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Exploring English Language Teaching in Ecuadorian Secondary Schools: Teachers' Beliefs About the National Curriculum Reform

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Abstract

The present study explored the Ecuadorian secondary school teachers' beliefs about teaching EFL in the context of national curriculum reform. The data comprised in-depth interviews with 16 teachers from 14 public secondary schools in Ecuador. The interviews were semi-structured, and they were guided by a set of questions probing into the teachers' beliefs about instructional design, assessment, teaching materials, and learning activities. Qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts revealed some interesting insights into the Ecuadorian teachers' beliefs and reported practice. The findings showed that the teachers were positive about the principles and innovation in the new curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education. However, various contextual and practical constraints hindered the teachers from implementing the intended curriculum. These factors included large class size, a lack of teacher training and professional development, and the heavy load caused by compulsory extra-curriculum activities. Implications for EFL pedagogy and teacher professional development are discussed.

Keywords: Ecuadorian EFL teachers, EFL curriculum reform, teacher beliefs, pedagogical practices

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1. Introduction

Beliefs can be defined as "propositions individuals consider to be true and which are often tacit, have a strong evaluative and affective component, provide a basis for action, and are resistant to change" (Borg, 2011, pp. 370-371). Teachers' beliefs have been an important research area in education in general and in language education in particular (Borg, 2015; Hoy et al., 2006; Pajares, 1992). Various studies have investigated the beliefs of language teachers and how their beliefs influence their actual classroom teaching. This strand of research has found that teachers' beliefs can exert a strong impact on teachers' classroom teaching, and there is sometimes a two-way influence between teacher's beliefs and classroom practices (Basturkmen et al., 2004; Borg, 2015, 2017; Gao et al., 2021; Ha, 2021, 2022a; Ha & Murray, 2020; Kagan, 1992; Tran, Ha, Le, et al., 2021). The examination of teachers' beliefs is particularly important in the context of curriculum reform. Therefore, there has been some research looking at the teachers' beliefs in response to the curriculum reform and the influence of teachers' beliefs on the success of the reform (Ha, Tran, et al., 2021; Shakhshi Dastgahian, 2021; Tran, Ha, et al., 2021; Zhang & Liu, 2014; Zheng & Borg, 2014). However, most of the studies have been conducted in Western countries or major populations in Asia, such as China. Little is known about teachers' beliefs in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in South American countries such as Ecuador. Therefore, this study is necessary. It was designed to examine the beliefs, knowledge, and reported practice of secondary school EFL teachers in the context of national curriculum reform.

2. Literature Review

In this section, relevant literature regarding teachers' beliefs and the influence of teachers' beliefs on EFL curriculum reform is reviewed. Due to the importance of teachers' beliefs, a large body of research has investigated various aspects of teachers' beliefs, such as beliefs about grammar teaching (Phipps & Borg, 2009; Sato & Oyanedel, 2019), learner autonomy (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012), testing and assessment (Ha, Tran, et al., 2021), teaching English to young learners (Reynolds et al., 2022; Reynolds et al., 2021), and corrective feedback (Ha & Murray, 2021; Ha

& Nguyen, 2021). Some researchers, such as Derakhshan and Shakki (2020), have highlighted teachers' beliefs in the context of curriculum reform, revealing several important insights. Zhang and Liu (2014), for example, looked at the Chinese EFL teachers' beliefs in high schools in the context of national curriculum reform, revealing a multi-dimensional structure of teachers' beliefs. They found that, from a surface level, the teachers' beliefs generally matched the constructivism-oriented curriculum reform; however, the teachers also favoured a traditional approach of language teaching, such as a focus on language form, rote learning, and exercise drills. Similarly, Zheng and Borg (2014), in a case study with three teachers, explored the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices regarding Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) - a curriculum innovation in mainland China. Zheng and Borg found that the teachers had a narrow view on TBLT, associating TBLT generally with communicative activities. They also found that the less experienced teacher was more likely to be open to the reform and innovation than the other two more experienced teachers. Some other studies found that teachers tried their best to make the curriculum reform successful, such as those in studies of Nguyen et al. (2018) and Peng and Pyper (2019). Nguyen et al. (2018) found that Vietnamese EFL teachers in a selective school made considerable efforts to adapt or replace textbook tasks to make them more authentic and practical to their learners. The teachers showed a strong orientation towards the social and affective dimensions of task-based learning.

