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Exploring Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Beliefs About Learning English in the Tertiary Ecuadorian Context

Explorando las Creencias de Profesores de Inglés en Formación sobre el Aprendizaje del Idioma en el Contexto Universitario Ecuatoriano

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ABSTRACT

This study describes the beliefs of pre-service EFL teachers in the tertiary Ecuadorian context, to identify their perceptions of English language learning and analyze whether these beliefs vary according to their semester of training. Using a Spanish-adapted version of the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) questionnaire, the researchers administered surveys to 317 students from different academic levels, and they employed a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to examine the differences between groups. The results reveal that pre-service EFL teachers hold both beneficial and limiting beliefs, which are not static but change throughout their academic training. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of implementing pedagogical interventions aimed at modifying misconceptions and promoting positive attitudes towards English learning to improve the quality of teaching in the Ecuadorian context. This study contributes to the understanding of future teachers' conceptions in Ecuador, providing a basis for developing more effective and contextualized training programs.

Keywords: beliefs, BALLI, pre-service EFL teachers, English language learning, Ecuador tertiary education

RESUMEN

Este estudio describe las creencias de los futuros docentes de inglés en el contexto universitario ecuatoriano, para identificar sus percepciones sobre el aprendizaje del inglés y analizar si estas creencias varían según el semestre de formación. Utilizando una versión del cuestionario Beliefs

About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) adaptada al español, los investigadores administraron encuestas a 317 estudiantes de diferentes niveles académicos, y se realizó un análisis multivariado de varianza (MANOVA) para examinar las diferencias entre grupos. Los resultados revelan que los profesores en formación mantienen creencias tanto beneficiosas como limitantes, y que estas creencias no son estáticas, sino que cambian a lo largo de su formación académica. Asimismo, el estudio destaca la importancia de implementar intervenciones pedagógicas dirigidas a modificar percepciones erróneas y promover actitudes positivas hacia el aprendizaje del inglés, con el fin de mejorar la calidad de la enseñanza en el contexto ecuatoriano. Este estudio contribuye a la comprensión de las concepciones de los futuros docentes en Ecuador, proporcionando una base para el desarrollo de programas de formación más efectivos y contextualizados.

Palabras clave: creencias, BALLI, profesores de inglés en formación, aprendizaje del inglés, educación superior en Ecuador

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INTRODUCTION

In a globalized world, mastering English as a foreign language (EFL) has become a fundamental skill for academic and professional success. To meet this growing demand, high-quality English teacher training is a crucial element in educational systems. Within this process, educational research has increasingly focused on the factors that influence the professional development of future teachers, aiming to identify the elements that contribute to their success or, conversely, can pose a barrier.

For several decades, teachers' beliefs about language learning have been researched. Pioneering authors like Horwitz (1987) have explored the nature of these beliefs and their impact on acquiring a new language. Several measurement instruments have been developed, with Horwitz's Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) being particularly notable. It is widely used to identify students' and teachers' perceptions of the language learning process (Huntz, 1996). These beliefs directly influence motivation, attitudes, and strategies that students employ. Similarly, future teachers' conceptions about English teaching and learning can impact their pedagogical practices and instructional approaches in the classroom (Richardson, 1996).

Despite the importance of these beliefs, research focusing on pre-service EFL teachers is still limited, leaving a gap in our identification and understanding of conceptions that influence future teaching practices. This gap is particularly notable in the Latin American context, and specifically in Ecuador, where studies on beliefs are scarce (Santos & Veiga, 2022). This lack of research hinders the development of teacher training programs that address the specific needs of the country.

This descriptive study aimed to identify the predominant beliefs of pre-service EFL teachers about learning English and to analyze potential differences based on their semester of training. Studying preservice ELF teachers' beliefs is essential because they are learners and teachers simultaneously. Their beliefs as students will shape not only their own learning but, more critically, their future teaching practices. For this reason, the research questions that guide this study are: 1) What are the pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs about learning English? 2) Do the pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs about learning English differ according to the semester?

