



**THE
TURKISH ONLINE
JOURNAL
OF
EDUCATIONAL
TECHNOLOGY**

November, 2017
Special Issue for IETC 2017

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ISSN: 2146 - 7242

Indexed by

Education Resources Information Center – **ERIC**
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Published in TURKEY

Contact Address:
Prof. Dr. Aytekin İŞMAN
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Message from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Colleagues,

We are very pleased to publish Special Issue for IETC-2017 conference. This issue covers the papers presented at International Educational Technology Conference and International Teacher Education Conference which were held in Harvard University, Manchester, USA. These papers are about different research scopes and approaches of new developments and innovation in teacher education and educational technology.

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November, 2017

Prof. Dr. Aytekin ISMAN

Sakarya University

English Language Teaching in Ecuador: An Analysis of its Evolution within the National Curriculum of Public Primary Schools

Sandy T. SOTO

*ELT Innovators Research Group
Universidad Técnica de Machala, Ecuador
<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2314-654X>
stsoto@utmachala.edu.ec*

Eder INTRIAGO

*ELT Innovators Research Group
Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí, Ecuador
eder.intriago@gmail.com*

Estefanía VARGAS CAICEDO

*ELT Innovators Research Group
Universidad de Guayaquil, Ecuador
vargasnestefania@gmail.com*

Maricela CAJAMARCA ILLESCAS

*ELT Innovators Research Group
Universidad Nacional de Educación – UNAE, Ecuador
cajamarcam1@gmail.com*

Silvia CARDENAS

*Colegio Río Upano, Ecuador
silvyelizabethcs@hotmail.com*

Paolo FABRE MERCHAN

*ELT Innovators Research Group
Universidad Estatal de Milagro, Ecuador
mrpipe23@gmail.com*

Israel BRAVO

*Universidad de Guayaquil, Ecuador
bravo.israelgt@gmail.com*

María Antonieta MORALES

*Universidad de Guayaquil, Ecuador
antonieta.moralesj@ug.edu.ec*

Jhonny VILLAFUERTE

*Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí, Ecuador
University of the Basque Country, Spain
Fellow of Senescyt, Ecuador
jhonny.villafuerte@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

This study aims at portraying the gradual change in the status of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) subject within the Ecuadorian National Curriculum for public primary schools since it was introduced in the curriculum in 2000. For the achievement of this purpose, we performed a review of public documents including Ministry of Education agreements, studies performed by UNESCO as well as data from official webpages, and newspapers. The results showed that the introduction of the EFL subject in the curriculum of public primary schools in 2000 resulted from the attempts made by the administrators of the CRADLE project since 1993. In 2000, English was introduced as an elective subject. It could only be taught in the establishments that had the facilities and specialized human resources. School principals had the say whether to incorporate EFL, Music, or Manual Arts in the periods assigned for the elective subject. In 2011, the status of the subject changed to as complementary activities. EFL and Computing were the choices this time. In March 2014, the complementary activities were excluded from the primary school curriculum, generating a huge controversy around Ecuador. Consequently, the Ministry of Education claimed that EFL would be included again in the primary schools' curriculum after having the curriculum for this subject and prepared human resources ready. EFL was officially implemented as a compulsory subject in all Ecuadorian public primary schools in September 2016 in the *Sierra* and Amazon region; and in 2017, in the coastal provinces. Space is left to study whether this subject is being incorporated in all schools or not.

Keywords: EFL, Public primary schools, Ecuador, Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in Ecuador has undergone several processes and reforms that in most cases benefited only secondary schools. In 1992, the launch of the Curriculum Reform Aimed at the Development of the Learning of the English (CRADLE) project drove the incorporation of EFL in the curriculum for the secondary level starting in 1993 (The CRADLE Project, Ecuador, n.d.). Unfortunately, this was not the case for public primary schools- grades 1st to 7th. Before 2016, EFL teaching in public primary schools was not a priority. Economic, social, political, and educational forces (Soto, 2014) influenced how EFL would be considered in that academic level. Despite of this, many attempts were made to introduce the subject into the curriculum of primary schools. Such efforts led stakeholders to issue agreements that would address the introduction of EFL in the curriculum under different denominations/statuses.

