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DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN EIGHTH GRADE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Dificultades en la enseñanza de una lengua extranjera en octavo grado y rendimiento académico

Dificuldades no ensino de uma língua estrangeira no oitavo ano e desempenho acadêmico

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Difficulties perceived in teaching and learning English as a foreign language may involve instructional, psychological, motivational, linguistic, contextual, and self-regulatory factors. However, their relationship with academic achievement remains insufficiently explored in rural secondary education. Objective. To examine the relationship between perceived barriers to learning English and academic achievement among eighth-grade students at Unidad Educativa Chamanga, Ecuador. Materials and Methods. A quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional correlational study was conducted with 50 eighth-grade students from classes B and C. Data were collected from official English grades and a 24-item questionnaire. Of the 1,200 expected responses, 1,113 could be reliably coded, while 87 were treated as missing because the selected options could not be clearly identified. Descriptive statistics, internal consistency estimates, and correlation analyses were performed. Results. The mean English grade was 7.99 (SD = 1.18), with 82% of students meeting or exceeding the required learning standards. Linguistic barriers had the highest mean score (M = 2.91). No statistically significant association was found between the overall barrier index and academic achievement ($r = 0.017$; $p = 0.907$). Linguistic barriers showed a negative but non-significant association ($r = -0.245$; $p = 0.087$). The overall index showed limited internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.415$). Conclusions. Students reported learning difficulties despite generally satisfactory academic achievement, and no statistically significant association was observed between the overall barrier index and English grades. The findings highlight the need to refine the assessment of learning barriers and conduct further research using validated instruments and larger samples.

Keywords: learning barriers; English as a foreign language; academic achievement; secondary education; Ecuador.

RESUMEN

Introducción. Las dificultades percibidas en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera pueden manifestarse en dimensiones didáctico-metodológicas, psicológico-motivacionales, lingüísticas, contextuales y de autorregulación, cuya relación con el rendimiento académico requiere mayor evidencia en contextos de educación secundaria rural. Objetivo. Examinar la relación entre las barreras percibidas en el aprendizaje del inglés y el rendimiento académico de estudiantes de octavo grado de la Unidad Educativa Chamanga, Ecuador. Materiales y métodos. Se desarrolló un estudio cuantitativo, no experimental, transversal y correlacional con 50 estudiantes de octavo grado, paralelos B y C. Se analizaron las calificaciones institucionales de Inglés y las respuestas a un cuestionario de 24 ítems. De las 1.200 respuestas previstas, 1.113 pudieron codificarse y 87 se trataron como datos faltantes debido a la imposibilidad de identificar inequívocamente la opción seleccionada. Se aplicaron análisis descriptivos, estimaciones de consistencia interna y pruebas de correlación. Resultados. La calificación media fue de 7,99 (DE = 1,18), y el 82 % de los estudiantes alcanzó o dominó los aprendizajes requeridos. La dimensión lingüística presentó el mayor promedio de barreras percibidas (M = 2,91). No se identificó una asociación estadísticamente significativa entre el índice global de barreras y

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el rendimiento académico (r = 0,017; p = 0,907). La dimensión lingüística mostró una asociación negativa no significativa (r = −0,245; p = 0,087). La consistencia interna del índice global fue limitada (α = 0,415). Conclusiones. Las barreras percibidas coexistieron con un rendimiento académico mayoritariamente satisfactorio, sin evidenciarse una asociación estadísticamente significativa entre ambas variables. Los hallazgos destacan la necesidad de perfeccionar la medición de las dificultades de aprendizaje y profundizar su estudio mediante instrumentos validados y muestras más amplias.
Palabras clave: dificultades de aprendizaje; inglés como lengua extranjera; rendimiento académico; educación secundaria; Ecuador.

RESUMO

Introdução. As dificuldades percebidas no ensino e na aprendizagem do inglês como língua estrangeira podem envolver fatores didático-metodológicos, psicológico-motivacionais, linguísticos, contextuais e de autorregulação. Entretanto, a relação dessas dificuldades com o desempenho acadêmico ainda é pouco investigada no contexto do ensino secundário rural. Objetivo. Examinar a relação entre as barreiras percebidas na aprendizagem do inglês e o desempenho acadêmico de estudantes do oitavo ano da Unidad Educativa Chamanga, no Equador. Materiais e métodos. Realizou-se um estudo quantitativo, não experimental, transversal e correlacional com 50 estudantes do oitavo ano, turmas B e C. Foram analisadas as notas oficiais de Inglês e as respostas a um questionário de 24 itens. Das 1.200 respostas previstas, 1.113 puderam ser codificadas de forma confiável, enquanto 87 foram tratadas como dados ausentes, pois não foi possível identificar com clareza as opções assinaladas. Foram realizadas análises descritivas, estimativas de consistência interna e análises de correlação. Resultados. A média das notas de Inglês foi de 7,99 (DP = 1,18), e 82% dos estudantes atingiram ou superaram os níveis de aprendizagem exigidos. A dimensão das barreiras linguísticas apresentou a maior média (M = 2,91). Não foi identificada associação estatisticamente significativa entre o índice global de barreiras e o desempenho acadêmico (r = 0,017; p = 0,907). As barreiras linguísticas apresentaram uma associação negativa, porém não significativa (r = −0,245; p = 0,087). A consistência interna do índice global foi limitada (α = 0,415). Conclusões. Os estudantes relataram dificuldades de aprendizagem, apesar de apresentarem desempenho acadêmico predominantemente satisfatório, sem que fosse identificada associação estatisticamente significativa entre o índice global de barreiras e as notas de Inglês. Os resultados ressaltam a necessidade de aprimorar os instrumentos de avaliação das dificuldades de aprendizagem e ampliar as investigações com instrumentos validados e amostras maiores.
Palavras-chave: barreiras à aprendizagem; inglês como língua estrangeira; desempenho acadêmico; ensino secundário; Equador.

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Introduction

In discussing English proficiency in schools, we need to highlight that it is not solely determined by vocabulary and grammar knowledge. The success depends on factors such as available teaching opportunities, emotional aspects, linguistic requirements and strategies as well as the educational environment that students have to engage in. Ecuadorian EFL state curriculum states its focus on the diversity of learners: “this curriculum is created with single and multi-lingual learners in mind” (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador 2). The acceptance of inclusiveness at a policy level is important since valuable learning depends on not only the curriculum content but the conditions that learners go through within education. The latest research findings present information about Ecuadorian conditions as somewhat poor regarding the issues such as teacher preparation, availability of teaching materials, technological means, authentic practice and student motivation (Álvarez Llerena et al., 2026; Sevy-Biloon et al., 2020; Soto et al., 2025). The international data supports an idea where teacher support, motivation, emotional influence and self-control have been associated with success in the learning process (Dong, 2025; Hasanzadeh et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2023; Tao et al., 2022).

Furthermore, barriers to learning have to be understood as the “students’ perception of the obstacles to learning”. According to Brem (2021), there is a clear need for viewing barriers in terms of educational, cognitive, emotional, pedagogical, linguistic barriers and language learning competence barriers. Khan (2016) highlighted “learning habits, ability to retain information, linguistic issues and attitude towards learning” (p. 1) as important barriers that influence the learning process in addition to the teaching methods used. Brem defines a barrier as "the student's subjective response to objective challenges that affect the learning process" (p. 561). That makes sense in methodological terms. It gives rise to the concept of measuring what is considered a block, without consequence of making a stronger and generally ungrounded argument such as that every barrier has an immediate effect on the level of achievement.

Affective dimension is probably the most frequently researched one. According to Zhang (2019) in a meta-analysis of 55 samples as well as over 10,000 learners, the negative correlation between the two constructs equals approximately r=-.34, while according to Dikmen (2021) a meta-analysis of 69 studies including 23,150 students shows even stronger relation which equals r=-.61. These statistics are not interchangeable due to different number of subjects involved and measures used, but they let us conclude that emotional barriers have significant academic consequences.

