

**DIFFICULTY FACTORS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE****Factores de dificultad para el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera****Fatores de dificuldade para a aprendizagem do inglês como língua estrangeira**

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**ABSTRACT**

English plays a crucial role in globalization, education, and professional development; however, students in Ecuador still face multiple difficulties when learning it as a foreign language. This study aimed to identify the cognitive and motivational factors that hinder English learning among eighth, ninth, and tenth-grade students at the Vicente Rocafuerte Educational Institution in Ecuador. A descriptive exploratory study was conducted using surveys, interviews, and classroom observations; the sample included 180 students and five English teachers. Findings revealed low motivation (15.4% stable interest), limited peer interaction in English (42.1% never speak it), and insufficient instructional resources, which negatively affect comprehension and participation. In conclusion, cognitive and motivational factors interact to hinder English learning, highlight the need for participatory strategies, increased oral practice, and improved teaching sources.

**Keywords:** English learning, cognitive factors, motivational factors, language teaching.

**RESUMEN**

El inglés desempeña un papel fundamental en la globalización, la educación y el desarrollo profesional; sin embargo, los estudiantes en Ecuador aún enfrentan diversas dificultades para aprenderlo como lengua extranjera. El objetivo de este estudio fue identificar los factores cognitivos y motivacionales que dificultan el aprendizaje del inglés en estudiantes de octavo, noveno y décimo grado de la Unidad Educativa Vicente Rocafuerte en Ecuador. Se realizó un estudio descriptivo y exploratorio mediante encuestas, entrevistas y observaciones en el aula; la muestra estuvo conformada por 180 estudiantes y cinco docentes de inglés. Los resultados evidenciaron baja motivación (15.4% con interés estable), escasa interacción en inglés entre compañeros (42,1% nunca lo utilizan) y limitados recursos didácticos, lo que afecta la comprensión y la participación. En conclusión, los factores cognitivos y motivacionales interactúan dificultando el aprendizaje del inglés, por lo que se requieren estrategias participativas, mayor práctica oral y mejores recursos pedagógicos.

**Palabras clave:** aprendizaje del inglés, factores cognitivos, factores motivacionales, enseñanza de idiomas.

**RESUMO**

O inglês desempenha um papel essencial na globalização, na educação e no desenvolvimento profissional; entretanto, estudantes no Equador ainda enfrentam diversas dificuldades ao aprendê-lo como língua estrangeira. Este estudo teve como objetivo identificar os fatores cognitivos e motivacionais que dificultam a aprendizagem do inglês em alunos do

oitavo, nono e décimo ano da Instituição Educativa Vicente Rocafuerte, no Equador. Foi realizado um estudo descritivo e exploratório utilizando questionários, entrevistas e observações em sala de aula; a mostra foi composta por 180 estudantes e cinco professores de inglês. Os resultados evidenciam baixa motivação (15,4% com interesse estável), pouca interação em inglês entre colegas (42,1% nunca o utilizam) e recursos didáticos limitados, afetando a compreensão e a participação. Em conclusão, os fatores cognitivos e motivacionais interagem dificultando a aprendizagem do inglês, indicando a necessidade de estratégias participativas, maior prática oral e melhores recursos pedagógicos.

**Palavras-chave:** aprendizagem de inglês, fatores cognitivos, fatores motivacionais, ensino de línguas.

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## INTRODUCTION

The English language is becoming increasingly important and prominent in our society. This global relevance is largely due to English being the primary language for international communication, scientific publication, and digital platforms (Chowdhury et al., 2024; Coleman, 2010; Kuteeva, 2020; Petal, 2023). In today's global economy, the demand for foreign language skills has increased significantly due to the integration of technology, commerce, and science into international markets (Chowdhury et al., 2024; Ku & Zussman, 2010; Wang, 2016). In addition to enhancing professional opportunities for individuals through developing a foreign language capability, these domains will also continue to utilize English as their lingua franca (Jenkins, 2014; Ku & Zussman, 2010; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). As such, many individuals are now understanding the importance of developing foreign language skills in order to enhance their professional opportunity and broaden their career options within sectors that rely on intercultural and/or multilingual communication (British Council, 2013; Chowdhury et al., 2024; Petal, 2023).

