B-LEARNING TO IMPROVE LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG EIGHTH-GRADE STUDENTS

B-LEARNING PARA MEJORAR LA COMPETENCIA LINGÜÍSTICA EN INGLÉS EN ESTUDIANTES DE OCTAVO AÑO

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Abstract

English instruction in Ecuadorian public schools relied on traditional practices, and students finished basic education with low proficiency. A blended learning (B-learning) intervention was designed to improve the linguistic competence of eighth-grade students in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and its feasibility was assessed through a diagnostic survey. A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental posttest-only design and a non-equivalent control group was planned for two existing classes of 30 students. In a two-week pilot, the experimental group would combine face-to-face lessons with two weekly online sessions on Google Classroom. Both groups would take tests adapted from the Cambridge A1 Movers exam. The survey was administered to 40 students and 43 parents or guardians. More than 92% of the families had internet at home, although a shared mobile phone was the most common device and most students lacked an email account for classes. Speaking received the lowest self-rating. Agreement with the online sessions reached 76.9% among students and 90.7% among parents. Based on these results, the plan included account creation at the start, mobile-friendly tasks open all week, and short video instructions. The results indicate favorable conditions for the intervention, which addresses the limited school-level evidence on B-learning in Ecuador.

Keywords: B-learning; linguistic competence; English as a foreign language; upper basic education; quasi-experimental design

Resumen

La enseñanza del inglés en las escuelas públicas ecuatorianas mantenía prácticas tradicionales y el dominio estudiantil era bajo. Se diseñó una intervención de aprendizaje combinado (B-learning) para mejorar la

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competencia lingüística de estudiantes de octavo año en comprensión auditiva, expresión oral, lectura y escritura, y se evaluó su factibilidad mediante una encuesta diagnóstica. Se planteó un enfoque cuantitativo con diseño cuasiexperimental de solo posprueba y grupo de control no equivalente, con dos paralelos ya conformados de 30 estudiantes. En un piloto de dos semanas, el grupo experimental combinaría clases presenciales con dos sesiones semanales en Google Classroom, y ambos grupos rendirían pruebas adaptadas del examen Cambridge A1 Movers. La encuesta se aplicó a 40 estudiantes y 43 padres o representantes. Más del 92 % de las familias tenía internet en casa, pero predominó el celular compartido y la mayoría de los estudiantes no tenía correo para clases. La expresión oral obtuvo la valoración más baja. El acuerdo con las sesiones en línea fue de 76,9 % en estudiantes y 90,7 % en padres. Los resultados indican condiciones favorables para aplicar la propuesta, que atiende la escasa evidencia escolar sobre B-learning en Ecuador.

Palabras clave: *B-learning; competencia lingüística; inglés como lengua extranjera; educación básica superior; diseño cuasiexperimental*

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Introduction

English is the most common shared language for international communication (EF Education First, 2025). It is also the main language of academic publishing, a dominance that has been questioned for limiting the visibility of scholars from other regions (Suzina, 2021). This global status has led researchers to call for a change in the way English is taught (Rose et al., 2021). In Ecuador, the national EFL curriculum follows an intercultural approach, so learning English also helps students compare their own culture with others (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016). However, in public schools of Cañar, English classes still rely mostly on translation, and students finish school with a low level of proficiency (Ortega-Auquilla & Minchala-Buri, 2019).

Ecuador ranks 83rd of 123 countries in the EF English Proficiency Index and is placed in the low proficiency band. Its lowest skill scores are in listening and speaking (EF Education First, 2025). This study addresses these difficulties at the eighth-grade level. In listening, students need materials suited to their level. In speaking, they often feel insecure and lack fluency and confidence when they interact in English. In reading, they struggle to interpret texts and extract their full meaning. In writing, they make recurrent errors in grammar and sentence structure. Limited access to individual devices and adequate materials, together with insufficient teacher training in innovative methods, adds to these problems.

If these needs are not addressed, students may move to higher grades without the A1 competence that the national curriculum expects by the end of ninth grade (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016). In the

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long term, a low command of English limits access to academic and work opportunities where the language is required (EF Education First, 2025). Previous studies on B-learning have focused on university students (Cedillo-Hernandez & Velazquez-Garcia, 2022; Ramos Vera & Misaico Ruiz, 2024) or on subjects other than English (Carrillo López et al., 2025; Edegbe-Efosa & Ugiagbe, 2024). Among the studies reviewed, none measures the effect of B-learning on the four English skills of eighth-grade students in Ecuadorian public schools.

