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“Limitations of Teaching English in Rural High Schools in Cuenca, Ecuador”


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Resumen

Este trabajo cuantitativo descriptivo pretendió determinar los desafíos en la enseñanza del inglés de los docentes que trabajan en colegios rurales de Cuenca, Ecuador. Los datos para este estudio fueron recolectados con base en una encuesta realizada a diez docentes de inglés que trabajan en instituciones educativas rurales de la ciudad. Para la elaboración de dicha encuesta se realizó la revisión literaria de diversos estudios empíricos y se sintetizó al contexto establecido para el estudio. Finalmente, el análisis de los datos permitió concluir que los mayores retos que los docentes encuestados encontraron en la enseñanza de inglés en colegios rurales están relacionados a (1) recursos y equipamiento, (2) infraestructura, (3) conocimientos en técnicas y métodos de enseñanza, (4) exposición de los estudiantes al idioma, y (5) el conocimiento gramatical de los estudiantes. Al final también se estableció algunas relaciones entre las características demográficas de los docentes encuestados y los mayores retos presentados por los mismos.

Palabras clave: retos, colegios rurales, lengua inglesa, docentes rurales, características demográficas

Abstract

This quantitative descriptive study aimed to determine the English language teaching challenges of teachers working in rural schools in Cuenca, Ecuador. The data for this study were collected based on a survey of ten English teachers working in rural schools in the city. For the elaboration of the survey, a literature review of various empirical studies was conducted and synthesized to the context established for the study. Finally, the analysis of the data allowed concluding that the greatest challenges that the surveyed teachers found in teaching English in rural schools are related to (1) resources and equipment, (2) infrastructure, (3) knowledge of teaching techniques and methods, (4) students' exposure to the language, and (5) students' grammatical knowledge. At the end, relationships were also established between the demographic characteristics of rural teachers and the major challenges they face.

Keywords: challenges, rural high schools, English language, rural teachers, demographic features

Table of contents

Resumen	2
Abstract	3
Table of contents	4
Dedication	9
Acknowledgements	10
Introduction	11
CHAPTER I	13
Description of the Research	13
1.1 Background	13
1.2 Statement of the Problem	14
1.3 Rationale	14
1.4 Research Questions	15
1.5 Objectives:	15
1.5.1 General objective	15
1.5.2 Specific objectives	15
CHAPTER II	16
Theoretical Framework and Literature Review	16
2.1 Theoretical Framework	16
2.1.2 English proficiency in students from rural areas	16
2.1.3 Isolation in teachers from rural educational institutions	17
2.1.4 Infrastructure as an essential educational factor	17
2.1.5 Demographic factors	18
2.2 Literature Review	18
2.2.1 Challenges of teaching English in rural areas	18
2.2.2 Demographic features of high school teachers in Cuenca	21
CHAPTER III	22
Methodology	22
3.1 Research design	22
3.2 Participants	22
3.3 Research Venue	22
3.4 Data collection procedures	23

UCUENCA

	5
CHAPTER IV	25
Data Analysis and Results	25
CHAPTER V	42
Conclusions and Recommendations	42
5.1 Conclusions	42
5.2 Recommendations	45
References	46
Annexes	54

List of figures

Figure 1: Accessible Location of the High Schools	25
Figure 2: Feasibility between Distance of Educational Institution and Current Address of Teachers	26
Figure 3: Teachers' Perception on Work Environment	26
Figure 4: Rural Teachers' Training in the Last Academic Year	28
Figure 5: Number of Training Sessions in the Last Academic Year	28
Figure 6: Last Training of Untrained Rural Teachers in 2021 and 2022	29
Figure 7: Training offered by the Ministry of Education for Rural Teachers	29
Figure 8: Training offered by Rural High Schools for their Teachers	30
Figure 9: Training Organized by the Rural Teachers Themselves	31
Figure 10: Rural Teachers' Satisfaction Level with the Received Training	31
Figure 11: Labor Motivational Factors in Rural Teachers	33
Figure 12: Rural High School Teachers' Motivation	35
Figure 13: Rural Teachers' Perception on Students' Motivation	35
Figure 14: Teachers' Perception on Students' Motivational Factors	36
Figure 15: Reasons for Students' Demotivation from Teachers' Perspective	37
Figure 16: English Rural Teachers' Use of L1 in English Classes	38

List of tables

Table 1: Teachers' Responses regarding Social Relationship Indicators	27
Table 2: Classification of training topics for English teachers in rural high schools	32
Table 3: Teachers' Perceptions on Working Conditions	34
Table 4: High School Students' English Classes per Week	37
Table 5: English Teachers' Rationale for Using Spanish in the EFL Classroom	38
Table 6: Rural Teachers' Perspective on Common Students' Mistakes	39
Table 7: Examples of Common Grammatical Errors of Rural High School Students	40
Table 8: Rural Teachers' Satisfaction Level on Equipment and Resources	40

List of Annexes

Annex A: Survey Questions for the Rural High School Teachers

54

Dedication

I am grateful to God for the opportunity to finish this project. It is dedicated to my beloved parents, Maria and Fernando, my grandmother Elvira, and my sister Fernanda who have supported me and believed in me despite the circumstances from the beginning to the end of my career. Finally, I dedicate this graduation project to a special friend who always motivated me to keep going and taught me that defeats are to learn and get up with new energies. Karlita, I thank you for all your words.

Anabel

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Anabel

Introduction

The English language is globally used since most people speak it as a first, second, or foreign language. In the case of Ecuador, a country located in South America, English as a foreign language is included in the national curriculum for both public and private educational institutions. The Ecuadorian curriculum shows five learning components: (1) communication and cultural awareness; (2) oral communication—speaking and listening; (3) reading; (4) writing; and (5) language through the arts, which teachers must develop in their classes.

Since the country is sectorized depending on the geographical conditions of each zone, there are rural and urban areas in each canton or province. Likewise, rural areas have been the subject of countless analyses related to education because of the existent gap between urban and rural areas and the problems that each context faces with regard to teaching and learning. As this study is focused on a specific subject, English, the challenges or difficulties of teachers in rural educational institutions are raised. Asian authors such as Febriana et al. (2018) and Kizilaslan (2012) exposed that the most common problems of English teachers in rural educational institutions are infrastructure, learning sources, language barriers, parents' mentality, students' competencies, motivation, among others. Colombian authors such as Holguin & Morales (2016) and López & Ramos (2020) underscored challenges such as the lack of teachers' preparation, educational institutions' inappropriate infrastructure, essential services, and connectivity that affect the English teaching process in rural educational institutions.

Hence, this research study focused on describing the challenges that a group of English teachers in Cuenca, Ecuador, go through in rural settings and how these challenges relate to their demographic characteristics. Based on a convenience but homogenous sample of English teachers in rural schools, the following questions were addressed:

1. What are the challenges English teachers go through when teaching in rural educational institutions in Cuenca?
2. What is the relationship between teachers' demographic features and the major challenges encountered?

Therefore, the information and data collected in this descriptive research on the limitations of English teachers in rural schools in Cuenca comprise five chapters. The first chapter includes the background, problem statement, justification, research questions, and objectives. The second chapter, the theoretical framework, analyzes crucial terminology related to teaching English as a foreign language in rural areas, the proficiency level of rural students, the isolation of teachers in rural educational institutions, infrastructure as an essential educational factor, and the conceptualization of teacher demographic factors. The literature review covers the most common challenges exposed by authors in relation to research studies and some

demographic characteristics of teachers in rural schools in Cuenca. The third chapter, the methodology, presents the research design, the description of the participants, the developed context, and the designed instrument. The fourth chapter illustrates the findings and their critical analysis. Finally, chapter five covers the conclusions and recommendations for educational authorities and further research.

CHAPTER I

Description of the Research

1.1 Background

Ecuador is a developing country, which faces educational challenges, especially with students from rural areas. According to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (2021), the nation seeks educational excellence at the national level, but the most notorious drawback is the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) in the rural sector. Hossain (2016) stated that EFL education in this area is poor compared to an urban area. In addition, according to Milon (2016), most of the rural primary school students are unable to achieve the competencies that the curricula expose, thus creating a deficit in the educational system.

There are three key factors that enhance the educational deficit and marginalization in the rural sector: economic and socio-cultural differences, children's low concentration, and lack of resources and materials (Ab Aziz et al., 2019; Bonilla & Cruz-Arcila, 2013; Holguin, Morales & Hernandez, 2012). In the same way, a report released from the Ministry of Education (2015) stated that until 2012, the non-attendance to classes of a significant percentage of the population between 5 to 17 years old was commonly due to lack of economic resources. Regardless of the efforts that the National Government has made for several years, in an attempt to promote a new structure in the English language teaching, there has not been any continuity or follow-up. Consequently, the efforts to help teachers improve their skills are not enough to face the problems in rural pedagogical environments.

Other studies emphasize problems that arise in rural education. One of them is the location of schools and high schools because teachers have difficulty reaching them, and as a consequence, teachers choose to provide their services in urban areas (Dasaraghi et al., 2016). Sainful and Trivono (2018) stated that accessing education in rural sectors is another major challenge that teachers face. According to Songbatumis (2017), another significant challenge in teaching English in rural areas is the lack of professionalism of teachers, their poor preparation, and their unfamiliarity with innovative teaching methods.

The concern of many educational and governmental entities that aspire to improve the educational system in rural areas has ceased to be an option. They have abandoned improvement proposals progressively, which on many occasions have been neglected, forgotten, and archived in time and space (Noro, 2016). For this reason, a gap is created for teachers since they must adapt to the environment in which they are, using the available resources to achieve the objectives that the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education demands.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Education is a fundamental pillar in the development of a country (King, 2011). Article 26 in the Ecuadorian constitution states that education is an unavoidable and inexcusable right for all individuals that make up society (Const. Del Ecuador, art. 26). Also, the government must satisfy all the fragile situations suffered by its inhabitants. Regardless of what the constitution states, there is a neglect of rural education due to the scarce economic resources allocated to educational well-being, which receives the least investment and attention. Likewise, the financial resources granted to cover the educational needs of areas far from urban sectors are preposterous amounts. They make it impossible to comply with the standards proposed by international organizations to guarantee an educational system capable of satisfying the demands of the country (Garofalo & Villao, 2018). In addition, in rural areas of Ecuador, it has been evidenced that students rarely pass exams that assess their knowledge of the English language (Tierra de Nadie, 2020), which leads us to question the effectiveness of the educational system in these areas.

Knowledge of the English language is relevant and decisive worldwide in the development of society, as the former Governor of the Bangladesh Bank, Mohanmmad Frashuddin, mentioned, mastering English is necessary for a nation to end poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, and indignity. Despite teachers' efforts, especially in their attempt to contribute to the learning of the English language, there are certain factors that prevent them from providing professional and efficient teaching. Among these factors are learners' social and cultural circumstances, teachers' delays to reach their destination (Auquilla & Fernández, 2017) and lack of resources. Considering that teaching in rural areas involves a series of factors, the main purpose of this descriptive research is to find out the main challenges in teaching English in rural areas in Cuenca.

