

Improving EFL Teaching in Higher Education: A Review of Challenges and Evidence-Based Recommendations

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Article information	Abstract
Article history: Received: 19 Jun 2025 Last revised: 16 Jul 2026 Accepted: 16 Jul 2026 Available online: 20 Jul 2026 Keywords: EFL teaching Higher education Language pedagogy Instructional challenges Teacher professional development Curriculum reform Educational policy	<i>This study provides a narrative review of contemporary challenges in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in higher education across diverse international contexts. It synthesizes evidence from peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025. The analysis identifies six interrelated domains of difficulty: student-related factors (proficiency, motivation, anxiety), cultural and linguistic diversity, pedagogical and methodological constraints, community attitudes and perceptions, curriculum and assessment systems, and teacher, technological, and institutional limitations. Rather than representing isolated barriers, these challenges interact across policy, institutional, pedagogical, and learner levels. Positive attitudes toward English often coexist with critiques of inequality; Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is endorsed in policy but undermined by exam-driven curricula; and technology promises innovation yet exacerbates inequities without adequate training and infrastructure. The review argues that sustainable improvement depends on systemic coherence across policy, institutional governance, curriculum design, teacher development, and learner-centered practice rather than isolated interventions. Future research should expand comparative research across underexplored regions, employ longitudinal designs to assess the durability of reforms, and critically examine the role of emerging tools such as artificial intelligence (AI) in language instruction. By integrating evidence across diverse educational contexts into a coherent multi-level framework, the study contributes a holistic perspective on improving EFL teaching in higher education.</i>

INTRODUCTION

In today's era of accelerated globalization, the demand for a shared international language has grown considerably. Expanding cooperation in political, economic, cultural, and academic spheres has not only reshaped global interactions but also transformed linguistic dynamics on a worldwide scale. As spoken communication remains a core element of these exchanges,

English has come to dominate as the global lingua franca—a development largely shaped by the historical and geopolitical influence of English-speaking nations, particularly in the aftermath of World War II.

The increasing global role of English has left a profound imprint on education systems across the world, especially in the field of EFL instruction. In academic contexts, proficiency in English is now widely viewed as a prerequisite for international academic engagement and professional mobility. Yet, the expansion of English education has exposed enduring and evolving pedagogical challenges that differ significantly across national and regional settings.

These challenges encompass both systemic and individual factors. At the structural level, issues such as inadequate language policies, limited funding, low professional status, and resource constraints prevail. At the classroom level, educators confront difficulties like inconsistent student motivation, varied proficiency levels, and classroom management. Teachers also grapple with internal challenges linked to confidence, instructional skills, and evolving professional identities.

One increasingly important issue is the rise of non-native English-speaking teachers, who often navigate professional bias, exclusion from global discourse, and identity-related tensions in multilingual classrooms (Vaishnav, 2025). These experiences raise critical concerns regarding equity, representation, and professional development within the broader ELT profession.

In addition, unequal access to educational infrastructure deepens these problems—particularly in rural, indigenous, and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas. In such contexts, the absence of qualified instructors, language labs, and digital tools reduces English instruction to an exam-focused subject rather than a means of meaningful communication (Kayum, 2025). As a result, the broader integrative potential of English is diminished.

Altogether, these realities highlight the need for inclusive, context-sensitive, and well-supported approaches to EFL teaching that reflect both global trends and local challenges.

Aim of the study

The purpose of this review is to synthesize current research on the challenges associated with teaching EFL in higher education and to consolidate evidence-based recommendations for improving instructional effectiveness. Accordingly, the article seeks to address the following two guiding questions:

1. What pedagogical, methodological, and contextual challenges are most frequently identified in the literature on EFL instruction in higher education?
2. What strategies do researchers propose to address these challenges and enhance the quality of English language education?

By offering a comparative, cross-contextual perspective, this study aims to contribute to the global discourse on English language education and provide insights that may support policy reform, teacher professional development, and curriculum innovation.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a narrative review approach to provide a qualitative synthesis of scholarly literature on the challenges of EFL teaching in higher education. A narrative review was chosen over a systematic review to allow for greater flexibility in synthesizing diverse study designs, conceptual frameworks, and regional perspectives. This approach enables the integration of empirical, theoretical, and policy-oriented insights that might otherwise be excluded by stricter systematic protocols. Although narrative reviews may incorporate grey literature, the present review deliberately focused on peer-reviewed journal articles to ensure methodological consistency, academic quality, and comparability of the synthesized evidence. This decision reflects the review's emphasis on drawing conclusions from rigorously evaluated scholarly sources while preserving the interpretive flexibility inherent in narrative synthesis.

Search strategy. Searches were conducted between January and March 2025 across four major academic databases: *Scopus*, *Web of Science*, *ERIC*, and *ResearchGate*. Boolean search strings were applied to maximize relevance (e.g., “EFL teaching” OR “English as a foreign language” AND “higher education” OR “university level” OR “tertiary education” AND “challenges” OR “barriers” OR “difficulties” OR “limitations”). Filters limited results to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 in English. The five-year window was selected to capture the most recent developments in EFL teaching, particularly post-pandemic shifts, while the restriction to English-language publications was due to feasibility constraints. The latter introduces a language bias, acknowledged as a limitation of this review.

The decision to exclude grey literature may have limited the representation of local practices and policy perspectives, particularly in under-researched contexts. However, this trade-off was considered appropriate in view of the review's emphasis on synthesizing evidence from peer-reviewed academic research.

Screening and selection. After removing duplicates, 294 articles were screened by title and abstract. A total of 112 studies met the inclusion criteria for full-text review. Studies had to focus explicitly on EFL instruction within higher education contexts, including both empirical and theoretical research. Publications addressing primary/secondary education, ESL contexts, or non-formal learning environments were excluded. Following the full-text review, 31 studies were included in the final narrative synthesis (see Appendix A). These studies represented 21 countries and one global review, enabling comparative and cross-cultural analysis across diverse higher education contexts.

Data extraction and analysis. Data from the included studies were extracted into a matrix and coded for recurring themes. A qualitative thematic synthesis was applied to identify both cross-national patterns and region-specific challenges. To reduce subjectivity in theme identification, two reviewers independently conducted coding and reached consensus through iterative discussion.

Quality considerations. While no formal appraisal tool such as CASP or PRISMA was applied, studies were evaluated based on the clarity of methodology, contextual relevance, and

richness of pedagogical insight. This pragmatic approach reflects the flexibility of the narrative synthesis design but also constitutes a methodological limitation.

LIMITATIONS

This review is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the decision to restrict the search to publications in English introduces a language bias, as relevant studies published in other languages were excluded. Second, although a narrative review design was selected to allow for flexibility and the inclusion of diverse study types, the absence of a formal quality appraisal framework (e.g., CASP, PRISMA) reduces methodological rigor. Instead, included studies were evaluated pragmatically for clarity of methodology, contextual relevance, and richness of pedagogical insight. Although this allowed for a broader and more flexible synthesis across diverse contexts, it may have introduced a degree of subjectivity in source selection and thematic coding. Future research should consider systematic approaches to enhance transparency and replicability.

