

# CHAPTER 1

## **The Tapestry of EFL Teachers in Ecuador**

María José Barragán Camacho

José Miguel Campuzano Díaz

Heidi Marlen Marriott Toledo

Karen Anabella Yambay Castro

Katherine Anabelle Salvador Cisneros

Mónica Elva Vaca Cárdenas

## Introduction

Many Latin American countries include English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs in their educational curriculum to prepare students to work and live in a globalized world (Cronquist and Fiszbein, 2017; Stanton and Fiszbein, 2019). In Ecuador, the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) has implemented systematic program reforms for over three decades, attempting to improve the country's English proficiency through implementing curricular restructuring, recruiting new teachers, and establishing a minimum required English proficiency as well as standardizing English learning outcomes, developing instructional materials, and improving infrastructure. Nonetheless, large-scale surveys —like the Education First Proficiency Index— suggest that such reforms have yielded limited results (see Introduction). In addition to issues of English certification and proficiency, education authorities face considerable challenges with respect to gender parity and ethnic representation. Language teachers in Ecuador, as in much of Latin America and the Western hemisphere overall, are mostly women. Existing research on gender highlights gender inequities in the teaching profession as well as the profound impact of gender on teacher-student interaction and student attitudes and performance. By situating the case of Ecuador —both within broader concerns about EFL education in Latin America and within specific demographic tendencies pertaining to the Ecuadorian context— this chapter can help better understand the social and pedagogical implications of the demographic composition of Ecuadorian EFL teachers and provide a foundation for specific policy recommendations.

This first analytical chapter examines data elicited in the national survey related to teacher demographics. The analysis is supported and contextualized by census and other public data, allowing us to describe the social composition of Ecuadorian EFL teachers and compare them to the Ecuadorian population more generally. In the absence of long-term data, the analysis constructs a pseudo-longitudinal framework that attempts to identify demographic shifts over time by tracing patterns according to the years of teaching experience reported by participants. This composite demographic framework integrates and charts the relationships between incidental demographic factors —such as ethnicity, gender, and geographical region— and indicators of professionalization in EFL teaching —including language proficiency, certification, educational profile, and years of experience in the field. This data not only provides information on teacher composition but also helps the analysis identify key concerns about diversity,

inclusion, equity, and teacher preparation within which subsequent chapters are situated. This comparative approach illuminates the case of Ecuador in relation to regional trends and broader theoretical frameworks, specifically the roles of race, gender, ethnicity, location, and proficiency, as they pertain to teacher satisfaction and student success in the EFL classroom.

At first glance, the results suggest that Ecuadorian EFL teachers constitute a relatively homogenous group. The majority of EFL teachers identify as *mestiza* (mixed-race) with a teaching experience between six and ten years and intermediate English proficiencies. However, upon further examination, the survey reveals gradual diversification of English teachers and movement toward gender parity and, at the same time, gaps and contradictions across these trends. Positive trends aside, the low level of professional qualifications and English proficiency certifications across teachers of all demographic categories and experience levels raises concerns. Ultimately, English language proficiency for teachers across all demographic indicators must be prioritized above other professionalization factors.

Ideally, this chapter's analysis offers broad and contextualized conclusions and recommendations for policy makers, stakeholders, and teacher trainers to ground and design future EFL policies, training programs, and recruiting efforts. The recommendations include expanding inclusive recruitment practices that assure EFL teachers reflect the overall Ecuadorian population. With this, a more consistent application of professional standards that provide teachers with the requisite pedagogical knowledge and language proficiency for effective EFL teaching is imperative. Finally, administrators and teachers across all demographic indicators must prioritize English language proficiency training among teachers while attending to recruitment and retention issues and providing more opportunities for professional development, even among the most experienced teachers, which address curricular matters.

Our analysis provides specific, context-based recommendations to initiate the building of a ground-up structure that attends to and is based on the particular problems uncovered in our study. These problems represent the everyday realities in Ecuadorian EFL classrooms and the recommendations address these problems in ways that are much more relevant and accomplishable than broad reform.

## English Teachers in Latin America: A Critical Overview

In Latin America, and globally, teaching is generally considered a woman's profession and, as women's work, is typically undervalued. Such feminization of woman's work and language teaching reflects broader gender stereotypes. Women are more inclined toward the profession presumably because of their inherently maternal instincts and associated interactive abilities (UNESCO, 2002, p. 20) and because they are also better at learning languages than men. These assumptions intertwine essentialist ideas of women's inherent social sensitivity and expressiveness with language acquisition (Schmenk, 2004, p. 519).

The feminization of teaching in Latin America is especially pronounced. Early in the twentieth century, emerging nationalist movements in the region obligated men to depart classrooms to join their nation's political and economic struggles (Cortina, 2006, pp. 107-108). Thus began a dramatic regional shift toward teaching as a women's profession. Current estimates indicate that nearly three out of four teachers in Latin America are women and that their numbers are especially high in preschool and primary education. Reflecting stereotypes, women are also more likely to teach English than other subjects (Stanton and Fiszbein, 2019, pp. 10-11).