1.3 Rationale

This project will contribute to a deeper understanding of English teachers' practices. In EFL rural environments, there are different challenges, and one of them is being an agent for its change. The impetus to develop this project is based on the fact that my school training began in communities that, although not entirely rural, are surrounded by a lot of rurality. There is no standard national definition of rural, and consequently, it depends on the experience of a person in the place (Pasutri, 2020). In addition, as Hossain (2016) stated, doing descriptive research will contribute to the understanding of the rural context that increasingly needs resources, tools, and people to help children and young learners improve their quality of life in the countryside. Furthermore, descriptive research concerning the challenges EFL teachers in rural areas face is pivotal since information on this topic is scarce in the Ecuadorian context.

Likewise, the data collected will help the rural educational institutions of the State to improve the process of teaching English and encourage students to make their acquisition of this language meaningfully. It is because the execution of this type of project can show the importance of rural education and the contribution of rural communities in general (Cardona, 2017). Therefore, this descriptive research seeks to identify the problems that English teachers face when teaching in rural areas, while providing the opportunity to obtain first-hand data of this social phenomenon in its natural environment.

1.4 Research Questions

After preliminary research, as previously mentioned, the following questions emerged:

1. What are the challenges English teachers go through when teaching in rural educational institutions in Cuenca?
2. What is the relationship between teachers' demographic features and the major challenges encountered?

1.5 Objectives:

1.5.1 General objective:

- To identify the challenges that teachers go through when teaching in rural educational institutions in Cuenca.

1.5.2 Specific objectives:

- To determine the major challenges that English teachers in Cuenca encounter in rural high schools.
- To identify relationships between teachers' demographic features and their major challenges.

CHAPTER II

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 TEFL in rural areas

The acronym TEFL is popular and common to refer to the teaching of English as a foreign language. Conversely, a rural area is linked to the territory with a small number of inhabitants whose main economic activity is agriculture (Gardiner, 2008). Relating the two terms exposed, the context to be treated is presented, which is the development of the teaching of English as a foreign language in rural areas. According to government regulations, high school students have to take this subject obligatorily which corresponds to receive 5 hours per week (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017). Established by the government, students in schools and high schools receive free texts for each subject, including English (El Comercio, 2015).

On the other hand, English teachers must meet standards depending on the country. In Ecuador, the profile for a language teacher has certain achievements as the third level title, B2 level endorsed by international exams (Mendieta et al., 2021), among others. In rural sectors, school activities are usually taught by less than competent teachers (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017). In 2016, many English teachers took the Pearson English Placement Test, which showed the need for better language proficiency as rural areas ranked at A1 level.

2.1.2 English proficiency in students from rural areas

Student English proficiency is defined as students' ability to use English to create and communicate meaning verbally and through writing (Butler, 2004). In other words, reading, writing, speaking, and listening are the four macro skills that students have to acquire. The international company specializing in language teaching, EF Education First, conducted a survey in 88 nations and announced that Ecuador was ranked 65th out of 88 countries with a score of 48.52 out of 100. This ranking showed that Ecuador dropped places concerning the results of the study carried out previously (El Telégrafo, 2022).

Ortega and Fernández (2017) conducted a study to measure the English language level of high school students from educational institutions in rural towns using the Preliminary English Test (PET). The results showed that the high deficiency of foreign language learning concentrates in rural areas. Each component was graded 100 as the highest score. The averages of the educational units in each linguistic domain were outrageous. In the speaking component, the highest average was 69.1, and the lowest was 20.4; in the writing component, the averages ranged from 0.54 to 18.18 out of 100; in the reading component, the highest average was 34.68, and the lowest was 20.4; finally, the listening component showed an

average of 3.06 to 21.53 (Bilal et. al., 2013; Ortega & Fernández, 2017). To sum up, the proficiency level of this language is not satisfactory in the population.

2.1.3 Isolation in teachers from rural educational institutions

There are two different approaches for defining teacher isolation (Flinders, 1988). First, working in rural or isolated communities is a prerequisite for a teacher's job, that is, the characteristics of the teacher's workplace and the interaction between colleagues can cause isolation. Second, teacher isolation is a state of mind, not a working state. It refers to the feeling that teachers have about the distance they have to travel due to the location of their workplace, which affects contact with their family or friends. Regarding the first argument, educational institutions tend to be isolated according to their geographic location (Gardiner, 2008, p. 13). Garofalo and Villao (2018) provide examples in which they argued that in the Ecuadorian Educational System, study plans and curricula are inclusive only in the urban sector. Besides, teachers are prepared mainly by professionals who have not lived in rural areas, which causes the development of content excluding those environments. Also, pedagogical advisors and supervisors as support figures for teachers are insufficient to serve rural educational units due to their location and their focused work on control instead of pedagogical tasks (Juárez, 2017). These lacks of skills of the before-mentioned figures and resources may cause a feeling of isolation in teachers since they limit their teaching (Juárez, 2012). The situation of the rural teacher who lives in isolated conditions proves the lack of teacher training policies, as well as the little attention paid to working conditions and well-being (Buitrago & Salamanca, 2017).

2.1.4 Infrastructure as an essential educational factor

In the educational context, the term infrastructure commonly refers to the space where academic activities take place. Martinez and Livingston (2018) stated that it is a set of goods that support the productive structure, the improvement of social relations, and individual and collective economic activities to provide services to users of the infrastructure in general.

The premise that the physical environment of the educational institution is a factor that influences educational quality is strongly supported by several researchers. The studies of Barbosa and Fernandez (2001) and Martinez and Livingston (2018) showed the role of infrastructure in school effectiveness since appropriate establishments guarantee good educational development. Components such as the classroom, laboratories, libraries, among others, are essential elements to ensure learning and they influence the academic performance of students (Marín et. al., 2016; Martinez & Livingston, 2018). In contrast, there are other factors that influence the academic training of students. As determined by Murillo et

al. (2016), teachers, resources, and parents' expectations all contribute to the correct and effective training of students, but infrastructure plays a significant role as well.

2.1.5 Demographic factors

The United Nations Organization (UN) defined demography as the science whose object is the study of human populations and deals with their dimension, structure, evolution and general characteristics, considered mainly from a quantitative point of view. For researchers, this is not limited to measurement, but necessarily it includes the interpretation and analysis of data or projections based on assumptions that include non-demographic variables (Boucourt & Gonzalez, 2006).

Demographic data is general information about groups of people (Bautista et al., 2019). Social, economic, and cultural changes in society's contexts generate a series of changes in demographic aspects that are evident in the structure and composition of the population. The demographic profile is determined through indicators of the reality of a population such as size, age, gender, occupation, among other characteristics of the participants.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Challenges of teaching English in rural areas

Educational institutions in rural areas have presented problems in different facets of the educational system, that is, they have problems with economic, human, logistics, and preparation resources (Ortega & Fernandez, 2017). Consequently, the role of English teachers becomes more challenging when the necessary economic, human, and material resources are not available or the subject is not even taught.

Reviewing different studies, the following challenges were found:

- *Social and professional isolation of teachers*

This factor plays a decisive role when a teacher chooses the workplace. Teachers from urban areas have problems adapting to the context, which is sometimes far away of their residences (Holguín & Morales, 2016). Some teachers have problems related to the demographic location of rural high schools and this affects their teaching practices (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Khulel, 2021). That is, high schools are located in areas that are inconvenient for teachers to access.

- *Social relationships with colleagues*

Social relationships among colleagues are important for the best performance of teachers in their functions. During the educational work, there are disagreements among colleagues, so maintaining disputes can be detrimental to them as it affects their working environment. Some studies show that the relationship between teachers is vital to have a healthy coexistence in

the development of activities that benefit students (Bota, 2013; Oco, 2022; Vaquilar, 2018). On the contrary, there are teachers who become stressed when interacting academically with work colleagues.

- *Quality of rural teacher training*

English teachers are guides for students in the process of learning a new language. Therefore, they must have qualities that allow students to learn the language (Chiu et. al., 2017). Some authors have agreed that rural areas have professionals who are not duly qualified to teach due to poor professional training (Hossain, 2016; Alam, 2016 and Wulandari, 2019).

- *Mastery of teaching methods and techniques*

To achieve an effective teaching process, a teacher must have formal training in teaching practices and methods. Hossain (2016) surveyed 300 high school students to assess the effectiveness of English teachers' practices. He found that they failed to use the correct teaching methods and that the lesson plans were irrelevant. On the other hand, teachers who did not develop planning could not apply an appropriate method in the classroom (p. 6). Moreover, the relationship in both cases was the use of traditional methodologies.

- *Teachers' motivation*

A teacher must be prepared to work in any social context. Rural teachers are the ones who must experience the most adaptability, which affects their professional life, including motivation in their practice (Tanaka, 2010). Motivation does not imply a uniform concept, but it is as a condition that encompasses the inclination towards engagement in the activity (Evans, 1998). Although the complexity of the relationship between job satisfaction and teacher motivation is great, studies have found a relationship between them. These studies concluded that rural teachers are not satisfied with their jobs, so they had considered the possibility not to remain in the teaching profession (Bame, 1991; Benell & Akeampong, 2007; Tanaka 2010). On the contrary, other authors highlight rural teachers' liking of their work areas (Alam & Farid, 2011; Shikalepo, 2019). Another factor that influences teaching practices is the marital status of teachers. Although studies such as Bello (2011), Odanga et al. (2015) and Pianta et al. (2012) showed that there is no significant relationship between marital status and teacher efficacy, there is an influence of one on the other. They found a significant influence of marital status on teacher self-efficacy in instructional strategies in favor of married teachers. That is, married teachers have more techniques that motivate students to focus their attention on organizing information for effective learning. The role of the authorities is another factor that affects teachers' motivation. English teachers must comply with rules and content objectives which are imposed by the Ministry of Education, but this often affects their teaching practices. Besides, they have to follow the prescribed guidance in the execution of it, which triggers the lack of autonomy on their functions (La Ganza, 2008; Pearson & Moomaw, 2006).

Other factors such as class size, schedules and extra-curricular or non-teaching duties are also problems for rural teachers (Aoumeur, 2017; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010), as these factors may increase poor performance and negative attitudes in teachers (Mosha, 2014; Renganathan, 2021).

- *Students' motivation*

People who were surveyed in Rodríguez-Pérez's (2012), Velázquez's (2019), and Wulandari's (2019) studies agreed that rural students are less motivated than urban learners and justify it by not seeing the practical utility of learning a foreign language in this context. English teachers stated that motivation depends largely on the family environment and the rural environment itself (Rodríguez-Pérez, 2012). Likewise, one teacher who worked in both urban and rural settings mentioned that parents in rural areas consider that their children do not need to learn English since they will be working in the same area as their family (Rodríguez-Pérez, 2012, p. 396).

