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Teaching Speaking Skills in Ecuador: EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs during the Practicum

Abstract

Teachers' beliefs shape their pedagogical strategies, yet many language teachers remain unaware of their educational philosophies and how these beliefs are manifested in their teaching practices. This issue becomes more significant regarding pre-service teachers' beliefs, which affect their performance during the practicum when they start university programs with pre-established beliefs about teaching. The present qualitative study aims to investigate five Ecuadorian EFL pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching speaking skills. Data were collected through written and visual narratives, focus group interviews, and reflective journals. The analysis was done following grounded theory. Findings show three different core beliefs: (a) the importance of English, (b) speaking error correction, and (c) methodologies to teach speaking skills. Research into teachers' beliefs is critical, as it may offer insights into teachers' thought processes and classroom planning strategies. Further research is necessary to see how these beliefs affect their teaching practices.

Keywords: speaking, teaching, practicum, EFL, Ecuador

Since 1950, the Ecuadorian government has focused on achieving higher English proficiency levels, recognizing the opportunities this proficiency can provide across various societal sectors. However, due to diverse challenges, Ecuador was ranked as the country with the lowest English proficiency in Latin America in 2019 (El Universo, 2019). The deficit in English-speaking skills,

a topic that has not been the focus of recent pedagogical research in Ecuador, along with the prevailing linguistic landscape, one of the researchers' personal teaching experiences in this country, and pressing concerns within the field, prompted us to conduct this research.

Each year, pre-service English teachers express dissatisfaction with their English-speaking abilities (Uztosun, 2016), often entering the university at an A1 proficiency level as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020). According to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, all students should ideally graduate high school at an A2 level, and all of them, from all the courses, should finish university with a B1 (Ministerio de Educacion del Ecuador, 2016); unless they are future English teachers, they need a B2. This lack of competence of the prospective teachers impacts their participation in oral activities. Vieira-Abrahão (2009) asserted that speaking skills are frequently challenging during undergraduate study, as these programs do not sufficiently concentrate on this skill. These students fear entering the classroom (practicum) with inadequate competence in this area, impeding their teaching efficacy.

In Ecuador, the English teachers training program offers the students two subjects (*Prácticas—Practicum* and *Vinculación—teaching placement*) to improve their pedagogical competencies: *Prácticas*, where students spend one semester observing a teacher/tutor, and *Vinculación*, where they take on the role of an English teacher and apply everything they have learned through observation and with their past teachers' experiences (Creamer Guillén, 2021). During this application phase, the pre-service teachers' speaking skills are implemented. Presumably, their beliefs on how to teach this skill affect their teaching strategies and efficacy.

Teachers' beliefs shape their pedagogical strategies for teaching and learning (Viana & Carazzai, 2010). Nevertheless, many language teachers remain unaware of their educational philosophies and how these beliefs are manifested—or indeed not reflected—in their teaching practices (Farrell, 2007). Consequently, research into teachers' beliefs is critical, as it may offer insights into teachers' thought processes and classroom planning strategies (Gonçalves, 2015). However, this issue becomes more significant regarding pre-service teachers' beliefs (Debreli, 2012), who start university programs with pre-established beliefs about teaching and learning that can affect their performance during the practicum (Qiu et al., 2021). Thus, the findings of this investigation aim to shed light on pre-service teachers' beliefs so that they can be addressed in the academic curriculum of the university training program.

Given the importance of the practicum in teacher training programs (Grudnoff, 2011) and of examining teachers' beliefs, one would expect abundant research on these areas. Despite the global increase of studies exploring teachers' beliefs (Santos et al., 2022), no published study in Ecuador has investigated

pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching speaking skills from 2010 to 2020 (Santos et al., 2022). So, this study addresses this gap in the literature.

This paper is organized as follows: First, it presents the literature review on beliefs, EFL pre-service teachers' beliefs, and teaching speaking skills. Second, the research question is introduced, followed by the research methodology. Then, the findings are presented in the results section, followed by a discussion, and finally, a conclusion.

Literature Review

Teaching Speaking Skills

In today's globalized world, achieving fluency in English is a goal many students share (Hughes & Reed, 2017; Ushioda, 2017). This aspiration originated from the extensive recognition of English as a lingua franca, essential for international communication, academic success, and professional advancement. For that reason, in the scope of EFL, speaking skills have been considered a keystone of language proficiency (Burns & Seidlhofer, 2019) since this skill is what students will be most evaluated on in real-world scenarios (Garcia-Ponce & Tagg, 2020).

The definition of speaking varies among scholars. Harmer (2007) affirmed that speaking is the capacity to express oneself fluently, requiring a grasp of linguistic features and the skill to process information and language in real time. Hughes and Reed (2017, p. 17) characterized speaking as "transient, unplanned, context-dependent, oral/aural, and dynamic." Baron (2020), on the other hand, described speaking as an interactive process encompassing various stages: the production, reception, and processing of information, all contributing to the creation of meaning. A common thread in all these definitions is the emphasis on its significance for language learners, as it allows students to communicate effectively. However, improving this skill is more challenging than other skills because it is an active dynamic process in which the speaker needs to know about relevant world events to effectively keep up with the flow of the conversation (Hughes & Reed, 2017).

Given the importance of speaking English fluently, one of the core principles of the Ecuadorian EFL curriculum is the implementation of the communicative language approach (CLT) "because the goal of foreign language learning is not to turn learners into experts in linguistics who can conceptualize and decipher the various components of the language, but rather future citizens who are competent in the use of a second language for oral and written communication"

(Ministerio de Educacion del Ecuador, 2016, p. 3). The curriculum is based on developing Ecuadorian students' speaking skills to prepare them for the 21st-century globalized world. Despite its significance and the recognition of these characteristics, EFL Ecuadorian teachers encounter various challenges when teaching speaking skills.

