

Challenges of the basic education system in Ecuador; the voices of the future teachers

Abstract

This study aims to identify, since the voice of future teachers, poor teaching practices that required to be worked to improve the current quality of the Basic Education System of Ecuador. The participants are 25 students of the Teacher's Training Program at a national university located on the coastal region of Ecuador. The ethnographic method is applied to collect data through the techniques: focus group, forums and life histories research. All data were organized chronologically and analyzed with the Maxqda 12.0 software. The results allowed identifying challenges for the future teachers, related to: pedagogy, philosophical approach and teacher attitudes to work on ethnic diversity and inclusive education. In addition, a proposal for strengthen the professional profile on the future teachers is introduced in this study. It is concluded that the communicational competence, motivation to teach, inclusive education culture and environmental attitudes should be strengthen in future teachers programs to act in coherence to the Agenda 2030 for Global Sustainable Development.

Keywords: teacher competences, sustainable development, educational inclusion, educational innovation, higher education

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Introduction

The school is the place where learners use their fundamental rights.¹ Children and teenagers acquire a wide range of learning based on their teachers' comments, advices and corrections.²

Thus, this work studies the services of Basic Education System in Ecuador, where important changes have been implemented since the declaration of the new Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador in 2008.³ An important legal framework was created to guarantee the provision of human talents, economic and material resources, under the govern promise of high quality educational services to all the population. Those laws are: Organic Law for Basic Education⁴ and Organic Law for Higher Education.⁵

Contreras et al.,⁶ state that schools allow transmission of values, attitudes and norms to strengthen learners' the citizenships competences. The teaching staff turns out to become highly influential on the students' decision to achieve a satisfactory and healthy life style.⁷

However, Palomares et al.,⁸ argue that "there is a lack of consensus and coordination between school and family, in the role of transmitting values and civic competencies, which should be strengthened from schools". Such affirmation raises the need to improve the communication styles between school staff and students' relatives. Thus, the teachers' mission can be as a professional vocation to train students about values, to transmit knowledge sources, to provide didactics that enhance learning, etc., but also, teaching is a service offered to the community as a contribution for the local development.⁹

In the case of Ecuador, a notable progress is reported in terms of increasing schools' physical infrastructure, number of laboratories, new educational equipment, acquisition of technological tools, installation of libraries, and construction of new spaces for physical practice, sports and recreation through the project "Schools of Millennium". However, Corral Bravo & Villafuerte¹⁰ argue that, the public policies fail to be efficient when people do not have the

attitudes or the willingness to generate the change expected. This is clearly observed when, teachers express that they do not feel qualified to work with students with physical or intellectual disabilities, and they express this professional profile weakness despite the multiple inclusive education trainings they had completed.¹⁰

The Millennium Development Goals¹¹ had guided the decisions of the nations around the world, to eliminate the social, cultural and economic gaps that persist despite the efforts undertaken. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 21st century, among the goals for human development, still appear: reduction of global poverty, increment of the access to educational services, and the improvement of the quality of life for the population of all the nations. The Agenda 2030 for the Sustainable Development of the Planet¹² ratifies the need to work on the construction of more equitable, inclusive and sustainable societies. To advance on this goal, it has been necessary to generate educational innovations which include the active participation of the communities.

The new lifestyles have affected the public health due to the increase in sedentary lifestyle and the acquisition of wrong nutritional habits, especially in the younger students. In the case of Ecuador, the reaction was to create a govern policy to increment the number of hours / classes from 3 to 5 hours per week on the subject Physical Education. However, the effective use of these class periods is not clear. In addition, all the schools do not have didactic, sports, and technical materials enough for teaching to groups with 30 to 45 students.

According to Pastor et al.,¹³ in the Basic Education schools are still applied traditional educational models and poor pedagogical practices that could put the well-being of girls, boys and young people at risk. In the case of Ecuador, little innovation has been observed in the teaching-learning processes in public schools. Meanwhile, in private schools there is a greater control on the use of the time that students spend inside the school. However, 882 cases of violence and sexual crimes to minors inside primary and high schools have been reported

during the 2014–2017 period.¹⁴ The authorities have begun the capture of the aggressors, among teachers (women and men), maintenance personnel and guardians who worked in the schools. However, it is suspected that there are still more cases to be reported.

The complex scenario described, justify that future teacher review the current situation of the Ecuadorian Basic Education System. The questions to be solved in this study are: (1) what are the educational poor practices from the past that, persist in the current basic education system in Ecuador? (2) What are the key aspects that the future teachers consider should be improved on the Basic Education System in Ecuador?