This article is structured as follows: First, a review of the relevant literature is presented; second, the methodology used is described; third, the results are presented; fourth, their implications are discussed; and finally, the study's implications are concluded with suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Beliefs

The study of beliefs has increased over the last few decades (Inceçay, 2011; Santos & Luque-Agulló, 2025). Despite the growing interest in the field, there is no universally accepted

definition of beliefs because of the varying terminology employed in different studies. However, Richardson (1996) defines beliefs as ideas or assumptions about the world that a person accepts as true, considering beliefs as a framework through which individuals interpret their reality. Similarly, Santos & Luque-Agulló (2025) state that “beliefs are predispositions of our mind that we hold to be true” (p.139), emphasizing that beliefs shape the way we perceive our world.

Nurhalimah et al. (2020) and Barcelos (2001) emphasize that a central aspect of beliefs is their influence on a person’s behavior and thought processes. In essence, beliefs have a significant impact on human actions, guiding our way of thinking and feeling. These statements are supported by Richardson (1996), who also considers that beliefs drive actions. Despite this, she argues that experiencing and reflecting on our actions has the potential to change or enrich our beliefs. Kalaja (1995) explains that beliefs are dynamic and constantly changing, as they develop through social interaction and depend on the context in which they are formed. This indicates that beliefs are fluid and evolve through new experiences, reflection, and interactions with others, highlighting their contextual and socially constructed nature.

Building on this perspective, the foundational framework of this study is Social Learning Theory, developed by Bandura in 1977 (Rumjaun & Narod, 2025). This theory explains that beliefs are socially constructed through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. According to this view, individuals, especially during their formative years, internalize beliefs by modeling the attitudes and behaviors that are rewarded or repeated in their environment. This underscores that beliefs are not formed in isolation but are strongly shaped by social and cultural contexts.

To complement this psychological foundation, recent research in neuroscience has provided insights into how beliefs are developed and biologically sustained. As Sathyanarayana Rao et al., (2009) explain, beliefs function as internal filters that organize perception and influence behavior, deeply intertwined with emotions and physiological processes. They are formed through repeated exposure to experiences, symbolic messages, and environmental stimuli, which are stored in memory and reinforced through neural mechanisms involving the prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and amygdala. Over time, these processes embed beliefs at a biological level, affecting not only cognition and behavior but also the body’s biochemical responses.

In the context of Language Learning, Barcelos (2001) suggests that beliefs are the opinions and ideas that students and teachers hold about how language is taught and learned. In line with this, Victori & Lockhart (1995) state that beliefs are general assumptions students have about themselves as learners, about the factors affecting language learning, and about the nature of language learning itself. These definitions highlight the fundamental role of beliefs in the learning process, as they influence students’ perceptions of the language, their motivation, the learning strategies they adopt, and their overall engagement with language learning.

Beliefs play a pivotal role for both learners and teachers (Pusparini et al., 2021). Indeed, Inceçay (2011) argues that highlighting the importance of teachers' beliefs is essential for

enhancing teaching practices and improving professional teacher preparation programs. In this context, preservice EFL teachers, who are students training to become educators, occupy a unique position: they are both learners and teachers. That means the beliefs they hold as students are likely to shape their teaching practices. Victori (1992) found that many of these beliefs lack a scientific basis and are, instead, misconceptions about language learning. Similarly, Richardson (1996) emphasizes that misconceptions often arise from accumulated experiences rather than empirical evidence. This highlights the need for critical examination and reflection due to “any incorrect beliefs about EFL teaching and learning can be detrimental to the students’ learning and might negatively affect their future practices” (Pusparini et al., 2021, p.148)

Preservice teachers’ guidance is so crucial in teaching educational programs. Green (1971) asserts that teaching involves, in part, the process of modifying and shaping belief systems. For that reason, teachers are crucial in supporting preservice teachers toward a more informed, evidence-based understanding of language learning. By understanding these beliefs, educators and future educators can identify and address potential learning barriers, foster a supportive and positive learning environment, and implement more effective teaching strategies.

Pre-Service EFL Teachers’ Beliefs About Learning English

According to Santos & Luque-Agulló (2025), research on pre-service teachers’ beliefs is still limited. A systematic review conducted by them found that there are around 37 studies about pre-service teacher beliefs from the last two decades (p.11). This reminds us of the urgency for data in the field. Nevertheless, some studies are closely related to the identification of preservice teachers' beliefs about learning English.