Following Hughes and Reed (2017), these challenges included several issues: correctly producing the sounds (intonation, rhythm, stress), appropriate use of the grammatical structures, assessing the characteristics of the target audience, selecting appropriate vocabulary for the audience, knowing the strategies to enhance comprehensibility, using body language, and following the pace of the conversation.

EFL teachers face other challenges when teaching speaking skills, including: (a) big size of classes, hindering personalized instruction, and reducing individual practice opportunities (Chen & Goh, 2011); (b) different levels of student proficiency, impeding the design of activities appropriate for diverse learners (Alharbi, 2021). Additional difficulties include: (c) limited exposure to authentic language use/production and interaction, particularly outside class (Al Zoubi, 2018); (d) an insufficient number of classes per week, which are mainly devoted to other skills (Santos & Ramírez-Ávila, 2022); (e) students' emotions, which can hamper their participation (Santos et al., 2020); and (f) teachers' beliefs, which determine how speaking skills are considered in the classroom (Garcia-Ponce & Tagg, 2020). These beliefs are formed through their past experiences learning the skill and their participation in teacher training programs (Tsunemoto et al., 2023). Understanding these beliefs is crucial for effectively implementing CLT strategies and overcoming the challenges in teaching speaking skills in EFL contexts.

Beliefs

The term *belief* has been researched in Sociology, Cognitive Psychology, Education, and Applied Linguistics (AL) (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011). In psychology, Uso-Domenech and Nescolarde-Selva (2016) defined beliefs as a group of principles held to be true by someone that shapes their actions. Within AL, Wenden (1986) said beliefs are opinions that have their basis in experience and the points of view of others and that impact how someone behaves. Miller and Ginsberg (1995), on the other hand, defined this construct as “ideas that students have about language and language learning” (p. 294). Richards (2000) complemented this notion, adding that the belief system becomes the primary source of teachers' classroom practices. This study adopted the definition of Lundberg and Brandt (2023), which encompassed a broad spectrum of concepts, including “ideologies, attitudes, views, perspectives, perceptions,

dispositions, judgments, conceptions, or preconceptions” (p. 2). This interpretation allowed pre-service teachers’ beliefs to be considered psychological conceptions, providing a framework for analyzing their impact on educational practices.

Different beliefs have been studied within the context of language learning and teaching. For example, Ke and Cahyani (2014) investigated students’ beliefs about the importance of speaking English nowadays, highlighting how these beliefs influence their motivation and learning strategies. Shabir (2017) and Tan (2017) explored teachers’ beliefs about the use of first language (L1) during English class. Zhu and Wang (2019) researched learners’ beliefs about correcting speaking errors, which is crucial for understanding their preferences and reactions in language learning environments. Additionally, Hussain (2017), Spawa and Hassan (2013), and Yang (1999) explored beliefs about methodologies to teach speaking. These studies show how beliefs affect instructional choices and classroom dynamics. Namely, they contributed to understanding how beliefs about teaching methodologies influence pedagogical practices and the development of speaking competencies in language learners.

Beliefs about Speaking Skills

In recent decades, there has been a significant surge in studies focusing on the beliefs of EFL pre-service teachers about teaching speaking skills such as English immersion strategy (Kayaoğlu, 2012), repetition to teach pronunciation (Buss, 2016), games to practice speaking (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016), use of technology (Fauzi et al., 2017), and timing during speaking error correction (Değirmenci Uysal & Aydin, 2017). This increase can be attributed to the recognition of the substantial influence of their beliefs on classroom practices (Peacock, 2001; Suárez et al., 2017), the enhancement of programs for teacher education that might strengthen beliefs in favor of instructional strategies (İnceçay, 2011) and the fact that this skill is frequently seen as one of the most challenging skills to teach and learn, due to its immediate, interactive, and improvisational nature. However, as Santos et al. (2022) asserted, there has been no published study in the last decade in Ecuador regarding pre-service teachers’ beliefs about teaching speaking skills, a gap this study aims to address.

Based on this conceptual framework, the discussion of EFL pre-service teachers’ beliefs about teaching speaking skills deserves particular attention. Table 1 compiles various studies conducted worldwide, showcasing the different contexts, objectives, participants, and data collection methods used in examining these beliefs. It offers insights into how these beliefs vary across different cultural and educational settings. Additionally, it illustrates how beliefs are formed within specific contexts and result from enculturation and social construction (Pajares, 1992).

Table 1
Studies on Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs about Speaking

Author/Year	Objective	Participants	Context	Data collection
Chun (2014)	To understand Korean EFL university students' beliefs about native English-speaking teachers and Korean English teachers	125	Korean	Questionnaire
Gandeel (2016)	To explore five Saudi English language teachers' beliefs and practices regarding their teaching of speaking	5	Saudi Arabia	Interview/ observation
Tleuov (2016)	To explore language teachers' belief-practice consistency about teaching speaking	4	Kazakhstan	Observation/ interview
Emaliana et al. (2020)	To uncover the relationship between EFL students' speaking score achievement and their epistemic beliefs	63	Indonesia	Questionnaire/ test
Garcia-Ponce and Tagg (2020)	No objective is presented	3	Mexico	Observation/ interview
Phisutthangkoon (2021)	To investigate Thai EFL university teachers' beliefs regarding the teaching of speaking skills and to explore their classroom practices in speaking instruction	6	Thailand	Observation/ interview
Boté (2022)	To explore what elements are fundamental, from the learners' viewpoint, in order to have positive and enjoyable experiences in the classroom	–	Spain	Open-ended questionnaire/ semi-structured interviews/focus groups
Eticha et al. (2023)	To investigate EFL teachers' and first-year students' beliefs in teaching and learning English speaking skills in the multilingual classroom	290	Ethiopia	Questionnaire

Source: own research.