Methodology

This work is based on the assertions of Escobar & Useche¹⁵ regarding the need to analyse the current teaching practices, to transform the education system to a sustainable approach. This work subscribes to the reflective critical paradigm to offer future teachers of Basic Education of Ecuador, the opportunity to express their voice in concern to the current problems and professional challenges demanded by 21st century education.

The participants are 25 students of the teacher training program of the Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí (ULEAM), Ecuador. The profile of the participants includes: being a student of the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the ULEAM, attending regularly to one of the Teachers Training Programs, and expressing the desire to participate in this process. The participation of students with physical disabilities, gestational status, migrants, ethnic diversity, learning difficulties, and superior intelligence has been prioritized.

Instruments and data process

1. Focus group. The questionnaire used was designed by the research team to collect the participants' voices about their experiences lived 20 years ago, when they were children attending to primary school. The participants' voices were contrasted with their current knowledge as students of a Teacher Training University Program.

The questionnaire instrument for the focus group was tested by expert investigators of Psycho didactics, Physical Education, and Language and Literature of ULEAM. The corrections made to the questionnaire were focused on the relevance of the questions and their style of writing. Five questions were considered repeated and were eliminated of the final instrument version which consisted of 8 questions grouped into the categories: (i) Past of Basic Education in Ecuador, 4 questions; and (ii) Present of Basic Education in Ecuador, 4 questions.

Life histories

Volunteer students shared their life histories about situations they lived during their pre-professional practice at local primary schools. The format used was a life history card, participants' identity is protected. Names of trees were used to identify the participants.

The subcategories studies were:

- (1) Assessment of the Ecuadorian Basic Education system
- (2) Openness to change
- (3) Motivation to teach in primary school.

Data was analyzed using the software Maxqda.12.0. The information was organized according to the categories: Past, present

and future challenges for the Basic Education System in Ecuador.

Forum for qualitative social research

The participants identified 3 contemporary educational problems to discuss: (i) Violence and sexual abuse in schools, (2) Bullying, and (3) Students' attitudes to climate change.

Volunteer students prepared and presented educational and social researches to install the forums. The discussions were held using the UNESCO methodology. The main forum question is: What is the role of the teachers before those contemporary educational problems?

A word cloud was designed with the most repeated terms.

Results

Question 1: What are the educational poor practices from the past that, persist in the current basic education system in Ecuador?

The past of basic education in Ecuador:

The future teachers' voices were collected through a focus group for the category: (1) the past of Basic Education system in Ecuador, see Table 1.

Analysis: In the past, there was a more behavioral view of the Basic Education system. There was no movement in classes without the teachers indicating it. The classes were totally directive and did not start from a clear method that facilitated the construction of a learning experience. The students were punished when they did not follow the teacher's guidelines. The classes were part of a military indoctrination where discipline was the most preponderant, however that process was not so bad, only that the abuse of it came to break spaces of respect towards the students. They were exposed to hard punishments that could cause psychological and bodily harm.

Class disruptions made by students generally led to punishment.¹⁶ The way an instructor handles punishment and student misbehavior can reinforce or break the teacher–student relationship. Thus, the need to work teacher–student communication styles such as suggestive language, direct language, formal and informal communication is identified; including intercultural communication.^{17,18}

The present of the basic education system in Ecuador

The future teachers' voices were collected through a focus group. See Table 2. To change those poor practices from the past that, persist in the current basic education system is needed a balance in the use of communication styles between the teacher and students, teachers and relatives, etc., is a limitation that persists from the past. It is one of the weaknesses that must be overcome in the Basic Education System. "The extremes are the ones that hurt us" [see: P4_0: 10:07].

The reflective process, work in pairs and in teams; and sharing as learning practices allow students to make use of conversational language. Dynamics and work in diversity can help group members to learn various processes to handle problems and work on pupils' interaction. A variety of practices are required to improve the level of communication comfort commonly applied by the students.¹⁹ It is ratified that efficient communication between work teams empowers students with emotional competences.^{20,21}

Analysis: Students have diverse interests and motivations for learning²² that must be taken by teachers and their parents, as opportunities to (Table 3) bring them closer to learning.¹⁸