In Ecuador, women represent the overwhelming majority of teachers (INEVAL, 2016). According to the MINEDUC's annual statistics report, 71.55% of teachers in primary and secondary schools were women in the 2020-2021 academic year, up nearly 5% from 66.66% during the 2009-2010 academic year (MINEDUC 2021). Such tendencies toward gender parity have significant implications for classroom practice, student engagement, and achieving second language proficiency outcomes (Decke-Cornill, 2007; Dewaele, 2018; Drudy, 2008; Jule, 2016; Gkonou and Mercer, 2018). Regarding classroom practice, teaching materials typically have gendered aspects. Texts, worksheets, and other materials often perpetuate gendered work as in "She cleaned the house" and "She cooked the dinner." Although women are still the primary party responsible for domestic work in Ecuador (i.e., in one's own household), student practice material can always be non-gender specific.

These stereotypes have real-world consequences; female teachers earn lower salaries than men who opt for positions in higher paying and higher status fields. In Ecuador,

women are entering the labor force in greater numbers, but they are undervalued and experience job insecurity. Indeed, Ecuadorian public school teachers not only earn relatively low salaries, but women EFL teachers also earn lower salaries than their male counterparts. Public school teachers usually earn less than private school teachers; the former also have limited assurance for job continuity because they do not have tenuous positions. Only 52.49% of public school teachers have a labor contract; moreover, 47.51% work through temporary appointments or other arrangements (MINEDUC, 2021). In contrast, nearly all (98%) private school teachers hold long-term contracts. As women represent more than 7 out of 10 teachers in Ecuador, those who work in the public sector are disproportionately affected by lower salaries, job insecurity, and attendant economic instability than their male and private-sector peers.

Gender issues and stereotypes are inextricable from matters of race and ethnicity in EFL teaching (Grant and Sleeter, 1986), given that gender, racial and ethnic identity are strongly linked to traditional values involving language use and acquisition (De Jesus Ferreira, 2007; Kubota and Lin, 2009). Existing research considers teachers racial or ethnic identity in relation to that of their students and overall community population. In Mexico, for example, *mestizo* Oaxacan EFL teachers report feeling undervalued during the hiring process because of their ethnicity (Sayer et al, 2013). Language itself plays a dominant role in social and ethnic identity formation, and English teaching in particular is closely associated with imperial domination (Canagarajah, 1999). In addition, teaching materials, especially in EFL contexts, are rife with stereotypes that construct racial knowledge through the process of language learning (Taylor-Mendes, 2009, p. 66). To address these issues, scholars have called for new critical and theoretical approaches to examining race in EFL learning (Ruecker, 2011); these approaches would recognize the longstanding association between native speakerism and racism as well as the need to understand how language, power, and race conspire to perpetuate inequities in EFL teaching and learning.

These considerations are compounded with respect to EFL teaching in Ecuador where the population is ethnically diverse, composed of people from European, African, and Indigenous ancestries as well as people who recognize the intermixture of these varied origins. In general, *mestizo* in Ecuador refers to people of mixed European and Indigenous ancestries. The category *mulato* (*mulatto*) was used in the national census in 2001 to denote people of mixed African ancestry, as opposed to *negro* (black), *blanco* (white), or *mestizo*. However, the 2010 census radically

changed these color-centric racial categories to more culturally and community-oriented identities, including afroecuatoriano (Afro-Ecuadorian) instead of negro and mulato. The 2010 census also recognized montuvios, a term that refers to the people who comprise the self-sustaining agricultural communities of coastal Ecuador, following their official recognition as a distinctive group by the national government in late 2001. This identity signals a communal identity among people whose identity is constructed primarily through their collective agricultural practices rather than ethnic or racial origin.

According to the 2010 census, most Ecuadorians (72%) self-identify as mixed-race or *mestizo*. Historical census data also indicates shifts in ethnic identification during recent decades. Those identifying as *mestizo* in 2010, for example, dropped from 86.5% in 2001, due in part to changes in the ethnic and racial categories used in the 2001 and 2010 census forms. Nonetheless, the category of *mestizo* remains closely tied to upper-class notions of whiteness rather than recognition and acceptance of the nation's history of ethnic intermingling and plurality (Roitman, 2016).

While the national census recommends greater recognition of ethnic diversity, reports published by MINEDUC show that teachers have become more ethnically homogenous over the past decade. In the 2009-2010 school year, 88.4% of teachers self-reported being *mestizo*, a number that has increased to 91.0% in 2020-2021. Yet, as discussed below, our survey shows a countertrend indicating a decline in the number of *mestizos* among EFL teachers as well as gains among minority ethnic groups. Little, if any, work has accounted for these dynamics or considered how the ethnicity of EFL teachers affects English teaching.

