

## Diagnostic of the current situation with native English-speaking students in EFL classes

*Diagnóstico de la situación actual con estudiantes nativo hablantes del inglés en clases de inglés*

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**Palabras**

**claves:** nativos hablantes del inglés, hablantes de lengua heredada del inglés, clases obligatorias de inglés, estudiantes de inglés como segundo idioma, inglés, Cuenca.

**Keywords:**

native English speaker, heritage language learner, EFL, compulsory English classes, English learner, English, Cuenca..

**Resumen****Introducción.**

**Introducción.** Este estudio pretende diagnosticar el número de hablantes nativos y de lengua heredada del inglés en clases obligatorias de inglés como lengua extranjera en el sistema educativo de Cuenca. **Objetivo.** Se pretende que a través de esta investigación se analicen las percepciones de los nativos hablantes y de lengua heredada del inglés desde su propia perspectiva y la de los profesores en cuanto a aspectos de comportamiento en el aula, 5 habilidades lingüísticas vistas desde cada uno de los actores, y se discutan los posibles problemas, así como las futuras áreas de investigación. **Metodología.** Para ello, se encuestaron 12 colegios diferentes (7 privados, 3 fiscomisionales y 2 públicos) con la finalidad de determinar si existe o no un número significativo de estos dos tipos de alumnos. **Resultados.** Este diagnóstico sirve para identificar los siguientes aspectos: (1) existe un número considerable de hablantes de inglés nativos y de lengua heredada en Cuenca que estudian principalmente en colegios privados. (2) Este estudio puede servir de base para futuras investigaciones que analicen los aspectos afectivos y las otras percepciones en el aula (incluyendo las opiniones de los compañeros no nativos). Otro aspecto que se concluye es que (3) futuros estudios deberían abordar elementos que tienen que ver con lo que ocurre con las habilidades lingüísticas de los hablantes de inglés por herencia y nativos una vez que se trasladan a un país donde el español es la lengua dominante. Por último, (4) se necesitan estrategias que ayuden a los profesores a enfrentarse a clases con alumnos mixtos.

**Abstract**

**Introduction.** This study attempts to diagnose the number of both native and heritage language speakers of English in EFL compulsory classes in the educational system in Cuenca. **Objective.** It is intended that through this piece of research, perceptions about NES and HLS of English students from their own outlook and teachers' standpoint are analyzed in terms of classroom behavioral aspects, five language abilities as seen from each stakeholder, and potential problems, as well as future and further areas of research, are discussed. **Methodology.** To do this, twelve different schools (7 private, three semi-private, and two public) were surveyed to find out whether there is a considerable number of these two populations of students.

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Results. This diagnostic serves to identify the following aspects: (1) There is a considerable number of Native and Heritage language speakers of English in Cuenca studying in private schools. (2) This study can be used as a bedrock for future and further research which analyzes affective aspects and classroom perceptions (including non-native peers' opinions). Another aspect concluded is that (3) future studies should address elements that have to do with what happens with the language abilities of the heritage and native speakers of English once they move to a country where Spanish is the language of dominance. Finally, (4) there is a need for strategies to help teachers deal with mixed-learner classes.

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## **Introduction**

### *Difficulties in EFL classes*

#### *EFL teachers*

English is a language taught all over the world nowadays and such a trivial issue always allows problems to emerge. EFL and ESL classes are full of issues that need to be addressed all at once. Teachers have been in the spotlight of researchers as they represent one of the key factors in the learning process. Similarly, one of the main concerns has been the nativeness aspect. For instance, the pros and cons of having Native and Nonnative English-speaking teachers in EFL classes (Agudo & Robinson, 2014; Árvá & Medgyes, 2000; Farrell, 2015; Florence, 2012; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Levis et al. 2016; Llurda, 2004, Medgyes, 2001; Pae, 2017; Villalobos, 2011; Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012; Tajeddin & Adeh, 2016; Wang, 2013).

In Ecuador, most teachers are non-native speakers and from those, the majority does not meet the minimum requirements to teach the language (Sevy-Biloon, 2019). This represents a hindrance to English language teaching in the country. According to Florence (2012), NNESTs (nonnative English-speaking teachers) pose different linguistic problems. They have been shown to have unnatural accents, wrong stress patterns, and inaccurate word choices in several language contexts. Such features of the language are passed down to students creating inaccurate and unnatural language patterns. Nonetheless, in two pieces of research by Levis et al. (2016) and Farrell (2015), it has been determined that the aspects regarding the places where teachers are from do not matter at least to a meaningful extent when teaching English in EFL classes. This, of course, happens provided the non-native English-speaking teachers have a proficient

level of English. In that given case, they can teach the language adequately and just as a native speaker would. Thus, a way of solving this problem would be having teachers who show proficient language use leading English classes. Once this problem has been tackled, some other issues start to become more apparent. Those have to do with the other side of language teaching, the students.

