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From fear to confidence: A practice-based case study on professional identity development in pre-service English teachers

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Abstract

This study explores the design and implementation of a structured, sequenced, and reflective process to support the development of professional identity in pre-service English teachers. This structure included the application of Task-Based Instruction (TBI) to strengthen pedagogical beliefs and instructional performance. Even though the national curriculum in Ecuador contains key methodological approaches in English language teaching, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), traditional instruction remains a dominant paradigm. As a result, future teachers tend to replicate these rooted approaches in their teaching practice, largely due to limited classroom experience, which often leads to insecurity.

This qualitative research examines the effects of guided reflective practice as support for a methodological shift. This study was conducted with two parallel groups of undergraduate students enrolled in a Methodology course during the second semester of 2025. This case study included data from diagnostic and post-intervention perception surveys, sequential lesson plan drafts, reflective reports, recorded demonstration classes, and formative feedback. The collected data were analyzed through cross-source triangulation and thematic coding.

The evidence suggests a positive shift from reliance on first language instruction and repetitive application of traditional methods such as grammar-focused routines toward increased use of English as the medium of instruction. Participants progressively incorporated elements from CLT, including rich input, structured progression from controlled to freer practice, and strategies to lower the affective filter in order to promote meaningful interaction. The data also reveal greater coherence and engagement in lesson planning, as well as strengthened reflective capacity, which served as a basis for increasing confidence in their professional identity.

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Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching; Initial teacher education; Reflective practice; Task-based learning; Teacher self-efficacy