In addition to incidental demographics such as gender, race, and geography, Ecuadorian EFL teacher demographics involve teacher professionalization aspects that fall under the banner of education background, years of experience, and English proficiency and certification. Existing scholarship consistently identifies language proficiency as critical for improved teaching ability (Faez and Karas, 2017, p. 136; Renandya, p. 69). It is significant because effective teaching does not come from high proficiency alone but also teacher knowledge and use of the language in teaching situations (Canh and Renandya, 2017; Faez and Karas, 2011 p.135; Tsang, 2017 p. 99). Some studies have found a positive correlation between language proficiency and teachers' classroom confidence in their

instructional abilities. Certainly, providing teachers with training practices to develop a positive attitude can help teachers with lower proficiency to be more effective (Freeman, 2017, p. 31; Nguyen, 2017, p. 83). Still, teacher confidence does not alone or always equate with better teaching. Better teaching is in many ways tied to interactive teaching practices.

Although MINEDUC has implemented clear standards for EFL teacher proficiency in recent years, our analysis shows that relatively few teachers have achieved the B2 benchmark on the Common European Framework. As such, this study not only considers the need to improve language proficiency but also efforts to better understand how teachers with different proficiency levels use language to maximize their contributions to student success (Renandya, p. 69). Given this circumstance, we must identify the appropriate proficiency levels for non-native teachers regarding grade level and other instructional matters, develop and implement appropriate means of testing, and train teachers to use interactive teaching. However, EFL teachers' language proficiency is notoriously difficult to measure. Moreover, although self-reporting is neither ideal nor does it present a complete assessment, it is often the only available option (Tsang, 2017 p. 99; Faez and Karas, 2017, p. 145). In the present study, therefore, we consider teachers' self-reported language ability and also whether they hold a valid certification of language proficiency. In some small measure, then, the analysis here can identify tendencies in self-reported proficiency and the role that certification plays among different demographic indicators.

Given the problems with attaining and testing proficiency, formal training in language instruction is just as imperative as demonstrating language proficiency. In Brazil, a greater percentage of EFL teachers hold master's degrees and PhDs than their peers in other countries such as Mexico or Colombia (Howard et al., 2016). In contrast, 76% of EFL teachers in Mexico hold a bachelor's degree, yet only 28% have taken a language proficiency test (Sayer, Mercau, and Blanco López, 2013). Higher educational attainment correlates to other indicators in teacher preparedness. Brazilian EFL teachers, for example, were more confident in their proficiency level than EFL teachers in Mexico or Colombia. These results suggest, but do not demonstrate, that more experienced English teachers develop more reflective as well as interactive teaching practices and confidence in their language use.

At present, more questions than answers exist about demographics in EFL contexts in Latin America and Ecuador in particular. Clearly, further work is needed to understand demographic factors related to EFL teaching and to adapt teacher classroom practices to specific Ecuadorian contexts. By illuminating the demographic profile of EFL teachers and understanding the relationships between incidental demographic markers and indicators of professional preparedness, we can design initiatives directed toward equity and inclusion and, thereby, prepare Ecuadorian EFL teachers who are better trained and more representative of the communities they serve.

## Framework for Analyzing EFL Teacher Demographics

To characterize the composition of EFL teachers we examined the results of self-reported demographic indicators such as gender, ethnicity, and geographic region in which they work. In addition, teachers were queried about their years of experience as EFL teachers, educational attainment, English proficiency on the Common European Framework, and their attainment of a certificate recognized by the MINEDUC to validate their proficiency. We considered the responses to these questions and compared the EFL teacher survey results to current and historical national census data as well as to more general data on teachers published in a report by MINEDUC.

In addition to frequency distribution analysis and comparison, our analysis used cross-tabulations to identify relationships between different demographic indicators—including those between personal demographic characteristics of race, gender, and region and those external ones related to professional training, experience, and language proficiency. In addition, we examined potential relationships between geographical location and gender and ethnic representation to determine whether shifts in teacher demographics are regionally localized or can be generalized across Ecuador. The analysis uncovered relationships that help us better understand how English proficiency and training depend, in great part, on social factors related to class and gender as well as to access to professional training and exposure to the English language. While the analysis does not fully account for why some EFL teachers are better prepared than others, it sheds



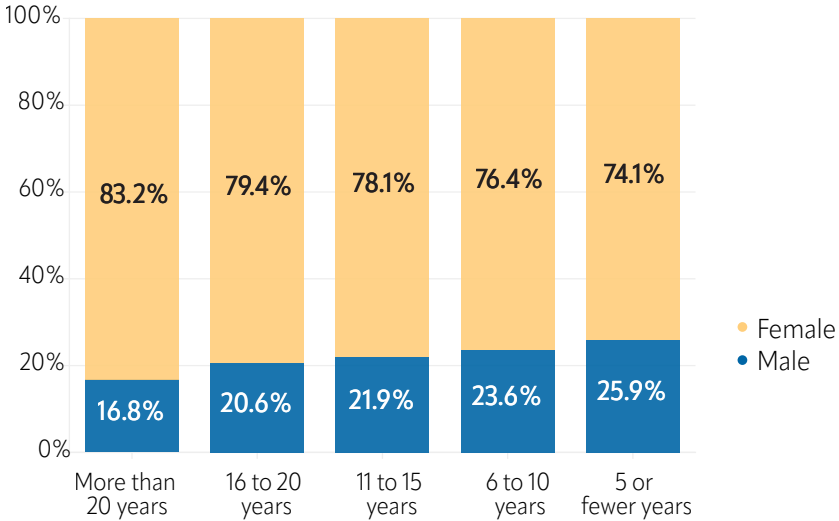
light on differences in training needs and English proficiency certification among teachers regardless of their years of experience in the field.