A further limitation concerns the potential subjectivity in theme identification. Although coding was conducted independently by two reviewers and consensus was reached through iterative discussion, researcher interpretation inevitably shaped the synthesis. Additionally, while the review covers 21 national contexts together with one global review, it does not capture the full global diversity of higher education systems, with certain regions (e.g., Latin America, parts of Europe) being underrepresented.

Finally, the focus on the 2020–2025 period strengthens the review’s relevance to current post-pandemic developments but may have excluded valuable insights from earlier research. Future reviews could adopt systematic protocols, incorporate multilingual databases, and expand regional representation to enhance comprehensiveness and rigor.

FINDINGS

Drawing upon a comprehensive analysis of academic research and cross-national case studies, this review delineates six primary categories of obstacles encountered in EFL instruction at the tertiary level. These categories encapsulate both structural impediments and pedagogical complexities that collectively shape the effectiveness of teaching practices. The synthesis identified six interrelated domains of challenge:

- student-related challenges;
- pedagogical and methodological issues;
- curriculum and assessment constraints;
- teacher-related challenges;
- technological and resource-based barriers;
- institutional and systemic issues.

Student-related challenges

Low language proficiency on entry. The literature consistently identifies heterogeneous entry-level English proficiency as one of the most persistent barriers to effective EFL instruction in higher education. Differences in students' linguistic, educational, and socio-economic backgrounds result in wide variation in language competence and learning needs (Mengwai & Molotja, 2025; Regmi, 2023; Sombonah et al., 2024). Students with lower proficiency frequently experience difficulties with vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, sentence construction, and academic writing conventions, limiting their ability to communicate ideas effectively (Ghafar, 2023; Regmi, 2023). At the classroom level, limited English proficiency constrains teachers' ability to conduct instruction exclusively in English, often requiring strategic use of learners' first language to clarify complex concepts (Kpaka, 2024). These challenges become even more pronounced in multilingual classrooms, where uneven proficiency levels and first-language interference complicate communication, instructional pacing, and learner participation (Ghafar, 2023; Wang, 2025). Taken together, these findings indicate that heterogeneous proficiency is not merely a student-level issue but a pedagogical challenge that affects classroom interaction, instructional decision-making, and equitable learning opportunities.

Lack of motivation

The reviewed literature suggests that low motivation is not a uniform phenomenon but the result of multiple interacting influences that extend beyond the language classroom. Across diverse higher education contexts, three interrelated dimensions consistently emerge: economic, sociocultural, and educational.

From an economic perspective, motivation is strongly linked to perceived employability. In Japan, for instance, economic hardships and limited job opportunities reduce students' enthusiasm for learning English, as they question its practical utility (Saito & Turner, 2025). By contrast, in Zambia, English proficiency is associated with upward socioeconomic mobility, making students more inclined to pursue English—even if this preference comes at the expense of local languages (Kaunda, 2025). These contrasting examples illustrate that learners' motivation depends not only on economic incentives but also on the social meanings attributed to English within particular national contexts.

Beyond economic considerations, students' motivation is also shaped by the symbolic meanings attached to English. In India, English education is frequently viewed as a continuation of colonial hierarchies, privileging elites and alienating marginalized groups (Kayum, 2025). This perception undermines motivation by framing English as an instrument of inequality. Conversely, in other contexts, such as Zambia, English is embraced as a unifying or modernizing force, highlighting how the same language can carry contradictory symbolic meanings depending on national histories and identities.

Educational environments further affect motivation. Online learning, while expanding access, often reduces engagement due to feelings of isolation and lack of structure (Thonghattha, 2025). Similar demotivation arises in traditional classroom contexts where English is used only

for examinations or where exposure outside the classroom remains limited (Alfares, 2024). In both cases, the absence of authentic communicative practice erodes learners' interest and progress.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that learner motivation is highly context-dependent. Rather than reflecting individual attitudes alone, motivation emerges from the interaction of labor market opportunities, sociocultural perceptions of English, and learning environments that provide meaningful opportunities for communication. Consequently, strategies to enhance motivation must extend beyond classroom practices and address the broader institutional and societal conditions that shape students' engagement with English.

Recommendations

Strategies to address low student motivation can be synthesized into three interrelated areas: instructional feedback, curriculum alignment, and community engagement.

1. Instructional feedback and support. Regular monitoring of progress and timely, personalized feedback help sustain learner engagement, particularly in online and hybrid environments where disengagement is common (Siddiqui et al., 2025). Although providing individualized feedback may increase teachers' workload, especially in large classes, digital feedback tools and peer-feedback strategies can improve feasibility while maintaining learner engagement.

2. Curriculum alignment with student aspirations. Embedding practical and job-relevant communication modules into English courses makes language learning more visibly connected to employability (Saito & Turner, 2025). However, curriculum redesign may require institutional approval and additional instructional resources. Where feasible, gradual integration of practice-oriented modules can strengthen the relevance of English instruction without requiring comprehensive curriculum reform. Furthermore, incorporating culturally relevant materials and promoting learner autonomy through goal setting foster intrinsic motivation (Al-wossabi, 2023). These measures address the disconnect between English instruction and students' real-world needs.

3. Community engagement and sociocultural relevance. Involving local communities in English language education reinforces its value beyond examinations and classrooms. However, meaningful collaboration depends on sustained partnerships between universities and local stakeholders, which may not be equally accessible across all institutional contexts. Community-based activities counteract perceptions of English as elitist or irrelevant, while also broadening opportunities for authentic practice (Kayum, 2025). This approach helps mitigate the negative legacies of colonialism in some contexts while strengthening the practical utility of English in others.

Collectively, these strategies emphasize that motivating students requires more than classroom-level interventions. Sustainable engagement emerges when instructional practices, curricular content, and community involvement are aligned to make English both meaningful and relevant in learners' social and professional lives.

Language anxiety and fear of mistakes

The reviewed literature consistently identifies language anxiety as a major barrier to students' active participation in EFL classrooms. Although anxiety is a widespread phenomenon, its sources differ across educational and sociocultural contexts and generally fall into three interrelated categories: fear of evaluation, pedagogical traditions, and limited opportunities for authentic language use.

A common factor is the fear of public performance. In Iraq and other EFL higher education contexts where opportunities for authentic English communication are limited, students often hesitate to speak English in front of peers, fearing mistakes and negative evaluation (Azad, 2024; Kpaka, 2024). Similar patterns are also reported in multilingual classrooms in Ghana, where uneven proficiency levels heighten students' self-consciousness and discourage active participation (Sombonah et al., 2024). These findings suggest that fear of public performance is intensified in multilingual classrooms where differences in proficiency increase learners' self-consciousness and discourage active participation.

In contrast, pedagogical traditions also shape anxiety. Learners accustomed to teacher-centered, lecture-based approaches may initially resist interactive tasks such as role-plays or group discussions. For these students, communicative pedagogy itself becomes a source of stress, as it challenges long-established learning habits (Azad, 2024). Thus, anxiety is shaped not only by learners' individual characteristics but also by the instructional cultures in which they have been socialized.

