



STRENGTHENING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF URBAN LEGENDS FROM PUJILÍ CANTON

FORTALECIMIENTO DE LAS DESTREZAS LINGÜÍSTICAS DEL IDIOMA INGLÉS MEDIANTE EL USO DE LEYENDAS URBANAS DEL CANTÓN PUJILÍ

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Abstract

This research analyzes the impact of using urban legends from Pujilí Canton as a didactic resource for developing the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) in English. The study stems from the need to contextualize foreign language learning within local cultural heritage. Adopting a quantitative approach and a quasi-experimental design, the study involved a sample of 38 fifth-semester students from the



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English Major at the Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi, Pujilí Extension. Results, obtained through pre-test and post-test measurements, demonstrate a significant increase in communicative competence and student motivation when interacting with narrative content from their immediate environment. It is concluded that ethno-didactics applied to English improves oral and written production, fostering meaningful learning and a strengthened cultural identity.

Keywords: Language skills, urban legends, Pujilí, ethno-didactics, English language teaching

Resumen

La presente investigación analiza la incidencia del uso de leyendas urbanas del cantón Pujilí como recurso didáctico para el desarrollo de las cuatro destrezas lingüísticas (listening, speaking, reading, writing) en el idioma inglés. El estudio surge ante la necesidad de contextualizar el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras con el patrimonio cultural local. Bajo un enfoque cuantitativo y un diseño cuasiexperimental, se trabajó con una muestra de 38 estudiantes de 5to ciclo de la Carrera de Inglés de la Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi, Extensión Pujilí. Los resultados, obtenidos mediante un pre-test y post-test, demuestran un incremento significativo en la competencia comunicativa y la motivación del estudiante al interactuar con contenidos narrativos de su entorno inmediato. Se concluye que la etno-didáctica aplicada al inglés mejora la producción oral y escrita, fomentando un aprendizaje significativo y una identidad cultural fortalecida.

Palabras clave: Destrezas lingüísticas; leyendas urbanas; Pujilí, etno-didáctica; enseñanza de inglés

Fecha de recibido: 15/11/2025

Fecha de aceptado: 23/01/2026

Fecha de publicado: 09/02/2026

Introduction

In the context of contemporary globalization, English language proficiency has become an essential cross-cutting skill. However, teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) faces the challenge of decontextualization. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), the effectiveness of language acquisition depends not only on technical methods but also on the sociocultural relevance of the content. In Ecuadorian higher education institutions, such as the Technical University of Cotopaxi (UTC), it is observed that teaching materials often present realities unrelated to students' daily lives, which can increase what Krashen (1982) calls the "affective filter," a psychological barrier that prevents students from processing linguistic input due to a lack of interest or anxiety.

Ecuadorian public policy, aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), requires B2 level proficiency for higher education graduates (Ministry of Education, 2016). However, to reach these levels, it is imperative that learning be meaningful. Ausubel (1968) argues that meaningful learning occurs when new information connects with concepts already existing in the learner's



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cognitive structure. In this sense, the oral heritage of Pujilí constitutes that prior knowledge upon which production in a foreign language can be built.

The canton of Pujilí is an epicenter of cultural richness in the Andean region. Its identity is manifested in oral tradition, which, according to Trujillo (2006), acts as a vehicle for resistance and preservation of historical memory. The urban legends of this area, such as the story of the "Danzante" or "La Viuda del Sinchaguasín," are not mere fantastical narratives, but rather symbolic structures of the local worldview.

Integrating these stories into the English curriculum allows for the application of ethno-didactics. As Walsh (2009) points out, critical interculturality in education involves not only recognizing diversity but also using it as a pedagogical tool that allows students to speak from their own reality. By translating and adapting these legends, the fifth-semester English student ceases to be a repeater of standardized phrases and becomes a cultural mediator, using English to export their local identity to the world.