- *Students' English exposure*

Chadán (2017) stated that rural students do not adequately develop the macro skills of the English language due to the lack of appropriate environments for learning and opportunities for practice. The practice of the language is one of the most important goals for an English teacher, thus the limitation of time in-class hours and the social contact with family, friends, or relatives who do not use the English language to communicate daily affect the development of the language (Sharmin, 2019). Certainly, the studies of De la Campa & Nassaji (2009) and Shabaka-Fernandez (2021), although they state the importance of a permanent use of English in the classroom, they consider Spanish or L1 can be used for specific situations during class. Therefore, the author consider that these interventions do not affect the learning of English.

- *Students' grammatical knowledge*

Students from rural areas have problems with general learning due to various situations, which cause a delay in their academic training. Consequently, the learning of the English subject has more complex challenges since teachers must develop their classes and accomplish their planning and goals regardless of students' lack of grammar knowledge. Indeed, students' lack of English knowledge is prevalent in rural educational institutions (Halik & Nusrath, 2020; Milon, 2016; Cuong, 2021). Alam (2016) claimed that this situation reflects unsuccessful teaching as a consequence of poorly trained teachers. Additionally, Olleta (2013) suggested that English teachers reinforce topics that include mostly the use of vocabulary for primary students.

- *Limited resources*

The government guarantees the distribution of resources to all sectors, focusing on rural settings to create opportunities for a better education, providing the necessary material

resources to achieve educational compensation (Olleta, 2013), but these standards are not met. Students, teachers, and parents agreed that the lack of resources and teaching materials in rural institutions, such as textbooks or visual materials to decorate the classroom, are unsolved aspects to improve teaching practices (Chadán, 2017 and Velázquez, 2019).

- *Equipment needs*

Rural students must be able to develop skills in English, so they need appropriate instruments for this purpose. Holguin and Morales (2015) stated that some rural educational institutions lack adequate equipment as, in many cases, the construction materials and furniture are supplied by the community itself, i.e., community members voluntarily provide this type of material for local schools. Even though parents do their best, classrooms generally need visual materials that stimulate learning, as well as simple scientific lab equipment, radios, and audiovisual instruments that are the government responsibility. In short, standard academic equipment is not available in rural areas.

2.2.2 Demographic features of high school teachers in Cuenca

Cuenca is divided into parishes that can be urban or rural and are represented by Parish Boards of the Municipality of Cuenca. In the canton, there are 15 urban and 21 rural parishes (Municipal GAD of the Cuenca Canton, 2015). The rural parishes correspond to Baños, Chaucha, Checa, Chiquintad, Cumbe, El Valle, Llacao, Molleturo, Nulti, Paccha, Quingeo, Ricaurte, San Joaquin, Santa Ana, Santa Rosa, Sayausi, Sidcay, Sinincay, Tarqui, Turi and Victoria del Portete.

The open digital records of the Ministry of Education (2021) allowed the researcher to obtain information about high school teachers in Cuenca. First, there are 229 fiscal educational institutions in operation between the city's urban and rural areas, of which 62 are high schools. Second, the amount of teachers between men and women in the canton for these institutions is 3,099, of which approximately 866 correspond to high school teachers. Finally, these teachers perform their roles with an educational demand average of 18,823 high school students.

Professionals who teach in high schools all have a university degree. Also, some tutors have postgraduate degrees, diploma courses, specializations, masters' degrees, or doctorates (Calle et al., 2012). Teachers receive a minimum salary of \$527, and this depends on the category to which the teachers belong to. Concerning age, the range is between 25 and 71 years old (p. 9). All these demographic aspects allowed to synthesize the data to establish the relationship between the situation of rural high school teachers and the greatest limitations of their English teaching process.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study was focused on a quantitative research approach. As Watson (2015) mentioned, quantitative research is a model that contributes to find general laws that can explain the nature of the object of study from observation, verification, and experience. In order to answer the research questions, a descriptive study was conducted. This kind of research aims to explore a phenomenon to reach new insights (Kramer, 1985). Therefore, a group of secondary school teachers who have taught English in rural areas of Cuenca filled out a survey, and through it, quantitative data was collected on the main challenges they face. After the data collection procedure was over, the data was analyzed considering the research questions established for this study.

3.2 Participants

This study was conducted with the participation of a group of English teachers in rural areas in Cuenca. The participants were ten EFL teachers. The sample was a convenience one, since participants were selected based on their voluntary agreement to participate in the research (Sousa et al., 2002). Moreover, to guarantee reliable and valid data, the sample was homogeneous, as the selection of participants depended on the following inclusion criteria: (1) English teachers who have worked in rural areas in Cuenca and (2) teachers who had more than one year of experience working in the rural setting.

3.3 Research Venue

This study was carried out with teachers from Cuenca, a city located in the southwest of Ecuador. According to Oakland (2012), the particularities of classrooms in Ecuador depend on whether they belong to urban or rural areas; therefore, statistical data show that approximately sixty percent (60%) of the Ecuadorian population lives in urban areas and forty percent (40%), largely indigenous people, live in rural areas.

Moreover, Hargreaves et al. (2009) stated that, when comparing rural and urban schools, rural high schools are considered inferior because urban high schools have more teachers and easier access to resources for teaching and learning. Teachers in urban high schools have access to teaching materials, while teachers in rural areas often lack teaching materials that can support them in delivering their lessons. This condition leads to a monotonous teaching and learning process in rural education institutions. According to the report on the educational situation of Ecuador published in 2015, rural students do not attend classes due to various

reasons, including lack of financial resources, lack of educational institutions, lack of technological resources, among other reasons.

The quality of teachers in high schools is different from the quality of teachers in urban schools. According to the Ministry of Education (2019), some teachers in the rural sectors of Ecuador are not suitable. In addition, the infrastructure is still insufficient, which is also often inadequate and lacks cultural identity, while the curriculum does not align with the demands of the different contexts in Ecuador (Calderón, 2015).

3.4 Data collection procedures

The instrument for collecting data in this descriptive research study was a structured survey, considering that the purpose of this type of survey research is:

To answer questions that have been raised, to solve problems that have been posed or observed, to assess needs and set goals, to determine whether or not specific objectives have been met, to establish baselines against which future comparisons can be made, to analyze trends across time, and generally, to describe what exists, in what amount, and in what context. (Isaac & Michael, 1997, p. 136).

First, the survey included socio-demographic information about the rural teachers who voluntarily participated in this study. This includes age, gender, marital status, educational degree, professional experience and location. Second, this instrument aimed to determine the significant constraints of rural high school English teachers and contains eight sections with their specific type of questions. These sections were categorized considering the following criteria.

- (1) *Institutional localization satisfaction*: it contained closed questions.
- (2) *Social relationships*: this section included questions to establish teachers' perceptions about their work as well as to measure their level of satisfaction with their co-workers.
- (3) *Education training*: it possessed (a) a screening question that addressed two subsections related to the training teachers received; (b) sub-sections that included a Likert scale to measure the level of satisfaction with the training received.
- (4) *Teachers' motivation*: this category enclosed multiple-choice, closed-ended questions and a Likert scale to measure teachers' motivational factors.
- (5) *Students' motivation*: it included a screening question with multiple-choice subsections to find out the possible reasons for students' motivation or demotivation to learn English from their teachers' perspective.
- (6) *Language exposure*: this category had closed-ended questions regarding the frequency of English classes per week and the use of Spanish in the EFL classroom.

(7) *Students' grammar knowledge*: this section contained a multiple-choice question to delve into the main grammatical errors made by students from their teachers' perspective.

(8) *Resources and equipment*: this category had a Likert scale to measure teachers' satisfaction with facilities at the classroom and institutional level.

Some of the questions incorporated in the survey were self-developed, and others were adapted from different studies to accomplish the research objectives (Izquierdo et al, 2021; Liu & Ramsey, 2008; Oco, 2022; Owu-Ewie & Williams, 2017; Vaquilar, 2018).

After receiving authorization from the teachers, the survey was applied to collect data. The questions related to teacher satisfaction (mean) used the following rating scale to describe and interpret the responses of the participants.

Interval	Weight	Interpretation
1.00-1.79	1	Strongly Satisfied/ Agree
1.80-2.59	2	Satisfied/ Agree
2.60-3.39	3	Neutral
3.40-4.19	4	Dissatisfied/ Disagree
4.20-5.00	5	Strongly Dissatisfied/ Disagree

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis and Results

The data obtained from this descriptive research was organized and processed employing quantitative analysis and then presented through tables and graphs, which allowed the examination and interpretation to answer the research questions established at the beginning of this investigation.

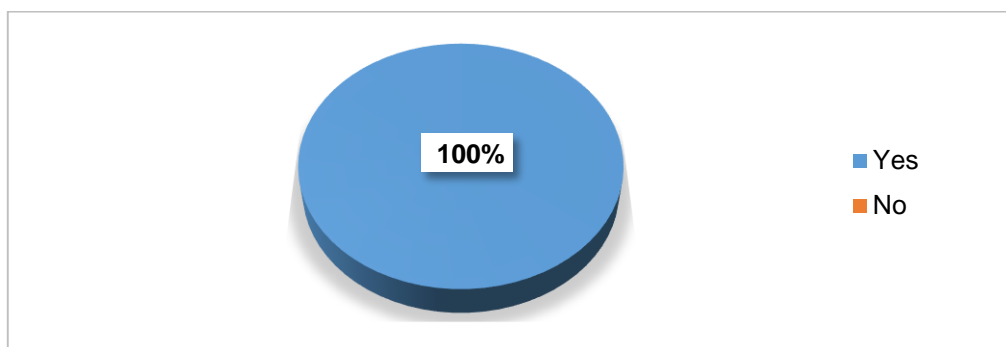
Before discussing the survey results, demographic information is given to fully understand the characteristics of the teachers surveyed. Participants' ages ranged from 32 to 59 years old. Their experience working with high school students ranged from 5 and 18 years of experience. Based on the use of a convenient but homogeneous sampling, the teachers who participated in this survey were eight female teachers, representing the eighty percent (80%) of women from the target population and two male participants, representing twenty percent (20%) of the men in the target population. This corresponds to a stratification of the population surveyed. In marital status terms, fifty percent (50%) of the teachers were married, forty percent (40%) were divorced, and ten percent (10%) were single. In educational terms, sixty percent (60%) of the respondents had a master's degree, and forty percent (40%) had a bachelor's degree. The average teacher salary varied from \$601 to over \$1000. Regarding the teachers' residence sector, eighty percent (80%) of them lived in urban areas, and a small portion, twenty percent (20%), lived in rural areas.