According to Torres et al. (2018), the teaching of English is essential in helping to prepare our students for advancing in 21st-century education. The fact that English is, as noted earlier, a global language, means that its significance is very high – especially to our students – within their educational experiences. As a result, fluency in English is now viewed as an imperative for achieving academic success and future employment, as compared to previously having language fluency as just one of many advantages, and, therefore, could be a large contributing factor to a student's ability to be successful academically and/or achieve future success in their chosen field (Torres et al., 2018).

Inca Chunata et al. (2021) affirm that Ecuadorian education is currently given variability, which allows teachers to adopt and design autonomously the pedagogical process to be taught in the classroom. In Ecuador, English is the primary foreign language taught. This underscores the significance of the language in the educational sector, contributing to its integration into the curriculum by numerous institutions. As Márquez Sánchez (2021) notes, the current challenge for the educational system is to develop activities that promote and motivate people to learn different languages (Quidel Cumilaf et al., 2014). The teaching-learning process of the English language in the classroom has become an elementary guideline for students to approach a foreign language; that is, to practice a language other than their mother tongue.

The present research seeks to identify the cognitive and motivational factors that hinder the learning of English as a foreign language. This work focuses on eighth, ninth and tenth-grade students at the Vicente Rocafuerte public school. To carry out these studies, a survey and an interview were used. Subsequently, with the guidance of the instructor, an observation form was completed to assess the students' progress. The implementation of these techniques and instruments will facilitate the identification of obstacles that hinder the teaching of English in eighth, ninth and tenth-grade students, thereby contributing to the enhancement of English language instruction.

## DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Pincay Rodríguez et al. (2019) claims that the process of language acquisition is impacted by factors on the cognitive, emotional, social and intellectual scales. The literature has shown that different variables such as age, motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, and prior experiences greatly impact the learning of a foreign language (Duran Nieto et al., 2021; Giraldo Grisales et al., 2023; Vega, 1990). All of these factors contribute to the challenge of teaching languages and may lead to outcomes in English language learning that are not suitable to the fulfillment of the learner's personal or professional goals (Giraldo Grisales et al., 2023; Vega, 1990).

The study of a foreign language presents significant challenges. The individual in question is confronted with the challenge of transcending the limitations of their own language and seeking to comprehend a new culture, way of thinking, feeling, and acting (Rodas-Pacheco & Rodas-Brosam, 2021). This traversing entails overcoming cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural barriers, for better or for worse, which may pose challenges to learning a new language (Beltrán Arias, 2015; Dornyei & Ryan, 2015; Piechurska-Kuciel et al., 2017; Sumonte & Fuentealba, 2019). Mastering the details of cultural communication is imperative for purpose of interaction across cultures, communication, and even language learning (Apodaca Ugalde, 2022).

As Wang (2021) and Shao et al. (2020) suggest, there are numerous emotional and cognitive factors that influence the teaching and learning process, especially regarding new materials. In this case, it is necessary to learn and actively participate since participation stimulates the affective and intellectual levels vital to meaningful learning (Oxford, 2015; Shao et al. 2019). Which, in turn, enables the learner to use the language practically in conveying and receiving messages both orally and grammatically which helps to increase effectiveness in the target language (Oxford, 2015; Wang, 2021).

Ceballos and Davila (2014), cited by Ruiz et al. (2019), found that learning difficulties can be seen in the inadequate academic development presented by students. Among the most common difficulties are:

- Inadequate supply of trained and certified English instructors.
- Inadequate instructional resources and teaching aids.
- Excess reliance on textbooks and curriculum.
- Assimilative rather than communicative approaches dominated the learners' syllabus.
- Listening and speaking skills are still given little attention.
- Persistent neglect of the English language in various educational settings.
- Teaching approaches and materials were conventional, dull, or uninspirational.
- English speaking immersion or exchange programs are lacking.
- Attitudinal and motivational students' dispositions towards learning grammar and structure were low.
- Teaching resources are multidisciplinary but also interdisciplinary, making their access to identification rather limited.
- Teaching English to student with no prior knowledge would result in the unachievable expectation of flexible student studying in an overcrowded classroom.