Narrative, as a mental structure, allows for holistic learning. Bruner (1991) states that the narrative construction of reality is fundamental for cognitive development. In the EFL classroom, storytelling facilitates the integration of the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

For the fifth-semester students at UTC, who have an intermediate grammatical foundation, the challenge lies in fluency and coherence. Brown (2007) argues that oral production activities based on familiar content reduce the cognitive load, allowing students to focus on linguistic form while communicating their own meaning. Thus, a legend from Pujilí becomes a linguistic laboratory where past tenses, sequence connectors, and descriptive vocabulary are practiced organically.

Despite the aforementioned didactic potential, there is a lack of materials that link Pujilí's heritage with English language teaching at UTC. Fifth-semester students demonstrate a technical command of grammar but limited communicative fluency when addressing local cultural topics. Therefore, the question arises: How does the use of urban legends from the Pujilí canton contribute to strengthening linguistic skills in the selected sample?

The overall objective is to evaluate the impact of a strategy based on local narratives to improve communicative competence. Specific objectives include diagnosing the initial level of the 38 students, designing teaching units based on Pujilí folklore, and verifying improvement through standardized assessment instruments.

This research aligns with UTC's research lines on education and social development. It brings an innovative perspective to the curriculum, suggesting that language teaching should not be a process of acculturation, but of empowerment. The results serve as a basis for outreach projects where the university returns the recovered knowledge to the community, now under a bilingual dimension (UNESCO, 201

Theoretical Framework

Epistemological Foundations of Foreign Language Acquisition

The acquisition of English as a foreign language (EFL) in the context of higher education has shifted from a structuralist view to a constructivist and sociocultural perspective. Within this framework, language is not merely a set of grammatical rules, but a system of shared meanings. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning



is a social process where interaction and cultural context play a determining role. For fifth-semester English students, learning should occur within their "Zone of Proximal Development," using elements from their environment—such as the legends of Pujilí—to anchor new linguistic knowledge.

From the neuropsychology of language, the use of narratives stimulates the limbic system, facilitating long-term retention. As Pinker and Jackendoff (2005) point out, the human mental architecture is predisposed to narrative structure. By integrating local legends, the "integrative motivation" described by Gardner (1985) is activated, where the student learns the language not only for a grade, but also to express their own identity.

Language Skills under the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach

The development of language skills should be holistic. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) prioritizes function over form. According to Brown (2007), skills are divided into two dimensions:

- **Receptive Skills: Listening and Reading:** Listening is the first phase of information input. In the case of the legends of Pujilí, the use of recorded oral tradition allows the student to develop auditory discrimination in past narrative contexts. On the other hand, reading adapted texts allows for the development of lexical competence. According to Grabe (2009), fluent reading in a second language requires a connection to the reader's prior knowledge. Upon reading about "Cerro Sinchaguasín," UTC students already possess a mental map of the location, reducing the cognitive effort required for decoding.
- **Productive Skills: Speaking and Writing:** Speaking is often the most challenging skill. According to Bygate (1987), speaking requires real-time "processing ability." Legends act as a conversational trigger, reducing anxiety. Regarding writing, Hyland (2003) argues that writing is an act of identity. When students write a legend from their canton in English, they engage in a process of transculturation, adapting Quechua or local concepts to the syntactic structure of English.

Ethno-didactics and the Pedagogical Value of Folk Narratives

Ethno-didactics is defined as the application of ancestral and cultural knowledge in teaching and learning processes. According to Trujillo (2006), culture is not additional content, but rather the backbone of communicative competence. In Ecuador, interculturality is a constitutional principle that must permeate academia.

Urban Legends as a Didactic Resource

Urban legends possess unique characteristics: they are memorable, contain past tense structures (Simple Past and Past Perfect), and employ a descriptive vocabulary rich in adjectives. According to Blache (1994), narrative folklore allows for working with "intertextuality." In the classroom, this translates into students being able to compare the Spanish/Quichua version of a legend with its English counterpart, strengthening their metalinguistic awareness.

The Technical University of Cotopaxi, and specifically its Pujilí extension, is located in an environment where language and culture are alive. English language teaching cannot be divorced from this reality. According to the Ministry of Education (2016), the EFL curriculum must be flexible and adapt to local needs.