## Countercurrents in Gender and Ethnicity

The number of women teachers in Ecuador and Latin American overall is growing. With respect to gender and ethnicity, the results reveal several individual tendencies among EFL teachers. As a group, however, these trends lead to further questions that cannot be resolved with this data but suggest pathways for subsequent research. For instance, mestizas are overrepresented in EFL compared to teachers in other fields and the overall Ecuadorian population. Ecuadorian women represent an even larger proportion of EFL teachers (77.9%) than the national data for teachers across all disciplines (71.55%).<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the results show movement toward greater gender parity and ethnic diversity in relationship to other demographic factors. Comparing gender ratios with total years of teaching experience revealed a trend among EFL teachers which has significant consequences for the current high proportion of female EFL teachers. Men are gradually occupying a greater share of EFL teaching positions. As Figure 1 illustrates, women represent 83.2% of the most experienced EFL teachers (20 or more years), while the number of men at the same experience level are noticeably fewer at 16.8%. However, the percentage of male teachers increases to 25.9% among those with 5 or fewer years of experience, overall, a gain of 9.1%. Thus, men are currently entering the field of EFL teaching at higher rates than twenty years ago. This movement toward gender parity vis-à-vis years of teaching experience is a positive development; at the current rate of change, however, parity will not be achieved for at least two more decades. Moreover, the overrepresentation of men at lower levels of teaching longevity might not be, at least in part, a matter of new recruits in a field historically dominated by women. Perhaps, gender parity would be greater if men did not leave the profession at a relatively high rate. But data on this possibility must be collected and analyzed.

1 The options for gender identification were masculino (male), femenino (female), and otro (other). Of the 3,813 valid responses, only one participant chose "other." Therefore, this analysis considers only those who identify as male or female.

**Figure 1.** Gender Representation as a Function of Years of Teaching Experience

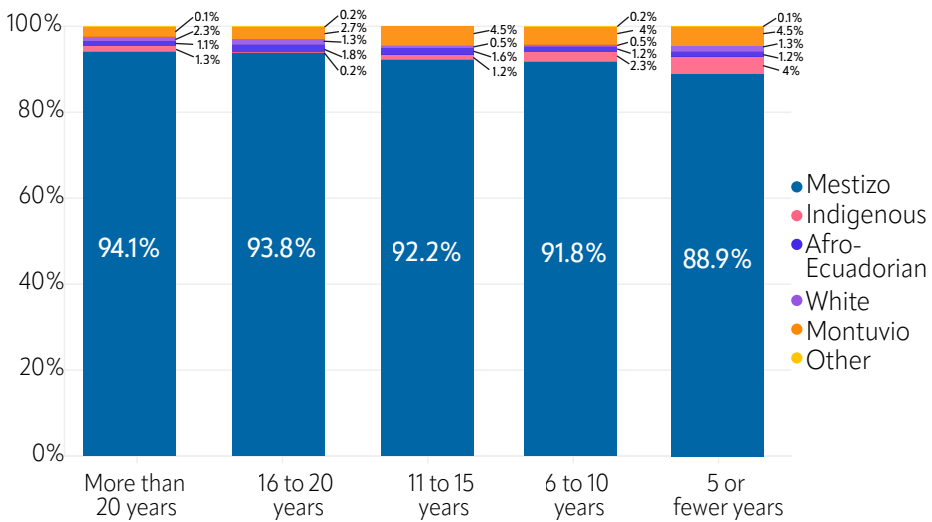
Regarding ethnicity, the survey percentages of EFL teachers align closely with those in MINEDUC's national report (2021) of teachers across all disciplines. In this report, 90.7% of teachers identify as Mestizo, followed by Indigenous peoples at 4.1%, White as 2.6%, Montuvio at 1.3%, and Afro-Ecuadorian at 2.0%. Similarly, our survey found that 91.9% of EFL teachers identify as mestizo, while only 3.7% identify as Montuvio, 2.0% as Indigenous, 1.3% as Afro-Ecuadorian, and 0.9% as White. The greatest differences in ethnic representation between EFL teachers and teachers overall involves Montuvios, who represent a greater share of the former teachers than of the latter. In contrast, Indigenous Afro-Ecuadorians and Whites are less likely to teach EFL teachers other subjects. Significantly each of these ethnicities is underrepresented within the overall Ecuadorian population. The data thus indicates that EFL teachers, as the general teaching population, are more ethnically homogenous than the Ecuadorian population with more than 9 out of 10 identifying as Mestizo. Moreover, ethnic diversity among Ecuadorian EFL teachers is trending toward greater representation of the overall population. Here, too, several reasons are possible. Perhaps more teachers are now self-identifying as Mestizo as a means of obtaining racial capital.

