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How cultural awareness influences senior year students to achieve curricular standards through Ecuadorian literature

Influencia de la conciencia cultural en estudiantes de último año para alcanzar estándares curriculares empleando literatura ecuatoriana

Andrea Aurora Lara Ramirez

andrealara994@gmail.com

aalarar@ube.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4530-445X>

Universidad Bolivariana del Ecuador
Ecuador

Jacqueline Elizabeth López López

jelopezl@ube.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2113-2451>

Universidad Bolivariana del Ecuador
Ecuador

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Abstract

English proficiency is a global necessity, and Ecuador is no exception, where it has been integrated into the education curriculum to enhance language skills. However, student performance in English has remained below the desired level, falling short of the B1 proficiency standard set by the Ecuadorian Curriculum. This research focuses on assessing the influence of cultural awareness on EFL high school students through the integration of Ecuadorian literature, with the goal of aiding them in achieving the B1 proficiency level by the culmination of their senior year. For this end a survey was administered to thirty (30) high school senior students at an all-girls high school in the city of Cuenca to ascertain their stance on the incorporation of cultural material related to Ecuadorian literature in English classes following the implementation of a demonstration class. Employing a mixed-method approach, quantitative data were gathered through surveys, while qualitative insights were gleaned via open-ended questions. The findings convey a notable interest among students in embracing local literary works within their English classes, with a substantial proportion expressing a distinct preference for this pedagogical approach. These results underscore the potential of culturally relevant pedagogical strategies in language instruction.


Keywords: cultural awareness, efl, ecuadorian literature

Resumen

El dominio del inglés es una necesidad global, y Ecuador no es una excepción, ya que se ha integrado en el currículo educativo. Sin embargo, el rendimiento de los estudiantes en inglés ha permanecido por debajo del nivel deseado, sin alcanzar el estándar de competencia B1

establecido por el Currículo Ecuatoriano. Esta investigación se centra en evaluar la influencia de la conciencia cultural en estudiantes de secundaria de inglés como lengua extranjera a través de la integración de la literatura ecuatoriana, con el objetivo de ayudarles a alcanzar el nivel de competencia B1 al final de su último año. Con este fin, se administró una encuesta a treinta (30) estudiantes de último año de secundaria en un colegio de la ciudad de Cuenca para determinar su opinión sobre la incorporación de material cultural relacionado con la literatura ecuatoriana en las clases de inglés después de la implementación de una clase demostrativa. Utilizando un enfoque mixto, se recopilaron datos cuantitativos a través de encuestas, mientras que las percepciones cualitativas se obtuvieron a través de preguntas abiertas. Los resultados muestran un notable interés entre los estudiantes por adoptar obras literarias locales en sus clases de inglés, con una proporción sustancial que expresa una clara preferencia por este enfoque pedagógico. Estos hallazgos subrayan el considerable potencial de estrategias pedagógicas culturalmente relevantes en la instrucción de idiomas.

Palabras clave: cultura, efl, literatura ecuatoriana

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INTRODUCTION

English has emerged as a universally recognized language, playing a pivotal role in facilitating communication across diverse borders, cultures, and industries. In this interconnected world, the acquisition of English language skills has evolved into an imperative across nearly every nation, including Ecuador. Recognizing the critical importance of English proficiency in today's global landscape, the Ecuadorian government introduced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) into the national education curriculum with the explicit goal of enhancing students' English language abilities.

However, despite the integration of EFL within the curriculum, the performance of Ecuadorian students in English remains below the desired level. High school students are expected to attain a B1 level of proficiency, as outlined by the Common European Framework of Reference. Regrettably, official sources indicate that a significant number of students have struggled to attain this benchmark (Lara, 2020). The English Proficiency Index (EPI), a study conducted by the organization English First (EF) in 2022, further underscores the existing gap in English language proficiency among Ecuadorian students. The results of the EPI revealed that Ecuadorian students' proficiency level stands at A1, the lowest level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (Sempertegui, 2022; Castillo, 2021). These findings are alarming, particularly in light of the ambitious goals set by the English Curriculum, which strives to equip high school students with the language skills required to meet international standards (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). Moreover, limited English language skills hinder students' prospects for studying abroad, accessing international job opportunities, and engaging with a wider array of educational resources.

