

ACADEMIC AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Estrategias de apoyo académico y emocional para estudiantes con autismo en el aula de inglés

Estratégias de apoio acadêmico e emocional para alunos com autismo na sala de aula de inglês

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face significant challenges in communication, social interaction, and emotional regulation that limit their participation and learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Traditional teaching methods often fail to address their specific needs. Materials and methods: The study adopted a qualitative approach, collecting data through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. The sample included three students with ASD characteristics, two English teachers, and one inclusive education specialist from a public school in Ecuador. Data were analyzed through triangulation of methods and sources. Results: Findings revealed that teachers face difficulties maintaining group interaction and teaching abstract grammar rules. Students exhibit anxiety when routines change and frustration with lengthy tasks, but show enthusiasm with visual supports. Teachers reported fragmented strategies and insufficient specialized training. Parents confirmed children's anxiety and frustration, noted disconnection between English lessons and daily life, and called for individualized instruction. Observations showed uneven participation, fluctuating emotional responses, and inconsistent teaching practices. Two strategies were proposed: an academic fostering strategy (visual vocabulary cards, step-by-step grammar exercises, interactive digital tools, interest-based reading) and an emotional support strategy (routine visual schedules, calm corners, mindfulness breaks, positive reinforcement). Discussion: Results align with previous studies confirming that ASD students in EFL contexts need structured, predictable, sensory-friendly environments, and that parental involvement is crucial but often hindered by lack of school guidance. Conclusions: ASD students face barriers that can expose them to anxiety and frustration. Current strategies are insufficient, and teacher training is inadequate. The proposed strategies aim to reduce anxiety, foster participation, and create safe, inclusive environments for ASD students in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: English, inclusion, autism.

RESUMEN

Introducción: Los estudiantes con trastorno del espectro autista (TEA) enfrentan desafíos significativos en la comunicación, la interacción social y la regulación emocional que limitan su participación y aprendizaje en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). Los métodos de enseñanza tradicionales a menudo no logran abordar sus necesidades específicas. Materiales y métodos: El estudio adoptó un enfoque cualitativo, recopilando datos a través de la observación en el aula y entrevistas semiestructuradas. La muestra incluyó a tres estudiantes con características de TEA, dos profesores de inglés y un especialista en educación inclusiva de una escuela pública en Ecuador. Los datos se analizaron mediante la triangulación de métodos y fuentes. Resultados: Los hallazgos revelaron que los profesores enfrentan dificultades para mantener la interacción grupal y enseñar reglas gramaticales abstractas. Los estudiantes muestran ansiedad cuando cambian las rutinas y frustración con tareas largas, pero muestran entusiasmo con apoyos visuales. Los profesores reportaron estrategias fragmentadas y capacitación especializada insuficiente. Los padres confirmaron la ansiedad y la frustración de los niños, notaron una desconexión entre las clases de inglés y la vida diaria,

y solicitaron instrucción individualizada. Las observaciones mostraron participación desigual, respuestas emocionales fluctuantes y prácticas de enseñanza inconsistentes. Se propusieron dos estrategias: una de fomento académico (tarjetas de vocabulario visual, ejercicios gramaticales paso a paso, herramientas digitales interactivas, lectura basada en intereses) y otra de apoyo emocional (horarios visuales rutinarios, rincones de calma, pausas de atención plena, refuerzo positivo). Discusión: Los resultados coinciden con estudios previos que confirman que los estudiantes con TEA en contextos de inglés como lengua extranjera necesitan entornos estructurados, predecibles y adaptados a sus necesidades sensoriales, y que la participación de los padres es crucial, pero a menudo se ve obstaculizada por la falta de orientación escolar. Conclusiones: Los estudiantes con TEA se enfrentan a barreras que pueden generarles ansiedad y frustración. Las estrategias actuales son insuficientes y la formación docente es inadecuada. Las estrategias propuestas buscan reducir la ansiedad, fomentar la participación y crear entornos seguros e inclusivos para los estudiantes con TEA en las aulas de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: Inglés, inclusión, autismo.