**Figure 2.** Ethnicity of EFL Teachers Compared with Public School Teachers and Ecuadorian Population

|                   | Ethnicity of English Teachers, National Survey | Ethnicity of Public-School Teachers, 2021 MINEDUC Report | Ethnicity of Ecuadorians, 2010 Census |
|-------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Mestizo/a         | 91.9%  | 90.7%  | 71.9%                                 |
| Montuvio/a        | 3.7%   | 1.3%   | 7.4%                                  |
| Indigenous        | 2.0%   | 4.1%   | 7.0%                                  |
| Afroecuatoriano/a | 1.3%   | 2.0%   | 4.2%                                  |
| Blanco/a          | 0.9%   | 2.6%   | 6.1%                                  |

Ethnic composition and professional experience are trending gradually toward greater diversity, particularly among Indigenous and Montuvio EFL teachers, despite this many groups remain underrepresented. The representation of Indigenous EFL teachers, for example, is only 1.3% of teachers with more than 20 years of experience, while 4.0% of those with fewer than 5 years of experience claim that identity (see Figure 3). In other words, over the past two decades, the Indigenous representation among EFL teachers has tripled. Further, the proportion of Montuvios nearly doubles from 2.3% of the most experienced teachers to 4.5% among newer teachers while mestizos decline 5.1% by the same measure. White and Afro-Ecuadorians remain relatively consistent across the most and least experienced teachers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Neither the EFL national survey nor the MINEDUC report on general teacher demographics considered the ethnic categories of Negro/a or Mulato/a, which were categories included in the 2010 census. These categories represent 1.0% and 1.9% of the Ecuadorian population, respectively. Their exclusion from both educational surveys does not significantly affect the findings, which if anything understates the disparities in ethnic representation among Ecuadorians who identify as black or Afro-descendent.

**Figure 3.** Ethnicity of EFL Teachers as a Function of Years of Teaching Experience

In the absence of dependable longitudinal data, measuring ethnic representation in terms of teaching experience provides a reasonable estimate of changes in the ethnic composition of EFL teachers. These results suggest a gradual increase in ethnic diversity, particularly as Montuvios and Indigenous peoples comprise a larger share of newer EFL teachers. But teachers in all fields are more ethnically homogeneous than the general Ecuadorian population. Furthermore, representation among newer Indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian, and Montuvio EFL teachers remains below national census figures; here, each of these groups represent just over 7% of the population. These gradual shifts toward ethnic diversity are promising, especially when considered against the contradictory tendency toward ethnic homogenization among teachers; representation of mestizo, Montuvio, and Indigenous teachers has held steady or declined over the past decade (Ministerio de Educación, 2021, p. 35). Because the data shows movement toward gender parity, it will take several decades to reach numbers among EFL teachers that are more representative of the Ecuadorian population. Much more ethnic diversity is needed, but additional data is also necessary to move forward on understanding and responding.

## Geographical Indicators of Teacher Preparedness

After completing the gender and ethnic analysis, we also considered if the lower representation of certain ethnic groups, particularly of Indigenous peoples, was related to their geographic region in terms of access to teacher training and/or to English certification programs. In general, the proportion of teachers working in urban communities is higher than the overall number of Ecuadorians who report living in urban areas. This data suggests that rural communities are comparably underserved, and survey responses bare out this claim. For example, the survey finds that 69.1% of EFL teachers work in urban schools, while only 62.8% of Ecuadorians reported living in urban communities in the 2010 census.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, only 30.9% of EFL teachers report working in rural areas, compared with 37.2% of Ecuadorians who reside there. However, according to the 2010 census, 78.5% of Indigenous people live in rural areas, while only 33.7% of mestizos and 18.6% of whites report living in these communities.

Regional access alone is not sufficient to explain inequities in ethnic composition. For example, most Afro-Ecuadorians, who are also underrepresented among EFL teachers, live in urban areas (74.3%); yet this population is largely concentrated around the cities of Esmeraldas on the northern coast rather than in the political and economic centers in cities such as Quito and Guayaquil. Therefore, these groups cluster in areas considered urban but are rural in practice because they are isolated from other populations in their region.