To address this complex challenge and enhance students' English language proficiency, it is imperative to explore effective strategies that not only prioritize cultural awareness but also facilitate foreign language learning. Cultural awareness assumes a vital role in language acquisition by enabling learners to grasp the dynamic interplay between the target language and their own cultural context (Liu & Fang, 2017). Not to mention that neglecting students' cultural identity and heritage can adversely impact academic performance and lead to academic underachievement (Haboud, 2009). Thus, given the undeniable significance of cultural awareness and its potential impact on language learning outcomes, it becomes vital to consider ways to integrate it into the EFL classroom. Evidently, many EFL classes appear to favor foreign cultures over Ecuadorian culture (Lara, 2020), a bias that could contribute to the underperformance of Ecuadorian high school students in English. Consequently, there arises a compelling need to explore innovative approaches that honor cultural awareness, thereby infusing Ecuadorian culture into the English language learning process.

Literature stands out as a potent instrument for fostering both cultural awareness and language skill development. As Noaman (2013) suggests, literature serves as a conduit for enhancing critical language competencies, encompassing reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. Similarly, Lara (2020) underscores the significance of Ecuadorian literature in capturing the essence of everyday lives and experiences. By integrating Ecuadorian literature into the EFL curriculum, students engage with texts that resonate with their cultural heritage, forging a profound connection to their roots while concurrently advancing their language proficiency.

Building upon these observations and recognizing the multifaceted benefits of incorporating Ecuadorian literature into EFL instruction, this research aimed to examine the impact of cultural awareness on senior year EFL students' ability to meet curricular standards by uncovering students' viewpoints and receptiveness regarding the integration of Ecuadorian literature in the English classroom. The final objective was to investigate how cultural awareness, nurtured through the inclusion of Ecuadorian literature, can catalyze senior year EFL students' capacity to fulfill curricular benchmarks.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding Culture and Identity

As put by Tawfiq (2017), "culture equals identity" (p. 164), which is a concept shared by DeVos (1992) who defines identity as an individual's conception of self within both their immediate group and the larger societal context. Language, as noted by Cumming (2012), is intrinsically tied to identity, particularly in our contemporary era where traditional markers of identity are undergoing transformation. This assertion aligns with Crystal's (2000) observation that language serves as a primary vehicle for expressing cultural distinctiveness. In essence, culture encompasses the beliefs, values, behaviors, and worldviews shared among a group of individuals, encompassing language, folklore, history, and associated attributes (Lara, 2020). Thus, culture can manifest at individual, global, familial, communal, regional, national, or geographical levels (Lara, 2020).

Importance of Cultural Awareness in Cross-Cultural Communication

Regarding the merits of incorporating cultural awareness in educational contexts, Cumming (2012) underscores that students well-versed in their own culture exhibit heightened sensitivity to both cultural disparities and commonalities. This awareness facilitates the preservation of one's cultural identity within cross-cultural interactions. Furthermore, the curricular emphasis on Communication and Cultural Awareness acknowledges that learners who compare their own culture with others can appreciate the parallels and differences that exist. In essence, they evolve into adept global citizens capable of transcending disparities to communicate effectively across borders (Ministerio de Educación, 2016).

Cummins (2014) underlines the importance of acknowledging the nexus between language, culture, and identity within educational environments. He contends that negating students' cultural identities leads to academic underperformance and failure, whereas incorporating their cultures into the educational framework enhances self-concept and academic achievement. This viewpoint is supported by Lara (2020) who suggests that spotlighting students' culture and identity in the EFL classroom holds the potential to enhance language proficiency and performance. Complementarily, O'Dowd (2004) adds that Literature can effectively engage students with diverse cultures and perspectives.

Role of Local Literature in EFL Instruction

Local literature offers readers insight into a country's historical, political, and cultural contexts, shedding light on societal behaviors and attitudes of the period (Lara, 2020). For instance, Ecuadorian literature often reflects the lives of ordinary citizens, intertwined with national events, social matters, and political disputes (Queirolo, 2008). In this regard, Tanaka (2015) ascertained that literature wields substantial pedagogical power, as it captures students' interest and involvement. Moreover, it can serve as an effective platform to teach essential language skills, encompassing reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

Within this context, the notion of introducing Ecuadorian literature in English serves as a means to engage students' linguistic capabilities while preserving their cultural connection (Lara, 2020). This perspective is extended by Tanaka (2015) who suggests that employing literature in translation in the language classroom eases some of the conventional challenges, not to mention that familiar cultural contexts foster a sense of confidence, prompting students to voice opinions and lead discussions. Hence, students can engage with their cultural heritage while actively enhancing their proficiency in the language, encapsulating the dual objectives of linguistic enrichment and cultural connection.