In order to effectively intervene with students, identifying whether or not issues experienced by English Language Learners (ELLs) are due to specific curriculum or broader problems is very important (Valero & Jimenez, 2015). Properly flipping the data will ensure we have clear understanding of what factors contribute to ELL success in their language learning process. Due to such importance, great efforts need to be made to address the issue and to improve it.

There are different factors, which are all interrelated, that influence students' performance and participation while learning English as it is taught as a foreign language. The emotional and the cognitive aspects are important because they determine the students' ability to process, store, and use the language. According to Shao et al. (2020), emotions, more than anything else, can accelerate or decelerate the acquisition of a language. Enjoyment and anxiety can either facilitate or hinder acquisition depending on how the emotions are dealt with in the learning environment, which can either be very supportive or very restrictive.

Also, according to Wang (2021), teacher immediacy issues also concern cognitive and affective engagement, which is important in relation to engagement with the language. Emotional reactions while learning language, according to Oxford (2015), enhance and motivate the learners to put more effort into the tasks. That is to say, meeting learners' affective needs is the more fundamental approach to addressing their academic needs because emotion is the dominant stimulus. Zuo et al (2019) jointly found that many learners' emotional, behavioral, and cognitive responses prominently affect students' perceptions and attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language for university purposes.

Moreover, Shi (2021) analyzes the emotional aspects for instructors teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and how such aspects influence practices aimed at fostering students' learning. Conroy (2018) points out

that some factors, such as participation in study abroad programs, serve as major avenues for authentic language and culture learning. In addition, it has been noted recently how teacher empathy and immediacy positively impact students' emotional learning outcomes, which highlights the crucial focus on interpersonal aspects of teaching (Wang & Kang, 2023). Such studies argue that teaching English effectively requires integrating affective, cognitive, and contextual frameworks responsive to the learner's developmental and communicative needs.

### **LEARNING ENGLISH IN THE ECUADORIAN CONTEXT**

As cited in Mendoza and Castellanos (2017), English has not only become a language of wide communication and interaction on a globalized scale, but it has also become essential to learn and master, specifically in the professional and educational spectrums during periods of crucial change. This has also been noted by Brilianti and Rokhim (2023) who note that engineering students understand the need to be proficient in English in order to understand complex technical materials and partake in international collaborations. According to Kurbanova and Abdugafforova (2024) English is the primary language used in instruction and thus serves as a medium to access academic information and resources, which is beneficial when one seeks higher education.

Likewise, Agustina et al. (2024) mention that due to the change in the economy globally, English is required to promote effective communication and to remain competitive in business as well as to deal with professionals from different cultures field greatly improves intercultural cross interaction. Deepa et al. (2023) highlight the growing importance of English skills for consideration for promotion, especially in industries that primarily communicate in English. Collectively, all of these studies point to the necessity of mastering the English language particularly on the educational and vocational fronts.

In the 21st century, a single language is no longer sufficient to respond adequately to the demands of today's global environment, where different types of expressions and thoughts coexist (Burgos & López, 2010). Given that historically, access to this type of education was limited to individuals with financial resources in private institutions, the regulations were modified to make the teaching and learning of this language accessible to public entities. However, this does not address the inequities that exist in the pedagogy of both. In this regard, Villafuerte (2019) notes that English is one of the languages most commonly used to market elite educational services. This has exacerbated existing social disparities in Ecuador.

In this context, Valero & Jiménez (2015) emphasize the importance of English language instruction in the country's recent linguistic developments. Consequently, the learning process has exposed certain gaps due to the introduction of new elements, particularly given the shift from foreign language instruction as a mere content subject to its role as a learning tool. Therefore, Pincay Rodríguez (2019) explains that, in this process, it is necessary to distinguish the specific knowledge, actions, or skills that students must acquire as part of the content they learn.

The Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (2016), has listed five components for the teaching of English in schools and high schools, which are as follows: Oral Communication (speaking and listening), Reading, Writing, Language through the Arts and Communication and Cultural Awareness. These components seek to foster the 4Cs (Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration and Creativity) in learners using a holistic approach. These elements are also in sync with the overarching objectives of the Ecuadorian curriculum which focuses on fostering innovativeness, just, and citizens who, in a globalized world, are internationally competitive while supporting local development. The Ministry of Education advocates for the use of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as the approach for teaching English so as to enhance the authenticity and relevance in learning the language.

