

Barreras para el uso de recursos digitales en el aprendizaje del inglés en Jipijapa, Ecuador

Barriers to the use of digital resources in english language learning in Jipijapa, Ecuador

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RESUMEN

Esta investigación examina las barreras que enfrentan los estudiantes de instituciones educativas públicas de Jipijapa, Ecuador, para el uso de recursos digitales en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera. El estudio se deriva del proyecto de vinculación con la comunidad Acompañamiento Pedagógico para la Integración de Herramientas Digitales en la Enseñanza del Inglés en Instituciones Educativas de la Zona Urbana de Jipijapa y adoptó un enfoque cuantitativo con diseño exploratorio y descriptivo de corte transversal. Se aplicó una encuesta estructurada a 170 estudiantes de la Unidad Educativa Fiscal "Quince de Octubre" y la Unidad Educativa Fiscal "Daniel López". Los resultados revelan que el 41.8% de los participantes no utiliza ningún recurso digital en sus clases o tareas de inglés. Entre quienes sí los emplean ($n = 99$), el uso es predominantemente ocasional y orientado a la realización de tareas en casa. Las principales barreras identificadas son de carácter institucional: insuficiencia de dispositivos, inestabilidad del Internet escolar y escasa integración de herramientas digitales por parte de los docentes. El 84.8% de los estudiantes reportó que su docente de inglés usa herramientas digitales "a veces" o "nunca", lo que evidencia una brecha pedagógica significativa. El estudio concluye que superar estas barreras requiere no solo mayor acceso a infraestructura tecnológica, sino también formación docente continua y políticas institucionales que promuevan el uso sistemático de recursos digitales en la enseñanza del inglés.

Palabras clave: Barreras digitales, Recursos digitales, Inglés como lengua extranjera, EFL, Brecha digital, Jipijapa, Ecuador.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the barriers that students at public educational institutions in Jipijapa, Ecuador, face when using digital resources in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. The research derives from the community outreach project "Pedagogical Support for the Integration of Digital Tools in English Language Teaching in Educational Institutions in the Urban Area of Jipijapa" and followed a quantitative approach with an exploratory and descriptive cross-sectional design. A structured survey was administered to 170 students from Unidad Educativa Fiscal "Quince de Octubre" and Unidad Educativa Fiscal "Daniel López". Results show that 41.8% of participants do not use any digital resources in their English classes or assignments. Among those who do ($n = 99$), use is predominantly occasional and primarily oriented toward completing homework at home. The main barriers identified are institutional in nature: insufficient devices, unstable school internet, and limited integration of digital tools by teachers. Notably, 84.8% of students reported that their English teacher uses digital tools only "sometimes" or "never," revealing a significant pedagogical gap. The study concludes that overcoming these barriers requires not only greater access to technological infrastructure but also sustained teacher training and institutional policies that promote the systematic use of digital resources in English language teaching.

Keywords: Digital barriers, Digital resources, English as a Foreign Language, EFL, Digital divide, Jipijapa, Ecuador.



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Introduction

Recent technological advances have profoundly reshaped teaching and learning processes worldwide. In many countries, including Ecuador, digital resources have become essential components of contemporary education rather than supplementary aids. This shift is especially significant in nations facing notable disparities in technological access and infrastructure (Okoye et al., 2023; Murillo-Jiménez et al., 2025). The current study builds upon findings from the community outreach project entitled *“Pedagogical Support for the Integration of Digital Tools in English Language Teaching in Educational Institutions in the Urban Area of Jipijapa”* (*Acompañamiento Pedagógico para la Integración de Herramientas Digitales en la Enseñanza del Inglés en Instituciones Educativas de la Zona Urbana de Jipijapa*). This initiative was conducted in various educational institutions nationwide and revealed insufficient incorporation of digital tools and interactive methods in English instruction.

Mastering English as a foreign language continues to be one of the most demanding areas in Ecuador's education system. Although national policies promote the use of digital technologies, learners still encounter numerous challenges that hinder the development of their language skills (Barre-Parrales & Villafuerte-Holguín, 2021; Toro Añazco et al., 2025). Studies carried out in recent years consistently point to inadequate internet connectivity, weak technological infrastructure in schools, and insufficient teacher preparation as major recurring obstacles (Cárdenas Sánchez et al., 2024; Proaño Álvarez et al., 2025).

In the canton of Jipijapa, Manabí province, these problems are more pronounced due to the particular socioeconomic and geographic characteristics of the region. Previous local investigations have recognized the promising benefits of digital resources while simultaneously underscoring serious difficulties in their practical application

(Mantuano-Cedeño & Rivadeneira-Barreiro, 2022; Macías-Parrales et al., 2025). Students commonly struggle with unreliable internet connections, limited availability of devices, and lack of proper instructional support for using digital platforms.