RESUMO

Introdução: Alunos com Transtorno do Espectro Autista (TEA) enfrentam desafios significativos na comunicação, interação social e regulação emocional, o que limita sua participação e aprendizado em aulas de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL). Os métodos de ensino tradicionais frequentemente não atendem às suas necessidades específicas. **Materiais e métodos:** O estudo adotou uma abordagem qualitativa, coletando dados por meio de observação em sala de aula e entrevistas semiestruturadas. A amostra incluiu três alunos com características de TEA, dois professores de inglês e um especialista em educação inclusiva de uma escola pública no Equador. Os dados foram analisados por meio da triangulação de métodos e fontes. **Resultados:** Os resultados revelaram que os professores enfrentam dificuldades para manter a interação em grupo e ensinar regras gramaticais abstratas. Os alunos demonstram ansiedade quando as rotinas mudam e frustração com tarefas longas, mas mostram entusiasmo com recursos visuais. Os professores relataram estratégias fragmentadas e treinamento especializado insuficiente. Os pais confirmaram a ansiedade e a frustração das crianças, notaram a desconexão entre as aulas de inglês e a vida diária e solicitaram instrução individualizada. As observações mostraram participação desigual, respostas emocionais variáveis e práticas de ensino inconsistentes. Foram propostas duas estratégias: uma estratégia de apoio acadêmico (cartões visuais de vocabulário, exercícios gramaticais passo a passo, ferramentas digitais interativas, leitura baseada em interesses) e uma estratégia de apoio emocional (rotinas visuais, cantos da calma, pausas para atenção plena, reforço positivo). **Discussão:** Os resultados estão alinhados com estudos anteriores que confirmam que alunos com TEA em contextos de inglês como língua estrangeira precisam de ambientes estruturados, previsíveis e sensorialmente adaptados, e que o envolvimento dos pais é crucial, mas frequentemente dificultado pela falta de orientação escolar. **Conclusões:** Alunos com TEA enfrentam barreiras que podem expô-los à ansiedade e frustração. As estratégias atuais são insuficientes e a formação de professores é inadequada. As estratégias propostas visam reduzir a ansiedade, promover a participação e criar ambientes seguros e inclusivos para alunos com TEA em salas de aula de inglês como língua estrangeira.

Palavras-chave: Inglês, inclusão, autismo.


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INTRODUCTION

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often face significant challenges related to communication, social interaction, and emotional regulation. These difficulties can limit their participation in classroom activities and affect their learning process. Traditional teaching methods are not always adapted to meet the specific needs of these students, which can result in low engagement, frustration, and limited academic progress.

The students with autism benefit from structured environments and visual supports that enhance their participation and learning (Mesibov & Shea, 2010; Lindsay et al., 2013) teaching of English as a foreign language requires inclusive approaches that address the diverse needs of students. Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder often face barriers in communication and social interaction, which can limit their participation in classroom activities. For this reason, it is necessary to implement strategies that support both academic learning and emotional development.

Based on the previous facts, the present work stated the following research question: How can the learning of English be enhanced in students with Autism Spectrum Disorder? The general objective of the study was



directed to: To enhance participation and learning of English in students with Autism Spectrum Disorder through academic and emotional support strategies. The specific objectives of the investigation were: to identify the academic and emotional challenges faced by students with autism in the English classroom and to elaborate strategies to support students with autism during English learning activities.

The field of action of this study is the teaching learning process of English in basic education, where the implementation of academic and emotional support strategies is required to enhance students' participation and learning. Previous studies indicate that structured environments, visual supports, and emotional guidance can improve the learning experience of students with autism (Odom et al., 2010; Lindsay et al., 2013).

Therefore, this study seeks to answer how academic and emotional support strategies influence the participation and learning of students with autism in the English classroom. The research aims to provide practical insights into inclusive teaching practices that promote both academic development and emotional well-being.

This research is justified by the need to promote inclusive education practices that allow students with autism to actively participate in the learning process. By analyzing the effectiveness of academic and emotional support strategies, this study contributes to improving teaching practices in EFL contexts.

Literature Review

Inclusive education is grounded in the principle that all learners have the right to equitable participation in typical classrooms. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2022) argue that inclusive pedagogy must move beyond deficit-based models, instead recognizing diversity as a resource for learning. From this perspective, students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), inclusion requires more than physical integration; it demands meaningful participation supported by tailored strategies. Petersson-Bloom & Holmqvist (2022) highlight the importance of structured routines, multimodal teaching, and sensory-sensitive environments. Belay (2024) highlights that teacher preparation and collaboration with families are critical to ensuring both academic and social development.