A further source of anxiety is limited exposure beyond the classroom. In Iraq and other foreign-language contexts, the absence of opportunities to practice English in daily life reduces students' confidence and reinforces the perception that mistakes in class are costly (Hussein & Alqassier, 2024). Similar findings are reported elsewhere, where English is confined to the classroom and rarely used in authentic settings (Al-wossabi, 2023).

Collectively, the reviewed studies demonstrate that language anxiety is not merely an individual psychological trait but a context-dependent phenomenon shaped by the interaction of classroom practices, educational traditions, and opportunities for authentic communication. Addressing anxiety therefore requires coordinated pedagogical and institutional efforts that normalize mistakes, foster supportive classroom climates, and extend meaningful language use beyond formal instruction.

Recommendations

Addressing language anxiety requires a multi-pronged approach that combines pedagogical strategies, classroom climate, and extended practice opportunities.

1. Supportive pedagogical strategies. Role-play activities, peer feedback, and structured communicative tasks create lower-stakes opportunities for students to practice without fear of harsh judgment. These methods gradually normalize mistakes and build learner confidence

(Azad, 2024). Successful adoption, however, requires teachers to receive training in facilitating communicative activities and managing supportive classroom interaction.

2. Positive classroom climate. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering psychologically safe environments where students feel encouraged to take risks. Creating psychologically safe classrooms may be particularly challenging in large or examination-oriented classes, underscoring the need for institutional support alongside teacher commitment. Equitable participation and respectful interaction reduce anxiety and help students view mistakes as part of the learning process (Devaki, 2025).

3. Opportunities beyond the classroom. Sustained exposure to English outside formal instruction—through extracurricular activities, online interaction, or community engagement—helps reinforce communicative competence. Such opportunities may require collaboration with extracurricular programs, language clubs, or digital platforms, which are not equally available across higher education institutions. Regular use in informal contexts reduces the pressure on classroom performance and fosters more natural language acquisition (Sombonah et al., 2024).

By addressing the psychological, pedagogical, and contextual roots of language anxiety, these strategies contribute to a more supportive learning environment where students can participate actively and develop confidence in their English use.

Diverse learning styles and cultural backgrounds

Teaching EFL in multilingual and multicultural contexts presents challenges that extend beyond language proficiency. While many studies document difficulties arising from heterogeneous proficiency levels, contrasting cultural expectations, and systemic inequalities, the literature often frames these challenges in deficit terms, overlooking the potential contributions of diverse linguistic and cultural repertoires.

At the linguistic level, mixed-proficiency classrooms are widely described as barriers to effective instruction, since teachers struggle to address varying abilities simultaneously (Wang, 2025). However, few studies explore differentiated or translanguaging strategies as opportunities rather than obstacles. This reveals an important gap in the literature: linguistic diversity is predominantly portrayed as a classroom management challenge rather than as a pedagogical resource capable of enriching language learning through differentiated instruction or translanguaging practices.

At the cultural level, students from collective or non-Western traditions are frequently portrayed as disadvantaged when encountering English academic conventions that prioritize individual voice and linear argumentation (Ghafar, 2023). Yet such analyses risk reifying Western norms as universal. Very few studies investigate how alternative rhetorical traditions could enrich classroom dialogue or foster more pluralistic academic discourses. This reflects a Western-centric bias in much of the literature on EFL pedagogy.

Beyond differences in classroom interaction, cultural diversity also shapes learners' identities and their relationships with English as a language of education. In India, English is often associated with historical inequality and elite status, shaping students' sense of belonging within educational settings (Kayum, 2025). By contrast, in Zambia, English is more commonly associated with educational opportunity and social mobility (Kaunda, 2025). These contrasting perspectives illustrate how cultural and historical contexts influence learners' identities, expectations, and engagement with English. However, relatively little research examines how these culturally shaped identities influence classroom participation, learning strategies, and long-term educational trajectories.

Taken together, these findings indicate that diversity-related challenges cannot be reduced to differences in language proficiency or classroom behavior alone. Rather, they emerge from the interaction of linguistic diversity, cultural identities, and broader sociocultural contexts. Future research should therefore move beyond deficit-oriented perspectives and examine how these forms of diversity can be transformed into pedagogical resources that promote inclusion, learner agency, and intercultural competence.

Recommendations

Addressing the complexity of diverse learning styles and cultural backgrounds requires moving beyond a deficit-oriented view of students' linguistic and cultural diversity. Instead, reforms should focus on inclusivity, contextualization, and critical reflection.

1. Inclusive language policies. Bilingual or multilingual frameworks that scaffold English learning through local languages have been shown to reduce alienation and support equity (Kaunda, 2025). Yet many universities remain reluctant to institutionalize multilingual approaches because of curriculum constraints, assessment policies, and limited teacher preparation. Future reforms should therefore evaluate multilingual pedagogies systematically while ensuring that appropriate institutional support is available for their implementation.
2. Contextualized and culturally relevant curricula. Current programs often rely on Western-centric textbooks and writing norms (Ghafar, 2023), reinforcing cultural hierarchies. Incorporating local content and rhetorical traditions can not only increase student engagement but also challenge the assumption that Western models represent the "gold standard" of academic communication (Regmi, 2023; Sharma & Kumar, 2024). Developing such materials, however, requires collaboration among curriculum designers, local educators, and policymakers, making implementation dependent on institutional commitment and available resources.
3. Culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers should be equipped to integrate students' lived experiences into classroom activities and acknowledge diverse academic conventions. While some studies advocate for intercultural content (Ghafar, 2023), few evaluate its actual classroom impact, highlighting a need for empirical research on how such approaches affect learning outcomes. In addition, successful implementation depends on teachers receiving adequate preparation to translate culturally responsive principles into everyday classroom practice.

4. Critical teacher education. Professional development should extend beyond technical training to include reflection on colonial legacies and cultural assumptions embedded in EFL curricula (Kayum, 2025). Such programs should be embedded within long-term institutional professional development frameworks rather than delivered as isolated workshops if they are to produce sustainable change. Without this critical awareness, teachers risk reproducing inequalities even while adopting “modern” methodologies.

By reframing diversity as a resource rather than a barrier, these recommendations highlight the need for systemic reforms that challenge Western-centric norms and empower educators to design pedagogy that is both equitable and globally relevant.

Pedagogical and methodological issues

Across many higher education contexts, EFL instruction continues to rely heavily on traditional, teacher-centered methods, with limited integration of communicative and learner-centered approaches. This persistence reflects not only pedagogical inertia but also structural and cultural constraints that shape classroom practices.

One recurring issue is the dominance of grammar-translation and exam-oriented instruction, which privileges grammatical accuracy and memorization over communicative competence (Rahimi et al., 2024; Zapotichna, 2024). While such methods provide predictability in large classes, they restrict opportunities for authentic interaction and leave students underprepared for real-world communication. This pattern illustrates how methodological choices shape not only what students learn but also how they engage with language, often privileging accuracy over meaningful communication.