B-learning has been proposed as an alternative to address this problem. This model combines face-to-face and online instruction (Hrastinski, 2019). It allows students to work at their own pace and keeps communication with teachers and classmates active in both modalities (Mora-Aranda et al., 2023). In Peru, Mora-Aranda et al. (2023) found a high positive relationship between B-learning and autonomous English learning in secondary students. In a public high school, students who used a learning management system in addition to face-to-face classes obtained higher listening and speaking scores than those who only attended face-to-face classes (Terzioğlu & Kurt, 2022).

This article presents the design of a B-learning intervention for eighth-grade students of a public institution in Ecuador. It also reports the results of a diagnostic survey administered to students and parents to examine the conditions for online work. The intervention seeks to determine the effect of B-learning on linguistic competence in English, measured through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The study addresses the following question: Is there a significant difference in the four language skills between eighth-grade students taught through B-learning and those taught through traditional face-to-face instruction?

B-learning in English language teaching

B-learning integrates face-to-face teaching with online education. Definitions of the term vary, but there is general agreement that both components are part of it (Hrastinski, 2019). Mora-Aranda et al. (2023) describe it as a model that combines in-person and remote experiences and adapts to the pace of each learner. Its development has been gradual and based on constant experimentation to improve teaching practices (Cedillo-Hernandez & Velazquez-Garcia, 2022). Online resources have also changed how students interact with English, as they provide complementary tools for autonomous learning (Mora-Romero et al., 2023).

Linguistic competence and the four language skills

In this study, linguistic competence refers to the ability of students to use English in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The Ecuadorian EFL curriculum organizes these skills according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Eighth-grade learners start at level A1.1, ninth grade continues in A1.2, where A1 competence is expected, and tenth grade works toward A2.1 (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016). A1 is the lowest level of generative language use. At this level, learners can interact in a simple way and ask and answer simple questions about themselves (Council of Europe, 2020).

Each skill has specific expectations at this level. In listening, learners recognize familiar words and very basic phrases about themselves, their family, and their immediate surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly. In reading, they understand familiar names, words, and very simple sentences, such as those on notices or posters. In speaking, they use simple phrases and sentences to describe where they live and people they know. In writing, they produce simple isolated phrases and sentences (Council of Europe, 2020).

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Empirical evidence on B-learning and language skills

Several quasi-experimental studies report positive effects of B-learning on language skills. In tenth-grade classes in North Cyprus, Terzioğlu and Kurt (2022) added a learning management system to face-to-face lessons for eight weeks. The experimental group obtained higher posttest scores in listening and speaking fluency than the control group. In China, Tao et al. (2024) compared 363 university students in blended courses with 313 students in traditional courses over 18 weeks. Scores increased in reading, listening, and writing, although the gain in writing was smaller, and low-proficiency learners improved the most. Outside language teaching, Edegbe-Efosa and Ugiagbe (2024) used a non-equivalent control group design in basic science classes in Nigeria. Students in the blended group performed better than those in conventional classes, with no interaction effects of gender, school type, or ability level.

In Latin America, evidence comes mainly from correlational and perception studies. Ramos Vera and Misaico Ruiz (2024) surveyed 109 university students in Lima and found a significant but weak positive relationship between interaction in B-learning and collaborative learning ($p = .004$). In Ecuador, Carrillo López et al. (2025) used a mixed, non-experimental, cross-sectional design with 160 students and six teachers of a technical baccalaureate program in accounting. Most students reported a better understanding of content with B-learning (72%) and stated that virtual classrooms made learning easier (69%). In English teaching, Guayasamín and Inga (2024) reported that flipped learning improved the engagement, motivation, and perceived learning outcomes of seventh-grade students. These studies report positive results of technology-based models, although most of them rely on correlational or perception data.

Materials and Methods

Research design

The study follows a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental posttest-only design and a non-equivalent control group. A quantitative approach is proposed because the effect of B-learning on the four language skills will be measured through numerical scores. The design is quasi-experimental because the intervention will be implemented with existing classes, without random assignment of participants (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza Torres, 2018). One class will receive the B-learning intervention, and the other will continue with face-to-face instruction. Only a final test will be administered at the end of the intervention, so no pretest is used. Both classes belong to the same grade, follow the same national curriculum, and will work with the same contents and number of class hours. In addition, the English grades of the previous term, taken from the institutional records without personal identifiers, will be compared to check that both classes start from a similar level. The scope is explanatory, since the study seeks to determine whether posttest differences between the classes are consistent with an effect of the intervention.

