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SAPIENTIAE

PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES AMONG ECUADORIAN EFL STUDENTS: CAUSES AND CLASSROOM SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence in learning English as a foreign language, as it directly influences intelligibility and oral interaction. However, in the Ecuadorian educational context, students experience persistent difficulties that affect their communicative performance. The objective of this study is to analyze the main pronunciation difficulties of Ecuadorian students, identify their causes, and propose pedagogical solutions. The research used a literature review design, analyzing theoretical and empirical studies published between 2015 and 2026 in academic databases and institutional repositories. The results show that the most frequent difficulties are related to Spanish interference, limited exposure to authentic English, lack of explicit instruction, and affective factors such as anxiety. Furthermore, pronunciation tends to receive less attention in the classroom than other language skills. The study concludes that it is necessary to implement systematic pronunciation instruction that combines explicit instruction, communicative activities, technology, and low-anxiety learning environments. These strategies contribute to improving students' intelligibility, confidence, and communicative competence.



Keywords: communicative competence; English as a foreign language; linguistic interference; pronunciation; pronunciation teaching.

DIFICULTADES DE PRONUNCIACIÓN ENTRE LOS ESTUDIANTES ECUATORIANOS DE EFL: CAUSAS Y SOLUCIONES EN EL AULA

RESUMEN

La pronunciación es un componente esencial de la competencia comunicativa en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera, ya que influye directamente en la inteligibilidad y la interacción oral. Sin embargo, en el contexto educativo ecuatoriano, los estudiantes presentan dificultades persistentes que afectan su desempeño comunicativo. El objetivo de este estudio es analizar las principales dificultades de pronunciación de estudiantes ecuatorianos, identificar sus causas y proponer soluciones pedagógicas. La investigación se desarrolló mediante un diseño de revisión de la literatura, en el que se analizaron estudios teóricos y empíricos publicados entre 2015 y 2026 en bases de datos académicas y repositorios institucionales. Los resultados evidencian que las dificultades más frecuentes se relacionan con la interferencia del español, la limitada exposición al inglés auténtico, la falta de instrucción explícita y factores afectivos como la ansiedad. Asimismo, se identifica que la pronunciación suele recibir menor atención en el aula que otras habilidades lingüísticas. Se concluye que es necesario implementar una enseñanza sistemática de la pronunciación que combine instrucción explícita, actividades comunicativas, el uso de tecnología y entornos de aprendizaje de baja ansiedad. Estas estrategias contribuyen a mejorar la inteligibilidad, la confianza y la competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: competencia comunicativa; enseñanza de la pronunciación; inglés como lengua extranjera; interferencia lingüística; pronunciación.

ABSTRACT

Pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence in learning English as a foreign language, as it directly influences intelligibility and oral interaction. However, in the Ecuadorian educational context, students experience persistent difficulties that affect their communicative performance. The objective of this study is to analyze the main pronunciation difficulties of Ecuadorian students, identify their causes, and propose pedagogical solutions. The research used a literature review design, analyzing theoretical and empirical studies published between 2015 and 2026 in academic databases and institutional repositories. The results show that the most frequent difficulties are related to

Spanish interference, limited exposure to authentic English, lack of explicit instruction, and affective factors such as anxiety. Furthermore, pronunciation tends to receive less attention in the classroom than other language skills. The study concludes that it is necessary to implement systematic pronunciation instruction that combines explicit instruction, communicative activities, technology, and low-anxiety learning environments. These strategies contribute to improving students' intelligibility, confidence, and communicative competence.

Keywords: communicative competence; English as a foreign language; linguistic interference; pronunciation; pronunciation teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation plays a fundamental role in effective communication and is widely recognized as a key component of communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Clear pronunciation enhances intelligibility, facilitates interaction, and strengthens learners' confidence when participating in communicative situations. Even when learners demonstrate adequate grammatical knowledge and broad vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation may hinder successful communication.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages learners are expected to communicate with reasonable fluency and clarity in familiar situations. At this stage, students should be able to produce understandable speech, although they may still present pronunciation errors influenced by their first language. These difficulties affect intelligibility and may create barriers during oral interaction, particularly in contexts where English is learned as a foreign language.