Table 1 The “past” of the Basic Education System of Ecuador

The Future Teachers' voices	Sub Categories
<p>P1_0:03:25 "The Salesian model gave the guidelines to the Basic Education of Ecuador in those years. Education was more traditional. European ideas were imposed to teach all the theories and knowledge of that time".</p> <p>P4_0:04:50 "It was quite limiting, because of the exaggerated traditional pedagogical tendencies; and accompanied by religious ideologies, Passionists that often biased the development of integral thinking of us as students. Teachers' authority prevailed."</p>	Application of traditional teaching methods.
<p>P4_0:06:22 "...and the students' analytical thought was very restricted. Everything was learned by heart. There was no opportunity to develop an idea from a concept".</p> <p>P3_0:06:40 "...I think there are good things and bad things, but adults wanted children to be good people when they grew up".</p> <p>P4_0:04:52 "The student did not have a chance to reply and if someone tried, he was punished".</p>	Memorise education and few opportunities for reflection.
<p>P3_0:09:09 "It seems that having very rigorous teachers and of brave face, worked to control the boys and girls".</p> <p>P2_0:05:10 "The best thing was that our parents should not know that the teacher had hit you because, if the parents knew, at home they punished you again".</p> <p>P4_0:05:00 "That punishment was supported by the parents".</p> <p>P2_0:06:11 "... The first day of school, parents told the teacher. Here I give you (to the boy or girl). You can punish him/her if it is necessary. I give you all the authorization".</p> <p>P3_0:06:18 "... You as a teacher has all the power to punish my son/daughter when he/she has a bad behaviour.</p>	The punishment of the teacher towards the student was consented to by the parents.
<p>P2_0:05:05 "If they had asked me when I was that age, I would have said that the teacher taught correctly; but, now that I study about education, I know that teacher was wrong".</p> <p>P2_0:03:10 "A traditional teacher who threw the chalk, who punished you. He kept the group with discipline with shouts. It was also based on respect but that led to fear".</p>	The motivation to learn was based on fear.

Source: Focal group (2017).

Table 2 The poor practices from the past that, persist in the current basic education system in Ecuador

The Future Teachers' Voices	Poor Practices
<p>P3_0:06:43 "... there are flaws ... It's about changing education. The needs of the student must be considered. I think teachers fail."</p> <p>P1_0:08:21 "Many primary school teachers today have a similarity with the teachers of the past. They forget what they studied in the universities to be able to teach in a friendly way."</p> <p>P2_0:13:00 "Practically they are lacking in the desire to teach by many factors. They do not teach well as they should."</p>	Teachers with low motivation for teaching
<p>P1_0:08:21 "Teachers have many forms to fill out and too many processes to perform."</p> <p>P4_0:13:00 "Teachers have a lot of work. Complete on time the teaching portfolios, plan the classes, fill class attendance records, help in other school activities, etc. There are several activities that reduce the effective work time of the teacher with the students."</p>	Reduced the effective time of the teacher's work with the students
<p>P3_0:09:12 "... at present, children and young people are more restless than in the past. The limits of overconfidence with some students have been exceeded; while with others communication styles are required to reach them".</p> <p>P1_0:08:21 "... Current teachers are an example of how they taught in the past. There are teachers who continue with traditionalism, memorizers, assign many tasks to do at home, and do not communicate properly with students."</p>	Poor communication between teachers-students-parents
<p>P3_0:11:10 "Today, when a teacher yells at a child, he is missing the child's rights. The correction has other formats."</p> <p>P4_0:09:12 "If we see that a teacher does not arrive to classes, we say that the teacher is cool but, they do not know the damage we are doing ourselves."</p> <p>P3_0:09:12 "But, if we see a more permissive teacher, the students take advantage of the situation"</p>	Lack of interpretation of the legal framework
<p>P3_0:09:12 "...As teachers, we can be friends with the students and give confidence, but little by little."</p> <p>P4_0:10:07 "...What happens is that a little balance is needed. I believe that extremes are the ones that hurt.</p> <p>P4_0:12:07 "The extreme of the traditionalist makes students accumulate information. It does not allow them to produce their own learning ..."</p> <p>P1_0:10:07 "... the extreme of permissive pedagogy also does not help the student to develop his learning. Freedom exceeds the limit of respect for the teacher. The teacher loses authority ..."</p>	Extreme permissive pedagogy

Source: Focus Group (2017).