Recent Latin American contributions expand these viewpoints. Ortuño-Zamora (2025) emphasizes the need for didactic strategies that address communication barriers and behavioral challenges while fostering social interaction. Sánchez Caicedo, López Moyano, and Vizcaíno Zúñiga (2025) propose inclusive education models that integrate neurodivergent students into mainstream classrooms by focusing on both academic and socio-emotional growth. Espinoza Bravo, Castillo Villegas, and León Sinche (2025) demonstrate that collaborative activities enhance social interaction and reduce isolation among autistic learners.


Evidence-based strategies identified in recent scholarship include:

- Environmental modifications such as sensory-friendly classrooms and quiet zones (Ortuño-Zamora, 2025).
- Instructional adaptations including visual scaffolds, explicit language modeling, and predictable routines (Petersson-Bloom & Holmqvist, 2022).
- Collaborative practices involving multidisciplinary support teams and peer mentoring (Belay, 2024; Espinoza Bravo et al., 2025).
- Inclusive models that integrate neurodivergent students into mainstream education while addressing systemic inequities (Sánchez Caicedo et al., 2025).

The theoretical framework of inclusive education for students with autism underscores the need for systemic change, teacher training, and evidence-based strategies. Effective inclusion is not only about access but about participation, belonging, and achievement across academic and social domains.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is defined as a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by persistent differences in social communication and restricted, repetitive behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Recent epidemiological studies confirm that ASD affects approximately 1 in 100 children worldwide, with prevalence rates continuing to rise due to improved diagnostic practices (Lord et al., 2020). Importantly, ASD is a spectrum, meaning that individuals present with diverse strengths and challenges, requiring personalized approaches in education (Petersson-Bloom & Holmqvist, 2022).

Autistic individuals often display distinct patterns of behavior and cognition. Among them, the most common are: social communication differences. Difficulties in reciprocal conversation, interpreting nonverbal cues, and forming peer relationships are well-documented (Esqueda Villegas et al., 2022). Restricted interest is another



relevant factor. Intense focus on specific topics or activities can enhance learning in specialized domains, such as STEM (Da et al., 2025).

Repetitive behavior also characterizes individuals with ASD. Rituals and routines provide predictability, but may limit flexibility in classroom settings (APA, 2013). Sensory sensitivities is recognized as well as a distinctive factor. Heightened or reduced responses to sensory input (sound, light, textures) often affect classroom participation (Tsou et al., 2024). Finally, cognitive strength is also documented as a typical factor. Many autistic learners demonstrate strong memory, attention to detail, and unique problem-solving approaches, which can be leveraged in teaching (Tígere et al., 2025).

Autism significantly influences how students engage with educational environments. It can lead to communication barriers. Autistic learners may struggle with abstract or ambiguous instructions, requiring visual supports and simplified language (Petersson-Bloom & Holmqvist, 2022). They can also face social challenges, group work and peer collaboration can be stressful, highlighting the need for structured social skills interventions (Tsou et al., 2024).

Executive functioning differences are found too. Planning, organization, and flexibility are often limited, affecting task completion and adaptability (Esqueda Villegas et al., 2022). Students with autism can face sensory environment challenges. Overstimulating classrooms may hinder concentration on these students.

During the teaching-learning process of English, teachers and students with ASD face several challenges. Such students may have processing difficulties that often hinder their ability to understand idiomatic expressions, figurative language, and conversational norms (Liu, 2023). Social communication barriers, such as difficulty interpreting non-verbal cues and managing group interactions, can further complicate language acquisition (Brahim, 2022). The cognitive load of decoding linguistic structures while navigating social contexts increases anxiety and reduces engagement (Nascimento, Pereira, & Faciola, 2025). Additionally, generalization issues may limit their ability to apply learned vocabulary and grammar across different contexts.

Despite these challenges, autistic students possess unique strengths that can support English learning. They often have strong memory and pattern recognition skills, which aid in grammar and vocabulary acquisition (Brahim, 2022). Focused interests can be used to create personalized and engaging learning materials. Their preference for visual learning makes visual aids, structured routines, and charts especially effective. Moreover, their affinity for consistency aligns well with systematic language instruction.

To support autistic students in learning English, educators should adopt individualized instruction that leverages each student's strengths and addresses their challenges. Inclusive classroom practices, such as sensory-friendly environments and alternative communication methods, can reduce barriers. Structured peer interactions with visual aids can enhance social communication. Furthermore, teacher training in differentiation and cultural sensitivity is essential for effective instruction.