In a recent study, Tran, Ha, et al. (2021) examined the beliefs and practices of Vietnamese EFL teachers in response to the use of Task-supported language teaching - a curriculum innovation in Vietnam. Using a qualitative approach with multiple data sources, Tran, Ha, et al. (2021) found that the teachers' beliefs were congruent with their classroom practices. However, they were different from the principles of the curriculum reform. The teachers prioritized a traditional structural approach in language teaching. Drawing on a sociological view, Tran, Ha, et al. (2021) explained the reasons why teachers believed and taught in their own way, which was opposite to the innovation perspective. Similarly, Shakhshi Dastgahian (2021), in a case study, explored the teachers' incentive for grammar teaching in the context of EFL curriculum reform in Iran. Shakhshi Dastgahian (2021) found that the

teachers made some attempts to conduct the intended changes of the new curriculum, but practical constraints (e.g., students' low English proficiency and parental expectation) and teachers' beliefs in the importance of accuracy strongly influenced the teachers' practices. As a result, the teachers focused on grammar teaching, diverging their teaching from the expected communicative pedagogies of the new curriculum. These studies suggest that teachers' beliefs have a significant impact on their implementation of curriculum reform.

The studies reviewed above indicate that teachers' beliefs have strong influence on their implementation of curriculum innovation. Also, there is increasing research interest in exploring teachers' beliefs and/or practices in the context of curriculum reforms. However, there is little empirical evidence about teachers' perspectives on curriculum reforms in minor EFL contexts in South America, such as in Ecuador. Extending this line of inquiry, the current study was designed to investigate the beliefs of secondary school teachers regarding a national curriculum reform in Ecuador, an underexplored EFL context. The following three research questions were proposed to guide this current study:

1. What are Ecuadorian EFL teachers' beliefs about the national curriculum reform?
2. What are Ecuadorian EFL teachers' perceptions of ELT in Ecuador?
3. What are Ecuadorian EFL teachers' reported practices in the context of the curriculum reform?

3. Methodology

The current research aims to gain in-depth insights into the thoughts, knowledge, ideas, beliefs and reported practices of Ecuadorian secondary school teachers concerning the national curriculum reform. Therefore, a qualitative approach was adopted. It is argued that qualitative research, through means of data collection such as interviews, can help researchers achieve the most in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences, thoughts and beliefs (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014).

3.1. Contexts

The study was conducted with Ecuadorian secondary EFL teachers. In Ecuador, secondary education strictly follows the policies and regulations set by the national curriculum. The Ecuadorian national EFL curriculum, introduced by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2016), establishes epistemological foundations, pedagogical methodologies, a coding system to design micro-curricular planning, and the Ecuadorian students' exit profile at primary and secondary education levels. This curriculum is meant to be applied to all public schools, from Elementary and General Education (EGB) to High School (BGU). It also presents a rationale and framework for English learning based on global engagement, social and thinking skills, and the foundation of lifelong learning.

The Ecuadorian national curriculum proposes five core principles (Ministry of Education, 2016). The first core principle is the learner-centered approach. According to Sanjana (2018), a learner-centered approach, which focuses on students who share responsibilities for activities and tasks, is widely used in language teaching. The second principle is communicative language teaching, a meaning-based and learner-centered approach to L2 education, where achieving fluency is an essential aspect of the teaching process (Spada, 2007). The third principle is related to the Common European Framework of References (CEFR). According to the Ministry of Education (2016), Ecuadorian EFL students must achieve the CEFR Level B1 by the end of secondary school in terms of language competence. Regarding the fourth core principle, the curriculum establishes the importance of developing thinking, social and creative skills to support learning English for lifelong learning (Ministry of Education, 2016). Finally, the fifth principle is based on the CLIL approach to help students improve their overall competence in the target language (Suwannoppharat & Chinokul, 2015).

