

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.124261034

EVALUATION OF THE INTEGRATED SKILLS METHODOLOGY IN PREPARATION FOR ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE EXAMINATIONS: A LONGITUDINAL CASE STUDY IN A CAMBRIDGE EXAM PREPARATION CENTER

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Received: 17/12/2025
Accepted: 30/03/2026

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ABSTRACT

This longitudinal study evaluated the implementation of the Integrated Skills methodology in a Cambridge exam preparation center in Ecuador, conducting a retrospective analysis of the records of 177 students between 2018 and 2022. The research aimed to determine the effectiveness of this integrated approach, which concurrently develops reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, compared to traditional methods focused on exam format. Results showed a general positive trend in linguistic competence, measured through an Integrated Global Score (IGS), with a significant improvement during the period, particularly notable in 2020. However, the analysis revealed uneven development among the skills. Listening comprehension was identified as the skill with the most pronounced and persistent gap for advancing between levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), while productive skills showed more stable progression. The study concluded that the Integrated Skills methodology was effective in promoting overall improvement in communicative competence within an exam preparation context. Furthermore, it provided a valid quantitative framework (the IGS) for monitoring ESL programs and highlighted the need to strategically emphasize listening comprehension development in future curricular designs.

KEYWORDS: Communicative competence, language development, formative assessment, second language.

RESUMEN

Este estudio longitudinal evaluó la implementación de la metodología de habilidades integradas en un centro de preparación para exámenes de Cambridge en Ecuador, realizando un análisis retrospectivo de los registros de 177 estudiantes entre 2018 y 2022. La investigación tuvo como objetivo determinar la eficacia de este enfoque integrado, que desarrolla simultáneamente las habilidades de lectura, escritura, comprensión auditiva y expresión oral, en comparación con los métodos tradicionales centrados en el formato del examen. Los resultados mostraron una tendencia general positiva en la competencia lingüística, medida a través de una puntuación global integrada (IGS), con una mejora neta significativa durante el período, especialmente notable en 2020. Sin embargo, el análisis reveló un desarrollo desigual entre las habilidades. La comprensión auditiva se identificó como la habilidad con la brecha más pronunciada y persistente para avanzar entre los niveles del Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas (MCER), mientras que las habilidades productivas mostraron una progresión más estable. El estudio concluyó que la metodología de habilidades integradas era eficaz para promover la mejora general de la competencia comunicativa en el contexto de la preparación de exámenes. Además, proporcionó un marco cuantitativo válido (la IGS) para supervisar los programas de ESL y destacó la necesidad de hacer hincapié estratégicamente en el desarrollo de la comprensión auditiva en los futuros diseños curriculares.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Competencia comunicativa, desarrollo del lenguaje, evaluación formativa, segunda lengua.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, English has solidified its status as the predominant language of science, business, technology, and diplomacy, becoming a key resource for academic mobility, employment access, and participation in globalized economies (He et al., 2024; Riera et al., 2024). Proficiency in English as a second language is associated with better opportunities for entry into higher education, professional competitiveness, and the development of global competencies in school and university contexts (Mimi & Hans, 2025; Shaniga & Ilankumaran, 2024). Within this framework, standardized English examinations, such as those from the University of Cambridge, play a central role as mechanisms for certification and academic progression (Clark & Yu, 2022).

However, there is a critical tension between this need for certification and the pedagogical approaches used to achieve it. The literature warns that excessively test-oriented teaching practices promote test-taking strategies disconnected from the genuine development of communicative competence, emphasizing memorization and exam mechanics (Clark & Yu, 2022; He et al., 2024; Yung, 2021; Aziz et al., 2020). In Latin America and Ecuador, where proficiency indicators are often low, this challenge is exacerbated by inadequate methodologies and the persistence of traditional assessment models that prioritize formal accuracy over meaningful language use (Guzmán, 2025; Riera et al., 2024; Mayancha, 2025; Assali, 2024).

In response to this landscape, there is growing interest in innovative methodologies that integrate exam preparation with authentic language development. The notion of "language assessment literacy" underscores the need for preparation to be conceived as a formative space that articulates skill development with a deep understanding of performance criteria (He et al., 2024; Gumartifa et al., 2023; Satar et al., 2025). In this context, the Integrated Skills methodology emerges as a promising pedagogical alternative, as it seeks to develop comprehension and production competencies in an interconnected manner within a communicative framework (Bonilla & Vinueza, 2024; Riera et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, scoping reviews of L2 test preparation reveal a notable lack of longitudinal and experimental studies that assess the sustained effects of specific methodological interventions in real-world exam preparation contexts (Clark & Yu, 2022; Numonova, 2024; Imbaquingo & Cárdenas, 2023). Research has focused on high-stakes exams like

IELTS and TOEFL, with limited diversity in contexts and participants, leaving a significant gap in the evaluation of methodologies within Cambridge exam preparation centers.