The Ecuadorian context provides evidence of the existence of the affective mechanism. Coutinho dos Santos et al. (2020) researched 138 students aged 11-18 years in Los Rios and found that fear of making mistakes was the most frequently mentioned emotional factor preventing them from speaking English (30.80%), followed by fear of evaluation (21.88%), and shyness (18.30%). Andrade-Molina et al. (n.d.) provide another perspective on that issue from the position of high school students. The study conducted by (2022) that dealt with the questionnaire of 128 secondary school students from Ecuador concluded that ideal L2 Self was a strong predictor of motivated learning and that school experience is important as a motivating factor. In addition, it showed that Ought-to L2 Self was insignificant in relation to the measure. The results indicate why motivation cannot depend simply on the external factors since motivation, given the experiences in classroom, future self-guides, emotional security, and identification of success can be different across students. In addition, Soto et al. (2025) conducted a review of the research on motivation in Ecuador and got the evidence that the results mainly concentrated on higher education and left primary and secondary sector barely represented. It represents the imbalance for eighth-grade students as their motivation profiles and academic self-identities are still being formed.

The other aspect is methodical help. According to Liu et al. (2023), teacher support is connected to teaching English through self-efficacy and achievement goal orientations. Dong (2025) has also found that support and engagement can work together on English academic performance. In addition, Liu et al. (2025) state that perceived teacher support can influence students by means of motivational intensity and grit. The other researches are conducted by Tang et al. (2026) that also define teacher support as one of the links in the process of influencing academic buoyancy, engagement, and achievement. It must be noted that such research aimed at teacher support shouldn't be considered as the notion of helpfulness, since teacher's support should include clarity in instruction, opportunities to practice the received information, and feedback. In a rural classroom in Ecuador, the students' perception of the quality of explanation and chances to practice is important academically despite the high grades they may secure.

Self-regulation is another reason since learners differ in their planning, self-monitoring, error evaluation, vocabulary practice, and persistence in learning. The meta-analysis that Chen (2022) conducted found an impressive outcome of self-regulated learning intervention on L2 learning (g=1.39) as well as on strategies and self-efficacy. In mainland China, Wang et al. (2024) conducted a synthesis of 49 studies with 111 effect sizes and proved a large overall impact of learning strategy instruction on English learning (ES=.92). However, Zhao et al. (2025) conducted a broader overview and found a lesser correlation between the implementation of self-regulated learning strategies and performance (r=.14). The discrepancy supports the idea about the important role of the context of the learning process as well as the age of students and, possibly, the approach in the research in terms of the research outcome.

Nevertheless, the role of linguistic complexity should be underlined. The studies by Tamayo Maggi & Cajas Quishpe (2020) showed the most important issues related to limited vocabulary, L1 interference, motivation and methodology of teaching in Ecuadorian EFL writing while a more recent national analysis conducted by Yunga Albán et al. (2025) reported about difficulties connected with motivation, teachers' proficiency in language and conditions of language practice among students. All the mentioned obstacles may operate cumulatively and lead to more serious effects.The main point from an analytical point of view is that it doesn't necessary mean that linguistic complexity exists separately from the barriers of the emotional or pedagogical kind, for the difficulties in question can be heightened due to the lack of practice experience.

Consideration of some contextual conditions is the layer that comes after ones mentioned above. The authors of the research detected that among the problems in EFL education in Ecuador, limited resources, lack of technological development, lack of motivation, little exposure to real life situations, as well as rural-urban bifurcation exist. Ramírez Tuárez and Riera Hermida (2025) in an experiment in a rural secondary school provided evidence of the importance of technology from the motivational point of view and showed the role of the accessibility factor in the process of learning English.

The current literature presents the important problem from the methodological perspective. Thus, while much has been written about problems, motivation or emotions, not much has been devoted to such an important issue as the connection of the multidimensional measure of students' perception to the objective criteria in the early stage of education (Soto et al., 2025; Álvarez Llerena et al., 2026). International studies usually concentrate on one aspect (either anxiety, or support of the teachers, or self-regulation), instead of finding out how different impediments coexist in practice (Zhang, 2019; Chen, 2022; Liu et al., 2023). Linking how students perceive barriers to effective English learning to their academic performance, therefore, is a modest but useful step towards establishing that such barriers are important in determining academic performance. In other words, the study does not prove that barriers are the cause of poor academic performance, but it helps understand which barrier domains have the greatest impact on achievement and can therefore be addressed through educational strategies.

Taking this into account, the study aimed to investigate the relationship between barriers experienced in ESL contexts and the academic performance of eighth-grade students at Unidad Educativa Fiscal Chamanga, Muisne, Esmeraldas, Ecuador. More precisely, the study focused on (a) defining the nature of the following barrier domains: didactic-methodological, psychological-motivational, linguistic, resource/environmental, and self-regulatory; (b) defining how English achievement can be accessed via institutional English grades; and (c) determining the relation between barrier domains and academic performance. The working hypothesis was that students who perceived that barriers were serious were likely to have low grades in English.

Critical synthesis of similar empirical works

The difference in evidence is a finding in itself. Studies on barriers to ESL success are characterized by varied epistemological positions, with some studies considering anxiety an independent psychological category, while others study motivation, self-regulation, or perceived support from teachers, with only limited number of works aiming to measure barriers. Earlier reports summarize and analyze empirical relations, while recent report raises additionally the question about instrument transference and appropriateness of age.

Zhang (2019) calculated a pooled correlation between emotional conditions of around –.34, based on 55 independent studies with over 10,000 respondents, while Dikmen (2021) received a greater correlation of around –.61 from his research with 69 studies and 23,150 participants. It is evident that the difference is attributable to the non-standard definition of anxiety at different studies and also to the different measures used and various populations examined. Botes et al. (2022) investigated the correlation among 96 effects with 28,166 students and found out that students' enjoyment of learning a foreign language positively correlates with success. The results should not be viewed as contradicting one another, as it's more correct to state that anxiety and enjoyment are both related emotional states that can have different importance depending on the variable of interest and the instruments applied.

Pedagogical and motivational studies cover a different part of the learning context. Following the results of synthesis of 71 studies, Tao et al. (2022) found a low correlation between perceived support of teachers and success ($r = .16$) and noted that the correlation varied with respect to different levels of education and different achievement measures. Liu et al. (2023) analyzed indirect relations between academic and emotional support of the teacher and engagement of the student through self-efficacy and different goal orientations in studies. These studies are important for the understanding of the classroom environment, but they do not indicate that self-reported support is the opposite of didactic obstacles that students report.

Self-regulation provides a very interesting comparative aspect. The author (Chen 2022) obtained a very high intervention meta-analytic effect in teaching English as a second language ($g = 1.39$). The researcher cannot simply compare intervention effect with a cross-sectional correlation between a questionnaire index and score for one course at the school. Such distinction is necessary for correct generalization of findings into pedagogical practice, showing that the effectiveness of instructional programs does not mean that students' low self-reported strategy use should correlate with any English grade.

Ecuadorian studies bring an interesting context. Coutinho dos Santos et al. (2020) carried out a study with 138 participants aged from 11 to 18 and revealed that fear of making mistakes, fear of the judgment of others, and shyness hinder the learning of English. Andrade-Molina et al. (2022) conducted a survey of 128 secondary students and noted that Ideal L2 Self and the experience in learning of a foreign language are crucial in motivating the learning of a foreign language, while Ought-to L2 Self does not play a significant role. The results obtained allow to conclude about the importance of the affective component in learning but do

not prove any direct link between the five-factor model and students' success in learning English.

Table 1 illustrates that 30 materials have been analyzed and compared according to both similarity of the outcomes and their differences in their context and methodology.