3.2. Participants

The participants' selection was based on a convenience sampling method. At the time of data collection, all the participants were working at Ecuadorian public high schools (the last three grades of a 12-year education system), teaching EFL. The

participants of this study included six male and ten female EFL teachers from 14 different high public schools in Ecuador. All the participants were from Ecuador, and their native language was Spanish. Their experience as EFL teachers ranged from 5 to 23 years. Of the 16 teachers, ten teachers held a Bachelor's Degree in EFL Teaching, four teachers had a Master's Degree in EFL Teaching, one teacher held a Bachelor's Degree in Basic Education, and the remaining teacher held a Bachelor's Degree in Information Technology. All the teachers were familiar with the Ecuadorian national curriculum and language standards established by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education.

Table 1
The Biographical Background of the Participants

No	Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Experiences (years)	Grade Taught
1	Luisa	29	F	5	1 st BGU
2	Karla	27	F	5	2 nd BGU
3	Carlos	29	M	6	1 st BGU
4	Gabriela	36	F	12	3 rd BGU
5	Elvia	36	F	12	3 rd BGU
6	Danilo	50	M	23	3 rd BGU
7	Wilson	35	M	12	2 nd BGU
8	Norma	40	F	14	2 nd BGU
9	Diana	28	F	5	2 nd BGU
10	Patricia	39	F	16	3 rd BGU
11	Nelly	45	F	18	1 st BGU
12	Mauricio	48	M	22	3 rd BGU
13	Maria	44	F	21	2 nd BGU
14	Andrés	36	M	12	1 st BGU
15	Esteban	32	M	8	3 rd BGU
16	Daniela	33	F	8	1 st BGU

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

In our study context, there is no need for institutional ethics approval. Instead, we informed the participants of the study's purposes. We explained clearly to them that the interviews were for research purposes only and there were no right or wrong answers. We encouraged them to provide us with the most in-depth detail about their beliefs, knowledge, thoughts and experiences with the Ecuadorian EFL

curriculum. Pseudonyms were used for all the participants to ensure confidentiality.

The main data source for the present study was semi-structured interviews. An interview schedule was developed to investigate the research questions established for this study. The interview questions received expert evaluation and feedback, and a back-translation process was carried out to ensure that the English and Spanish versions were equivalent. The interview consisted of 17 questions (see Appendix) to uncover teachers' instructional practices and beliefs about ELT in Ecuador. There were two main parts in the guiding questions: background and main study questions. The background questions (two broad questions) had been created to obtain the participants' demographic information. The other 17 questions had been designed to gain information about teachers' beliefs about the Ecuadorian national curriculum and their teaching practices, including instructional design, assessment, learning activities and materials applied in the EFL classrooms.

The interview schedule was planned based on the curriculum's main aspects and the research questions established for this study. This interview schedule was guided and systematically conducted with the 16 participants in Spanish through the online platform Zoom at different times and dates. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, which is the first language of all the participants and the first author. All the interviews were video and audio-recorded for subsequent data transcription and analysis. Each interview lasted for about 45 minutes. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim, and all the transcripts were sent back to the participants for member-checking. All the participants agreed with the interview transcripts.

The data analysis was guided by a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the interviews, all the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. The 16 interviews contained 93,786 words in total. By applying Microsoft Word, coding the findings was conducted by coloring similar patterns and emergent themes to create potential themes. Subsequently, those potential themes were related to curriculum planning, learning objectives, assessment, teaching materials, and teaching activities.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the main themes emerging from the interviews. It analyzes the Ecuadorian EFL teachers' beliefs about the national curriculum reform, EFL teaching and learning in Ecuador, and their pedagogical practices. The teachers' beliefs were then contrasted with the Ecuadorian national curriculum requirements provided by the Ministry of Education in public secondary schools. Implementing a new curriculum is a complex process (Amin, 2017), requiring teachers to consider a number of facets, such as the involvement of national policies, plans and how formal education needs to be taught and assessed in consideration of each school's reality (Atai, 2018).

