ISSN 3059-054X

# ELT Classroom Research Journal

Vol 2, Issue 2
November, 2025

ELTCRJ.com

*ELT Classroom Research Journal* (ELTCRJ) is for teachers and language educators, devoted to discussions and research on classroom English language teaching and development, especially as it relates to the global spread of English language teaching and learning.

Our global readership includes teachers of English as a second language, TESOL teachers, trainers, linguists, educators, and anyone with an interest in English language teaching research in global contexts.

This journal is a refereed publication that aims at providing free online access to our readership on advances and research into the classroom teaching of English to speakers of other languages.

For electronic submission
and to read more, please visit
https://eltcrj.com/

*ELT Classroom Research Journal* is owned and operated by Magpie Scholar, dedicated to open-access publication. Registered in Miryang, Republic of Korea.




사업자등록번호 : 283-78-00467





**ISSN: 3059-054X**

# Table of Contents

# EDITORIAL TEAM

# Foreword

We are pleased to share this third issue of the *ELT Classroom Research Journal* (Volume 2, Issue 2). It is especially rewarding to see that some long-developing works have reached the goal of publication through mentorship.

We have stayed true to our express mission of publishing teachers' classroom research, but also, and perhaps more importantly, our aim to mentor teacher-researchers. There are several paths in this mentorship model – pre-submission as well as for received manuscripts. This issue includes articles through three of these paths: mentorship on campus (Abu-Naji & Nassar), mentorship through a dedicated mentoring support group (all three book reviews came through our **MenTRnet** partnership), and mentoring both before submission and during the publication process, by editors and/or by Mentor-Referees (the three papers from Cameroon).

A recent blog post on the MenTRnet website deserves mention – Sidney Martin offers some excellent suggestions for those considering writing an Exploratory Action Research report, using our ELT Classroom Research Journal as a point for comparison with a more traditional scholarly journal. And Yes! We focus on teachers, student, and personal and professional growth. Not generalizability of studies.

This issue includes three teacher-research studies out of the Cameroon English Language and Literature Teachers Association (CAMELTA) Research Group, developed through a Teacher Research Training Project led by Dr. Eric E. Ekembe and supported by Alan Pulverness (Director) and Jennifer Law (Senior Consultant) of **Transform ELT**. These three articles are the first of what is hoped to be many more publications emerging from teachers in the especially challenging circumstances of EFL classrooms in Africa (read the papers for some amazing classroom realities!).

The **CAMELTA** (Cameroon English Language Teachers' Association) Research Group was founded by Dr. Ekembe in 2022 with an aim to empower teachers to identify and research an aspect of their classroom practice and to inform personal professional development goals. The group uses a CARS approach: Collaboration, Action planning, Reflection and Sharing, supported by Dr. Eric and external mentors. As each cohort completes their first research projects, they are encouraged to start satellite action research groups and expand the research community.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of *ELT Classroom Research Journal*, share the publication with others, and we warmly invite you to consider sharing your own classroom investigations with our readers.

## References

Martin, S. (2025). *Writing Effective EAR Reports: Practical Guidance and Recommendations for Teacher Researchers.* https://mentrnet.net/writing-effective-ear-reports/

## *Proud to Partner with*

Cameroon English Language and Literature Teachers' Association
AMELTA
PROMOTING QUALITY ELT NATIONWIDE

TransformELT

http://www.transformelt.com/

MenTRnet (https://mentrnet.net/) is an international free-to-join community of practice/ network for mentors of teacher-research in the field of TESOL which has grown up organically since 2020 and now numbers 260+ members. MenTRnet organizes monthly online support group meetings, yearly introductory workshops and an annual 'Teachers Research!' conference in association with IATEFL Research SIG.

MenTRnet

https://mentrnet.net/

# Enhancing Large-Class Language Teaching: Co-Teaching Strategies, Technology Integration, and Student Engagement

Aditi Jhaveri
*The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)*
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4360-9188

Delian Gaskell
*The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)*
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9397-153X

Nicholas Sampson
*The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)*
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3041-2132

Kathy Sin
*The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)*
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0979-2337

Sandy W. C. Chan
*The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)*
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9822-4730

**DOI: 10.23350/eltcrj.222**

**Article History**
Received: July 28, 2025
Accepted: Oct 13, 2025
Published: Nov 10, 2025

**Keywords:** large-class teaching; co-teaching; technology integration; student engagement; ESP; language pedagogy



## Abstract

Teaching large language classes presents unique challenges in maintaining engagement and personalized instruction. This study explores innovative approaches through a qualitative case study of LANG1234: Professional Speaking for the Workplace, an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course at a Hong Kong university designed to develop professional communication skills across disciplines in a large class size format. Grounded in the ESP principle of addressing learners' specific professional needs, the course features modules on branding, crisis communication, and intercultural competence. Drawing on instructor reflections and course documents, the paper examines how co-teaching models, technology integration, and active learning strategies are deployed to overcome the constraints of the large-class format. Findings indicate that collaborative co-teaching, digital tools (e.g., Miro, Mentimeter), and structured interactions successfully foster an interactive, skills-based learning environment. The study also identifies key challenges, including instructor role ambiguity and the 'disjuncture' of teaching profession-specific content, underscoring the need for structured professional development to support ESP educators in effectively scaling interactive, communicative language instruction.

## Introduction

Lecturing in large classes can make student engagement challenging, as it often creates a passive learning environment, particularly for students with long contact hours (Ekeler, 1994; LoCastro, 2001; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010; Urbano & Quiroz Montilla, 2010). Active learning strategies (Biggs, 1989; Motteram & Dawson, 2025; Rezi & Bedra, 2024) can help foster engagement, as meaningful interaction between students and the teaching context encourages deeper learning and higher-quality outcomes. However, students with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and abilities may struggle to follow lectures in large classes. In a crowded lecture hall, instructors cannot address every student's needs, and opportunities for student-teacher interaction diminish. As a result, students may disengage or lose focus. Additionally, gauging comprehension and providing timely feedback becomes difficult for instructors in such settings. While some teachers attempt to stimulate discussion by posing questions, Hong Kong students tend to be more passive than their Western counterparts (Choi, 2016), making them hesitant to respond.