EFL has passed from being an elective subject, as it was first introduced in 2000, to become a complementary activity later on. In both cases, it was not compulsory. However, such condition would change with the election of a new political leader in 2006. The progressive philosophy of Rafael Correa made of education one of the fundamental pillars of his government. He put a lot of emphasis on bringing the nation up to international standards, which included seeing English learning with different eyes. Proficiency and Assessment requirements, training for EFL teachers, the design of a new curriculum, the establishment of learning and teaching standards, among other things, would occur after a language proficiency evaluation administered to both students and teachers in 2009. All of this would once again target the secondary level forthwith. But, something had to be done for the primary school as well, considering that those years are critical for language learning.

Finally, EFL would be officially implemented as a compulsory subject in all Ecuadorian public primary schools in September 2016 in the *Sierra* and Amazon regions and in 2017 in the coastal region. Before that happened, a gap of about three years would emerge in the teaching of this language, though. The irregular way in which EFL had been taught in primary schools due to the lack of a curriculum, standards, alignments, qualified teachers to instruct the language at this level, among other considerations, led the stakeholders in turn to suspend the teaching of EFL in primary schools since 2014 up part of 2016. Such decision caused controversy nationwide because during that time no room was left for EFL, not even as an elective nor complementary activity. Uncertainty became part of the day to day also as the future of EFL teaching in elementary schools was not clear due to the shortage of qualified EFL teachers in Ecuador.

Considering the importance of documenting events that mark the advance of education in each nation worldwide, this study aims at portraying the gradual change in the status of the EFL subject within the Ecuadorian National Curriculum for public primary schools since it was introduced in the curriculum in 2000. To accomplish this objective, this work includes all the curricular frameworks approved for primary schools since 1996. A descriptive analysis of how EFL was acknowledged in each curricular framework complements the chronological portrayal of EFL in Ecuadorian primary schools.

METHODOLOGY

This study required a deep analysis of the historical background of English language teaching in primary schools taking into account how it was labeled in the curricular frameworks approved for this level over the years. Therefore, qualitative data such as official documentation and posts on government websites that helped in the understanding of the changes in the status of EFL teaching in Ecuadorian primary schools were analyzed. Agreements 00001504; 306-11; 0041-14; and 0052-14 were key in this study as they reported reforms and regulations for EFL teaching in primary schools. Reports published by UNESCO were also crucial as they provided information about the curricular framework of Latin American countries, including Ecuador. The data collection and analysis were carried out from January 2016 to May 2017.

FINDINGS

The efforts for introducing EFL as a formal subject in the secondary started in 1992-1993 with the implementation of CRADLE, and later on with Advance (the EFL teaching project that replaced CRADLE in 2012). This, however, was not the case for EFL in primary schools. In the past, there was not much support from education stakeholders to include English in public primary schools. In fact, as shown in the curriculum approved in 1996, see Table 1, it did not exist for the kindergarten, basic elementary, or basic intermediate levels of primary schools (UNESCO, 2010/11).

Table 1.
Curriculum Approved for Basic Elementary Levels

Subject	Weekly periods per grade					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Spanish	8	8	7	7	5	5
Math	5	5	6	6	7	7
Social Sciences	3	3	4	4	5	5
Science	2	2	3	3	4	4
Sub-total	10	10	8	8	8	8
Technical-Practical Formation						
Physical Education	3	3	2	2	2	2
Artistic Education	4	4	3	3	3	3
Practical Activities	3	3	3	3	3	3
Subtotal	10	10	8	8	8	8

Complementary Activities						
Class Association	2	2	2	2	2	2
Total	30	30	30	30	30	30

Source: UNESCO, 2010/11. Agreement 1443, April 1996

Adapted by the authors

However, efforts of citizens and CRADLE administrators started to gain strength years later. With the aim of improving EFL learning in Ecuador, the CRADLE project proposed to the Ministry of Education at that time to include EFL in the curriculum for primary public schools and seven years after they started operating with the project at the high school level, they managed that the Ministry of Culture and Education included EFL in primary schools (Caizaluisa, 2011; L. Arevalo, personal communication, February 11, 2016; J. Chamba, personal communication, January 10, 2016). Consequently, in March 2000, the Ministry of Culture and Education issued Agreement 00001504 (Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, 2000). According to the Article 2 of this agreement, the Ministry of Culture and Education agreed to include EFL instruction from the first to seventh years of primary school as an elective subject in the institutions that had the facilities and staff with the qualifications to teach the language.