Integration of CELTA Reading Lesson Plan

In the pursuit of designing the class that was taught for this research project, the CELTA reading lesson plan framework was selected. The CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) reading lesson plan is widely regarded for its comprehensive and effective structure in EFL

instruction. The CELTA approach prioritizes interaction and engagement, aligning seamlessly with the objectives of integrating Ecuadorian Literature to enhance cultural awareness and language proficiency.

The CELTA reading lesson plan framework encompasses a series of stages, including lead-in, pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities. Each stage is meticulously designed to foster active student participation, critical thinking, and deep comprehension. The emphasis on pre-reading tasks primes students for engagement with the text, preparing them to explore cultural nuances and textual themes that resonate with their own experiences. The subsequent while-reading activities encourage interactive analysis, fostering discussions that facilitate the connection of students' cultural identities with the material at hand (Watkins et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the post-reading activities in the CELTA lesson plan framework promote reflection and extension of learning, allowing students to apply newfound knowledge to broader contexts. This is particularly pertinent to the research's objective of exploring how cultural awareness through Ecuadorian Literature can influence students' achievement of curricular standards. By employing the CELTA reading lesson plan, students are provided with a holistic and structured learning experience that aligns with the research's pedagogical goals (Watkins et al., 2023).

Literature review

Integration of L1 Culture in the EFL Classroom

Maryam and Zamanian (2014) conducted a study to investigate the impact of incorporating L1 culture in L2 learning materials on the L2 proficiency of EFL learners. Employing a pre-test and post-test approach, the study found that the experimental group, exposed to culturally adapted materials, demonstrated significantly better post-test results compared to the control group. This outcome underscored the positive influence of culturally tailored materials on learner outcomes, suggesting that integrating L1 culture could enhance language proficiency.

Khan (2016) delved into the role of local culture in EFL classrooms, aiming to understand learners' perspectives on the introduction of Arabic culture and identify preferred cultural aspects. The research revealed that 72.3% of students expressed a preference for learning EFL with a local cultural context. Additionally, students indicated a strong desire for more Saudi Arabian cultural content in their textbooks. The study also found that 73% of students favored reading about Saudi Arabian cities over foreign cities. Preferences extended to various cultural domains, such as food, attire, dances, folklore, politics, sports, and entertainment. The integration of local culture in EFL lessons was perceived as engaging, fostering better student engagement through relatable content.

Integration of L1 Translated Literature in Ecuador

Martínez (2011) explored cultural awareness enhancement through storytelling by gauging student opinions on incorporating Ecuadorian culture and literature in EFL classrooms. Findings indicated unanimous agreement (100%) among students that self-identity, values, and culture held importance in the EFL context. Furthermore, 88% of participants endorsed the integration of Ecuadorian Literature, expressing enthusiasm for its inclusion. The study affirmed the positive impact of integrating L1 translated literature on cultural understanding and engagement in the EFL classroom.

Carchi and Pineda (2013) extended this line of inquiry by investigating the potential of traditional Ecuadorian legends to improve reading skills and enhance motivation among students. The use of Ecuadorian legends for teaching reading comprehension yielded positive outcomes. Although students demonstrated a preference for reading in languages other than English, 88% expressed a desire to read Ecuadorian legends in English classes due to their intriguing connection to identity. Furthermore, 35%

of students believed that integrating Ecuadorian legends could spark interest in reading and bolster motivation.

Lara (2020) investigated student perspectives on the integration of Ecuadorian Literature in EFL classrooms, revealing a strong inclination (90%) towards incorporating this approach. Reasons included the inherent interest in the content, promotion of cultural awareness, and potential facilitation of English learning. Notably, 81% of students agreed that working with Ecuadorian Literature could enhance their language skills. Importantly, students highlighted the engagement that arises from familiarity with content, suggesting that prior knowledge enhances the learning experience compared to unfamiliar topics.