Table 1. Critical evidence matrix of studies on EFL barriers, learning conditions, and academic performance

No.	Study	Country / context	Design / construct	Main findings	Critical relevance to the present study
1	Zhang (2019)	International; >10,000 learners	Meta-analysis, 55 samples; language anxiety / performance	Pooled anxiety–performance association r = −.34.	Specific anxiety outcome; unlike the present broad barrier composite.
2	Dikmen (2021)	14 countries; 23,150 learners	Meta-analysis, 69 studies; EFL anxiety / performance	Pooled correlation r = −.61; anxiety type moderated association.	Heterogeneity cautions against expecting the same association for school grades.
3	Botes et al. (2020)	International; 14,128 learners	Meta-analysis, 99 effects; classroom anxiety / achievement	Foreign language classroom anxiety associated negatively with achievement (general r≈−39).	Validated anxiety scale; stronger construct specificity than the current adapted subscale.
4	Teimouri et al. (2019)	23 countries; 19,933 learners	Meta-analysis, 105 independent samples; L2 anxiety	Confirmed systematic anxiety–achievement relationships across studies.	Different age, measures and achievement outcomes complicate direct comparisons.
5	Botes et al. (2022)	International; 28,166 learners	Meta-analysis; foreign-language enjoyment / achievement	Enjoyment positively relates to achievement; affective relations are multidimensional.	Enjoyment is not equivalent to anxiety or a composite of learning barriers.
6	Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014)	International; 1,746 learners	Survey of enjoyment and anxiety in language classrooms	Enjoyment and anxiety coexist and vary across learners and settings.	Supports separating positive and negative affect rather than merging them indiscriminately.
7	MacIntyre & Gardner (1994)	Second-language learners	Study of anxiety at input, processing and output stages	Stage-specific anxiety was related to corresponding language processing tasks.	Process-level outcomes are different from a broad institutional course grade.
8	Andrade-Molina et al. (2022)	Ecuador; 128 secondary students	Questionnaire; L2 motivational self-system	Ideal L2 self strongly related to motivated behavior; ought-to self was not significant.	Local example of differential motivational effects and non-significant pathways.
9	Coutinho dos Santos et al. (2020)	Ecuador; 138 pupils aged 11–18	Questionnaires, observation and interviews; speaking emotions	Fear of mistakes (30.80%) and fear of judgment (21.88%) prominent in speaking.	Describes classroom emotions, not correlations with official English grades.
10	Brem (2021)	Foreign-language learner context	Conceptual/measurement work on several barrier dimensions	Proposed a multidimensional approach to diagnosing learning barriers.	Source for operational domains, not proof that the adapted scale is reliable.
11	Khan (2016)	English-learning context	Exploratory investigation of obstacles to learning English	Discussed habits, language difficulties, learner attitudes and teaching practices.	Helps define domains; direct construct equivalence has not been established.
12	Pintrich & De Groot (1990)	United States; 173 seventh graders	Correlational study; motivation, self-regulation and classwork	Self-efficacy and self-regulation linked to classroom engagement/performance.	Age-adjacent benchmark, but neither EFL-specific nor equivalent in measures.
13	Chen (2022)	International L2 studies	Meta-analysis of self-regulated learning interventions	L2 achievement improved following SRL instruction (g = 1.39).	Intervention effect cannot be compared directly with cross-sectional r.
14	Wang et al. (2024), strategy instruction	Mainland China; university English learners	Meta-analysis of strategy instruction and learning outcomes	Strategy instruction showed positive academic and autonomy effects.	Higher-education intervention evidence; indirect relevance to eighth grade.
15	Zhao et al. (2025)	Online/blended education	Meta-analysis; SRL strategies and academic performance	Overall association between SRL and performance was relatively small (r ≈ .14).	Explains why strategy relations differ by context and instrument.

16	Wang et al. (2024), teacher support	Secondary language learners	Research on teacher support for technology-enhanced SRL	Distinguished strategy, capacity, resources, emotional and environmental support.	Shows that self-regulation is contextually scaffolded, not solely an individual deficit.
17	Tao et al. (2022)	International studies	Meta-analysis; teacher support, engagement and achievement	Perceived teacher support positively related to engagement and achievement.	Support indicators differ from negatively coded perceived instructional barriers.
18	Liu & Li (2023)	China; 1,401 high-school EFL learners	Factor-analytic survey of perceived EFL teacher support	Identified academic, instrumental and emotional dimensions of support.	Supports domain-specific measurement and examination of structure.
19	Liu et al. (2023)	EFL learners	Quantitative study; teacher support and engagement	Self-efficacy and achievement goals mediated support–engagement links.	Indirect mechanisms need not manifest as simple grade correlations.
20	Dong (2025)	EFL learning context	Path models and fsQCA of support and engagement	Support and engagement exhibited joint relationships with achievement.	Complex models are not equivalent to one-predictor correlations.
21	Li et al. (2025)	Secondary EFL learners	Moderated mediation: support, motivation, grit, enjoyment	Motivational and affective processes conditioned engagement.	Different constructs and outcomes help explain heterogeneous associations.
22	Hasanzadeh et al. (2024)	EFL learner context	Quantitative model of teacher concern, anxiety, motivation	Teacher concern linked positively to motivation and achievement, negatively to anxiety.	Emotional climate matters even when the local composite lacks reliability.
23	Luo & Gan (2025)	Secondary EFL learners	Validation study; social support, self-efficacy, achievement	Teacher and family support contributed to efficacy and achievement.	Unmeasured family support may affect institutional English grades.
24	Ma et al. (2024)	EFL classrooms	Quantitative study of climate, growth mindset and goal orientation	Investigated interrelated classroom conditions and student engagement.	Avoid attributing grades to one barrier without considering classroom climate.
25	Sevy-Biloon et al. (2020)	Ecuador; public schools	Study of factors affecting English teaching	Reported pedagogical and structural conditions in public-school EFL.	National context, but not an estimate from Chamanga students.
26	Álvarez Llerena et al. (2026)	Ecuador; 20 reviewed studies	PRISMA systematic review of Ecuadorian EFL challenges	Synthesized recurrent resource, motivation and teacher-training challenges.	Review identifies contextual themes but no local student-level association.
27	Soto et al. (2025)	Ecuador	Review of motivation studies in EFL education	Noted patterns and uneven educational-level coverage in national research.	Supports gap in lower-secondary research without implying an untested causal effect.
28	Tamayo Maggi & Cajas Quishpe (2020)	Ecuador; EFL writing	Study of obstacles to teaching and learning writing	Described proficiency, L1 and pedagogical difficulties in writing.	Writing-specific evidence does not directly validate composite school grades.
29	Yunga Albán et al. (2025)	Ecuador; elementary English education	Review of challenges and potential solutions	Discussed language, motivation and instructional-resource difficulties.	Younger population; context helps but age and design differ.
30	Ramirez Tuarez & Riera Hermida (2025)	Ecuador; rural school	Classroom study of technology, motivation and attitudes	Examined technology access and motivation in a rural EFL context.	Rural relevance; intervention outcomes differ from cross-sectional grades.

Note. The matrix compares 30 published studies conducted across different methodological approaches and educational contexts. Some statistical estimates from previous studies are presented as rounded values, as reported in their respective publications. Only the data collected at Unidad Educativa Chamanga correspond to the 50 participants in the present study. Statistical estimates from previous studies were not combined because of differences in research designs, measurement instruments, participant characteristics, and outcome variables.

Table 1 presents a critical comparison of 30 published studies examining different factors associated with English language learning and academic performance. The studies are organized according to their authors,

geographical and educational contexts, methodological approaches, principal findings, and relevance to the present investigation. This organization facilitates the identification of similarities and differences in research designs, participant characteristics, measurement instruments, and reported outcomes.

The matrix reveals that previous research has frequently investigated specific dimensions, including foreign-language anxiety, motivation, teacher support, and self-regulated learning. However, these dimensions have been examined through different instruments and statistical procedures, making direct comparisons inappropriate in some cases. For instance, correlation coefficients (r) describe the strength and direction of statistical associations, whereas standardized effect sizes such as Hedges' g quantify differences or changes under particular research designs.