The results of the survey are the following:

1. Institution location satisfaction

Figure 1

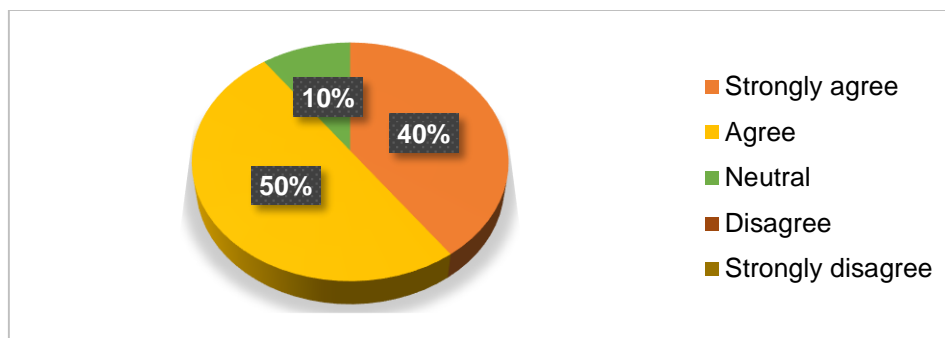
Accessible Location of the High Schools



One hundred percent (100%) of participants considered that the educational institutions where they worked were located in an accessible place for them. According to this data, it can be inferred that all teachers arrived at work without any access inconvenience.

Figure 2

Feasibility between Distance of Educational Institution and Current Address of Teachers

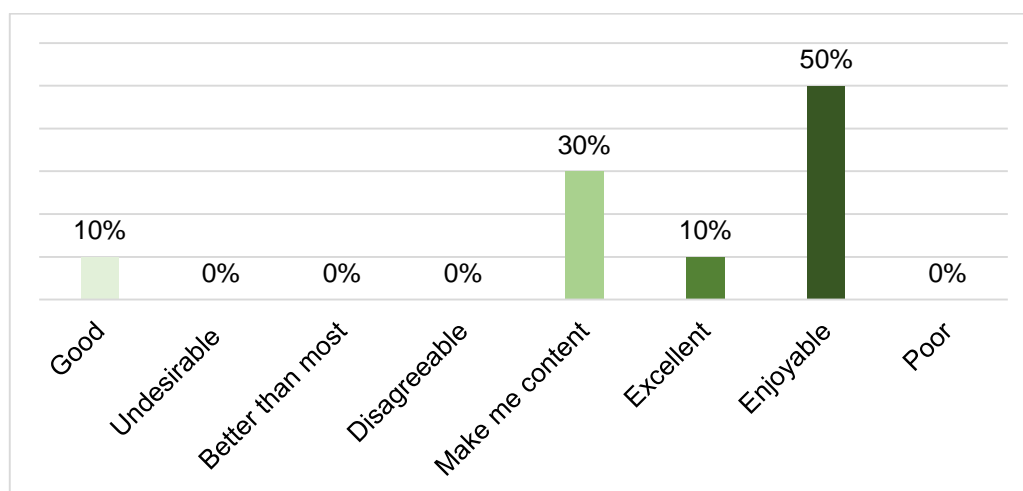


The data showed that forty percent (40%) of rural teachers strongly agreed that the distance between their current homes and the educational institutions was accessible. It means that there are no drawbacks in terms of mobilizing teachers to secondary schools. Then, forty percent (40%) of the teachers also had affirmative opinions regarding the distance. Only ten percent (10%) of the teachers had an uncertain judgment about distance issues. It means that most teachers had no inconvenience in their mobilization to the high schools with regard to the location of their residences.

2. Social relationships

Figure 3

Teachers' Perception on Work Environment



In the case of teachers' work environment, fifty percent (50%) of them rated their workplaces as enjoyable. Thirty percent (30%) considered that their workplaces made them happy. Only ten percent (10%) of teachers regarded those places as excellent, while another ten percent (10%) rated them as good places. These data allowed to infer that all teachers had a positive

perception of their work environment, since none of them used negative terms to describe them.

Table 1

Teachers' Responses regarding Social Relationships Indicators

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
1. There is a sense of fun in high school.	2.1	Satisfied
2. There is a sense of family in high school.	2	Satisfied
3. My colleagues are warm.	2.2	Satisfied
4. My colleagues are friendly.	2	Satisfied
5. My colleagues are cooperative (i.e., they engage in solving problems, collaborate in academic activities, among others)	1.9	Satisfied
6. I easily get along with my colleagues.	1.8	Satisfied
7. Colleagues trust each other in high school.	2.5	Satisfied
8. I consider this high school has a healthy working environment.	2	Satisfied

Note. Mean= 2.06 Interpretation of Likert Scale: 1.00-1.79= Strongly Satisfied vs 4.20-5.00= Strongly Dissatisfied

Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of the level of Job Satisfaction of the respondents regarding their social relations. The results give a mean of 2.06 with the corresponding interpretation, which in all cases, shows participants are satisfied as observed in all the indicators. Regarding colleagues' trustworthiness, the data show the highest mean of 2.5 in its indicator 7, which comprises a satisfying level. It means that teachers work with mutual trust and are more likely to improve their relationship with each other. Indicators 3 and 4, which refer to colleagues' level of friendship and warmth, show the mean scores of 2 to 2.2 interpreted as satisfied, which implies that teachers have the opportunity to develop human relationships within the educational institutions. Indicators 1, 2, and 8, with a mean score between 2 and 2.1 also show a satisfactory level, indicating that EFL teachers perform their responsibilities and duties in a productive environment due to a healthy working environment and good relationships. Indicator 5, concerning cooperation among colleagues with a mean score of 1.9 showing a satisfying level stands out that there is support among teachers, which means that respondents are experiencing a sense of recognition and belonging to their institution. Finally, indicator 6, concerning easy interaction among colleagues has a mean of 1.8 with a satisfactory level. It is the indicator with the highest tendency to be strongly satisfactory for the surveyed teachers. This means there is no need to improve the social

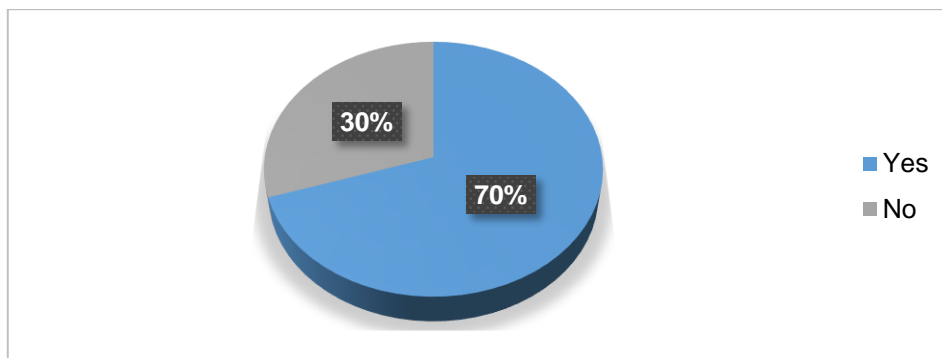
interaction between colleagues, which indicates that there is almost no possibility of a decrease in their work performance.

In general terms, these results suggest that teachers do not have problems regarding social relationships within the high school where they work, as one hundred percent (100%) of the indicators show levels of satisfaction among the participants.

3. Teacher education training

Figure 4

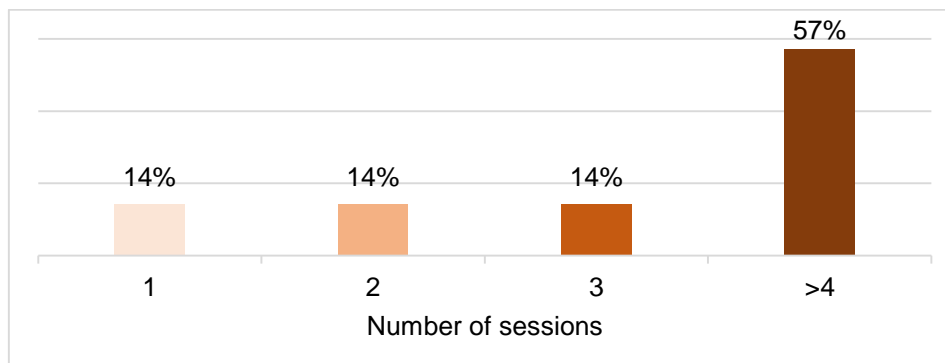
Rural Teachers' Training in the Last Academic Year



According to the graph, thirty percent (30%) of the teachers who filled out the survey have not received training during the 2021-2022 school year, while seventy percent (70%) indeed have been trained in teaching aspects. Hence, it can be inferred that there is training for teachers in rural high schools in Cuenca. Aligned with this data, teachers also specified the number of trainings they have received.

Figure 5

Number of Training Sessions in the Last Academic Year

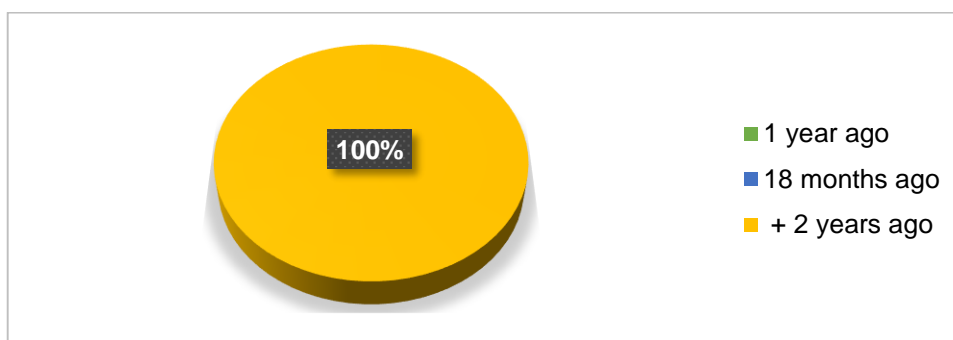


The illustration shows teachers who have received training in the 2021-2022 school year. Fourteen percent (14%) have had 1 session, fourteen percent (14%) have had 2 sessions, another fourteen percent (14%) have had 3 sessions, and fifty-seven percent (57%) have had more than four training sessions. In other words, most trained teachers can be up to date and improve personally and professionally in rural high schools because they attend trainings constantly.

In addition, the survey allowed to know the date of the last training of teachers who did not receive any training during the 2021-2022 school period.