METHODOLOGY

This research project adopts a mixed-method approach, which combines both quantitative and qualitative research methods, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between cultural awareness, the use of Ecuadorian Literature in EFL instruction, and the achievement of curricular standards.

The mixed-method paradigm recognizes that research questions can often be complex and multifaceted, requiring the integration of multiple types of data to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2014). By employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, this research project aims to capture the diverse perspectives and experiences of the participants, allowing for a more nuanced and in-depth exploration of the research problem.

The quantitative component of the research involves the administration of a survey to collect numerical data through closed questions. The survey evaluates students' perspectives after the implementation of a lesson plan based on Ecuadorian Literature. This survey provides quantitative data that can be analyzed using statistical techniques, offering insights into the participants' attitudes, perceptions, and self-assessment of their language proficiency. On the other hand, the qualitative component of the research involves open questions that allow students to express their ideas without constraints. Through the delivery of the lesson plan and the subsequent survey, qualitative data will be collected, including students' reflections, observations, and experiences. This qualitative data will be analyzed thematically, identifying recurring patterns, themes, and insights that emerge from the participants' narratives and reflections.

Overall, the mixed-method paradigm employed in this research project acknowledges the multidimensional nature of the research problem and aims to generate a rich and comprehensive understanding of the impact of incorporating Ecuadorian Literature in EFL instruction.

Data collection techniques

In this research, the primary technique to collect data was a survey. This technique aimed to gather valuable insights and feedback from the participants regarding the implementation of Ecuadorian Literature in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction and its impact on their language proficiency, motivation, and cultural awareness. Additionally, the surveys sought to assess the participants' perceptions of their progress towards meeting curricular standards.

This survey was administered after the implementation of an EFL lesson plan based on an Ecuadorian legend. It aimed to evaluate the participants' learning experience and capture their perceptions. The survey consisted of 12 questions designed to assess the participants' reflections on the effectiveness of the lesson plan in enhancing their language skills, promoting cultural awareness, and meeting their expectations. Additionally, it provided an opportunity for participants to express any remaining concerns or suggestions for improvement.

The quantitative data consisted of numerical responses, allowing for statistical analysis and comparison of participants' perceptions before and after the implementation of the lesson plan. On the other hand, the qualitative data consisted of open-ended questions that encouraged participants to provide detailed explanations and insights, providing descriptive information about their experiences. It's important to remember that the close-ended questions had a scale with the following options: always, often, sometimes, rarely, never.

By utilizing these data collection techniques, this research project aimed to gather comprehensive data that would contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between cultural awareness, the use of Ecuadorian Literature in EFL instruction, and the achievement of curricular standards.

Data analysis

Quantitative Analysis: The collected quantitative data will be subjected to descriptive statistics. Responses will be systematically tabulated, and frequency distributions will be calculated to gain insights into students' perceptions and attitudes towards learning English through the incorporation of Ecuadorian Literature.

Qualitative Analysis: The qualitative data from open-ended survey questions will undergo rigorous thematic analysis. Responses will be carefully examined and coded to identify recurring themes and patterns, providing significant insights into participants' viewpoints on the perceived benefits of integrating Ecuadorian Literature into EFL learning.

Ethical considerations

This research study is committed to upholding ethical standards to ensure the protection, privacy, and well-being of participants. Informed consent was obtained from both students and their parents or guardians prior to participation. They were provided with detailed information about the research objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences, given the voluntary nature of participation. The privacy and confidentiality of participants were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Population, the sample and sampling

The target population for this research project comprises students enrolled in the third year of Bachillerato General Unificado at a semi-public institution located in the city of Cuenca. The sample for this study consisted of one group of thirty-five (35) students aged sixteen to seventeen years old. These students attend English classes twice a week, with each session lasting 80 minutes, resulting in a total of four class hours per week. They are part of the morning shift at the institution. It is important to note that the institution selected was an all-girls school, and that all teachers who teach English for General Purposes at the high school level are internationally certified. Thus, by specifically selecting students from the third year of Bachillerato General Unificado, the research project focuses on a specific stage in the students' educational journey. Randomizing the selection process helps to minimize bias and increase the generalizability of the findings. It is important to notice that 5 of the 35 students in the class did not desire to participate, leaving only 30 active participants in the research.