Participants

The population consists of 150 eighth-grade students of Educación General Básica Superior from one public institution in Ecuador. The name of the institution is not disclosed for ethical reasons. Two existing eighth-grade classes of 30 students each will be selected purposively. Class A will be the experimental group and will receive the B-learning intervention. Class B will be the control group and will continue with the traditional method. According to the national curriculum, learners in this grade start at level A1.1 of the CEFR

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(Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016). For the intervention, the written informed consent of parents or legal guardians and the assent of students will be obtained, and the identity of the students will remain confidential.

Table 1. Operationalization of Variables

Variable	Conceptual definition	Dimension	Indicator	Instrument
Linguistic competence	Students' ability to use English to listen, speak, read, and write.	Listening	Score on the listening test	Adapted A1 Movers listening paper
		Speaking	Score on the speaking interview	Individual interview and rubric
		Reading	Score on the reading items	Adapted A1 Movers reading items
		Writing	Score on the writing items and rubric	Adapted A1 Movers writing items and rubric
B-learning model	Teaching model that combines face-to-face classes with online work on a learning platform.	Use of the platform	Frequency of use of Google Classroom and its resources	Perception questionnaire for the experimental group
		Interaction	Contact and feedback with the teacher in both modalities	
		Flexibility	Satisfaction with working at their own pace	

Note: Conceptual definitions, dimensions, indicators, and instruments for the two study variables. Source: Own Elaboration.

Diagnostic feasibility survey

Before planning the intervention, a diagnostic feasibility survey was designed and administered through Google Forms. The parent version had 18 questions, and the student version had the same questions except the relationship with the student. The questions were organized in five sections: general information, access to technology, experience with educational platforms, perception of the student's English, and willingness to take part in online activities. Seven statements were rated on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Five of them described the student's English: understanding simple audio or video, feeling confident when speaking, reading short texts, writing simple sentences, and liking to learn English. The other two asked about agreement with two 40-minute online activities per week and about whether online activities could help the student improve. A final open question asked what difficulties the student could have with online activities.

The parent version opened with a consent and assent statement and was completed together with the child. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and no personal identifiers were collected. Between October 23 and 28, 2026, 40 eighth-grade students and 43 parents or legal guardians answered the survey. Two blank duplicate submissions from the parent version were removed before the analysis. Because the parent version was completed together with the child, both versions largely reflect the same households. Their results are therefore reported side by side and are not treated as independent samples. In the student version, the two statements on online activities kept the parent wording (“my child”), so their results are read as the household's

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acceptance of the online component. The data were analyzed through frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, and a rating of 4 or 5 was considered agreement. Some statements had missing answers, so their percentages were calculated on valid responses. The internal consistency of the five statements on the student's English was acceptable, with a Cronbach's alpha of .71 in the student version (n = 38) and .77 in the parent version (n = 43). The two statements on online activities are reported individually. The answers to the open question were grouped into categories.

B-learning intervention

The intervention is planned as a two-week pilot. Both groups will keep the regular English class hours assigned to eighth grade and will work on the same curricular contents. The experimental group will combine its face-to-face lessons with two 40-minute online sessions per week on Google Classroom, four in total. The sessions can be completed from a mobile phone or a computer. In the face-to-face lessons, the teacher will present the language of each unit and guide oral practice. The online sessions will extend this work in the four skills. Students will complete short audio and video tasks, read brief texts with comprehension questions, and write short texts that receive written feedback. They will also record short voice messages for speaking practice. Following the adjustments derived from the diagnostic survey, student accounts will be created at the start of the first week, and each online task will remain open for the whole week, will be designed for mobile phones, and will include short video instructions. The control group will cover the same contents through face-to-face lessons and printed homework of similar length, without online activities. Table 2 shows the plan of activities for the experimental group.

Table 2. Plan of the Two-Week B-learning Pilot for the Experimental Group

Week	Topic	Face-to-face lessons	Online sessions (Google Classroom)	Skills
1	Personal information, family, and home	Basic vocabulary; pair dialogues to introduce oneself; there is / there are to describe places	Session 1: account setup, platform tour, and short audio tasks. Session 2: short text with questions and a voice message introducing oneself	Listening, speaking, reading
2	Daily routines and school	Present simple; information-gap work in pairs; guided writing of short sentences	Session 3: short video with questions and a recorded daily routine. Session 4: sentences about a picture with teacher feedback and a review of the four skills	Listening, speaking, writing, review

Note: Face-to-face lessons and online sessions planned for each week of the pilot. Source: Own Elaboration.