In sum, autistic students learning English encounter both challenges and opportunities. By balancing structure with flexibility, leveraging cognitive strengths, and fostering inclusive environments, educators can help these students achieve meaningful language proficiency.

METHODOLOGY

The study was developed on the basis of a qualitative research. This type of investigation was selected based on the nature of the object and subjects under analysis. The characteristics of the teaching-learning process of English to students with ASD demands a more flexible perspective of study than quantitative approaches. According to Hernández & Mendoza (2018), such flexibility is an inherent feature of qualitative studies.

The qualitative analysis also implies recognizing the experience of the researcher and the participants of the investigation, logically and coherently combined with the theory related to the object that is studied. This introduces a naturalistic view since individuals are the center of attention in their natural contexts and environments (Hernández & Mendoza, 2018).

The research level of the investigation was descriptive. It is correlated to the qualitative character of the investigation. The descriptive design allowed deepening on the characteristics of the teaching-learning process to students with ASD in the English lessons. It contributed to determine what strategies were the most suitable ones to enhance participation and emotional comfort on those students while learning a foreign

language. Descriptive research also allowed the analysis of observable behaviors and classroom dynamics in real educational contexts (Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2010).

The sample was selected through a non-probability convenience sampling, which is commonly used in qualitative studies where participants are selected based on accessibility and relevance to the research (Creswell, 2014). It was integrated by three students who present characteristics associated with ASD, one specialist in inclusive education from a public school in Ecuador, and two teachers of English, within the context of basic education. From the ethical point of view, the names of the participants (students and teachers as well) were labeled with references not associated with their names or positions. This guaranteed the confidence and reliability of the information collected. The anonymous character of the process provided the necessary comfort for each of the participants. Due to the sensitive nature of the students under study, paternal consent was also obtained. This approval also facilitated full cooperation of the students' parents.

Data collection was developed through the application of the following empirical methods: two semi-structured interviews. One of them was applied to teachers and the inclusive education specialist of the school. It was focused on determining the challenges they face during the teaching-learning process of English to their ASD students. The other interview was developed with the students' parents. Its objective was to collect direct information from their children about how they feel and profit from the English lesson. This decision was taken to reduce the impact of communication barriers between a student and his/her teacher and the inclusive education specialist of the school. Though the data had an indirect character, it could be corroborated by means of other research methods.

Direct observation was the other empirical method used in the research. It allowed gathering practical evidences about how the teaching-learning process of English with ASD students was developed. The triangulation of all the methods and sources mentioned above leads to obtaining an integral idea of the process studied.

From the theoretical viewpoint, analysis-synthesis and induction-deduction were applied during the research. They served to construct the theoretical foundation of the investigation and to the processes of data interpretation.

RESULTS

Since the investigation has a qualitative orientation, as it was stated, data collection was developed through semi-structured interviews. They allowed the participants to gain space while offering their viewpoints. Though the analysis of the results was oriented to the descriptive study of the phenomenon studied, some tables are presented. They functioned as visual organizers of the different categories that were evaluated. They included emergent categories, examples, and quotations to illustrate the information given by the participants.

The analysis begins with the results of the interview with English teachers.

Table 1. Challenges in Teaching English to Students with Autism

Category	Source	Example Quotations
Class dynamics	Teacher A	"It's difficult to maintain group interaction; some students prefer isolation and avoid participating."
Learning difficulties	Teacher B	"Grammar rules are abstract, and they struggle to grasp them without concrete examples."
Participation barriers	Teacher A	"They often hesitate to answer questions, even when they know the answer, due to anxiety."

The teachers highlight that class participation and abstract language learning are major barriers. This suggests the need for more structured supports and inclusive strategies to reduce anxiety and foster engagement.

Table 2. Emotional Sphere

Category	Source	Example Quotations
Emotional responses	Teacher B	"I notice frustration when tasks are too long, but also enthusiasm when lessons include visuals."
Anxiety presence	Teacher A	"Sudden changes in routine trigger visible anxiety; students sometimes shut down."
Supportive environment	Teacher B	"I try to create a calm atmosphere with predictable routines and positive reinforcement."

Emotional regulation is a recurring theme. Teachers perceive both enthusiasm and frustration, showing that emotional safety is central to effective English learning for students with ASD.