In Ecuador, while experiences of pedagogical innovation in English language teaching are beginning to be documented, there is a scarcity of studies rigorously and longitudinally evaluating the impact of methodologies specifically designed for exam preparation in language academies or other non-university settings (Bonilla & Vinueza, 2024; Cajas et al., 2025; Mimi & Hans, 2025; Riera et al., 2024). This gap limits the generation of robust local evidence to guide curricular and educational policy decisions in this crucial area.

Therefore, the objective of this longitudinal case study is to evaluate the Integrated Skills methodology in the preparation for English as a second language examinations at a Cambridge exam preparation center in Ecuador. The central research question is to what extent this methodology contributes to overcoming the pedagogical challenges associated with traditional exam preparation. This research aims, on the one hand, to contribute to scientific knowledge through the longitudinal analysis of a methodological innovation in a largely unexplored context, and on the other hand, to provide relevant inputs for decision-making in ESL exam preparation programs, promoting practices more aligned with current demands of English learning and the particularities of the Latin American context.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Location

The research was conducted at the Global English Trade language academy, located in the city of Puyo, Pastaza province, Ecuador. This academy is dedicated to teaching English as a foreign language and offers training programs focused on developing communicative competencies and preparing for English as a foreign language examination.

Global English Trade provided the study with access to students from diverse age groups and language proficiency levels and has been incorporating new methodologies into its teaching programs. In this context, the Integrated Skills methodology was implemented as the default approach for exam preparation, with the objective of achieving a balanced development of language skills.

2.2. Research Approach and Design

The study adopted a quantitative perspective, which is oriented toward the systematic assessment of

numerical measurements to evaluate the outcomes of the Integrated Skills methodology for preparing for English as a second language certification. In this way, student performance was assessed based on objective indicators from the grades used in the English exam and the proficiency levels attained.

The research design corresponds to a non-experimental longitudinal study, based on the retrospective analysis of academic records collected between 2018 and 2022. The longitudinal nature of the study allowed for the examination of student performance evolution over time and the identification of trends concurrent with the sustained implementation of the Integrated Skills methodology at the analyzed institution.

The design can also be configured as *ex-post-facto*, in the sense that the data used were generated within the normal operations of the academy and did not require manipulation of variables or random distribution of participants. This very context allows for the observation of student performance in an authentic educational situation, thereby granting ecological validity to the results.

2.3. Participants

The study population consisted of a total of 177 students who completed English programs at the Global English Trade academy during the period from 2018 to 2022. Participants were selected using convenience sampling, based on the availability of complete academic records corresponding to the exams taken.

All students included in the study were assessed in the four fundamental English language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening comprehension, and had final grades and systematically recorded proficiency levels from the institution.

2.4. Description of the Integrated Skills Methodology

The methodology analyzed in this study is based on the Integrated Skills approach, which conceives English as a second language learning as an integral and dynamic process in which the language skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening comprehension are developed jointly. This approach is grounded in the assumption that the authentic use of the language in real communicative situations requires the simultaneous activation of multiple skills; therefore, their teaching and assessment should reflect this interrelation.

At the Global English Trade academy, the implementation of the Integrated Skills methodology

was specifically oriented towards English exam preparation, integrating assessment requirements with pedagogical practices focused on the meaningful use of the language. Unlike traditional models that address each skill in isolation or prioritize the memorization of grammatical structures and exam formats, this approach promoted the balanced development of communicative competencies through articulated and sequenced tasks.

Class sessions were designed around thematic units incorporating diverse linguistic inputs, such as written texts, audio recordings, and contextualized communicative situations. Each unit included reading and listening comprehension activities that served as a starting point for oral and written production, facilitating the transfer of knowledge and the functional use of the language. Thus, students interacted with the language progressively, moving from reception to production, in line with the cognitive processes involved in learning a foreign language.

The pedagogical procedure followed during the implementation of the Integrated Skills methodology included several phases. First, students were presented with authentic or adapted material, aligned with the exam content and formats, aiming to activate prior knowledge and familiarize them with different text types and linguistic registers. Subsequently, analysis and comprehension activities were developed, aimed at identifying main ideas, specific information, and relevant linguistic resources. In a later phase, students engaged in oral and written production tasks that integrated the content worked on, such as brief presentations, guided writing exercises, or simulations of assessable communicative situations. Finally, formative feedback was provided, focusing on both communicative performance and the assessment criteria.

Within the framework of this methodology, exam preparation was conceived not merely as training to answer test items, but as a formative process aimed at developing comprehension, production, and self-regulation learning strategies. Activities were designed to strengthen transversal skills such as idea organization, discourse coherence, global and specific comprehension, and the ability to respond appropriately to different types of assessment tasks. Furthermore, the Integrated Skills approach allowed for a coherent alignment between teaching, learning, and assessment, as classroom activities, in an integrated manner, replicated the cognitive and communicative demands of the exam. This coherence

sought to reduce learning fragmentation and promote more meaningful preparation, enabling students to transfer their language skills to real assessment contexts.

