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Difficulties in learning English among Ecuadorian elementary students: causes and solutions.

Dificultades en el aprendizaje del inglés en estudiantes ecuatorianos de básica: causas y soluciones.

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Resumen

El aprendizaje del idioma inglés en la educación básica significa un reto continuo en ámbito educativo ecuatoriano. Por ende, esta revisión sistemática se centró en las principales dificultades y obstáculos más comunes que enfrentan los estudiantes de educación básica al aprender el idioma inglés, con el propósito de identificar las principales causas y sugerir soluciones eficaces. El objetivo del estudio fue identificar las dificultades y obstáculos más comunes que enfrentan los estudiantes de básica al aprender inglés, y analizar las posibles causas y soluciones. Se empleó, una revisión bibliográfica con enfoque descriptivo, siguiendo el protocolo PRISMA para asegurar rigurosidad y transparencia. Se seleccionaron 16 artículos científicos publicados entre los años 2020 y 2025, mediante las bases de datos como Scopus, RedALyC, Scielo y Google Scholar aplicando criterios específicos de inclusión y exclusión: investigaciones empíricas enfocadas en la población de educación básica en Ecuador. Los resultados evidenciaron que las principales dificultades la falta de motivación (61.5%), escaso dominio del inglés por parte del docente (53.8%), Además, se analizó que los contextos escolares. En conclusión, las barreras en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés en estudiantes de básica Utilización de métodos tradicionales,

Falta de competencias digitales, falta de capacitación al docente en el idioma inglés Como recomendación general, se sugiere reforzar la instrucción docente en idiomática inglesa, implementar tareas interactivas e involucrar a los familiares de los estudiantes. Esta investigación puede servir de guía para para futuras investigaciones o como guía en el diseño de políticas educativas más efectivas.

Palabras claves: Inglés, Educación Básica, Dificultades del Aprendizaje.

Abstract

The learning of the English language in basic education is a continuous challenge in the Ecuadorian educational environment. Therefore, this systematic review focused on the main difficulties and most common obstacles faced by basic education students when learning the English language, with the purpose of identifying the main causes and suggesting effective solutions. The objective of the study was to identify the most common difficulties and obstacles that elementary school students face when learning English, and to analyze the possible causes and solutions. A bibliographic review with a descriptive approach was used, following the PRISMA protocol to ensure rigor and transparency. 16 scientific articles published between 2020 and 2025 were selected, using databases such as Scopus, RedALyC, Scielo and Google Scholar, applying specific inclusion and exclusion criteria: empirical research focused on the basic education population in Ecuador. The results showed that the main difficulties were lack of motivation (61.5%), poor command of English by the teacher (53.8%), In addition, it was analyzed that the school contexts. In conclusion, the barriers in English language learning in elementary school students Use of traditional methods, Lack of digital skills, lack of teacher training in the English language As a general recommendation, it is suggested to reinforce teacher instruction in English language, implement interactive tasks and involve students' families. This research can serve as a guide for future research or as a guide in the design of more effective educational policies.

Keywords: English, basic education, learning difficulties,

Introduction



The learning of the English language has been consolidated as an essential pedagogical tool in the Ecuadorian educational field. However, significant challenges in the teaching-learning process of this language persist, especially at the basic education level. According to statistical data from the EE English Proficiency Index 2024 report, Ecuador ranks 82nd out of 116 studied countries, showing a minimal command of English at the national level (Pionce et al., 2023). The growing globalization and the importance of English as the main language make its mastery essential for the professional and personal growth of young Ecuadorians.

In this context, at a global level, one of the main difficulties in learning English for secondary school students is the lack of a proper didactic approach that aligns with the needs and characteristics of adolescents (Pionce et al., 2023). Students seek to find a social identity and an academic vocation, so it is important that English language teaching helps them develop practical skills and knowledge for their personal or professional future (Zaim et al., 2020).

From a critical perspective, English language learning in Latin America faces several challenges, the most prominent being the lack of resources, teacher training, and inadequate infrastructure in educational institutions, all of which limit teaching and the implementation of innovative methodologies. Another key aspect is cultural and linguistic diversity, which also poses a challenge in language learning (Arán et al., 2022).

