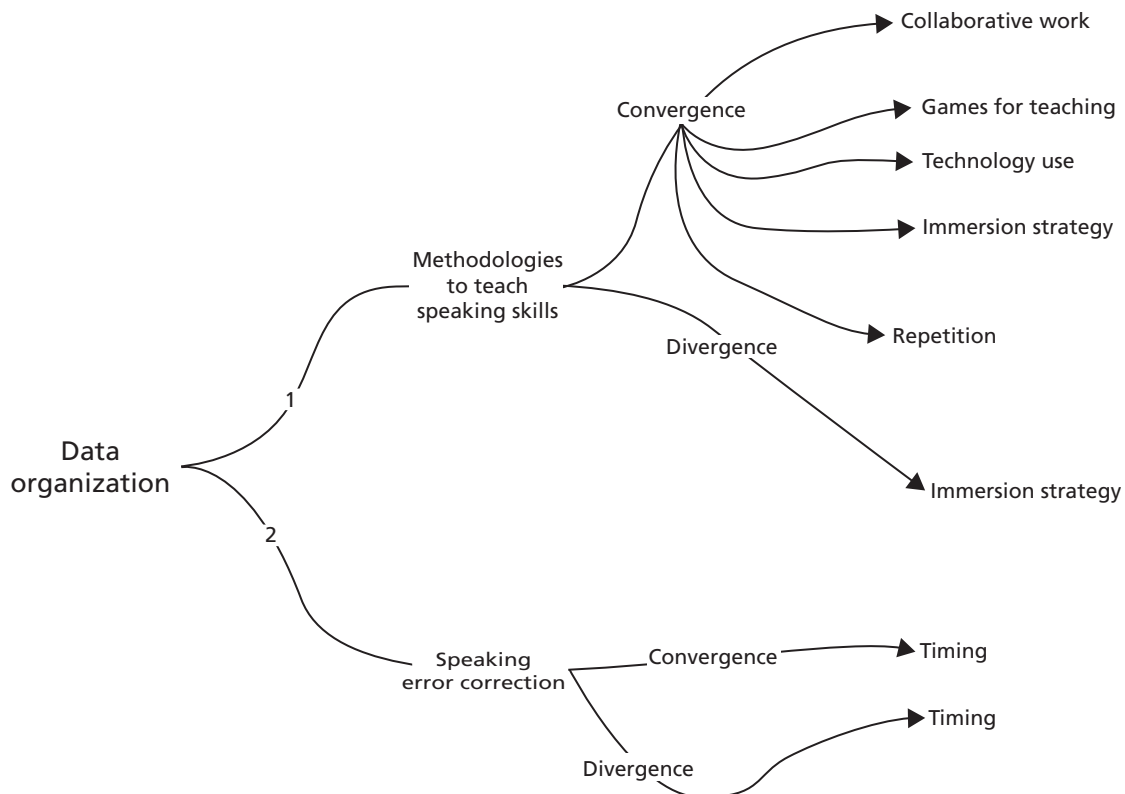
**Table 3.** Participants Stated Beliefs

Beliefs	Suggested strategies	Malena	Francesco	Rafaela	Pepe	Violet
Methodologies to teach speaking skills	Collaborative work	✓				
	Games to teach			✓		✓
	Use of technology		✓		✓	
	English immersion strategy	✓		✓		✓
	Repetition to teach pronunciation	✓	✓		✓	✓
Correction of speaking errors	Ways of correction	✓		✓		
	Timing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

This discussion begins by highlighting areas of convergence among collaborative work, games for teaching, technology use, the English immersion strategy, and repetition for teaching pronunciation. Subsequently, we address areas of divergence concern-

ing the English immersion strategy. Next, we examine beliefs concerning the correction of speaking errors, focusing first on convergence regarding timing and then on divergence. Figure 2 summarizes the data organization.

**Figure 2.** Data Organization



In this context of beliefs and practices, convergence refers to the agreement between what is believed or theorized (stated beliefs) and what is practiced (classroom practices), indicating consistency between theoretical foundation and practical implementations. Divergence, however, represents a disparity/tension or difference between stated beliefs and executed practices, highlighting a disconnect where actions do not reflect the theoretical or ideological expectations (Farrell & Yang, 2019; Tleuov, 2017).