Consequently, the evidence matrix provides a foundation for understanding the multidimensional nature of English-learning difficulties. It also highlights the importance of considering methodological differences when comparing previous findings with those obtained from the 50 eighth-grade students at Unidad Educativa Chamanga.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design and setting

A non-experimental cross-sectional correlational design was used in this study and was administered at the Unidad Educativa Chamanga in Muisne, Esmeraldas in Ecuador. The subject of the research is stated in the same words as used in the institution. The questionnaire was developed in order to assess students' perception of the problems they faced during the English classes, without measuring the quality of instruction or determining the reasons for the success.

Participants and academic records

The dataset included anonymous data of 50 participants that belong to two classes in eighth grade. There are 28 students in 8B and 22 students in 8C. The English grades were taken from the first-trimester academic records for the year 2026 as of October 23, 2026. One single course grade based on a scale from 0–10 was used as a measure of academic performance. There are also no unidentified personalized data from previous versions of the model.

Questionnaire and scoring

Perceived barriers to English learning were assessed using a 24-item questionnaire developed for the present study, drawing on the conceptual framework of foreign-language learning barriers proposed by Brem (2021) and the educational and learner-related difficulties examined by Khan (2016). The questionnaire was organized into five predefined domains: didactic-methodological (Q1–Q5), psychological-motivational (Q6–Q10), linguistic (Q11–Q15), resources/environment (Q16–Q20), and self-regulation (Q21–Q24). Responses were recorded using a four-point Likert-type scale. Positively worded items (Q1–Q5, Q9–Q10, and Q16–Q24) were reverse-coded by subtracting the original response value from five, so that higher scores consistently represented greater perceived barriers. Domain and overall scores were calculated as arithmetic means of available item responses.

Expert review and content-validity assessment

Although the 24-item questionnaire was developed based on the studies conducted by Brem (2021) and Khan (2016), an additional expert-review process was considered appropriate to assess its clarity, relevance, and linguistic suitability for the specific educational context and characteristics of eighth-grade students. Accordingly, the review of the 24-item questionnaire regarding perceived barriers in EFL was conducted using six expert-review matrices employed in this study. The item pool consisted of five major domains: methodological and pedagogical (items 1 to 5), psychological and motivation-related (items 6 to 10), linguistic (items 11 to 15), environmental and resource-related (items 16 to 20), and self-regulation (items 21 to 24). Each expert-review matrix rated the same 24 items drawing on the same three criteria: clarity of item wording, relevance of items to the area of concern, and linguistic suitability for middle-school students. All the matrices put forward by the experts showed that the 24 items received an excellent score on each of the three criteria, resulting in 432 positive ratings (six evaluators × 24 items × three criteria).

The expert review provided favorable assessments of the questionnaire's clarity, coherence, and linguistic appropriateness across its 24 items. The specialists also offered constructive recommendations concerning the wording and interpretation of certain statements, particularly those that could benefit from greater precision or simplification. These observations provided useful guidance for improving the clarity and comprehensibility of the instrument.

The six expert-review matrices documented the assessment of the questionnaire's content. Additional administrative information, including the dates of review and the experts' institutional affiliations, may be retained as part of the supporting documentation. The favorable expert assessments provide evidence regarding content appropriateness, while the internal consistency analysis offers complementary information about the relationships among questionnaire items. In this regard, the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.415$) and the psychological-motivational subscale coefficient ($\alpha = -0.046$) suggest that some dimensions would benefit from further refinement. These findings were considered when interpreting the results and outlining the methodological limitations of the study.

Data processing and statistical analysis

Across the different variations from H08-01 to H08-50, student identification numbers were aligned in a consistent manner through the use of numbered questionnaires. The data received in answer to the questionnaire was expressed in terms of its descriptive (means, standard deviations, medians, and frequencies of grade groupings). In the statistics, Pearson product-moment correlations were used to investigate linear relationships between domain-scale and global-scale scores and grades, and Spearman rank correlations were used as an additional check for confirmatory approaches. When calculating Pearson's r, confidence intervals of 95% were derived through the use of Fisher's z transformation. The level of reliability was estimated using Cronbach's alpha using item-by-item covariance data; these estimates were left exploratory. The accepted threshold of significance was set at 0.05.

Research ethics and data safeguards

The only connection between questionnaires and the grade record was through the student code, which was anonymized. Given that the participants were minors, the writer must present research ethical documents, authorization from the institution, consent from guardians, agreements from participants, and proof of the secure handling of link codes. There is no occurrence of invented authorization numbers and dates in the present article.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participant coverage and academic performance

Fifty questionnaire forms were matched to fifty institutional English grades (28 in class 8B and 22 in 8C). The mean grade was 7.99 (SD = 1.18), median 7.81, with a range from 6.02 to 10.00. Table 2 summarizes the recorded grade categories.

Table 2. Institutional English achievement, first trimester 2026

Classification	Students (n)	Percentage (%)
Masters required learning (9.00–10.00)	11	22.0
Achieves required learning (7.00–8.99)	30	60.0
Close to achieving required learning (4.01–6.99)	9	18.0
Does not achieve required learning (0–4.00)	0	0.0

Table 2 summarizes the academic performance of the 50 participating students based on their official English grades during the first trimester of 2026. Academic achievement was classified into four categories according to the institutional grading scale, ranging from 0 to 10 points. The symbol n represents the number of students within each category, while the percentage (%) indicates their proportion of the total sample.

The results indicate that 11 students (22.0%) mastered the required learning outcomes, achieving scores between 9.00 and 10.00. Another 30 students (60.0%) achieved the required learning outcomes, with grades ranging from 7.00 to 8.99. Meanwhile, nine students (18.0%) were classified as close to achieving the required learning outcomes, with scores between 4.01 and 6.99. No students were classified in the lowest achievement category.

Overall, 41 students (82.0%) achieved or mastered the required learning outcomes. The average English grade was 7.99 (SD = 1.18), indicating that the group generally obtained satisfactory academic results, although individual differences remained. The standard deviation (SD) describes how widely students' grades varied around the group mean. These findings describe the participants' academic achievement but do not, by themselves, establish whether perceived learning barriers were associated with their grades.

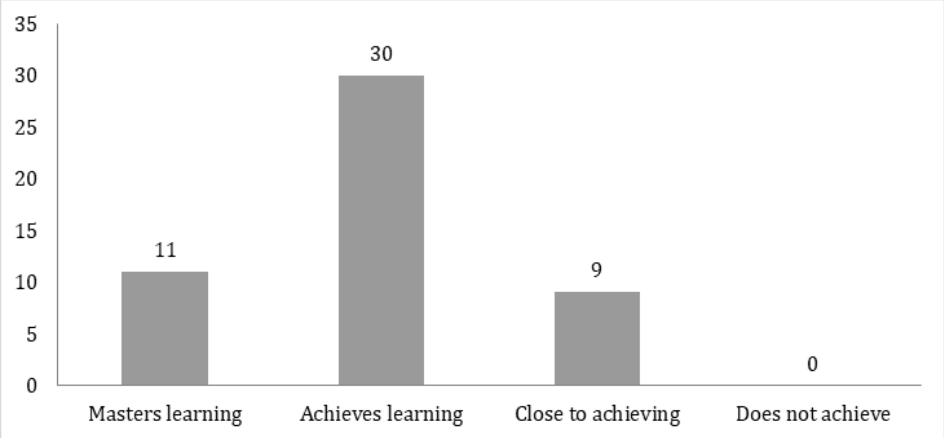

Figure 1. Distribution of institutional English achievement (n = 50)

Note. Counts are based on the first-trimester 2026 institutional English grades; categories are mutually exclusive. The chart is editable in Microsoft Word using its embedded Excel data. Grade categories follow the Ecuadorian academic scale used in the institutional extract. Counts and statistics derive from the 50 provided records.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the academic achievement categories reported in Table 2. The horizontal axis identifies the four achievement categories, while the vertical axis indicates the number of students. The notation n = 50 represents the total number of participants included in the analysis.