2.5. Data Collection Strategies

Data collection was carried out based on institutional academic records corresponding to the 2018–2022 period. The collected data included the grades obtained by students in the English exam and the proficiency level attained, according to the assessment criteria established by the academy.

The grades analyzed corresponded to student performance in the four assessed language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening comprehension. The records were organized and systematized in a database, ensuring the anonymization of students' personal information. Given the retrospective nature of the study, no additional instruments were applied, nor was there any interference in the institution's regular assessment processes.

2.6. Data Analysis Strategies

The data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, with the objective of examining the behavior of student performance on the English exam throughout the period from 2018 to 2022. For this purpose, quantitative indicators were employed to analyze both performance by language skill and the integrated global performance, as well as the progression of levels achieved.

First, annual averages for each language skill (reading, writing, speaking, and listening comprehension) were calculated. For each skill, the annual average was obtained from the sum of the individual scores recorded in a given year, divided by the total number of students assessed in that period. The calculation was expressed using the following general formula (1):

$$\bar{X}_{h,a} = \frac{1}{n_a} \sum_{i=1}^{n_a} X_{i,h,a} \quad (1)$$

where $\bar{X}_{h,a}$ represents the average for skill h in year a , $X_{i,h,a}$ corresponds to the score obtained by student i in skill h during year a , and n_a indicates the number of students assessed in that year.

Second, the annual average of the Integrated Global Score (IGS) was calculated. This allowed for the analysis of students' overall performance under the Integrated Skills approach. The individual IGS was previously defined as the arithmetic mean of the four skills, and the annual IGS average was obtained using the following expression (2):

$$\bar{IGS}_a = \frac{1}{n_a} \sum_{i=1}^{n_a} IGS_{i,a} \quad (2)$$

where \bar{IGS}_a represents the average integrated global score for year a , and $IGS_{i,a}$ corresponds to the integrated global score of student i in that year.

Additionally, the annual percentage variation in overall performance was analyzed to identify relative changes in average performance between consecutive years. This variation was calculated by comparing the annual IGS averages, in accordance with the following formula (3):

$$\Delta\%PGI_a = \left(\frac{\bar{PGI}_a - \bar{PGI}_{a-1}}{\bar{PGI}_{a-1}} \right) \times 100 \quad (3)$$

This indicator allowed for the observation of trends of improvement, stability, or decline in overall performance throughout the study period.

Finally, to graphically represent the results and facilitate the interpretation of longitudinal trends, the obtained data were processed and visualized using Origin software, version 2018. Line graphs were created to show the temporal evolution of the averages by skill and of the integrated global score, as well as bar graphs to illustrate the percentage distribution of levels by year. These graphical representations complemented the descriptive statistical analysis and allowed for a clear visualization of the observed performance patterns.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Distribution of Certified CEFR Levels and Their Temporal Evolution (2018-2022)

Table 1 and Figure 1 show the distribution of the 177 certificates analyzed by Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level and year. In the early years of the period, a clear predominance of the A1 level is observed: more than half of the certificates in 2018 (54.8%) and a still high proportion in 2019 (41.9%). This suggests that, in the initial phase, the majority profile of the student body corresponded to basic users of the language, likely in early stages of training or with less prior exposure to English. Although a slight increase in A2 and B1 levels is noted in 2019, the distribution continues to show a broad base at the initial levels, which could be linked to the nature of the training offering or the institutional certification requirements in place during those years.

The year 2020 marks an important turning point, with a notable increase in B1 certifications (70.0%) and a drastic reduction in A1 (3.3%), indicating a substantial improvement in linguistic performance. This shift could be associated with curricular adjustments, more specific exam preparation, or

transformations in teaching conditions (e.g., hybrid or virtual modalities that may have favored certain student profiles). However, 2021 sees a return to the predominance of A1 (41.7%), accompanied by a decrease in the percentage of B1 (25.0%), suggesting some instability in the consolidation of intermediate levels. Finally, in 2022, level A2 predominates (45.5%), with a relative increase in both A2 and B1

compared to 2021, which could be interpreted as a progressive recovery towards higher levels, albeit still with a significant presence of basic users. Overall, the time series reflects a non-linear improvement process, with advances and setbacks, highlighting the influence of contextual and institutional factors on the achievement of certified language competencies.

Table 1 Distribution of certified CEFR levels by year (n=177)

Year	N	A1 (KET) n (%)	A2 (KET/PET) n (%)	B1 (PET/FCE) n (%)	B2 (FCE) n (%)	Predominant Level
2018	42	23 (54.8%)	10 (23.8%)	9 (21.4%)	0 (0%)	A1
2019	48	21 (43.8%)	11 (22.9%)	15 (31.3%)	1 (2.1%)	A1
2020	37	3 (8.1%)	12 (32.4%)	19 (51.4%)	3 (8.1%)	B1
2021	28	11 (39.3%)	7 (25.0%)	8 (28.6%)	2 (7.1%)	A1
2022	22	3 (13.6%)	8 (36.4%)	8 (36.4%)	3 (13.6%)	A2/B1

KET = Key English Test (target A1-A2); PET = Preliminary English Test (target A2-B1); FCE = First Certificate in English (target B1-B2). The percentage is calculated based on the total number of cases (N) per year.