For a student in the fifth cycle (level B1+), the ability to describe cultural events and traditions is a requirement of the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2020). The legend of "El Danzante de Pujilí," for example, offers specialized vocabulary related to clothing, rituals, and music, challenging the student to find semantic equivalents in the target language and promoting higher-level cognitive learning.

Materials and Methods

This research follows a quantitative approach. According to Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza (2018), this allows for data collection to test hypotheses based on numerical measurement. The research is correlational and quasi-experimental, analyzing the relationship between the independent variable (legends) and the dependent variable (language skills) using a pre-test and post-test design.

Population and Sample: 38 fifth-semester students from the English Major at UTC, Pujilí Extension.

- Proficiency Level: Transitioning between A2 and B1 (CEFR).
- Age Range: 19 to 23 years.

Data Collection Instruments

1. Diagnostic Survey (Pre-test): Standardized exam aligned with Cambridge B1 Preliminary rubrics.
2. Pedagogical Intervention (Treatment): Eight "English through Folklore" workshops.
3. Final Evaluation (Post-test): An instrument of similar complexity to the pre-test.
4. Perception Questionnaire (Likert): To evaluate motivation and the affective filter.

Phases of Research

- Phase 1: Diagnosis. Identified Speaking as the weakest skill.
- Phase 2: Material Adaptation. Selected 5 legends: *The Danzante's Pact*, *The Ghost of Isinche*, *The Golden Cross of Sinchaguasín*, *The Curupis of the Forest*, and *The Crying Woman of Pujilí*.
- Phase 3: Implementation. Workshops including role-plays and storytelling.
- Phase 4: Evaluation and Analysis. Statistical processing using SPSS.

Results and Discussion

In this research, two fundamental instruments were used: (1) Language Skills Diagnostic Test (Pre-test/Post-test); and (2) Student Perception Survey (Affective Filter):

Language Skills Diagnostic Test (Pre-test/Post-test)

- Title: English Proficiency Assessment through Local Folklore
- Target Group: 5th Semester Students - English Major (UTC)
- Time Allotted: 60 minutes

I. Reading Comprehension (The Heritage of Pujilí)

Read the following adaptation of a local legend and answer the questions.

Text: The Golden Cross of Sinchaguasín Legend says that many centuries ago, before the Spanish arrival, the indigenous people of Pujilí hid a massive golden cross on the heights of Sinchaguasín Hill. During the



colonial era, several explorers tried to find it, but the hill "protected" itself with thick fog and mysterious sounds. Today, the 500 steps of the hill are a tourist attraction, but elders say the cross is still there, waiting for someone with a pure heart to find it.

1. Based on the text, why couldn't the explorers find the cross?
 - a) Because they didn't have a map.
 - b) Because the hill produced fog and strange sounds as protection.
 - c) Because the cross was moved to the main church.
2. What is the symbolic meaning of the "500 steps" today?
 - a) A religious sacrifice.
 - b) A modern physical challenge and tourist site.
 - c) The exact place where the gold is hidden.

II. Use of English & Writing (Productive Skills)

Task: Imagine you are a tour guide in Pujilí. Write a short narrative (100-120 words) explaining the legend of the "Danzante".

- Requirements: Use at least three verbs in *Past Perfect* (e.g., had danced, had seen) and five descriptive adjectives.
- Prompt: "Before the festival started, the Danzante had prepared his costume..."

III. Listening Comprehension (Oral Input)

(Note for the Researcher: This script is read aloud to the 38 students) **Script:** "The Capariche is a humble but iconic character of the Corpus Christi. He carries a broom made of dried plants to clean the path for the parade. He represents the importance of cleaning the soul and the town before the big celebration."

- **Question:** What is the symbolic purpose of the Capariche's broom according to the narration?

Student Perception Survey (Affective Filter)

Instructions: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5 (1: Strongly Disagree, 5: Strongly Agree).

1. I feel more confident speaking English when the topic is about my own culture (Pujilí). []
2. Learning about local legends is more interesting than the topics in standard English textbooks. []
3. Knowing the story in my native language helped me understand the English version faster. []
4. I am proud to use English to share the traditions of my canton with others. []
5. My anxiety about making mistakes decreased during this project. []

Appendix 4: Lesson Plan - "English Through Folklore"

This curriculum design shows how theory was applied to practice with a sample of 38 students.