### Beliefs About Methodologies to Teach Speaking Skills

#### Convergence

**Collaborative work.** Malena's belief in the power of collaborative work was evident in her sessions, where she encouraged group activities and peer feedback among students, facilitating a shared learning environment. Her classes were based on this activity, and the way she arranged the seating favored group activities. She justified this type of task:



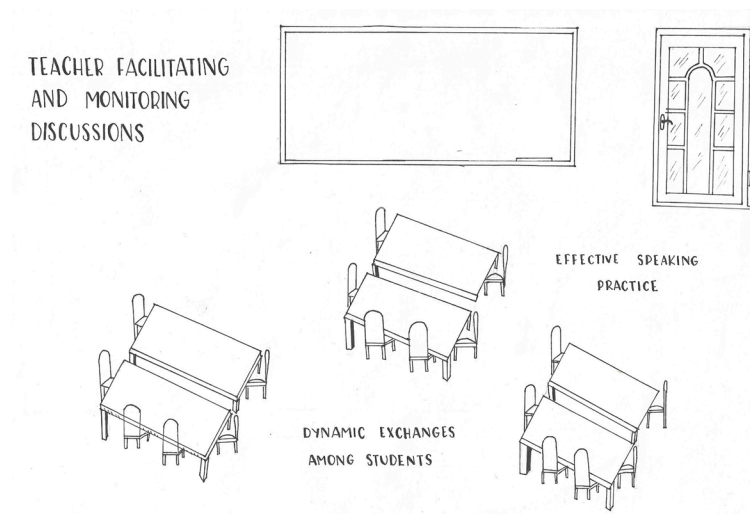
Sometimes students were shy about performing an activity on their own. So, when we worked with them together, I feel that even to understand the instructions, they assimilated them better in groups, or even if they didn't understand but saw that others were doing it in the group, then it was easier for them to carry out the activities and with that, speak calmly.<sup>1</sup> (SRI)

Malena's belief is consistent with Harmer's (2007) suggestion to provide different seating arrangements to foster the flow of spoken interactions and enhance the students' confidence in speaking (Brown, 2001; Luoma, 2004). Students in small groups can share ideas

and participate actively in the discussions generated in class. Correa et al. (2017) provide practical insights into classroom management, particularly regarding how physical arrangements impact language learning and student engagement. This belief suggests that educators should consider alternative seating arrangements to enhance interaction and participation in language classes.

Malena's class seating arrangement (Figure 3) involves small groups in which students face their classmates, allowing for better conversation. Furthermore, Malena formed the groups taking into account the students' peer preferences. Her role was to facilitate and monitor the discussions.

**Figure 3.** Drawing of Classroom Arrangement (Field Note)



**Games to teach.** Rafaela, Francesco, and Violet employed games as a central teaching technique. This aligns with their belief that games can significantly enhance language retention and make learning enjoyable for all age groups. They used more game activities when teaching children. In one of the observed lessons, Rafaela said:

Today, we are going to play a game called *Acting Out*. I write one action verb on the board that we learned in

the last class, and you have to repeat it and perform the corresponding movement. Later, you create a sentence and say it to the person next to you.

During the interview, Rafaela listed the reasons for using games to teach speaking skills to kids:

It's more entertaining for them. I've seen how much they enjoy recess, where they just spend time playing. Since they're kids, they don't sit down to talk or to be taught; for example, even their backpacks have animals or cartoon characters they play with. Seeing all this, I

<sup>1</sup> All excerpts have been translated from Spanish.

thought, “They’re used to it.” And whenever I said, “let’s learn something,” they seemed like, “ugh,” but if I said, “let’s play, let’s make a train,” all those kinds of things, they loved it. Also, because that’s how I was taught in kindergarten—I loved games—so I think they will enjoy them too. They learn faster; they have their routine. They know that if we’re going to play that game, we’re going to learn something, and by the end of the day, they’ll have something new to share.