The highest bar corresponds to students who achieved the required learning outcomes (n = 30), representing 60.0% of the sample. The second-largest group comprises students who mastered the required learning outcomes (n = 11; 22.0%), followed by those who were close to achieving them (n = 9; 18.0%). No students were classified as not achieving the required learning outcomes.

The figure therefore illustrates that academic performance was concentrated primarily in the satisfactory achievement categories. Nevertheless, the presence of relatively favorable grades does not necessarily imply that students experienced no difficulties during English instruction. Academic grades may reflect several components of classroom assessment and should not be interpreted as direct evidence that perceived barriers were absent.

Descriptive questionnaire scores and internal consistency

The global barrier score averaged 2.31 (SD = 0.27) on the 1–4 scale. The highest mean was observed in linguistic difficulties; the other domains had lower or similar averages. Cronbach's alpha values were heterogeneous, and some were weak or negative, indicating that the proposed dimensions cannot all be treated as reliable unidimensional measures in this dataset.

Table 3. Perceived barrier scores and exploratory internal-consistency estimates

Dimension	Items	Mean	SD	Alpha	n
Didactic-methodological	5	1.95	0.70	0.734	50
Psychological-motivational	5	2.33	0.54	-0.046	50
Linguistic	5	2.91	0.74	0.647	50
Resources/environment	5	2.10	0.59	0.430	49
Self-regulation	4	2.15	0.61	0.386	50
Global index	24	2.31	0.27	0.415	50

Note. Scoring is oriented so that larger values indicate higher perceived barriers. Alpha uses pairwise available covariance; a negative coefficient is not evidence of acceptable reliability. Missing item responses were not assigned numerical values.

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics and internal-consistency estimates for the five conceptual dimensions of perceived barriers to English learning. The columns report the number of questionnaire items, mean score (M), standard deviation (SD), Cronbach's alpha (α), and number of participants with available dimension scores

(n). The questionnaire used a four-point response scale, with higher scores representing greater perceived barriers after reverse-coding positively worded statements.

The linguistic dimension showed the highest mean score (M = 2.91; SD = 0.74), followed by the psychological-motivational dimension (M = 2.33; SD = 0.54). Self-regulation (M = 2.15), resources/environment (M = 2.10), and didactic-methodological barriers (M = 1.95) showed comparatively lower average scores. The global barrier index presented a mean of 2.31 (SD = 0.27).

These findings indicate that students reported relatively greater difficulties in the linguistic dimension. However, differences between means are descriptive and should not be interpreted as statistically significant without an appropriate comparative test.

Cronbach's alpha (α) provides an estimate of the internal consistency of the items within each dimension. The didactic-methodological dimension presented the highest coefficient (α = 0.734), while the linguistic dimension showed α = 0.647. Lower coefficients were observed for resources/environment (α = 0.430), self-regulation (α = 0.386), and the global index (α = 0.415). Notably, the psychological-motivational dimension produced a negative coefficient (α = −0.046), indicating a problematic pattern of item covariances rather than acceptable internal consistency.

These results suggest that several dimensions require further psychometric examination before they can be interpreted as reliable scales. The resources/environment dimension included 49 participants because one student had no usable responses for that dimension.

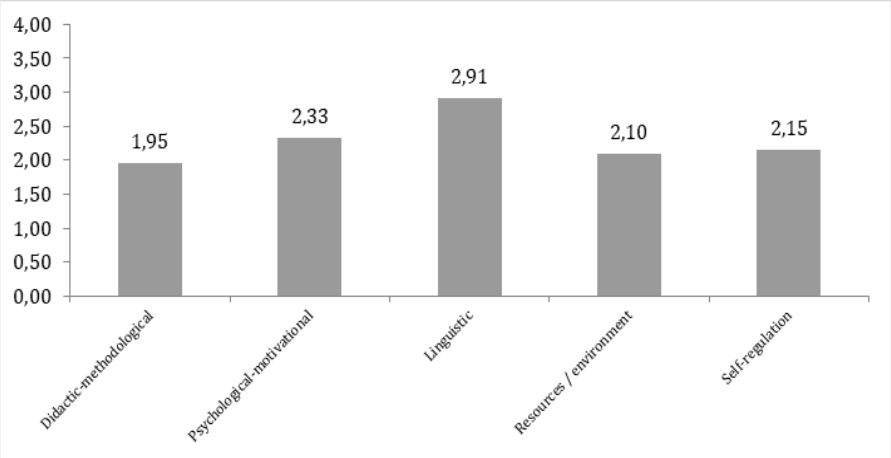

Figure 2. Mean perceived barrier scores by conceptual domain (n = 49–50)

Note. Higher scores indicate stronger perceived barriers following reverse-coding of positively worded items. Bars represent observed domain means; differences are descriptive and not tests of statistical significance. This is an editable chart with embedded Excel data.

Figure 2 illustrates the mean scores obtained for the five conceptual dimensions of perceived barriers to English learning. The horizontal axis identifies each dimension, while the vertical axis displays its mean score on the four-point scale. Higher bars represent higher average levels of perceived difficulty.

The linguistic dimension presented the highest mean (M = 2.91), suggesting that language-related difficulties were the most strongly reported among the five domains. The psychological-motivational dimension followed with a mean of 2.33, while self-regulation, resources/environment, and didactic-methodological barriers showed means of 2.15, 2.10, and 1.95, respectively.

The notation n = 49–50 indicates that the number of participants contributing to each dimension varied slightly according to the availability of responses. Specifically, 49 participants contributed scores to the resources/environment dimension, whereas the other dimensions included 50 participants.

Although the figure allows visual comparisons between the average scores, the differences should be interpreted cautiously. The bars represent descriptive means rather than statistically established differences between dimensions. Furthermore, the varying internal-consistency coefficients indicate that the dimensions should not automatically be regarded as equally reliable measures of perceived barriers.

Correlation between perceived barriers and grades

There was no evidence of an overall linear association between the global barrier index and English grades

(Pearson r = 0.017, 95% CI [-0.263, 0.294], p = 0.907, n = 50). The corresponding Spearman correlation was -0.040 (p = 0.783). The linguistic domain showed the largest negative correlation, but did not reach the pre specified 5% significance threshold. None of the five domain-level Pearson tests met p < .05 (Table 4).

Table 4. Correlations of perceived barriers with institutional English grades

Measure	n	Pearson r	p	95% CI	Spearman rho
Global index	50	0.017	0.907	[-0.263, 0.294]	-0.040
Didactic-methodological	50	0.142	0.326	[-0.142, 0.404]	0.018
Psychological-motivational	50	0.121	0.401	[-0.162, 0.387]	0.030
Linguistic	50	-0.245	0.087	[-0.490, 0.036]	-0.184
Resources/environment	49	-0.056	0.705	[-0.332, 0.229]	-0.073
Self-regulation	50	0.027	0.853	[-0.253, 0.303]	-0.003

Note. All p-values are two-sided and unadjusted for multiple comparisons. The 95% confidence intervals were calculated using Fisher's z transformation. Domain scores were calculated using available responses. One participant was excluded from the resources/environment domain analysis because no valid responses were available for that dimension.

Table 4 presents the correlations between the perceived-barrier dimensions and students' institutional English grades. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) indicates the direction and strength of the linear relationship between two variables. Coefficients range from −1 to +1, with negative values indicating inverse associations, positive values indicating direct associations, and values close to zero indicating weak or negligible linear relationships.

The table also reports the statistical significance value (p), the 95% confidence interval (95% CI), Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (ρ), and the number of valid paired observations (n). A p-value below .05 was established as the conventional statistical significance threshold. The 95% confidence interval indicates a range of plausible population correlation values under the assumptions of the statistical procedure.

The global perceived-barrier index showed a negligible positive correlation with English grades (r = 0.017; p = 0.907; 95% CI [−0.263, 0.294]). Since the p-value exceeded .05 and the confidence interval included zero, no statistically significant linear association was identified in the sample. Spearman's coefficient (ρ = −0.040) similarly indicated a negligible rank-based association.