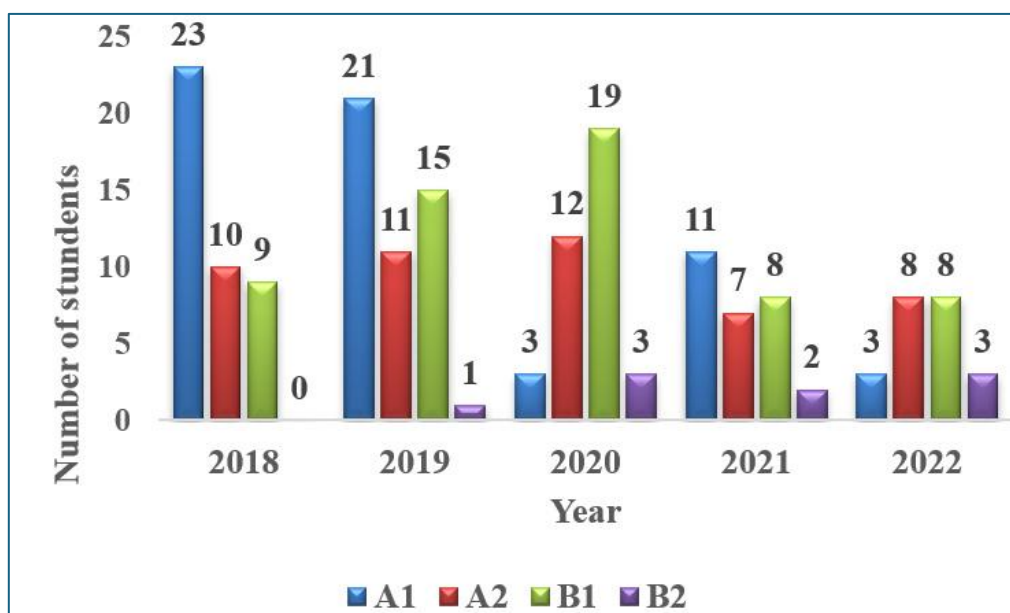


Figure 1 Number of students per year.

3.2. Performance Profiles by Skill According to CEFR Level

Table 2 and Figure 2 present the average performance in the four assessed skills (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking) by CEFR level, on a scale of 0 to 200 points. At the A1 level (KET, n=44), the mean scores were 110.2±9.8 in Reading, 124.1±12.3 in Writing, 94.3±10.5 in Listening, and 122.8±10.1 in Speaking, establishing the pattern Writing > Speaking > Reading > Listening. At the A2 level (KET/PET, n=34), a generalized increase is observed: 127.1±8.2 in Reading, 136.4±9.7 in Writing, 117.6±11.3 in Listening, and 133.5±9.4 in Speaking, with the same dominant pattern being maintained (Writing > Speaking > Reading > Listening). At the B1 level (PET/FCE, n=48), the averages rise to

142.3±9.6 (Reading), 151.8±7.5 (Writing), 144.2±10.8 (Listening), and 151.9±8.7 (Speaking), with a pattern in which Speaking ≈ Writing > Listening > Reading. Finally, at the B2 level (FCE, n=9), the highest values are reached: 159.3±7.2 in Reading, 166.7±6.39 in Writing, 166.7±6.3 in Listening, and 160.8±8.4 in Speaking, with a predominance of Listening > Writing > Speaking > Reading. In evolutionary terms, the results show consistent progression in performance across all skills as proficiency advances from A1 to B2, suggesting an adequate alignment between the CEFR levels and the performance observed in the sample. However, the pattern of strengths and weaknesses is not homogeneous across the different skills. At the initial levels (A1 and A2), a clear advantage of productive

skills, particularly writing and speaking, over receptive skills is evident. Listening shows the lowest scores. This finding could be linked to a greater pedagogical emphasis on guided written and oral tasks, as well as less systematic exposure to authentic auditory input during the early stages of learning.