#### *Mixed level classes among other aspects regarding students*

EFL classes in schools in Ecuador are packed with students who have diverse needs. Not only do teachers need to deal with mixed-level classes, but they also are confronted with students who have different language needs. L2 learners in English classes in Ecuador have different language proficiency levels which sometimes ends up provoking a lack of motivation in students for classes being either not challenging enough or too difficult to grasp what the teacher tries to explain. Additionally, due to a considerable number of Ecuadorian returnees from the USA, English-speaking people whose children were raised in our country, and people who have come from English-speaking countries to live here, EFL teachers from Ecuador have students who are native English speakers and heritage language speakers in their classes. Such reality has become more evident in the “Austro” area of Ecuador (i.e., Azuay, Cañar, and Morona Santiago), and especially in Cuenca (Abainza & Calfat, 2018). Given that researchers in Ecuador have not addressed the aspect, this research pretends to diagnose whether this factor poses a significant problem in the teaching field. On this basis, some things need to be discussed. First, there must be a semantic differentiation of the terms L2 learners, heritage language speakers, and native English speakers.

#### *The student*

##### *Native Speakers, heritage language speakers, and L2 or EF learners.*

Making a differentiation between these three individuals becomes important at this point. The definition of a native speaker is straightforward. Cook (2012) compiles some opinions from different authors and mentions that a native speaker is a person that speaks a language from an early age and that possesses some subconscious mastery of it (e.g., knowledge of rules, capability to produce the language fluently, natural lexis choice among others). A second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) learner is a person who studies a language for a variety of purposes. They are people that for one reason or the other have decided to take up a foreign language and who may or may not have formally enrolled in the educational system. Camus and Adrada-Rafael (2015), compare the writing abilities between heritage language speakers and L2 students. They suggest that proficient L2 learners possess conscious and mechanical knowledge of a language like rules, writing system, and a deep understanding of controlled and artificial contexts where the language can be used. Finally, a heritage language speaker is a person whose language

experience started at an early age at home. This allows them to acquire characteristics like the natural pronunciation of language fluency in familiar contexts (Torres, 2013). These people, however, have extremely limited opportunities to use the language in a natural context. Somehow, they end up sharing characteristics from both L2 learners and native speakers. As opposed to native speakers of a language, whose lexis knowledge tends to be limited, and just like L2 learners they may make unnatural word choices when interacting.

Understanding these three groups of people can help us have a better insight into what many teachers currently must deal with. In Ecuador, every teacher has undergone, at least once, what it feels like to teach English native speakers and heritage language speakers of English in compulsory EFL classes in high schools. Though, this aspect has not been investigated yet. An insight into this can be taken from studies conducted in countries where this has been a constant issue for many more years.

#### *Heritage language speakers and native speakers in second language classes*

In his case study Chick (2008), analyzes different perspectives a native English-speaking student has towards the educational system in Hong Kong as well as the outlook he has on EFL classes. Furthermore, the researcher states that the problem of having native English speakers in language classes is increasing, and given that currently, globalization is much more common everywhere, this situation is far from being overcome. Without a shadow of a doubt, one of the most important findings of this study is how the native speaker sees his nonnative peers, his teachers, and the educational system in general. Apart from that, although a native speaker is fluent in the language, knowledge of things that are usually evaluated in language classes, such as grammar or appropriate use of lexis come naturally. However, many educational systems require students to know more about the language (i.e., grammar rules) than how to use it to communicate. Chick (2008) also provides the standpoints of a nonnative English speaker who is a proficient user of the language regarding how it feels to have a native speaker as a classmate. In some cases, he reported he felt inhibited to speak in front of his native English-speaking classmate. This poses an obstacle for regular class development. To conclude, this paper also provides some insightful information on what might happen to a native English speaker who stops using the language daily. The native speaker mentions that his relatives have noticed some type of change in his normal accent as well as some changes in his natural use of the language which may indicate some sort of language attrition.