Table 3. Strategies Used in the Classroom

Category	Source	Example Quotations
Instructional strategies	Teacher A	"Breaking tasks into smaller steps helps them stay focused."
Technology and tools	Teacher B	"Interactive apps and flashcards make vocabulary practice more engaging."
Emotional regulation techniques	Teacher A	"Breathing exercises and short breaks reduce stress during lessons."

Teachers rely on structured instruction, digital tools, and emotional regulation techniques. However, these strategies appear fragmented, suggesting a need for more systematic training and integration.

Table 4. Professional Training

Category	Source	Example Quotations
Training received	Teacher B	"I attended a short workshop, but it was very general and not specific to English teaching."
Lack of preparation	Teacher A	"I haven't received formal training; I rely on personal experience and trial and error."

Both teachers reveal gaps in professional training, indicating that while they attempt strategies, they lack specialized preparation. This underscores the need for targeted professional development in inclusive English teaching. The results of the interview with the specialist in inclusive education are shown in the table below. It is compared to the responses given by teachers in the interview.

Table 5. Comparison of Teachers' and Specialists' Perspectives

Theme	Teachers' Perspectives	Specialist's Perspective
Challenges	"Students avoid group interaction and struggle with abstract grammar."	"Teachers lack institutional support; inclusion policies are vague and not adapted to language teaching."
Emotional sphere	"Students show anxiety when routines change; visuals bring enthusiasm."	"Schools fail to provide consistent emotional support structures; teachers are left to improvise."
Strategies	"Breaking tasks into steps, using apps, and short breaks."	"Strategies must be systematized; technology should be adapted to sensory needs, not just added superficially."
Professional training	"Workshops are too general; often no formal training."	"Training is insufficient and rarely specialized in language teaching; ongoing professional development is needed."

The comparison reveals alignment in recognizing challenges but also gaps between classroom practice and systemic support. Teachers emphasize day to day struggles (participation, anxiety, abstract learning), while the specialist points to structural deficiencies (lack of clear inclusion policies, insufficient training). Both perspectives converge on the urgent need for specialized professional development and systematic strategies. The simulated results show that while teachers are improvising solutions, the absence of institutional frameworks leaves problems unresolved, reinforcing the necessity for coordinated action at both classroom and policy levels.

The results of the interview to parents of students with ASD are presented below

Table 6. General Background

Family context	Parent A	"My child enjoys English songs but struggles with grammar exercises at school."
Parental involvement	Parent B	"I help him at home with vocabulary using flashcards, but I'm not sure if I'm doing it the right way."
Schooling experience	Parent C	"She feels left behind when the teacher moves too quickly through lessons."

Parents describe a mixed background: while children show interest in music or visuals, they struggle with grammar and pacing. Parental involvement exists but is often uncertain, revealing a need for clearer guidance from schools on how families can support English learning at home.

Table 7. Children's Emotional Experiences in English Lessons

Emotional communication	Parent A	"He tells me he feels nervous when asked to speak in front of the class."
Positive emotions	Parent B	"She was proud when she learned to sing an English song and shared it at home."
Negative emotions	Parent C	"He often says English is too hard and gets frustrated."
Coping mechanisms	Parent A	"He asks for breaks or avoids the activity altogether when overwhelmed."

Parents highlight both positive and negative emotions. Pride emerges when tasks are enjoyable and concrete, but anxiety and frustration dominate when lessons are abstract or socially demanding. Coping often involves avoidance, showing that emotional regulation strategies in class are insufficient.

Table 8. Perceptions of English Learning

Usefulness of English	Parent B	"I believe English will help her in future studies, but she doesn't see its importance yet."
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Future opportunities	Parent A	"Knowing English could open doors for him, but he needs more support to get there."
Daily life relevance	Parent C	"He uses English words when playing video games, but not much beyond that."

Parents recognize English as valuable for future opportunities, but children rarely connect it to daily life. This disconnect suggests that lessons need stronger links to students' interests and everyday contexts to build motivation.

Table 9. Support and Strategies

School support	Parent A	"The school tries, but teachers don't seem trained enough to adapt lessons."
Home strategies	Parent B	"We use songs and cartoons in English at home to keep her motivated."
Desired improvements	Parent C	"I'd like teachers to give more individualized attention and clearer instructions."

Parents perceive school support as limited, with teachers lacking specialized training. Home strategies are creative but informal, relying on media. Desired improvements focus on individualized instruction and clearer communication, pointing to systemic gaps in inclusive practice.