According to Mendoza and Castellanos (2017), the study revealed shortcomings in the formative results of high school students. The application of innovative methodologies, which are based on traditional models, has not been effective in complementing formal education. As a result, the expected results and impacts have not been achieved. Furthermore, a variety of social, economic, cognitive, and emotional factors directly impact the learning of this foreign language. It is important to note that the pedagogy employed for teaching this foreign language does not align with the optimal approach for language acquisition, which is evident in the students' limited English proficiency.

The teaching of English in Ecuador has been linked to the country's attempts at educational integration and system improvement. For the Ministry of Education of Ecuador, English is an integral part of development, and hence it is taught at public schools using communicative, learner-centered, and CLIL approaches (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2016). The national curriculum still aims to achieve critical thinking along with cultural and global citizenship awareness, expecting a B1 CEFR level during high school graduation (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2016).

However, there is a lack of many less flexible, structural obstacle; these are highly problematic in practice. Research indicates that there is a significant gap between expectations and reality, including inadequate levels of teachers' English proficiency for the school curriculums, high student numbers, and lack of educational coherency (Guerrero Rodríguez & Moreira Baquerizo, 2025; Newman et al., 2023; Ortega Auquilla & Fernández, 2017).

Furthermore, English is more than just an academic hurdle; it is an emerging requirement for social stratification in employment and society. English has been noted as a global lingua franca in academic, business and international interaction, providing high value information and resources along with better employment opportunities (Jenkins & Panero, 2024). Regardless, the advocacy for English must be harmonized with appreciation for the sociocultural aspects of Ecuador's multilingual communities (Newman et al., 2023). In short, enhancing the teaching of English in Ecuador necessitates innovation in curriculum and policy as well as comprehensive skills training for teachers, appropriate funding, and resources centralized in the primary educational institutions.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

To achieve this objective, a comprehensive research approach encompassing descriptive and exploratory studies was undertaken. In this case, Ochoa & Yunkor (2021) stated that the descriptive study focuses on deepening the topic it has developed. That is, the study aims to provide full knowledge of the line of research and its characteristics, as well as its properties, features, and the theories on which it is based. This type of research allows us to analyze, describe, and even detail the characteristics of the situation under study through the results obtained.

To complement the work, exploratory research was used because it was necessary to thoroughly examine the causes of low performance in eighth, ninth and tenth-grade elementary school students' learning. Through inquiry, it was possible to gain a more in-depth understanding of these causes. According to Ramos Galarza (2020), the application of this methodology is intended to facilitate the investigation of previously unstudied phenomena, with a focus on examining their characteristics or specific variables.

The study required the implementation of the empirical method for scientific research in the educational field, which required instruments to verify the object under investigation in practice and ensure the collection of the necessary information to reach scientific conclusions (Rojas Plasencia et al., 2018). This methodology needed the utilization of techniques such as surveys, interviews, and observations. These techniques yielded valid data, allowing us to identify the cognitive and motivational factors hindering English language learning. As a result, we were able to propose a solution to the identified problem.

To achieve the first objective concerning the description of the cognitive and motivational factors, a bibliographic review of books, magazines, theses, and websites was conducted. This review revealed essential data, which led to the structuring and application of these techniques in the eighth, ninth and tenth-grade students and teachers at the Vicente Rocafuerte School.

The second objective involved an analysis of the perceptions of the teachers and students. These perceptions were obtained from a survey with 13 questions proposed by Montero & Reales (2017). An interview was also conducted with the teachers. This interview was extracted from the research of Peña Ledesma (2019). The interview allowed for the determination and identification of the cognitive and motivational factors that hindered the learning of this foreign language.

Finally, in the third objective, the cognitive and motivational factors were identified using an observation sheet developed with the theoretical approach of Lozada Bernal & Obonaga Carvajal (2016), in which the evaluation parameters for these two variables were contemplated. The card featured a 12-question format that was graded based on observations from the class's development. We also elucidated the causal relationships determined by the results obtained from the application of the instruments. These findings were determined through an analysis that examined the incidence of cognitive and motivational factors.

### **Population and Sample**

Once the problem was identified, it was proceeded to define the population that will be the object of the study. For this purpose, it has been considered the students of the Vicente Rocafuerte school. The sample was limited to students in the eighth, ninth and tenth year of basic education (educación general básica), which consists of 180 students legally enrolled in the English area. It is also important to note that in the upper basic grades (eighth, ninth and tenth-grade), this subject is taught by five teachers.