#### **Methodology**

The present study is a diagnostic conducted in Cuenca. To obtain information for it, different techniques that belong to both qualitative and quantitative types of research have been used. Surveys were applied to different members of the educational system starting

with principals or pedagogic coordinators, to later move on to teachers, and finally, applying surveys to students. It has been determined that getting information from twenty different schools in Cuenca would give meaningful and reliable data to resort to and generalize. The instruments of this study were applied in various parts and to different targets. The first part was used to know the exact number of both native English speakers (hereafter NES) and heritage language speakers (hereafter HLS) in the selected school. Obtaining at least one student who belongs to any of these two categories; the second part will be administered to teachers to identify what things have been done to instruct those students, and whether they have represented a challenge in their classes. The third part of this process was to apply some surveys to the native English-speaking students and heritage language students of English to find out how they have dealt with compulsory EFL classes.

Being this, solely, a diagnostic of the current situation of the previously stated groups, no names of any institution are displayed. Additionally, for this research twenty schools were selected randomly in Cuenca. Nonetheless, some of them have not kept records of whether the students are native English speakers or Heritage language speakers of English. For that reason, they decided not to participate in the present investigation. In the end, twelve schools (7 private, three semi-private, and two public schools) took part in the data collection process, and from the obtained data, results were broken down. It is worth highlighting that all the people who answered the survey were asked to do it voluntarily. The main question of this research is: Is there a considerable number of native English-speaking students to pose an educational challenge in compulsory EFL classes in Cuenca? The subsidiary inquiries are: how are native English speakers and heritage language speakers of English perceived by teachers, and themselves? what are the current methods which educators are utilizing to address this situation in their classrooms? can the information obtained be used to establish a well-grounded baseline as well as areas of future research?

## Results

To present results in an accessible manner, data have been analyzed by members of the educational community targeted for this research. Starting with the number of NES and HLS of English in the schools that participated in the data collection process to have a general idea of the numbers of students who belong to the aimed studied group. Thereafter, a more detailed diagnostic is presented. It pinpoints three distinct aspects; the first one is an analysis of the classroom environment and behavioral aspects of the students as well as teachers whenever NES and HLS of English are part of the students' population; the second aspect deals with language abilities and the perceived capacities NES and HLS of English have as reported by themselves and their instructors. Lastly, a description of potential challenges that must be faced by different members of the

educational community. This latter aspect will shed light on future areas of research as well as deeper and further research.

### General overview

**Table 1**

*Number of Native and Heritage language speakers of English in EFL classes*

	Type of School	Total # Ss	NES and HLS	Percent
School 1	Private	750	35	4.66%
School 2	Private	800	30	3.75%
School 3	Private	900	Unknown	0%
School 4	Semi-private	1071	0	0%
School 5	Public	1500	6	0.4%
School 6	Semi-private	1200	Unknown*	0%
School 7	Public	850	3	0.35%
School 8	Private	664	8	1.2%
School 9	Semi-private	1800	0	0%
School 10	Private	1500	4	0.26%
School 11	Private	1900	10	0.66%
School 12	Private	1500	100	6.66%
Total		14435	197	1.36%

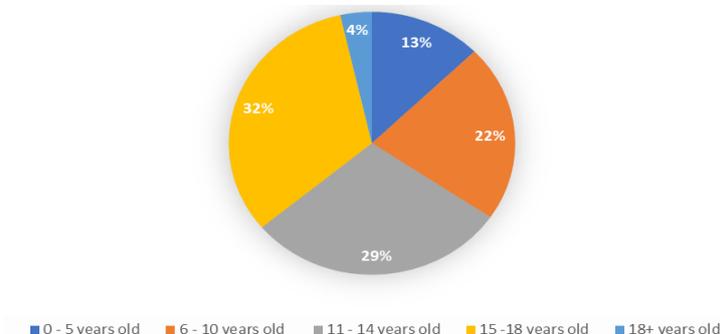
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Notel: In school three, the coordinator could not give an exact number of NES or HLS of English in the school. However, he reported that at least one student belongs to that group since that person is currently collaborating with him.

As seen in table 1, 1.36% of the total number of students in the schools that participated in this research are NES and HLS. Additionally, it can be noted that there is a greater concentration in the number of NES and HLS of English in private schools with 187 students belonging to that specific population. Followed by 9 NES and HLS of English in public schools, and just one student in Semi-private.

**Figure 1**

*Number of Native and Heritage language speakers of English in EFL classes divided by age*



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As seen in figure 1, 32% of the total, sixty-four students, are in ages between 15 - 18 years old. Followed by 29% of the population, fifty-eight students of NES and HLS of English are currently ages 11 - 14 years old. Also, seven students representing 4% of the total population are ages eighteen and over. Those ages belong to students who are currently high schoolers. Thus, 108 of the total number of students are currently enrolled in classes from eighth grade to third year of high school. As for elementary school students, 35%, 68 students, are part of this group. Distributed as follows, forty-three of those in ages from 6 - 10 years old, and twenty-five students who are 5 years old or under.