In Ecuador, research conducted by postgraduate scholars indicates that EFL learners experience pronunciation difficulties due to multiple factors, including Spanish phonological interference, limited exposure to authentic spoken English,

and insufficient classroom practice. These challenges are further exacerbated by contextual constraints such as overreliance on textbooks, limited pedagogical resources, and large class sizes, which restrict opportunities for individualized feedback and oral interaction. From a pedagogical perspective, it is often observed that learners demonstrate adequate grammatical knowledge but limited speaking performance, frequently hesitating or avoiding oral participation. Additionally, affective factors such as anxiety and nervousness, especially under communicative pressure, significantly hinder pronunciation development and reduce learners' confidence and overall communicative effectiveness.

Despite its recognized importance, pronunciation remains one of the most challenging aspects of English learning in the Ecuadorian educational context. Students at this stage are expected to communicate effectively in a variety of everyday situations; however, many continue to struggle with sound production, word stress, rhythm, and intonation patterns. These persistent difficulties often lead to misunderstandings and reduced self-confidence in oral interactions such as presentations, interviews, and conversations. Furthermore, pronunciation instruction often receives limited attention in English classrooms, where grammar, reading, and writing are prioritized. As a result, students often lack systematic training and sufficient phonological awareness to recognize and correct their own pronunciation errors.

In response to the identified pronunciation challenges among learners in Ecuador, this study proposes a set of pedagogical solutions grounded in current research and classroom realities. Pronunciation instruction should be addressed systematically and explicitly, incorporating both segmental features (vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental features (stress, rhythm, and intonation). At the same time, it should be integrated into communicative activities such as role-plays, discussions,

and task-based interaction to promote meaningful language use. Increasing learners' exposure to authentic spoken English through audiovisual materials and digital tools is essential, while technology-enhanced feedback can support self-monitoring and individualized practice.

By addressing these issues, the study seeks to improve pedagogical practices and to enhance students' intelligibility, confidence, and overall communicative competence. To effectively address pronunciation difficulties among Ecuadorian EFL learners, this research is guided by key questions that explore the role of applied linguistics principles and the relationship between pronunciation and oral performance:

- How can principles of Applied Linguistics explain the pronunciation difficulties faced by Ecuadorian EFL students?
- In what ways do speaking and pronunciation as productive skills affect students' intelligibility and oral performance?
- Which effective teaching methodologies can help reduce pronunciation difficulties in EFL contexts?

Second language acquisition

The distinction between language acquisition and language learning was proposed by Krashen (1982) as part of his Second Language Acquisition theory. Language acquisition is a subconscious, natural process that occurs when learners are exposed to meaningful communication, much as children learn their first language. In contrast, language learning is a conscious process that involves the formal study of grammar rules, vocabulary, and language structures. While learning helps learners understand how the language works, acquisition is considered more important for developing fluency and real communicative ability. Krashen (1972)

developed five hypotheses that explain how learners acquire a second language.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis guides the selection of literature focusing on the role of comprehensible input and authentic exposure to English, which are repeatedly linked to improved pronunciation acquisition. By framing input exposure as a key variable, the review explicitly links linguistic data (phonological interference and learner errors) to contextual factors such as limited classroom interaction and lack of authentic materials.

Similarly, the Affective Filter Hypothesis is operationalized to analyze affective barriers like anxiety and confidence issues. Studies reporting emotional constraints on oral production are interpreted within this framework, emphasizing the need for low-anxiety, learner-centered environments. This connection supports the identification of affective factors as both causes and obstacles in pronunciation development.