The population and sample were selected with the intention of revealing the factors that impede the learning of English as a foreign language. For the study, the convenience sampling method described by Hernández-Ávila & Carpio (2019) was employed, with the understanding that the selected individuals must align with the specific characteristics of interest of the researcher. After careful consideration of the methodology, the eighth, ninth and tenth year of basic education belonging to the básica superior sub-level was selected as the target year. This level represents the transition to the bachillerato level.

This research yielded valuable insights, enabling the identification of key cognitive and motivational factors hindering the process of language acquisition. The data collected provided a solid foundation for implementing targeted corrective actions in the upcoming academic year. It is also important to emphasise that students who successfully complete the bachillerato program do so holistically, having developed the four essential language skills: listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing.

## RESULTS

The survey administered as part of the research initiative sought to gauge students' perceptions regarding the challenges and opportunities associated with English language learning. Regarding learner interest in English study, the findings are inconsistent. Only 15.4% of students expressed consistent interest in pursuing English studies, while an additional 48.7% indicated that their interest is variable, occasionally disliking English lessons. Variations in class attendance suggest that dynamic and interactive instructional methods are necessary to promote learner engagement.

Analysis of participation patterns indicates major issues with students within their levels of self-esteem and their language skills. For instance, 61.5% of students participated in some of the time during English lessons; none reported always participating in these lessons. In addition, the use of the English language creates further challenges to student participation in class due to the communication barrier created between students who do not speak the same language. For instance, 38.5% of students never respond to hellos or goodbyes in English, demonstrating a lack of language practice.

On a slightly more positive note, the students demonstrated responsible study habits. According to the most recent data, approximately 35.9% of students consistently complete their English homework on time, while 20.5% do so nearly every time. This is a very responsible approach to assignments, although their class participation remains low. English peer-to-peer communication poses a major risk and problem. Of the students surveyed, 42.1% never use English to communicate with their peers and only 5.3% report that they always communicate with peers in English, indicating a considerable opportunity loss for practicing and acquiring the English language among peers.

At the same time, 66.7% of students agree that their teachers regularly correct their language errors, indicating that students are learning in an attentive and supportive environment. There are many facets involved in the issue of parental involvement. In terms of academic achievements, (25.6%) or approximately one-fourth of students receive compliments or praise from their parents often, and 28.2% receive frequent praise for account or academic achievement. However, 23.1% of students rarely receive praise for academic achievements. On average, approximately one-fourth of students (25.6%) report that they have never received academic punishment (due to poor grades) at home.

The students struggle to understand spoken or written English provided to them by the teachers. Only 17.9% indicated that they never had difficulty understanding. The materials that are provided to instructors to teach students English have a median score of 5, with approximately 30.8% of individuals reporting that they always found the materials useful, while 38.5% of individuals only sometimes found the materials useful, this provides evidence of the need for a strategic approach to pedagogy and instructional materials.

The teachers, who teach 8th, 9th, or 10th years basic education students, were interviewed regarding the various factors that inhibit the acquisition of the English language, with an emphasis on cognitive and motivational factors. The first question posed to one of the teachers was about his years of experience teaching English. The teacher replied: "I have been working as an English subject teacher for six years." When asked about the teaching techniques he finds appropriate for English courses, the teacher replied: "The techniques that I find appropriate for teaching English courses include readings, texts, and videos." With respect to the study materials, one of the teachers clarified that sentence composition, fundamental grammar, and present tense questionings

are the primary focus. When asked about the level of enthusiasm shown by students in English classes, one of the teachers indicated that there is minimal enthusiasm and that students appear fearful. The teacher has expressed concerns about the efficacy of the methodology employed in the instruction of basic education students.

Moreover, the teachers indicated that the English proficiency level of eighth, ninth and tenth-graders was suboptimal and attributed this to the virtual format of classes during the pandemic. Teachers further stated that this issue was not exclusive to eighth, ninth and tenth-grade students. When asked about the impact of the pandemic on English language learning among students, teachers indicated that the absence of mandatory standards hindered progress in this area.