Among the individual dimensions, linguistic barriers showed the largest negative correlation (r = −0.245; p = 0.087). Although this coefficient suggests an inverse pattern in which students reporting higher linguistic barriers tended to obtain relatively lower English grades, the association did not reach statistical significance. Its confidence interval [−0.490, 0.036] also included zero.

The remaining dimensions presented relatively weak correlations: didactic-methodological (r = 0.142; p = 0.326), psychological-motivational (r = 0.121; p = 0.401), resources/environment (r = −0.056; p = 0.705), and self-regulation (r = 0.027; p = 0.853). None reached the established significance threshold.

Overall, these results indicate that the present sample did not provide sufficient statistical evidence of a relationship between the measured perceived barriers and academic performance in English. Nevertheless, this finding should not be interpreted as proof that such relationships are absent in other populations, particularly given the limited internal consistency of several questionnaire dimensions and the relatively small sample size.

The main conclusion of this research is that no statistically significant relationship was found between the perceived barrier score and institutional English grades in a sample of 50 students. This is contrary to the earlier published results of several other reviews on foreign language anxiety and performance (Zhang 2019; Dikmen 2022). This contradiction may not be regarded as paradoxical as those studies involved affective variables while the score in the current research is formed by using various perceived barriers, which makes its internal validity low. In addition, a combined score may mix variables which perform differently instead of presenting one solid concept.

The language variable had the highest negative score, although this finding was statistically weak and its confidence interval contained zero. Nevertheless, the obtained data can be said to be consistent with the findings of studies devoted to difficulties with language learning, L1 transfer and ease of teaching in Ecuadorian EFL classes (Tamayo Maggi & Cajas Quishpe, 2020; Sevy-Biloon et al., 2020; Yunga Albán et al., 2025). Yet, this does not allow concluding that either vocabulary or grammar differences negatively influenced students' grades.

The educational methodological and motivational psychological correlations turned out to be low and positive in the present study. The literature dedicated to teacher support provides relevant explanations of this result without imposing any subjective expectations. The existing meta-analysis and secondary EFL studies showed a correlation between perceived support and engagement, achievement, and, possibly through self-efficacy, motivation and other connections (Tao et al. 2022; Liu et al. 2023; Li et al. 2025; Dong 2025). Course assessments indicate a teacher's grading method and many other aspects so they cannot be directly compared to other assessments such as standardized proficiency tests. The methods of assessment contribute to the barriers of direct comparison of the outcomes of various studies.

The other key finding refers to the quality of measurement. Despite the fact that the questionnaire has been based on previous research works (Brem, 2021; Khan, 2016), the use of items related to young learners and the inclusion of items that mention both positive and negative aspects requires careful analysis regarding the content validity, comprehension, dimension measurement, and reliability tests. The results show that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is low for the overall measure and some subscales and therefore lack of significant correlation does not mean that the perceived barriers are irrelevant concerning academic achievement. Therefore, the study indicates the necessity of refining the measurements used.

High average course grades and the number of students meeting the requirements of the institution suggest that students might face serious challenges in terms of getting a good mark. Single quarter grades might be impacted by attendance and homework done and by the format of tests taken and grading procedures applied as well as prior academic performance. Self-regulation and assistance theory differentiates the concepts of learning conditions, involvement, and performance outcomes (Chen, 2022; Wang et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2025).

Despite the stated contributions made by the current study, there are some limitations associated with it. The main limitations include the fact that the study focuses on a single school with two groups of students in terms of cross-sectional measurement and unstandardized grades. The response styles and common method effect can also influence the results and objectivity of the study. As multiple relationships were evaluated, it is crucial to focus on intervals of stress and measures of influence instead of focusing on just one section of the case. Replication should include modified items, independent analysis of psychometric, a larger number of schools, and the outcome measurement that clearly states many factors influencing EFL proficiency.

The question of interpretation is not only about the question whether the value of p value exceeded .05 or not, but whether the research has provided the measure that is precise and coherent for the comparison. The total coefficient of correlation is very low ($r = .017$), but its confidence range of 95 [−.263, .294] indicates both weak negative and positive relations. Therefore, the given evidence does not show the situation of equal effectiveness in practice due to the absence of correlation in the population. The null result should be perceived as the product of the small sample of research and minor variability of composite measure, as well as low levels of internal reliability ($\alpha = .415$). The results concerning correlations close to zero provide the characteristic of the dataset, but do not serve as the evidence that perceived barriers are irrelevant for language learning.

This differentiation becomes more significant when it is compared with the literature on foreign-language anxiety. The author of the study Zhang (2019) made the summary of 55 independent samples where the value of correlation was $r \approx -.34$, whereas the research made by Dikmen (2021) mentioned 69 samples, which provided the value of correlation at $r \approx -.61$. The pooled values provided by both reviews deal with anxiety, but they are not related to the non-homogeneous system of classroom, material, linguistic self-regulatory conditions etc. Even psychological motivational component of the present measurement contains different constructions and should not be identified as a standard scale of foreign-language anxiety. Local psychological motivational score correlates weakly and positively with achievements in English ($r = .121$) and produces negative value of alpha coefficient. With that in mind, any useful comparison of directions of impact should be avoided as the underlying composite is not well-supported.

Importantly, comparisons with existing findings on the impact of positive emotions bear a strong distinction in constructs. Botes et al. (2022) found moderate connections between foreign-language enjoyment and academic performance and noted a reverse relationship between enjoyment and anxiety. This model does not stipulate that students with passing grades are supposed to see the process of learning as easy. Grades can accompany anxiousness, fear of being evaluated by peers, or the need to work hard. For instance, Coutinho

dos Santos et al. (2020) studied fear of failures, prejudgment, and shyness at the same time with the student sample aged 11 to 18 years, yet their isolation of the context of speaking was the major aim of the research conducted. The presence of satisfactory grades in Chamanga might also be seen as evidence of the fact that language learners manage to overcome or compensate for existing impediments rather than proof that such impediments do not exist in the first place.

Finally, regarding the language aspect, it should be noted that it was associated with the highest negative value (r =-0.245, p = 0.087). Its confidence interval [-0.490, 0.036] does not eliminate the possibility of having either strong negative or almost equal to zero connection. Thus, it would be incorrect to describe such a situation as a significant effect, a causal mechanism, or the confirmation that the language barrier leads to academic failure. Nonetheless, it seems to be too limiting to remove the correlation from the discussion. The most suitable answer to this question is that vocabulary, understanding, and cross-linguistic factors may be worth studying through a different assessment of language proficiency. One of the possible reasons behind the difference between the findings here and those of prior studies could possibly be the criteria of achievement. Tao et al. (2022) showed that the links between perceived teacher support and other parameters varied based on the fact whether the researchers used grades from school subjects or scores on standardized tests. The trimester mark in English is a combination of the marks from various class assignments, attendance marks, grading methods, and results in various components. The grades are meaningful institutionally; however, they cannot be regarded as direct measures of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical accuracy, interactional fluency, and other language aspects. The lack of correlation with the total score on perceived barrier can be explained with the criterion used instead of only the predictive factor.

The didactic-methodological finding shows how one cannot put the blame on the teacher while analyzing students' responses from surveys. The correlation with grades is rather low and positive (r=0.142, p = 0.326) whereas the dimension is characterized by the highest internal consistency out of the five subscales analyzed (α = 0.734). Nevertheless, the correlation between teacher support and achievement exists and is significant, although the current items perceived as didactic barriers from the students might be the reverse evaluations of the case and as such cannot be correlated to one grade, which is not similar to multivariable mediation models involving teacher support and engagement. The results support the significance of the pedagogical process without attributing the responsibility for it to the teacher.