Another barrier lies in the limited adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Although CLT is widely endorsed in theory, implementation remains inconsistent due to inadequate teacher training, rigid curricula, and assessment systems that continue to reward rote knowledge over oral competence (Chanwaiwit & Kantisa, 2022; Mutolwa & Mwanza, 2025). This tension between pedagogical intent and systemic constraints often results in fragmented or superficial applications of communicative strategies. Consequently, communicative methodologies often remain aspirational rather than fully embedded in everyday classroom practice.

A third dimension involves the lack of personalization and contextualization in instruction. Many educators struggle to adapt content to students’ varied proficiency levels, learning styles, and socio-cultural backgrounds (Devaki, 2025). In contexts such as Iraq, entrenched stereotypes about students’ abilities further limit differentiated instruction, reinforcing inequities (Hussein & Alqassier, 2024). These findings suggest that effective personalization depends not only on teachers’ pedagogical skills but also on institutional conditions that enable differentiated instruction.

These patterns indicate that pedagogical challenges are not simply a matter of outdated techniques but reflect a broader misalignment between instructional practices, assessment

systems, and learners' diverse needs. Without systemic changes, isolated methodological reforms are unlikely to be sustainable.

Recommendations

Improving pedagogy in EFL higher education requires coordinated reforms that target teacher preparation, curriculum design, and classroom practice.

1. Strengthening teacher preparation. Comprehensive training in communicative and learner-centered approaches is critical. Initiatives that retrain educators in CLT, supported by aligned assessment frameworks, have been shown to increase teacher confidence and adoption (Chanwaiwit & Kantisa, 2022). However, sustained implementation depends on institutional investment, ongoing mentoring, and opportunities for teachers to apply newly acquired practices in authentic classroom settings.

2. Reforming curricula and assessment. Curricula must explicitly integrate communicative goals alongside grammatical accuracy. Aligning examinations with communicative outcomes—such as oral presentations or project-based tasks—ensures consistency between what is taught and what is tested, reducing the backwash effect of traditional exams (Leon & Castro, 2025). Such reforms may require substantial revisions to institutional assessment policies and coordination across academic departments, making gradual implementation more feasible than immediate system-wide change.

3. Promoting personalization and inclusivity. Needs analysis and differentiated instruction should become standard practice, enabling educators to adapt lessons to varied student profiles. Incorporating culturally relevant examples and acknowledging World Englishes can further contextualize learning and enhance engagement (Devaki, 2025; Kumar, 2024). Successful personalization, however, requires manageable class sizes, sufficient instructional time, and access to appropriate teaching resources, conditions that remain challenging in many higher education contexts.

Collectively, these reforms highlight that sustainable improvements in pedagogy require systemic alignment between instructional methods, teacher capacity, and institutional frameworks. Only by bridging these gaps can EFL teaching move beyond traditional practices toward approaches that genuinely foster communicative competence and learner autonomy.

Community attitudes and perceptions

Community attitudes toward English strongly influence how students engage with EFL in higher education. While many studies emphasize the supportive role of positive attitudes, the literature often treats communities as homogeneous and underexamines conflicting or ambivalent perceptions.

The reviewed literature suggests that community attitudes toward English are rarely uniform. Instead, three recurring patterns emerge across higher education contexts (Kaunda, 2025). The first recurring pattern associates English with educational opportunity, social mobility, and

global competitiveness. In Zambia, proficiency in English is widely viewed as a pathway to socioeconomic advancement (Kaunda, 2025). Similar patterns are noted in South Asia, where English carries prestige and is linked to elite professional domains (Kayum, 2025).

A second recurring pattern concerns critical perceptions of English as a language associated with historical inequality and cultural marginalization. In India, English is frequently criticized as a colonial legacy that perpetuates inequality, privileging elites and marginalizing speakers of indigenous languages (Kayum, 2025). In Nepal, reliance on imported English textbooks has been seen as alienating learners and reinforcing dependency on Western academic norms (Regmi, 2023). These perspectives highlight that English can function simultaneously as an instrument of empowerment and exclusion.

A third pattern is the coexistence of these competing perspectives within the same educational systems. In Latin America, English is often perceived simultaneously as a tool for global integration and a marker of elite privilege, producing ambivalence similar to postcolonial contexts in Asia and Africa (Leon & Castro, 2025).

The literature also reveals a tendency to frame negative attitudes as obstacles to be overcome, rather than as legitimate critiques of the sociopolitical positioning of English. Few studies examine how these critiques might inform more equitable and locally grounded pedagogical approaches. This constitutes a gap in research, where community perceptions are described but rarely analyzed for their potential to reshape EFL policy and practice.

Taken together, these insights suggest that community attitudes are not unidirectional but deeply shaped by colonial legacies, socioeconomic conditions, and cultural identities. A more critical approach requires treating ambivalence not as noise but as evidence of the contested status of English in higher education.

Recommendations

Reforms addressing community attitudes should move beyond promotional campaigns about the “benefits” of English and instead engage critically with the ambivalent and contested meanings it carries. However, implementing such reforms requires sustained institutional commitment, collaboration with local stakeholders, and sensitivity to sociocultural contexts.

1. **Community-inclusive policy design.** Where institutional structures permit, policymakers and universities should involve local communities in curriculum development. However, such collaboration may require additional funding, stakeholder coordination, and policy support, particularly in highly centralized higher education systems.

2. **Valuing indigenous languages.** Integrating local languages alongside English in higher education can counter perceptions of marginalization. While some models of bilingual education exist (Kaunda, 2025), they are under-researched in university contexts. Expanding such models could strengthen inclusivity, although successful implementation depends on institutional capacity, curriculum flexibility, and the availability of qualified multilingual instructors.

3. Context-sensitive curricula. Locally produced teaching materials that reflect cultural realities can reduce alienation and challenge the dominance of Western-centric textbooks (Regmi, 2023). Although developing locally produced materials requires considerable time and financial investment, such efforts may reduce learners' alienation while ensuring that English complements rather than undermines local cultural identities.

4. Critical awareness in teacher training. Integrating critical language awareness into teacher education may require curriculum revision and facilitator preparation, but it can help future teachers address questions of language, identity, and power more effectively.

By acknowledging ambivalence as a structural feature of English in postcolonial and multilingual societies, these recommendations emphasize the importance of equitable, community-informed approaches that situate English within broader cultural and political realities.

Curriculum and assessment constraints

Curricular design and assessment frameworks play a decisive role in shaping the quality of EFL instruction, yet in many contexts they remain rigid, outdated, and misaligned with communicative goals.

One recurring issue is the overemphasis on standardized examinations. In countries such as China and South Korea, high-stakes university entrance and graduation exams focus heavily on grammar and reading comprehension, leaving little room for oral practice (Zhang, 2024). Similarly, in parts of the Middle East, English courses are shaped almost entirely by multiple-choice tests, reinforcing rote memorization rather than communicative competence (Hussein & Alqassier, 2024). As a result, assessment systems shape not only how students are evaluated but also what teachers prioritize in everyday classroom instruction.