The present research examines the obstacles that prevent effective use of digital resources in English language learning within public schools in Jipijapa. While the outreach project involved multiple institutions across the country, this study concentrates on students from Unidad Educativa Fiscal “Quince de Octubre” and Unidad Educativa Fiscal “Daniel López”, where the project was also executed. Rather than assessing long-term effects on language proficiency, this work follows an exploratory and descriptive approach. Its primary purpose is to capture students' views and to identify the main difficulties they face when attempting to use digital tools during English lessons and assignments.

The integration of technology in foreign language teaching draws on well-established theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). These models stress the relevance of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and external support conditions for successful technology adoption (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003; Sulistiyo et al., 2022; Çeşme & Akdağ Çimen, 2026). Nevertheless, in settings such as Jipijapa, these factors are heavily influenced by structural and contextual limitations.

This research holds importance because it tackles a pressing issue in the local educational context. By documenting the concrete barriers experienced by students in Jipijapa, the study seeks to offer practical insights for educators, school leaders, and policymakers aiming to narrow the digital divide and enhance English language learning in environments with restricted resources (Bui, 2022; Zehler et al., 2019; Vélez-Olvera et al., 2026).

Barriers to the Use of Digital Resources in English Language Learning

The integration of digital technologies in English language teaching is grounded in several established theoretical models that explain technology adoption and its barriers in educational settings. One of the most influential frameworks is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), originally proposed by Davis (1989). This model posits that users' behavioral intention to adopt a technology is primarily determined by two key factors: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), these constructs help explain why students and teachers may or may not incorporate digital resources in their learning processes (Sulistiyo et al., 2022; Çeşme & Akdağ Çimen, 2026).

Building upon TAM, Venkatesh et al. (2003) developed the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), which incorporates additional variables such as performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions. This broader model has proven particularly useful in educational research, especially in developing countries where external conditions like infrastructure and institutional support play a decisive role in technology adoption (Chen, 2023; Toro Añazco et al., 2025).

In Latin America, and particularly in Ecuador, the successful implementation of digital tools in education is frequently hindered by structural barriers. Okoye et al. (2023) highlight that despite growing interest in digital technologies, issues related to internet connectivity, limited access to devices, and inadequate teacher training remain significant bottlenecks. These findings are consistent with Murillo-Jiménez et al. (2025), who emphasize that barriers to technological inclusion in education are multidimensional, encompassing technical, organizational, and sociocultural factors.

Local studies in Ecuador further support this perspective. Mantuano-Cedeño and Rivadeneira-Barreiro (2022) documented how students in rural areas of Jipijapa face considerable challenges when attempting to use digital resources for English learning, mainly due to connectivity problems and lack of adequate equipment. Similarly, Cárdenas Sánchez et al. (2024) and Proaño Álvarez et al. (2025) identified teacher preparation and institutional infrastructure as critical elements that influence the effective use of digital tools in EFL classrooms.

The concept of digital divide is also central to this study. Silva-Martínez et al. (2023) argue that unequal access to technology creates significant disparities in learning opportunities, particularly affecting students in public educational institutions. In addition, Zehler et al. (2019) stress that the successful use of digital resources for language learning depends not only on availability but also on the pedagogical competence of teachers and the relevance of the tools to students' needs.

Method

The present research followed a quantitative approach with an exploratory and descriptive design. A cross-sectional study was carried out to identify the main barriers experienced by students when using digital resources in English language classes and tasks. The study focused on collecting data directly from the students' perspectives in their natural educational context without manipulating any variables.

The research was conducted in public educational institutions in Jipijapa, Manabí province, with special emphasis on Unidad Educativa Fiscal "Quince de Octubre" and Unidad Educativa Fiscal "Daniel López". A non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique was used. The participants were students from basic education and high school levels who were enrolled in English courses during the current academic year.

Data collection was carried out through a structured online survey titled *Barreras para el uso de recursos digitales en el aprendizaje del inglés en Jipijapa, Ecuador*. The instrument was divided into four sections and included multiple-choice questions, multiple selection items, Likert-type scales, and open-ended fields. The survey was designed based on constructs derived from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and previous studies on digital barriers in EFL contexts (Davis, 1989; Chen, 2023; Cárdenas Sánchez et al., 2024). Before its application, the instrument was validated by experts and piloted with a small group of students.

Participation was completely voluntary and anonymous. At the beginning of the survey, participants received detailed information about the objectives of the study, the estimated time to complete it, and the academic purpose of the data. Informed consent was obtained digitally through the first section of the questionnaire. Students were clearly in-

formed that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences and that their responses would be treated with strict confidentiality for research purposes only.