The motivational evidence from Ecuador makes the situation more complex. The research work conducted in 2022 mentioned that the Ideal L2 Self and the educational experience in school were quite significant for motivated behavior towards learning and it also indicated that Ought-to L2 Self was not statistically associated with the outcome. These results suggest that diverse motivational mechanisms behave differently despite the theoretical association with language acquisition. The aggregation of anxiety, confidence, interest, and willingness to act into a single indicator makes it impossible to observe those differences. Therefore, it is necessary to understand positive motivation in the barrier instrument.

The concept of self-regulation provides an example of the difference in the research questions, as demonstrated by Chen (2022), according to whom the deliberate self-regulated learning method had a powerful impact on L2 outcomes, however, the barrier subscale in this very study demonstrated insufficient internal consistency (α = .386) and weak correlation with the scores (r = .027). Despite the seeming inconsistency of the results, they represent not contradictions, but rather different levels of the research process. The issue of the research impact of the intervention presupposes the question of implementation of the effectiveness of a new method, whereas the issue of researching the correlation presupposes the need for checking whether the variables are ranked with each other in a certain group of respondents. Brem (2021) has created a diagnostic tool for Russian speakers over the age of 15, while the validation framework differs substantially from the case of eighth-graders in a rural school in Ecuador. The entailed adaptation cannot be assumed to ensure the reliability, factor structure or criterion validity found in the methodology used in the country of origin. There are language, age, and culture distance issues, as well as the distribution of positively and negatively formulated statements in the questionnaire which might affect understanding and variable covariance. The negative alpha coefficient for the psychological-motivational aspect may indicate the existence of some issue broad enough to turn the quest for an explanation into a guessing game, as there could be conceptual, procedural and coding issues obediently sending researchers into a negligent insoluble ambiguity. Future work in the realm of validation should thus include various tools such as interviews with respondents, content interpretation by domain experts, and more extensive meaningful data allowing for factor assessment.

The problem of missing responses should be taken into account in the interpretation process. Among 1,200 possible answers, only 1,113 were coded. This is a matter of some significance as the inability to code responses might be due to survey fatigue, confusion, quality of the scan or survey administration. The current approach uses the observed responses to answer the questions rather than relying on some other values created independently and backed by smaller n. Not every answer in the study is random, and this assumption has to affect the descriptions of the missing responses.

The national context contributes to the value of the study despite the fact that no significant relations between variables were found in general. The emotional challenges related to oral participation in Ecuadorian secondary education have been outlined in (Coutinho dos Santos et al., 2020) and the different roles of L2 self-guides and school experience are discussed in (Andrade-Molina et al., 2022). However, these studies do not result in forming a definitive list of the classroom barriers to be found everywhere and the specific conditions of the individual school should not be seen as a representative example of the rural Ecuador. The study under discussion provides local connections between the administrative grades and the general tool for measuring students' impressions but it shows how the inferential results depend on how the constructs are defined, the quality of measuring instruments and selection of the criteria.

Hence, the practical recommendations have to be given in a proportionate and reversible way rather than as traditionally considered causal solutions. Teachers could use in class different types of checking their students' understanding of the instructions, providing them with no punitive opportunities of oral and written practice, giving them formative feedback on their lexical mistakes, providing them with relevant materials and helping the students to reflect on their learning strategies properly. Such recommendations correspond to the studies of teacher assistance with (Liu et al., 2023; Tao et al., 2022), studies connected with emotional barriers to participation in Ecuador (Coutinho dos Santos et al., 2020) as well as studies on self-regulation interventions (Chen, 2022). None of these recommendations can be considered such that prove that the correlation study in question was useful in providing intervention effect. Therefore, anything that is to be done in the specific school should be measured with the help of the appropriate design.

There are some perspectives for further studies with a deeper empirical basis. First of all, a larger scale study covering several schools could provide better estimates of the associations made. Second, the collected grades should be supported by the measures of EFL proficiency that would be assessed by independent evaluators. In the third place, a revised questionnaire should clarify the meaning of every construct, verify how students perceive its meaning and how to determine dimensionality before calculating a global index. Lastly, potential or repetitively-measured designs could indicate whether the perceived difficulties come before score changes or are the response to score changes. Research of this kind would provide an answer to the limitations of interpretation of cross-sectional analysis while being careful not to over interpret the result of the study.

Understanding the non-significant global finding requires making a distinction between mere failure to reject a statistical null hypothesis and proof that no relationship exists between the constructs of interest. The sample size of only 50 students may render even moderate relationship uncertain. In addition, an interval of 95% confidence of-0.263 and +0.294 implies that many associations of significance are included. Thus, no serious conclusions about the absence of perceived difficulties in learning can be made. However, the outcome should be interpreted more narrowly; from the data at hand we can state that there is no definite and statistically detectable linear relationship between the composite and one grade of the institution regarding the sample under investigation. This is also in line with the importance of specific constructs and effect diversity in the anxiety meta-analysis by Zhang (2019), Teimouri et al. (2019), Botes et al. (2020), and Dikmen (2021).

One of the most important differences exists between the anxiety research, which utilizes specifically designed test for affect, and the Chamanga instrument that uses items from domains of teaching-related attitudes, affect, language processing, environment and study habits. The mean anxiety-performance correlation by Zhang (2019) was-0.34 while that found by Dikmen (2021) was significantly higher. According to Peixoto (2020), one of the studies that investigated anxiety in educational settings indicated that anxiety correlates negatively with academic performance (around −.39). However, such a development cannot be a reason for using an overall metric for the given heterogeneous constructs. Another work by Teimouri et al. (2019) illustrated the significance and variety of the research into anxiety.

The process of designing and measuring emotional variables requires careful attention. Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced the phenomenon of foreign language classroom anxiety as a context-bound construct, while

MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) proved that anxiety can be linked to input, processing, and output processes. Also, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) provided the examples of simultaneous presence of anxiety and enjoyment among language learners, and Botes et al. (2022) showed connections between enjoyment and achievement.

Thus, it could be concluded that there is no reasonable assumption to think that 5 psychological-motivational statements create a continuum. Moreover, the negative value of the Cronbach coefficient in this category indicates that it will be wrong to treat its figure as an established scale unless one reevaluates the meaning of the items (needs the process of reverse coding). The Ecuadorian literature contributes to the understanding of this phenomenon but does not solve the problems of measuring it. For instance, Coutinho dos Santos et al. (2020) identified fear of making mistakes, evaluation from the peers, and shyness in children from Los Ríos, and Andrade-Molina et al. (2022) indicated differences in the different aspects of L2 motivational self-system. Importantly, in the last study, it was stated that the path for ought-to L2 self was not statistically significant, which shows that theoretically important motivating factors do not always correlate with the target variable. However, their findings deal with a behavior that has been triggered, rather than a formal English grade used in this research. Thus, it is reasonable to place the current research alongside the results obtained at the national level, rather than in a pool with them.

Another aspect is that of teachers' assistance and perceived difficulty of teaching. Research by Liu and Li (2023) identifies various types of teacher assistance: academic, instrumental, and emotional, while Liu et al. (2023), Dong (2025), and Li et al. (2025) focus on the pathways through self-efficacy, involvement, motivation, perseverance, and satisfaction. Tao et al. (2022) present the general positive correlation between perceived assistance and academic success, yet their measures of assistance do not replicate the wording and purposes of the present research. Such studies provide theoretical explanations for the importance of teaching conditions and show that simple Pearson correlation for one grade on a student's report card might not consider all the mediating factors. Additionally, Hattie and Timperley (2007) point out that feedback can depend on the level of its content and presentation; asking a person about what he or she understood cannot replace measuring the quality of feedback.

The low correlation for didactic-methodological ($r=0.142$, $p=0.326$) should not be interpreted to mean that the quality of teaching is inversely proportional to success, or that students with problems do not benefit from poor quality instruction. The identity of the sign may stem from measurement noise, reverse-coded responses, composition of the cohort where the observations were made, or from actual contextual processes which cannot be told apart in the current scheme. Supportive educational practice is valid no matter whether or not the findings were statistically significant. Luo and Gan (2025) argued for consideration of social support extending beyond the influence of a single teacher, while Ma et al. (2024) point to the importance of taking into account the broader classroom climate and achievement-related orientations. All these factors require much more precise data than available in the current case.