RESULTS

Question 1 investigated students' preferences for the frequency of incorporating Ecuadorian literature in their English language learning. The responses demonstrated a positive inclination towards this integration. Specifically, 33.3% of participants expressed a desire for regular inclusion, while an additional 33% indicated a preference for occasional inclusion. The option of 'often' was selected by 26.7% of participants, whereas only 6.7% expressed a rare interest. Notably, none of the participants chose the option 'never'.

In response to Question 2, which assessed students' perceptions of the benefits of including Ecuadorian literature in English classes, a substantial proportion (36.7%) believed it would always be advantageous. Similarly, another 36.7% of students expressed that it would be beneficial frequently. A smaller yet notable percentage (26.6%) believed it would be beneficial on occasion. No participants selected the option 'never'.

Question 3 sought to identify the academic areas students believed would benefit most from the inclusion of Ecuadorian literary material. The majority (36.2%) identified productive skills, encompassing speaking and writing, as the primary beneficiaries. Receptive skills, such as reading and listening, were chosen by 27.6% of participants, placing them in second place. Vocabulary acquisition was deemed essential by 24.1% of students, while grammar received the lowest preference, with only 12.1% of participants selecting it as the area of greatest benefit.

Regarding Question 4, participants reflected on the potential benefits of incorporating Ecuadorian literature in terms of cultural awareness and motivation. The most commonly selected area of benefit was the broadening of cultural knowledge, chosen by 35.6% of students. Enhancing language proficiency closely followed with 33.9%. Fostering critical thinking skills was identified by 16.9% of participants, while 13.6% believed it would lead to increased engagement with the subject matter. Notably, none of the students selected 'none' as an option, indicating unanimous agreement on the benefits of incorporating this material. Question 5, designed for students who selected 'none' as an answer in Questions 3 and 4, was left blank, as no participants chose this option.

Question 6 assessed aspects students believed could be improved in the demonstration class. A tie emerged in the first-place response, with 28.9% of participants expressing a desire for more educational resources, such as presentations, videos, recordings, and worksheets. Equally, 28.9% of participants expressed a need for additional vocabulary activities. Grammar-focused activities were identified by 19.2% of participants as an area for improvement. Moreover, 15.3% of students desired an increase in productive activities like speaking and writing, while 7.7% preferred more receptive activities such as listening and reading.

Question 7 gauged students' interest in participating in additional English classes incorporating Ecuadorian literature. A substantial 43.3% of participants expressed a desire for frequent participation, followed by 33.3% who preferred occasional involvement. A noteworthy 16.7% expressed a preference for constant inclusion in such classes. Conversely, 6.7% of students indicated a rare interest, and none selected 'never'.

In response to Question 8, which explored the impact of including Ecuadorian literature on student motivation, 36.6% of participants believed it would occasionally enhance motivation and engagement. A significant 30% felt it would consistently have this effect, while 26.7% believed it would do so frequently. Only 6.7% of participants selected 'rarely', and none selected 'never'.

The following table provides a thematic analysis of participants' responses to Question 9, in which students who selected the options 'always', 'sometimes', and 'often' in Question 8 were asked to explain their reasoning. By offering open-ended explanations, participants articulated their viewpoints on how the incorporation of cultural elements influenced their engagement and enthusiasm in the process of language acquisition. These responses have been systematically classified into four primary themes, presenting valuable insights into the nuanced benefits perceived by students when introduced to Ecuadorian literary works within the context of their EFL class.

Table 1

Thematic Analysis of Responses - Positive impact of Ecuadorian literature on EFL students

Theme	Response by participants
Cultural connection and identity	"Focusing on Ecuadorian culture might make some students feel more interest" "Yes because we would learn about our culture" "Because we are learning about our country and English at the same time" "I feel it's a nice way to learn more about our country and practice English language at the same time" "Because it is my background and I feel more familiar speaking English to express my reality and my country" "Because I would learn more about my country" "It allows us to learn important things about our country, which I think is interesting" "Students can feel more confidence speaking about their country because they already know about it and are familiar with it"
Enhanced learning and cognitive skills	"To improve thinking skills and learn in a better way" "The student would feel more confident about his own knowledge and it would make learning easy"
Language Proficiency and Skills Development	"Students could improve their language skills and learn about Ecuadorian culture" "It can help us learn grammar and vocabulary when we read" "It broadens our mind and our vocabulary, and the way we think"
Interest in Reading and engagement	"It is interesting for students who like to read" "This type of interactive topics make it easier to learn vocabulary and writing" "Reading about topics that we don't learn about often would make class more interesting"