As it was stated in Agreement 00001504, room was made for incorporating EFL in the curriculum of public primary schools as an elective subject. However, the academic hours assigned for the elective were not exclusive for the teaching of EFL. According to the Ministerio de Educación (2011), the school principals had the say to include either EFL, Music, or Manual Arts as an elective. As a guide for EFL teachers of primary schools that included English in their curriculum, in 2007, CRADLE presented, through the Foreign Language Administration, the EFL Program for grades one to seven of EGB: Curriculum design by competences: Philosophy, foundation, and guidelines for the teaching of elective EFL in grades 1st. to 7th (Ministerio de Educación, Dirección Nacional de Currículo, & División de Idiomas Extranjeros, 2007). This program was noncompulsory, therefore, not all public primary school teachers adhered to it.

The possibility of having EFL as an elective the curriculum for primary schools was mandated in Agreement 00001504, but the national curricular framework of primary schools was not modified immediately. Schools principals did attached to what was ordered in Agreement 00001504, though. In December 2009, the Ministry of Education launched a new curricular framework for primary schools, see Table 2, and in its structure is seen the incorporation of the aforementioned elective subject (UNESCO, 2010/2011).

Table 2.

Primary Education: Weekly Schedule per curricular area

Area	Weekly periods per grade					
	First cycle		Second cycle		Third cycle	
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Spanish and Literature	12	12	10	10	8	8
Math	6	6	6	6	6	6
Social and Natural Environment	5	5	-	-	-	-

Science	-	-	4	4	4	4
Social Studies	-	-	4	4	5	5
Esthetics	3	3	3	3	3	3
Physical Education	2	2	2	2	2	2
Elective	2	2	1	1	2	2
Weekly total	30	30	30	30	30	30

Source: UNESCO, 2010/2011. Agreement 61199, December 6, 2009.

Adapted by the authors.

Another change that involved EFL teaching in primary schools was seen in August 2011 with the issue of Agreement 306-11 (Ministerio de Educación, 2011a). Through this agreement, the Ministry of Education assigned five class periods for complementary or additional activities, which replaced the two class periods appointed to the elective subject in primary schools. The extra periods of complementary activities added five more class periods to the school workload, which translated into an official transformation of the school workload from 30 to 35 hours. As complementary activities, teachers could, among other subjects, instruct students in EFL and Computer Use (see Table 3). However, in order to incorporate these subjects (special subjects as they were named), public primary schools were required to have qualified staff and resources to teach the mentioned subjects.

Table 3

Approved workload for basic general education.

Subject	EGB Grades									
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th
Spanish and Literature	-	12	12	9	9	8	8	6	6	6
Math	-	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Social and Natural Environment	-	5	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Science	-	-	-	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Social Studies	-	-	-	4	4	5	5	5	5	5
Esthetics	-	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Physical Education	-	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Elective	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	5	5
Subtotal	-	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Additional Activities*	-	5	5	5	5	5	5	-	-	-

Total	35	35	35	35	35	3	35	35	35	35
						5				

Adapted by the authors. Source: Agreement 306-11 of August 2011.

* Additional activities included EFL, Computer Use, Music or Physical Education

As can be noticed, in the agreements issued between 2000 and 2011 EFL was only considered officially as an elective subject within the curriculum of public primary schools; no mandatory curriculum existed for this subject at the primary level; and, school authorities were the ones who decided whether to include English in their schools or not based on the available resources at their disposal. 2014 marked another important point of reference for EFL teaching in primary schools in Ecuador. A new agreement was issued in that year which generated polemic nationwide.