From level B1 onwards, a shift in the performance profile becomes apparent. Although reading remains the relatively weakest skill, listening and speaking consolidate. By level B2, listening moves to the top position, followed by writing and speaking. This

turnaround suggests that as proficiency increases, students develop a greater capacity to process more complex oral input, likely resulting from more intensive exposure to auditory materials and the integration of more demanding communicative tasks. The sustained improvement in writing across all levels further indicates that this skill benefits from cumulative practice and teacher feedback. Conversely, the relative lag in reading might signal the need to reinforce reading comprehension strategies and diversify the types of texts used in instruction

Table 2: Average performance by skill according to CEFR level (Mean \pm SD; scale 0-200)

Level CEFR	N	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking	Performance Pattern
A1 (KET)	44	110.2 \pm 9.8	124.1 \pm 12.3	94.3 \pm 10.5	122.8 \pm 10.1	Writing > Speaking > Reading > Listening
A2 (KET/PET)	34	127.1 \pm 8.2	136.4 \pm 9.7	117.6 \pm 11.3	133.5 \pm 9.4	Writing > Speaking > Reading > Listening
B1 (PET/FCE)	48	142.3 \pm 9.6	151.8 \pm 7.5	144.2 \pm 10.8	151.9 \pm 8.7	Speaking \approx Writing > Listening > Reading
B2 (FCE)	9	159.3 \pm 7.2	166.7 \pm 6.39	166.7 \pm 6.3	160.8 \pm 8.4	Listening > Writing > Speaking > Reading

The symbol \approx denotes a difference of less than 1 point between averages.

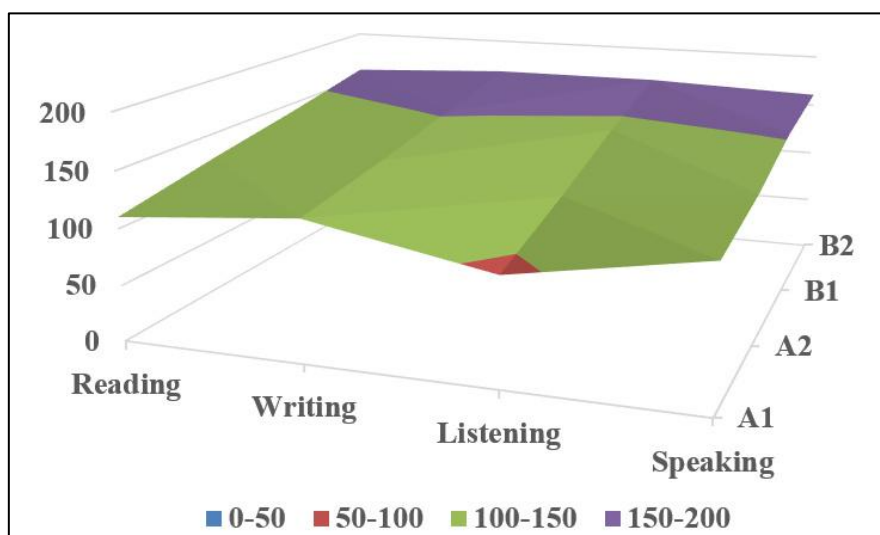


Figure 2 Average performance by skill according to CEFR level.

3.3. Competency Gaps in Level Transitions

Table 3 and Figure 3 present the average difference (Δ) in points on the 0-200 scale between the mean skill scores of candidates certified at one CEFR level and those at the immediately higher level (see averages in Table 2). A positive value indicates the average increase necessary to reach the next threshold of certified competence. From A1 to A2, the gaps range from +10.7 to +23.3 points; from A2 to B1, from +15.2 to +26.6; and from B1 to B2, from +8.9 to +22.5. This suggests that progression is neither uniform nor identical across skills but instead presents differentiated demands depending on the specific language skill involved.

A consistent feature is that listening comprehension constitutes the skill with the largest gap in all three transitions (+23.3, +26.6, and +22.5 points). This

indicates that the development of this skill requires a more pronounced increase in performance than the others to justify moving to a higher CEFR level. This pattern aligns with evidence showing that listening is often perceived as the most problematic skill by students, due to both the speed and density of oral input and the demands of real-time processing (Permatasari et al., 2023). Furthermore, recent studies indicate that receptive proficiency (especially aural vocabulary) is significantly associated with CEFR levels, but presents great internal heterogeneity, making it difficult to homogeneously reach the higher thresholds of competence (Li et al., 2024; Zhang, 2025).

In contrast, writing and speaking show more moderate gaps, particularly in the B1→B2 transition (Δ writing = +9.9; Δ speaking = +8.9). This could be

interpreted as a more gradual progression in productive skills once an intermediate level has been achieved. This behavior is related to research documenting relatively stable increases in syntactic complexity and written accuracy between A1, A2, and B1, but with less dramatic differences as learners approach upper-intermediate levels (Fleckenstein *et al.*, 2019; Khushik & Huhta, 2018). Overall, the results

from Table 3 suggest that curriculum design and teaching practices should explicitly account for these differential gaps, assigning reinforced weight to the development of listening comprehension during level transitions, without neglecting the progressive refinement of oral and written production that characterizes the B1–B2 and higher stages.

Table 3 Average score difference required for transition between consecutive CEFR levels.