A literature review conducted by Pusparini et al. (2021) underscore that beliefs about learning and teaching originate from prior learning experiences, such as the influence of their own teachers’ pedagogy. The research also indicates that these beliefs are not static but are validated and adjusted as preservice teachers interact with real classroom contexts. Fundamentally, they highlight the profound impact of beliefs on students and their guiding role in teaching practice.

In the Ecuadorian context, Santos and Luque-Agulló (2025) revealed a complex relationship between preservice teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding teaching English speaking skills, with both convergences and divergences identified between their beliefs and practices. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of teacher education programs to address these discrepancies to better prepare future teachers for the demands of modern English language teaching in Latin America.

While some studies suggest that beliefs can be changeable (Kalaja, 1995; Barcelos, 2001; Richardson, 1996), Radwan's (2020) research provides evidence of their resistance to change. This author observed that, despite participation in educational programs, teachers’ beliefs remained relatively stable, indicating their complex nature and difficulty in being altered. This finding highlights the vital importance of early intervention regarding beliefs, especially those

that might be detrimental. In this regard, it is fundamental to “understand that the belief structures of teachers and teacher candidates are essential to improving their professional preparation and teaching practices” (Pajares, 1992, p. 307). As a result, Abu Radwan (2020) stresses the indispensable need for careful and prompt intervention in the early stages of a student’s professional training. The goal of this intervention is to equip future teachers with the necessary theoretical and pedagogical beliefs to positively influence their own students.

Additionally, Santos & Veiga (2022) conducted a descriptive study on university students’ beliefs about foreign language learning in Ecuador. Although their research focused on students rather than pre-service teachers, their findings suggest that cultural and educational factors in Ecuador significantly influence beliefs about language learning. These findings can be extended to future teachers in training, highlighting how the sociocultural environment shapes their perceptions and attitudes toward teaching and learning English.

Balli

To support researchers in identifying and studying beliefs, several measurement instruments have been developed, with Horwitz’s Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) being particularly notable. It is a Likert-scale questionnaire divided into five areas: difficulty in learning the language, aptitude in learning the language, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations. It is used to identify students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the language learning process (Huntz, 1996). Since its development in 1987, it has been adjusted. Additionally, several studies have been conducted using BALLI in the last decades, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Studies that use BALLI

Author	Year	Participants	Country
Barrios Espinosa	2013	Pre-service Teachers	Spain
Cimen	2015	Pre-service and in-service English language teachers	Turkey
Abu Radwan	2019	Pre-service teachers	Omán
Santos & Veiga	2022	University students	Ecuador

The table 1 shows a selection of studies conducted in the last decade that have used the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) instrument to investigate students' beliefs about language learning. These studies, carried out in different countries such as Spain, Turkey, Oman, and Ecuador, demonstrate the global application of the BALLI as a measurement tool. A common pattern is that most of the research focused on preservice teachers, highlighting the importance of this population in understanding the beliefs that influence the language learning

process. The diversity of years and geographical locations of these works emphasizes that the topic remains of academic interest, and that BALLI continues to be a valid and relevant instrument for studying language learning beliefs despite being developed several decades ago.

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study employed a descriptive design to identify and compare pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs about learning English. According to McCombes (2019), descriptive design aims to describe a population, situation, or phenomenon systematically. This kind of research is used to explore characteristics, frequencies, trends, and categories, and it is useful when not much is known yet about the topic or problem. In this regard, this methodology is the most suitable due to the existing gap in the study of pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs in Ecuador.

Context and Participants

This study was conducted in a EFL teaching training program at a public university in Los Ríos, Ecuador. The sample consisted of 317 participants ($N=317$) recruited through self-selection from the first to the eighth semester (last one) of the teaching training program. The sample included 82 men and 235 women, aged 17 to 54 years old. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and gave informed consent before participation.

Data Collection Instrument

Balli

This study utilized a Spanish-adapted version of the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). This adapted questionnaire consisted of 30 statements addressing five key areas of English learning. Participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (1. Strongly agree and 5. Strongly disagree). The survey was distributed via email using Google Forms, and the answers were collected over one month to ensure data quality.