A related challenge concerns the persistence of curricula that continue to prioritize grammatical accuracy and examination performance over communicative language use. For instance, in Ukraine, university English programs often remain tied to traditional grammar-translation methods, limiting students' preparedness for international mobility (Zapotichna, 2024). This illustrates how curriculum design can reinforce traditional instructional priorities even where broader educational reforms advocate communicative competence.

Curricula are also criticized for their lack of flexibility and contextual adaptation. In Latin America, several universities have adopted imported textbooks from the U.S. and U.K. without cultural adaptation, making examples irrelevant to local realities (Regmi, 2023). Likewise, in Nepal, generic curricula fail to address students' multilingual repertoires, which often results in disengagement (Sharma & Kumar, 2024).

Recent evidence also suggests that assessment practices themselves can either constrain or enhance language learning. While traditional assessment remains predominantly summative, rubric-based self-assessment has been shown to strengthen students' metacognitive awareness, learner autonomy, and academic writing performance. However, these benefits

depend on students' assessment literacy and explicit instructional support, indicating that assessment reform requires not only new assessment tools but also systematic development of both students' and teachers' assessment literacy to ensure meaningful implementation in classroom practice (Al-Nafjan et al., 2025; Puspawati & Murtiningsih, 2025).

A further challenge lies in the disconnect between policy and practice. For instance, India's national curriculum frameworks explicitly endorse CLT, yet university programs often continue with grammar-translation methods due to entrenched exam systems and inadequate teacher training (Kayum, 2025). Similarly, Zambia's education policy supports learner-centered pedagogy, but large class sizes and limited resources force instructors to default to lecture-based teaching (Kaunda, 2025).

Taken together, these issues reveal that curricular and assessment barriers are not isolated problems but part of a broader systemic misalignment between educational goals, instructional practices, and evaluation systems. Without reform, even well-trained teachers remain constrained by inflexible frameworks that reward accuracy over communication.

Recommendations

Improving curriculum and assessment requires systemic reforms that integrate alignment, contextualization, and innovation.

1. Curriculum-assessment alignment. Learning objectives, classroom instruction, and assessments must reinforce each other. Incorporating communicative tasks such as oral presentations, debates, or project-based evaluations ensures that what is tested matches the intended outcomes (Leon & Castro, 2025). Achieving such alignment, however, often requires coordinated curriculum revision, assessment redesign, and collaboration among academic departments, making phased implementation more realistic than immediate large-scale reform.
2. Contextualization of content. Curricula should integrate locally relevant materials, case studies, and problem-solving activities that link English learning with students' lived experiences and professional needs (Regmi, 2023). Developing context-sensitive materials may require additional time, collaboration with local stakeholders, and institutional flexibility to move beyond standardized textbooks.
3. Closing the policy-practice gap. Universities should provide institutional support for adopting national curriculum reforms through professional development, resource allocation, and monitoring mechanisms. Without such support, policy mandates risk remaining rhetorical rather than transformative (Sharma & Kumar, 2024). Effective implementation also depends on sustained institutional leadership, transparent monitoring procedures, and adequate financial support.
4. Innovative assessment practices. Incorporating formative assessment, peer evaluation, and rubric-based self-assessment can complement summative examinations, promote learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness, and provide a more comprehensive picture of

students' progress. However, these approaches require explicit assessment criteria, assessment literacy, and appropriate teacher guidance to ensure consistent and meaningful implementation across courses (Al-Nafjan et al., 2025).

By ensuring curricular relevance, systemic coherence, and diversified assessment methods, higher education institutions can create environments where English learning is both meaningful and aligned with communicative competence.

Teacher-related challenges

The effectiveness of EFL instruction in higher education is closely tied to teachers' preparation, professional conditions, and opportunities for development. However, across diverse contexts, educators face challenges that stem from workload pressures, limited professional training, and systemic constraints.

One major issue is heavy workload and limited resources. In contexts such as Zambia and India, large class sizes and inadequate teaching materials make it difficult for instructors to implement learner-centered approaches, even when they are motivated to do so (Kaunda, 2025; Kayum, 2025). Overcrowded classrooms reduce opportunities for individual feedback and interactive pedagogy. These structural constraints directly limit teachers' ability to implement learner-centered methodologies, regardless of their professional commitment or pedagogical expertise.

Similar constraints are reported in Ghana, where lecturers often face large classes and minimal institutional support, forcing them to adopt lecture-based approaches despite policy endorsements of communicative teaching (Sombonah et al., 2024).

Another challenge concerns insufficient professional training. In many higher education systems, opportunities for sustained professional development remain limited, leaving instructors with few avenues to update their pedagogical knowledge or adapt to evolving educational demands. In Nepal, for instance, university instructors often rely on lecture-based delivery due to limited exposure to alternative methodologies (Sharma & Kumar, 2024). Similar patterns are found in Iraq, where lack of teacher training programs reinforces dependence on traditional grammar-translation methods (Hussein & Alqassier, 2024). These examples illustrate that the challenge lies not only in teachers' individual competencies but also in the absence of sustained institutional support for continuous professional development (CPD).

An additional dimension of teacher preparation concerns language assessment literacy. Recent evidence from Indonesian higher education indicates that although EFL instructors generally recognize the importance of valid and learner-centered assessment, many experience difficulties translating assessment principles into consistent classroom practice. Recent studies further demonstrate that insufficient assessment preparation extends beyond assessment literacy alone. EFL teachers frequently report difficulties implementing continuous and formative assessment because of large class sizes, heavy workloads, limited time, and

inadequate professional training, indicating that effective assessment reform requires both assessment competence and supportive institutional conditions (Puspawati & Murtiningsih, 2025; Senouci, 2022).

A further difficulty involves restricted access to CPD. Even where training programs exist, they are often short-term, donor-driven, or disconnected from local needs (Mutolwa & Mwanza, 2025). As a result, teachers may gain theoretical awareness of communicative practices but lack sustained mentorship or institutional support to implement them effectively.

These conditions highlight that teacher-related challenges are not merely individual shortcomings but structural issues linked to systemic underinvestment in teacher capacity. Without institutional reforms, even motivated educators remain limited in their ability to provide high-quality, student-centered instruction.

Recommendations

Addressing teacher-related challenges requires reforms at both institutional and systemic levels, focusing on workload management, professional development, and resource provision.

1. **Workload management and resources.** Universities should adopt policies that reduce class sizes where possible and provide teachers with adequate materials, including access to digital tools. This creates the conditions necessary for more interactive and personalized instruction.
2. **Sustained professional development.** Pre-service and in-service teacher education must go beyond one-off workshops to include sustained modules on communicative, intercultural, and technology-enhanced pedagogy. Embedding training within national higher education frameworks ensures consistency and sustainability (Sharma & Kumar, 2024). Professional development should also strengthen teachers' language assessment literacy, enabling them to design valid assessment tasks, provide effective feedback, and align classroom assessment with intended learning outcomes (Puspawati & Murtiningsih, 2025).
3. **CPD.** Institutions should establish structured CPD programs that include peer observation, mentoring, and reflective practice. Long-term support helps teachers move from theoretical awareness to practical application of innovative methods (Mutolwa & Mwanza, 2025).
4. **Institutional recognition and incentives.** Teacher motivation can be enhanced through recognition of innovative practices in promotion criteria, research opportunities, and access to professional networks. Such incentives encourage continuous improvement and signal institutional commitment to teaching excellence.