The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis shapes the pedagogical recommendations by foregrounding acquisition-oriented techniques (e.g., communicative activities, multimodal input) alongside formal learning methods (e.g., explicit phonetic instruction). This dual focus reflects Krashen's distinction between subconscious acquisition and conscious language learning, proposing a holistic instructional model.

These hypotheses are particularly relevant for pronunciation development because they emphasize the importance of meaningful input, frequent exposure to spoken language, and supportive classroom environments.

Interlanguage Theory, proposed by Barone (2024), suggests that learners develop a dynamic linguistic system between their L1 and L2. In Ecuador, mastering

pronunciation is a multifaceted challenge influenced by Spanish phonological structures, such as vowel inventories and stress placement. These deviations are part of an evolving system rather than a lack of effort.

According to Paredes-Riera (2020), pedagogy is a context-sensitive and situationally grounded field. For Ecuadorian learners, pronunciation challenges must be addressed by considering the country's specific educational landscape. This perspective ensures that teaching methodologies are effectively adapted to the students' evolving linguistic realities and historical demands.

Studies in Second Language Acquisition emphasize that the development of phonology differs from that of grammar, as it requires both auditory discrimination and speech production mechanisms. The Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM) accounts for how native-language (L1) experience shapes speech perception (Best, 1995). PAM says we hear new languages through the "filter" of our first language. If a new sound sounds almost the same as one we already know, we just lump them together. This makes it very hard to hear the tiny differences between them. Recent developments in 21st-century phonetics highlight the growing importance of voice quality as a central component of speech production. According to Garellek (2022), modern phonetic research has demonstrated that voice quality is not merely a paralinguistic or expressive feature, but a linguistically relevant phenomenon that can contribute to meaning distinction and intelligibility.

Supporting this perspective, Gordon and Ladefoged (2001), argues that phonation types such as creaky and breathy voice play a systematic role in prosodic structure and phonological contrast across languages. His research emphasizes that voice quality interacts with stress and intonation patterns, reinforcing its phonological relevance. Similarly, Garellek and Keating (2011) highlight the integration of acoustic, articulatory, and perceptual evidence in understanding phonation

contrasts.

From a pedagogical perspective, Levis (2018) argues that pronunciation teaching should move beyond segmental accuracy and incorporate suprasegmental and phonation-related features to enhance comprehensibility. This aligns with Garellek's view that voice quality is an essential component of effective spoken communication.

Productive process of language

Pronunciation changes how well people understand what you say. You can know many words and have good grammar, but if your pronunciation is bad, people might get confused. New studies show that if you make mistakes with sounds, word stress, or the rhythm of your voice, it is very hard for listeners to understand your message. Alghazo et al. (2023) a recent longitudinal study conducted by Pesantez & Dellwo (2023) examined individual differences in foreign language pronunciation development, focusing specifically on vowel production among Ecuadorian learners of English. Their findings revealed that learners exhibit significant variability in the acquisition of English vowel contrasts over time, suggesting that pronunciation development is not uniform and may be influenced by perceptual sensitivity, exposure, and individual learner factors.

On the other hand, Bonilla (2025) suggests that classroom solutions for learners should incorporate structured phonics-based activities, guided pronunciation drills, and opportunities for controlled and communicative oral practice. Rodríguez (2025) emphasizes that while teachers recognize the importance of speaking practice, pronunciation is often addressed implicitly rather than systematically. In contrast, Rojas and Venegas (2025) argue that many pronunciations problems stem from insufficient explicit instruction in phonetic principles, including articulatory phonetics and phonemic awareness.

Choe et al. (2025), argues that effective pronunciation approaches in EFL contexts must integrate segmental and suprasegmental training to strengthen comprehensibility and fluency. In the Ecuadorian high school context, Sarango & Nesterenko (2022), the Repositorium UTPL identified common pronunciation difficulties, particularly in vowel production, consonant articulation, and stress placement, that negatively affect oral production and listener understanding. Furthermore, Caisaguano (2024), in a study from the University of Cuenca Repository, highlights that affective factors, limited exposure, and insufficient guided speaking practice hinder the development of accurate pronunciation, ultimately reducing students' communicative performance. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that speaking and pronunciation are interconnected skills: when pronunciation accuracy improves, intelligibility increases, fluency becomes more natural, and overall oral performance is strengthened.