Figure 6

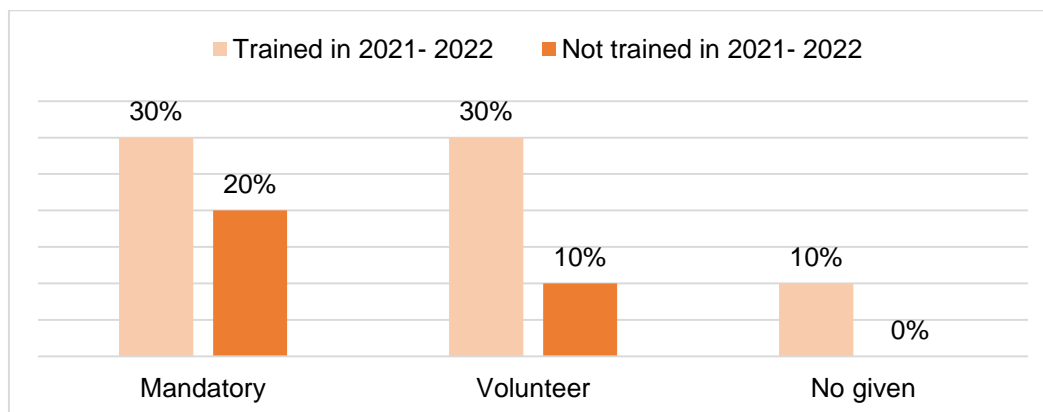
Last Training of Untrained Rural Teachers between 2021 and 2022



In this data, one hundred percent (100%) of the teachers who have not received training in the 2021-2022 school year agreed that the last capacitation was taken more than two years ago. This information represents that those untrained teachers need to adapt and improve their skills for suitable performance in their pedagogical practices. Similarly, surveyed teachers also specified other aspects related to the received instructions.

Figure 7

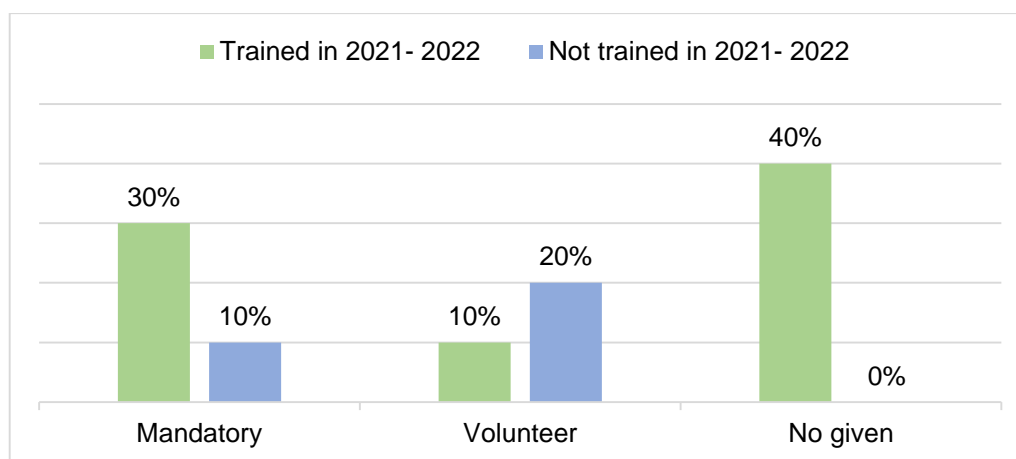
Training offered by the Ministry of Education for Rural Teachers



The figure illustrates teachers who received training from the Ministry of Education. A total of fifty percent (50%) of the surveyed teachers had to take mandatory training organized by the governmental institution. The bar graph does not differentiate whether rural teachers have received or not the instruction in the 2021- 2022 school year. Also, forty percent (40%) of the participants answered that the training was voluntary. Finally, only ten percent (10%) did not receive any training organized by the Ministry of Education. In general, the results show that regardless of whether teachers received mandatory or voluntary training, the Ministry of Education has made the effort to train the majority of rural high school teachers and has been concerned about keeping them updated and adequately trained.

Figure 8

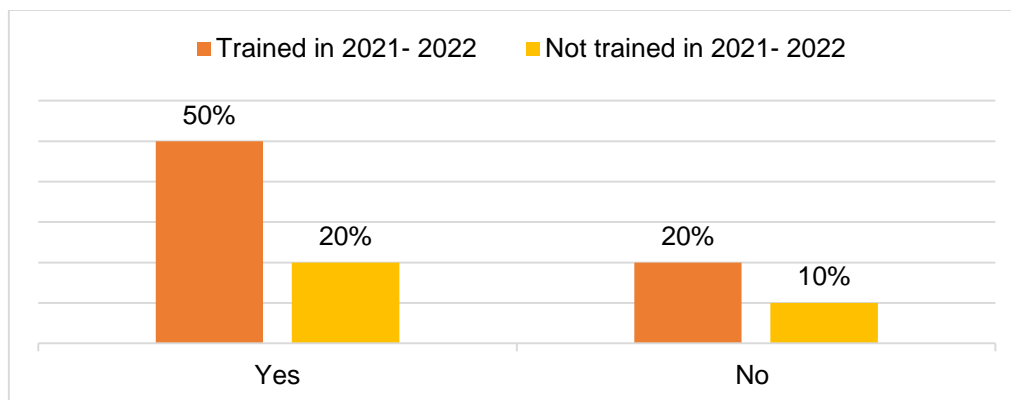
Training offered by Rural High Schools for their Teachers



The figure illustrates teachers who received training organized by their educational institutions. Regardless of the training period, forty percent (40%) of the surveyed teachers attended mandatory training while thirty percent (30%) voluntarily attended the training sessions. With regard to the teachers who voluntarily participated, twenty percent (20%) did not receive training in the 2021-2022 school year. Similarly, forty percent (40%) of the trained teachers did not receive the training organized by their educational institutions. In other words, although most rural teachers received training from the high schools where they work, it is not a remarkable amount. It is because less than half of the teachers received capacitation during the last school year. The results suggest that rural high schools should be more concerned about their English teachers so they can perform their responsibilities adequately and develop their sense of belonging.

Figure 9

Training Organized by the Rural Teachers Themselves

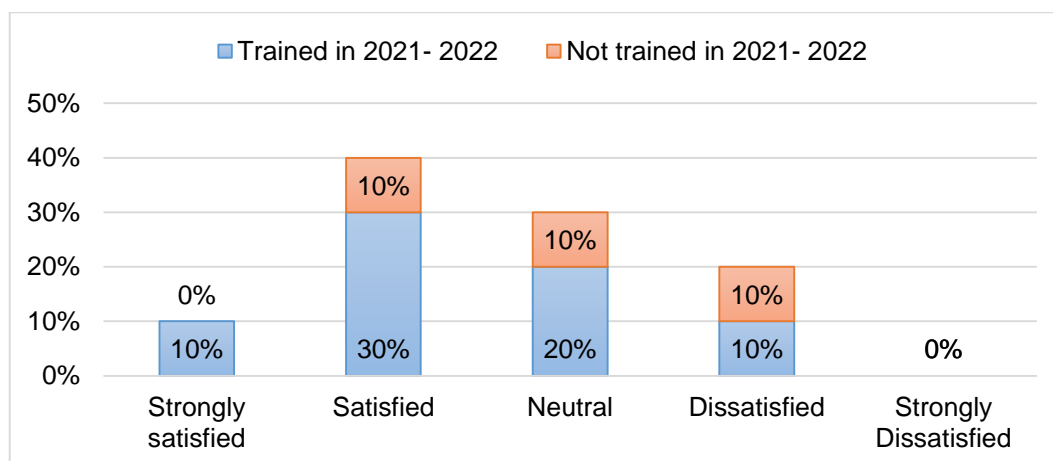


Note: This category refers to the percentage of teachers who voluntarily decided to take courses or seminars outside their institutions.

The graph reveals the percentage of teachers who have organized their own training. Seventy percent (70%) of them have trained themselves, of which fifty percent (50%) occurred in the 2021- 2022 school year. On the other hand, teachers who have not trained themselves account for thirty percent (30%), of which twenty percent (20%) correspond to teachers trained in the last school year. As an interpretation, rural teachers seek their own professional growth and the improvement of their educational practices.

Figure 10

Rural Teachers' Satisfaction Level with the Received Training



The figure shows teachers' satisfaction levels concerning the training received before and during the 2021-2022 school year. Data shows that in general teachers are satisfied with their training. Ten percent (10%) of teachers reported to be strongly satisfied while forty percent (40%) of teachers mentioned to be satisfied with this training. Only thirty percent (30%) of

teachers rated their training as neutral. Finally, twenty percent (20%) of teachers informed their training as dissatisfied. In general, the results reveal that most teachers received useful and necessary training for their work.

Table 2

Classification of training topics for English teachers in rural high schools

Approach	Topics	N° teachers	Percentage
Pedagogy	Methodology	2	20%
	Didactics	1	10%
	Assessment	1	10%
	Strategies for teaching in general	1	10%
	Teaching strategies for grammar	1	10%
Social Learning	Avoiding violence against women	1	10%
	Affective communication in the classroom	1	10%
ICTs	Virtual activities design	1	10%
	Use of Digital platforms	3	30%
Target Language	English course	1	10%
Special education	Special ability students and needs	2	20%
Research	Academic research projects	1	10%

Note. N= 10 English teachers

More than one answer per participant has been included in the table.

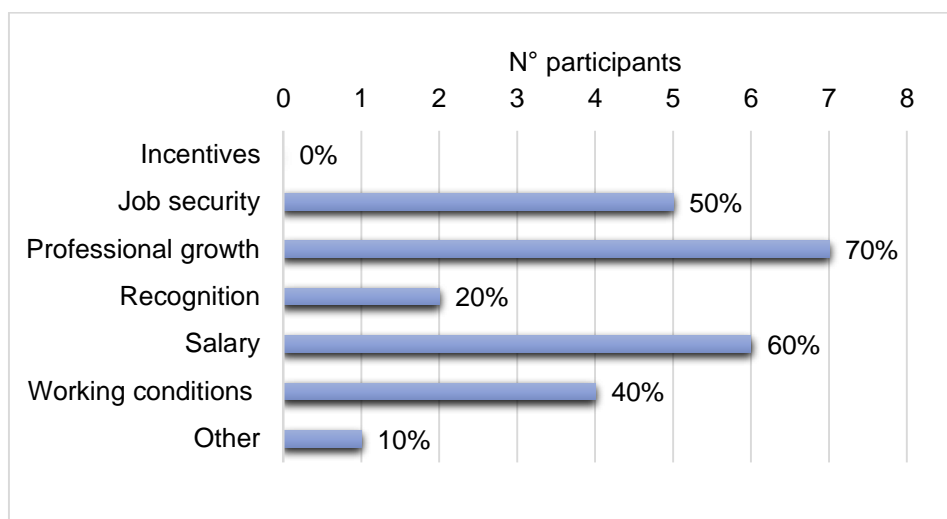
In table 2, English teachers mentioned the different training topics that they have received. This information has been categorized according to the focus of the training received. First, in the pedagogical approach, twenty percent (20%) of the teachers were trained in methodological issues while ten percent (10%) were trained on didactics for teaching English. Regarding assessment, table 2 shows that only one teacher, representing the 10% of the participants was trained in this aspect. Other topics were about strategies for teaching in general and for grammar teaching, representing ten percent (10%) and twenty percent (20%) of all teachers, respectively. With regard to the social learning approach encompassing topics such as avoiding violence against women and affective communication in the classroom, only two teachers, ten percent (10%) of participants, respectively, was trained in this aspect. Then, focusing on ICTs usage, teachers comprise ten percent (10%) of the participants who were trained in virtual activities design and thirty percent (30%) received capacitation for using digital platforms. Concerning the learning of English itself, only ten percent (10%) of the surveyed teachers mentioned having taken courses to improve the language. Afterwards, the percentage of participants in training on special educational needs is twenty percent (20%). Finally, only ten percent (10%) of teachers received training on research for educational

purposes, that is, the development of academic research projects. With all these data, it can be inferred that the use of digital platforms was the most demanded type of training in rural English teachers. The rationale for this focus may be that due to COVID-19, as teachers needed to know more about virtual classes and activities for virtual learning.