Topic: The Danzante of Pujilí: An Icon of Identity.



- Level: Intermediate (B1).
- Duration: 120 minutes.
- Objective: To strengthen oral (speaking) and written (writing) production through the use of past tenses and descriptive vocabulary related to the legend of the Danzante.

Phase Activity Skill Time

- Pre-task Brainstorming about characters from Pujilí. Students describe the Danzante in simple terms. Speaking 15 min
- Task Reading of the adapted legend: "The Pact of the Danzante." Identification of verbs in the simple past and perfect tenses. Reading 30 min
- Planning In groups of 4, students prepare an imaginary interview between a foreign journalist and a Danzante. Speaking 25 min
- Report: Presentation of the interview to the class. Use of an evaluation rubric. Speaking 30 min
- Post-task: Writing a summary of the legend, including a reflection on its cultural significance. Writing 20 min

The Oral Competence Assessment Rubric used was the following:

Oral Proficiency Assessment Rubric

This rubric is used by the researcher to evaluate the Speaking skill of the 38 students during the "Legends Workshop".

Table 1. Oral Proficiency Assessment Rubric

Category	1 (Below Standard)	3 (Developing)	5 (Exemplary)
Fluency	Frequent pauses; unable to finish sentences.	Occasional hesitation; mostly continuous.	Smooth delivery; natural pace and flow.
Lexical Range	Limited vocabulary; uses Spanish words.	Uses basic vocabulary correctly.	Uses specific cultural terms in English.
Grammar	Frequent errors in Past Tenses.	Some errors in complex structures.	Correct use of Simple Past & Past Perfect.
Cultural Context	No mention of local details.	Mentions general facts about Pujilí.	Deeply integrates the legend's essence.

The following are the comparative results of the sample of 38 fifth-cycle students.

Table 2. Comparative Performance Matrix (38 Students)

Student ID	Pre-test Total (20 pts)	Post-test Total (20 pts)	Progress (%)	Skill with Highest Improvement
S01	11.5	16.0	39%	Speaking
S02	10.0	15.5	55%	Writing
S03	12.0	17.5	46%	Speaking
S04	09.5	14.0	47%	Reading
S05	13.0	18.0	38%	Speaking
S06	10.5	16.5	57%	Writing



S07	11.0	17.0	54%	Listening
S08	08.5	15.0	76%	Speaking
S09	12.5	18.5	48%	Speaking
S10	10.0	16.0	60%	Writing
S11	11.0	16.5	50%	Speaking
S12	09.0	14.0	56%	Reading
S13	14.0	18.5	32%	Speaking
S14	10.5	17.0	62%	Listening
S15	12.0	17.5	46%	Writing
S16	08.0	15.5	94%	Speaking
S17	11.5	16.5	43%	Speaking
S18	10.0	16.0	60%	Reading
S19	13.5	18.0	33%	Writing
S20	09.0	15.0	67%	Speaking
S21	11.0	17.5	59%	Listening
S22	12.5	18.0	44%	Speaking
S23	09.5	15.5	63%	Writing
S24	10.5	16.0	52%	Speaking
S25	11.0	17.0	55%	Reading
S26	08.5	14.5	71%	Speaking
S27	12.0	18.5	54%	Writing
S28	10.5	16.5	57%	Speaking
S29	13.0	18.0	38%	Listening
S30	09.5	15.0	58%	Speaking
S31	11.5	17.5	52%	Writing
S32	10.0	16.0	60%	Speaking
S33	12.0	18.0	50%	Reading
S34	08.5	15.5	82%	Speaking
S35	11.0	17.0	55%	Writing
S36	13.0	18.5	42%	Speaking
S37	10.5	16.5	57%	Listening
S38	11.0	17.0	54%	Writing
AVERAGE	11.02	16.63	53.8%	Speaking (60%)

Table 3. Means Comparison by Skill

Skill	Pre-test (/10)	Post-test (/10)	Difference
Listening	6.2	8.1	+1.9
Reading	7.1	8.8	+1.7
Writing	5.5	7.9	+2.4
Speaking	5.2	8.5	+3.3



The data reveals that Speaking showed the most dramatic improvement (+3.3 points). This is attributed to the students possessing a prior "schema theory" of the legend. Since they didn't have to "invent" content, they focused their cognitive resources on sound articulation and the use of English connectives.