The Ministry of Education, together with the academic curriculum, has implemented several strategies to improve the teaching and learning experience of English in Ecuador. One significant initiative was proposed, specifically designed for students from 2nd to 10th grades of General Basic Education and from 1st to 3rd grades of Unified General Baccalaureate, who do not have English as their first language (Cruz et al., 2021).

Problem-solving, from this perspective, is discussed in research by Bravo and Alves (2020), through a cross-sectional field study with a sample of 469 English teachers and students. The main challenges identified include the lack of curriculum adaptation to students' socioeconomic environment. Another issue is the way teachers deliver lessons in a non-didactic manner, leading to a lack of interest among students in learning English. Studies by Páez T. (2025) show that lack of motivation and teacher training significantly impact learning. Likewise, Soto et al. (2025) mention that both the absence of motivation and effective motivational strategies negatively affect English language acquisition.

Similarly, studies by Molina et al. (2024) propose didactic strategies, including memory-based, cognitive, compensatory, and metacognitive approaches. The results demonstrated a reliability of 0.9, showing improvements in students' academic performance. Regarding reading skills, 40.13% of students showed improvements, with a correlation of 0.865, leading to the conclusion that if these strategies are implemented correctly, the outcomes are positive.

Faced with this reality, the research question arises: What are the main difficulties and obstacles that secondary school students in Ecuador face when learning English, and what are the possible causes and solutions to overcome them?

In response to this question, the present article aims to systematically analyze the available empirical evidence on this impact, utilizing the PRISMA methodology. Accordingly, the following specific objectives have been established:

1. Identify the main difficulties faced by basic education students in Ecuador in learning English.
2. Analyze the underlying causes of these difficulties, considering pedagogical, technological, and socioeconomic factors.
3. Propose evidence-based strategies and solutions to improve English teaching and learning at this educational level.

Next, the methodology and the article's section detailing the review process and the most relevant empirical findings are presented, along with an analysis of their pedagogical implications for basic education in Ecuador.

Methodology

To identify the most common difficulties and obstacles that basic education students face when learning English and to analyze the possible causes and solutions in Ecuador, a systematic review research with a descriptive approach was conducted using the PRISMA method (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). This method ensures the transparency, thoroughness, and reproducibility of the literature review process.

To develop this systematic review, scientific studies published in reliable journals and academic databases such as Scopus, RedALyC, Scielo, and Google Scholar were selected, applying specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. The selection process focused on empirical research targeting basic education students in Ecuador. Studies published between 2020 and 2025 were chosen using specialized search keywords and Boolean operators to refine the search. The keywords used included: "English learning difficulties," "basic education," "English learning obstacles," "Ecuador," "causes of learning English," and "possible solutions," utilizing Boolean operators AND and OR to optimize information retrieval in both English and Spanish.

Below are the search methods used in the different consulted databases.

Table 1. Search strategy employed for the research

Database	Search Strategy
Scielo	“English learning difficulties” AND “basic education” AND “Ecuador”
Dialnet	(“English learning difficulties” AND “basic education”) OR (“English learning obstacles” AND “Ecuador”)
Google Scholar	“English learning difficulties” OR “English learning obstacles” OR “causes of learning English” AND “basic education” OR “basic education students” AND “Ecuador”
RedALyC	“English language learning obstacles” AND “basic education students”

For the information search, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied:

Inclusion Criteria:

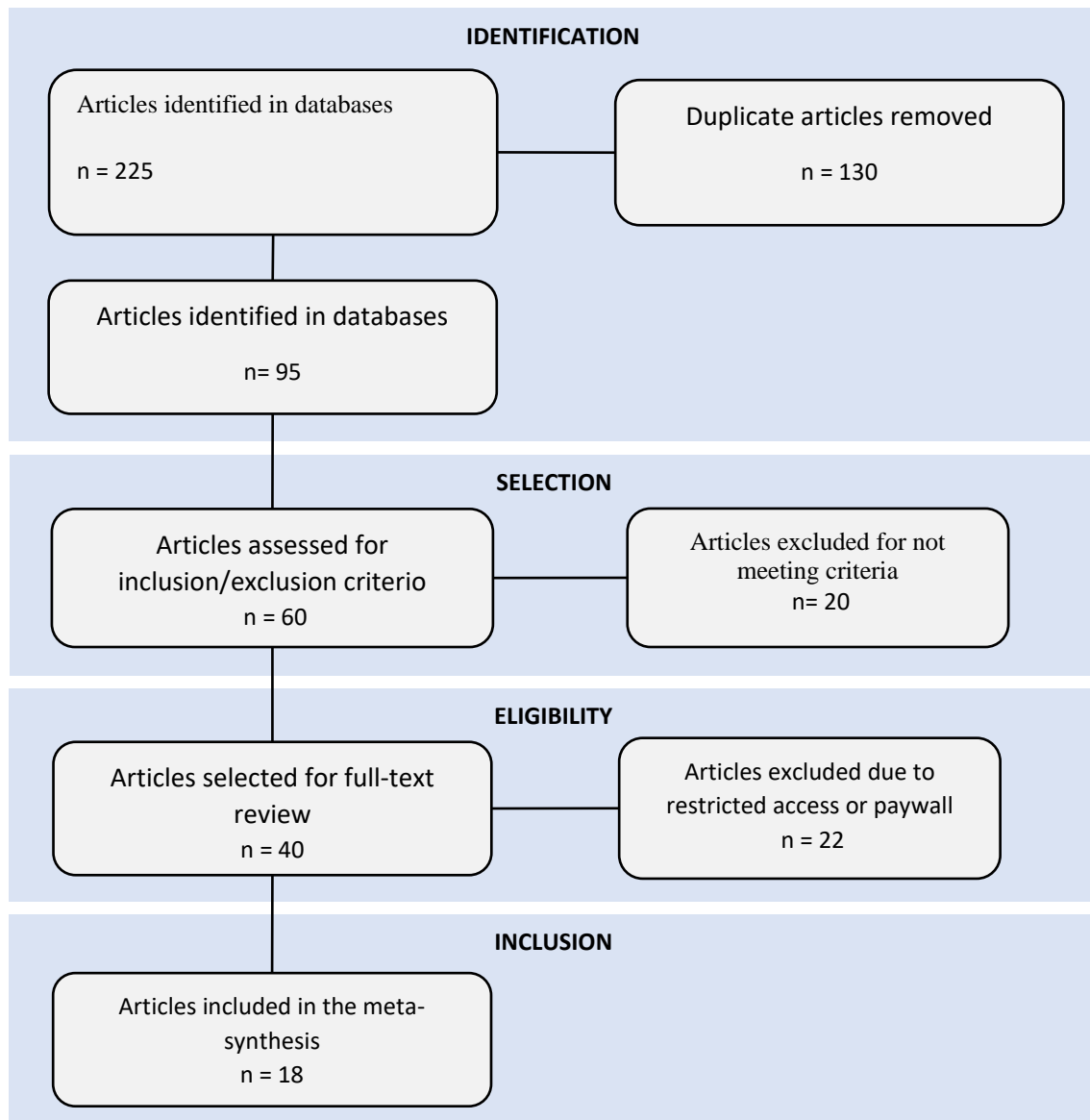
- Studies addressing the most common difficulties and obstacles basic education students face when learning English.
- Studies that measure or analyze possible causes and solutions in Ecuador.
- Academic studies with well-structured and defined methodologies.
- Articles published between 2020 and 2025.
- Studies in both English and Spanish.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Studies focused on educational levels other than basic education.
- Research not directly related to English language learning difficulties.
- Non-scientific publications, such as websites or blogs.
- Studies outside the required years.
- Studies in languages other than Spanish and English.

The selection and evaluation phase of the research was conducted following PRISMA guidelines to ensure transparency and coherence at each stage. The most relevant studies from Scopus, RedALyC, Scielo, and Google Scholar databases were identified. Titles and abstracts of the identified studies were analyzed to verify their relevance, applying inclusion and exclusion criteria to select articles for the research.