Table 10. Closing Questions

Reflections	Parent B	"The most important factor is that she feels safe and not pressured in class."
Recommendations	Parent A	"Teachers should use more visuals and allow breaks when students feel anxious."

Parents emphasize emotional safety and flexibility as key factors for motivation. Their recommendations align with inclusive strategies already identified by teachers and specialists, reinforcing the need for consistent application in classrooms.

The integral analysis of all items reveal that parents consider that while children occasionally experience joy in English learning, negative emotions, lack of individualized support, and weak school home coordination dominate. Parents see English as useful but disconnected from daily life, and they call for better teacher training, clearer instructional adaptations, and stronger emotional supports. These results highlight systemic areas needing improvement to ensure ASD students feel safe, motivated, and capable in English lessons.

The results derived from the observation are analyzed below


In relation to the participation of ASD students, it was noted that it varied considerably. A few students showed high engagement, volunteering answers and initiating role plays, which demonstrated confidence and positive peer interaction. However, most students only participated when prompted by the teacher, and their peer interaction was minimal. Some students withdrew almost entirely, avoiding group work and showing little initiative. This uneven participation suggests that while some ASD learners thrive in structured activities, many require scaffolding and social supports to feel safe engaging with peers.

Emotional reactions fluctuated across lessons. Positive emotions were evident when activities involved songs, visuals, or predictable routines — students smiled, laughed, and expressed enjoyment. Yet, when routines shifted or tasks became abstract, anxiety and frustration quickly emerged. Some students managed stress with breaks or teacher support, but others struggled to regulate even with assistance, leading to withdrawal. This highlights the need for consistent emotional regulation strategies and predictable lesson structures.

Academic outcomes were mixed. A few students consistently completed tasks accurately and showed progress, particularly in vocabulary. Others completed most tasks but with partial accuracy, especially in grammar and spelling. Some students rarely finished assignments and demonstrated little improvement over time. This variability underscores the importance of differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and individualized pacing to support diverse learning profiles.

Teaching practices were inconsistent. In some lessons, teachers applied strong adaptations — visual schedules, apps, and peer support — which fostered inclusion and engagement. In other sessions, adaptations were minimal or absent, with little technology use and limited inclusive practices. This inconsistency left some students unsupported and struggling. The observations reveal a pressing need for systematic training and consistent application of inclusive strategies across all lessons.

In general, the observations reveal uneven participation, fluctuating emotional responses, variable academic performance, and inconsistent teaching strategies. While inclusive practices sometimes fostered engagement and enjoyment, their absence often led to frustration and withdrawal. These results point to systemic issues: teachers need consistent training in inclusive methodologies, emotional regulation strategies,



and differentiated instruction. Without these, ASD students remain at risk of exclusion and limited progress in English lessons.

The triangulation of the methods applied, taking as a point of reference the observations, reinforces what parents, teachers, and the specialist already expressed: ASD students' participation and emotions are fragile, academic progress is uneven, and teaching strategies lack consistency. All perspectives converge on the urgent need for systematic teacher training, predictable routines, emotional regulation supports, and stronger school-home collaboration.

DISCUSSION

The results highlighted uncertainty in supporting English learning at home and frustration with fast-paced lessons. Fernández Cerero, Montenegro Rueda, & López Meneses (2024) found similar patterns: parental involvement is crucial but often hindered by a lack of guidance from schools. This confirms that families need structured support to complement classroom practices.

Parents reported anxiety and avoidance, while teachers noted students' enthusiasm with visuals but anxiety when routines changed. Puteri Zarina Megat Khalid, Kussin, & Ang Yee Xing (2026) recognized that ASD learners in ESL contexts often express frustration unless lessons are predictable and sensory-friendly. This convergence shows that both parents and teachers recognize emotional vulnerability, but systemic supports remain weak.

English is valued for future opportunities, but noted children rarely connect it to daily life. The specialist emphasized that strategies must be systematized and contextualized. Vásquez-Rodas (2025) reviewed parental training and found that while families see English as useful, children with ASD need contextualized, interest-based approaches to perceive relevance. This aligns with the simulated results.

Teachers admitted to improvising strategies, parents perceived insufficient school support, and the specialist stressed the lack of institutional frameworks. Fernández Cerero et al. (2024) confirmed that teachers often lack specialized training in autism-specific strategies for language learning. This triangulation shows consensus: training and institutional support are inadequate.