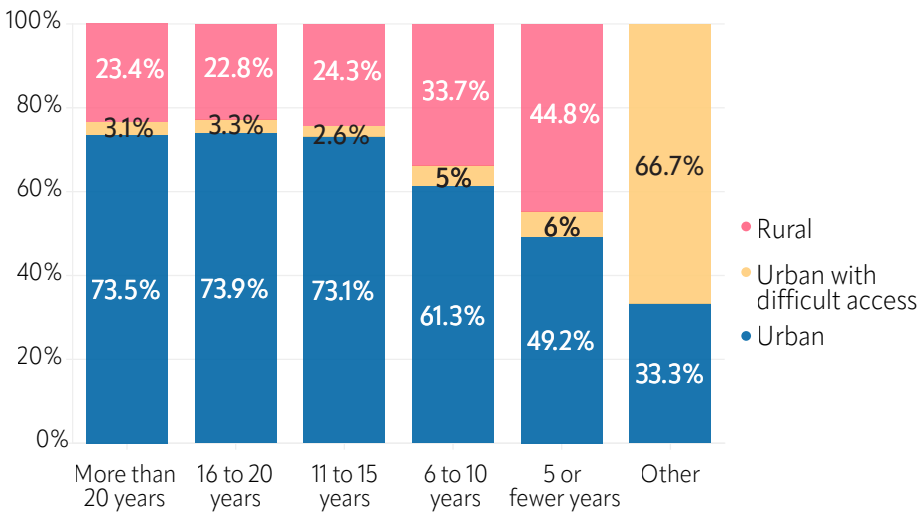
To better understand the relationships between these demographic factors and their implications for teacher training, we examined current shifts in gender with respect to regional distribution and ethnic representation. As with gender and ethnicity, tracking the region of practicing EFL teachers according to years of experience revealed important demographic shifts. In fact, 44.8% of teachers with fewer than 5 years of experience report working in rural areas, compared with just 23.4% of their most experienced peers with more than 20 years of experience. In

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3 In the national survey, a third category of “urban areas with difficult access” was included as third option beyond “rural” and “urban”. Of the 69.1% of EFL teachers working in urban schools, 4.2% chose the “urban with difficult access” category. For the purposes of this study, the results of both urban categories (regular and difficult access) were combined for the

other words, the proportion of newer teachers working in rural areas approximates the proportion of Ecuadorians who reside there. The data also raises questions and suggests further research to be conducted. We do not know the demographic composition of new EFL teachers in rural locations. Are they men or women? What are their ethnicities, level of proficiency, and educational attainment?

**Figure 4.** Geographic Region of English Teachers as a Function of Years of Teaching Experience



While these comparative results suggest that access to EFL is growing among Ecuador's diverse population, they do not explain relationships between such trends in the gender, ethnic, and regional profiles of EFL teachers. As mentioned above, the survey revealed a three-fold increase among Indigenous teachers based on years of experience. Similarly, the proportion of men among newer EFL teachers is higher than their more experienced peers. Nonetheless, correlation analysis revealed that the relationships between geographic location, gender, and ethnicity are negligible. An individual element is not a strong predictor of the changing demographics of EFL teachers. But when taken in the aggregate, such changes indicate movement toward a more diverse and equitable composition.

## Challenges in Certifying Language Proficiency Among English Teachers

Unlike the gradual diversification of EFL teachers vis-à-vis gender, ethnicity, and experience, the data shows little development in the relationships between qualifications and teaching experience. Moreover, the data on low teacher English proficiency and lack of certification evidence is alarming. Only slightly more than one third (35.3%) of EFL teachers report holding the minimum B2 proficiency in English required by the MINEDUC; even fewer teachers (31.3%) have a certificate to validate their proficiency.<sup>4</sup>

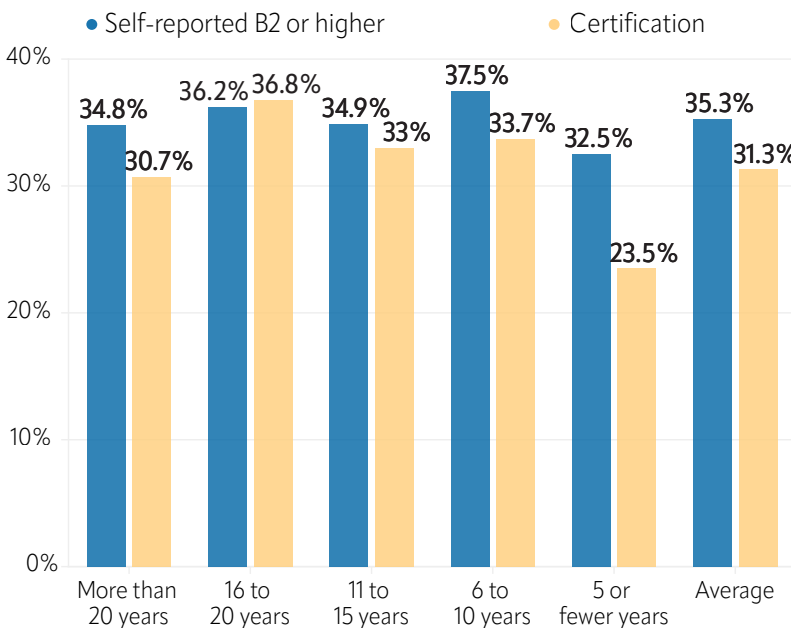
Within that lower percentage, newer teachers validate their English proficiency levels at lower rates than their more experienced peers; specifically, certification jumps from 23.5% for teachers with 0 to 5 years of experience to 33.7% for those with 6 to 10 years of experience, a difference of 10.2%. For mid-career teachers, the certification rate ranges between 33.0% and 36.8%, and it drops down again to 30.7% among the most experienced teachers. Such indicators suggest that most new EFL teachers enter the field without certifying their English proficiency and that very few achieve certification by mid-career. Furthermore, the most experienced teachers do not appear inclined to pursue certification later in their careers. Obviously, if we do not have certification information, but only self-reports, we cannot know who is in fact proficient. Still, some hypotheses can be drawn from these results. For instance, only one third of all EFL teachers declare the required B2 level, whether they hold certification or not. In addition, self-reported proficiency levels are relatively consistent across all experience groups (see Figure 5). When compared with self-reported proficiency levels, the results show no significant relationship between English proficiency, certification, and professional experience beyond the threshold of the first five years.