Level Transition	Δ Reading	Δ Writing	Δ Listening	Δ Speaking	Skill with the Largest Gap (Δ)
From A1 to A2	+16.0	+12.3	+23.3	+10.7	Listening Comprehension (Listening)
From A2 to B2	+15.2	+15.4	+26.6	+18.4	Listening Comprehension (Listening)
From B1 to B2	+17.0	+9.9	+22.5	+8.9	Listening Comprehension (Listening)

Δ = (Average of Higher Level) - (Average of Lower Level). Calculations are based on the averages presented in Table 2.

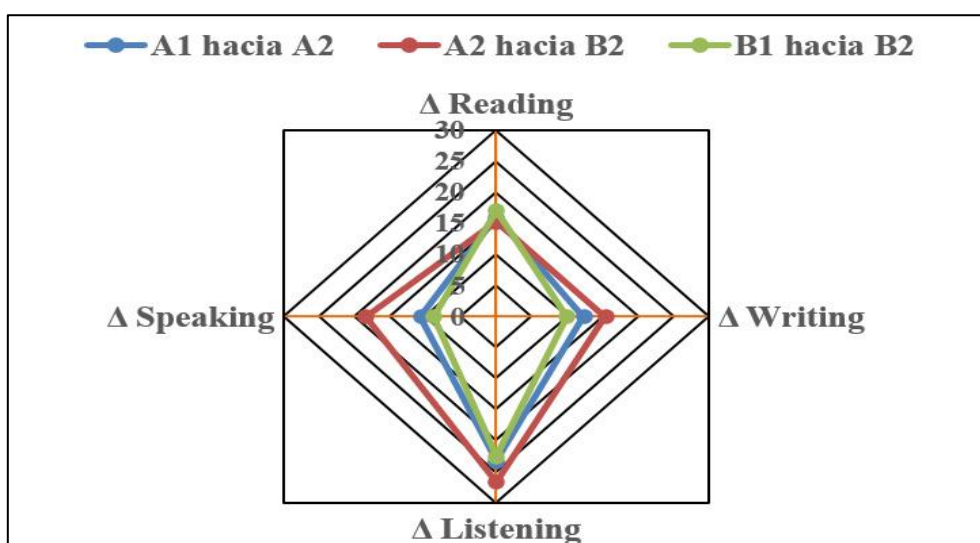


Figure 3 Scores required for transition between consecutive CEFR levels.

3.4. Evolution of the Integrated Global Score (IGS) as an Index of Overall Competence

Table 4 presents the annual evolution of the IGS as a synthetic indicator of overall competence between 2018 and 2022. The IGS was calculated by averaging the scores for reading, writing, listening, and speaking for each candidate, including only those with at least three skills reported. This reinforces the stability of the index by reducing the impact of incomplete data (Park *et al.*, 2021; Puig-Mayenco *et al.*, 2023). The overall mean for the period was 137.5 ± 13.5 points, with a baseline in 2018 of 132.1 ± 11.4 . Starting from this reference point, increases are observed in 2019 (134.8 ± 12.1 ; $\blacktriangle +2.7$) and especially in 2020 (142.6 ± 13.8 ; $\blacktriangle +7.8$), followed by a decline in 2021 (137.2 ± 15.0 ; $\blacktriangledown -5.4$) and a new recovery in 2022 (141.9 ± 13.2 ; $\blacktriangle +4.7$). The 95% confidence intervals (CI 95%) show partial overlaps between years but confirm a general upward trend compared to 2018 (Figure 4).

In terms of overall comparison across the period, the IGS shows a net improvement of almost 10 points between the 2018 baseline and the 2020 value, and despite fluctuations, it remains above the initial level in 2021 and 2022. This behavior is consistent with longitudinal studies documenting sustained, though not linear, growth in language competence when prolonged learning trajectories and repeated assessments across multiple skills are available (Hubert, 2022). The most pronounced increase in 2020 suggests a possible confluence of curricular, methodological, or cohort factors that favored more accelerated progress. Conversely, the decline in 2021 could reflect contextual disruptions in the teaching-learning processes (e.g., abrupt changes in instruction or assessment formats), a phenomenon already noted in other research on interannual variability in language performance (Alshihry, 2024). From a measurement perspective, the use of the IGS as an integrated average of four skills aligns with

recent recommendations advocating for global proficiency indices based on multiple domains, rather than on single or merely institutional indicators (Puig-Mayenco et al., 2023). This approach allows for a better grasp of overall competence, especially when skills do not evolve uniformly, and facilitates trend monitoring at the program level. However, the observed dispersion (SD between 11.4 and 15.0) and the overlap of CIs between years remind us that progress is not uniform among

candidates and that year-to-year changes should be interpreted as aggregate trends, not as guarantees of individual improvement (Fleckenstein et al., 2019). Furthermore, the literature cautions that even "global" measures may only partially capture the complexity of the competence construct. Therefore, it is recommended to combine integrated indices with skill-specific analyses when making fine-grained curricular decisions (Basantes-Andrade et al., 2025; Kizi, 2025; Mohamad et al., 2025).

Table 4 Annual evolution of the Integrated Global Score (IGS) (2018-2022).