These studies highlight the diversity of beliefs regarding speaking skills, influenced by their cultural, educational, and linguistic backgrounds. Gandeel (2016), for example, investigated the congruence between Saudi English language teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. The author identified several beliefs, such as the importance of grammar, the perceived role of speaking in language learning, controlled practice, corrective feedback, and using L1. These beliefs influenced their instructional strategies and the integration

of speaking activities within their teaching, reflecting a complex relationship between their beliefs and the practical realities of classroom management. Tleuov (2016) explored the complex relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in Kazakhstani EFL classrooms. The study revealed that teachers hold significant beliefs about the necessity of error correction, using students' first language, and the effectiveness of group work in teaching speaking. These beliefs influence their classroom behaviors, although the teaching practices often diverge due to various contextual constraints and practical limitations.

On the other hand, Eticha et al. (2023) discovered that teachers and students hold positive beliefs about the feasibility of teaching and learning English in multilingual settings. Teachers preferred monolingual over multilingual classrooms but acknowledged the potential benefits of multilingual environments if supported by effective pedagogical strategies. These studies demonstrate the multifaceted nature of beliefs and emphasize the need for a comprehensive understanding of how these beliefs translate into classroom practices.

Research Question

What are Ecuadorian EFL pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching speaking skills?

Methodology

Method

This study is characterized by qualitative research and follows the procedures of a case study. According to Wellington (2015), this approach is "strong on reality" (p. 174), so it can capture the interaction between phenomena, context, and people. Additionally, it can identify the phenomenon's intricacy and uniqueness (Cohen et al., 2018).

Context and Participants

The study population consisted of five students enrolled in the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages career at an Ecuadorian public university in the Los Ríos province, Ecuador. The sample included three girls and two

boys. Their participation was voluntary and not rewarded in any way. They could withdraw at any time for any or no reason, and their identity would be protected using pseudonyms. They were purposefully selected, corresponding to qualitative case studies that most frequently utilized sampling techniques (Merriam, 1988). This process of purposive sampling selection was based on several inclusion criteria to ensure a rich and diverse array of experiences and perspectives: (a) pre-service students enrolled in the fourth semester; (b) students with no teaching experience; (c) voluntary participants; (d) Ecuadorian; (e) aged between 18 and 24. We selected students from this semester because the program spans nine semesters, typically beginning practical experiences in the fifth semester. To provide deeper insights, we present the profiles of the participants for whom pseudonyms were used.

Malena is 20 years old. She has been studying English for 16 years. She has never traveled abroad and has never taken a private academy. For her, learning English is difficult, especially regarding her improvement in speaking and writing skills. Francesco is 19 years old. He has been studying English for two years. He has never traveled abroad and has never taken an English course. He reports that learning English is easy for him. He feels he needs to improve his reading and writing skills. Rafaela is 20 years old. She has been studying English for five years. She has never traveled abroad and has never taken private English courses. She believes learning English is relatively easy but needs help improving her speaking and writing skills. Pepe is 21 years old and the oldest participant. He has been studying English for five years and has never traveled abroad or taken a private English course. He reports that learning English is difficult for him, especially regarding listening and writing skills. Violet is 19 years old and has been studying English since she was five. She is the only participant who studied in a private elementary school, although her high school was public. She has never traveled abroad and has never taken an English course. She reports learning English is slightly difficult, particularly concerning listening and writing.

Data Collection Instruments

A multi-method design was used in this study, following Creswell (2015). This ensured the data triangulation by validating results and improving their robustness and trustworthiness. Furthermore, it allowed for delineating distinctive aspects, leading to richer information (Tierney et al., 2019).

The different instruments used in this study were designed by the authors following previous literature (Cohen et al., 2018; Mattar & Ramos, 2021; Paiva, 2019) and validated by three experts, who provided corrections and feedback, which were then incorporated. After the validation, these instruments were

piloted with other students to evaluate the data collection's feasibility and usefulness. These instruments include a written narrative, a visual narrative, a focus group interview, and a reflective journal. All of them were aimed at identifying and comprehending students' beliefs. The data collection process was conducted over five months.

Written Narrative

Written narrative (WN) comprehends or represents complex situations and settings (Silva, 2018), describing or presenting a proposed topic. By sharing life narratives, including personal or professional journeys, participants can examine their beliefs, actions, knowledge, and the significance of learning moments throughout their development (Silva, 2018). In this study, participants were requested to narrate their English learning history, focusing on the following: their first contact with the English language, highlighting possible positive and negative points, the classes during school time, the role of the teacher, moments of class interaction, methods/approaches/activities used to teach oral skills, and, finally, ways in which teachers used to correct their pronunciation errors (Appendix 1). The document was emailed to them, and they had two weeks to hand in the written narrative.