Table 3 Future Basic Education Teachers' Life Histories

Participants' Data	Life Histories Fragments
My name is "Red Acacia". I am a student of the ULEAM Basic Education Program. I live in Manta, Ecuador.	"During pre-professional practices, I've felt like a child again, We have understood that education should be fun, dynamic." [hv1.09-10] "... education unites us and complements us as a group, as a community ..." [hv1.11]
I share the history of my pre-professional practices during the year 2017.	"These experiences have allowed me to have an idea of the way my work will be when I am the teacher" [hv1.14-15]. "I do not want to be one of those teachers who spend their classes talking and nobody listens to them. I want to teach in an innovative way so that students are motivated, inspired and can know more about science, geography but also more about sports, health, music and arts, etc." [hv1.21-24]. "... I want to be part of that generation change. Teachers of the 21st century" [hv1.31] "I have managed to understand that Education is something else. It is much better than what I received as a child." [hv1.39] "... Thinking about improving education in Ecuador has touched my sensitivity and my vocation as a future teacher" [hv1.55].
My name is "Pine". I am a student of the ULEAM Basic Education Program.	"... Each semester in the university, I have received a training that gives me to become that new teacher that my country needs" [hv2.03-04]. "...I will not be a traditional teacher" [hv2.10]
I live in Manta, Ecuador.	"The human and sensitive side of a teacher can be accompanied by many things to impart knowledge." [hv2.15-16] "... In order to reach the current student, the teacher's way of thinking must be changed". [hv2.21]
I share my experiences regarding my teacher training process.	"The student is not just that small person who sits down to write. It is a person who promises to society. Personally, I feel a radical vocation day by day." [hv2.32-34] "...I know I'm going to hit a system but, I'm committed to doing it." [hv2.38] "I am aware that the time will come when I should help improve current ways of teaching." [hv2.43-44]
My name is "eucalyptus". I'm from the El Carmen canton but I study at ULEAM, Manta.	"I am very motivated to help change Basic Education in Ecuador. I do not want to be like those teachers who act badly" [hv3.11-12].
I want to be a teacher of Basic Education. I think that national norms and laws impose new challenges on us.	"...The central challenge is to teach with quality and warmth". [hv3.17] "Politicians say that education is now the most, quality and all technified. But, they do not know the situations and realities in a close way ". [hv3.19-20] "...Future teachers are aware of the problems of the education system." [hv3.23] "We face tough challenges because the laws continue to change and I believe these new laws seek to reduce spending on education. The new teachers will take care of other components of the Basic Education curriculum. We will have to teach physical education" [hv3.26-28]. "...That requires us to continue preparing ..." [hv3.36] "I do want to be part of that change that education in Ecuador needs" [hv3.39].
My name is "oak." I have a visual deficit but, I want to be a teacher of basic education. I live in Manta. Although there have been teachers in my family, I think it is time to leave behind visions and obsolete ways of teaching; It's time for a change of course.	"I realized that before, teachers had only to enter the classroom and teach (impose) the class. I have understood that there is a need to change" [hv4.21-22] "...leave old visions and look for new ways of teaching" [hv4.25]. "I have understood that, it is not about the students taking control of the class. Rather it is about using the passion I have for teaching and looking for ways to convey the ideas that come up that can help students. Even I should acquire foreign languages to use ICT and establish international contacts" [hv4.33-25]

Table continued...

Participants' Data	Life Histories Fragments
	<p>"To get children and young people to learn something new every day ..." [hv4. 43]</p> <p>"If it is necessary to break the barriers that the system puts us to reach a quality education and warmth. Whoever wants to enter to defend the educational system will have to understand that its weaknesses will cause it to break "[hv4. 52-54].</p> <p>"... Because every system has the option to change and renew itself..." [hv4. 59]</p> <p>"Then I do feel committed. I feel challenged with everything that is being lived to say that I am going to be a decent 21st century. So they pay me very little salary, I commit myself to this country. Support what I can to improve and innovate everything that I see wrong ... we must do it well. I feel motivated and inspired." [hv4. 63-66].</p> <p>"Every new teacher must show that commitment to the country. A person who wants to be a teacher "must be" someone with that charisma, that attitude of giving everything in life "[hv4. 68-70].</p> <p>"...A teacher "must be" someone with charisma ..." [hv4. 78].</p>
Sub Categories	
1. Education valuation	
"... education unites us and complements us as a group, as a community ..."	
"...The central challenge is to teach with quality and warmth".	
"...Teacher should acquire foreign languages to use ICT and establish international contacts"	
2. Opening to change:	
"... Because every system has the option to change and renew itself to improve ..."	
"I know I'm going to hit a system but, I have the commitment to do it ..."	
"Future teachers are aware of the problems of the education system"	
3. Motivation to teaching:	
"... I want to be part of that change of generation teachers of the 21st century"	
"...Thinking about improving education in Ecuador, has touched my sensitivity and my vocation as a future teacher"	
"I will not be a traditional teacher."	
"To get children and young people to learn something new every day ..."	
Conclusion regarding the routes to follow in the future practice as teachers of Basic Education system:	
"... Leave old visions and look for new ways of teaching".	
"...The challenges demand to future teacher to continue studying..."	
"... In order to reach the current student, the teacher's way of thinking must be changed".	
"...Foreign languages, ICT and international communication are part of the challenges"	
"...A teacher should be "someone with charisma."	