Contrarily, Question 10 was aimed at students who selected "rarely" and "never" in response to Question 8. It is notable that only two students provided their insights on this matter, as they were the only ones who selected those options. The subsequent table delineates the two primary categories that emerged from their responses.

Table 2

Thematic Analysis of Responses - Negative impact of Ecuadorian literature on EFL students

Theme	Response by participants
Personal interests	"Personally, I am not interested in literature, I only read short stories"
Overdone material	"Students regard it as yet another obligation, and often the topics are repeated or we have learned about them before"

The following table provides a thematic analysis of students' responses to Question 11 regarding the ways in which incorporating material related to Ecuadorian literature in English classes can enhance cultural awareness according to their own perspective.

Table 3

Thematic Analysis of Responses - Enhancing Cultural Awareness through Ecuadorian Literature in English Classes

Theme	Response by participants
Broadened Cultural Knowledge	"It allows me to improve my vocabulary and thinking skills." "It helps us learn about our identity as Ecuadorian citizens." "It helps cultural awareness because we will engage in our culture and learn much more." "It allows students to learn about Ecuadorian culture and English. It is also interesting for those who like literature." "Ecuadorian literature would help us expand our knowledge because it is diverse."
Simultaneous Learning of Culture and Language	"It would be nice to see this content regularly because we learn about English and Ecuadorian culture at the same time." "We learn customs, traditions, and can share our own ideas." "It makes teenagers engaged and lets us learn more about our country." "Students can develop their knowledge of culture and learn a foreign language at the same time." "We could speak about our culture in English." "I feel it's a nice way to learn more about our country and practice English language at the same time." "Students can feel more confidence speaking about their country because they already know about it and are familiar with it."
Improved Language Proficiency and Grammar	"It is possible to learn grammar and understand our culture better." "When our culture and another language are mixed, you can learn faster because you understand the background." "We learn about our country's culture and do it in a foreign language such as English."
Valuing Diversity and Cultural Heritage	"It enhances our knowledge about our culture and we learn more about Ecuador which is important and useful when we want to learn a new language." "It builds up our knowledge, we learn more about our country and its culture, and we value the diversity in our country." "It raises cultural awareness since often we don't know much about our country." "It gives students a new perspective when they learn because they also learn about history." "We can learn how to say in English words that we use in our country." "Because it is my background and I feel more familiar speaking English to express my reality and my country."
Motivation, Engagement, and Effective Learning	"to learn more and foster literature, which is a great way to learn." "It helps students with both culture and English learning." "To know more about our culture and where we come from." "It can help share our culture to other people such as foreigners who speak English." "Learning about these stories can help students learn in a better way."
Encouraging Critical Thinking and Communication Skills	"Students could improve their language skills and learn about Ecuadorian culture." "It broadens our mind and our vocabulary, and the way we think." "Some students find these topics attractive, which means they will try their best to understand the English text, which leads to cultural understanding."

Finally, Question 12 aimed to discern students' perspectives on how incorporating Ecuadorian literature might contribute to achieving the curricular standard of B1 English proficiency by the end of their senior

year. A majority (50%) expressed confidence in 'often' achieving this standard, while 26.7% believed it would 'always' contribute. A further 20% considered it beneficial 'sometimes', and a minimal 3.3% believed it would do so 'rarely'. Notably, none of the participants selected 'never', indicating unanimous agreement on the positive impact of incorporating Ecuadorian literature in English instruction.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the impact of incorporating Ecuadorian literature in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction at an all-girls high school. The mixed-method approach employed in this research provided a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between cultural awareness, the use of local literary works, and the achievement of curricular standards.

One notable finding emerged from the survey data, revealing that a significant percentage of students expressed a strong interest in integrating Ecuadorian literature into their English classes. This was particularly evident in their responses to questions 1 and 2, where 33.3% indicated a preference for always including such material, and an additional 33% favored its inclusion sometimes. This suggests that students perceive value in connecting their language learning with their cultural heritage through the medium of literature.