4. Motivation of English teachers

Figure 11

Labor Motivational Factors in Rural Teachers



Note. More than one answer per participant has been included in the bar graph.

The graph illustrates the factors that teachers regarded as helpful to stay motivated in their jobs. The highest percentage (70%) belongs to professional growth followed by salary, which represents sixty percent (60%) of the responses. Concerning security, fifty percent (50%) agreed that it is a key factor in maintaining their motivation. Other factors such as recognition and working conditions motivate twenty percent (20%) and forty percent (40%) of the surveyed teachers, respectively. Another motivational factor is helping young learners to become better people and professionals, with only ten percent (10%) of the participants. It means teachers find their greatest motivation in professional training and monetary aspects, while recognition is regarded as a less important factor. In short, it can be inferred that the majority of teachers in rural areas prioritize their professional growth.

Table 3*Teachers' Perceptions on Working Conditions*

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
1. Educational authorities should be more flexible regarding content covering.	1.8	Agree
2. Educational authorities should allow teachers more autonomy in their work.	1.8	Agree
3. Class sizes sometimes affect my teaching activities.	2	Agree
4. Teaching loads should be decreased to have more time for lesson planning, marking student assignments, etc.	2.5	Agree
5. I feel comfortable with my work schedule.	2	Agree

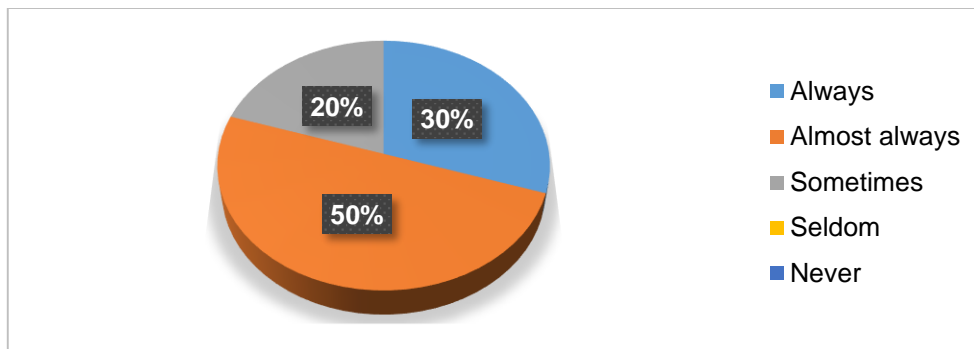
Note. Mean= 2.02 Interpretation of Likert Scale: 1.00-1.79= Strongly Satisfied vs 4.20-5.00= Strongly Dissatisfied

Table 3 describes the level of agreement of rural English teachers on their working conditions. The surveyed teachers agreed with all the indicators. The highest mean was 2.5 in indicator 4, regarding the teaching load adjustment which highlights that teachers do not feel comfortable with their work schedule for preparation and review of activities. It means that if there is an excessive workload, the teacher will experience emotional exhaustion and low motivation for teaching (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). Indicator 3, concerning the effects of class sizes, exposed that teachers manage a high number of students per classroom, which affects their performance considerably, while indicator 5, regarding the convenience of teachers' work schedules, contradicted the two previous indicators. It is evident that the teachers' time management was effective as they achieved a balance in their educational activities. Also, indicators 1 and 2, concerning teachers' work autonomy and flexibility from educational authorities with a mean of 1.8 each, which are the most remarkable means in the table, highlighted the great need to improve both aspects. It demonstrates the lack of improvement in the rules and regulations in the teachers' work system and the need for independence in their functions, as these directly affect their performance and job satisfaction.

In summary, rural teachers' main concerns are (1) the workload not related to classes; (2) the designated number of students per classroom; (3) the lack of flexibility from educational authorities; and (3) the lack of teachers' autonomy in their educational practices.

Figure 12

Rural High School Teachers' Motivation

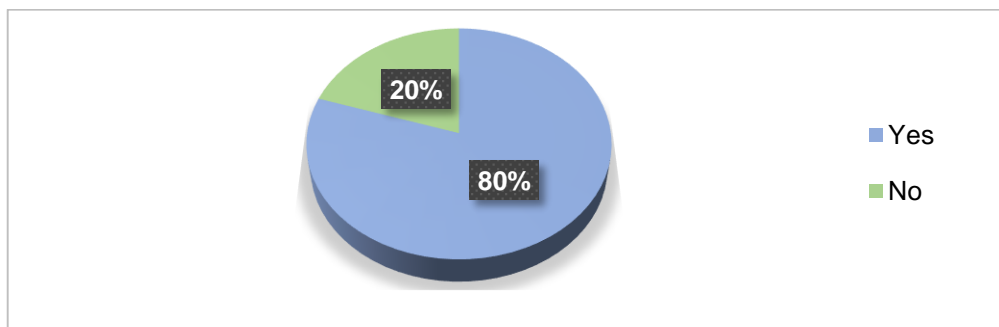


The graph exposes the level of motivation of rural teachers. It reveals that fifty percent (50%) of the surveyed English teachers are almost always motivated, thirty percent (30%) are always motivated, and twenty percent (20%) are sometimes motivated. It is important to mention that this question was applied at the end of the survey to obtain a more objective perception of teachers' motivation. It means that the majority of English teachers in rural high schools in Cuenca are mostly motivated in their jobs and teaching practices.

5. Motivation of students

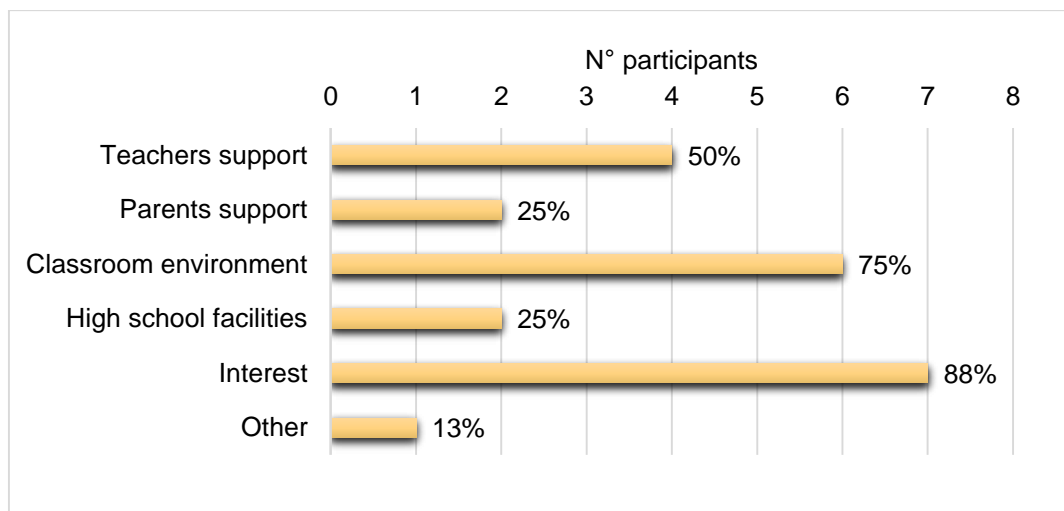
Figure 13

Rural Teachers' Perception on Students' Motivation



The graph shows that eighty percent (80%) of the rural English teachers consider their students are motivated, and twenty percent (20%) regard their students as not motivated. This data supports the premise that English teachers work in a positive environment where students are active in their learning process.

These results allow the questioning of the reasons for students' motivation and demotivation.

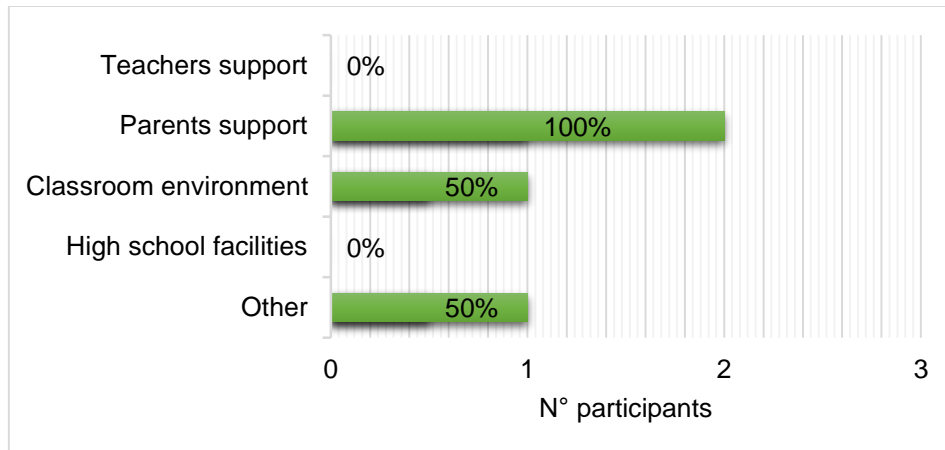
Figure 14*Teachers' Perceptions on Students' Motivational Factors*

Note. More than one answer per participant has been included in the bar graph.

The teachers who established their students were motivated in the English classes exposed the possible reasons. In the graph, the highest percentage of teachers, eighty-eight percent (88%), pointed to students' interest as the most relevant motivating factor. Another possible reason was classroom environment, in which seventy-five percent (75%) of the teachers agreed to this motivational factor as essential. Other fifty percent (50%) of teachers considered their students were motivated because of the support teachers provided, and twenty-five percent (25%) indicated that parental support was also an influencing factor. Another twenty-five percent (25%) of them considered that high school facilities influenced students' motivation. Finally, thirteen percent (13%) of teachers established the desire for personal improvement as a motivational factor in learners. This information shows that students may have more intrinsic motivation (personal interest) than extrinsic motivation (external factors) for learning the target language.

Figure 15

Reasons for Students' Demotivation from Teachers' Perspective



Note. More than one answer per participant has been included in the bar graph.