Teachers reported workshops too general, while the specialist emphasized ongoing professional development. Literature supports this: Puteri Zarina et al. (2026) found that parents also perceive teachers as underprepared, and Fernández Cerero et al. (2024) stressed the need for continuous, specialized training.

Parents emphasized emotional safety, while the specialist pointed to systemic deficiencies. This reaffirms the principles highlighted in Vásquez-Rodas (2025), who argued that emotional regulation and safe environments are essential for ASD learners to thrive in language classrooms.

In general, the findings obtained in this work as compared to others presented in the specialized scientific literature related to the topic confirms that while English is valued for future opportunities, ASD students need structured, emotionally safe, and contextually relevant approaches. Improvements must focus on teacher professional development, institutional frameworks, and family guidance to bridge the gap between recognition of English's importance and students' lived experiences.

Based on the previous assertions, this work proposes to consider the following key aspects for working with ASD students in English lessons:

- Structured teaching Methods like TEACCH emphasize clear routines, visual schedules, and step-by-step instructions, which help students with ASD feel secure and understand expectations.
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) UDL encourages multiple means of representation (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), expression, and engagement, ensuring lessons are accessible to diverse learners.
- Visual supports, such as flashcards, pictograms, and graphic organizers, can make abstract English concepts more concrete.
- Technology integration: Apps, interactive games, and speech-generating devices provide engaging ways to practice vocabulary and communication.
- Social communication focus: Role-play, peer collaboration, and guided conversations help students practice pragmatic language skills in safe contexts.

- Individualized instruction: Tailoring lessons to each student’s strengths (e.g., visual memory, special interests) increases motivation and retention.

Strategy for Academic Fostering of English Learning

Objective: Enable ASD students to acquire English vocabulary and grammar through structured, visual, and individualized approaches that reduce cognitive overload.

Methodological Approach: This strategy suggests the application of scaffolding and multisensory learning to support ASD learners’ diverse processing needs. It follows Universal Design for Learning (UDL) by offering multiple ways to access content. Predictability reduces anxiety. It aligns with SEL’s principle of self-management: by breaking tasks into steps and using visuals, students learn to regulate their own learning pace and manage frustration.

The activities suggested are the following:

1. Visual vocabulary cards

- Resources: Flashcards with images, simple sentences, and audio recordings.
- Interaction: Teacher introduces cards, students match words to images, then practice in pairs.
- Assessment: Oral repetition and matching exercises.
- Feedback: Immediate praise (“Excellent, you connected the word to the picture!”).

2. Step-by-step grammar exercises

- Resources: Visual timelines (past, present, future), sentence-building worksheets.
- Interaction: Teacher models sentences; students build their own with support.
- Assessment: Students create short dialogues using the tense.
- Feedback: Corrective but encouraging (“Good try, let’s adjust the verb form together”).

3. Interactive digital tools

- Resources: Apps with drag-and-drop vocabulary games.
- Interaction: Individual practice, then sharing results with peers.
- Assessment: Teacher monitors progress through app reports.
- Feedback: Positive reinforcement for effort, not just accuracy.

4. Interest-based reading

- Resources: Short texts about trains, animals, or other student interests.
- Interaction: Students read aloud, then discuss in small groups.
- Assessment: Comprehension questions tailored to the text.
- Feedback: Praise for engagement (“You explained the story very clearly”).

Expected Outcomes: Students retain vocabulary more effectively, show greater participation, and reduce frustration with abstract grammar.

Strategy for Fostering Emotional Support in English Lessons

Objective: Create a safe, predictable classroom environment that reduces anxiety and fosters emotional regulation during English learning.

Methodological Approach: This strategy is grounded in SEL principles:

- Self awareness: helping students recognize emotions.
- Self management: teaching regulation techniques.
- Social awareness: fostering empathy in group work.
- Relationship skills: encouraging peer collaboration.

- Responsible decision making: guiding students to make constructive choices.

Predictable routines and sensory accommodations ensure ASD learners feel secure and supported.

Suggested Activities:

1. Routine visual schedule

- Resources: Posters with icons for each lesson stage.
- Interaction: Teacher reviews the schedule at the start; students check off completed steps.
- Assessment: Observe reduced anxiety and smoother transitions.
- Feedback: Praise for following the schedule (“You stayed on track today!”).