Visual Narrative

Visual narrative (VN) efficiently identifies students' emotions and beliefs in the learning/teaching context (Paiva, 2008). VN represents a specific situation using photographs, collages, and drawings (Kalaja et al., 2008) and is used to illustrate students' beliefs. Participants in this study were invited to portray a typical day of speaking activities in an English class (Appendix 2). They could draw, use collages, or any application. They had to deliver the visual narrative with a small description within two weeks. The visual-grounded theory relies on the comparative method. Researchers can develop theoretical codes or connections by comparing images with other data sources (Suchar, 1997). Using pictures and their sequences provides a comparative view of empirical data, aligning with the comparative analysis approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Some image sequences capture stages of action, forming natural sequences. Analyzing these sequences helps identify patterns, enhancing the conceptual understanding of the investigated phenomena (Konecki, 2009, p. 89).

Focus Group Interview

Focus group interviews (FGI) are structured discussions created to gather participants' viewpoints on a subject (Krueger, 2014). This instrument aims

to understand the psychological and sociocultural processes within the group that share specific characteristics. For this study, one of the researchers worked as the focus group moderator. During the data collection stage, four interviews were conducted. They were conducted in Spanish to facilitate participants' interactions and oral production (Appendix 3). The interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed, and analyzed. The interviews were sent to the participants to confirm validation.

Reflective Journal

A reflective journal (RJ) is a written document in which students reflect on their learning process (Tahmasbi et al., 2022). It provides a means to explore representations and views about pedagogical endeavors, fostering introspection and professional growth for educators (Perez, 2013). Participants were required to keep a reflexive journal of their practicum following the four steps proposed by Liberali (1999): (a) describe concrete events experienced in the classroom; (b) inform the principles and theories that guide the teaching and learning process, which underpin the teacher's behaviors; (c) confront through the connection of actions to the broader cultural, political, and economic influences that extend outside the classroom setting, and finally, (d) reconstruct the practices thinking about how they would act differently. They all had to send the journals to the tutor (researcher) monthly to be checked and receive feedback (Appendix 4).

Data Analysis

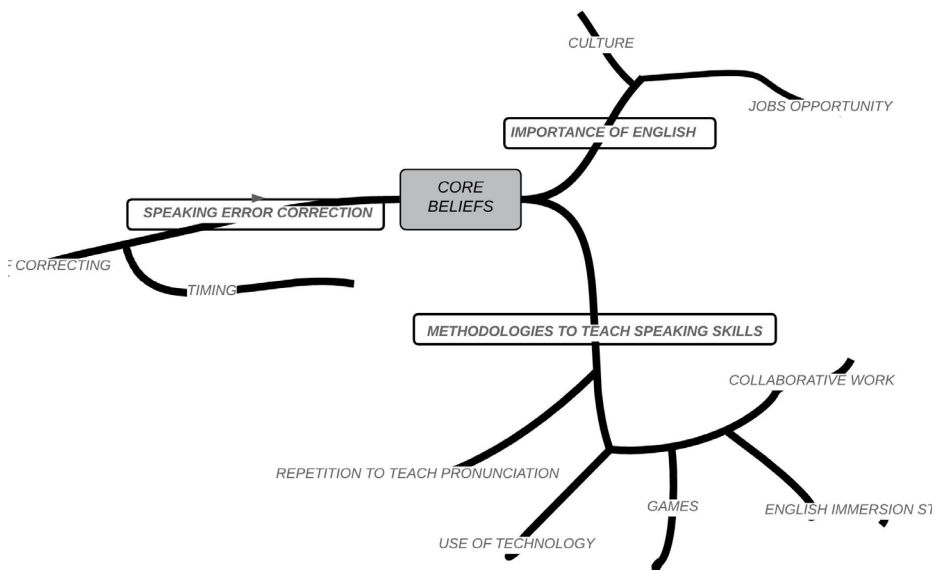
The collected data (interview transcripts, written and visual narratives, and reflective journals) were analyzed thematically using grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). First and foremost, during the open coding, the data gathered were read thoroughly many times and broken down. Subsequently, in the axial coding stage, they were grouped according to their similarities to make connections and categorize. Thirdly, the codes were meticulously crafted around several core themes paramount to the study's objectives: (a) the importance of speaking English, (b) methodologies to teach speaking, and (c) speaking error correction. Finally, a comprehensive review was undertaken to ensure consistency and accuracy in data representation. All the data were collected in Spanish, and after the analysis, they were translated into English.

This study adheres to the principles of ethical research conduct, operating under the permission granted by the University of Jaén (Reference: FEB.23/15. PRY), with precise attention to the welfare and rights of the participants involved.

Results

This qualitative study explores the beliefs about teaching speaking skills held by five Ecuadorian EFL pre-service teachers. The results of the data collection instruments indicated a complex interaction of personal experiences, educational theories, and cultural influences. These factors shape their perspectives on teaching speaking skills to English language learners during the practicum. While each participant carried a distinct standpoint to the discussion, several similar themes, outlined in the literature review, emerged, offering insights into the collective mindset of this cohort. Figure I shows a summary of the participants’ beliefs.

Figure 1
Summary of the Participants’ Beliefs



The following section presents and develops the five common beliefs expressed by the participants, which arose during the data collection process and throughout all the instruments.

Importance of Speaking English

A noticeable unanimity emerged among the participants around the importance of learning English nowadays, although each participant held different

opinions about this issue. Malena believed that English is a global language, and she reported that one of its benefits could be applying for scholarships in other countries. During the focus group interview, she said: “I think it is important to learn English because it is a global language, and with that, I can apply for scholarships or study abroad” (Malena, FGI).