The growing demand for language education in higher education has led to larger class sizes, presenting both opportunities and challenges. A notable example of innovation in this area is *LANG1234* (pseudonym): *Professional Speaking for the Workplace*, a three-credit language course designed as an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course to target students' professional language needs, which was launched last year and offered in both Fall and Spring terms. The course meets twice weekly for 1.5-hour sessions and is designed to equip students from different faculties at the university with professional communication skills for diverse workplace scenarios. Due to the nature of the course, the instructor chosen to conceptualise the course design and syllabus was someone who had started their career as a language teacher after significant industry experience in areas such as business development, marketing, and social work. Thus, the course incorporates modules on personal branding, intercultural business meetings, and crisis communication, to provide students with practical strategies combined with theoretical insight to influence diverse workplace audiences using multiple modes of communication. Combining interactive tutorials with hands-on assessments, including video presentations, simulated press conferences, and reflective analyses, the course prepares students to navigate real-world communication challenges while meeting specific learning outcomes tied to persuasion, situational awareness, and collaborative problem-solving. Unlike traditional language courses offered by the university's language center, *LANG1234* employs a unique structure combining large plenary sessions with smaller tutorial-style classes. During 90-minute plenary lectures (with 40-60 students), instructors deliver core content through interactive presentation styles using tools such as Miro and Mentimeter while 90-minute tutorials (20 students) provide enhanced skills practice. The course addresses eight key learning outcomes, from audience analysis and cultural sensitivity to reflective practice. More specifically, the course seeks to enable students to analyze workplace communication needs, craft strategic messages, and deliver them persuasively using appropriate verbal, nonverbal, and multimodal techniques for diverse audiences. Students are expected to develop intercultural competence, collaborative skills, and reflective practice to evaluate and improve their professional communication effectiveness in various workplace contexts. Students demonstrate understanding through graded simulations (e.g., Week 3's elevator pitch recordings) and tutorial and take-home tasks that require applying lecture concepts to workplace communication challenges while all teachers share the same lesson plan for each class session. By exploring spoken genres and communication theories, students learn to adapt their language strategies for various professional audiences, including clients, colleagues, and supervisors.

The *Professional Speaking for the Workplace* language course offered in a university at Hong Kong illustrates as a case study how instructors navigate large-class instruction through co-teaching, technology integration, and active learning strategies. Reflections from the course instructors—referred to here by pseudonyms: Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, and Teacher D—highlight both the successes and challenges of this approach. Their reflective accounts on co-teaching in large plenaries, integrating technology, and implementing active learning strategies offer valuable insights into effective large-class language instruction. The course's focus on multimodal communication and professional speaking skills makes it highly relevant to today's workplace communication needs, while its unconventional structure provides important lessons on scaling language education effectively.

This paper explores the professional development (PD) implications of teaching large language courses, analyzing instructor reflections alongside literature on language pedagogy, ESP, technology-enhanced learning, and co-teaching models. This *LANG1234* case study demonstrates how courses can maintain interactive, skills-based language learning even in larger formats, while also identifying areas where targeted instructor support is most crucial.

## Literature Review

### Defining Large Language Classrooms

Recent scholarship on large class language teaching underscores the significant pedagogical challenges that arise when class sizes limit opportunities for individualized instruction and meaningful interaction. Brown (2001) argues that an ideal language class should consist of no more than 12 students to optimize effective learning and teaching due to the need for sufficient individual attention. Contemporary studies generally align with this view, considering classes exceeding 25 students large enough to require substantially different teaching strategies (Bikowski, Park, & Tytko, 2022; Motteram & Dawson, 2025). Bikowski et al. (2022) highlight the complexities of large-enrollment language classes, especially online, where interaction and individual feedback become challenging. Similarly, Motteram and Dawson (2025) emphasize the integration of digital tools and active learning approaches to enhance engagement in larger classes. Other scholars suggest that classes larger than 15 students already face constraints on opportunities for meaningful practice and feedback (LoCastro, 2001; Urbano & Quiroz Montilla, 2010).

The relativity of 'large-class' definitions become particularly apparent in cross-cultural educational comparisons. What some Western educational systems consider large, typically 25-30 students, may represent standard or even small class sizes in other contexts, particularly in developing countries where 60+ student classes are common (Marzulina, 2022; Ramana, 2013). This variability has led researchers and educational organizations like INEE (n.d.) to argue that the operational definition should focus less on absolute numbers and more on the point at which fundamental challenges of classroom management, individual feedback provision, and student engagement become pronounced and require specialized teaching strategies. The diminished opportunities for meaningful interaction in large classes directly conflict with communicative language teaching principles that emphasize authentic dialogue and frequent practice (Brown, 2001; Marazulina, 2022; Panhwar, Barich & Shahzad, 2020; Zaroog, 2021). These factors collectively necessitate adapted teaching methods and modified materials to maintain engagement and instructional effectiveness at scale.

## Challenges of Large-Class Language Teaching

Classroom management emerges as a primary concern, with instructors reporting significant difficulties in maintaining order, keeping students focused, and ensuring instructions are effectively communicated to all learners in large group settings (Anderson, 2023; British Council, 2015; LoCastro, 2001). These management challenges are exacerbated by the physical constraints of large classrooms, which often lack the flexible seating arrangements or spatial configurations that facilitate interactive language activities (Sanako, n.d.).

Perhaps the most pedagogically significant challenge lies in the severe limitation of individual attention and personalized feedback opportunities. In language learning contexts where students often have diverse proficiency levels and learning needs, the inability to provide tailored support can substantially hinder progress (Hadi & Arante, 2015; Hess, 2010). The situation is particularly problematic for productive skills like speaking and writing, which traditionally require more individualized feedback for meaningful improvement (Bughio, 2023; Rezi & Bedra, 2024; Zaroog, 2021).

Physical resource limitations further compound these pedagogical challenges. Many institutions lack adequate classroom infrastructure, technological tools, and instructional materials suitable for effective language teaching in large groups (Bughio, 2013). As Anderson (2023) notes, this scarcity often forces instructors to default to traditional lecture-based methods that directly contradict contemporary communicative language teaching principles.

The psychological impact on teachers represents another critical dimension of large-class challenges. Instructors frequently report feelings of frustration and burnout stemming from the constant demands of managing large groups while being unable to establish meaningful connections with individual students (Hadi & Arante, 2015). Recent research by Panhwar, Barich and Shahzad (2020) highlights how these challenges manifest in monitoring student progress. The resulting gaps in learning monitoring can lead to unnoticed skill deficiencies and uneven progress across student populations. These monitoring challenges are compounded when attempting to implement interactive activities like pair or group work, which become logistically complex and potentially chaotic in large classes (Zaroog, 2021).

## Co-Teaching in Large Language Classes

Recent educational research has increasingly explored co-teaching as a potential solution to the challenges of large language classes. The literature positions co-teaching as a collaborative instructional model where two or more educators share responsibility for planning, delivering, and assessing instruction to a diverse student group within a single classroom (Friend, 2014; York-Barr et al., 2007). This model shows particular promise for addressing the individual attention and engagement challenges prevalent in large language classes (Panhwar et al., 2020).

The theoretical foundation of co-teaching rests on its ability to combine complementary educator expertise, creating instructional synergies that benefit diverse learners. As Boland et al. (2019) demonstrate, this collaborative approach allows for more targeted support without segregating students. The model's flexibility enables implementation of simultaneous small-group instruction, differentiated activities, and integrated language-content learning - all

particularly valuable in large class contexts (Forsman, 2024). These advantages help explain the growing adoption of co-teaching in language programs.