Figure 1.
PRISMA Flow Diagram



Results

Once the analysis and selection phase of the 18 articles through the PRISMA methodology was completed, the following findings are presented in relation to each of the specific objectives established for the development of this systematic review research.

The analyzed studies are detailed in **Table 2**, highlighting the main obstacles faced by basic education students in learning English. The most prominent difficulties include the lack of technological infrastructure in educational institutions, particularly in rural areas, reliance on traditional teaching methodologies, inadequate teacher training in English, and the lack of educational resources. Consequently, students exhibit a low level of English proficiency, limiting their educational and professional opportunities.

Table 2

Identification of the main difficulties faced by basic education students in Ecuador in learning English

No.	Authors/Year	Type of Study	Sample	Main Difficulties	
1	(Bravo & Alves, 2020)	Cross-sectional field research, non-experimental quantitative study	Survey of teachers	469 teachers and students from the English department	Lack of curriculum adaptation, implementation of an inadequate academic curriculum, traditional model, low motivation
2	(Guerrero et al., 2025)	Exploratory case study with a quantitative approach	52 students and 57 teachers from 7th grade	Technical problems, digital infrastructure, lack of teacher training, socio-emotional impact	
3	(Páez & Santillán, 2020)	Field study, quantitative	15 teachers and students from 8th, 9th, and 10th grade	Class size, excessive number of students, lack of educational resources, lack of teacher training	
4	(Soto et al., 2025)	Literature review	19 articles and 1 book on primary and secondary education for review	Lack of motivation, motivational strategies, cultural factors	
5	(Páez T., 2025)	Systematic review	22 studies on primary education in Ecuador	Student motivation, difficulty due to lack of teacher training, challenges in effective application	

6	(Guillen & Cerón, 2025)	Mixed study (qualitative and quantitative)	80 students from 5th, 6th, and 7th grade	Use of traditional methods, lack of digital competencies, lack of teacher training in English	
7	(Cárdenas & Soto, 2022)	Documentary analysis	Basic education students	Lack of implementation of educational policies and inadequate academic curriculum	
8	(Ariza, 2024)	Reflective essay	Random sample of primary students	Traditional teaching, native language influence, lack of educational policies, lack of necessary educational resources such as updated books, internet access, and motivation	

The studies analyzed in **Table 3** highlight the causes hindering English language learning in Ecuadorian secondary students. These causes are categorized into pedagogical factors, technological limitations, and socioeconomic barriers.

Table 3

Analysis of causes and consequences considering pedagogical, technological, and socioeconomic factors

No.	Authors/Year	Type of Study	Factor Type	Causes	Consequences
9	(Yáñez et al., 2024)	Systematic review	Technological	Digital divide, need for teacher training in technological tools	Unequal pronunciation among students, low academic performance
10	(Páez & Santillán, 2020)	Descriptive study	Socioeconomic	Limited resources, lack of family support,	Low motivation in English

				inadequate learning environment	language learning
11	(Intriago et al., 2024)	Qualitative and quantitative study	Pedagogical	Lack of teacher training, reliance on traditional teaching methodologies	Low vocabulary level, grammatical difficulties, lack of motivation in learning

The studies analyzed in **Table 4** highlight evidence-based strategies and solutions to improve English language learning in secondary school students. These include pedagogical strategies, didactic approaches, digital tools, and the use of stimulating and motivational learning environments. The details are as follows.