Data collection took place during the month of June 2026. The survey was shared through WhatsApp groups of teachers with their students. Once collected, the data were organized and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to identify the most common barriers at personal, institutional, and teacher-related levels.

Results

The survey generated 170 responses. Of these, 99 students (58.2%) reported having used digital tools in their English classes or assignments during the current academic year, while 71 (41.8%) indicated no use of such resources. As shown in Table 1, most participants belonged to Unidad Educativa Fiscal Daniel López, with a similar distribution observed between Basic General Education and Unified General Baccalaureate levels.

Table 1.

Distribution of participants by educational institution and level (n=99)

Institution / Level	Frequency	Percentage
Unidad Educativa Fiscal Daniel López	63	63.6%
Unidad Educativa Fiscal Quince de Octubre	36	36.4%
Basic General Education (EGB)	63	63.6%
Unified General Baccalaureate (BGU)	36	36.4%

Note: Percentages were calculated based on the 99 students who reported using digital resources in English learning activities. Values above the bars indicate frequency (n) and percentage (%). EGB = Basic General Education; BGU = Unified General Baccalaureate.

Among the students who use digital resources, the frequency of use was predominantly occasional. Most participants indicated using these tools mainly to complete homework at home. ChatGPT was the most frequently mentioned tool, followed by Edu-

cational YouTube and Canva. Table 2 presents the complete distribution of frequency, purpose, and most used tools, including additional platforms such as Google Search, Wordwall, Wayground, and Kahoot.

Table 2.

Digital Resource Use and Access Profile Among Students in Jipijapa

Variable	Category	n	%
Use of digital tools (N = 170)	Yes — uses digital resources	99	58.2
	No — does not use digital resources	71	41.8
Frequency of use (n = 99)	Never	5	5.1
	Sometimes	73	73.7
	Frequently	14	14.1
	Always	7	7.1
Main purpose of use (n = 99)	To complete English homework at home	65	65.7
	In class and for homework	15	15.2
	During English classes	12	12.1
	Rarely use them	7	7.1
Most used digital tools (n = 99)*	ChatGPT	63	63.6
	Educational YouTube	31	31.3
	Canva	22	22.2
	Google Search	6	6.1
	Wordwall	5	5.1
	Wayground (formerly Quizizz)	5	5.1
	Kahoot	4	4.0

Note: Students could select more than one digital tool; therefore, percentages do not add up to 100%. Percentages were calculated based on n = 99 (students who reported using digital resources), except for the first section where N = 170.

Regarding barriers, institutional limitations were the most prominent. The lack of sufficient devices and unstable internet connection stood out as the main obstacles. When asked which group of difficulties affected

them the most, school-related difficulties were identified as the primary barrier. Personal difficulties, such as lack of personal devices and unstable connections, were also frequently reported.

Table 3.

Main Barriers to Digital Resource Use Reported by Students (n = 99)

Variable	Category	n	%
Personal barriers (n = 99)*	I do not have my own device	23	23.2
	The connection is unstable	18	18.2
	I share the device with other people	18	18.2
	Some tools are difficult to use	15	15.2

	I need more help to use them	11	11.1
	No personal barriers reported	29	29.3
Institutional barriers (n = 99)*	There are not enough computers or devices	44	44.4
	The school's internet has problems	29	29.3
	My English teacher uses few digital tools	27	27.3
	Not enough time in class for digital tools	12	12.1
	No institutional barriers reported	22	22.2
Most influential barrier group (n = 99)	School-related difficulties	38	38.4
	Technological difficulties (internet/devices)	28	28.3
	No difficulties reported	23	23.2
	Personal difficulties (time, knowledge, distraction)	9	9.1

Note: Participants could select more than one option; therefore, percentages do not sum to 100%.

Concerning teacher practices and the perceived usefulness of digital tools, Table 4 reveals a notable pedagogical gap. The majority of students (49.5%) reported that their English teacher uses digital tools only sometimes, while 35.4% indicated that their teacher never uses them. Combined, these figures show that 84.8% of students have little or no exposure to digital tools through their teachers. Similarly,

tasks requiring digital resources are assigned only sometimes (78.8%) or never (9.1%). Despite these limitations, students recognize the value of digital tools: 33.3% reported that they frequently help them learn English, and 12.1% said they always do, suggesting that perceived usefulness is present even when institutional and pedagogical conditions do not favor consistent use.

Table 4.

Teacher Digital Practices and Perceived Usefulness of Digital Tools (n = 99)

Variable	Response	n	%
Teacher digital practices			
Frequency with which the English teacher uses digital tools in class	Never	35	35.4
	Sometimes	49	49.5
	Frequently	13	13.1
	Always	2	2.0
Teacher assigns tasks requiring digital tools	Never	9	9.1
	Sometimes	78	78.8
	Frequently	10	10.1
	Always	2	2.0
Perceived usefulness of digital tools			
Frequency with which digital tools help students learn English	Never	3	3.0
	Sometimes	51	51.5
	Frequently	33	33.3
	Always	12	12.1

Note: Likert-type scale responses (Never, Sometimes, Frequently, Always). All percentages were calculated based on n = 99 students who reported using digital resources.