*Classroom environment and behavioral aspects*

*From the students' perspective*

**Table 2**

*General views of English classes from the students' standpoint*

Category	Questions	Options	
<b>Enjoyment</b>	Do you enjoy having English classes?	YES	NO
		34	3
<b>Following the classes</b>	Is it easy to follow what my English teachers explain?	YES	NO
		34	3
<b>How lessons are</b>	How are your English lessons?	Easy	Difficult or challenging
		15	22

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N = 37

As can be seen in Table 2, most of the NES and HLS of English students enjoy their English lessons although twenty-two of them find their lessons difficult or challenging. What is more, thirty-four students find it easy to follow what their teachers explain through the whole class. It is worth noting that one of the students during the recorded interviews reported that the reason why “it is very easy to follow what my teachers say because they tend to, in some cases, overexplain things” ( L. Barrera, personal communication, November 5, 2021), and those are usually given in both Spanish and English to ensure every student gets what they will be doing next.

**Table 3**

*How the classroom environment is affected by having NES and HLS*

Stakeholder	Statements	Scale				
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
<b>Students</b>						
	1. I like the way my teachers teach English	1	3	2	13	18
	2. I like to speak in English with my teacher and my classmates during class	5	2	7	11	12
	3. My teacher asks me to pronounce words in English	3	2	5	8	19
	4. My teacher uses me as an example	7	9	16	2	3
	5. I feel my English teacher treats me differently	23	7	5	2	0
	6. My classmates feel comfortable speaking in English to me	3	2	7	14	11
	7. I notice my teacher makes a lot of mistakes	17	11	7	2	0

**Table 3**

*How the classroom environment is affected by having NES and HLS (continuación)*

Stakeholder	Statements	Scale				
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Students						
	8. I understand all the things my teacher uses whenever he/she is giving explanations in English	0	0	8	9	20
	9. When I speak to my teachers, I switch between Spanish and English	7	11	7	8	4

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N = 37

Table 3 highlights the classroom environment as seen by the students who are NES or HLS of English. Attitudes, in general, are positive from the students' viewpoint as most students, for instance, mentioned that they like the way their teachers lead their classes (S#1). Likewise, most of them feel comfortable speaking to their teachers and classmates in class (S#2). Most of the students are asked to pronounce words in English by their teachers (S#3), and as Montrul (2010), mentions in his study even though heritage language speakers do not have the same language proficiency as NES, they are described as having good control of phonological features of the language. Thus, both NES and HLS of English can serve as an example when it comes to pronunciation during class time. It is worth noting that however that this does not happen so frequently because as seen in Table 3 the students do not feel they are used as examples in the class commonly (S#4), nor do they feel they are treated differently (S#5).

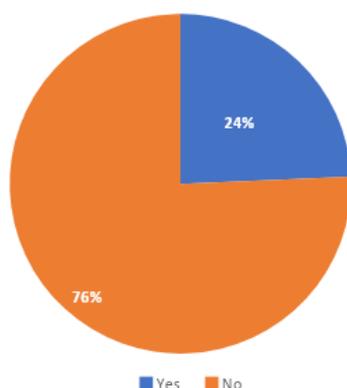
In other aspects, Heritage/Native speakers of English mentioned that their nonnative peers feel comfortable speaking to them in English (S#6). This aligns with what Edstrom (2007), discusses in his study conducted in a Spanish as a foreign language class where both Native and Heritage speakers of Spanish could be found. The researcher concluded

that heritage/native English-speaking students are respectful whenever they listen to their foreign language classmates' contributions during class time despite mistakes being present. The way in which they perceive their teachers is also positive. Most students do not notice their teachers make a lot of mistakes (S#7). This, however, can be attributed to the fact that all the students who partake in this survey are currently in private schools, and schools in private schools are required to demonstrate a satisfactory level of English proficiency before being hired. What is more, their teachers can give students comprehensible instructions (S#8), and there are various levels of frequency reported when analyzing code-switching between Spanish and English (S#9). This would be an area of further and future research.

### *Teachers' outlook*

**Figure 2**

*Do you find it difficult to have NES or HLS on English in your classes?*



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Twenty-eight out of the thirty-seven teachers who were surveyed mentioned that they do not find it difficult to work with classes where NES and HLS of English are. In one of the interviews though, one teacher said, “for me as a teacher it is not a problem to have native speakers of English in class as long as I am not aware of that because I know it is just another class like the others I have taught” (A. Correa, personal communication, October 20, 2021). There is a possibility that in some cases those specific students are overlooked by their teachers.