4.1. Ecuadorian EFL Teachers' Beliefs About the Ecuadorian National Curriculum

Analyses of the interviews showed that all the teachers considered that there was some incongruence between the Ecuadorian EFL national curriculum and their teaching practices. The findings showed that all the participating teachers were concerned about the expectations and the principles of the Ecuadorian national curriculum. In addition to the macro and micro contextual factors that impede the English teaching success (Salinas, 2017), the teaching reality within the limited resources (Nguyen & Ha, 2021; Zhang & Liu, 2014), and the social and pedagogical factors, the study revealed that planning the micro-curriculum based on the coding system proposed by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education was another factor that demotivated English teachers to work effectively.

The teachers mentioned that although the reformed curriculum, established in 2016, tried to improve the quality of English teaching and learning in Ecuadorian secondary schools, various factors hindered them from carrying out the intended curriculum. These obstacles included a lack of teacher training and technological resources, the low level of English of students as well as a lack of motivation, the excessive extracurricular activities, and the inconsistency of course books. This is illustrated in the following examples.

Although the national curriculum, as a document, is well organized and incorporates current teaching approaches and methods to teach EFL, it is not developed based on our teaching reality. (Luisa)

The Curriculum Approach and CLIL, on which the curriculum is based, are not applied in public schools due to different circumstances, such as a lack of teacher training and students' motivation to learn the English language. (Diana)

Since the national curriculum does not cover important factors such as teaching students with special needs, using the curriculum in planning is not efficient. (Patricia)

Similarly, all the teachers believed that the excessive mandatory and desirable objectives to accomplish at each school year and the confusing coding system to develop the micro-curriculum planning were the main issues they found when planning their teaching-learning process. Karla, for example, claimed that when planning a lesson, it was a waste of time to match the general objectives' codes, the mandatory and desirable goals for each curricular thread, the performance indicators, and the evaluation criteria. For her, this was a complex process which aimed to fulfil bureaucratic rather than educational purposes. Mauricio added that because of this confusing and unnecessary coding system, most teachers only filled in these documents to fulfil the Ministry of Education requirements when planning their lessons. He claimed that the majority of the teachers only copied and pasted the syllabus, since it was a waste of time and they had to invest their time in other teaching activities. Norma manifested that using the code system to plan the syllabus, based on their real educational contexts, was confusing and demotivating. She explained that teachers from high school had not received adequate formal training about planning based on the coding system provided by the national curriculum reform.

Similar to some previous research in different reform contexts (e.g., Shakhshi Dastgahian, 2021; Tran, Ha, et al., 2021; Zheng & Borg, 2014), these findings show that the teachers had mixed views about the Ecuadorian national English curriculum. Although the teachers highlighted several positive aspects of the curriculum, they considered that the principles and expectations did not match the

reality of teaching and learning. Various contextual factors were reported to be the barriers to the successful implementation of the curriculum.

4.2. Teachers' Perceptions of English Language Teaching in Ecuador

All the teachers mentioned that the Communicative Language Teaching approach and CLIL were the main foundations of the Ecuadorian EFL national curriculum. Most teachers (14/16) reported that they knew how the CLIL curricular threads were divided and the students' exit profile that students had to be achieved at the end of each year based on CEFR. They all had experience designing the annual and unit plans based on the Ministry of Education's coding system. Although all the teachers had planned their annual, unit, and lessons based on the EFL national curriculum, they had not applied suggested language teaching approaches and methodologies in their classrooms due to many constraints.

The teachers mentioned some reasons to justify their own choice of teaching. Gabriela, for instance, stated that when incorporating the communicative approach in language teaching, having many students with different English levels in the same classroom was the primary constraint. She explained that students in Ecuador are not placed in each class according to their English proficiency but their grades. Thus, trying to use communicative approach techniques with 35 to 45 students per class with A1, A2, and even B1 English proficiency is impossible.

Students' low motivation is another constraint that teachers mentioned about ELT in Ecuador. Carlos claimed that students' low motivation to learn English also impeded the effective application of what was set up in the curriculum and their teaching reality. He pointed out that most high school students were neither motivated nor encouraged to learn English because they had no plans to study or work abroad. Besides, in Ecuador, people did not speak English; for that reason, his students thought learning English was unnecessary.