Instruments and data collection

Linguistic competence will be measured at the end of the intervention through tests adapted from the format of the Cambridge A1 Movers exam, which is designed for young learners at the A1 level of the CEFR (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, n.d.). The listening test has five parts and 25 questions and lasts about 25 minutes. The reading and writing test has six parts and 35 questions and lasts 30 minutes. Reading items and writing items will be scored separately, and the writing tasks will also be scored with an analytic rubric that evaluates grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and sentence structure. The speaking test will be an individual interview of five to seven minutes in four parts. It will be scored with an analytic rubric that evaluates pronunciation, fluency, grammatical accuracy, and word choice.

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Two English teachers, unaware of each student's group, will score the writing and speaking tasks independently with the rubrics. Inter-rater agreement will be estimated with the intraclass correlation coefficient, and the final score will be the mean of both raters. Both groups will take the tests under the same conditions. In addition, the experimental group will answer the perception questionnaire on B-learning shown in Table 1.

Data analysis

The scores will be organized in a database and analyzed with IBM SPSS Statistics. To compare the four skills on the same scale, the score of each test will be converted to a 10-point scale. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, median, and standard deviation, will summarize the results of each group in each skill. The previous-term grades of both groups will be compared with the same procedure to check their initial equivalence. Normality will be checked with the Shapiro-Wilk test in each group, and homogeneity of variances with Levene's test. Student's t-test for independent samples will then be used to compare the posttest means of the experimental and control groups. When Levene's test indicates unequal variances, Welch's t-test will be used. If the data do not meet the normality assumption, the Mann-Whitney U test will be used instead.

For each skill, the comparison will test two hypotheses. H_1: there is a significant difference in the posttest scores between the students taught through B-learning and those taught through face-to-face instruction. H_0: there is no significant difference in the posttest scores between the two groups. Two-tailed tests will be used with a significance level of .05. Because four skills are compared, p values will be adjusted with the Holm-Bonferroni procedure. Effect size will be reported as Cohen's d for t-tests and as r for the Mann-Whitney U test. With 30 students per group, a two-tailed test with a power of .80 can detect an effect of d = 0.74.

Results and Discussion

Diagnostic survey results

Most students were 12 years old (77.5%), and the rest were 13. Slightly more than half of the families lived in rural areas (55.0% in the student survey and 53.5% in the parent survey). Mothers completed most of the parent questionnaires (83.7%). Table 3 shows that internet access was not the main barrier, since more than 92% of respondents in both versions reported fixed internet at home. The main limitation was the device. The most frequent option was a mobile phone shared with the family (45.0% of students and 44.2% of parents), and only 15.0% and 14.0% had a computer or laptop. The most frequent response was one to two hours of connected use per week (57.5% of students and 58.1% of parents). This time is compatible with the two 40-minute online sessions planned in Table 2. Previous use of educational platforms was mostly occasional, and 20.0% of the students had never used one. In addition, 60.0% of students and 69.8% of parents stated that the student had no email account for classes, although most families reported that they could help with the platform at home.

Table 3 also presents the perception of the four skills and the acceptance of online work. Speaking obtained the lowest mean in both versions (M = 3.13 for students and M = 3.12 for parents), and only 31.6% of the students agreed that they felt confident when speaking English. Listening and reading reached intermediate values, with agreement close to 50%, while writing obtained the highest mean among students (M = 3.74). Most students liked learning English (60.5%). Acceptance of the online component was high. Agreement with

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two weekly online sessions reached 76.9% in the student version and 90.7% in the parent version, and 77.5% and 88.4% considered that online activities could help students improve their English.