The internal consistency of the BALLI questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The obtained value was $\alpha = 0.79$. Based on standard benchmarks ($\alpha \geq 0.7 = \text{acceptable}$), this indicates acceptable internal consistency. This suggests that the items measure a cohesive construct with relatively low measurement error. For the purposes of this study, the value is considered adequate for research use.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was performed using the statistical program SPSS 25 to identify the predominant beliefs of pre-service teachers regarding learning English. Subsequently, a correlational test was conducted to compare these beliefs across various levels of educational training.

Descriptive Statistics

The first stage of the analysis consisted of the identification of pre-service teachers' beliefs about learning English. To characterize the sample and provide a foundational understanding of the data, descriptive statistics were calculated. This stage included the measurement of percentages, mean, and standard deviation of each statement (Rendón-Macías et al., 2016).

Manova

In the second stage of the data analysis, a MANOVA (Multivariate Analysis of Variance) was applied. This analysis method is used to determine if there are significant differences among groups (semesters). Hassan (2024) explains that **MANOVA** provides a more comprehensive view of how variables affect one another, allowing for higher-quality comparisons in research.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the educational ethical considerations proposed by the British Educational Research Association (Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, Fourth Edition (2018), n.d.) to ensure consensual, informed, voluntary, and anonymous participation from the respondents. First, participants were invited, ensuring that only volunteers were involved. Next, the author presented the study's objective, clarifying the implications of participation and guaranteeing anonymity. Finally, participants agreed to collaborate with the researchers.

RESULTS

The results of this study are presented below in tables, detailing the percentages of participant responses. To facilitate analysis, the statements have been classified into five main categories. Each table is accompanied by a descriptive text that summarizes the key findings for each group, showing how participants align with beliefs about language learning.

Difficulty in Learning the Language

Focused on the difficulty in learning English, we found interesting results (Table 2). On the one hand, 52.1 % of preservice teachers agree that it is easier to read and write in English than to speak and understand it. Similarly, 67.5% believe that some languages are easier than others. On the other hand, the perception regarding the difficulty between speaking and understanding English was more divided. A notable 37.5% of participants remained in disagreement, with a slight tendency toward neutrality.

Table 2*Difficulty in Learning the Language*

Belief						Std.	
	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Dev.
10. It is easier to read and write in English than to speak and understand it.	19.6	32.5	29.3	15.8	2.8	2.50	1.063
15. It is easier to speak English than to understand English.	6.9	20.5	35.0	33.4	4.1	3.07	.989
2. Some languages are easier than others.	26.2	41.3	21.1	10.7	0.6	2.18	.964
Note: * 1=Strongly agree; 2= Agree; 3=Neutral; 4 =Disagree; 5= Strongly disagree							

Aptitude for Learning the Language

Concerning language learning ability, results reveal three types of answers (Table 3). First, 83% of preservice teachers agreed that it is easier for children than for adults to learn English. Also, 42.2 % of participants agreed that some people are born with a special ability that helps them learn English. Likewise, it was found that 61,5 % agreed that it is easier for someone who already speaks English to learn another foreign language. Additionally, 49.2% show agreement in concordance with the importance of Ecuadorians speaking English. A higher percentage of participants, 68.5 %, also agreed that they have an aptitude for foreign languages. Similarly, 63,4% agreed that people who speak more than one language well are very intelligent. As well, 94.3% of participants agreed that everyone can learn to speak English. Furthermore, neutral answers were found: 46.1% declared they are neutral about whether women are better than men at learning English, and 50.5% stated a neutral argument about whether Ecuadorians are good at learning English. Finally, 53.6% disagreed that people who are good at math and science are not good at learning English.