Source: Life Histories (2017).

From the socio-educational approach, the school, the authorities, peers, but especially the teachers will radically influence the self-esteem of each student. It is a factor that brings people closer to personal and social success or failure.²³ Thus, children and young people learn about humanistic society, democracy, social needs and concerns, access to economic, cultural and social goods.²⁴

Sports practice and the arts have been included to support the processes of integral development of the student body, from the perspective of inclusive education¹⁰ and for its concretion; teachers with an open mind to change are required.

According to,²⁵ the education of the 21st century poses the challenge of identifying and developing in the students the competencies for life in fullness; issue that raises the need to transform the functions of the teaching staff; and insists on rethinking the actions of schools in goals related to continuous improvement and teacher training.

However,²⁶ affirm from the field of physical education and sports that this is part of basic education, because the goal is not to train athletes or bodybuilders; its mission is to facilitate opportunities for inclusion, integration, attention, listening, recreation, and full psychomotor development.²⁷

Question 2: What are the key aspects that the future teachers consider should be improved on the Basic Education System in Ecuador?

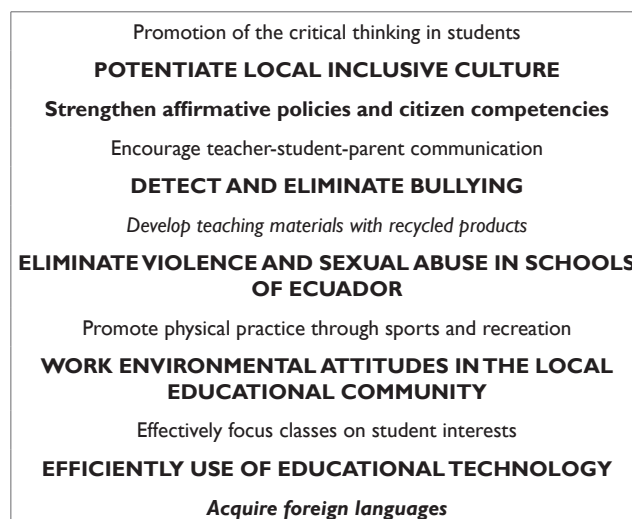
Category 3: The future basic education in Ecuador:

The forums held to identify and reflect on contemporary issues that are pending tasks to promote education in Ecuador allowed the construction of the following cloud of frequent words:

Analysis: Socio-economic development processes have

prioritized materialistic, competitive and individualistic behaviors. It is necessary to work routes to strengthen the socio-affective development of children and young people through motivating, social and educational inclusion (Figure) practice that should be enhanced with assertive and conciliatory communication.¹⁸ Physical education supported by positive communication processes triggers personal and group experiences that are associated with the emotional development of those who practice it.²¹

Figure Future teachers' challenges in Ecuador.



Source: Future Basic Education Teachers' perceptions (2017)

The respect to the students' bodies and integrity is an issue of high priority. It is urgent the work for restoring the capacity of second home to school without any form of violence and discrimination (Table 4).