Collectively, these measures emphasize that improving EFL outcomes depends not only on student engagement and curriculum reform but also on strengthening the professional conditions and capacities of teachers.

Technological and resource-based barriers

Technology has become an indispensable part of EFL teaching in higher education, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. However, its integration remains uneven, shaped by infrastructure gaps, digital literacy issues, and pedagogical limitations.

A major barrier is the digital divide. In many low- and middle-income contexts, unreliable internet access and lack of devices limit the effectiveness of online or blended learning. For example, in Nepal and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, students often rely on shared devices or mobile phones with limited data, making sustained participation in virtual classrooms difficult (Mutolwa & Mwanza, 2025; Regmi, 2023). Such constraints exacerbate inequalities between urban and rural learners.

In Sierra Leone, unreliable electricity and internet infrastructure pose barriers to consistent online instruction, highlighting that technological inequities are infrastructural as much as pedagogical (Kpaka, 2024).

Another issue concerns teachers' digital readiness. Even where infrastructure is available, instructors may lack the training to use technology effectively. In Iraq, teachers reported difficulties in managing online platforms and incorporating multimedia resources into lessons, resulting in a reliance on traditional lecture formats delivered over Zoom (Hussein & Alqassier, 2024). Similarly, in Latin America, educators often face steep learning curves in adapting to new educational technologies without adequate institutional support (Leon & Castro, 2025). These findings indicate that effective technology integration depends not only on access to digital tools but also on sustained institutional investment in teachers' digital competence.

Finally, there are pedagogical challenges in online environments. Students frequently experience reduced motivation and engagement in virtual classrooms due to feelings of isolation and lack of structure (Thonghattha, 2025). In hybrid and blended contexts, the absence of interactive design can lead to passive learning, undermining the communicative goals of EFL instruction. This demonstrates that technology alone cannot improve language learning outcomes unless it is accompanied by pedagogically meaningful instructional design.

These patterns suggest that technological challenges are not only technical but also pedagogical and systemic, requiring holistic solutions that combine infrastructure investment with teacher training and innovative instructional design.

Recommendations

Overcoming technological barriers requires a multi-layered strategy that addresses infrastructure, training, and pedagogy simultaneously.

1. **Infrastructure investment.** In contexts where major infrastructure investments are not immediately feasible, institutions can reduce digital inequalities by expanding shared computer laboratories, extending campus Wi-Fi access, adopting low-bandwidth learning platforms, and

encouraging the use of open educational resources. Larger infrastructure investments should remain a long-term policy objective rather than the sole strategy for improving digital access.

2. Teacher digital training. Rather than relying exclusively on externally delivered workshops, universities can integrate short information and communication technology-focused (ICT) professional development modules into existing professional development activities, encourage peer mentoring, and foster communities of practice where instructors exchange effective digital teaching strategies.

3. Institutional support for ICT skill development. Where dedicated ICT support centers cannot be established, institutions can designate digital coordinators within existing academic units or create peer-support networks that provide ongoing technical and pedagogical assistance.

4. Pedagogical innovation. Course designs should incorporate interactive features such as breakout rooms, peer collaboration, and project-based digital tasks. These practices counteract isolation and foster engagement in virtual environments (Thonghattha, 2025). Many of these practices can be introduced incrementally using existing learning management systems without requiring substantial additional financial investment.

5. Blended learning models. Well-structured hybrid systems that combine face-to-face sessions with online flexibility can maximize the strengths of both modalities, provided they are supported by clear frameworks and training. Successful blended learning depends less on sophisticated technologies than on thoughtful instructional design and clear guidance for both teachers and students.

By combining realistic technological solutions with teacher preparedness, institutional support, and pedagogically informed instructional design, higher education institutions can ensure that technology functions as an enabler of communicative learning rather than a source of inequity.

Institutional and systemic issues

Policy frameworks and institutional structures strongly influence the success of EFL teaching reforms. However, in many higher education systems, support for EFL remains fragmented, inconsistently implemented, and poorly connected to classroom realities.

One recurring issue is the policy-practice gap. National education policies frequently endorse communicative and learner-centered approaches, yet universities often lack the resources, teacher training, or monitoring systems to implement these reforms effectively. For example, India's national frameworks promote CLT, but exam-driven assessment practices continue to dictate classroom instruction (Kayum, 2025). Similarly, Zambia's higher education policies encourage learner-centered pedagogy, yet overcrowded classes and underfunded institutions prevent meaningful change (Kaunda, 2025). These examples demonstrate that policy reforms alone cannot transform classroom practice unless they are supported by institutional capacity, adequate resources, and consistent implementation mechanisms.

Another challenge involves institutional underinvestment in teacher development and infrastructure. In Latin America, universities often expect instructors to integrate technology and adopt modern methods without providing sustained training or support systems (Leon & Castro, 2025).

A further issue is the short-term nature of many reforms, particularly when driven by international donors. Such programs may introduce innovative practices or technologies but often lack mechanisms for sustainability once external funding ends (Mutolwa & Mwanza, 2025). This mismatch leaves educators underprepared and undermines reform goals. This highlights the importance of embedding reforms within long-term institutional strategies rather than relying on externally funded initiatives alone.

These patterns underscore that policy and institutional challenges are not only about reform design but also about implementation, resource allocation, and sustainability. Without structural commitment, pedagogical reforms risk remaining rhetorical rather than transformative.

Recommendations

Strengthening policy and institutional support requires systemic commitment, resource allocation, and sustained implementation strategies.

1. Bridging the policy-practice gap. Governments and universities must ensure that curriculum reforms are supported by teacher training, aligned assessments, and adequate monitoring. Policy directives without implementation structures risk being symbolic. Achieving such alignment requires sustained collaboration among ministries, universities, and accreditation bodies. In decentralized or resource-constrained systems, phased implementation accompanied by periodic evaluation may be more feasible than comprehensive reform introduced simultaneously across institutions.

2. Sustainable investment in teacher development. Where dedicated funding is limited, institutions can integrate professional development into existing teaching and learning structures, encourage peer mentoring, and prioritize low-cost professional learning initiatives while progressively expanding investment as resources become available. Such an approach can reduce dependence on short-term donor initiatives while gradually strengthening institutional capacity.

3. Resource provision and infrastructure. Although expanding infrastructure and reducing class sizes often require long-term investment, institutions can begin by prioritizing the most critical resource gaps, improving access to shared teaching materials, and making more effective use of existing digital resources. Such incremental improvements can create a stronger foundation for broader institutional reforms over time.

4. Accountability and evaluation. Establishing mechanisms to evaluate policy implementation—such as periodic reviews, feedback systems from teachers, and student outcome assessments—ensures reforms remain adaptive and effective. Embedding evaluation within routine

institutional quality assurance processes can improve feasibility while ensuring that reforms remain responsive to changing educational needs.