Table 3*Aptitude for Learning the Language*

Belief						Std.	
	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Dev.
1. It is easier for children than for adults to learn English.	46.4	36.6	12,9	3.8	0.3	1.75	.844
16. Some people are born with a special ability that helps them learn English.	12.3	30.0	31.5	21.1	5.0	2.77	1.074
18. It is easier for someone who already speaks English to learn another foreign language.	24.3	37.2	24.0	11.4	3.2	2.32	1-.060

19. Ecuadorians think it is important to speak English.	16.4	32.8	27.1	20.8	2.8	2.61	1.075
22. I have an aptitude for foreign languages.	18.3	50.2	26.8	4.4	0.3	2.18	.790
28. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.	21.8	41.6	26.5	8.5	1.6	2.26	.948
30. Everyone can learn to speak English.	69.7	24.6	4.7	0.6	0.3	1.37	.637
11. Women are better than men at learning English.	5.9	6.9	46.5	26.2	14.8	3.37	1.015
25. Ecuadorians are good at learning English.	5.4	26.2	50.5	15.5	2.5	2.84	.841
21. People who are good at math and science are not good at learning English.	4.7	7.3	34.4	38.8	14.8	3.52	.989
Note: * 1=Strongly agree; 2= Agree; 3=Neutral; 4 =Disagree; 5= Strongly disagree							

Nature for Language Learning

Regarding the nature of learning the language, two different perspectives were found (Table 4). First, a high percentage of participants said that they agreed that learning a foreign language is mainly a matter of learning many new vocabulary words (74.5 %) and learning many grammar rules (51,1%). Conversely, 51.1% disagreed that learning a foreign language is mainly a matter of translating. Also 71,0% agreed that learning English is different from learning other school subjects. Additionally, 76.0% emphasized it is better to learn English in an English-speaking country; however, only 43,8% agreed it is necessary to know the Anglophone culture to speak English.

Table 4

Nature for Language Learning

Belief	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev.
9. Learning a foreign language is mainly a matter of learning many new vocabulary words.	32.2	42.3	17.0	7.9	0.6	2.03	.931
17. Learning English is mainly a matter of learning many grammar rules.	15.5	35.6	27.4	18.6	2.8	2.58	1.048
23. It is necessary to know the Anglophone culture to speak English.	11.0	32.8	42.0	12.9	1.3	2.61	.892
24. Learning English is different from learning other school subjects.	21.8	49.2	18.0	10.1	0.9	2.19	.923

29. It is better to learn English in an English-speaking country.	35.0	41	19.2	4.4	0.3	1.94	.864
7. Learning a foreign language is mainly a matter of translating.	3.8	15.4	29.7	42.9	8.2	3.36	.967
Note: * 1=Strongly agree; 2= Agree; 3=Neutral; 4 =Disagree; 5= Strongly disagree							

Learning and communication strategies

About learning and communication strategies, we found two answers (Table 5). Firstly, 97.5% of students believe it is important to repeat and practice a lot. Similarly, 52.0% agreed it is important to speak English with an excellent accent. Concerning to their emotional aspects, 66.6% of participants feel self-conscious speaking English in front of other people. Also, 49.2% considered that if they are allowed to make mistakes at the beginning while learning English, it will be difficult to overcome them later. Lately, 38.85 disagreed with guessing if you don't know a word in English. Similarly, 68.8% disagreed that they shouldn't say anything in English until they can say it correctly.

Table 5

Learning and communication strategies

Belief	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev.
4. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	74.8	22.7	1.6	0.6	0.3	1.29	.561
12. It is important to speak English with an excellent accent.	20.8	31.2	27.8	16.1	4.1	2.51	1.113
26. I feel self-conscious speaking English in front of other people.	24.0	42.6	17.0	12.3	4.1	2.30	1.089
27. If you are allowed to make mistakes at the beginning while learning English, it will be difficult to get rid of them later.	19.9	29.3	20.8	24.3	5.7	2.67	1.205
6. It's okay to guess if you don't know a word in English.	6.6	21.5	33.1	31.2	7.6	3.12	1.041
14. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	3.8	7.9	19.6	46.4	22.4	3.76	1.010
Note: * 1=Strongly agree; 2= Agree; 3=Neutral; 4 =Disagree; 5= Strongly disagree							

Motivations and Expectations

Regarding motivation and expectations, we found agreement in the whole section (Table 6). A high percentage of participants believe that they will eventually learn to speak English very

well (89.6%), and they would like to learn English to better understand its speakers (87.4%). Additionally, they agree that if they heard someone speaking in English, they would approach them to practice the language (70.0%). Concerning opportunities, they agreed they will get to speak English very well, and they will have many opportunities to use it. Also, 80,7% believe that if they learn to speak English very well, they will get a good job.