Empirical studies have documented several significant benefits of co-teaching in language education contexts. Boland et al.'s (2019) comparative research found that students in co-taught EFL classrooms demonstrated markedly higher achievement across all four language skills compared to peers in traditional single-instructor classes. The shared instructional responsibility inherent in co-teaching appears to create more responsive learning environments where student needs can be addressed more promptly and effectively (York-Barr, Ghere, & Sommerness, 2007). Additionally, the collaborative planning process required for effective co-teaching fosters valuable professional development opportunities as teachers reflect on and refine their practices collectively (Forsman, 2024).

However, the literature also identifies important implementation considerations for successful co-teaching. Forsman's (2024) research emphasizes that effective co-teaching relationships require substantial investments in mutual respect, shared goals, and institutional support structures. The model's success depends on careful coordination, including clear role delineation, regular co-planning sessions, and ongoing professional development focused on collaborative teaching skills (Friend, 2014; York-Barr, Ghere, & Sommerness, 2007). These requirements present both logistical and cultural challenges for institutions accustomed to traditional solo-teaching models.

**Navigating Large-Class Language Teaching Challenges**

Contemporary approaches to large-class language teaching increasingly emphasize communicative and task-based methodologies that maintain interactive, learner-centered instruction despite scale-related challenges. Rezi and Bedra (2024) document how these approaches successfully enhance language proficiency, particularly in speaking and listening skills, by creating authentic contexts for real-world language use, which prove particularly valuable in large classes learner autonomy and motivation.

Technology integration has become a pivotal strategy in addressing the challenges of large-class language teaching. Research demonstrates that platforms such as Kahoot! significantly improve learning outcomes by fostering motivation and providing real-time feedback, particularly in large classrooms where individualized attention is difficult (Wang & Tahir, 2020). Similarly, AI tools, Mentimeter and Miro facilitate collaborative learning and instant feedback, helping instructors maintain interactivity even in high-enrollment settings (Irawati et al., 2025). These tools align with the need for innovative solutions in large-class pedagogy, where traditional methods often fall short in promoting active participation (Marzulina, 2022; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010). However, while such technologies offer scalable engagement, scholars emphasize meaningful human interaction to sustain effective language learning (INEE, n.d.).

Cultural responsiveness represents another critical dimension of effective large-class language instruction. As classrooms become increasingly diverse, culturally sensitive teaching practices have grown from desirable to essential (Irawati et al., 2025; Rezi & Bedra, 2024). This shift reflects broader recognition that language learning is inextricably linked to cultural understanding and that inclusive pedagogies benefit all learners. The success of an integrated approach to large class teaching for scaling depends on thoughtful implementation, ongoing professional development, and institutional support structures.

### ESP Syllabus Design for Professional Communication in Large Classes

The pedagogical design of the *LANG1234* course aligns with English for Specific Purposes (ESP), an approach where curriculum and instruction are driven by learners' specific professional communication needs (Akhadova, 2025). A cornerstone of ESP is a process that involves tailoring course content, materials, and assessments to the authentic tasks of the target workplace (Aguaguiña Pilla et al., 2025). The *LANG1234* course, with its modules on personal branding and crisis communication, exemplifies this by moving beyond general English to teach profession-specific speaking skills.

A central challenge in ESP is the integration of subject-specific content, which can cause a "disjuncture" for language teachers required to teach beyond their primary expertise (Mehisto, 2008). In large-class settings, this challenge is amplified, requiring strategic use of authentic materials and contextualized learning tasks like simulations to bridge the gap between language and professional practice (Ahmed et al., 2023).

Therefore, it is crucial to understand how instructors in a large-format ESP course navigate the integration of professional content and language teaching, and what PD support is most effective in mitigating the associated challenges of disjuncture.

## Methods

### Participants and Context

This study analyzed four language instructors' written reflections about teaching a course that expanded from 20-25 to 40-60 students. Three were instructors, while one also served as a materials developer. While two of the reflections came from local Hong Kong teachers, one reflection was written by a Canadian instructor and another by an instructor from the UK. Primary data included attributed written reflections from an institutional platform, focusing on co-teaching, technology use and engagement strategies in large classes. The primary data consisted of detailed written reflections posted by the instructors on their institution's internal scholarship platform, a space where faculty share teaching insights for peer engagement. Unlike anonymous postings, these reflections were attributed, allowing for direct follow-up when clarification was needed. These reflections are posted following up on the peer observation of teaching exercise that teachers engage in at least once a year. The starting point of this reflection writing is usually after they have engaged in a dialogue with the colleague whose class the instructor observed or after the instructor was observed by their colleague. The output of this reflective dialogue is a written reflective account by each instructor, which is uploaded on the language centre's common digital platform designed for sharing teaching and scholarly experiences. Although the reflections were not anonymous on the internal platform, all identifiable details, including the course code, institution name, and instructors' names, were anonymized in this study. The use of attributed reflections was mitigated by aggregating data to prevent individual identification in publication. By analyzing these as situated experiences, the study contributes to broader discussions on scaling language instruction while offering insights into how educators adapt to changing classroom dynamics.

## Data Collection: Teacher Reflections

Four teacher reflections and course documents (syllabi and assessments) were analyzed to triangulate findings and contextualize reflections. One particularly structured form of teacher reflection, the critical incidents approach, was used for this study. In this form of reflection educators focus on analyzing specific, memorable events, including successes or struggles, which had a significant impact on teaching or learning. A critical incident is an event that stands out due to its influence on the teacher's practice, such as a lesson that failed unexpectedly, a breakthrough moment with a struggling student, or a classroom management challenge that led to a new strategy.

Teacher reflections as a data collection method have several defining characteristics. First, they are self-reported and introspective, revealing tacit knowledge such as unspoken assumptions and intuitive decisions that shape classroom interactions. Second, reflections provide contextual and authentic insights into classroom life (Borg, 2013). Unlike formal assessments or third-party observations, they capture the teacher's real-time decision-making processes, including spontaneous adjustments made during lessons. Third, reflections are iterative and developmental, meaning they encourage continuous improvement. By regularly documenting and revisiting their experiences, teachers can identify patterns, track growth over time, and refine their instructional strategies. Finally, reflections are primarily qualitative and narrative-based, often taking the form of written journals, audio logs, or video diaries. This allows for rich, descriptive data that highlights the teacher's voice and perspective.

However, the personal nature of reflections make them susceptible to subjectivity and bias. Teachers may unintentionally overlook certain issues or emphasize others. Additionally, the depth and quality of reflections can vary. Without guidance, some entries may remain superficial, lacking critical analysis. Finally, social desirability bias may influence reflections, as teachers might avoid offending others in their team or documenting failures due to fear of judgment.