Likewise, teachers identified several factors that contribute to the reluctance of eighth, ninth and tenth-grade students to pursue English learning. “A lack of interest, attention, teaching methodologies, and boredom.” In terms of the cognitive and motivational factors that significantly impact English language learning, curiosity about new knowledge emerged as a key element, as noted by the instructor. Finally, teachers believe that an environment conducive to learning is required for effective learning, with appropriate equipment to support teaching.

The results below are the findings of the observation form completed while observing English lessons instructed by teachers to eighth, ninth and tenth-grade students. The observation tool was divided into cognitive and motivational factors, evaluated according to various characteristics, and rated in high, medium, or low levels, depending on what was observed during the lessons.

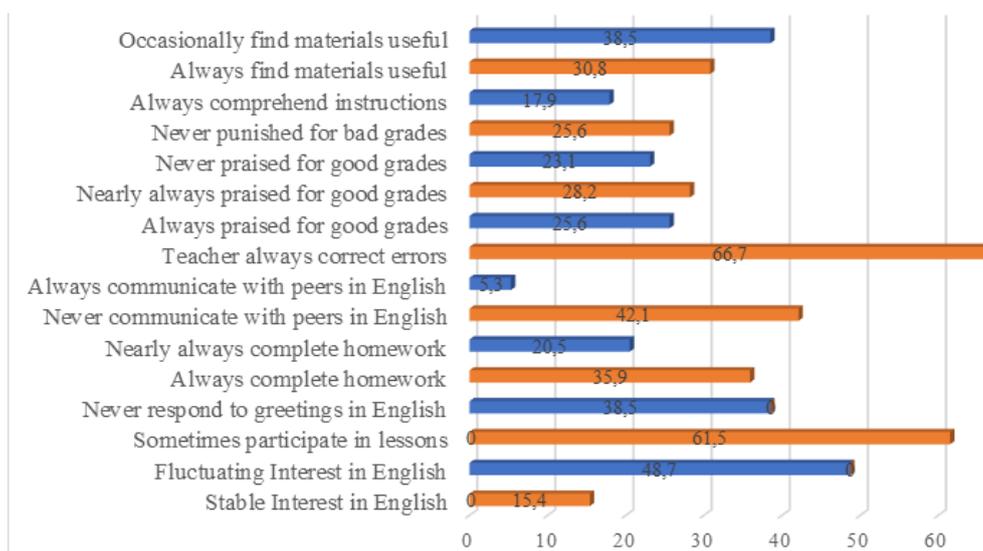


Figure 1. Summary of the main results about the student perceptions on challenges and opportunities in English learning.

Source: Own elaboration

The results of analysis indicate that there are many barriers faced by learners on their journeys to learning the English Language. For example, 42.1% of students reported never having a conversation in English with another student and 38.5% of students do not say “hello” when passing a classmate, indicating both a lack of authentic opportunities to use English as well as low self-efficacy. Also, students are participating in a passive manner since 61.5% of students said they “sometimes” participate in a given lesson while no student has been identified as a full participant. Completion of homework also appears inconsistent: while 35.9% always complete set work, only 20.5% nearly always do so.

Likewise, motivation is equally fragile, with 48.7% reporting fluctuating levels of interest in English, zero reporting consistent interest, and therefore suggesting a need for more stimulating and pertinent lessons. Recognition and reward seem insufficient, given that 23.1% reported being unrecognized for receiving good grades, with only 25.6% of participants always praised for grade achievement. Even if 66.7% of the respondents believed that a teacher consistently corrects work done by the learner, comprehension is a problem since only 17.9% claim they follow instructions all the time. Similarly, concerning the materials, 38.5% view them as only sometimes useful, while 30.8% deem them always useful, indicating consideration or lack thereof regarding the students’ needs and preferences. Overall, the results still suggest an interplay of affective and methodological factors that hinder educational achievement, highlighting the urgent need to increase interaction, recognition, and English teaching and learning engagement.