Table 4 Proposed profile of the future teacher of Basic education

Knowledge Field	Evidence	Professional profile
Ethics and values	P4_0:10:11 "Procure a balance between both things by increasing it and giving the teacher the tools based on knowledge to be able to project his teachings"	Socio-affective competence.
Technological literacy	P2_0:6:10 "...The teacher must be given cognitive tools to the teacher. Digital tools I think give you cognitive tools because the brain is that it creates everything digital ". P4_0:14:00 "... a new type of pedagogy and renewed didactics.	Digital competence
Didactic and curricular planning	P3_0:22:10 "Curricular planning seen as a dynamic tool not as a straitjacket that forces to execute activities that at one time responded to some needs but, in the future, will no longer be required".	Curricular competence
Supervision of pre-professional practices	P3_0: 19: 05 "The pre-professional practices and demonstration classes have helped me a lot to understand what happens during the classes". P1_0: 20: 011 "... during the pre-professional practices, future teachers can see the real problems and think about solutions".	Organizational competence
Educational and social inclusion	P3_0:34:10 "We see flaws and barriers to educational inclusion every time we go to schools. That's when I ask myself: has education really changed? "	Competence for work in inclusion.
Knowledge of the legal framework	P4_0:29:10 "It's not just about knowing the laws of education. I believe that it is to know the laws to promote educational activities based on the rights approach"	Competence for legal interpretation
Assertive communication style	P1_0: 41: 00 "... Improvements must be made in relation to communication systems between students-parents and teachers". P3_0: 49: 10 "...When I have pre-professional practices I can meet with the students day by day. P4_0: 51: 10 "They call me and ask me to hurry up to teach them"	Communicational Competence
Individual and group academic counselling	P3_0: 27: 17 "... here at the university we understood that the teacher of the future should no longer be that person who scolds and punishes you. It is the person who guides and advises you. P2_0: 29: 26 "I have seen those teachers who shudder at the children and say: Boy, stay there! That must change. " The teacher should be the one who helps you learn the topics you do not know.	Competence for mentoring and counselling

Source: Focus group (2017).

Analysis: For the teaching population it is difficult to assimilate a concrete definition regarding the new professional profile of the teacher of Basic Education. There are several aspects to improve: communication, promotion of teamwork, etc.; and it is clear that the breadth and diversity of definitions demands leaving the traditionalist practice for a more conciliatory, inclusive and flexible model. Motivating and highly creative of new forms of interaction based on the reproduction of previously learned movement patterns.²⁸

Carlino²⁹ raises two fundamental problems of higher education in Latin America. The first problem focuses on the learning process; thus “the student who works in the class is the one who really learns when the teacher exposes [...] It refers to the students who have learned how to learn and are motivated to do so” (p.11). The second problem is related to teaching focused on the transfer of knowledge. At this point, the teacher manages to communicate only a portion of everything the students need to learn. However, other strategies such as exchange, student mobility, research as a training activity, among others, are important in the construction of the professional profile of the teacher. This, without neglecting the work of social skills, as Zurita et al.,³⁰ show, university students perceive in their training programs, deficits in the development of competencies for cooperative work and attitudes socializing.³¹

For Kenneth³² it is indisputable that the teachers have the responsibility to make decisions about the planning, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum but, without communication, it will not be possible for the students to have real learning; since they transfer contents, data, ideas and express expectations through speech, body language and written expressions.³³

Effective communication is not only the concern of the correct use of language; it is also about other forms of interaction between people. Thus, for Berg & Lahelma³⁴ any Physical Education teacher who chooses to use cooperative games must “be” aware that the gender composition of a group has a direct impact on the intensity of the emotions experienced by the participants of the same way, there are intergenerational priorities so that parents and children know that a proper communication style will allow a better understanding among them. For Duta et al.,¹⁸ the term “communication style” means “specific ways of receiving the message, personal ways of interpreting messages, specific ways of expressing the response” (p.1008).³⁵⁻³⁹ It is also an indicator to define relationships and social judgments among people; subject that fits the different cultures, ages, etc. It is not difficult to detect how teachers use these different communication styles during their classes; and attack that the efficient level of communication in the classroom is a more complex and unpredictable process. It is the way in which students see and judge the information that surrounds them; For that reason, each teacher must develop the correct communication strategies to use with their students in relation to the subject, the size of the group, the ages and interests of the students, etc. However, the strategy of “couple work” is one of the most used.¹⁹

Final thoughts

In Ecuador, universities must answer the call to be pedagogically sensible and be willing to invest in training processes for future teachers of the Basic Education system. More than for a mandatory and compliance with the norm, it is an effort to meet the expectations of children and youth to learn from creative methods at the level of international progress.

The teaching and learning process requires the strengthening of competences; socio-affective, digital, curricular, organizational, work in inclusion, foreign language, legal interpretation, communication, tutoring or advice.

Showing and exchanging information through the interactions between teachers and students should be channelled in innovative ways to motivate the work and achieve better results in less time. This communication balance that involves empathic listening to achieve excellence is potentially visible in the Ecuadorian Basic Education System.

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Conflict of interest

Author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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