Problematic as they are individually, the consistency of the data indicates that EFL teacher proficiency does not improve incidentally over time. For example, 32.5% of the least experienced teachers report having the minimum B2 proficiency, while 34.8% among the most experienced teachers report the same. Teachers with 6 to 10 years of teaching experience are somewhat more likely to report B2 or higher

4 The MINEDUC recognizes international certificates including the TOEFL iBT, IELTS, Cambridge, iTTEP, among others. Certification, for the purposes of this study, refers to these recognized exams.

proficiencies (37.5%). Thus, EFL teachers across all experience levels report very similar language abilities, and only slightly more than one-third (35.3%) meet the required B2 level on the CEFR. Such results suggest that teachers substantially improve their English proficiency as they gain more teaching experience. But we do not know for certain because of gaps in the dataset. Less proficient newer teachers will likely reflect poorer student outcomes. Then again, even if the self-reported data is consistent across the group, it is not reliable proof of proficiency. Having valid certification, now regrettably absent, would not only indicate whether teachers overestimate or underestimate their proficiency levels but also help measure English proficiency more accurately.<sup>5</sup> It is clear, however, that lower proficiency can be mitigated by using interactive methodologies.

**Figure 5.** Self-Reported and Certified English Proficiency as a Function of Years of Teaching Experience



Without any demonstrable evidence that certification yields higher proficiency, we looked for other indicators of teacher preparation and professionalization. As indicated, the survey results clearly indicate that English proficiency does not significantly improve with teaching experience. But, surprisingly, whether EFL teachers

5 Further discussion of certifying EFL proficiency will be taken up in the final chapter, in which we discuss the Ecuador Habla Inglés initiative and its long-term implications for improving this metric.



hold a degree in a language-related field makes little difference. In fact, 37.1% of teachers with a university degree (undergraduate or graduate) in a relevant field report a minimum B2 proficiency, a rate not much higher than the 33.5% of those with degrees in other fields. Certification levels are similarly low across disciplines; 33.6% hold a certificate in a relevant field, compared with 28.6% of those in other fields. While just over half of all EFL teachers (53.8%) have a university degree in a field related to languages, such lack of formal training may not be as critical as other more generalized inadequacies related to language competency including curricular knowledge. Thus, subject area has little bearing on language proficiency and certification; even those who formally studied languages or language pedagogy are not necessarily more proficient in the language itself.

A far better indicator of English proficiency than certification or field of study is the highest degree obtained, regardless of the discipline. In particular, 51.7% of those holding a graduate degree in any field report a B2 or higher proficiency, and 47.3% of the same group report holding a certificate. These rates are higher than those who hold an undergraduate degree, among whom only 32.1% report a B2 or higher proficiency, with only 28.1% holding a valid English proficiency certificate. The survey cannot explain the reasons for the higher rate, although a few inferences can be made. First, it seems likely that those who pursue graduate studies are, in the aggregate, more academically and professionally ambitious than their peers who stop at undergraduate studies; they are presumably, but not necessarily, better prepared. In addition, and a matter involving economic status, Ecuadorians with the means pursue graduate studies abroad; admission to those programs often requires certification of an intermediate or high level of English. Once again, subject matter seems inconsequential: only 22.6% of EFL teachers with a graduate degree completed programs in a language-related field, compared with 64.0% of those with an undergraduate degree. Whatever the reasons, the results indicate that higher degree of educational attainment is a better predictor of English proficiency than teaching experience or certification.

Gender and ethnicity are also better predictors of proficiency, though less reliable than the highest degree obtained. For example, men are substantially more likely to report a minimum B2 proficiency than women, 46.4% and 32.2%, respectively. To a lesser extent, albeit self-reported, men also report holding a certificate at higher rates than women (36% compared to 30%). At first glance, this suggests that men are both more proficient and better certified than their women peers. However, the difference

between self-reported proficiency and certification is far greater among men than women: 10.4% for men versus 2.2% for women. Thus, although men are somewhat more likely than women to hold a certification, they are also much more likely to report a higher proficiency level without necessarily having a certificate to confirm it.