Furthermore, Kang (2022) highlights that prosodic feature, particularly prominence and intonation, are key predictors of oral performance ratings. Research by Saito (2021) demonstrates that improved pronunciation accuracy correlates with gains in fluency and speaking proficiency over time. In addition, Thomson (2018) emphasizes that explicit pronunciation training enhances learners' confidence and spontaneous speech production. Finally, Szpyra-Kozłowska & Stasiak (2016). underscores that phonological competence supports communicative effectiveness by reducing misunderstanding and improving interactional flow.

Overall, these studies demonstrate that speaking and pronunciation are interdependent productive skills: when pronunciation improves, intelligibility increases, fluency becomes more natural, listener effort decreases, and students' overall oral performance is significantly strengthened.

Effective teaching methodologies

One of the most influential approaches is communicative language teaching (CLT), which focuses on meaningful interaction, real-life communication, and learner participation. This approach is closely connected to Stephen Krashen's Input and Affective Filter Hypotheses.

Krashen argues that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input in low-anxiety environments. Similarly, CLT promotes authentic communication and supportive classroom settings, allowing students to practice pronunciation naturally while reducing fear and increasing confidence. The roles of teachers and learners also change significantly, as learners become active participants who collaborate and take responsibility for their learning, while teachers act as facilitators who guide communication and provide feedback. Materials are often authentic and designed to reflect real-life language use, sometimes supported by digital tools.

Effective teaching methodologies that reduce pronunciation difficulties in EFL contexts integrate explicit phonetic instruction, multimodal input, communicative practice, technology-enhanced feedback, and learner self-regulation. Current pronunciation pedagogy emphasizes intelligibility, suprasegmental awareness, and meaningful classroom integration rather than isolated drills (Pennington, 2021). Multimodal approaches combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic input have proven effective (Panyathikul & Poopatwiboon, 2025), while innovative instructional designs highlight technology integration and interactive digital environments (Ping & Tao, 2025).

Additionally, structured pronunciation interventions yield measurable gains, particularly when incorporating rhythm- and phonics-based methods such as chant instruction and bilingual rhythm training (Al-Asi, 2024; Kunova & Kralova, 2025).

Technological innovations also play a central role in improving pronunciation (Moncayo, 2023) . Tools such as robot tutors, acoustic feedback software, visual prosody cues, gamified applications, and AI-driven systems enhance segmental accuracy and fluency (Barriuso & Hayes-Harb, 2018; Anggraini, 2022; Kotake, 2024; Majidi et al., 2025).

Furthermore, strategies such as peer feedback, corpus-based shadowing, metacognitive self-monitoring, and drama-based prosody workshops contribute to improving learners' pronunciation and communicative competence (Qian et al., 2023; McKinnon, 2025; Pérez, 2026). Overall, combining communicative, cognitive, technological, and prosodic approaches provides a comprehensive pathway to reducing pronunciation difficulties and improving intelligibility in EFL learners.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a systematic literature review methodology aligned with applied linguistics research standards. The primary objective is to synthesize and critically analyze existing theoretical and empirical evidence regarding pronunciation difficulties experienced by Ecuadorian EFL learners, as well as to identify pedagogical solutions relevant to the local educational context.

Multiple academic databases and institutional repositories were consulted to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant studies. These included Google Scholar, Scopus, JSTOR, and Ecuadorian university digital archives, notably from Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja and Universidad de Cuenca. Search queries combined terms such as “English pronunciation difficulty,” “EFL learners,” “Spanish interference,” “Ecuador,” “phonological awareness,” “second language acquisition,” and “pronunciation teaching.” Boolean operators (AND, OR) facilitated precise searches.