In terms of CLIL, Daniela explained that not having a solid foundation in English and the unfamiliarity of the content presented in the course books provided

by the Ministry of Education were also obstacles to efficiently integrating CLIL in their classrooms. For her, “the content established in the course books are interesting and engaging; however, due to the low students’ English proficiency, teachers must focus only on teaching the language rather than content.” Although the Ecuadorian EFL teachers indicated that they always tried to do their best to incorporate these teaching methodologies and approaches in their lessons despite all the constraints mentioned before, they still had to use a structural approach frequently in their teaching. They focused more on teaching vocabulary words, grammar, and sentence structure before asking students to perform activities on what they had learned. This finding is in line with some previous studies (Le & Barnard, 2009; Shakhsi Dastgahian, 2021; Tran, Ha, et al., 2021). For example, in a recent study, Tran, Ha, et al. (2021) found that Vietnamese high school teachers opted for a structural approach that was divergent from the principles of the designated Task-Supported Language Teaching curriculum due to various constraints.

From the five CLIL threads presented in the Ecuadorian national curriculum, all the teachers agreed that Language through the Arts was the most relevant and interesting thread of this curriculum. Diana claimed, “by elaborating projects based on what students learn during the lessons, Language through the Arts allows them to show their creativity”. Furthermore, Mauricio stated that when students applied Language through the Arts, by performing activities based on reality and customizing their final projects according to their preferences, it helped them obtain lifelong learning. Additionally, Carlos affirmed that Language through the Arts was the most interesting thread in the curriculum because it allowed students to connect the content taught in English with the artistic expressions they had as human beings.

In terms of English teaching approaches and methods, it was found that even though the Ecuadorian national curriculum had been updated to introduce the most updated teaching approaches and methodologies, the reality in secondary schools was that EFL teachers still designed their curriculum based on traditional methods of teaching grammar and vocabulary. This is shown in the following teachers’ statements:

Even though I plan my lessons based on what the curriculum requires, the reality is different. With 35 to 45 students per class and a few hours per week to teach English, it does not allow me to apply the new methodologies and approaches in the teaching process. (Andrés)

The national curriculum has particular requirements that students have to accomplish at the end of each school year. However, in my experience, students who attend high school are not at the English level they are supposed to be. Consequently, I had to start teaching them basic grammar rules and vocabulary that students were supposed to learn in previous years. (Patricia)

I have been teaching EFL for more than 20 years. In the past, we used to attend different workshops and teacher training which were provided by the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, during the last years, EFL teachers from public schools have not attended any teacher training. I believe this is a significant constraint since probably most of the teachers do not have a clear idea about how to apply the new approaches and methodologies established in the national curriculum. (Mauricio)

The teachers explained that even though the Ecuadorian national curriculum proposed current and innovative teaching methods and approaches, a lack of teacher training, scarce technological resources, students' low motivation, excessive extracurricular activities, and the inconsistency of course books and students' English levels were the main constraints that hindered successful English teaching.

4.3. Ecuadorian EFL Teachers' Reported Practices

Although all the teachers indicated that teaching English in Ecuador was not an easy job, it had been established that they had substantial experience in teaching EFL in Ecuadorian public schools. The teachers' most common aspects were planning, assessment, and activities and materials applied in the classroom.

According to the teachers, designing the annual, unit, and lesson plans was a complex but futile task. Norma stressed the importance of planning before starting the lesson to avoid improvising when teaching English. Nevertheless, the teacher

also claimed that to follow the schools' requirements and fill in all the documents at the beginning of the school year, teachers wasted time simply copying and pasting the document and not contextualizing it according to the reality of each school.

Elvia stated that the reality was that teachers had to plan using codes from the national curriculum and the course books provided by this Ministry of Education even though they were allowed to prioritize the content they wanted to teach. Maria mentioned that planning students' exit profile based on the CEFR and obtaining the B1 level at the end of high school was only a utopian goal when teaching EFL in Ecuador. She indicated,

according to the national curriculum, students entering high school are at A2.2 English proficiency level. However, the majority of the students are at A1 level. Consequently, it is impossible that students achieve the B1 level, required by the Ministry of Education, at the end of the high school.