The graph shows the possible factors for the students' lack of motivation from their teachers' point of view, considering that their students are not motivated in their English classes. This group of teachers agreed, one hundred percent (100%), that it was because of parental support. Another reason was classroom environment, with fifty percent (50%) of teachers agreeing to this indicator. In addition, fifty percent (50%) of the teachers coincided that there was one key factor that had to be considered as well: the lack of interest that learners show in their own improvement of the English language. The above data proved that for the English teachers their students were unmotivated due to a lack of intrinsic motivation.

6. Language exposure

Table 4

High School Students' English Classes per Week

Days per week	Hours per week	Percentage
1-2 days	+5 hours	10%
3-4 days	3-4 hours	50%
	+5 hours	10%
+ 4 days	+ 5 hours	30%

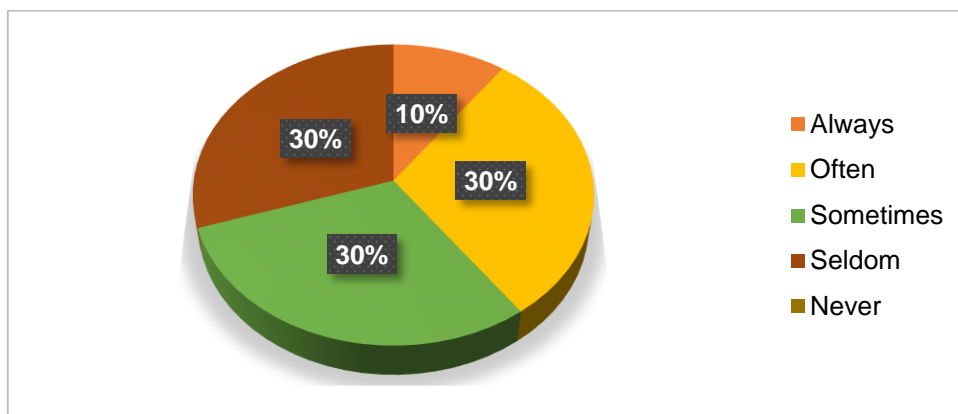
Note. N= 10 English teachers 1 Hour= 40 minutes

Table 4 shows the frequency of conducting classes by rural English teachers during the workweek. Fifty percent (50%) of the teachers teach from 3 to 4 days a week with a schedule of 3 to 4 hours per week. Ten percent (10%) of them teach for more than 5 hours during the same number of days a week. Only thirty percent (30%) of the teachers teach more than 5

hours a week. For more than 5 hours per week, ten percent (10%) of the teachers teach their lessons for 1 to 2 days. This information allows the interpretation that only half of the surveyed teachers do not comply with the schedule established by the Ministry of Education. It means that authorities need to adjust and enforce the regulations imposed on education that establish that English teachers in public institutions should teach 5 hours a week. In sum, the results show that the time students devote for their learning of the English language is not similar and thus this inequality in learning between different groups can cause a detriment in their learning.

Figure 16

English Rural Teachers' Use of L1 in English Classes



The pie graph shows the English teachers frequency of Spanish usage in their classes. Ten percent (10%) of teachers always use Spanish, thirty percent (30%) of the respondents use it frequently, and another thirty percent (30%) use it sometimes. The rest, thirty percent (30%) of the teachers, seldom uses Spanish. This graph makes it possible to ensure that rural high school students do not have considerable exposure to the English language since most teachers use Spanish during their classes.

Table 5

English Teachers' Rationale for Using Spanish in the EFL Classroom

Situation	Percentage
New topic introduction	20%
Clarifying doubts	30%
Developing all stages of a class lesson	10%
Presenting a new grammar structure	20%
Feedback	10%
Other topics	10%

Note. N=10 English teachers

In table 5, the surveyed teachers stated the cases in which they have used Spanish into their classes. The results show that teachers, thirty percent (30%), have used this language mostly to clarify doubts to students with examples, explanations, and instructions on the activities to be carried out. Twenty percent (20%) of teachers mentioned that they preferred to use Spanish to introduce new topics while another twenty percent (20%) have taught grammatical structures through learners' L1. A small percentage of teachers have used Spanish to (1) develop all the stages of a class lesson; (2) give feedback; and (3) make announcements with ten percent (10%) each. In general terms, students interact with the target language only when they carry out activities, since teachers mostly use Spanish for the other class stages.

There is a relationship between figure 16 and table 5 concerning the use of Spanish (L1) in the EFL classroom. The data in figure 16 and table 5 reveal that the majority of teachers in rural secondary schools use the Spanish language in specific situations, which do not affect their students' learning of the target language. These situations are: presenting a new grammar structure, clarifying doubts, giving feedback, introducing a new topic and making announcements. Although the use of Spanish is favorable to EFL students, it is important that they have constant exposure to the target language during classes (Latsanyphone & Bouangeune, 2009; Sharma, 2010).

7. Students' grammar knowledge

Table 6

Rural Teachers' Perspective on Common Students' Mistakes

Category	Specified Mistake	Percentage
Agreement errors	Subject/Verb agreement	30%
Grammar Tense errors	Using verbs for mood	70%
	Verb tenses	
Number errors	Singular/Plural form	40%
Prepositional errors	Use of prepositions	40%
Articles errors	Use of articles	30%
Word errors	Missing words	50%
	Wrong/ Misused word	
Spelling	Letter agreement	50%
Sentence construction	Word order	80%

Note. N=10 English teachers

More than one answer per participant has been included in the table.

Table 6 reveals the most common grammatical errors made by rural school students from their teachers' perspective. These errors have been classified into eight categories: (1) sentence construction and (2) tense errors are the most common problems according to eighty percent (80%) and seventy percent (70%) of English teachers. Concerning (3) word errors and (4) spelling errors, they are both very common among students, representing fifty percent (50%) of teachers' responses, respectively. With regard to (5) errors in number, (6) prepositional errors, (7) article errors and (8) agreement, results show that they are the least frequent type of error, representing less than forty percent (40%).

In particular, rural English teachers face difficulties in teaching as their students have problems remembering and applying grammatical rules and patterns. Some errors presented were taught in previous years, so teachers must be properly prepared for students to reach the level required by the national curricular parameters.

With regard to table 7, the surveyed teachers gave examples of these situations, which list is in the table below showing the lack of reinforcement on grammatical knowledge.

Table 7

Examples of Common Grammatical Errors of Rural High School Students

Grammatical mistake	Example
Subject/Verb Agreement	The children is play in the patio.
	She do homework.
	She live in Baños.
Regular/ Irregular Verb Awareness	They eated pizza.
Spelling	She has ben in the park
	Father = fader
	Sister = sisther
Sentence Construction	Three = tree
	The is cat brown
	Woman beautiful is

8. Resources and equipment satisfaction

Table 8

Rural Teachers' Satisfaction Level on Equipment and Resources

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
1. Financial resources for instruction are adequate.	3.9	Dissatisfied

2. Resources and materials/ equipment for my classroom(s) are sufficiently available.	3.7	Dissatisfied
3. Computers and other kind of technology for my classroom(s) are sufficiently available.	4.1	Dissatisfied
4. The high school facilities (buildings and grounds) are in optimal conditions.	3.6	Dissatisfied

Note. Mean= 3.8 Interpretation of Likert Scale: 1.00-1.79= Strongly Satisfied vs 4.20-5.00= Strongly Dissatisfied

Table 8 shows English teachers' satisfaction level with the equipment and resources in rural secondary schools. The overall mean of 3.8 categorizes all of the indicators listed at a level of teacher dissatisfaction. The highest mean of 4.1 is in indicator 3, concerning the suitable amount of technological resources. This indicator is the most relevant since it tends to be strongly dissatisfactory for the surveyed teachers. It allows to show that rural institutions do not have adequate electronic equipment for teaching. Then, indicators 1 and 2, with averages of 3.9 and 3.7, respectively, regarding the resources and materials of the educational institutions, show that there is no significant investment by the Ministry of Education, and that the materials are insufficient for the teaching and learning process. Indicator 4, referring to the need of repairing in high school facilities with a mean of 3.6, demonstrates that the facilities of the educational institutions are not in optimal conditions for the proper development of the students.

These results established that rural high schools in Cuenca had problems with the resources and equipment in their classrooms, specifically for the subject of English. As described above, most teachers had a negative opinion about the financial resources invested for instruction, the availability of resources, materials, equipment, and technological instruments. Finally, regarding the infrastructure of the rural educational institutions, they are not totally adequate.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Recommendations

5. 1 Conclusions

Teaching English in rural areas has been challenging for several teachers all around the world (Alam, 2016; Alam & Farid, 2011; Bame, 1991; Benell & Akeampong, 2007; Chadán, 2017; Chang et. al., 2017; Evans, 1998; Holguin & Morales. 2016; Hossain, 2016; Ortega & Fernández, 2017; Olleta, 2013; Rodrigues, 2012; Sharim, 2019; Shikalepo, 2019; Tanaka, 2010; Velázquez, 2019; Wulandari, 2019, among others). Similarly, teachers in rural high schools in Cuenca, Ecuador, face several challenges in teaching English as a foreign language. Therefore, one of the objectives of this descriptive research was to identify the challenges that English teachers face when teaching students in rural high schools in Cuenca. According to the findings described and analyzed in the previous chapter, this study can conclude that all participants encountered problems regarding various factors, but some generated more concerns among teachers than others.

First, resources and equipment are indispensable in an EFL classroom, and the government, according to the Ministry of Education, guarantees their delivery to all public educational institutions, including rural high schools. However, the participants in this study described that the financial resources for rural high schools are insufficient and may cause detriment to students' optimal learning. Furthermore, the results suggest that rural high schools do not have sufficient resources and materials such as computers and other technological devices that are necessary for their English classes. In other words, the resources and equipment for teaching English are limited. Hence, some teachers pointed out the need for repairs in their classrooms and their furniture; thus, highlighting that infrastructure was also a factor that affected their teaching work.

Second, the constant challenges in teaching demand teachers to be prepared and updated for this task. Therefore, this may lead the actors within the educational system to train teachers according to these demands, but unfortunately teachers' reported perceptions in this study show they are not satisfied with the training they have received. Indeed, few teachers were trained in pedagogy-related topics such as methodology, didactics, assessment and teaching strategies. In other words, there is a deficit in the updating of the themes related to teaching methods, strategies and techniques. This is detrimental to language teaching as these topics do not only help the transfer of teaching skills but also contribute to the motivation of the students in their learning process.

Third, students learn English appropriately when they are exposed to English frequently. According to what the Ministry of Education establishes, students in public schools, including rural institutions, must take five hours of English a week. Although this number of hours is

covered, students' exposure to the language has not been fully achieved. It may be attributed to the fact that educators use their L1, Spanish, for most stages during the classes. Generally, most of the rural students' relatives are not English speakers, so it is essential that they have more interaction with the target language in the classroom (Sharmin, 2019). It is important, however, to point out that Spanish can be used when necessary, i.e. teachers can use their L1 for explanations, grammar structure teaching, new topics introduction, among others (De la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Shabaka-Fernandez, 2021).