Table 3. Results of the Diagnostic Feasibility Survey

Indicator	Response	Students (n = 40)	Parents (n = 43)
Access to technology and platform experience, f (%)			
Internet at home	Fixed internet (wifi)	37 (92.5)	42 (97.7)
Device available for homework	Mobile phone shared with the family	18 (45.0)	19 (44.2)
	Own mobile phone	14 (35.0)	15 (34.9)
	Computer or laptop	6 (15.0)	6 (14.0)
Weekly hours online for homework	Less than 1 hour	3 (7.5)	6 (14.0)
	1 to 2 hours	23 (57.5)	25 (58.1)
	3 hours or more	14 (35.0)	12 (27.9)
Previous use of a learning platform	Sometimes or often	31 (77.5)	34 (79.1)
	Never	8 (20.0)	9 (20.9)
Email account for classes	No	24 (60.0)	30 (69.8)
Help at home with the platform	Yes or sometimes	35 (87.5)	39 (90.7)
Statements rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), M (SD); agreement %			
The student understands simple audio or video in English.		3.49 (1.02); 53.8%	3.44 (0.88); 51.2%
The student feels confident when speaking English.		3.13 (1.02); 31.6%	3.12 (1.00); 37.2%
The student can read and understand short texts in English.		3.41 (1.04); 51.3%	3.47 (0.88); 53.5%
The student can write simple sentences in English.		3.74 (0.91); 61.5%	3.51 (1.08); 55.8%
The student likes learning English.		3.53 (1.29); 60.5%	3.74 (0.98); 65.1%
I agree that my child does two online activities of about 40 minutes per week as part of the English class.		3.97 (1.04); 76.9%	4.23 (0.78); 90.7%
I believe online activities can help my child improve in English.		4.03 (1.05); 77.5%	4.23 (0.81); 88.4%

Note: Frequencies may not add up to n because of missing answers; agreement (4 or 5) is based on valid responses. Source: Own Elaboration.

In the open question, 32.5% of students and 41.9% of parents reported no difficulty. The most frequent difficulty was understanding words, instructions, or pronunciation (25.0% and 25.6%), followed by internet or power cuts and problems accessing the platform (15.0% and 18.6%). Fewer answers mentioned the lack of a device or the need to share one phone among several children (5.0% and 4.7%). Others referred to the need for more support or class time (2.5% and 4.7%) and a preference for face-to-face classes (2.5% and 2.3%). Only students mentioned attention or anxiety (5.0%), and 12.5% of the student answers and 2.3% of the parent answers were unclear or unrelated. These results led to three adjustments in the proposal. Student accounts will be created during the first week, online tasks will remain open for the whole week and will be designed for mobile phones, and each task will include short video instructions.

Discussion

The survey results agree with the literature in two aspects. First, the low self-rating of speaking is consistent with the national profile reported by EF Education First (2025), in which speaking and listening are the weakest skills. It also supports the emphasis on oral practice, since an eight-week blended intervention

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improved speaking fluency and listening in a public high school (Terzioğlu & Kurt, 2022). Second, the high acceptance of online work is similar to the perceptions reported in Ecuador by Carrillo López et al. (2025), where 69% of the students stated that virtual classrooms made learning easier. It is also in line with the positive relationship between B-learning and autonomous English learning found by Mora-Aranda et al. (2023).

The survey also adds information that the reviewed studies do not provide. Most of those studies were conducted with university students (Cedillo-Hernandez & Velazquez-Garcia, 2022; Ramos Vera & Misaico Ruiz, 2024; Tao et al., 2024), while this survey describes the conditions of public basic education students. In this context, internet access is common, but the device is often a mobile phone shared with the family. This condition supports short tasks that remain open for the whole week. The survey measured perceptions and not proficiency, so it does not replace the posttest. Its contribution is to describe the conditions for the intervention before it starts.

Expected results of the intervention

The experimental group is expected to obtain higher posttest scores than the control group in the four skills, with larger differences in listening and speaking. These two skills improved in the study by Terzioğlu and Kurt (2022), and speaking received the lowest rating in the diagnostic survey. These expectations correspond to the alternative hypothesis (H_1), which will be supported if H_0 is rejected in the posttest comparison.

Conclusions

The literature reviewed shows that B-learning can improve English language skills when online work complements face-to-face lessons. School-level evidence is available for listening and speaking (Terzioğlu & Kurt, 2022), while gains in reading, listening, and writing have been reported mainly with university students (Tao et al., 2024). In Ecuador and Latin America, most of the studies reviewed are correlational or based on perceptions. The design proposed here compares an experimental and a control group in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with tests aligned with the A1 level that the national curriculum sets for eighth grade.

The diagnostic survey indicates favorable conditions for the proposal in the participating institution. Almost all families had internet at home, most students could use a connected device for the time the online sessions require, and acceptance of the online component was high among households. The survey also identified the main risks: shared mobile phones, the lack of email accounts, connection cuts, and difficulties in understanding instructions. These risks were addressed through the adjustments described in the Results section. The low self-rating of speaking supports the emphasis on oral practice through voice messages and pair work.

The teacher should receive basic training in Google Classroom before the intervention, and online tasks should be short and clear. Future studies could include a pretest or random assignment, as well as a longer intervention, such as a full school term, to observe whether the effects remain over time.

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