A controversial agreement

Agreement 0041-14 issued on March 11, 2014 caused national controversy as it established a new curricular framework for EGB which did not leave room for EFL teaching in primary schools (see Table 4). The academic hours assigned for complementary activities, in which English could be taught, were excluded from second to seventh grade in this curricular framework. In their place, academic hours for *Clubs* were included. As it was contemplated on this curricular framework, *Clubs* were meant for extracurricular activities concerning cultural-artistic, sporting, scientific, and social interaction matters (Ministerio de Educación, 2014a). The school community and the media reacted immediately and claimed that this new agreement represented a setback for the public primary education.

Table 4
School workload for the ten years of EGB

Core Subjects and Clubs	Grades of EGB / Hours per week									
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th
Language Literature	25	12	12	9	9	9	9	6	6	6
Mathematics	-	8	8	7	7	7	7	6	6	6
Natural and Social Environment	-	5	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Natural Science	-	-	-	5	5	5	5	4	4	4
Social Studies	-	-	-	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Aesthetic Education	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Physical Education	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
English as a foreign language	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	5	5
Clubs	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

Source: Agreement 0041-14 issued on March 11, 2014.

Translated by the authors

In light of this, on March 23rd, 2014, the Ministry of Education issued a communication on its official website and stated that what had been reported by the media was weak and that such agreement did not modify the curricular framework for public primary schools (Ministerio de Educación, 2014c). In addition to that, the Ministry of Education also indicated that

those institutions that already offered EFL or any other foreign language within their curriculum, in the first grades of EGB, could continue offering its instruction by presenting the curriculum to the corresponding District Administration following the transitory disposition stipulated in the mentioned agreement (par. 3).

However, the point was that this transitory disposition stated that only once the Ministry of Education had published the curriculum for EFL, had the textbooks and the necessary human resources to teach this subject in the first years of GBE, the current curriculum and the class workload could be modified to incorporate EFL as an individual subject (Ministerio de Educación, 2014a). This meant that schools had to wait until the Ministry of Education and the Foreign Language Administration were ready to implement this subject in the curriculum of public primary schools.

The day after the aforementioned communication was published on the Ministry of Education's website, a new agreement was issued by the Ministry of Education, Agreement 0052-14. Through this agreement, the Ministry of Education agreed to issue the "Regulations Exploitation of the Transitory Disposition Included in the Agreement which stated that English language teaching would be mandatory for public, religion-driven, and private institutions from the second grade of primary school to the last year of high school (Ministerio de Educación, 2014b). This reform would be included in the 2016-2017 school year for the *Sierra* and amazon regions and in 2017-2018 for the coast (Ministerio de Educación, 2014d) -Dates vary because the beginning of the school year in Ecuador is not the same for all regions in the country. Classes begin in April-May in the coastal provinces and the Galápagos Islands and in September in the *Sierra* and Amazon regions.

Likewise, in its Article 2, Agreement 0052-14 also stipulated that the academic periods, which in Agreement 041-14 were assigned to *Clubs*, could be used for EFL classes. Additionally, in its article 3, the agreement also specified that "for schools to be able to incorporate EFL in their curriculum, they needed to have teachers accredited with a CEFR B2 level; the school should also have the necessary resources to guarantee the correct learning of this language" (Ministerio de Educación, 2014b, p. 3). The deficit of English teachers with a B2 level was evident, meaning that several schools that wanted to implement English in their curriculum were not able to fulfill this requirement. In one of its articles, *el Comercio* (2014, March 26) highlighted this situation; and, since English was not compulsory for the primary grades, the schools that did not have teachers for the job could opt for the other alternatives offered through *Clubs*.

Principals of public primary schools, concerned with continuing to provide EFL instruction, appealed to their districts administrators to assign an English teacher to their institutions, but as there were very few teachers with a CEFR B2 level to work in primary schools so this requirement could not be fulfilled. The state of EFL instruction in public institutions varied between public primary schools that excluded the subject to adhere to the new curricular framework and those schools that continued with it. Being the former case the most commonly found due to the lack of competent EFL instructors available (*El Comercio*, 2014, March 26).