Table 4

Proposing evidence-based strategies and solutions to improve English teaching and learning at this educational level

No.	Authors/Year	Type of Study	Solutions	Findings
12	(Lalvay & González, 2024)	Quantitative study	Implementation of the flipped classroom methodology	Significant improvement in oral, vocabulary, and grammar skills among seventh-grade students in Cuenca
13	(García et al., 2024)	Systematic review	Pedagogical strategies, communicative approach-based methodologies, integration of technology and stimulating learning environments	Improvements in linguistic skills and motivation in English learning among primary students
14	(Molina et al., 2024)	Descriptive study	Didactic strategies such as memory-based, cognitive, compensatory, and metacognitive approaches	Improved English language learning and academic performance
15	(Rodríguez et al., 2022)	Non-experimental, quantitative and qualitative	Use of digital resources and technological strategies	The use of digital tools enhances verbal fluency and academic performance

16	(Cedeño & Viguera, 2020)	Systematic review	Implementation of flipped classroom	Improved motivation and conceptual understanding
17	(Malavé et al., 2025)	Systematic review	Project-based strategies	Improvement in academic performance, linguistic competence, and motivation
18	(Pacheco et al., 2022)	Mixed approach	Physical activity and motivation	Interactive classes incorporating dance and dramatization enhance motivation

Discussions

The teaching of English as a foreign language to basic education students in the Ecuadorian context faces multiple challenges and difficulties that hinder students' learning. Among the most relevant issues identified are institutional, methodological, and technological problems that prevent the development of linguistic skills. The main obstacles include the lack of appropriate didactic resources, the frequent use of traditional teaching methods that are ineffective for proper learning, and the lack of technology in the classroom. These limitations negatively affect skills such as listening comprehension, oral expression, written communication, and verbal fluency. To address these difficulties, several studies have proposed innovative methods or strategies, including flipped classroom methodology, the use of digital resources, competence-based teaching implementation, and teacher training to improve English language learning among basic education students in Ecuador.

Objective 1

In the research conducted by Bravo & Alves (2020), a cross-sectional field study with a sample of 469 English teachers and students, the main challenges identified include the lack of curriculum adaptation to students' socioeconomic environment and the non-didactic way in which teachers deliver their classes, leading to students' lack of interest in learning English. Similarly, Guerrero et al. (2025) found that inadequate infrastructure and limited teacher knowledge about proper English language instruction are significant obstacles. In conclusion, it is crucial to focus on implementing a curriculum centered on grammar learning activities and incorporating innovative resources that capture students' interest.

In the studies by Guillen & Cerón (2025) and Arán et al. (2022), both authors agree that one of the main difficulties students face is the reliance on traditional teaching methods, which prevents them from fully developing their linguistic skills. Additionally, a lack of

educational policies, necessary resources such as updated books, internet access, and motivation were identified. Among teachers, fear of speaking English, lack of practice at home, and general disinterest—such as insufficient speaking skills—were observed.

The studies by Páez T. (2025) highlighted that lack of motivation and inadequate teacher training are key factors affecting English learning. Similarly, Soto et al. (2025) stated that both the absence of motivation and the lack of effective motivational strategies hinder students' progress in acquiring the language. In conclusion, future studies should focus on strategies that enhance student motivation, cultural influences, educational strategies, and teacher training to encourage students to learn English.

The findings of Páez & Santillán (2020), through a field study, reveal that classroom size and the number of students per class prevent teachers from effectively working on students' verbal fluency. Traditional methods such as rote memorization of English, the absence of a conducive physical environment, and the lack of well-prepared daily lessons by teachers were additional challenges. Meanwhile, Cárdenas & Soto (2022) identified shortcomings in the implementation of educational policies and an inadequate academic curriculum. Emotional and social challenges, pronunciation difficulties—given the complexity of English vowel and alphabet sounds—and structural issues in sentence formation were also documented.

Objective 2

Yáñez et al. (2024) examined causes and consequences related to the technological gap, finding that inadequate teacher training leads to poor pronunciation among students, negatively impacting academic performance. However, the integration of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) promotes motivation and interest, allowing students to practice autonomously and receive feedback, which enhances their engagement and class participation while improving academic averages (Páez & Santillán, 2020). Other findings included a lack of planning, excessive student numbers per class, and small classrooms, all of which limit verbal fluency and participation opportunities. Additionally, Intriago et al. (2024) reported that 52% of students do not have internet access, suffer from low vocabulary levels, grammatical difficulties, and lack motivation for learning.