**Table 4**

*How the classroom environment is affected by having NES and HLS from the teachers' standpoint*

Stakeholder	Statements	Scale				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>Teachers</b>						
	1. I feel very confident speaking in English when I have a NES or HLS of English in class.	0	4	3	15	15
	2. My classes are the same even if I have more than one NES or HLS of English in them.	1	5	8	4	19
	3. I never use Spanish with my NES and HLS of English students.	5	6	7	2	17
	4. I feel native English-speaking students are judging my English whenever I am teaching.	13	6	9	2	7

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N = 37

As can be seen in Table 4, 30 teachers agreed that they feel confident speaking in English with their students even when NES and HLS of English are part of their language classes (S#1). Twenty-three said that they feel their classes are the same despite having even

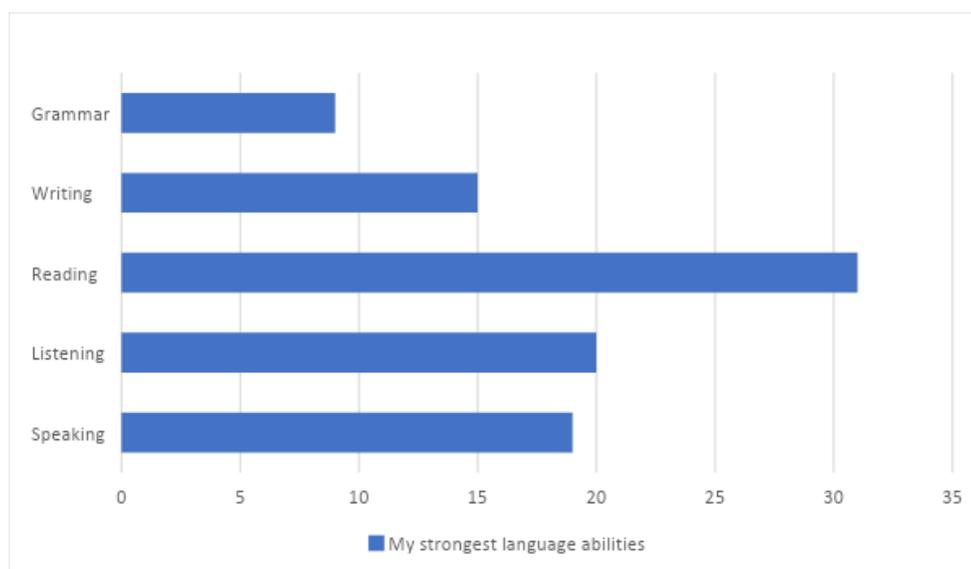
more than one NES and HLS of English in them, eight had a neutral opinion, and six disagreed (S#2). During the interviews, one of the teachers remarked that he prefers to treat those students differently because he thinks that there is nothing (language-related) he could instruct his students, and he comes up with exercises that students work on individually as he progresses with his classes (F. Brito, personal communication, October 20, 2021). Making use of Spanish in class is another aspect in which teachers have diverse opinions (S#3). Nineteen agree that they do not make use of Spanish in class, seven have a neutral attitude, and eleven mentioned that they use Spanish during class time. During a follow-up question in the interviews, a teacher said, “it is impossible for me not to use Spanish because some of my students” (referring to the nonnative ones) “don’t understand a word I say in English” (V. Chiriboga, personal communication, October 20, 2021). The way teachers feel they are perceived when having heritage/native English-speaking students towards their English level when teaching is mostly positive as nineteen say that they do not feel judged, nine have a neutral opinion, and nine feel judged by their students (S#4).

*NES and HLS of English and the language abilities*

*Students’ perspectives*

**Figure 3**

*Students’ self-reported language abilities*



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Figure 3 illustrates NES and HLS of English students’ self-reported language abilities. Out of the thirty-seven students, most of them feel their receptive skills are stronger. Thirty-one mentioned that Reading was the strongest ability and twenty chose Listening

followed by Listening and Speaking with 19 and 15 students choosing them as their strongest language abilities, respectively. Students reported that Grammar for them would be their weakest ability because only nine of them chose it as their strongest language ability. One of the students mentioned “I know how to speak well, but the teacher sometimes asks me to use the past participle or whatever and I just don’t know what to say” (K. Morocho, personal communication, November 5, 2021).

