

# **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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## **Summary**

This paper presents a comparative analysis of the teaching-learning of English language in (primary and secondary) Ecuador and European countries. To this effort a group of 5 factors that influence determinedly on the quality of education of the English language are used. The results show the need to establish English as a compulsory subject in basic education of Ecuadorian education system, this entails the professional completion of teachers of the language.

## **Introduction**

English is undeniably the lingua franca of today's world, being present in most technical, scientific, academic, commercial and social documents. Its use has been increasing in virtually all areas of social life, for instance currently the English language proficiency is a valuable attribute in curriculum vitae of candidates to a job position anywhere in the world.

In recent years the importance of the English language has grown considerably in different professionals, mainly in Education, areas where universities of worldwide recognition require to have a thorough knowledge of the language, for example in the case of study of majors link to exports, international businesses, among others.

This phenomenon of use of English has brought hard work of education professionals, focused on improving the teaching-learning process of the language. Although progress has been made in this regard, it can still assert that there is a big difference in English proficiency among people from different regions of the world, for example between Latin America and Europe. It is common for students who have finished their high school from Latin America take university studies with a level which goes from Basic to Intermediate,

while European teenagers who have not even finished high school demonstrate an advanced proficiency of language, the above example has been found by the authors data collected by the International School of Languages Education First (EF), campus Toronto, Canada.

International language schools are focused on the development of communication skills (productive-receptive). At the time a student join to one of these institutions must take a placement test, it is used to assess the level of communication skills in English of the individual, in accordance with international standards. This evaluation is a clear evidence that European students get better results than Latin American, which shows the difference between learning received between both. Most European students from countries like Germany, Spain, Russia, Italy, Poland, Switzerland, among others, are located at advanced levels (C1 and C2), while Latin American students from Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, reach the minimum score to go to the intermediate levels (B1 and B2) score.

Few cases of Latin American students who demonstrate a high proficiency in the English language. On the contrary, it is very common for students from Europe have highly developed language skills in the language. Based on this interesting fact authors can make the following critical reflection:

If education is universal and there is an International Baccalaureate program, in which students are aimed to achieve a functional level of English and other achievements (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 6). Why is there a bond difference knowledge of English language among students from Europe and Latin America?

Undoubtedly the fundamental issue which should be reviewed pretending to obtain an answer to the previous question, it is the teaching-learning process of English in both regions, although there is a group of cultural and social aspects that influence this phenomenon.

For the aforementioned and with the aim to answer the stated scientific question, authors propose to make a comparative analysis of the teaching-learning process of English language (primary and secondary) in Ecuador and European countries.

## **Body**

According to the "European Commission" in the "First European Survey on Language Competences" English is in first among the five (5) languages most taught in Europe, with French (second), German (third), Italian (fourth ) and Spanish (fifth). (European Commission, 2011, p. 5)

This commission conducted the study based on "Standardized International Classification of Education" to high school students, dividing them into lower (students 12-14 years) and higher secondary (students 14-16 years). The population consisted of approximately 53,000 students enrolled in 16 education systems that were evaluated by the European Survey on Language Competences in 2011 (European Commission, 2011, p. 6). This study was conducted with the aim of obtaining updated and truthful information about language learning, teaching methods and curriculum, thereby creating a valuable source of information for researchers, policy makers, educators and other professionals in education. It is also important for parents and students, who will be able to assess their progress in language teaching.

At the end of the study, the commission identified several factors that underlie the high English level that European students exhibit. These factors will be used in the article as criteria for comparing teaching-learning processes of English language (primary and secondary) in Ecuador and European countries.

### 1- Starting age of compulsory education.

Ten (10) out of the sixteen (16) educational systems of compulsory education in Europe, conceived the teaching of English lessons at the age of six (6) years (Spain, Slovenia, Portugal, Poland, France, Croatia, Bulgaria, German Community of Belgium, French Community of Belgium and Flemish Community of Belgium). In four (4) education systems, compulsory education starts at the age of five (5) years (England, Greece, Malta and the Netherlands), and only two (2) educational systems start at the age of seven (7) years (Estonia and Sweden) (European Commission, 2011, p. 13). Therefore it is shown that the obligation to learn a second language is bonded from the

first years of student lifetime in Europe, which does not happen in Ecuador as shown below.