Objective 3

The studies by Lalvay & González (2024) and Cedeño & Vigueras (2020) propose implementing the flipped classroom methodology as a solution. This approach fosters student motivation through collaborative and autonomous learning, leading to improvements in grades, linguistic skills, and competencies. The strategy also optimizes class time and assignments, allowing students to learn at their own pace, enhancing engagement, and improving comprehension among basic education students.

In the research by García et al. (2024), pedagogical strategies, communicative approach methodologies, technological integration, and stimulating learning environments were identified as effective solutions. These elements promote active participation, ensure clear and fluid class delivery, and create engaging learning environments that support English language acquisition for advanced proficiency. Meanwhile, Malavé et al. (2025) reinforced the effectiveness of project-based strategies, demonstrating improvements in academic performance, competencies, and linguistic skills compared to traditional learning methods. This strategy is considered essential for modern English language teaching, benefiting both teachers and students.

Similarly, Molina et al. (2024) highlighted the use of didactic strategies such as memory-based, cognitive, compensatory, and metacognitive techniques. Results showed a reliability coefficient of 0.9, confirming significant improvements in students' academic performance, particularly in reading, where 40.13% of students demonstrated improvement. A correlation of 0.865 suggests that correct implementation of these strategies yields positive outcomes.

Rodríguez et al. (2022) analyzed the impact of digital resources and technological strategies, finding that internet use significantly enhances verbal fluency, making it a key tool in English language teaching and learning. Finally, Pacheco et al. (2022) examined the role of physical activity and motivation, demonstrating that interactive classes incorporating dance and dramatization improve student engagement. To address these challenges, additional activities such as reading at home, watching series, listening to music in English, using digital platforms, and audiobooks are recommended. In conclusion, educational institutions should integrate digital tools into academic curricula, develop learning content, and adopt practical approaches to help students relate English to real-life situations.

Conclusions

Objective 1

The review of the articles allows us to conclude that basic education students face recurring problems such as the use of traditional methodologies, lack of motivation, inadequate technological infrastructure, and fear of reprimand. These issues are present in both urban and rural environments, negatively affecting essential skills such as pronunciation, listening comprehension, and oral expression. Similarly, insufficient teacher training and a teacher-centered approach lead to passive and, consequently, less meaningful learning. The effects are evident in low linguistic competence and disinterest in the subject. Therefore, it is necessary to seek teaching strategies based on students' actual needs and to promote studies that propose innovative solutions focused on Ecuadorian basic education institutions.



A strong interference from the mother tongue (Spanish or indigenous languages) in English retention and pronunciation was also observed. It is recommended to implement continuous teacher training, reorganize the curriculum timing allocated to English, and equip schools with adequate teaching resources.

Objective 2

The research analyzed the most significant causes and consequences, with pedagogy emerging as the most relevant factor. The predominant issues include the use of traditional memorization-based methods. In the technological aspect, limited access to digital tools and poor connectivity—especially in rural areas—were identified. From a socioeconomic perspective, a large percentage of students lacked a supportive family environment for their studies and suffered material limitations that prevented them from accessing supplementary educational resources.

Further investigation is needed to understand how national language policies shape language teaching practices in different schools, both rural and urban. Underlying causes identified include teaching methodologies centered on grammar and mechanical memorization, limited access to educational technologies in rural areas, and the low socioeconomic status of families, preventing participation in learning activities. Additionally, there is a lack of exposure to English in real communication contexts.

Objective 3

The strategies and solutions proposed to improve language learning focus on incorporating active methodologies such as communicative approaches, learning through games, using songs, audiovisual tools, and integrating educational technologies within the Ecuadorian context. These methods boost student motivation and enhance vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension with greater ease.

It is advisable to include these strategies in institutional policies, incorporate them into teacher training programs, and ensure financial support for their implementation. Further research is needed on the long-term impact of these strategies on English learning throughout the academic years.

The application of communicative and flexible pedagogical approaches is recommended, as well as the integration of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) into classroom strategies. Additionally, collaboration with local community representatives and governmental organizations is necessary to help address access barriers. Future research directions should focus on.

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