**Table 5**

*Students and their language abilities from the students’ viewpoints*

Stakeholder	Statements	Scale				
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
<b>Speaking</b>						
	1. I speak English with my teacher	0	2	8	8	19
	2. I speak English with my classmates	4	10	11	10	2
	3. I like to speak in English with my teacher and my classmates during class	5	2	7	11	12
<b>Listening</b>						
	1. I understand everything my teachers try to say	0	2	1	12	21
	2. I understand all the things my teacher uses whenever he/she is giving explanations in English	0	0	8	9	20
<b>Reading</b>						
	1. I read in English at school	0	3	9	6	17

**Table 5**

*Students and their language abilities from the students' viewpoints  
(continuación)*

Stakeholder	Statements	Scale				
Speaking		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Writing						
	1. I write in English (e-mails, letters, essays, structured pieces) with ease during class time	5	8	6	7	11
	2. I write in English in class (take notes, write explanations, non-structured pieces)	0	3	2	8	24
Grammar						
	1. I do well in grammar tests	0	3	12	14	8

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N = 37

As seen in Table 5, most students like to speak English frequently with their peers and their teachers (Statement about Speaking #3). However, two of them like to do it rarely, and five mentioned that they never like to do it at all. Most of the students, 35, mentioned that they speak to their English teachers at least sometimes, and only two of them do that rarely (Statement about Speaking #1). This is not the same when they must speak to their classmates given that only two chose always, ten often, eleven sometimes, ten rarely, and four never speak to their peers during class time (Statement about Speaking #2). Listening is not reported to be a problem for most students since most of them mentioned that they understand everything the teacher says (Statement about Listening #1), and this

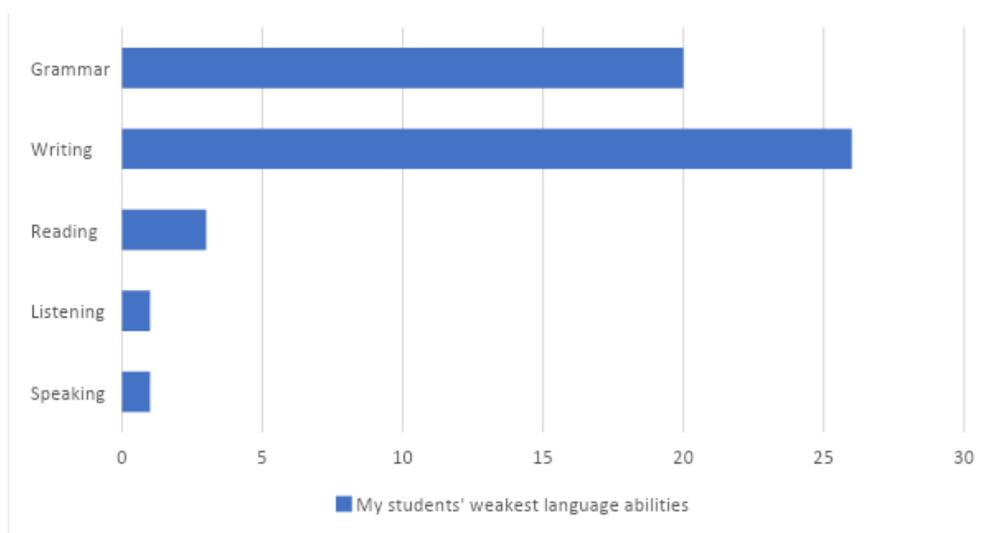
understanding is even more frequent when it comes to receiving explanations in English (Statement about Listening #2).

As for Reading, most students reported that they read in English at school at least sometimes (i.e., nine sometimes, six often, and seventeen always), and only three of them reported that they rarely do so (Statement about Reading #1). Non-structured Writing did not seem to be a problem for students since most of them 8 and 24 mentioned that they do it often and always accordingly, and only five do this less frequently with two of them reported to do it sometimes and three do this rarely (Statement about Writing #2). This is not the case when students reported about structured pieces of writing because here, eleven mentioned that they always write, followed by seven students who often write, six sometimes, eight rarely, and five reported that they never write (Statement about Writing #1). Students’ perceptions towards grammar tests are positive as most of them reported that they do well as follows: eight always, fourteen often, twelve sometimes, and only three rarely (Statement about Grammar #1)

*Teachers' perceptions*

**Figure 4**

*Students’ weakest language abilities as viewed by their teachers*



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Figure 4 shows how teachers perceive their students’ language abilities. Most of them, 26, mentioned that their NES and HLS of English students’ weakest language ability is Writing followed by Grammar with twenty answers. As for the abilities that teachers perceived as not so weak are Reading with three answers and for Listening and Speaking only one answer in each one of them.