In 2014, an agreement drafted to standardize curriculum in Ecuador resulted in a controversial situation in the Ecuadorian education, according to the Ministerial Agreement 0041-14, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014, Education Minister Augusto Espinosa, officially settings in the workload developed by the under-secretary of Educational Foundations. (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 3).

Among the eight (8) subjects that appeared in the curriculum; Physical Education, Mathematics, Language and Literature had an increase in their weekly hours, however, it is not clear whether the English subject from First to Seventh basic year is optional or not. It only mentioned that should be taken one hour daily of the subject in Eighth, Ninth and tenth basic year of Education (El Comercio, 2014, March 25<sup>th</sup>)

Based on the aforementioned agreement, they tried to regulate English education but it was misunderstood by a large number of people, hence that the Minister had to submit the Agreement 0052-14, which mentions specifically that "English teaching will be compulsory from second basic year to third year of baccalaureate (from 5-6 to 17-18 years approximately), but only from 2016 to 2017 period, on the Highland, and in 2017-2018, on the coast, for all public, private and partly funds institutions of the country "(Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 3).

## 2- Duration of English levels according to the International Standard Classification of Education.

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) provides the standards to establish the information in education and the training lead by UNESCO. It is part of the international family of economic and social classifications of the United Nations (International Standard Classification of Education, 2011, p. 11). Level 1 of ISCED equivalent to elementary education or first stage of basic education (from first to seventh year of basic education), while level 2 represents the lower secondary or second stage of basic education (from eighth to tenth year of basic education). ISCED

was designed as an instrument suitable for assembling, compiling and presenting statistics of education within countries and internationally.

The European Commission considers crucial the duration of levels 1 and 2 of the ISCED for educational system. In most European educational systems the duration of ISCED 2 is shorter than that of ISCED 1, the duration of ISCED 1 is six (6) years, while the duration of ISCED 2 is three (3) years, the exceptions are Bulgaria and Croatia where the duration of both levels of ISCED is four (4) years. Malta has the longest ISCED levels (11 years), followed by Spain (10 years) and the Netherlands (being from 9 to 10 years depending on the type of school) (European Commission, 2011, p. 13).

Concerning to Ecuador, the Ecuadorian primary and secondary educational system work within the parameters of the ISCED, at the moment of finishing high school any Ecuadorian student, would comply with levels 1, 2 and 3 according to the description thereof. Ministerial Agreement 0041-14 2014 evidences that English teaching from second to seventh year of basic education is considered among one of the optional subjects that could be included in the curriculum depending on the availability of human and material resources for the aforementioned subject. (El Comercio, 2014, March 23<sup>rd</sup>). It will be from 2017 that the subject is going to be considered compulsory in Ecuador from the second year of basic education until the third year of high school, as expressed by the Minister of Education in the Agreement 0052-14.

### 3- Compulsory learning of a foreign language.

Another element presented in the European Education is the "compulsory learning of a foreign language", the foreign language is considered the core-curriculum option or entitlement option, educational institutions must offer a foreign language among the set of optional subjects. According to the curriculum, each student must choose at least one subject (which does not have to be a foreign language) from this set of subjects (Eurydice, 2008, p 113).

There are educational systems where there is no established language to study as a foreign language, but it is compulsory for all (or almost all) students in ISCED 1 or ISCED 2 take English as the first foreign language; these systems are in: The French

Community of Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, England, Estonia, France, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Slovenia. In the other six education systems English is established as a second foreign language. In the German Community of Belgium, the second target language (English) it is compulsory for all (or almost all) students in ISCED 3 (European Commission, 2011, p. 16).