Both Francesco and Rafaela articulated a common belief underscoring the instrumental role of English language proficiency in enhancing employability. Francesco remarked: “Acquiring a new language can benefit individuals, with an emphasis on the professional field” (Francesco, FGI). Rafaela highlighted: “I think it is important to learn English because it opens many doors to job opportunities” (Rafaela, FGI).

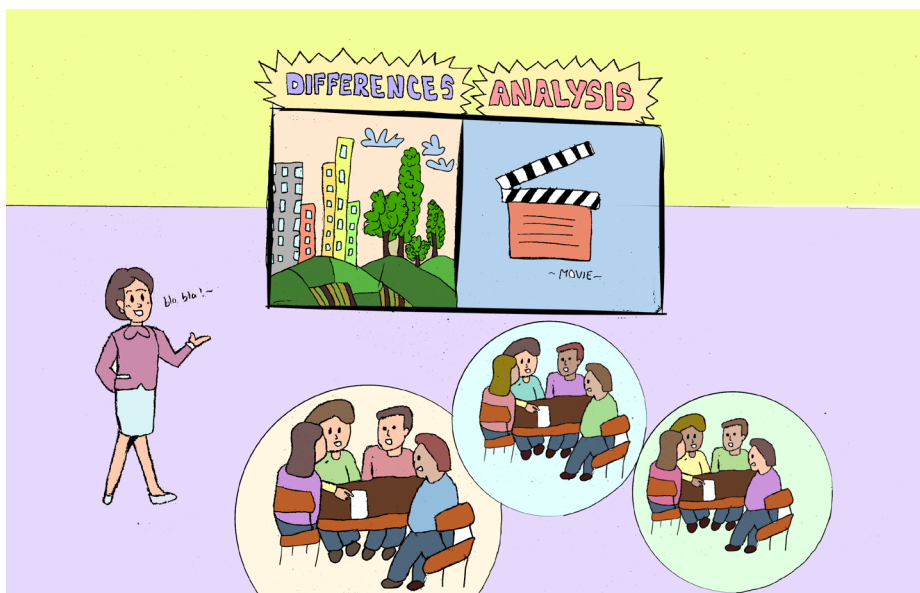
Pepe and Violet also share similarities in their beliefs. They saw learning English as a gateway to intrinsic values of cultural exchange and understanding. Pepe claimed that “[l]earning English is important for understanding another culture” (Pepe, FGI), and Violet asserted that “[l]earning English is important for discovering new cultures because it is practically an international and global language” (Violet, FGI).

Methodologies to Teach Speaking Skills

This section portrays the many ways the participants think are beneficial and effective in teaching English speaking skills, representing their viewpoints on how academic knowledge concerning language acquisition should be converted into practical implementation in the teaching setting.

Collaborative Work

One methodology that is particularly emphasized is the use of collaborative work. Malena asserted the significance of cooperative work in teaching speaking skills: “In English classes, it is also very important to encourage collaborative work to practice speaking” (Malena, FGI). Rafaela agrees with this information: “Collaborative work allows students to learn from each other and helps promote the development of social and oral skills” (Rafaela, RJ). Rafaela confirms this belief in her visual narrative (see Figure 2) when asked to portray a typical day of a speaking class.

Figure 2*Rafaela's Visual Narrative*

As can be visualized during the class, the students are working cooperatively. They seem happy, and all of them are talking. Thus, they are practicing their speaking skills. The number of students is compatible with what she declared during the focus group: “The ideal English class would be with around 20 to 25 students, but the reality is that there are many students, so one must adapt and be creative.” In Ecuador, the number of 20–25 students is not realistic in public schools. The average number of students is 50. Malena wrote: “I think that to feel more comfortable speaking in front of the whole class, it is important to start speaking in small groups first” (Malena, WN). This belief shows her comprehension of some of the affective factors involved in speaking a foreign language.

Games

The use of games was another belief that emerged among the participants. When this aims to help improve oral skills, Francesco believes “that the teaching-learning process occurs effectively” (Francesco, RJ). Violet advocated the effectiveness of games in teaching speaking skills to encourage students to speak and engage with the language. She affirmed: “A very good material would be games, implementing more games so that people can understand that games are also material for getting students to talk” (Violet, FGI). She

complemented this idea, saying that learning English cannot be limited to rigid grammar study. Instead, she highlights the role of games and interactive activities in making the learning process more enjoyable and effective, especially in promoting speaking practice: “One cannot learn English just with grammar and by being so rigid, but also through games, interactive activities, and that is very fun” (Violet, FGI).

Rafaela shares the same belief; she recalls a memory from elementary school about using games to practice her speaking: “In school, the best years of language learning were in ninth grade at a private school because the teacher was very dynamic and taught with games, and I think that is the best way to practice the English language” (Rafaela, WN).

Technology

Pepe and Francesco’s beliefs highlight the integral role of technology in teaching speaking skills. Pepe asserted that “using technology is necessary because it offers many different ways to teach speaking English” (Pepe, FGI). Francesco also believes technology is vital to improving speaking skills: “For me, the use of technological tools was very necessary because I was interested in improving my oral skills in this language autonomously, seeking to reinforce topics covered in class” (Francesco, WN).

English Immersion Strategy

Malena notes that constant speaking practice is the key to being aware of the language. Her belief is embedded in the idea that students should speak only in English to practice this skill. “I think that when we speak and practice the language, we can become more aware of the difficult words to pronounce, the tenses we should use in specific cases, and other aspects that we can improve but that we would only realize through constant practice. That is why it is important to use English 100% in the class” (Malena, FGI).