**Table 6**
*Students and their language abilities from the teachers' standpoint*

Stakeholder	Statements	Scale				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Speaking						
	1. I do not understand what my heritage/native speakers of English are trying to say.	17	14	3	2	1
Writing						
	1. My NES and HLS of English students have problems whenever they have to write in English.	2	3	11	13	8
Grammar						
	1. I feel my NES and HLS of English students have problems understanding how grammar works.	3	10	9	7	8
	2. My NES and HLS of English students usually get bored whenever I teach grammar.	1	8	12	9	7

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N = 37

Table 6 shows the opinion teachers have towards their students' language abilities. Students reported that most of them are capable of understanding what their students say thirty-one answers in total, three have a neutral opinion, and three agree that they do not understand what their students try to say (Statement about Speaking #1). One teacher mentioned in the interviews the following: “My students use phrases that I have never heard before. For that reason, I do not understand in many cases” (C. Alvarez, personal communication, October 20, 2021). Therefore, it can be said that the fact that those three teachers do not understand what their heritage/native English-speaking students say does not depend on their students' speaking abilities, but instead, the teachers are bereft of knowledge. In another language ability, writing, most teachers -21- agreed that their students have problems whenever they must write something in English, eleven have a neutral opinion and the rest, 5, disagreed with this idea (Statement about Writing #1).

When grammar was inquired in the surveys, teachers had divided opinions since fifteen agreed that they felt that their Native and Heritage language students had problems understanding how grammar works, five had a neutral opinion, and thirteen disagreed with that statement (Statement about Grammar #1). Finally, sixteen teachers reported that their NES and HLS of English usually get bored whenever they are taught grammar, twelve have a neutral attitude, and nine disagree with the statement (Statement about Grammar #2).

**Table 7**

*Possible issues found in classes with NES and HLS of English as students*

Stakeholder	Statements	Scale				
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
<b>Students</b>						
	1. I speak English with my parents or caretakers	13	12	6	3	3
	2. I think my English classes are useful	1	0	8	12	16
	3. I would like to do something different whenever I have English classes	4	4	11	7	10

**Table 7**

*Possible issues found in classes with NES and HLS of English as students  
(continuación)*

Stakeholder	Statements	Scale				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>Teachers</b>						
	1. My students feel embarrassed to use English whenever there is a native speaker in class.	11	4	9	8	5
	2. I am very conscious of the things that I say in English whenever I have native speakers in class.	5	0	4	8	20
	3. I feel I do not know how to work with native speakers in classes.	16	9	7	3	2
	4. Having mixed-level classes and native speakers at the same time is more than a challenge.	3	4	10	6	14

**Table 7**

*Possible issues found in classes with NES and HLS of English as students  
(continuación)*

Stakeholder	Statements	Scale				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Teachers	5. There is nothing I can teach my NES and HLS of English students.	23	5	5	2	2
	6. I feel my level of English is very strong to even teach native English speakers.	0	0	10	10	17
	7. NES and HLS of English students should do something different during English classes.	8	6	8	9	6
	8. I feel I need to know ways in which I could include NES and HLS of English students in my classes more naturally.	6	2	8	11	10

Created by: Angel Carrión (2022)

N = 37

Table 7 illustrates potential problems that can be the target of future and further research in the same field. From the students' viewpoint, the following problems have been identified. Most of the heritage/native English-speaking students do not use English regularly in their households. Thirteen mentioned that they never use English with their caretakers, twelve rarely use it, six sometimes, 3often, and only three always (Students' statement #1). Most students considered that their English classes are useful at least sometimes eight answers, twelve often, sixteen always, and only one student mentioned that their English classes are never useful (Students' statement #2). When it comes to doing something different during English classes, students reported that ten would always like to do something different, seven often, eleven sometimes, four rarely, and four said that they never feel they would like to do something different whenever they have English classes (Students' statement #3).

As from the standpoint of the other stakeholders, the teachers, fifteen mentioned that they disagreed that their non-native English-speaking students feel embarrassed to use English whenever there is a native/heritage language speaker in class, nine have a neutral opinion, and eleven mentioned that they agreed (Teachers' statement #1). Interestingly, although most teachers felt very confident using English even when they have to teach native-English speaking students (see Table 4, S#1), and also, 27 teachers agreed that feel as though their level of English is good enough to teach native English speakers and 10 mentioned they had a neutral opinion (Teachers' statement #6), 28 agreed that they feel very conscious of the things they say when they have NES and HLS of English in their classes, 4 have a neutral opinion, and 5 strongly disagree with this statement (Teachers' statement #2). In other aspects, twenty-five teachers disagree with the statement that they feel they do not know how to collaborate with native speakers in classes, seven had a neutral opinion, and five agreed with the statement (Teachers' statement #3). One of the teachers broadened up a bit more on this question and said "I just teach my regular classes just like any other class. Sometimes I wonder whether the native speakers are following what I am saying or not" (G. Ayala, Personal communication, October 20, 2021). Despite that, twenty-one teachers agreed that they feel they need to know ways in which they could include NES and HLS of English students in my classes more naturally, eight had a neutral opinion, and eight disagree (Teachers' statement #8).