To maintain focus and relevance, studies were selected based on:

- Target population: EFL learners with proficiency around B1 (intermediate) level, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).
- Context: Research conducted within Ecuador or comparable Spanish-speaking EFL environments to ensure sociolinguistic relevance.
- Time frame: Publications from 2015 to 2026 to reflect current pedagogical realities and research trends.
- Content focus: Works addressing pronunciation challenges, causal factors, affective elements, and classroom solutions or teaching methodologies.
- Type of publication: Peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, dissertations, conference papers, and institutional reports written in English or Spanish.

Exclusion criteria included studies aimed at native English speakers, unrelated language skills (e.g., reading-only), or those predating 2015.

An initial retrieval of approximately 70 publications was conducted. Title and abstract screening reduced this to 45 articles and papers. Subsequently, full texts were reviewed to confirm alignment with inclusion criteria, and duplicates were removed, resulting in a final corpus of 40 relevant studies. Reference lists of key studies were also mined for additional influential sources.

The selected studies were analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify and group recurring patterns related to pronunciation difficulties and their causes,

theoretical underpinnings, and proposed pedagogical interventions.

Themes included segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation challenges, L1 interference effects, limited authentic input, anxiety and confidence issues, and explicit versus implicit pronunciation instruction approaches. Comparative and contrastive analyses were applied to reveal converging insights and debates within the literature, guiding the development of evidence-based recommendations for Ecuadorian classrooms.

As the study reviews publicly accessible secondary data and published literature, no direct ethical approval or participant consent was required. Proper attribution of sources has been ensured throughout the research.

The review is inherently limited by the scope and quality of the existing literature, which displays variability in research design, sample sizes, and contextual specificity. The predominance of qualitative over quantitative data in some cases may impact on the generalizability of findings. Future empirical studies are encouraged to complement this foundational analysis.

RESULTS

The findings of this literature review confirm that pronunciation among EFL learners in Ecuador results from a complex interaction of linguistic, affective, and pedagogical factors. Across the analyzed studies, a consistent pattern emerges: learners struggle primarily with vowel production, consonant articulation, and suprasegmental features such as stress and intonation.

These difficulties are strongly linked to the influence of Spanish phonological structures, which shape learners' perception and production of English sounds.

Research within the Ecuadorian context emphasizes that challenges in vowel and

consonant production are primarily due to interference from Spanish phonological patterns.

For instance, Pesantez and Dellwo (2023) identified that vowel accuracy is significantly hindered by these prior linguistic structures, suggesting that increased exposure to authentic English is vital for development. Similarly, Sarango Ajila, C. S., & Nesterenko, N. A. (2019) concur that vowel contrasts and intonation patterns represent a substantial hurdle for student intelligibility.

Regarding specific articulations, Rodríguez (2019) emphasizes the need for explicit phonetic instruction using minimal pairs, and highlights the recurring difficulty learners face with consonant clusters such as /st/ and proposes flipped classroom strategies to maximize practice time within the school environment.

The integration of technology and direct instruction has proven to be a fundamental pillar for improving oral proficiency. Herrera (2023) recommends integrating technological tools to provide visual and auditory feedback on complex grammatical endings, such as the final -s.

Along the same line, Martínez and Pauta (2025), along with Rojas and Venegas (2025), argue that the direct teaching of sounds, stress, and intonation not only improves accuracy but also fosters self-monitoring skills and increases the confidence of Ecuadorian learners.