Similar tendencies are evident in relation to ethnicity. Whites and mestizos are most likely to report a B2 or higher proficiency (50% and 35.8%, respectively), while Afro-Ecuadorians are least likely to report this level (23.5%). Nonetheless, all ethnic groups except Montuvios report certifications of their knowledge at rates lower than they report holding the B2 minimum proficiency. In contrast, 26.8% of Montuvios report a B2 or higher, while 30.3% hold a certificate. The analysis indicates that whites, mestizos, and males overestimate their English abilities to some degree, while women and Montuvios are most likely to underestimate their English proficiency or rely on testing and certification to verify it. Again, we have no data on actual proficiency levels.

In sum, according to the data, regardless of social demographic indicators, years of professional experience, or teaching subject, specialized training in language education appears to have very little bearing on English teacher proficiency in Ecuador; the best predictors of language ability are highest degree attained, gender, and ethnicity. Our results also show a more tenuous relationship between experience, educational background, and language proficiency than indicated in prior research on Latin America and elsewhere. Specifically, more experienced teachers outperform less experienced ones; thus, teaching experience has limited influence on proficiency. Finally, solely holding a subject-related advanced degree is not enough to assure proficiency within the pool of English teachers.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, our analysis of the survey data reveals homogeneity among Ecuadorian EFL teachers across incidental demographic categories of race and gender, particularly when considered in relation to the general Ecuadorian population. Out of this relative consistency, the data offers a clear profile of the typical Ecuadorian EFL teacher: she is a mestiza who works in urban areas. She has a lower-intermediate level of English proficiency, and her proficiency most likely has not been certified by MINEDUC. Although she likely holds an undergraduate degree, her academic training is not necessarily in a field related to language teaching.

Beneath this composite image, however, the analysis reveals far more complexity. When we compared incidental demographic factors about ethnicity, gender, and geographic region with years of teaching experience, we found several trends for which we have no simple explanations. With regard to gender, for instance, one trend shows gradual movement toward gender parity and another trend toward greater ethnic diversity; specifically, men are overrepresented at lower levels of teaching longevity. But would there be greater gender parity if men did not leave the profession after a short time? From this perspective, the issue is not, or not only, that more women are teachers but that fewer men remain in the profession. If so, another interesting dimension of questioning emerges and identifies new data to collect. Also, with respect to gender, teaching materials are typically gendered to perpetuate stereotypes (see above). Again, even if Ecuadorian woman undertake most of the domestic work, our materials and student practices do not have to reflect these norms. New data on student recognition of these stereotypes and examining teaching materials would be helpful, especially in revising existing materials.

This chapter also addressed the racialization of teaching materials, attitudes, and practices. Self-reported data on proficiency is higher from male, whites, and mestizo; other races, women and Montuvios are less confident. Reflecting existing and longstanding racial hierarchies, this data may indicate that the former racial groups are, indeed, more proficient. But, given the privilege males, whites, and mestizos have in Ecuadorian culture, it is no surprise they exhibit higher confidence levels. Is it possible that more teachers are self-identifying as mestizo now than they did before as a way of obtaining racial capital? Other questions emerge. What role does the subject area of the undergraduate and/or graduate degree have in self-reported and achieved B2 status? Are some EFL teachers “playing” the system by reporting a higher degree status than actually earned? Again, we have no data on actual proficiency levels let alone with respect to these issues.

Other questions about race emerge. Is there a statistically significant relationship among years of teaching experience and gender, or between years of teaching experience and ethnicity/race, or the years of teaching experience and school location? The data on location suggests that access to EFL education in rural locations is increasing. But we cannot confirm this hypothesis because we do not know if class sizes or other practical scheduling issues change in response to the presence of more teachers. If class sizes increase with the number of teachers, then the educational benefit would be mitigated. Moreover, we do not know the demographic

composition of new EFL teachers in rural locations. Are they men or women? What are their ethnicity, level of proficiency, and highest degree earned?

Although the analysis has uncovered positive trends, much information is needed. As such, this chapter showed the limitations of analyzing change in teacher demographics over time, or at least the limitations of assuming that one pass through the data will yield sufficient data to achieve statistical significance. Accordingly, longitudinal tracking of teachers would clarify whether these results indicate problems in recruitment, retention, or both or other matters. In addition, interviews and/or case studies would provide further understanding of, among other issues, teachers' reasons for entering or leaving the field.

The Ecuadorian educational system overall and its EFL curriculum need systematic reform. However, implemented reforms have not worked. Instead, and rather repeating failed proposals to effect systematic reform, our analysis provides specific, context-based suggestions to initiate the building of a ground-up context structure that attends to—in a much more relevant and accomplishable manner—the particular problems uncovered in our study; problems that represent the everyday realities in Ecuadorian EFL classrooms.

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