Table 7

Motivations and expectations

Belief						Std.	
	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Dev.
8. I think I will eventually learn to speak English very well.	46.7	42.9	8.5	1.6	0.3	1.66	.727
5. I would like to learn English to better understand its speakers.	50.5	36.9	9.8	1.9	0.9	1.66	.806
20. If I heard someone speaking in English, I would approach them to practice the language.	26.5	43.5	18.0	9.5	2.5	2.18	1.011
3. If I get to speak English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.	63.4	29.7	6.0	0.3	0.6	1.45	.681
13.If I learn to speak English very well, I will get a good job.	35.0	45.7	17.4	1.6	0.3	1.86	.774

Note:* 1=Strongly agree; 2= Agree; 3=Neutral; 4 =Disagree; 5= Strongly disagree

Manova

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed that the independent variable, semester, had a statistically significant effect on students' beliefs about learning English. Specifically, the tests of between-subjects effects showed significant differences in several beliefs across the semesters, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Beliefs about learning English that differ significantly based on the semester

Belief	F	p
6. Learning a foreign language is mainly a matter of learning many vocabulary words	F(7,309) = 3.371	P = 0.002
7. It is easier to read and write in English than to speak and understand it	F(7,309) = 4.122	p < 0.001
8. It is important to speak English with an excellent accent (,).	F(7,309) = 5.053	p < 0.001
10 It is easier to speak English than to understand English (, p = .003).	F(7,309) = 3.136	p = 0.003

12. It is easier for someone who already speaks English to learn another foreign language	$F(7,309) = 3.628$	$p < 0.001$
13. Ecuadorians think it is important to speak English	$F(7,309) = 3.937$	$p < 0.001$

DISCUSSION

In this part of the article, the key findings obtained from the BALLI questionnaire are discussed. Principal results indicated that: a) most of the relevant answers were found in the motivation and expectations category, where participants agreed with most of the beliefs related to it; b) following this, significant findings were obtained in nature for learning the language, where participants agreed with half of the statements; c) also, we found several interesting responses in the categories of aptitude for language learning and learning and communication strategies, and, d) finally, difficulty in language learning showed less agreement.

These general results show a close relationship with the findings encountered by Santos & Veiga (2022). Although their study involved university students instead of preservice teachers, general results show a high percentage of similarity in the agreement of beliefs per category. This might be the influence of context and common background experiences of participants due to having been immersed in a similar educational system in Ecuador.

Table 8
Rank of beliefs agreement

Rank	Belief	Agree (N)	%
1	It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	309	97.5%
2	Everyone can learn to speak English	299	94.3%
3	If I get to speak English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.	295	93.1%
4	I think I will eventually learn to speak English very well.	284	89.6%
5	I would like to learn English to better understand its speakers.	277	87.4%
26	It is easier to speak English than to understand English.	87	27.4%
27	Learning a foreign language is mainly a matter of translating.	61	19.2%
28	Women are better than men at learning English	41	12.9%
29	People who are good at math and science are not good at learning English.	38	12.0%
30	You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	37	11.7%

With a 97.5% agreement rate, the belief that repetition and practice are essential was the most common one found. This result is supported by similar findings obtained by Abu Radwan (2020), in which 97.5% of students agree with the same statement. Richardson (1996) stated that

beliefs come from personal experience, schooling, instruction, among others. In alignment with her, this belief might be related to traditional methods in what students have been taught since school, where repetition was a central part. From the perspective of Social Learning Theory, beliefs are reinforced through observation and imitation of these practices and might later be reproduced in preservice teachers' own classrooms as shown Santos & Luque-Agulló (2025), who found that students with a strong belief in repetition as a learning strategy apply this belief in their teaching practice when they assume the role of teacher during their training. It highlights the urgency for the deconstruction of misconceptions, which, according to Pusparini et al. (2021), can be detrimental for students. Taking action to align preservice teacher beliefs with the Communicative Language Approach (according with the Ecuadorian EFL curriculum) is key in today's language learning education.