### **Cognitive factors considerations**

With regard to cognitive factors, the teachers' direction inclination was rated low in all classes. This was due to students having poor subject understanding and minimal assistance from the instructor to improve understanding. The utilization of instructional materials was also found to be suboptimal. English textbooks were never provided to learners, and the instructional materials used by the teachers were primarily ineffective. Efforts made by the instructor to recreate the auditory experience did not go over very well with his students. As such, he got a low score on that aspect of teaching; he never gave audio support to the language learning by using any type of audio materials, but only using his voice and directions to assist them in their learning processes. He also rarely used English within the class time he had with them. Consequently, there was little interest on the part of students for the instructional activities; therefore, very few of the students would participate in activities requiring English to be spoken. Students' ability to understand what has been taught from one class to another is deemed as moderate, and they successfully accomplished the exercises within a class even though they lacked adequate comprehension of those same exercises being conducted within each class.

### **Motivational factors considerations**

In terms of motivational factors, the demonstration of nervousness or anxiety during class was rated low. While students did not display overt anxiety or nervousness, they did demonstrate fear when faced with reading or pronunciation exercises. The students' motivation to study a new language, in this case English, was found to be low. Teachers noted minimal attention and interest during lessons. Correspondingly, the Learning Attitudes received a minimal score due to there being little positive evidence of learning attitudes and the motivation provided by teachers was low. The ability to ask a question when uncertain was also lacking. Only 1 or 2 students asked questions, with the remaining students sitting quietly, indicating that they were not very interested in improving their understanding.

There was little acknowledgement from the teachers regarding the student's contributions; therefore, the teachers displayed a lack of interest in their students' participation. Students who did not want to answer or participate in class received low scores. This was not due to a lack of willingness to participate, but rather because they were unsure how to respond. As a result, they chose to remain silent rather than risking an incorrect response. The observed teaching practices and classroom interactions are not perceived as adequate in promoting effective learning of the English language among the learners.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of the present study, indicating that only a small proportion of primary learners (15.4 %) demonstrated stable motivation and that a high percentage exhibited reluctance to speak English due to anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, align with extant evidence demonstrating that affective variables such as motivation, willingness to communicate (WTC), and anxiety are central mediating factors in EFL learning outcomes (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Horwitz et al., 1986; ; Li et al., 2022; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Teimouri et al., 2019). The results can also be interpreted through the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1982), which suggest that high levels of anxiety and low motivation may limit students' ability to acquire a second language.

Research on willingness to communicate underscores the critical role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in shaping learners' confidence and participation, showing that learners with low motivational profiles are more reluctant to engage in oral interaction and are more likely to experience negative emotional states during speaking tasks (Khajavy et al., 2018; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Oxford, 2016; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Purwaningsih & Harahap, 2025; Yashima et al., 2004). In their empirical study, Purwaningsih and Harahap found that learners with lower motivation levels reported significantly lower confidence in speaking and greater hesitation, linking motivational dispositions directly to communicative engagement in the classroom (Purwaningsih & Harahap, 2025).

Corroborating these findings, large-scale investigations into the relationships among anxiety, academic buoyancy, and WTC have demonstrated that foreign language anxiety (FLA) negatively predicts willingness to communicate, with psychological resilience (such as academic buoyancy) partially mediating this relationship (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Gregersen, et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2025; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Teimouri et al., 2019). Their mixed-method analysis revealed that learners with high anxiety consistently exhibited lower

WTC, while learners who displayed higher buoyancy demonstrated greater communicative confidence and engagement, indicating that the interplay between affective restraint and motivational disposition shapes communicative behavior in significant ways (Gregersen et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2025; Teimouri et al., 2019).

Moreover, longitudinal evidence suggests that attitudes toward language and WTC can remain stable over time and are interconnected constructs that influence learners' long-term engagement and language learning outcomes. An examination of EFL students in China over time revealed they had stable levels of motivation and were open to interacting in English (WTC). These findings support the idea that students' emotional investments in learning languages at the beginning of their education, and their motivation to remain engaged in learning English, will help them continue communicating in English throughout their schooling (Feng et al., 2023; Li et al., 2020; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Yashima et al., 2004). Thus, this evidence confirms that motivation and WTC are important contributors to students' learning trajectories in EFL, and the data collected in other studies can provide a useful theoretical framework for understanding why it is seen such low participation rates and high anxiety levels among EFL students in your research. They also highlight the need for pedagogical interventions that cultivate both positive motivational climates and psychological resilience in young learners, thereby facilitating more active engagement with the target language.