Decisively, twenty teachers agreed that having mixed-level classes and native speakers at the same time is more than a challenge, ten had a neutral opinion, and six disagreed (Teachers' statement #4). Edstrom (2007), highlights that teachers around the world are dealing with the fact that they need to work in mixed-learner classes (i.e. classes that have students who are L2 learners, Native speakers, and heritage language speakers), and this reality has become much more frequent as a result of migration and the increase in the

number of returnees, making a foreign language class, as most teachers have not been trained to address such groups, hard to handle. in Table 7, it is also shown that twenty-eight teachers disagree with the statement that there is nothing they can teach their NES and HLS of English students, five had a neutral opinion, and four agreed (Teachers' statement #5). As for the last statement left about whether NES and HLS of English students should do something different during English classes, fourteen teachers disagreed, eight had a neutral opinion, and fifteen agreed (Teachers' statement #7).

### **Discussion**

It has been identified that there are, indeed, several students who are NES and HLS of English significant enough to raise a potential hindrance in the ELT field in Ecuador. As mentioned in Burgo (2018), countries such as the USA have created special courses for students who are HLS of Spanish so that better teaching work can be done with that specific group of students. In the same study, a problem that has been identified is that many NES and HLS are placed in advanced language classes with L2 learners - as is the case of a high school that works their students by English levels. However, this rather than being a solution has created an implication in foreign language classes given that foreign language teachers are not trained to deal with students who are HLS of English let alone NES. For that reason, in many institutions especially in the USA, languages courses have been created to cater to the needs of those who are HLS of Spanish, and in this way, instructors have been able to contribute more to the development of literacy skills (i.e. Reading for comprehension, Writing, Lexis, Register, and Spelling) of those specific students as well as native Spanish-speaking students who for some reason had migrated to the United States (Burgo, 2018). This can serve as a foundation for future proposals in Ecuador to know how to work with NES and HLS of English as well as a niche of investigation for further research.

As for other aspects to be analyzed Edstrom (2007), pinpoints that heritage and native Spanish speakers are asked about some affective factors to determine whether they feel comfortable working with non-native speakers in Spanish classes. Just like in the present study, they mentioned that they are happy and appreciative of their interaction with their peers. However, in the study done by Edstrom Native/Heritage speakers also reported feeling impatient whenever they notice their non-native peers struggle to express their thoughts and feelings in Spanish. The same could be true in the context of this present research piece. Therefore, a deeper analysis can be done regarding affective factors and perceptions native, non-native, and heritage English-speaking students have towards one another.

Another interesting piece of information found in this study is the fact that most of the native/heritage language speakers of English in Cuenca reported that they barely use English with their parents or caretakers (See Table7, Students' statement #1) because in

some cases, students had English as a dominant language since they lived in an English-speaking country up to a certain point in their lives. Nevertheless, once their parents or caretakers decide to move back to Ecuador, due to lack of exposure to their dominant language, their heritage language, Spanish in this case, becomes then the dominant environmental language as suggested in Flores and Snape (2021). Hence, the dominance is inverted from the L1 to the HL. What is more, whenever there is no exposure to a language at all, language attrition can be more noticeable especially so in areas such as morphological complexity loss, phonetic and phonological erroneous processing as well as influence in terms of lexis and morphosyntax from the language of dominance (Flores & Snape, 2021). This conjures up another potential area of interest for future researchers who want to deepen into language attrition and language loss in Ecuadorian returnees.

### **Conclusions**

The present study was diagnostic to identify information to use as a foundation for future research. On that basis, the following aspects have been found:

- There is a considerable number of Native and Heritage language speakers of English in Cuenca. This number, however, is heavily slanted towards private schools.
- Apart from analyzing the classroom environment, in future pieces of research, the focus of study should be affective aspects, classroom perceptions (including non-native peers' opinions), among other elements.
- Future pieces of research should address aspects, such as what has happened to those students whose first dominant language was English as exposure to it diminishes by living in a Spanish-speaking country, and the lack of usage in households, and to analyze whether and to what extent language attrition takes place.
- Given that most teachers mentioned that they do not know how to work with heritage and native language speakers of English, future proposals for how to include them in EFL classes more naturally as well as if there is a necessity to work with literacy skills with those students (as past research has shown) are required.

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