Year	Average (IGS±SD)	CI 95% (Lower Limit)	CI 95% (Upper Limit)	Trend
2018	132.1±11.4	128.2	136.0	Baseline
2019	134.8±12.1	130.9	138.7	▲ +2.7
2020	142.6±13.8	137.5	147.7	▲ +7.8
2021	137.2±15.0	130.9	143.5	▼ -5.4
2022	141.9±13.2	135.3	148.5	▲ +4.7
Total	137.5±13.5	-	-	-

Note: IGS = (R+W+L+S)/4. Only candidates with at least 3 reported skills were included. SD = Standard Deviation. CI = Confidence Interval.

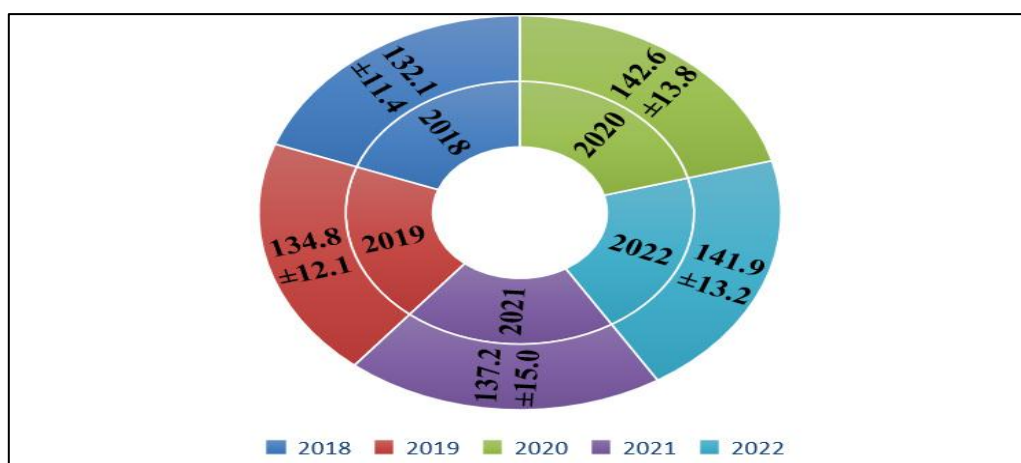


Figure 4 Annual evolution of the Integrated Global Score (IGS) (2018-2022).

3.5. Year-on-Year Percentage Variation in Overall Performance

Table 5 summarizes the year-on-year percentage variation of the IGS as a synthetic indicator of change in overall performance. Pairs of consecutive years (a-1 to a) are compared, showing the average IGS for each year, the absolute difference (Δ IGS), the percentage variation ($\Delta\%$ IGS), along with a qualitative interpretation of the trajectory. Between 2018 and 2022, three periods of growth (2018 to 2019, 2019 to 2020, 2021 to 2022) and one of decline (2020 to 2021) are recorded. The average of the variations reveals a net positive trend, with a mean absolute increase of +2.45 points and an average percentage variation of +1.87%, calculated based on the absolute values of $\Delta\%$ IGS.

In terms of interpretation, the change from 2018 to 2019 (+2.7 points; +2.04%) is classified as moderate growth, while 2019 to 2020 shows accelerated growth, with an increase of +7.8 points and +5.79% (Figure 5). This type of acceleration aligns with second language development profiles where, following an initial consolidation period, phases of more intense gain can be observed, associated with curricular adjustments, increased exposure, or improvements in teaching and assessment practices (Isbell et al., 2018; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2018). In 2020 to 2021, a significant decline occurs (-5.4 points; -3.79%), followed by a solid recovery in 2021 to 2022 (+4.7 points; +3.43%). This suggests the system's capacity to absorb disruptions and return to an upward trajectory, a pattern also described in programs where competence

is periodically monitored using standardized tests (Isbell et al., 2018).

The percentage variations, though relatively small in numerical terms, can reflect substantive changes in the distribution of proficiency levels, especially when the index integrates multiple skills and is calculated for large cohorts (Park et al., 2021). The decline from 2020 to 2021 could be linked to contextual factors (changes in teaching modality, impact of external crises, alterations in exam conditions) affecting learning continuity and the stability of results. This phenomenon is documented in studies tracking oral and overall proficiency, where temporary declines are observed in contexts of educational disruption (Khushik & Huhta, 2018). The subsequent recovery indicates that once more stable conditions for teaching and assessment are re-established, the system regains its capacity to generate aggregate progress.

Overall, the year-on-year variation in the IGS shows a non-linear but globally upward trend, characterized by phases of moderate growth, a strong surge, a specific decline, and sustained recovery. This dynamic resembles the progress patterns described in longitudinal proficiency studies, where gains are not uniformly distributed over time and can be modulated by cohort factors, context, and changes in curriculum implementation or assessment instruments (Isbell et al., 2018; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2018). From a management and quality assurance perspective, the joint reading of absolute and percentage differences allows for the identification of "critical" years (such as 2020 to 2021) that require more detailed analysis of causes. Simultaneously, it confirms that the overall balance of the period is positive. This supports the use of the IGS and its annual variations as a useful tool for the strategic monitoring of the program's overall performance.