In Ecuador, the English will be compulsory from 2017, however, the Minister of Education emphasized that the institutions with the necessary resources for the development of English classes can continue teaching as usual. (El Comercio, 2014, March 24<sup>th</sup>). In addition, bilingual institutions may continue offering subjects in their second language, according to the institution's educational plan and thus fulfilling the rules that monitor bilingualism in the national education system.

#### 4- Teaching time for foreign languages.

At teaching time, the European Commission mentions that most of the authorities (the highest level) of the central educational systems recommend that the minimum annual teaching time for foreign languages as a compulsory subject should be: For most ISCED 1 education systems between 30 and 80 hours on average per year in ISCED 2 hours to consider will be from 30 to 180 hours on average (European Commission, 2011, p. 17)

While in Ecuador the current education system maintains an approximate number of 180 hours for Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Year Basic Education (Ministry of Education, 2014), corresponding to the hours that internationally demand ISCED. In this view it is good to note that the Ecuadorian educational system allocates a considerable number of hours for English teaching, however the results do not correspond to their European partners.

#### 5- Teachers of English area.

The English language teaching began in 1912 in Ecuador, the foreign language was considered more formal in the presidential term of Galo Plaza Lasso in the 50s, where

only English was taught 1 hour a week at the secondary level and there were not English teachers. (El Comercio, 2014, March 26)

One point that has not taken into consideration the European Commission, is the human resource, i.e. English teachers. In the foreign educational institutions can teach English classes considering three aspects; speak fluently the language, have an academic degree and an international certification supporting to their proficiency of language.

In Ecuador, in the early English teaching in Ecuador there were no graduate teachers with an English degree. One of the first universities to train teachers in this area was the Central University at the Faculty of Philosophy and Educational Sciences, as stated by the Dean Edgar Herrera (El Comercio, 2014, March 26<sup>th</sup>)

In 1994 a survey was conducted to determine the number of teachers who teach English, then 3500 professionals were identified in this area, 10 years later its number increased to 4200, which was good in relation to student demand that there was.

From the 4200 teachers who were teaching English subject in 2004, only 38 teachers had the B2 Certification based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), that is less than 10% of teachers were able to teach the subject. Therefore. What has it been taught in English if they have qualified professionals in this area?

It is true that grades or levels not define intelligence, however Certifications of the Common European Framework of Reference - A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 - define knowledge and express the linguistic domain that anyone could have on a particular language. Having reached the B2 level that means approve "First Certificate in English" (FCE), qualify the person with the linguistic skills needed to live and work independently in an English-speaking city or also for studying courses taught in English

Based on this reference the Ministry of Education has considered new strategies and those new aspirants to work in teaching must first pass a series of tests to determine their general and specific knowledge, and aptitudes. Once approved the aforementioned tests with a minimum of seventy percent (70%) of the final grade, passed the supporting and standardized test of specific knowledge in the area of

English. To pass this test the candidate must demonstrate the required minimum score equivalent to B2 or higher level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Teachers who reach level B1 according to the CEFR receive temporary designation to test for a period of two years and who reach B2 level, get permanent designation, (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 12)

## **Conclusions**

One comparative analysis of the teaching-learning process of English language in (primary and secondary) Ecuador and European countries, based on the reference of five factors defined by the "European Commission" in the "First European Survey on Language Competences" is performed.

As a general rule authors can say that in most European countries it is compulsory to study a second language and it is very usual that this is English, also it is studied from very early ages and for a long period of time, which has not been happening in Ecuador although it has introduced the subject of English in the education system from an early age, the reality is that it is an optional subject because there is often no availability of qualified human and material resources.

The Ecuadorian educational system conceived for 180 hours eighth, ninth and tenth year of basic education, which correspond to the hours demand internationally by ISCED, however the results are different from those obtained by Europe. To keep in mind that in the preceding stage the English study is optional and there are also problems with qualified human and material resources in the analysed years.

## **Recommendations**

The Ecuadorian educational system should introduce English as compulsory at all levels of basic education, this decision would entail the training and incorporation of English teachers in the classroom.

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