Fourth, teachers' reported perceptions about students' grammatical knowledge of the English language reveals that students' level of proficiency is not appropriate for the levels in which they are immersed, which may affect their optimal language development. According to the national English curriculum, high school students should have at least an A2.2 level, but this aspect was not reflected on teachers' points of view and assumptions. In the survey, teachers foregrounded that students are more likely to confuse sentence constructions and tenses and misuse words. Furthermore, aspects such as subject-verb agreement, use of singular and plural forms and use of prepositions and articles make teaching in rural areas even more challenging for teachers. This becomes a huge limitation as teachers in the baccalaureate level of rural high schools cannot continue with the planning, since students come with a very low level of English knowledge, a situation that has become a frequent issue in rural settings (Cuong, 2021; Halik & Nusrath, 2020; Milon, 2016).

Fifth, most teachers did not report being motivated in their work and this allowed the researcher of this study to explore the different aspects that may be leading teachers to feel demotivated. In the first place, authorities' lack of flexibility regarding the amount of content that is expected to be covered during the school year is a key factor that demotivates teachers. According to rural teachers' perceptions regarding work conditions, it can be inferred that teachers require the support of flexible authorities who can understand that rural settings have a lot of limitations that prevent teachers from following a rigid educational system and its demands. In the second place, teachers' lack of autonomy for their educational practices is another key demotivating factor. From teachers' perspective, educational authorities have imposed many rules and restrictions that affect their work performance. The degree of teachers' autonomy impacts different facts within the teaching profession such as teacher stress, teacher professionalism, teacher empowerment, job satisfaction and the desire to remain in the profession (La Ganza, 2008; Pearson & Moomaw, 2006). In the third place, another demotivating factor for teachers is the number of students assigned per class. In this research, the surveyed teachers showed their dissatisfaction related to class size. For most rural teachers, large classes imply a challenge to find efficient ways and time to communicate with students, to manage the class, to elaborate the materials to be used, to assess their

performance, among other things (Aoumeur, 2017; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010). In the fourth place, the schedules assigned to teachers is another factor that affects their motivation. This allows inferring that teachers have many periods to teach. This situation contributes greatly to the lack of effective teaching as it makes it difficult for them to construct knowledge in such a way that students perform well in the subject (Mosha, 2014). In the fifth place, large teaching loads also affect rural teachers. Teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the time available for lesson planning, assignments development, and other activities unrelated to teaching a class. This causes teachers to experience stress during their professional practices, affecting students' language acquisition or learning (Renganathan, 2021).

Sixth, student motivation is essential in language learning. While rural students were attributed as unmotivated in English learning, teachers' perception in this study was different, that is, most of them considered their students were motivated. According to teachers, students' motivation highly depends on their interest in language learning, teacher support, and the classroom environment. Gardner (2006), Suleiman (1999) and Mosha (2014) argued the importance of student motivation in learning a foreign language since a motivated student learns adequately and effectively. Instead, demotivated students would have a slow learning which would affect the practices of teachers.

Other challenges evaluated in the survey were related to the accessibility of English teachers to their workplace, the social relationships within the high school, and the training frequency. These did not present significant aspects that contributed to the vision of the research because teachers' perceptions were mostly positive among them. Regarding high school localization, teachers did not have inconveniences of access. Although this is considered a challenge (Holguin & Morales, 2015; Juarez, 2017), rural teachers in Cuenca did not agree to this statement. Social relationships among colleagues are also considered a challenge for teachers (Bota, 2013; Oco, 2022; Vaquilar, 2018); however, the surveyed teachers did not show to have problems in this aspect as they were satisfied with the indicators raised. Finally, regarding the lack of training provided to rural English teachers, Alam (2016), Hossain (2016) and Wulandari (2019) exposed that rural teachers are mostly neglected by the government and must adapt to changes without any prior guidance. In contrast, teachers in Cuenca were mostly trained in the 2020- 2021 school year. This can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic as the most demanded topics were related to ICTs. In addition, these trainings were organized by the Ministry of Education, the schools themselves or teachers' own initiatives. This allows inferring that teachers did not receive training in the last school year, so they had to adapt to the needs of students without external support.

Another objective of this work was to identify relationships between teachers' demographic features and the major challenges encountered. As mentioned above, the most considerable

challenge for rural teachers was related to the availability of resources and equipment in the educational institutions in which they work. Therefore, a relationship can be established between resources limitations and teachers' professional experience, as six out of ten teachers with more than ten years of experience were not satisfied with the available resources for teaching and learning the target language.

Another considerable challenge was the limited amount of training received on teaching-related topics. Some teachers did not receive training from the Ministry of Education or any educational institutions, so they had to take external courses voluntarily. There may have been drawbacks because their salary (\$601 to \$1000) may not be adequate to take such courses. In addition, it is possible that the Covid-19 pandemic and the family expenses it entailed may have played a role.

Finally, the level of grammatical knowledge of rural students was considered another challenge for rural teachers. In this research, teachers pointed out that their students commonly have problems with sentence construction, tenses, and word usage, which evidences a low level of grammatical knowledge in rural students and the need for teachers to be properly prepared to face these problems in their work practices. At this point, we can establish a correlation between grammatical problems and teachers' preferences to use students' L1 in their classes. We can therefore infer that the incorporation of the L1 can be related to less exposure to the target language and less understanding of the grammar structures of the target language.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the results of this descriptive research, two recommendations can be established. First, support for rural educational institutions should be more rigorous on the part of the competent entities, since problems persist in terms of resources and infrastructure. In addition, the constitution guarantees education as a right as thus the government should focus on achieving it, prioritizing both urban and rural areas. And second, there is a need to conduct primary studies in Ecuador regarding the limitations of teaching English in rural settings and their implications for the Ecuadorian education system in general.

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Annexes

Annex A. Survey Questions for the Rural High School Teachers

Demographic information

Age (number):

Gender:

Feminine

Masculine

Other

Marital status:

Single

Married

Divorced

Other

Academic degree:

Bachelor degree

College degree

Master degree

Doctoral degree

Working experience (number):

My home is located at an/a:

Urban area

Rural area

Institution location satisfaction

- **Do you consider that the institution is located in an accessible place?**

Yes

No

- **The distance between the institution and my current home is feasible.**

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

Social relationships

- **In general, what is your job like most of the time?**

Good
 Undesirable
 Better than most
 Disagreeable
 Make me content
 Excellent
 Enjoyable
 Poor

- **Mark your level of satisfaction for the following statements.**

Indicator	Strongly satisfied 1	Satisfied 2	Neutral 3	Dissatisfied 4	Strongly dissatisfied 5
There is a sense of fun in high school.	1	2	3	4	5
There is a sense of family in high school.	1	2	3	4	5
My colleagues are warm.	1	2	3	4	5
My colleagues are friendly.	1	2	3	4	5
My colleagues are cooperative (i.e., they engage in solving problems, collaborate in academic activities, among others)	1	2	3	4	5
I easily get along with my colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5

Colleagues trust each other in high school.	1	2	3	4	5
I consider this high school has a healthy working environment.	1	2	3	4	5

Education training

- **Have you participated in training courses in your institution during this school year?**

Yes ___ No ___

If the answer is yes,

How many training sessions have you received?

- ___ 1
- ___ 2
- ___ 3
- ___ +4

Mention the topics of the different trainings I have received:

I received training organized by the Ministry of Education.

- ___ Mandatory
- ___ Volunteer
- ___ No given

I received training organized by the educational institution.

- ___ Mandatory
- ___ Volunteer
- ___ No given

I received training organized by myself.

- ___ Yes
- ___ No

How would you rate the course(s) received?

- ___ Strongly satisfied
- ___ Satisfied
- ___ Neutral
- ___ Dissatisfied
- ___ Strongly Dissatisfied

If the answer is no,

How long ago did you receive your last training?

- 1 year
- 1 year and 6 months
- + 2 years

Mention the topics of the training received

I received training organized by the Ministry of education.

- Mandatory
- Volunteer
- No given

I received training organized by the educational institution.

- Mandatory
- Volunteer
- No given

I received training organized by myself.

- Yes
- No

How do you rate the course(s) received?

- Strongly satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Strongly Dissatisfied

Motivation

- **Which of the following factors keep you motivated in your job? (Choose more than one)**

- Salary
- Job security
- Working conditions
- Recognition
- Professional growth
- Incentives
- Other:

- **Mark the interval that is appropriate for your salary.**

- ___ <\$100
- ___ \$200- \$300
- ___ \$301- \$ 400
- ___ \$401- \$ 500
- ___ \$501- \$600
- ___ \$601-\$700
- ___ \$701- \$800
- ___ \$801- \$900
- ___ \$901-\$1000
- ___ >\$1001

- **Indicate to what extent you agree to the following statements.**

Item	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Neutral 3	Disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5
Educational authorities should be more flexible regarding content covering.	1	2	3	4	5
Educational authorities should allow teachers more autonomy in their work.	1	2	3	4	5
Class sizes sometimes affect my teaching activities.	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching loads should be decreased to have more time for lesson planning, marking student assignments, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel comfortable with my work schedule.	1	2	3	4	5

Students' motivation

- **Do you think your students are motivated?**

Yes

No

If the answer is yes, mark the possible reasons.

Interest

High school facilities

Classroom environment

Parents support

Teachers support

Other:

If the answer is no, mark the possible reasons.

High school facilities

Classroom environment

Parents support

Teachers support

Other

Language Exposure

- **How many days a week do your high school students take English classes?**

1-2 days

3-4 days

+4 days

- **How many hours a week do your high school students take English classes?**

1 hour

2 hours

3 - 4 hours

+5 hours

- **I use Spanish to teach English to my students.**

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

- Please, explain the reasons why:

Students' Grammar Knowledge

- What are the most common grammatical mistakes that your students have?

- ___ Sentence construction
- ___ Singular/Plural form
- ___ Subject/Verb agreement
- ___ Verb tenses
- ___ Use of prepositions
- ___ Use of articles
- ___ Spelling
- ___ Verb form (mood)
- ___ Missing word
- ___ Wrong/Misused word
- ___ Other:

Institutional Resources and Equipment

- Please, rate each of the following statements

Item	Strongly Satisfied 1	Satisfied 2	Neutral 3	Dissatisfied 4	Strongly Dissatisfied 5
Financial resources for instruction are adequate.	1	2	3	4	5
Resources and materials/ equipment for my classroom(s) are sufficiently available.	1	2	3	4	5
Computers and other kinds of technology for	1	2	3	4	5

my classroom(s) are sufficiently available.					
The high school facilities (buildings and grounds) is in optimal conditions.	1	2	3	4	5

After having answered all the questions, can you say that you are a motivated English teacher?

- Always
- Almost always
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never