EFL finally became a core subject in primary schools

After all the ups and downs, on February 17th, 2016, the Ministry of Education issued the agreement that would give EFL a life of its own in primary schools. EFL would not be treated as an elective or complementary activity anymore. Agreement *MINEDUC-ME-2016-00020-A* finally incorporated EFL as a core subject in the curriculum of primary schools (Ministerio de Educación, 2016a). With a new curricular framework (see Table 5), Agreement *MINEDUC-ME-2016-00020-A* restated what the Ministry of Education had indicated in Agreement 0052-14. English language teaching became compulsory for public, religion-driven, and private institutions from the second grade of primary school to the last year of high school in the 2016-2017 school year of the *Sierra* regime and in the 2017-2018 school year of the coast regime. It would be incorporated progressively, though, until all primary schools have the staff with qualifications to teach English.

Table 5
School workload for the ten years of EGB

Subjects	Grades of EGB / Hours per week								
	Basic elemental			Basic Intermediate			Upper Basic		
	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th
Language and Literature	10	10	10	8	8	8	6	6	6
Mathematics	8	8	8	7	7	7	6	6	6
Social Studies	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4
Natural Science	3	3	3	5	5	5	4	4	4
Cultural and artistic education	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Physical Education	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
English as a foreign language	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	5	5
School projects	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3

Source: Agreement *MINEDUC-ME-2016-00020-A* issued on February 17th, 2016.

Translated by the authors

By the time EFL was allocated as a core subject in the curriculum of primary schools, the curriculum and textbooks for this subject were ready; just like the Ministry of Education had reported in Agreement 0052-14. The requirement of counting with staff accredited with a CEFR B2 level would be met through the “It is time to teach in Ecuador project”. This project has recruited (since 2016 up to date) volunteer professionals who hold a B2 accreditation to teach in public schools of Ecuador (Ministerio de Educación, 2016b). It is time to teach in Ecuador project will be open until accomplishing the goal of counting with qualified staff to teach EFL in all schools belonging to both the primary and secondary level.

As it has been discussed throughout this work, the EFL has been part of the curriculum of primary schools for almost two decades. It did not hold a place of its own for thirteen years; during those years, it was taught as an elective or complementary activity. An interval of about three years without EFL in primary schools occurred prior to earning a spot in the Ecuadorian curriculum. However, the shortage of teachers with the qualifications to teach this language is still a barrier that need to be overcome. Hopefully, projects like "It is time to teach in Ecuador" will aid to cover the demand of EFL teachers for primary schools and soon children all over Ecuador will have the opportunity to learn this language.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this work was to portray the gradual change in the status of EFL within the Ecuadorian National Curriculum for public primary schools. In light of this objective and the results found, we can conclude that EFL has existed (under different labels) in the curricular framework of primary schools in Ecuador for almost two decades. Since 2000 up to 2013, two agreements allowed for its delivery as an elective subject first and then as a complementary activity, which permitted some schools, teachers and students to benefit from it. Of course, the quality, extent and depth of the program depended on factors such as the will of the principal and availability of resources and teachers. Regardless of this reality, some primary schools did offer EFL to their children.

President Rafael Correa, who governed Ecuador since 2007 up to 2017, was not satisfied with the irregular way EFL was delivered in primary schools. It was noncompulsory, there was no curriculum for this level, no books, no teachers with appropriate qualifications, no guidelines, nothing. It meant that not all children would be benefited from learning EFL. It also meant that what children enrolled in one primary school learned was completely different from what was learned by children enrolled in other primary school, no matter if both schools were located in the same city or neighborhood. Therefore, in 2014 the Ministry of Education banned primary schools from teaching EFL unless they had teachers with qualifications to do it. At the same time, The Ministry of Education also communicated that EFL would be part of the curriculum of primary schools in 2016 again, but this time a curriculum, books, and qualified teachers would frame its delivery. A gap of about three years arose in the teaching of EFL in primary schools before it finally became part of their curriculum with the status of EFL itself and not under the label of elective or complementary activity.

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