## Data Analysis: Thematic Coding and Intercoder Agreement

The four instructor reflections were analyzed using qualitative thematic coding (Flick, 2022). An initial set of codes was developed inductively by the first author, resulting in three overarching categories: (a) co-teaching experiences, (b) use of technology, and (c) classroom strategies for student engagement. Each category was further subdivided into specific sub-codes; for instance, the 'technology' category included sub-codes for tools such as polling software and quiz applications like Kahoot.

To ensure the consistency and trustworthiness of the coding process, a formal check for intercoder agreement was conducted. After the first author established the initial codebook, a second coder, a colleague experienced in qualitative methods but not involved in the study, was trained on the codebook's definitions and application. This second coder then independently coded a representative sample of the data.

The agreement between the two coders was calculated. We used a simple percentage agreement method, where the number of agreed-upon coding decisions is divided by the total number of decisions. The initial agreement rate was 87%. The coders then met to discuss the instances of disagreement. These discussions led to clarifications in the codebook definitions,

improving the precision of codes like 'co-teaching challenge' versus 'engagement strategy.' Following this consensus-building process, the first author proceeded to code the entire dataset. This rigorous process enhances the credibility of the thematic findings by demonstrating that the codes could be applied consistently by more than one researcher. Where the reflections contained ambiguous or unclear statements, the respective instructors were contacted via email for clarification to ensure accurate interpretation.

### Methodological Limitations

This study analyzed reflections from four out of six instructors who taught the course, selected specifically because they chose to reflect on the large-class language course, indicating they deemed it noteworthy. While their varying roles (senior/junior lecturers, material designer vs. deliverers) provide diverse perspectives, the self-selection risks overrepresenting strong opinions and excludes insights from the two teachers who reflected on other courses, potentially omitting disengaged or indifferent viewpoints. While the small sample (n=4) limits generalizability and role differences (e.g., material designers' curricular biases) may fragment findings, the examination of course documents triangulate the findings. Moreover, when seen through the lens of an exploratory study, this focus captures prioritized challenges from engaged practitioners with the intention of revising the course in the future (and/or designing similar courses for large classes) while also offering targeted insights for further research.

## Findings and Discussion

### The Implementation of Co-Teaching in *LANG1234*

Co-teaching involves two or more educators sharing instructional responsibilities in a single classroom to enhance student learning. While co-teaching models have been extensively explored in educational research, critical gaps remain in their application to university-level language instruction. Friend (2014) notes that existing co-teaching frameworks lack adaptation for specific needs. This is particularly noticeable in higher education settings where pedagogical goals and student demographics differ markedly from K-12 contexts. Honigsfeld and Dove (2019) advance the concept of 'collaborative cycles' (co-planning, co-teaching, co-assessing, co-reflecting), yet their work primarily addresses K-12 English Language Learners, leaving a void in research on how these cycles function in large university language classes with diverse proficiency levels and disciplinary demands.

### Co-Teaching Models Employed for *LANG1234*

The course employed a flexible, combined co-teaching model that adapted to instructors' comfort levels and classroom needs. The instructors experimented with varied co-teaching approaches in plenaries of 40–60 learners. Teacher A observed that active co-teacher involvement such as colleagues standing and contributing during tasks, created a "dynamic environment," while passive roles led to lecture-style disengagement. For example, a more dynamic environment was created in plenaries when co-teachers acted as sounding boards for the plenary teacher, raising their hands, asking questions and offering opinions and extra information to supplement what the plenary teacher was presenting, which seemed to cause the students to notice they had three teaching professionals in the lecture hall and correspondingly respond by engaging more in the material and with each teacher. This contrasted with a different group of co-teachers in a different section, where only the plenary teacher would stand

up and speak, and all the other non-plenary presenting instructors simply sat in the front or back of the classroom; sometimes looking at their own laptops instead of engaging with the plenary teachers or the students. This 'critical incident' demonstrated that disengagement from co-teachers resulted in very typical 'lecture', especially if the plenary teacher was presenting with a PPT, which did not engage the students very much. This supports Friend's (2014) "team teaching" model, where equal participation fosters student interaction. However, teacher A contrasts between sections, highlighting the fragility of co-teaching dynamics. Without explicit role negotiation, collaborations risk reverting to traditional hierarchies, a pitfall documented in co-teaching research (Anderson, 2023; British Council, 2015; Forsman, 2024; Friend, 2014). In this course, instances of role negotiation could be seen in many of the more successful and engaging plenaries where the roles had been decided on before the plenary began. For example, in certain cases, the instructor who was notably 'in-charge' of the plenary would present the structure and most of content of the lecture, but the co-teachers in the room had already agreed to actively circulate around the room, sometimes commenting and challenging the materials being taught by the 'main instructor', so it became clear to the students that there were three teachers in the plenary, each taking on different roles to facilitate the students' learning as needed. Without this 'role negotiation', this type of active engagement with the materials and the students might have been more chaotic and less cohesive. According to Teacher A, "This did require communication before and after each plenary for the three instructors to briefly discuss how they expected the best way to participate would be but resulted in a more engaged and enjoyable class".

In plenary sessions, the most common approach was 'One Teach, One Assist', where the lead lecturer delivered content while co-teachers circulated to clarify instructions, manage student questions, or address technical issues (Friend, 2014). The interdisciplinary nature of *LANG1234*, serving students across all disciplines, made such an approach particularly valuable for addressing diverse learner needs. The course's focus on practical communication skills, from personal branding to crisis management, benefited significantly from the multiple perspectives offered by co-teaching teams. For example, in Module 1, the focus of the course was for each student in these large groups to create a personal branding video, and these students benefited from having instructors who had backgrounds in marketing and branding, as well as years of teaching young university students how to use stories, multimodality, and linguistic strategies to engage their audience in order to create the elements needed to create a digital version of their personal brand. On the same teaching team, there were often other teachers with backgrounds in educational technology or years of experience assisting students to learn how to promote themselves in a more traditional interview style of branding. This range of knowledge and perspectives enabled these instructors to help a diverse group of students while simultaneously addressing the ESP disjuncture between subject or profession-specific knowledge and language teaching (Mehisto, 2008). Similarly, during Module 3 on Crisis Communication, instructors with backgrounds in business and linguistics could collaborate to demonstrate how rhetorical strategies intersect with nonverbal delivery in high-stake professional scenarios. This ensured immediate support for learners in large groups, ensuring the smooth implementation of the ESP framework of aligning language teaching with the authentic professional communication needs of students (Aguaguiña Pilla et al., 2025; Ahmed et al., 2023; Akhadova, 2025).