Regarding the assessment, all the teachers indicated that they evaluated students in both formative and summative ways. Observations, class participation, discussions, and projects were the most mentioned instruments for a formative assessment, making it an essential aspect of the learning process. An overall belief was that projects were the best way to assess students. Luisa, for instance, claimed that the best way to connect the national curriculum objectives, the content, and lifelong learning was to evaluate based on projects. For her, "when students develop their own projects, they can achieve some requirements stipulated on the curriculum such as collaborative work, autonomous learning, and transferability of the acquired knowledge to different scenarios." Nelly had also indicated that students improved their English skills, creativity, and autonomous learning when developing projects. As an assessment instrument, Mauricio mentioned that projects were authentic and more valuable than a standardized test.

All the teachers believed that the new coursebook provided by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education included engaging and contextualized content. However, it mainly focused on writing and reading English skills, and it did not equal students' English level. For that reason, the teachers preferred using their own materials and providing activities based on students' reality. Esteban indicated that "even though

the coursebooks published by the Ministry of Education had engaging and interesting activities, I preferred using other authentic and contextualized activities from the Internet.” Andrés also claimed that he preferred prioritizing which content the students would learn by choosing the most authentic activities from the Ministry of Education’s coursebook and handouts designed by himself.

Another constraint to the implementation of the new curriculum was the teachers’ limited knowledge and skills in using Information Communication Technology (ICT). Fifteen of the 16 teachers considered the lack of technology as one of the most important challenges in carrying out the new EFL national curriculum. Carlos claimed that even though the national curriculum encouraged the use of technology to improve students’ language skills, the reality was that schools did not have an Internet connection, and students did not have ICT tools to work in the classroom. He claimed that “public schools only have internet connection in the administrative offices and some students do not have cell phones, which hinders using ICT in the class.” Furthermore, Diana avoided using ICT tools and online platforms in the classroom because she explained that it was difficult to work with 35 to 45 students with only a few computers. Norma stated that teachers had not been adequately trained to use technology and new teaching methodologies in the last seven years.

There were some interesting notes in the teachers’ beliefs about their roles. In contrast to the findings of some previous studies (e.g., Ha & Murray, 2020; Ha, Nguyen, et al., 2021) which found that teachers see themselves as experts and knowledge givers, the current study showed some encouraging findings. The results revealed that although teaching English was challenging and demanding in Ecuador, the teachers considered themselves as facilitators, motivators, and guides of their students’ knowledge. Wilson argued that teachers were motivators of students’ learning. He claimed that “in Ecuador, students’ motivation to learn a language is relatively low. However, language teachers are probably the only ones who can motivate students to learn English by sharing their experiences abroad and highlighting aspects about new cultures and places to visit in the world.” Besides, Maria stated that teachers used to be the center of learning, but nowadays teachers had become a guide of learning. She stated that “teachers now are guides of the

construction of their students' knowledge by designing learner-centered approach activities." Similarly, all the teachers considered themselves facilitators of knowledge because they provided the necessary scaffolding and teaching support when it was required (Shakki, 2022).

In the view of most of the participants, ELT in Ecuadorian secondary public institutions was challenging. When planning the syllabus, it was found that all the teachers followed the traditional design, which started from deciding the content to be taught, then the teaching process, and finally the assessment instruments to evaluate students' outcomes (Richards, 2013). Educational policies, infrastructure, perceptions, and English Language Teaching status were other factors that impeded or aided ELT in Ecuador (Sevy-Biloon et al., 2020). In fact, in this study, the teachers confirmed that those factors influenced their choices of traditional methodologies such as the grammar-translation methods in most of their classes.