Rafaela articulates the same idea; she recognizes the classroom as the exclusive place where students can practice their oral skills. “I can say it is essential because the English class is the only space where students can learn about the language. They can correct mistakes, learn vocabulary, and above all, improve their skills” (Rafaela, FGI).

According to Violet, the classroom offers the foremost opportunity to practice the language, which contributes to improving students’ fluency, pronunciation, and overall language comprehension. For that reason, English should be maintained throughout the entire class. “It is very important for students to make an effort only to speak English during class because, by speaking English in class, students can practice their oral communication skills, which

will help them improve their fluency, pronunciation, and understanding of the language” (Violet, FGI).

Pepe reflects on the importance of creating an immersive educational setting that aims to replicate a natural environment: “By integrating these topics into the classroom, meaningful learning is promoted, and students are allowed to apply the language in contexts that are relevant to their lives” (Pepe, RJ). He also suggests that “emotional obstacles to speaking decrease when students feel at ease in an atmosphere where English is the primary language.” “A class should be conducted entirely in English because it makes them feel the adaptation around them, making them comfortable speaking the language” (Pepe, FGI).

Contrastingly, Francesco’s position recognizes the possible drawbacks of an English-only policy, particularly regarding students’ comprehension. He said: “I believe it is not necessary because in formulating sentences when we speak, we might not know some words. So, I can say that in certain exceptions, the first language can be used so that the information can be fully understood, thereby respecting each students level” (Francesco, FGI).

Repetition to Teach Pronunciation

Violet claims that pronunciation activities should be repetitive and, at the same time, funny. She asserted: “An effective activity for teaching pronunciation should be fun, creative, and repetitive” (Violet, FGI). Repetitions should not be tedious to capture students’ interests.

Malena and Pepe punctuate the effectiveness of shadowing, a technique that helps students improve their pronunciation, in which learners repeat language immediately after hearing it. According to Malena, “[p]racticing shadowing is associating the word with the sound that is heard” (Malena, FGI). Likewise, Pepe indicates: “I consider the shadowing technique to be an excellent way to teach pronunciation, assimilate grammatical structures, and consolidate vocabulary knowledge since it involves the constant repetition of words and phrases, among others” (Pepe, FGI). He also mentions that “[i]t is fundamental for the development of student’s oral language skills to teach how to construct sentences with both regular and irregular verbs and their pronunciation in the classroom” (Pepe, RJ).

Francesco also emphasizes the role of imitating sounds for pronunciation accuracy. “Imitating the sounds of words is important because, when the teacher says a word like ‘uninhabitable,’ students will analyze various aspects such as tongue movements, lip shapes, and intonation. This way, the student begins to repeat what the teacher did, and in this manner, they can achieve correct pronunciation” (Francesco, FGI).

Speaking Error Correction

Ways of Correction

Malena and Rafaela argued that teachers should be cautious about correcting their students' speaking mistakes. This feedback should be constructive and non-threatening to the student. Malena declared that the correct way to correct mistakes is by repeating mispronounced words. "If we mispronounce or incorrectly conjugate a verb while speaking, the teacher repeats it, but correctly. This way, we realize our mistakes without feeling singled out. It is not about being called out but learning from the correction" (Malena, FGI). She further confirms the effectiveness of this approach in her written narrative: "Even when I made pronunciation mistakes, the teacher would correct them subtly by repeating the word or phrase I had said incorrectly in the correct manner. I believe this approach is ideal" (Malena, WN).

Rafaela has the same belief, stating that the teacher should accurately repeat the wrong word. She argued: "If I say something wrong, or if I see something wrong, or if I write something wrong, the teacher can repeat it but correct it kindly" (Rafaela, FGI). Rafaela narrates her high school experience, where her teacher used online dictionaries to model pronunciation and repeating words. She comments: "My teacher taught pronunciation by placing the word in an online dictionary and repeating it so we could listen and practice. He corrected kindly, pronouncing slowly over and over so that the students could understand" (Rafaela, WN).

Timing

Pepe and Rafaela advocate for immediate correction but present as recommendations rather than criticisms: "I think that when a mistake is made, it should be addressed in the form of a suggestion" (Pepe, FGI). Rafaela supports the same idea and adds that giving students immediate correction might increase their self-confidence: "It is beneficial to do it at the moment the student is making the error to help them gain confidence and continue with their performance/presentation" (Rafaela, FGI).

On the other hand, Francesco, Violet, and Malena recommend correction at the end of an activity. Francesco is concerned that immediate correction might be embarrassing and discourage further participation, especially if it is done in front of the whole class. Francesco claimed: "If I mispronounce a word and the teacher corrects me right then in front of my classmates, it is a great embarrassment. It makes me not want to read aloud or participate anymore; I think

I do not want to try again. So, I believe corrections should not be immediate in such cases” (Francesco, FGI).

Violet adds that doing this at the end avoids student frustration or embarrassment. “The best moment to correct students’ speaking errors is after they have had the opportunity to express themselves. Students might feel frustrated and embarrassed if corrected during a conversation or in front of a classroom” (Violet, FGI). Pepe agrees and says that the feedback should be motivating and explanatory. “At the end of the activity, pointing out the mistake while also motivating, that is, by explaining in a better way so that the student does not feel singled out” (Pepe, FGI).

Malena also supports delayed correction but is more worried about not interrupting students during the speaking activity. “I believe that, after the student has finished expressing their idea completely, it is necessary to correct the error, as this way, they are not interrupted, and, in the end, they will know what they got wrong” (Malena, FGI). Table 2 summarizes each student’s belief regarding the mentioned areas, which were obtained/gathered using a written narrative, a visual narrative, a focus group interview, and a reflective journal.