The present findings clearly indicate that speaking based anxiety was a significant factor limiting students' engagement and oral production. This aligns with a well established body of research showing that foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) negatively impacts learners' willingness to communicate (WTC), oral performance, and overall participation in classroom interactions. Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is generally viewed as a source of apprehension, doubt, and concern associated with the process of attempting to speak or anticipating the opportunity to speak in a target language, which typically results in decreased speaking or willingness to communicate orally. (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Horwitz et al., 1986; Teimouri et al., 2020). Research shows that individuals who experience High FLA do not take advantage of opportunities to speak. This affects their competencies in speaking and therefore their language development. (Khajavy et al., 2016; Peng & Woodrow, 2010).

The nature of speaking leads to a high level of anxiety for learners of a foreign language due to the requirement to generate a language in real time and subject to assessment by others. Therefore, it is common for learners to feel anxiety, fear of making a mistake, being judged negatively by others, and losing face as a result of being judged (Dewaele, 2019; MacIntyre, 2020). In addition, research indicates that language learners in EFL settings demonstrate tension, fear, physiological symptoms of unease, and cognitive responses when asked to produce spoken English. These reactions are closely associated with lower levels of participation in oral practice and a reluctance to engage in oral tasks, and are consistent with some of the findings in the study being discussed here (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021; Zhao et al., 2023). Teacher-reported data has consistently shown that one of the biggest sources of anxiety for learners in a foreign-language classroom is speaking. This is due, in part, to the fear of making mistakes, the pressure to perform well, and the tendency for students to hesitate before speaking (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

## CONCLUSIONS

The investigation showed that cognitive and motivational aspects are the chief barriers to English Proficiency of Vicente Rocafuerte school's ninth-grade students. Using an integrative methodological approach that included administering surveys, interviewing participants, and observing classes, we uncovered a clear bidirectional interaction between these two dimensions.

The motivational dimension blends with cognitive barriers that include low interest, high fear of diagnostic features such as mispronouncing words, and extremely low English interaction among peers that is bound to English. Survey findings corroborated that merely 15.4% of the participants reportedly had interest in English language learning, while 42.1% never spoke English with fellow students, which proves that motivation is indeed linked to level of engagement.

The data provided indicated that there was very little teacher direction, inefficient use of resources, and low student participation. It also signaled an anxiety or embarrassment about being a willing participant alongside negative attitudes toward learning as persistent factors. Moreover, the teacher interview disclosed other structural and pedagogical gaps such as a learning deficit resulting from the pandemic, an overemphasis on grammar and reading materials, and an underemphasis on practical language use. These problems confirm more recent studies which propose that the language learning process suffers because it is not impeded by

disjointed cognitive or emotional burdens, but rather the intricate intertwining of all three (Náznean, 2023; Ren & Abhakorn, 2022).

Adopting these conclusions suggests that intervention strategies should be aimed at changing the pedagogy to bridge the gap between cognition and motivation. The advocacy of minimal pressure relating to speaking tasks along with accepting erring as constitutive of learning (Hidajat et al., 2023) coupled with flexible and engaging materials, active sustained feedback, and teaching that empowers learners to shape their sense of self and emotional safety is required. The promotion of participation and the recognition of mastery of basic communication skills in grading should be strengthened. The results provide these English language practitioners and policymakers working to improve the instructional resources and sociopsychologically challenging context of the classroom with most sustainably adaptable principles to address.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

### **Declaration of responsibility of authorship**

We, Stefany Gabriela Vélez Muñoz, María Gabriela Intriago Vera, Miguel Macías Loor, Roberth Israel Ponce Martínez and Martha Narcisa Loor Fernández, authors of the indicated manuscript, DECLARE that we have contributed directly to its intellectual content, as well as to the genesis and analysis of its data; therefore, we

are in a position to be made publicly responsible for it and accept that our name appears in the list of authors in the indicated order. And that the ethical requirements of the aforementioned publication have been met, having consulted the Declaration of Ethics and Malpractice in the publication. Adriana Stefany Mendoza Lopez, María Gabriela Intriago Vera, Miguel Macías Loor, Roberth Israel Ponce Martínez and Martha Narcisa Loor Fernandez: research, collection, interpretation and analysis of data, drafting of the manuscript, preparation of the abstract and preparation of the conclusions.