By combining evidence-informed policy implementation, sustained institutional commitment, strategic resource allocation, and continuous evaluation, higher education systems can move beyond symbolic reform and create conditions in which EFL innovation becomes both sustainable and contextually responsive.

These interrelated challenges and corresponding strategies are synthesized in Table 1, which organizes the reviewed evidence into major challenge domains, illustrative issues, representative country examples, and recommended strategies. The detailed characteristics of the included studies are provided in Appendix A.

Table 1
Challenges in EFL teaching and recommended responses

Challenge domain	Illustrative issues	Representative country examples	Recommended strategies
Student factors	Motivation, language anxiety, uneven proficiency, learner autonomy, metacognitive awareness	Japan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq	Inclusive pedagogy, learner support, authentic learning opportunities
Cultural & linguistic diversity	Western-centric curricula, deficit framing of multilingualism	Nepal, India	Culturally responsive curricula, multilingual teaching approaches, teacher preparation
Pedagogy & methodology	Reliance on grammar–translation, limited personalization, weak CLT integration	Iraq, Nepal	Learner-centered practice, communicative teaching, assessment alignment
Community attitudes	Ambivalence: English as mobility vs. colonial legacy and inequality	India, Zambia	Community engagement, multilingual policy, culturally responsive implementation
Curriculum & assessment	Exam-driven systems, rigid curricula, limited assessment literacy, reliance on summative assessment, imported textbooks	Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Algeria, Ukraine	Curriculum adaptation, formative and rubric-based assessment, assessment literacy development, curriculum alignment
Teacher, technology & institutions	Heavy workload, limited digital competence, large classes, weak institutional support	Zambia, Ghana, Sierra Leone	Continuous professional development, assessment literacy, scalable digital support, institutional capacity-building

Note. Representative country examples illustrate the principal contexts discussed in the reviewed literature rather than providing an exhaustive geographical coverage.

CONCLUSIONS

This review has identified and synthesized the major challenges shaping EFL teaching in higher education across diverse regions. Despite contextual differences, recurring issues included:

varying student proficiency, motivation, and anxiety; cultural and linguistic diversity often framed as deficit rather than resource; reliance on traditional pedagogies and limited personalization; ambivalent community attitudes toward English; rigid curricula and exam-driven assessment; constrained teacher capacity and uneven access to technology; and systemic gaps in institutional and policy support. Collectively, these findings reveal persistent misalignments between policy vision, institutional capacity, classroom practice, and learner needs.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-level and sequential strategy, where reforms at one level enable progress at others:

1. Policy and governance → align national frameworks with classroom realities, ensure sustainable funding, and embed accountability mechanisms. Without systemic commitment, reforms risk remaining rhetorical.
2. Institutional and curricular reform → develop flexible, context-sensitive curricula and alternative assessment methods that reward communicative competence alongside accuracy. Institutions should act as mediators between national policy and classroom practice.
3. Teacher development and support → provide sustained professional development, ICT capacity-building, and incentives for pedagogical innovation. Teachers are the pivotal agents who translate policy into practice.
4. Learner-centered pedagogy → integrate culturally relevant content, foster inclusive practices, and address affective factors such as motivation and anxiety. Learners' diverse linguistic repertoires should be treated as assets rather than obstacles.
5. Technology and innovation → position technology as a cross-cutting enabler that supports communicative, equitable, and sustainable language learning across all levels of the system.

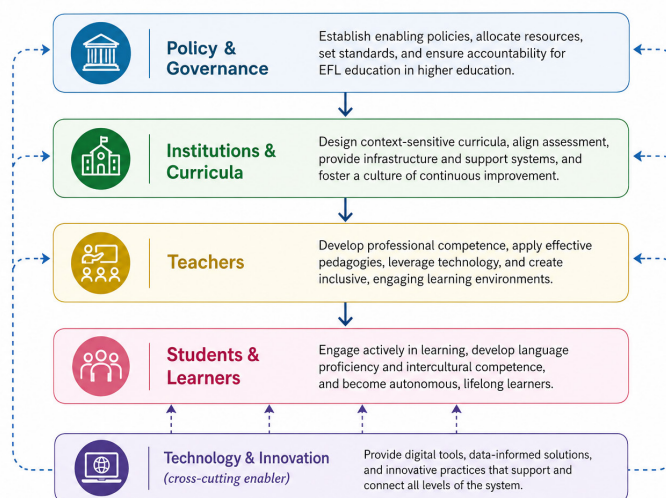


Figure 1. Algorithm of multi-level responses to EFL challenges in higher education.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework for multi-level responses to EFL teaching challenges in higher education

The interdependence of reforms is illustrated in Figure 1, where policy creates enabling conditions for institutions, institutions support teachers, teachers engage students, and technology functions as a cross-cutting enabler across all levels. This sequence highlights that reforms are not discrete but interdependent: policy enables institutional reform; institutional frameworks empower teachers; teachers foster student engagement; and technology functions as a cross-cutting enabler that supports and connects each level of the system, strengthening the coherence of reforms across policy, institutions, teachers, and learners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Future work should address gaps in the literature by:

- conducting comparative cross-regional analyses that extend existing evidence from well-represented contexts to comparatively underexplored regions, including parts of Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America;
- undertaking longitudinal studies to trace the sustained impact of reforms on student outcomes;
- examining the pedagogical potential of emerging technologies, including AI in language learning, with attention to equity and access;
- exploring locally grounded pedagogies that challenge Western-centric norms and integrate indigenous knowledge systems.

By synthesizing challenges and strategies into a coherent framework, this review underscores that the improvement of EFL teaching in higher education depends not on isolated initiatives but on systemic coherence across policy, institutions, teachers, and learners.

Declaration of AI usage

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) as an editorial support tool. Artificial intelligence was used to assist in language editing, identifying typographical and grammatical inconsistencies, and checking the consistency of terminology throughout the manuscript. AI-assisted tools were also used to generate the visual design of Figure 1 based entirely on the authors' original conceptual framework and synthesis of the reviewed evidence. All literature searches, study selection, data extraction, critical analysis, synthesis of evidence, interpretation of findings, and final scientific decisions were otherwise performed exclusively by the authors. All content has been carefully reviewed and verified by the authors who hereby declare and accept full responsibility for all of the ideas and notions conveyed in this article.