Meanwhile, Violet commented that using games helps students become more engaged in class:

First, attention: Students pay much attention to a game, especially if there are winners and losers because no child likes to lose. They feel happy, motivated, relaxed, and can develop their oral skills more effectively. (SRI)

Both preservice teachers highlighted the importance of engagement and enjoyment in learning through games. These findings suggest that incorporating games into the teaching of speaking skills can make learning more effective and enjoyable.

**Use of technology.** Francesco and Pepe utilized technological tools, including language learning apps and interactive software. During a typical class session, Francesco might guide his students through interactive lessons using apps that focus on gamification and collaborative work, which help students practice their speaking skills. Meanwhile, Pepe often used voice recording software that allowed students to practice speaking. These activities were combined with peer feedback, allowing students to practice interacting with each other and demonstrating the importance of making mistakes in the language learning process. By employing technological tools, Francesco and Pepe aimed to create a classroom atmosphere that was not only educational but also engaging and responsive to the needs of modern learners. According to Santos and Ramírez-Avila (2023), digital technologies can provide immediate feedback and personalized learning experiences, which are crucial

for developing language skills, enhancing interaction, and fostering communicative competence —essential components in language acquisition.

**English immersion strategy.** Rafaela consistently applied an English-only policy in her classroom to immerse students in the language, reflecting her belief that immersion aids quicker and more natural language acquisition (Cook, 2001). She spoke no Spanish words; everything was done in English. During the interview, she stated: “I believe it is important to speak 100% in English because you gradually get used to the language and start learning. Maybe not through translation, but perhaps through logic.”

**Repetition to teach pronunciation.** Finally, a standard methodology among Malena, Violet, Francesco, and Pepe was the use of repetition to teach pronunciation. This approach was crucial for developing accurate and confident speech abilities in students across different levels. The following two episodes demonstrate the use of repetition in the classroom.

#### Episode 1

Pepe: *Otra vez* [again], little finger.

Students: Little finger.

Pepe: *Todos a la vez* [everybody at once], little finger.

Students: Little finger.

Pepe: *¡Muy bien!* [very good!]

#### Episode 2

Malena: *¿Recuerdan lo que aprendimos en la clase pasada?*

[Do you remember what we learned last class?] We learned about colors. Repeat with me. We learned about colors.

Students: We learned about colors.

Malena: What color is this? Purple. Repeat with me: purple.

Students: Purple.

Malena: Now, it is orange. Orange. Repeat with me.

Students: Orange.

Malena: *¿Alguien me dice qué color tiene la bandera de Ecuador?* [Can someone tell me what color the Ecuadorian flag is?]

Students: Blue, yellow, red.

Pepe, Malena, and Violet used repetition in various moments of the class, each with the same goal: to have students practice their pronunciation. Violet mentioned,

I believe that repetition is important. It worked not only in the engagement process but also in the practice sessions. As we repeated, they would naturally repeat the same sentences as us, which improved their pronunciation, or in other cases, their sentence structure or all aspects of grammar. (SRI)

Although belief and practice were congruent, this stated belief contradicts the principles of CLT, which prioritize meaningful communication over accuracy and fluency (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The reliance on repetition underscores a traditional view that repetitive practice can solidify language structures and aid fluency. However, it does not necessarily prepare learners for spontaneous language use in diverse communicative contexts.

### Divergence

**English immersion strategy.** While there was significant alignment in many areas, a divergence was observed in the application of the English immersion strategy by Malena and Violet. Despite its proven effectiveness and popularity among some educators (Cook, 2001), as demonstrated by Rafaela's implementation, Malena and Violet deviated from this approach, going against their stated beliefs. Both preservice teachers used Spanish to give instructions about the activities, which were then conducted in English. Episode 3 is from Violet's first speaking class.

#### Episode 3

Violet and students: Good morning. How are you? Very well, I thank you. What about you?

Violet: *Otra vez* [again]. *A ver, escuchen. Quien no canta o baila la canción no va a ganar una happy face* [Alright, listen. Whoever doesn't sing or dance to the song won't earn a happy face].

Students: Good morning. How are you? Very well, I thank you. What about you?