For skill-building activities, the team occasionally adopted station teaching (Stolzer & Rigolosi, 2023), dividing students into smaller groups rotating between teacher-led tasks (e.g., role-playing workplace scenarios) and independent workstations (e.g., analyzing case studies on Miro boards) The assessment structure lent itself well to co-teaching approaches. For the

Personal Branding Video (Assessment 1), instructors adopted a 'station teaching' model where one teacher was able to focus on verbal messaging while another coached students on nonverbal delivery. This division of expertise allowed for more targeted feedback than a single instructor could provide in the large-class setting. Another example of division of expertise could be seen in the Crisis Communication assessment when students were put into groups to prepare for an 'emergency press conference'. Strong Q&A skills were needed in this assessment, as well as the ability to recall previous communication theories taught earlier in the course. In this large-class setting, a single teacher would find it challenging to help all these large groups prepare and practice for this assessment, so instead co-teachers divided up the groups, then teachers with strong skills in teaching press conference-style Q&A's set up a station where teams could visit and ask questions and receive experience, while other co-teachers set up a teaching station that focused on reviewing the main critical communication theories each group should be trying to demonstrate in their Crisis Communication assessment. In rarer instances, alternative teaching was used: the primary instructor engaged the majority of the class, while a co-teacher facilitated a smaller group at the back to ensure equitable participation without disrupting the main lesson flow (Friend & Cook, 2021). This hybrid approach leveraged each teacher's strengths, with roles shifting dynamically based on lesson objectives and real-time student needs. For example, during peer feedback sessions, an observing teacher collected data on participation patterns to refine future instruction, demonstrating the 'One Teach, One Observe' model (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2019). The flexibility of these combined strategies allowed the course to balance scalability with personalized attention, though challenges like role ambiguity and pacing inconsistencies occasionally arose.

## Co-Teaching as a Catalyst for Professional Development

The instructors' experiences highlight co-teaching as a dynamic professional learning opportunity. Teacher B, new to co-teaching, described it as "fascinating" to observe colleagues' diverse teaching styles and strategies while using the same material, which expanded his pedagogical repertoire. Teacher A reported being "inspired by the teaching styles of some of the instructors who were extremely active from the moment a student stepped into the lecture theatre". For example, one instructor would call out to any unresponsive student, using jokes and banter, together with the co-teachers who also participated in this banter to create an engaging, lively atmosphere that worked extremely well to keep students focused and engaged. This aligns with Friend's (2014) model of co-teaching as a collaborative service delivery method that pools expertise to meet diverse learner needs. The Business Meeting reflections (Assessment 2) revealed how co-teaching enhanced intercultural awareness. For instance, co-teachers from Canada, the UK and Hong Kong were able to provide concrete examples that enriched the discussion beyond the textbook content, providing examples of how and why different cultures communicate. These examples focused on cultural and linguistic norms such as why Hong Kongers tend to stand in certain corners of elevators according to the order of their entry into the elevator, with the most recent entrant occupying the place next to the buttons to open and shut the door (often using a tissue to push the 'Door Shut' button furiously), or why Canadians had a stereotype of being exceptionally polite because of their tendency to say 'Sorry' about almost anything, while actually not meaning to apologize. This aligns with Honigsfeld and Dove's (2019) finding that diverse instructor backgrounds enhance cultural learning. However, teacher B's reflection also reveals a gap in pre-service training for co-teaching, whereby many educators enter collaborations without structured preparation and figured it out as they went along. Therefore, it was not surprising to see Teacher D emphasize the role of mutual support in co-teaching, recalling how colleagues like teacher A provided

"brilliant examples" of linguistic choice for workplace communication during plenaries when she struggled, reinforcing the value of shared responsibility. This echoes Honigsfeld and Dove's (2019) 'collaborative instructional cycle,' where co-planning and co-reflecting enhance teaching efficacy. Yet, teacher D's experience also underscores the need for institutional structures (e.g., dedicated planning time) to sustain such collaborations. This could be done by incorporating an extra 30 min of work-load units that is devoted to co-teacher planning before and after each plenary session. Without this time, it may be unfortunately easy for instructors to be pulled into other duties rather than planning to sustain these successful collaborations.

**Implications for Language Teacher Development**

The experiences of *LANG1234* instructors offer critical insights for designing effective professional development (PD) programs for co-teaching in language education. First, the reflections underscore the necessity of structured training in collaborative pedagogy. Many instructors, like teacher C, entered co-teaching without prior experience, leading to initial role ambiguity. Pre-semester workshops introducing established co-teaching models such as team teaching, parallel instruction, or station teaching could possibly provide a framework for equitable collaboration. Such training aligns with recommendations by Honigsfeld and Dove (2019), who prioritise modeling and rehearsal of co-teaching strategies in PD. For instance, for the Crisis Press Conference (Assessment 3), the teaching team could implement an innovative 'role-play rotation' model. While one instructor could play the CEO delivering bad news, another could role-pay as a hostile reporter, a third could observe, and another could coach student responders. This immersive approach, though logistically challenging, can help students practice adapting messages for different stakeholders while receiving immediate feedback.

Second, the instructors' reliance on informal peer support (e.g., teacher D's post-class discussions with colleagues and teacher A's use of a previous colleagues' Miro Board to modify her plenary teaching) highlights the need for institutionally protected collaboration time. While ad hoc exchanges were valuable, dedicated co-planning and reflection sessions could systematize knowledge-sharing and prevent the inconsistencies teacher A observed when co-teachers disengaged. This echoes research advocating for 'collaborative cycles' (Friend, 2014) that institutionalize joint lesson planning, observation, and feedback. Third, the diversity in instructors' approaches, from teacher B's emphasis on student-centered adaptations to teacher D's materials-writing process, calls for differentiated PD. Just as language learners require varied instructional methods, PD needs to accommodate teachers' preferred learning styles (e.g., visual, experiential, or discussion-based). For instance, while some instructors benefitted from observing live demonstrations (e.g., teacher A found it particularly useful to watch how other colleagues taught materials she had already taught), others preferred written guides. This aligns with Yang et al.'s (2024) findings on the importance of flexible PD designs in multilingual contexts.

**Technology Integration in Large-Class Language Teaching: Instructor Perspectives**

Reflections of the four *LANG1234* instructors reveal thoughtful integration of digital tools to address the unique challenges of large-class language instruction. Teacher A's reflections highlight the transformative potential of Miro's collaborative whiteboard platform. She described how adapting a Miro board created by a colleague for group activities "changed the energy in the room," with students actively discussing and collaborating on language tasks.

She particularly valued Miro's ability to recreate small-group dynamics in large lectures through features like sticky notes and real-time editing, which enabled students to collectively analyze case studies. For the Personal Branding module (Assessment 1), instructors made use of Miro boards to create interactive "brand canvases" where students mapped their professional identities with the visual workspace helping students connect linguistic choices with personal presentation goals. This application supports the findings of Hampel and Stickler (2012) regarding how visual collaboration tools can facilitate meaningful interaction in language learning contexts. Additionally, the fact that students were preparing pre-recorded videos as well as producing live audio and video recordings of their presentations, writing their scripts, and thinking of the visual tools to make their presentations more visually attractive, reinforced the objective of making the course more multimodal.