Overall, the results reveal a moderate level of adoption of digital tools among students in Jipijapa, with significant limitations mainly associated with infrastructure, connectivity, and institutional support in both Unidad Educativa Fiscal Daniel López and Unidad Educativa Fiscal Quince de Octubre.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal a moderate level of digital tool adoption among students in Jipijapa, with notable barriers that limit their effective use in English language learning. Although more than half of the participants reported using some digital resource, the frequency of use remains predominantly occasional. This pattern aligns with previous research in Ecuadorian contexts, where access to technology does not always translate into regular and meaningful integration (Mantuano-Cedeño & Rivadeneira-Barreiro, 2022; Cárdenas Sánchez et al., 2024).

One of the most significant findings is the predominance of institutional barriers. The lack of sufficient devices and unstable internet connection were the most frequently reported obstacles. These results are consistent with Okoye et al. (2023) and Murillo-Jiménez et al. (2025), who identified infrastructure limitations as major bottlenecks for technology integration in Latin American education. In the specific case of Jipijapa, the situation is further complicated by the socioeconomic and geographic characteristics of the region, confirming local findings documented by Macías-Parrales et al. (2025).

A particularly striking finding concerns teacher digital practices. Data show that 84.8% of students reported their English teacher uses digital tools only sometimes or never, and 87.9% indicated that tasks requiring such tools are assigned only sometimes or never. This pattern points to a pedagogical gap that goes beyond infrastructure: even when students have access to devices or connectivity, the absence of sustained teacher-led integration limits meaningful exposure to digital resources. These findings are

consistent with Proaño Álvarez et al. (2025) and Chen (2023), who argue that teacher digital competence is a decisive factor in EFL technology adoption, and align with UTAUT's facilitating conditions construct, which emphasizes that institutional and pedagogical support are prerequisites for effective technology use (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Another relevant aspect is the limited use of digital tools by English teachers. A considerable number of students indicated that their teachers use digital resources only sometimes or never, and that tasks requiring such tools are assigned infrequently. This finding supports the observations of Proaño Álvarez et al. (2025) and Chen (2023), who emphasize that teacher digital competence and pedagogical practices play a decisive role in the successful adoption of technology in EFL classrooms.

The study also highlights the relevance of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and UTAUT in understanding these barriers. Factors such as facilitating conditions (infrastructure and support) appear to be more influential than perceived usefulness in this context, since many students recognize the potential benefits of digital tools but face structural obstacles that prevent their consistent use (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003; Sulistiyo et al., 2022).

These results have important practical implications. Educational authorities and school administrators in Jipijapa should prioritize improving technological infrastructure and providing continuous training for English teachers. Without addressing these institutional barriers, the potential of digital resources to enhance English language learning will remain limited.

Some limitations of the study should be acknowledged. The sample was obtained through convenience sampling and focused primarily on two public institutions, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the cross-sectional design only captures a snapshot of the situation during

June 2026. Future research could benefit from longitudinal designs and larger, more diverse samples. Furthermore, the fact that 41.8% of respondents reported no use of digital resources whatsoever suggests that non-adoption itself is a phenomenon deserving dedicated investigation in future studies.

Despite these limitations, the present study contributes to the understanding of digital barriers in EFL teaching in semi-urban and rural contexts of Ecuador. By documenting the specific challenges faced by students in Jipijapa, it provides valuable information for the design of more effective strategies to reduce the digital divide and improve English language learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This study identified significant barriers to the use of digital resources in English language learning in Jipijapa, Ecuador. Findings reveal that a considerable proportion of students do not use digital tools at all, and that among those who do, adoption remains occasional and largely restricted to homework completion outside the classroom.

Institutional barriers — insufficient devices and unstable internet connectivity — emerged as the most influential obstacles. Equally significant is the pedagogical gap identified: many students have little or no exposure to digital tools through their teachers, indicating that teacher practice constitutes a critical bottleneck that goes beyond infrastructure. Addressing this requires sustained teacher training and institutional policies that promote systematic digital integration in English instruction. Despite these barriers, students demonstrated a positive perception of digital tools as learning aids, suggesting that motivation exists and that targeted interventions could yield meaningful improvements in outcomes.

Reducing the digital divide in English language teaching in Jipijapa demands a coordinated response: investment in infrastructure, continuous teacher training, and

institutional commitment to making digital tools a structured part of everyday English instruction — not an occasional practice.

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