Table 1. *Theoretical Foundations of Pronunciation*

Author and location	Main idea	Suggestions
Pesantez & Volker (2023). Study conducted with Ecuadorian learners and published by the University of Zurich in the Zurich Open Repository and Archive.	Analyzed the development of vowel production among Ecuadorian learners of English. The study concludes that many learners experience difficulties producing English vowels accurately due to the influence of Spanish phonological patterns.	The authors suggest strengthening pronunciation instruction in EFL classrooms in Ecuador by incorporating focused vowel practice, listening activities, and greater exposure to authentic spoken English to improve students' intelligibility and pronunciation development.
Armas & Pila (2025). Study conducted in public schools in Ecuador.	The study concludes that pronunciation is often underemphasized in English classes, with teachers focusing more on grammar and vocabulary.	The authors suggest integrating systematic pronunciation activities, such as listening discrimination exercises and guided speaking practice, to help students improve intelligibility and develop stronger oral communication skills in EFL classrooms.
Esterenko (2019). Thesis conducted in Ecuador.	The study identifies several factors affecting oral production among EFL learners, including pronunciation	In Ecuador, it is recommended to increase speaking opportunities in the classroom, integrate pronunciation practice



difficulties, limited vocabulary, speaking anxiety, and lack of opportunities for oral practice. These factors reduce students' fluency and confidence in communication.

into communicative activities, and foster a low-anxiety learning environment to help students improve their oral production and confidence in English.

Table 2. *Causes of Pronunciation Difficulties*

Citation	Main ideas	Suggestions
Sarango Ajila & Nesterenko (2019). Study conducted in Ecuador.	The study found that Ecuadorian EFL learners commonly face difficulties with English vowel and consonant sounds, as well as intonation patterns. These challenges are mainly influenced by the phonological differences between Spanish and English, which affect learners' pronunciation and overall intelligibility.	The authors suggest that in Ecuador teachers should incorporate targeted pronunciation activities that address specific problem areas such as vowel contrasts, consonant sounds, and intonation.
Toasa (2022). Master's thesis conducted in Ecuador.	The study found that Ecuadorian EFL learners have difficulties producing /st/	The author suggests implementing flipped classroom strategies in EFL contexts in Ecuador, where students can



	consonant clusters, often adding an extra vowel sound (e.g., “eschool” instead of “school”) due to Spanish phonological influence.	practice pronunciation through videos and digital materials before class. In-class time can then be used for guided speaking activities, feedback, and interactive tasks focused on difficult sounds like consonant clusters, helping learners improve their pronunciation and confidence.
Rodríguez (2019). Study conducted in Ecuador.	The study analyzes vowel pronunciation difficulties among EFL learners, emphasizing that differences between the Spanish and English vowel systems lead to confusion and inaccurate production, which affects learners’ intelligibility.	In Ecuador, it is recommended to implement explicit teaching of vowel sounds through phonetic instruction, use of minimal pairs, and listening discrimination activities. Additionally, integrating pronunciation practice into communicative tasks can help learners improve accuracy and confidence in speaking.

Table 3. *Effective Teaching Strategies*

Citation	Main Idea	Suggestion
Herrera (2023). Study	The study applies a technology-based phonetic analysis approach to examine the	In Ecuador, it is recommended to integrate technological tools to support pronunciation



conducted with high school EFL students in Ecuador.

pronunciation of the -s ending in English. It shows that students have difficulties with correct pronunciation of plural and third-person singular endings.

instruction. Teachers can use these tools to provide visual and auditory feedback, helping students improve their accuracy in pronouncing grammatical endings like -s and enhancing their overall intelligibility.

Martínez and Pauta (2025)

The study examines how explicit phonetics instruction supports the development of speaking proficiency in EFL learners. It highlights that direct teaching of pronunciation elements such as individual sounds, stress, and intonation helps students improve accuracy, intelligibility, and overall oral performance.

In Ecuador, it is recommended to integrate explicit phonetics instruction into the English curriculum, combining explanation with guided practice. Teachers should include activities like phonetic drills, minimal pairs, and communicative speaking tasks to strengthen pronunciation and increase students' confidence in speaking English.

Rojas (2025) . Study conducted in Ecuador.