The teaching practices and learning experiences in EFL contexts were the factors that affected teachers' beliefs (Ha & Murray, 2021; Junqueira & Kim, 2013) and practices (Ha, 2022a). The current study shows that even though the teachers applied the grammar-translation methods frequently in their lessons, they always tried to use meaningful activities and authentic materials from different sources. Furthermore, all the teachers indicated that they saw themselves as guides, motivators, and facilitators of their students' learning within the English teaching process.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrated a complex array of challenges that Ecuadorian secondary school EFL teachers faced in implementing the new national curriculum. First, all of the participating teachers admitted that there was an incongruence between the Ecuadorian national curriculum principles and their actual teaching practices. The lack of contextualization of the curriculum and the complex code-based planning process were the main barriers that Ecuadorian English teachers found difficult to apply in their classrooms. Second, the teachers reported that the main factors hindering the effective implementation of the updated teaching approaches established by the Ecuadorian national curriculum were the excessive number of

students, a lack of teacher training and professional development, a lack of technical equipment and teachers' knowledge and skills of ICT, and the required engagement of teachers in extracurricular activities. Therefore, the teachers still applied the traditional approach, such as the grammar-translation method, as the primary method of teaching English in their classrooms. Third, from all of the principles established in the Ecuadorian national curriculum, the teachers considered Language through the Arts, as a part of the CLIL, as the most outstanding and interesting aspect applied in the classroom. The teachers also claimed that teaching English in Ecuador was challenging. However, they frequently tried to integrate authentic activities and engaging materials to foster their students' English skills and motivation to learn English. Overall, the findings revealed that Ecuadorian EFL teachers believed there was a lack of connection between the Ecuadorian national curriculum requirements and their teaching in secondary school contexts.

These findings suggest a strong need for professional development opportunities for Ecuadorian EFL teachers to improve their pedagogical knowledge (Khanjani et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2022; Zangani et al., 2021) and skills to carry out the intended curriculum more successfully. Professional development activities could be designed in a way that teachers are provided with ample opportunities for experiential learning, and reflective practice (Ha, 2022b; Ha & Murray, 2021; Tajik & Ranjbar, 2018) or they could be in the form of action research (Meihami & Werbińska, 2022). In this way, teachers will be able to learn through their everyday teaching and solve their practical pedagogical problems.

This study has several limitations that warrant further research. The participant sample used in this research comprised only 16 teachers due to the qualitative nature of the study. This might limit the generalizability of the findings. Further research, therefore, could use quantitative methods to include a larger number of participants so that the results could be generalized to other Ecuadorian contexts, and beyond. Secondly, due to the influence of COVID-19, the interviews were conducted online, and there were no classroom observations. Future studies could include teachers' actual classroom practice data to depict a more complete picture of the teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the EFL curriculum reform in Ecuador, and other similar contexts.

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Appendix

The Interview Questions

Background

1. Can you please tell me about yourself (e.g., age, educational background, teaching experience)?
2. Can you tell me about your student? (age, English level, learning motivation, etc.)

Main Interview Questions

1. Could you tell me what you know about the current Ecuadorian EFL curriculum?
2. What does it mean for you to plan English classes? Why?
3. Could you describe how you plan the units you teach during the year? What are your priorities when planning each unit?
4. How do you manage or deal with the content that you have to cover in each unit?
5. What do you think about the coding system to plan your syllabus?
6. How do you ensure that your students achieve lifelong learning in their English classes?
7. What instruments do you use to verify student learning?
8. There are multiple ways to evaluate students. How do you evaluate your students?
9. How do you assess your students in a formative way?
10. How do you assess your students in a summative way?
11. What do you think about assessing based on project-based learning? Do you use a project-based learning approach? If yes, what are the benefits and drawbacks (if any)?

12. What kind of activities and tasks will equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their learning objectives this year? Which activities that you have applied in your lessons? Are they meaningful and/or authentic? Why or why not?
13. What was the main objective of the first unit (and the second and the third unit)? What was its final product/project?
14. How will students work to achieve the objective of each unit?
15. Describe the materials you use to achieve student learning objectives.
16. What do you think about scaffolding learning? How and how often do you use scaffolding strategies in your teaching? What are the benefits/drawbacks of the scaffolding you have used?
17. What is your role as a teacher? Why?

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