Teacher C strategically employed gamification tools like Kahoot and Mentimeter to maintain engagement in classes of 40-60 students. He found that "business students particularly responded to the competitive elements" of Kahoot's timed quizzes and leaderboards, using them for vocabulary reinforcement and concept checks. For more reflective activities, he utilized Mentimeter's open-ended polling feature during plenary sessions, noting its effectiveness in giving quieter students a voice. This approach aligns with research by Wang and Tahir (2020) demonstrating how gamification in large classes can increase participation while providing instructors with immediate feedback on student understanding. Similarly, Mentimeter polls were used strategically during lessons to gather anonymous peer feedback on draft branding statements, lowering anxiety about sharing personal work/feedback in large groups.

Teacher D emphasized the scaffolding potential of these technologies when combined with co-teaching. She recounted instances where co-instructors used Mentimeter responses to identify knowledge gaps (for example, on language issues related to crisis communication) during plenaries, then addressed them immediately in breakout sessions. Teacher D also highlighted how Miro boards allowed teaching teams to "visually track group progress across multiple sections," enabling more targeted support. Her experience echoes recommendations by Hubbard (2013) for systematic technology integration in language teacher education programmes. For certain plenary activities, the team may also consider developing shared evaluation rubrics in Google Docs that can allow co-teachers to provide synchronized feedback, i.e., one instructor could comment on linguistic strategies while another could focus on nonverbal delivery, creating a more comprehensive review than individual feedback methods could achieve. However, important caveats about technological implementation must be borne in mind, for *tools alone don't create engagement - the pedagogy must lead.* As teacher B cautioned, tools alone cannot drive engagement; instructors need guidance on aligning technology with communicative language objectives (Hampel & Stickler, 2012). The most successful uses of Kahoot and Mentimeter occurred when instructors clearly aligned them with specific learning outcomes, such as practicing persuasive language techniques. Collectively, these reflections demonstrate how strategic use of polling tools and collaborative platforms can mitigate large-class challenges while creating new opportunities for interactive language practice. Their varied applications of the same tools also highlight the importance of PD opportunities that acknowledge different teaching styles while promoting evidence-based practices.

## Classroom Strategies for Student Engagement in Large-Class Language Teaching

The detailed reflections of 4 instructors on teaching LANG1234 along with the analysis of course documents reveal how intentional pedagogical strategies can foster engagement in large-class language instruction.

### Think-Pair-Share: Structured Peer Interaction

Teacher C frequently employed Think-Pair-Share (TPS) to counter passive learning in plenaries. He noted that this strategy "maximized participation" by giving students time to articulate ideas in pairs before whole-class sharing, which was particularly effective for business students who thrived on structured collaboration. In the *Personal Branding* module (Assessment 1), instructors implemented "Elevator Pitch Rotations" - a modified Think-Pair-Share - where students developed and refined 30-second professional introductions. This method aligns with research (see Apriyanti & Ayu, 2020), showing TPS enhances comprehension and reduces anxiety for language learners by scaffolding participation. Teacher B observed that TPS empowered quieter students to contribute, echoing findings that dyadic discussions lower affective filters in large classes. However, teacher A cautioned that without clear facilitation, TPS could devolve into superficial exchanges. To deepen engagement, variations like Think-Pair-Compare (where pairs contrast ideas with another duo) or Think-Pair-Write-Share (incorporating written summaries) could be integrated, as suggested in TPS literature (Apriyanti & Ayu, 2020).

### Small-Group Discussions and Role Assignments

To simulate small-class dynamics, instructors organized structured small-group discussions even in 60-student plenaries. Teacher D described how assigning roles (e.g., 'media', 'CEO', customers in a press conference simulation) ensured equitable participation while also providing structured practice for video assignments through repetition. Moreover, role allocation in this manner prevented dominant students from monopolizing class activities. Teacher A extended this by rotating group compositions weekly, exposing students to diverse perspectives, a practice supported by research on heterogeneous grouping for language learning. Challenges arose when groups lacked clear objectives; teacher C addressed this by providing discussion prompts tied to learning outcomes, a strategy emphasized in TPS guidelines. Students also undertook the role of peer reviewers where they gave feedback to one or more peers on their verbal and non-verbal language use during lessons focusing on meetings and rehearsal of response statements for crisis communication. This not only helped them stay engaged but also reinforced their learning.

### Active Learning Through Real-World Applications

Teacher B emphasized connecting content to professional contexts, such as having students analyze workplace communication scenarios, especially as part of the intercultural communication module. This approach aligns with situated learning theory (Cobb & Bowers, 1999), which posits that authentic tasks boost engagement and retention. Teacher D supplemented this with role-playing activities, where students practiced persuasive speaking in mock international meetings, underscoring the efficacy of role-play for developing pragmatic skills in large classes. However, teacher B noted that such activities required meticulous planning to ensure all students participated equally, suggesting the need for structured rubrics and instructions to guide interactions.

### Differentiated Instruction for Diverse Learners

The instructors adapted strategies to accommodate varying proficiency levels. Teacher C used tiered questions during discussions, allowing advanced students to explore nuanced arguments while others focused on foundational concepts, a technique endorsed by differentiated instruction literature. Teacher B highlighted the importance of flexible pacing, pausing plenaries to address confusion signalled by formative checks (e.g., quick polls). For reticent learners, Teacher A recommended "Silent TPS" (written exchanges before verbal sharing), a variation shown to support introverted and multilingual students. During Intercultural Business Meetings (Module 2), an instructor developed 'Silent Meetings', a novel adaptation of Silent TPS. Students first communicated written responses to meeting scenarios via shared documents, then transitioned to verbal discussion.

### Instructor Presence and Movement

Physical instructor presence was seen to be critical. Teacher C stressed "moving around the room" during activities to monitor discussions and prompt quieter students, a practice linked to increased engagement in large-class research. Teacher D added that co-teachers amplified this effect by dividing supervision roles, ensuring no student group was overlooked. Literature on classroom proximity underscores its impact on maintaining attention and reducing off-task behavior (Pham, Le & Duong, 2025).

### Further Recommendations for Augmenting Student Engagement

To further enhance student engagement in large-class language instruction, instructors can integrate three evidence-based strategies: Jigsaw activities, Fishbowl discussions, and use of reflective pauses. Each of these approaches addresses distinct aspects of collaborative learning, peer interaction, and metacognitive consolidation, supported by pedagogical literature and practical applications.