Violet: Very good! Good job! So, please, take a seat. Today, we are going to talk about fingers. Do you know what a finger is? Fingers are *dedos*. *¿Cómo se dice dedos en inglés?* [How do you say "dedos" in English?] Fingers. *Repita* [repeat]: Fingers. *Otra vez* [again]: Fingers. *Vamos a trabajar acerca de cómo se llaman los dedos* [We are going to learn the names of the fingers]. *Ustedes se acuerdan de que antes de ayer con miss Gaby, aprendieron sobre los dedos, ¿verdad?* [You remember that the day before yesterday, with Miss Gaby, you learned about the fingers, right?] *¿Cómo era este dedito?* [What is this finger called?]

This utterance demonstrates her effective teaching strategy and reflects academic perspectives on language teaching methodologies. Specifically, Violet's decision to initially provide instructions in Spanish to ensure clarity and comprehension mirrors the theoretical insights offered by Bateman (2008), who explained that the first language can be strategically used for clarification or giving directions in class. This bilingual approach acknowledges the advantages of using students' first language to establish a solid basis for participation in later English-speaking activities. By ensuring that students fully understand the instructions, Violet effectively facilitates a smoother transition to English, enhancing the communicative efficacy of her lessons. This practice underscores the dynamic interplay between teachers' beliefs and the pedagogical theories that support using L1 as a scaffold in EFL teaching, thereby validating Bateman's (2008) assertion in a real-world educational setting. During the interview, Violet stated:

At the beginning of the practicum, I didn't use Spanish, but something changed in me because it turned out that the students didn't understand me, and they didn't get what I was saying. It was as if I didn't exist, as if I were mute. For example, I would make gestures, interpret, and try to make myself understood, but it was like they just weren't getting it. They're used to Spanish, so I know that

Miss Gabby and many others have said that we shouldn't underestimate or overestimate the students, but I don't know. I feel like it was tough for me. It's hard to speak in English and have the students understand. For example, the instructions for assignments: I remember one time when I explained everything in English, even how to complete the task, and they did everything wrong, everything, everything was wrong. So, for that reason, speaking to them in English didn't work.

Using the L1 reflects an adaptive teaching strategy, recognizing the students' diverse linguistic backgrounds and the necessity of scaffolding their learning experiences to facilitate language acquisition. The switch from L2 to L1 demonstrates Violet's commitment to providing the best for her students. As Borg (2003) argues, "teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs" (p. 81).

### Beliefs About Correction of Speaking Errors

#### Convergence

**Timing.** Malena, Francesco, and Violet share a common belief in the importance of timing in error correction. They prefer to correct errors at the end of an activity or a speaking task rather than interrupting immediately. This approach is based on their belief that immediate corrections can hinder fluency and discourage learners. By allowing students to complete their thoughts, these educators aim to foster a more supportive and less intimidating environment that encourages communication and risk-taking in language use. The following episode is from Francesco's and is about the parts of the body. He started the class with a song and then asked the students to repeat the parts of the body that were mentioned in the song.

#### Episode 4

Francesco: *Nariz en inglés es nose.*

Students: Nose!

Francesco: Very good! *Boca en inglés es mouth* [mauθ].

Students: Mouth [mauθ].

Francesco: Please, say a sentence using this word.

Student: My mom's mouth [maut] is small...

Francesco: Excellent! Your mom's mouth [mauθ] is small...

In Episode 4, Francesco exemplifies his belief with Malena and Violet regarding the timing of error correction. When the student mispronounces "mouth" as [maut] instead of [mauθ], Francesco waits until the student completes their sentence before providing the correct pronunciation. This method not only corrects mistakes but also preserves the students' self-esteem and encourages ongoing participation by allowing students to express their thoughts first. These participants' beliefs align with Gharaghanipour et al.'s (2015) assertion that correcting students at the end of their utterances can help reduce speaking anxiety. This convergence may be related to the preservice teachers' experiences of feeling comfortable in class.