In the linguistic field, the relationship was particularly strong ($r = -0.245$), although the confidence interval overlaps with zero and the nominal p-value was .087. Therefore, rather than being an evidence of causal relationship, it is a rather vague negative connection. Moreover, the literature from Ecuador provides evidence of the special difficulties connected with writing (Tamayo Maggi & Cajas Quishpe, 2020) and English language teaching at schools (Sevy-Biloon et al., 2020) or just some problems in terms of learning English in elementary school (Yunga Albán et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the result obtained was the final evaluation grade taking many tasks and judgments into consideration. The problem is that the nature of the difficulties remained unidentified, such as whether there was a problem with vocabulary, transfer, following the instructions, or a particular speaking or writing competence. An assessment that would take into account one of these aspects would bring better results in further studies.

The self-regulation aspect should also be understood through moderation. Pintrich and De Groot (1990) correlated motivational and self-regulative areas with students' performance in the seventh grade of school, thus providing valuable age-related benchmark. Chen (2022) discovered a lot of evidence about the success of interventions aimed at teaching self-regulated learning, whereas Zhao et al. (2025) identified a comparatively small association between naturally occurring strategies and performance in online and blended environments. These findings represent different types of statistical evidence. Intervention studies examine changes in learning outcomes following structured instructional activities, whereas cross-sectional correlational studies assess associations between variables measured at a single point in time. Furthermore, Wang et al. (2024) highlight that teachers can support students' development of self-regulated learning strategies through access

to appropriate resources, emotional support, and structured opportunities for independent learning.

The success of students in English (7.99) cannot be considered a confirmation that barriers do not exist in the class. Even though the majority (82%) of students achieved the adequate level according to the requirements of the university, the questionnaire revealed that they experienced different feelings and linguistic skill-related emotions. Thus, a grade may depend not only on language skills but also on such factors as attendance, efforts, homework completed by the student, grades given by the teacher, etc. The data presented by Sevy-Biloon et al. (2020), Álvarez Llerena et al. (2026), Soto et al. (2025), and Ramirez Tuarez and Riera Hermida (2025) confirm that barriers and opportunities for education differ and vary by context.Different studies, like meta-analysis, survey in a small school, psychometric validation, a project in the rural classroom, and strategic intervention can bring valuable input to the conceptual framework without generating an identical effect. Interpreting the findings as a proof of a universal barrier-performance link means that citation gathering takes place rather than critical synthesis. This study, however, provides an example of how construct breadth, education level, geographical specifics, type of test, and reliability of assessment condition conclusions made. The significance of these elements is a much more useful contribution to the research gap than a claim of universal agreement in the existing theoretical and empirical literature.

From the methodology point of view, it is necessary to set the future research goals consisting in testing the polarity of items and defining the language-specific instrument for a particular age group. Brem (2021) and Khan (2016) provided a conceptual basis for the development of the questionnaire; since statement collection is not equal to the validation of psychometric tools. In several categories, the subscales had a low and negative reliability level whose global index $\alpha = 0.415$ indicates that the total score is not coherent enough to be interpreted meaningfully. In the following study, cognitive interviews, expert reviews, transparent missing data rules, item-total diagnostics, factor analysis on an adequately sized sample, and test-retest results can show whether the given subscales can be kept. The index may be recommended for using only after its empirical dimensionality is established.

At last, practical implications must not be based on finding $p > 0.05$. The following strategies can be defined as good pedagogical practices: clear explanation, scaffolded instruction, formative feedback, opportunities for low-stakes participation, and explicit strategy teaching that are confirmed by numerous studies (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Chen, 2022; Liu & Li, 2023). The latter approaches should be presented as first-rate suggestions rather than interventions tested and proved to be effective in correlation studies.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the relationship between perceived difficulties in English language teaching and learning and the academic performance of 50 eighth-grade students at Unidad Educativa Chamanga, Ecuador. The findings revealed that most participants achieved satisfactory academic results, with an average English grade of 7.99 (SD = 1.18) and 82% of students meeting or mastering the required learning outcomes. Nevertheless, students reported difficulties across the five dimensions examined, indicating that satisfactory academic performance does not necessarily imply the absence of perceived linguistic, instructional, motivational, contextual, or self-regulatory challenges.

Among the dimensions investigated, linguistic barriers presented the highest mean score ($M = 2.91$), suggesting that language-related difficulties were particularly prominent in students' perceptions of English learning. Psychological-motivational, self-regulatory, resource-related, and didactic-methodological barriers were also identified, although their average scores were comparatively lower. These findings highlight the multidimensional nature of perceived learning difficulties and suggest the importance of examining specific domains rather than assuming that all barriers contribute equally to students' educational experiences.

Regarding the central research objective, no statistically significant association was identified between the global perceived-barrier index and institutional English grades ($r = 0.017$; $p = 0.907$). Similarly, none of the five individual dimensions reached the established significance threshold of $p < .05$. Although linguistic barriers showed the strongest negative correlation with academic performance ($r = -0.245$; $p = 0.087$), this relationship remained statistically inconclusive. Consequently, the findings do not provide sufficient evidence to support the proposed negative association between perceived barriers and English academic achievement in the participating cohort. However, the absence of statistical significance should not be interpreted as demonstrating that learning difficulties are unrelated to academic performance in other educational settings.

An important methodological finding concerns the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The global barrier index demonstrated limited reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.415$), while several dimensions also presented low or problematic coefficients. These results suggest that the adapted instrument requires further examination of item wording, construct definition, dimensional structure, and suitability for younger EFL learners. Therefore, the study contributes not only contextual information about perceived learning difficulties in Ecuadorian secondary education but also evidence of the challenges involved in measuring multidimensional educational constructs using adapted questionnaires.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings support the importance of maintaining instructional practices that respond to students' identified learning needs, even when institutional grades are generally satisfactory. Clear explanations, opportunities for meaningful language practice, vocabulary development, formative feedback, emotionally supportive classroom environments, and explicit guidance in self-regulated learning may help address the difficulties reported by students. These recommendations are informed by the broader literature on English language education rather than by causal effects demonstrated in the present investigation. Accordingly, their effectiveness should be examined through appropriately designed future intervention studies.

Finally, the interpretation and generalizability of these findings are limited by the single-school sample, the cross-sectional and nonexperimental design, the use of institutional grades as the academic-performance indicator, and the limited reliability of several questionnaire dimensions. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, refined and psychometrically evaluated instruments, and complementary measures of English language proficiency. Longitudinal or intervention-based designs could also provide a clearer understanding of how perceived learning difficulties and academic performance develop over time. Despite these limitations, the study offers context-specific evidence from Ecuadorian lower-secondary education and underscores the importance of distinguishing students' perceived learning challenges from their measurable academic outcomes.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of responsibility of authorship

We, Horacio Vicente Ortiz Obando and Miguel Ángel Macías Loor, authors of the manuscript entitled "Difficulties in Teaching Foreign Languages in Eighth Grade and Academic Performance," declare that we have contributed directly to its intellectual content, research development, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and preparation of the manuscript.

We accept full responsibility for the integrity, accuracy, and originality of the research and agree to have our names included in the list of authors in the indicated order. Furthermore, we declare that the ethical requirements of the journal have been observed, in accordance with its Declaration of Publication Ethics and Malpractice.

Authors' Contributions

Horacio Vicente Ortiz Obando: Conceptualization, investigation, methodology, data collection, data organization, interpretation of results, and manuscript drafting.

Miguel Ángel Macías Loor: Conceptualization, methodological supervision, formal analysis, interpretation of results, critical review of the literature, manuscript review and editing, and academic supervision.

Both authors: Review and approval of the final manuscript and responsibility for its academic and scientific integrity.