Table 2
Summary of Each Student’s Belief

Beliefs		Malena	Francesco	Rafaela	Pepe	Violet
Importance of Speaking English	English as a global language	FGI				
	English to enhance employability		FGI	FGI		
	English for cultural exchange				FGI	FGI
Methodologies to Teach Speaking Skills	Collaborative work	FGI/VN/WN		RJ/VN/FGI		
	Games to teach		RJ	WN		FGI
	Technology		WN		FGI	
	English immersion strategy	FGI		FGI	FGI/RJ	FGI
	Repetition to teach pronunciation	FGI	FGI		FGI/RJ	FGI
Speaking Error Correction	Ways of correction	FGI/WN		FGI/WN		
	Timing	FGI	FGI	FGI	FGI	FGI

Source: own research.

The beliefs were identified in different instruments. Some beliefs were repeated in various instruments, suggesting the strength of these stated beliefs in each participant. For instance, the importance of speaking English was prominently discussed in FGIs. Methodologies to teach speaking skills, such as collaborative work and the use of games, were identified across FGIs, RJs, VNs, and WNs, though the emphasis varied.

Regarding speaking error correction, the ways of correction were discussed across FGIs and WNs. In contrast, the timing of corrections was noted in all FGIs, indicating a unanimous agreement on its importance across all group discussions. This comparative analysis, using different tools, illustrates how triangulation can grow our understanding by revealing shared beliefs and individual variations, thus enhancing the validity of our conclusions regarding teaching English speaking skills.

Discussion

The findings of this study (see Table 2) highlight the importance of identifying pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching speaking skills in EFL settings. This research offers further evidence that questions pedagogical approaches to teaching this skill in Ecuador. It shows that these pre-service teachers' beliefs were shaped by their educational experiences. Many reported during the interviews that their approaches to teaching are influenced by the methodologies and techniques they encountered as students. Such reflections on past academic experiences influencing their current teaching ideologies indicate a cyclical pattern that forms students' beliefs (Lortie, 1975). This issue underscores the need for English teacher training programs in the country to address this theme more often to help students (re)interpret their beliefs through their experiences (Vibulphol, 2004). Educators from these programs "need to be aware of the challenge of training teachers who are theoretically competent and sufficiently reflective to bridge theory and practice" (Marchesan, 2015, p. 19).

Therefore, the practicum (*Prácticas y vinculación*) is the adequate moment in these programs to broach this topic (Gebhard, 2009) because it provides pre-service teachers with the necessary practice to deal with the classroom realities in the future (Grudnoff, 2011). Pre-service teachers can improve their teaching skills by engaging in classroom activities and teaching under the guidance of experienced mentors/teachers. This process also enables them to examine and reflect upon their embedded values and beliefs, facilitating their cognitive learning and development (Cheng et al., 2010; Gebhard, 2009). The sociocultural perspective supports this view by asserting that pre-service teachers often undergo significant

transformations during their practicum, facilitated by their interactions and practical experiences (Borg, 2009; Ng, Nicholas, & Williams, 2010).

The participants recognize the increasing significance of English proficiency in today's global context. Their beliefs represent English as a bridge to cross geographical and linguistic borders. Consequently, they visualize the English language's worldwide status and globally interconnected mentality, which might motivate them to learn it. This language is seen as a professional asset that provides a competitive edge, which can help them find job opportunities beyond their local spot and surpass the global job market. Their beliefs identify English as more than a communication tool; it is a door to new career landscapes. For them, the importance of the language is more than just a set of expressions and rules; it is a means of understanding cultures other than their own. This view is aligned with the study by Ke and Cahyani (2014), which accentuates how learners' experiences with English as a Lingua Franca expand their perceptions of the language as a bridge across linguistic and geographical borders.

Regarding the beliefs held by these pre-service teachers, they mentioned that specific methodologies such as games, use of technology, English immersion strategy, and repetition to teach pronunciation play the most critical role in attaining/achieving positive results when teaching speaking skills. These beliefs are consistent with those previously identified in the studies conducted by Buss (2016), Değirmenci Uysal and Aydin (2017), Fauzi et al. (2017), Gozcu and Caganaga (2016), and Kayaoğlu (2012). On the other hand, Stevick (1980, p. 4) opposes this idea by stating that "success depends less on materials, techniques, and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom." This disagreement of views emphasizes the complexity of teaching methodologies in EFL contexts, suggesting that while methodologies are imperative, success in teaching speaking skills may also rely on interpersonal dynamics and practical engagement within the classroom environment. Hence, an adaptable approach that considers theoretical outlines and the practical realities of student interactions could be the most effective in fostering meaningful language acquisition, particularly regarding oral skills.

One of those methodologies, regarding the role of collaborative work, was referred to only by two participants. Tleuov (2016) identified the same core belief with his participants. This belief, grounded in social-constructivist theories of learning (Vygotsky, 1997), demonstrates that social interaction is crucial for students to improve their speaking skills. Faeza and Zena (2022), who investigated the role of collaborative work in enhancing the speaking skills of 100 undergraduate Arabic native speakers, concluded that collaborative learning positively correlates with the development of speaking skills among Iraqi EFL learners. Thus, these two students see the importance of interaction among peers. However, based on the advantages of using this type of methodology, such as allowing students to share knowledge, feel comfortable, and

develop communication skills, there is a need to foster this type of work or to make pre-service teachers more aware of its role for speaking skill development since only two believed in that.