The study conducted a study in Ecuador analyzing the impact of explicit phonetics instruction on EFL learners' speaking proficiency. The findings show that students improve their

The study suggests that in Ecuadorian classrooms, teachers should focus on developing students' phonological awareness and self-monitoring skills, encouraging learners to actively



pronunciation,
fluency, and
intelligibility when
they receive direct
instruction on sounds,
stress, and intonation
combined with guided
practice

notice and adjust their
pronunciation rather
than relying only on
repetition or
correction.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this literature review confirm that pronunciation among EFL learners in Ecuador results from a complex interaction of linguistic, affective, and pedagogical factors. Across the analyzed studies, a consistent pattern emerges that learners struggle primarily with vowel production, consonant articulation, and features such as stress and intonation. These difficulties are strongly linked to the influence of Spanish phonological structures, which shape learners' perception and production of English sounds. From a theoretical perspective, the results support the principles of Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition theory. The Input Hypothesis suggests that limited exposure to comprehensible spoken English restricts learners' ability to internalize accurate pronunciation patterns.

Additionally, the Affective Filter Hypothesis explains how factors such as anxiety and lack of confidence, as identified in previous studies, can hinder language acquisition by reducing learners' ability to process input effectively. At the same time, the Affective Filter Hypothesis helps explain how anxiety and lack of confidence, as identified in studies such as Nesterenko (2019), negatively affect students' willingness to speak and, consequently, their pronunciation development. In the Ecuadorian context, where opportunities for authentic communication are often limited, these affective barriers become even more significant.

The results also highlight a critical gap between theory and classroom practice. Although research emphasizes the importance of pronunciation for intelligibility, studies by Armas and Pila (2025) demonstrate that pronunciation instruction is frequently underemphasized in favor of grammar and vocabulary. This imbalance contributes to students' lack of phonological awareness and their inability to self-correct errors. Furthermore, the absence of systematic pronunciation training limits the development of both segmental and suprasegmental competence, which are essential for effective communication.

Another important finding is the strong relationship between pronunciation and overall oral performance. As shown in the studies by Pesantez and Volker (2023), improvements in pronunciation, particularly in vowel production. In terms of pedagogical implications, the discussion reveals that effective pronunciation instruction in Ecuador requires a combination of approaches rather than a single method. On the one hand, explicit phonetic instruction, as highlighted by studies such as Martínez (2025) and Rojas (2025), is essential to develop learners' awareness of sound production and phonological features. On the other hand, communicative approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) provide opportunities for meaningful interaction, allowing learners to apply pronunciation in real communicative contexts. This dual approach is particularly effective when aligned with Krashen's principles, as it combines comprehensible input with low-anxiety environments.

CONCLUSION

This literature review provides a critical analysis of pronunciation difficulties experienced by Ecuadorian EFL learners, revealing that these challenges stem from a complex interaction of linguistic interference from the L1 (Spanish), limited authentic input, pedagogical gaps, and affective factors such as anxiety. The

evidence emphasizes that insufficient explicit pronunciation instruction, coupled with low exposure to meaningful oral communication, substantially impedes learners' intelligibility and oral performance.

The findings advocate for a systematic, evidence-based approach to pronunciation pedagogy that integrates explicit segmental and suprasegmental training within communicative frameworks. Additionally, integrating technology-enhanced feedback mechanisms and fostering low-anxiety, learner-centered environments are indispensable for optimizing pronunciation acquisition. The interplay of cognitive, linguistic, and emotional factors requires that instructional methodologies transcend isolated drill-based practices in favor of holistic, multimodal interventions.

To address the curricular and institutional deficiencies in Ecuadorian EFL education, it is imperative to prioritize pronunciation instruction alongside other language skills, supported by adequate resources and teacher training. Such comprehensive pedagogical strategies have the potential to significantly improve learners' phonological awareness, self-monitoring abilities, and ultimately their communicative competence in English.

Future research should explore the longitudinal impact of integrated pronunciation interventions in diverse Ecuadorian educational settings to provide further empirical validation and inform best practices.

¹Note: This article is part of a research project of the Pedagogía de los Idiomas Extranjeros program, entitled: Development of the linguistic skills of the college students in Ecuador

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