The second common belief (94.3% agreement) among participants was that everyone can learn to speak English. It also closely links this to the fourth-ranked belief, where participants agree that they will learn to speak English eventually (89.6%). These findings are quite similar to those of Barrios-Espinoza (2013) and Cimen (2015), who found a high percentage of agreement with these statements. These results show that participants strongly believe they will develop speaking skills in English, and it also reflects their positive assumption that anyone can learn it. This is a good starting point that might help create friendly English learning environments where nobody is underestimated.

Beliefs about opportunities to use language ranked third in agreement (93.1%). This means that "If I get to speak English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it." The results show a high level of motivation among participants, who believe that good management of oral skills will open many opportunities for communication. Similarly, the belief in fifth place highlights participants' engagement with using English to understand its speakers (87.4%). These findings show how pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs are connected and support their interest in intercultural communication. Therefore, fostering positive beliefs is a vital part of an EFL teacher's role. Students are already motivated by the idea that English will create opportunities for communication and connection, so teachers should help bridge the gap between belief and reality.

The belief that "learning a foreign language is mainly a matter of translating" (position 27, 19.2% agreement) is particularly concerning. From a psychological perspective, translation can serve as a useful cognitive strategy, particularly at initial stages, as it helps learners connect new knowledge with their first language. However, reducing language learning to translation alone is problematic. The fact that 61 future EFL teachers support it indicates that an outdated view of language learning still prevails. By focusing on translation, they might neglect to develop communicative skills essential for real-world interaction. This belief could lead them to prioritize rigid translation exercises rather than fostering the authentic use of the language not only as

students, but also as teachers. This goes against the principles of the Communicative Language Approach (CLA), which aims for students to communicate naturally and effectively. When future teachers adopt the belief that learning a foreign language is mainly a matter of translating, they risk limiting both their own communicative development and that of their students. In line with Social Learning Theory, such beliefs are often reinforced by traditional classroom models, and if left unchallenged, they may be reproduced in future teaching practices.

Even more alarming is the belief at the very bottom of the ranking: “you shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.” Although only 37 (11.7%) future teachers subscribe to it, its potential impact is devastating. This idea might generate a paralyzing fear of making mistakes in their own learning process, limiting their participation and the development of their oral skills. When these students take on the role of teachers, it's likely they will pass this same fear on to their students. If a teacher discourages language experimentation for fear of errors, they are creating an inhibitory learning environment where students are afraid to speak. This completely halts the development of oral fluency, a critical skill for mastering English. The existence of this belief, no matter how minor, highlights a critical flaw that must be addressed, as these 37 individuals will be responsible for the education of hundreds of future students.

Finally, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) showed that semesters had a statistically significant effect on students' overall beliefs about learning. The belief that “it is easier to read and write in English than to speak and understand it” ($F(7,309) = 4.122, p < 0.001$) and the belief that “it is easier for someone who already speaks English to learn another foreign language” ($F(7,309) = 3.628, p < 0.001$) suggest that exposure to higher education in English alters how students view different language skills and the transfer of knowledge between languages. Moreover, the belief about the importance of an “excellent accent” ($F(7,309) = 5.053, p < 0.001$) and the “Ecuadorians think it is important to speak English” ($F(7,309) = 3.937, p < 0.001$) also showed significant differences.

These findings could indicate that the language degree curriculum might influence the beliefs of future teachers. As they progress in their studies, pre-service EFL teachers are exposed to pedagogical principles and linguistic knowledge that might demystify their misconceptions. The program seems to instill a more realistic and nuanced view of the difficulty of communicative skills, while also fostering an understanding of the importance of intelligibility over accent perfection. In essence, the degree might not only be teaching the language, but also reshaping the students' belief system, aligning it with a more professional perspective and a greater awareness of the social relevance of English in their environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The main goal of this descriptive study was to identify pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs in the Ecuadorian higher education context. To gather data, the BALLI questionnaire was utilized.