Furthermore, the thematic analysis of open-ended responses (Table 1) shed light on the various ways in which students believe that incorporating Ecuadorian literature can enhance cultural awareness. A substantial number of participants emphasized that this approach allows for a deeper understanding of their own cultural identity as Ecuadorian citizens. This sentiment was echoed in statements such as "Because it is my background and I feel more familiar speaking English to express my reality and my country" and "Students can feel more confidence speaking about their country because they already know about it and are familiar with it".

The participants' perspectives also underscored the potential for simultaneous learning of culture and language. Many noted that integrating Ecuadorian literature offers a unique opportunity to learn about customs, traditions, and shared ideas. Statements like "we learn customs, traditions, and can share our own ideas" and "we learn about our country's culture and do it in a foreign language such as English" highlight the multifaceted benefits of this pedagogical approach.

Similarly, students pointed out that this method not only enriches their cultural awareness but also strengthens their language proficiency. They emphasized that it allows for the improvement of vocabulary and thinking skills, aligning with the broader educational objectives. This is exemplified by statements such as "it allows me to improve my vocabulary and thinking skills" and "it makes students focus and learn more easily."

Additionally, there are key enhancements identified by participants that could improve the delivery of similar lessons in the future. These include the integration of diverse educational resources, encompassing videos, images, worksheets, and presentations. This multimedia approach not only heightens engagement but also fosters a more interactive learning environment. Likewise, participants expressed a strong inclination towards vocabulary-building activities, indicating their potential to significantly augment language acquisition and deepen comprehension of Ecuadorian literary terms.

However, a balance between vocabulary and grammar activities is recommended, as it ensures a comprehensive language learning experience. Lastly, the inclusion of thought-provoking discussion questions and activities can further cultivate students' analytical skills. Thus, by heeding these recommendations, educators can tailor the demonstration class to effectively meet the unique needs and preferences of the students, fostering a dynamic and engaging learning environment that maximizes the benefits of incorporating Ecuadorian literature in EFL instruction. Moreover, the research

reveals a consensus among participants regarding the efficacy of this pedagogical approach in helping them achieve curricular standards.

CONCLUSIONS

The study's objectives, research design, and data analysis align coherently, providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of incorporating Ecuadorian literature in EFL instruction. The mixed-method paradigm effectively captured the diverse perspectives and experiences of the participants, offering valuable insights into the multifaceted benefits perceived by students.

The results demonstrated a notable interest and positive reception among students for integrating local literary works into their English classes. A significant percentage expressed a preference for including Ecuadorian literature, emphasizing its value in enhancing cultural awareness and language learning. This supports the notion that connecting language instruction with cultural heritage can be a powerful educational tool. Consequently, given the students' keen interest in delving into their cultural heritage, infusing lessons with Ecuadorian cultural elements promises to forge a deeper connection between language acquisition and personal identity.

Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that the research not only elucidates the cultural and linguistic advantages but also sheds light on a critical aspect, which is students' determination to achieve curricular standards. Certainly, this research provides compelling evidence that integrating Ecuadorian literature into EFL instruction aligns with students' aspirations to attain a B1 level of English proficiency. The data reveals a consensus among participants, indicating that this pedagogical approach not only enhances their cultural awareness and language skills but also empowers them to meet established academic benchmarks.

This finding is particularly noteworthy, as it signifies the potential of culturally relevant teaching strategies in not only engaging students but also propelling them toward educational success. It suggests that embracing local literature can serve as a catalyst for students' academic progress, offering a path for educators to facilitate comprehensive language learning experiences. This study thus underscores the manifold benefits of incorporating indigenous literary works into EFL instruction, providing a valuable contribution to the pedagogical landscape.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of culturally relevant pedagogical approaches in language instruction. By integrating Ecuadorian literature into EFL classes, educators have the opportunity to not only enhance language proficiency but also foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of students' cultural identity. Therefore, this research contributes to the broader discourse on effective language instruction strategies and highlights the potential benefits of incorporating local literature in diverse educational contexts, as well as underscoring the potential of culturally relevant teaching strategies in propelling students towards academic success and reaching curricular standards.

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