The Jigsaw method (Aronson, 2021) enhances learning by dividing students into 'expert groups' to master subtopics (e.g., crisis communication) before sharing insights in mixed 'base groups,' fostering accountability and deeper comprehension. This approach aligns with language learning goals by requiring synthesis of diverse perspectives (Aronson, 2021). Fishbowl discussions structure participation by having a small group model debates while others observe. Then the two groups swap places to balance their active participation with reflective engagement.. Reflective pauses (Schön, 2017) bridge theory and practice, whether mid-activity (e.g., paraphrasing concepts) or post-activity (e.g., evaluating nonverbal cues), reducing cognitive load while reinforcing metacognition. Together, these strategies supported by peer interaction, modelled expertise, and deliberate reflection, can address large-class challenges by promoting inclusive, structured participation while developing critical language and professional skills.

## Conclusion

This study explored the challenges and strategies of large-class language teaching through the reflective practices of four instructors in the *LANG1234* course. The findings offer valuable insights into co-teaching dynamics, technology integration, and student engagement within a curriculum explicitly designed using an ESP framework to teach workplace

communication. The pedagogical design of the course, with modules on personal branding and crisis communication, was fundamentally driven by learners' specific professional needs, moving beyond general English to teach profession-specific speaking skills.

While the findings demonstrate the effectiveness of collaborative teaching models and digital tools like Miro and Mentimeter, they also reveal significant research gaps. The first is the lack of a systematic framework for co-teaching in university-level language courses, as existing literature predominantly focuses on K-12 contexts. The second, illuminated by the ESP lens, is the challenge of 'disjuncture', the discomfort language teachers face when integrating subject-specific content beyond their primary expertise. The challenge of connecting language to professional practice is particularly acute in large-class settings, where instructors must rely on authentic materials and contextualized simulations. Our analysis identified key co-teaching strategies, such as clear role negotiation between instructors, the integration of collaborative technologies, and the facilitation of structured student interactions, all of which could form the basis of a formal framework.

However, the study's methodological limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size (four instructors) and self-selection bias (only those who reflected on the course were included) may limit the generalizability of findings. Additionally, the absence of student perspectives and longitudinal data prevents a comprehensive assessment of how co-teaching impacts learning outcomes over time.

Future research should address these gaps by: (1) developing and testing a co-teaching framework tailored to large university language classes, incorporating structured roles, technology integration, and assessment metrics; (2) expanding participant pools to include student feedback and more instructors for balanced insights; and (3) investigating longitudinal effects of co-teaching on both instructor development and student proficiency. By bridging these gaps, educators can better navigate the complexities of scaling language education while maintaining instructional quality and engagement.

Ultimately, this study underscores the potential of co-teaching as a sustainable model for large-class language instruction. However, its success in an ESP context depends not only on successful technology integration and promotion of student engagement but also on providing targeted professional development to help instructors confidently navigate the integration of professional content and language teaching.

## References

Aguaguiña Pilla, M. P., Gordón Fiallos, B. A., Casa Molina, P. E., & Nuñez Melo, N. N. (2025). Development of communicative competence in specific contexts: Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in fields such as Medicine, Business, and Technology. *Ciencia Latina Revista Científica Multidisciplinar, 9*(1), 10262–10276. https://doi.org/10.37811/cl_rcm.v9i1.16636

Ahmed, K., Ali, S., & Khan, A. (2023). ESP needs analysis of productive skills: A case study of engineering students. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review, 7*(3), 800–812. https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023(7-III)69

Akhadova, N. F., qizi (2025). Teaching ESP: Problems and solutions. *International Journal of Scientific Researchers, 10*(2), 119-122. https://worldlyjournals.com/index.php/IJSR/article/view/9627

Anderson, J. (2023). Teaching large classes: contexts, challenges and strategies. King's College London. https://www.jasonanderson.org.uk/downloads/teaching_large_classes_kcl_june_2023.pdf

Aronson, E. (2021). The jigsaw classroom: A personal odyssey into a systemic national problem. In N. Davidson (Ed.), *Pioneering perspectives in cooperative learning* (pp. 146-164). Routledge.

Apriyanti, D., & Ayu, M. (2020). Think-pair-share: Engaging students in speaking activities in classroom. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, *1*(1), 13-19. https://jim.teknokrat.ac.id/index.php/english-language-teaching/article/view/246

Biggs, J. B. (1989). Approaches to the enhancement of tertiary teaching. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *8*(1), 7–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/0729436890080102

Bikowski, D., Park, H. K., & Tytko, T. (2022). Teaching large-enrollment online language courses: Faculty perspectives and an emerging curricular model. *System*, *104*, 102711. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0346251X21002657

Boland, D. I., Alkhalifa, K. B., & Al-Mutairi, M. A. (2019). Co-teaching in EFL classroom: The promising model. *English Language Teaching*, *12*(12), 95-98. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v12n12p95

Borg, S. (2013). *Teacher research in language teaching: A critical analysis*. Cambridge University Press.

British Council. (2015). What to consider when teaching English in large classes. *Voices Magazine* [Online]. https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/what-consider-when-teaching-english-large-classes

Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Longman.

Bughio, Faraz Ali (2023). Improving English language teaching in large classes at university level in Pakistan. [Doctoral Thesis, University of Sussex]. https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.23396018.v1

Choi, J. (2016). English speaking classroom apprehension: a study of the perceptions held by Hong Kong university students. *Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, *4*(2), 293-308. https://espeap.junis.ni.ac.rs/index.php/espeap/article/view/275/236

Cobb, P., & Bowers, J. (1999). Cognitive and situated learning perspectives in theory and practice. *Educational researcher*, *28*(2), 4-15. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X028002004

Ekeler, W. J. (1994). The lecture method. In K. W. Prichard & R. M. Sawyer (Eds.), *Handbook of college teaching: Theory and applications* (pp. 85-98). Greenwood Press.

Flick, U. (2022). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research design*. Sage Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529770278

Forsman, L. (2024). Co-teaching literacy strategies for the inclusion of second-language learners: possibilities for professional development. *Language and Education*, *39*(3), 638–655. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2024.2348596

Friend, M. (2014). Co-teaching: Classroom partnership for student success. Resources for the Conversation Wyoming Department of Education Seventh Annual Leadership Symposium June 23, 2014. Wyoming Instructional Network. https://wyominginstructionalnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Mon-Dr-Friend-Co-Teaching-Basic.pdf

Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2021). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals* (9th ed.). Pearson.

Hadi, M.J., & Arante, L.T. (2015). *Barriers in teaching English in large classes: Voice of an Indonesian English language teacher*. ERIC Document. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED582906

Hampel, R., & Stickler, U. (2012). The use of videoconferencing to support multimodal interaction in an online language classroom. *ReCALL*, *24*(2), 116-137. https://doi.org/10.1017/S095834401200002X

Hess, N. (2010). *Teaching large multilevel classes*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511732966

Honigsfeld, A., & Dove, M. G. (2019). *Collaborating for English learners: A foundational guide to integrated practices*. Corwin Press.