#### Divergence

**Timing.** In contrast, Rafaela and Pepe believe in the effectiveness of immediate correction. They argue that addressing errors as they occur helps students immediately understand their mistakes and learn the correct usage in context. This method is believed to prevent the reinforcement of incorrect habits and promote accuracy in language use from the beginning (Dawood, 2014). However, during their classes, they corrected the errors at the end of the activities. They waited for the students to finish the thought, and later, they wrote the mispronounced words on the board and asked them to repeat.

#### Episode 5

Rafaela: OK, students. Repeat these words with me. Comfortable, island, muscle...

In Episode 5, despite her belief in the benefits of immediate feedback, Rafaela's approach to error correction aligns more closely with Francesco's method, as seen in practice rather than in theory. Rafaela and Pepe advocate for immediacy in correcting mistakes to prevent the entrenchment of incorrect language habits and reinforce correct usage in the communicative context. However, in practice, Rafaela allows her students to complete their statements before addressing pronunciation errors, which does not align with her stated belief. This discrepancy between belief and practice could reflect a pedagogical compromise. By waiting until the end of the activity, Rafaela ensures that the students are not interrupted and can maintain their flow of speech, thus fostering a more fluid communication process.

Finally, in addressing our research question on how beliefs influence teaching practices, we observed that the preservice teachers who value interactive learning are more likely to integrate communicative language teaching methods into their classrooms. Their practices are influenced by a complex array of factors including their beliefs, the teaching context (e.g., the class seating arrangement, available technology, and lesson timing), institutional policies (e.g., the requirement to align with the CLT approach and the use of L1), and the characteristics of the learners (e.g., age, interests, learning styles, and motivation).

### Conclusion and Implications

This qualitative case study was designed to explore the relationship between the beliefs and practices of EFL preservice teachers as they taught speaking skills during their practicum. The research utilized classroom observations, field notes, and stimulated recall interviews to discern the convergences and divergences between the participants' stated beliefs and their actual practices.

This study identified instances where EFL preservice teachers' practices aligned with their stated beliefs, demonstrating convergence in collaborative

methods, games, technology, and immersion strategies, as well as timing decisions. However, divergences were also observed, particularly in repetition, immersion strategies, and timing, which intriguingly exhibited convergence in specific contexts. These mixed results suggest that convergence often arises from the immediate need to adapt teaching strategies to meet student requirements (Borg, 2003). While preservice teachers aim to implement their stated beliefs, practical adjustments are often necessary to accommodate the unique needs and characteristics of their student populations.

The findings underline the significance of preservice teachers recognizing and reflecting upon their educational beliefs to understand how they manifest in their teaching practices. This reflective process is crucial for the ongoing construction and reconstruction of their pedagogical identities, aiming to enhance the quality of education provided to students. The practicum is the ideal moment for this reflection, as preservice teachers' teaching abilities are put into practice (Collins et al., 1989), based on their conceptual knowledge, theories learned during university courses, and stated beliefs (Yunus et al., 2010).

### Limitations and Further Research

This study presented two limitations. Firstly, the sample size is relatively small and may lack diversity among participants, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings across all Ecuadorian EFL preservice teachers. Despite this, as a case study, it offers an in-depth analysis of a specific, and isolated educational context.

Secondly, the presence of the observer might have influenced the participants' behavior, potentially introducing bias into how classes were conducted. However, efforts to mitigate this influence included triangulating data and conducting multiple observation sessions, which likely reduced the impact of such biases.



Three recommendations can be made based on the results, the implications of this study, and a review of the existing literature. First, future studies should examine in-service teachers in Ecuador to identify their beliefs and practices and compare these with teachers in other cultural and educational contexts. This comparative approach could provide insights into how different societal norms and educational systems shape beliefs and practices. Second, research should examine preservice teachers' beliefs at three stages: in the first semester, during the practicum, and in the final semester. This will facilitate a comparison of these beliefs over time to determine if the English teacher education program influences them. Finally, based on the argument that beliefs are dynamic (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011), educational authorities in Ecuador should revise the teacher education curriculum to ensure it focuses on helping students with their stated beliefs. This recommendation may also be applicable to other countries, particularly those facing similar educational challenges, thereby enabling a broader application of the study's findings. By extending these considerations to different regions, the research could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of global educational practices and the interaction of cultural influences on teaching.

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