Some students mentioned additional methodological resources, such as using technologies and games. Participants did not consider them just as a tool for engagement or enjoyment but as a strategic method to enhance the effectiveness of language learning, particularly in developing speaking skills. However, there is a contradiction between past/present methodologies since most students perceive repetition as a central component in teaching pronunciation (Yang, 1999), which they consider essential within the speaking skill.

Likewise, most participants (four) advocated for an English immersion approach in which students should be encouraged to speak only in English. Their beliefs are coherent with immersion education (Barrett DeWiele & Edgerton, 2021), which holds that exposure to and actively using a language in situations that mimic real-world language usage is the most effective way to build oral language competence. However, their beliefs go against Tan's (2017) study. Her participants believed in the pedagogical benefits of using L1, particularly at lower proficiency levels. Both studies recognize teachers' challenges when using this approach in class. Nevertheless, this continuous practice might strengthen the speaking abilities.

Providing oral feedback was also mentioned by most of the participants, who emphasized the idea that it is critical to balance the necessity of correcting while maintaining a positive atmosphere. In the same vein, the appropriate time to correct the students' oral mistakes was a belief that caused some disagreement among the participants. The contrasting perspectives on the proper timing (immediate vs. delayed) reflect comprehension of the complex nature of language learning and error correction. Whereas immediate correction is favored by several authors (Dawood, 2014), delayed correction is preferred by numerous others (Gharaghanipour et al., 2015). Zhu and Wang (2019) found the same results in their investigation. Their participants demonstrated preferences for error correction, particularly the timing and type of feedback. They suggested that a balance between the two kinds of correction should be used because their effectiveness depends on the learner's level, context, and preferences.

Thus, this study adds to the growing body of literature indicating that beliefs like English immersion strategy, repetition to teach pronunciation, and timing during speaking error correction emerged as the most frequent pre-service teacher beliefs regarding learning oral skills. This prevalence might be due to their direct impact on the effectiveness of language acquisition, or it may reflect their past experiences as learners. However, beliefs such as English as a global language and collaborative work were mentioned less frequently. This could be because these areas, while important, might be viewed as more theoretical or less directly related to the immediate challenges of teaching the speaking skill.

Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This qualitative case study aimed to identify the pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching speaking skills during their practicum. Research into teachers' beliefs is critical, as it may offer insights into teachers' thought processes and classroom planning strategies. Data was collected through four different instruments, which permitted the validity and trustworthiness of the results.

The findings suggest that pre-service teachers might prioritize practical, immediately applicable strategies like immersion and repetition, supporting Peacock's discoveries (2001) and contradicting Suárez Flórez and Basto Basto (2017) study, over more abstract or systemic considerations like the global role of English or collaborative learning methodologies. These beliefs reflect a combination of traditional and innovative educational practices. Interestingly, while some participants emphasized the effectiveness of immersive environments and repetitive practices for pronunciation, others highlighted the potential of collaborative learning. Moreover, the study illuminates the critical role of feedback in language learning, with opinions diverging on the ideal timing for corrections.

Considering these findings, it is vital to recognize the role of practicum experiences in complementing and shaping pre-service teachers' beliefs. This experience provides a realistic context for these students to test and refine their beliefs, aligning theoretical knowledge with real-world classroom dynamics. In a micro way, this study contributes to the literature review. In a macro way, it suggests that teachers' training programs should emphasize reflective practices, enabling educators to continually reassess and evolve their beliefs in response to changing classroom environments and students' needs.

However, while providing valuable insights, it has two main limitations. Firstly, we cannot make general assumptions about Ecuadorian pre-service teachers, as only five students participated in this research. However, we consider that this study's findings may help to understand the Ecuadorian context. Secondly, the participants' limited experience in reflective practices might have led to misunderstanding some valuable insights. Thus, based on the concept that beliefs are dynamic and can be changed through our lives (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Yoshida, 2013), and following Basturkmen et al.'s (2004) point of view about classroom practices and stated beliefs contradictions, further research is still necessary to see how these beliefs affect their future teaching practices.

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Appendix 1

Written Narrative

SCRIPT FOR THE NARRATIVE OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Write a text describing your story of learning the English language. Below, you will find some questions that you should use to guide the writing of your narrative. Remember that you must write a coherent text in the form of a narrative addressing all the following topics.

- Write about your first contact with the English language, highlighting possible positive and negative aspects.
- Write about what your English classes were like in school and college.
- Write about the role of the student in learning the English language.
- Write about the role of the teacher in learning the English language.
- Write about how your English teacher approached oral expression (speaking) activities.
- Write about which oral expression activities were most used by your English teacher.
- Describe the moments when there was interaction/dialogue entirely in English during the class.
- Describe how your teacher taught pronunciation in class and how they corrected pronunciation errors.

Appendix 2

Visual Narrative

A visual narrative is a drawing/collage... about a specific topic. Please follow the instructions to do your visual narrative.

1. Draw a typical day of speaking class
2. Write a description/interpretation of your drawing.
3. The drawing should be made on white paper with no lines.
4. You can draw by hand or use any computer program to do it.

Appendix 3

Some Focus group interview questions

1. What is the importance of learning English nowadays?
2. How can you describe an English class?
3. What methodologies should be used in an English class?
4. What do you think a teacher should do to get the students to speak in the classroom?
5. What do you think is the best way to promote/encourage speaking in the classroom?
6. How do you think teachers should work with students they deem to be weak/strong in speaking?
7. What other skills do you think should be taught with speaking? Why?

Appendix 4

Reflective Journal

8. Write one reflection about each day of your practicum. Relate this reflection with the theory learned during the classes.