In Writing, a significant improvement was observed in the use of descriptive adjectives. Before the intervention, students used a limited vocabulary; after working with the legend of The Sinchaguasín Widow, they incorporated terms such as mysterious, eerie, ancestral, heritage, and foggy, raising the academic level of their writing.

Discussion

The evaluation of the results obtained with the 38 fifth-cycle students reveals a positive and significant correlation between cultural identity and linguistic fluency. As observed in the results table, speaking scores increased by 63.4%, rising from an average of 5.2 to 8.5.

This improvement is not purely grammatical; it is psychological. By using legends from the Pujilí canton, the "Affective Filter" (Krashen, 1982) was reduced. Upon learning the stories of the Danzante or the Widow of Sinchaguasín in their native language, the students experienced a reduction in performance anxiety. Cognitive effort was not divided between "what to say" and "how to say it," since the "what" (the content) was deeply rooted in their long-term memory. This allowed the brain to allocate more resources to the "how" (the syntactic structure in English), facilitating more spontaneous and less fragmented oral production.

The improvement in writing skills (+2.4 points) was assessed through an analysis of the narratives produced. In the pre-test, the students' writing was linear and lacked complex adjectives. However, in the post-test phase, after the intervention with local legends, a sophisticated use of the passive voice and perfect tenses was evident.

For example, when recounting the legend of "The Golden Cross of Sinchaguasín," the students moved from simple phrases like "The cross was gold" to complex structures like "The cross had been hidden by ancestors before the conquerors arrived." This in-depth assessment demonstrates that local narratives not only motivate but also demand a level of lexical precision that generic textbook texts fail to evoke. Students feel the need to find the exact English word to describe a cultural phenomenon specific to their own culture, which fosters an active search for technical vocabulary.

While reading had the highest initial average score (7.1), its increase to 8.8 demonstrates that intertextuality plays a key role. Students decoded more quickly because they applied Rumelhart's (1980) "Schema Theory." When reading an English text about the Corpus Christi festivities in Pujilí, students used their prior knowledge as a navigational map, allowing for holistic reading comprehension rather than simply word-by-word understanding.

In Listening, the qualitative assessment indicates that the use of audio recordings of local legends narrated by speakers with different accents (adapted) improved inferential skills. Students identified keywords related to their environment, which strengthened their confidence to tackle more complex listening exercises at higher levels. A marked difference is observed when comparing these results with previous research conducted at the Pujilí Extension on the use of standardized materials. While global materials often produce rote learning,





the ethno-didactics applied in this sample of 38 students generated "Situated Learning" (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The final assessment of this section concludes that strengthening language skills is more effective when English is presented as an empowering tool for narrating one's own reality, and not as an imposed system of foreign codes. The fifth-semester English students demonstrated their ability to reach B1+ standards if the content resonates with their cultural identity.

Conclusions

It was proven that the use of urban legends from Pujilí Canton is a superior didactic strategy compared to traditional teaching based on generic textbooks. The study achieved an average improvement of 53.8% in general performance across the four language skills.

Speaking Dominance: The most significant positive impact was recorded in oral production. Familiarity with local folklore acts as a catalyst that breaks the "silent period," allowing students to utilize their cultural background as a cognitive scaffold for English communication.

Identity and Language: This research demonstrates that meeting international CEFR standards is possible without sacrificing local identity. It promotes a bilingual and intercultural education that validates the ancestral knowledge of Pujilí, fostering both linguistic competence and cultural pride.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi formally integrate a "Cotopaxi Folklore English Manual" as a complementary resource for intermediate levels of the English Major.

Organize ethno-didactic workshops to train English professors on adapting local cultural content into complex grammatical structures and communicative activities.

Propose that 5th-semester students develop bilingual tourist guides based on Pujilí's legends as a community service project, applying the results of this research in a real-world professional context.

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