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Appendix A

Overview of Studies Included in the Narrative Review

No	Study	Country / region	Challenge domain(s)	Key contribution to the review
1	Adhikari (2021)	Nepal	Pedagogy & methodology; Teacher, technology & institutions	Highlights challenges of online EFL instruction and teachers' digital preparedness in higher education.
2	Al-Nafjan, Alhawsawi, & Nasser Abu Dujayn (2025)	Saudi Arabia	Curriculum & assessment; Student factors	Investigates rubric-based self-assessment in EFL academic writing, demonstrating its potential to enhance metacognitive awareness, writing performance, and learner autonomy while identifying challenges related to assessment literacy and students' confidence.
3	Al-Wossabi (2024)	Yemen	Student factors	Examines factors influencing EFL students' motivation and engagement in university learning.
4	Alfares (2024)	Saudi Arabia	Teacher, technology & institutions	Demonstrates the role of digital technologies in improving EFL teaching and learning.
5	Azad (2024)	Iraq	Student factors; Pedagogy & methodology	Shows how language anxiety and classroom practices affect students' communicative participation.
6	Chanwaiwit & Kantisa (2022)	Thailand	Pedagogy & methodology	Explores challenges in implementing communicative language teaching in higher education.
7	Devaki (2025)	India	Pedagogy & methodology; Student factors	Highlights the importance of adaptive teaching strategies for diverse learning styles in inclusive EFL classrooms.
8	Ghafar (2023a)	Iraq	Teacher, technology & institutions	Identifies the instructional and institutional challenges faced by EFL teachers and discusses practical teaching strategies.
9	Ghafar (2023b)	Iraq	Pedagogy & methodology	Examines challenges specific to teaching EFL writing and the instructional support required to improve writing instruction.
10	Hussein & Alqassier (2024)	Iraq	Student factors; Pedagogy & methodology	Demonstrates how stereotypical teaching practices and limited opportunities for authentic language use reduce students' communicative confidence.
11	Kaunda (2025)	Zambia	Community attitudes; Cultural & linguistic diversity	Explores the relationship between colonial legacies and culturally responsive English language teaching.
12	Kayum (2025)	India	Community attitudes	Highlights how sociocultural conditions in tribal communities influence English language teaching and learner engagement.

No	Study	Country / region	Challenge domain(s)	Key contribution to the review
13	Kpaka (2024)	Sierra Leon	Teacher, technology & institutions	Identifies inadequate teacher proficiency, weak institutional support, and limited government investment as major barriers to effective English language teaching.
14	Kumar (2024)	Global	Pedagogy & methodology; Teacher, technology & institutions	Synthesizes contemporary pedagogical trends, technological innovations, and persistent challenges in English language teaching, highlighting the need for context-sensitive and learner-centred approaches.
15	Leon & Castro (2025)	Philippines	Pedagogy & methodology	Provides empirical evidence that integrated, student-centred instructional approaches improve English language learning outcomes compared with traditional lecture-based teaching.
16	Loseke (2025)	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Teacher, technology & institutions; Cultural & linguistic diversity	Identifies institutional, linguistic, and resource-related challenges in EFL teaching and emphasizes culturally responsive pedagogy and continuous professional development as key responses.
17	Marav & Batsuuri (2025)	Mongolia	Teacher, technology & institutions; Student factors	Examines systemic challenges affecting rural EFL teachers, highlighting workload, teacher shortages, limited resources, and professional isolation, and emphasizes teacher wellbeing, institutional support, and context-sensitive policy responses.
18	Mengwai & Molotja (2025)	South Africa	Teacher, technology & institutions; Student factors	Examines challenges in implementing English language teaching and assessment policy, highlighting workload, resource constraints, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient pedagogical support, and learner disengagement, and emphasizes the need for institutional support and professional development.
19	Mutolwa & Mwanza (2025)	Zambia	Teacher, technology & institutions; Student factors	Investigates challenges of teaching English grammar through a communicative approach in multilingual classrooms, identifying learners' limited English proficiency, linguistic diversity, insufficient teaching resources, large class sizes, and teachers' limited proficiency in learners' local languages as key barriers to effective EFL instruction.

No	Study	Country / region	Challenge domain(s)	Key contribution to the review
20	Puspawati & Murtiningsih (2025)	Indonesia	Curriculum & assessment; Teacher, technology & institutions	Examines EFL teachers' language assessment literacy and classroom assessment practices, revealing a gap between teachers' assessment knowledge and its implementation, and highlighting the need for sustained professional development in assessment literacy.
21	Rahimi, Rahimi & Mahjoor (2024)	Afghanistan	Teacher, technology & institutions; Pedagogy & methodology	Synthesizes major barriers to effective EFL teaching in Afghanistan, highlighting outdated curricula, limited teacher training, teacher-centred instruction, and inadequate educational resources, while advocating learner-centred pedagogy and continuous professional development.
22	Regmi (2023)	Nepal	Curriculum & assessment; Student factors	Examines context-specific challenges of teaching English, highlighting the mismatch between students' English proficiency and curriculum demands, and advocating bridge courses and curriculum adaptation to support diverse learner needs.
23	Saito & Turner (2025)	Japan	Cultural & linguistic diversity; Pedagogy & methodology	Examines how Japanese high school teachers' understandings of language diversity shape their teaching practices, highlighting the need to move beyond native-speaker norms toward culturally responsive, multilingual, and translanguaging-informed pedagogy.
24	Senouci (2022)	Algeria	Curriculum & assessment; Teacher, technology & institutions	Investigates EFL teachers' continuous assessment practices in higher education, identifying limited implementation, large class sizes, workload, time constraints, and insufficient training as major barriers to effective formative assessment.
25	Sharma & Kumar (2024)	India	Teacher, technology & institutions; Pedagogy & methodology	Synthesizes key challenges of English language teaching in India, highlighting teacher preparation, resource disparities, technology integration, and communicative teaching strategies to improve learners' language proficiency.
26	Siddiqui, Memon, Jatoi & Akhter (2025)	Pakistan	Teacher, technology & institutions; Pedagogy & methodology	Examines post-pandemic challenges in online English language teaching, highlighting teachers' need for professional training, technological infrastructure, and digital instructional resources to support effective second language learning.

No	Study	Country / region	Challenge domain(s)	Key contribution to the review
27	Sombonah, Ankrah & Korang (2024)	Ghana	Student factors; Cultural & linguistic diversity	Examines challenges of teaching and learning English in multilingual classrooms, identifying weak linguistic backgrounds, learner anxiety, communication and writing difficulties, and emphasizing increased English language use to enhance learners' proficiency.
28	Thonghattha (2025)	Thailand	Teacher, technology & institutions; Pedagogy & methodology	Examines changes in EFL teachers' experiences before and after COVID-19, highlighting digital competence, technology integration, student engagement, and professional development as key factors for effective online and hybrid instruction.
29	Vaishnav (2025)	India; Oman	Teacher, technology & institutions; Cultural & linguistic diversity	Synthesizes the linguistic, professional, cultural, and pedagogical challenges faced by non-native English-speaking teachers, highlighting the importance of inclusive ELT policies, multilingual competence, and continuous professional development.
30	Wang (2025)	China	Pedagogy & methodology; Teacher, technology & institutions	Examines the application of interactive language teaching in college English classrooms, highlighting student-centred instruction, authentic language use, teacher preparation, and institutional support as key factors for improving English language learning.
31	Zapotichna (2024)	Ukraine	Pedagogy & methodology; Student factors	Compares communicative, task-based, and grammar-translation approaches, demonstrating that communicative and task-based instruction more effectively improves students' English proficiency, confidence, and perceived employability than traditional grammar-translation teaching.