Table 5 Year-on-year percentage variation of the IGS.

Period (from a-1 to a)	IGS (year a-1)	IGS (Year a)	Absolute Difference (Δ IGS)	Percentage Variation ($\Delta\%$ IGS)	Trajectory Interpretation
2018 to 2019	132.1	134.8	+2.7	+2.04	Moderate Growth
2019 to 2020	134.8	142.6	+7.8	+5.79	Accelerated Growth
2020 to 2021	142.6	137.2	-5.4	-3.79	Significant Decline
2021 to 2022	137.2	141.9	+4.7	+3.43	Solid Recovery
Average (Absolute Δ)			+2.45	+1.87	Net Positive Trend

Note: The average percentage variation is calculated as the mean of the absolute values of $\Delta\%$ IGS for the periods with data (n=4).

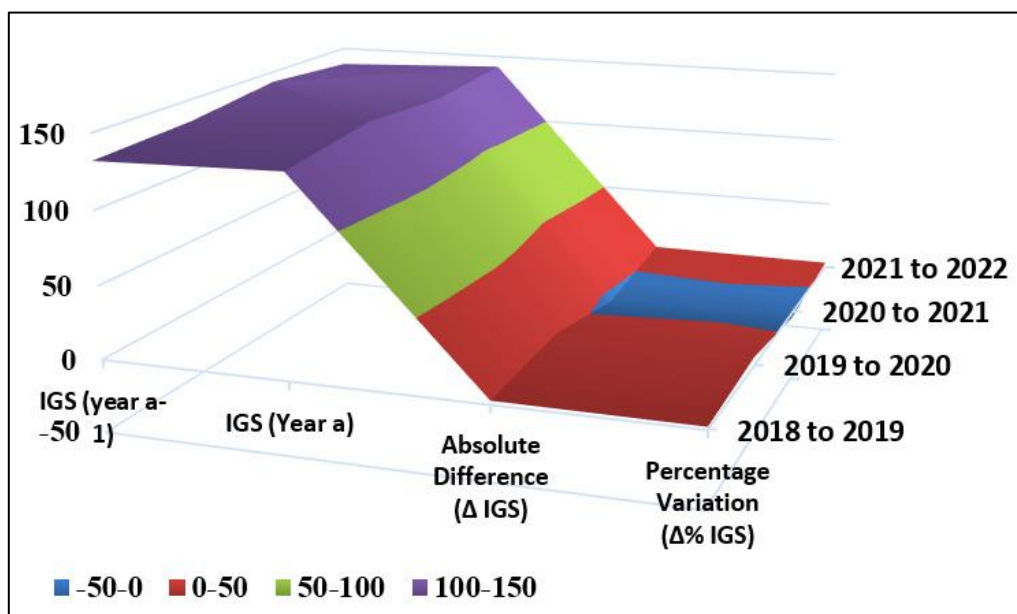


Figure 5 Year-on-year percentage variation of the IGS from 2018 to 2022.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The longitudinal implementation of the Integrated Skills methodology in a Cambridge exam preparation center in Ecuador proved to be an effective pedagogical strategy for promoting overall

improvement in students' linguistic competence, measured through the Integrated Global Score (IGS). Despite year-to-year fluctuations attributable to contextual factors, the net trend between 2018 and 2022 was positive, with significant growth

particularly notable in the year 2020. This suggests that the integrated approach, by articulating the development of the four language skills within a communicative framework, contributed to overcoming the limitations of traditional methods excessively focused on exam format.

The skill-based analysis revealed an uneven development pattern, identifying listening comprehension as the skill with the most pronounced and consistent gap in transitions between CEFR levels. While productive skills (writing and speaking) showed more stable progression, particularly at intermediate levels, listening required substantially larger performance increments to reach higher thresholds. This finding highlighted a specific vulnerability in students' competency profiles and indicated the need for future curriculum designs to incorporate a reinforced and strategic emphasis on developing this skill.

The study provided longitudinal, locally generated empirical evidence that validates the use of synthetic indices such as the IGS for monitoring ESL exam

preparation programs. The non-linear evolution of the IGS, with its phases of growth, decline, and recovery, aggregatedly reflected the complex dynamics of learning in a real-world context and enabled the identification of critical periods deserving in-depth causal analysis. Thus, the research not only evaluated a specific methodology but also offered an applicable quantitative framework for educational management and informed decision-making in similar English teaching contexts in Latin America

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge all the experts for their time, devotion and precious contributions to the study. Furthermore, the authors are grateful to the reviewers for the precious suggestions provided to improve the overall quality of the investigation.

FUNDING

The research was conducted independently by the researchers, and no funding was received.

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