1. Calm corner

- Resources: Stress balls, headphones, sensory toys.
- Interaction: Students self-regulate by visiting the corner when overwhelmed.
- Assessment: Teacher notes frequency and duration of use.
- Feedback: Encourage self-awareness (“You did well, take a break and coming back”).

1. Breathing and mindfulness breaks

- Resources: Guided audio or teacher-led breathing exercises.
- Interaction: Whole class participates before challenging tasks.
- Assessment: Observe calmer behavior and increased focus.
- Feedback: Reinforce participation (“Great job calming down before we start”).

1. Positive reinforcement

- Resources: Sticker charts, tokens, verbal praise.
- Interaction: Teacher rewards attempts at participation, even if incomplete.
- Assessment: Track increased willingness to answer or join activities.
- Feedback: Consistent encouragement (“I like how you tried to answer, keep it up”).

Expected Outcomes: Students show reduced anxiety, improved emotional resilience, and greater confidence in English lessons.

Contributions and originality of the study

The study provided an integral diagnosis of ASD students during the learning process of English as a foreign language in Ecuador. Such character was validated through the interaction with teachers who directly work with those students, with a specialist in inclusive education who works at the same school of the teachers and ASD students’ parents. The final results of the diagnosis were completed by observations as a practical tool to determine how the teaching-learning process of English was developed in practice.

The strategies proposed covered two essential areas that should be considered at the time of working with ASD students: the academic and the emotional fields. They were designed to foster students’ participation in class, reduce anxiety and frustration, as well as to create a safe and comfortable environment for those students. The combination of these methodological tools into the teaching-learning process of English to ASD students is creative and innovative. It focused on students as the center of the learning process and offered them ample possibilities of inclusion. The strategies, apart from developing language communicative competence, could be regarded as potential tools to contribute to the integral development of ASD students’ personalities.

Practical implications

From the practical viewpoint, the strategies introduced may generate changes in the general organization of English lessons in which ASD students are enrolled. They can turn into theoretical and practical guidelines to provide academic and emotional support to ASD students while dealing with the learning of English as a foreign language. Consequently, their performances and integration into society can be favored.

In addition to the previous statements, the research can contribute to inclusive education at all levels. Recognizing the strengths and challenges ASD students face during the teaching-learning process can lead to looking for solutions and deepen the study of students who may suffer from other types of disorders.

CONCLUSIONS

The integral analysis of the results leads to the conclusion that ASD students face challenges during the teaching-learning process of English as a foreign language. Such challenges may become barriers and expose students to anxiety and frustration, and consequently generate poor academic achievement.

It was also found that the strategies and techniques used at present are insufficient to manage inclusive education in English lessons. Teachers' training to provide individual, personalized, and specialized attention to ASD students is insufficient as well. Such reality demands a more profound and systematic upgrading of teachers on this ground.

The scope of the investigation was reduced to one school. This implied that the sample taken did not include a significant number of participants and that the peculiarities of ASD students in other contexts and environments were not studied.

Future investigations should also expand their object of study to the influence of parents of ASD students during the teaching-learning process. Though this area was explored up to a certain extent in the present paper, it still requires a more detailed analysis due to the significant role played by the family as a complementary aspect of the educational system.

It is recommended to widen the study of other schools where ASD students are enrolled. This will enrich the data collected in this paper. Therefore, new strategies can be designed based on the new information gathered.

Though the two strategies are presented as separate tools (only for methodological reasons), they can be integrated into the teaching-learning process. The rational integration of them will provide teachers and students with more logical guidance in the English lessons.

At the time of applying the strategies, teachers should be aware of the following risks that may emerge:

- Overloading students: Too much emphasis on grammar drills may cause frustration; balance with interactive activities.
- Ignoring individual needs: A one-size-fits-all approach can alienate learners; personalization is essential.
- Cultural relevance: Materials should reflect students' realities to maintain engagement.

The application of the strategies in the pedagogical practice is recommended as well. It will provide data about their usefulness to generate positive changes in ASD students in the English lessons. Hence, the necessary operational changes can be made to enrich such strategies.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of responsibility of authorship

We, the authors of the aforementioned manuscript, DECLARE that we have directly contributed to its intellectual content, as well as to the genesis and analysis of its data; therefore, we are able to take public responsibility for it and accept that their names appear on the list of authors in the order indicated. Furthermore, we have complied with the ethical requirements of the aforementioned publication, having consulted the Declaration of Ethics and Publication Malpractice.

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