Addressing the first research question, the findings reveal that pre-service EFL teachers hold both beneficial and limiting beliefs about learning English. Among the most prominent positive beliefs are motivation, perceived aptitude for language learning, and the opportunities they believe learning English will provide. These beliefs can enhance their engagement and effectiveness during teacher training. In contrast, limiting beliefs were identified, including overemphasis on repetition, reliance on translation, and reluctance to speak until producing perfectly correct language. Although some particular beliefs were held by a minority of participants, they are still important because they can significantly influence these future teachers' classroom practices and potentially perpetuate less communicative approaches.

Addressing the second research question, statistically significant changes were observed in the participants' beliefs based on their training semester. This suggests that the beliefs of the participants are not fixed; rather, they vary across different semesters.

The findings of this study significantly contribute to the literature on beliefs in the Ecuadorian context and also provide an important foundation for enhancing teacher training programs in Ecuador. By identifying both beneficial and limiting beliefs, pedagogical interventions can be designed to help future teachers critically reflect on, evaluate, and reconstruct their beliefs, fostering those that support communicative and effective language teaching

Because this study focused on a specific context, its results are not generalizable. Therefore, it is suggested that this research be replicated in other institutions to determine if the results are representative of a broader trend in the country. Furthermore, future research should qualitatively explore the underlying causes of these beliefs and conduct longitudinal studies to observe their evolution throughout teacher training programs.

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ANNEXED

Questionnaire and results

Belief	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. It is easier for children than for adults to learn English.	147	116	41	12	1	1.75	.844
2. Some languages are easier than others.	83	131	67	34	2	2.18	.964
3. If I get to speak English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.	201	94	19	1	2	1.45	.681
4. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	237	72	5	2	1	1.29	.561
5. I would like to learn English to better understand its speakers.	160	117	31	6	3	1.66	.806
6. It's okay to guess if you don't know a word in English.	21	68	105	99	24	3.12	1.041
7. Learning a foreign language is mainly a matter of translating.	12	49	94	136	26	3.36	.967
8. I think I will eventually learn to speak English very well.	148	136	27	5	1	1.66	.727
9. Learning a foreign language is mainly a matter of learning many new vocabulary words.	102	134	54	25	2	2.03	.931
10. It is easier to read and write in English than to speak and understand it.	62	103	93	50	9	2.50	1.063
11. Women are better than men at learning English.	19	22	146	83	47	3.37	1.015
12. It is important to speak English with an excellent accent.	66	99	88	51	13	2.51	1.113
13. If I learn to speak English very well, I will get a good job.	111	145	55	5	1	1.86	.774
14. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	12	25	62	147	71	3.76	1.010
15. It is easier to speak English than to understand English.	22	65	111	106	13	3.07	.989
16. Some people are born with a special ability that helps them learn English.	39	95	100	67	16	2.77	1.074
17. Learning English is mainly a matter of learning many grammar rules.	49	113	87	59	9	2.58	1.048
18. It is easier for someone who already speaks English to learn another foreign language.	77	118	76	36	10	2.32	1.060
19. Ecuadorians think it is important to speak English.	52	104	86	66	9	2.61	1.075

20. If I heard someone speaking in English, I would approach them to practice the language.	84	138	57	30	8	2.18	1.011
21. People who are good at math and science are not good at learning English.	15	23	109	123	47	3.52	.989
22. I have an aptitude for foreign languages.	58	159	85	14	1	2.18	.790
23. It is necessary to know the Anglophone culture to speak English.	35	104	133	41	4	2.61	.892
24. Learning English is different from learning other school subjects.	69	156	57	32	3	2.19	.923
25. Ecuadorians are good at learning English.	17	83	160	49	8	2.84	.841
26. I feel self-conscious speaking English in front of other people.	76	135	54	39	13	2.30	1.089
27. If you are allowed to make mistakes at the beginning while learning English, it will be difficult to get rid of them later.	63	93	66	77	18	2.67	1.205
28. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.	69	132	84	27	5	2.26	.948
29. It is better to learn English in an English-speaking country.	111	130	61	14	1	1.94	.864
30. Everyone can learn to speak English.	221	78	15	2	1	1.37	.637
Note:* 1=Strongly agree; 2= Agree; 3=Neutral; 4 =Disagree; 5= Strongly disagree							