Hubbard, P. (2013). Making a case for learner training in technology enhanced language learning environments. *CALICO Journal*, *30*(2), 163-178. https://doi.org/10.11139/cj.30.2.163-178

INEE. (n.d.). *Practical tips for teaching large classes: A teacher's guide*. Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies. https://inee.org/resources/practical-tips-teaching-large-classes-teachers-guide

Irawati, S., Wahyuni, S., & Al-khreshehm, M. (2025). Systematic review of teaching methods in language education: Trends and innovation. *International Journal of Educational Research and Excellence*, *14*(3), 2031-2041. http://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v14i3.31774

LoCastro, V. (2001). Managing large classes. In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice* (pp. 181-187). Cambridge University Press.

Marzulina, L. (2022). English education and large classes: unpacking the challenges and coping strategies. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *12*(3), 489-497. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1203.08

Mehisto, P. (2008). CLIL counterweights: Recognising and decreasing disjuncture in CLIL. *International CLIL Research Journal*, *1*(1), 93-119. https://jyx.jyu.fi/jyx/Record/jyx_123456789_101287

Motteram, G., & Dawson, C. (2025). What's changed in English language teaching? *Teaching English*. British Council. https://doi.org/10.57884/FPE8-5130

Mulryan-Kyne, C. (2010). Teaching large classes at college and university level: Challenges and opportunities. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *15*(2), 175-185. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562511003620001

Panhwar, A. H., Barich, S. N., & Shahzad, S. K. (2020). Analysing the situation of ESL teaching and learning in large university classes in Pakistan. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *10*(5), 250-264. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v10n5p250

Pham, B., Le, T., & Duong, H. (2025). Participation level in different seating zones and experiences with row-and-column arrangement in EFL speaking class. *Journal of Effective Teaching Methods*, *3*(1), 207-216. https://doi.org/10.59652/jetm.v3i1.493

Ramana, V. S. V. L. (2013). *Teaching large classes: Problems and prospects.* Vishwavidyalaya Publishers.

Rezi, M., & Bedra, G. K. (2024). Language teaching and curricular practices: A comprehensive literature review. *Lingeduca: Journal of Language and Education Studies*, *3*(2), 116–129.

Sanako. (n.d.). *The 10 biggest challenges for language teachers.* Sananko Blog. https://sanako.com/the-10-biggest-challenges-for-language-teachers

Schön, D. A. (2017). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Routledge.

Stolzer, J., & Rigolosi, L. (2023). *Station teaching: Elevating lessons for every grade level*. Columbia University. https://cpet.tc.columbia.edu/news-press/station-teaching-elevating-lessons-for-every-grade-level

Urbano, Y., & Quiroz Montilla, Y. (2010). *Class size and its implications in the foreign language teaching process*. [Bachelor's thesis, Universidad de Nariño]. https://sired.udenar.edu.co/5183

Wang, A. I., & Tahir, R. (2020). The effect of using Kahoot! for learning–A literature review. *Computers & Education, 149*, 103818. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2020.103818

Yang, S., Sato, M., Shu, D., & Wang, B. (2024). Materials writing as a vehicle for teacher learning. *ELT Journal*, *78*(3), 273-283. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccae021

York-Barr, J., Ghere, G., & Sommerness, J. (2007). Collaborative teaching to increase ELL student learning: A three-year urban elementary case study. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 12*(3), 301-335. https://doi.org/10.1080/10824660701601290

Zaroog, S. E. M. A. H. (2021). Exploring the difficulties that English language teachers encounter when teaching the speaking skill in a large class size. *International Journal of Novel Research in Education and Learning, 8*(5), 40-54. https://www.noveltyjournals.com/upload/paper/Exploring%20the%20Difficulties.pdf

## About the Authors

**Dr. Aditi Jhaveri** is a Senior Lecturer at the Center for Language Education (CLE) of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), with over 21 years of teaching experience in higher education. Her research interests include sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and genre studies, with a recent strong focus on Generative AI in language teaching and learning. Email: lcaditij@ust.hk

**Delian Gaskell** is a Senior Lecturer at the Center for Language Education at HKUST. Her professional interests include educational technology, pedagogies that supplement blended learning, game based learning, corpus linguistics and discourse analysis.

**Nicholas Sampson** is a Lecturer at the Center for Language Education at HKUST. He holds a Cert TEFL, an MEd (ELT) from Sheffield University and an EdD from Hong Kong University. Dr. Sampson has been involved in education for more than three decades, both as a teacher of English and as an ELT author with Macmillan Publishers and Pearson Education.

**Kathy Sin** is a Lecturer at the Center for Language Education at HKUST. She holds an MA in Special Applications of Linguistics, which she pursued following the completion of her BA in English Language & Literature. In her current role, she teaches various credit-bearing and supplementary English language courses.

**Sandy W.C. Chan** is a Lecturer at the Center for Language Education at HKUST. She holds a BA and MA from The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and a second MA from Lancaster University. Her professional interests include assessment and evaluation, creative writing, and multimodal compositions.

## Acknowledgments

No funding was received for the project.
Since the project used four written teacher reflections and course documents, ethical clearance was not required.

The listing of authors correctly identifies their level of contribution to this work.

## Contributor Roles

**Aditi Jhaveri:** Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project Administration; Supervision; Validation; Writing; Writing Review & Editing
**Delian Gaskell:** Data Curation; Writing Review & Editing

**Nicholas Sampson, Kathy Sin, Sandy W.C. Chan:** Data Curation

## Declaration of Possible Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no potential conflict of interest.

# The Experience of EFL Students Engaging in Collaboration Through Project-Based Learning

Duaa Abu-Naji
*The Academic College for Education-Haifa*
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1835-0981

Dr. Nahla Nassar
*The Academic College for Education-Haifa*
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1085-6016

**DOI: 10.23350/eltcrj.223**

**Article History**
Received: Oct 5, 2025
Accepted: Nov 4, 2025
Published: Nov 10, 2025

**Keywords:** Project-Based Learning; collaboration; EFL; critical thinking; problem solving; action research; Arab schools in Israel



## Abstract

This study investigates how Project-Based Learning (PBL) can promote collaboration and critical thinking in an EFL junior-high context. The project was carried out with nine 7th-grade students at a Junior High School in Kfar Kanna, Israel. Across four 45-minute lessons, students worked in three small groups to design a "dream" classroom, library, or schoolyard. Data was collected through classroom observations and interviews with one candidate from each group. The findings indicate that students enjoyed group work and expressed pride in their outcomes. Collaboration appeared in the ways they shared ideas, divided roles, negotiated disagreements, and reached compromises. Groups that appointed a peer leader showed clearer organization and higher productivity. Communication and active listening were essential for resolving disagreements, though some students remained passive or hesitant to participate, requiring teacher support. Overall, the project encouraged problem-solving, communication, and creativity, while shifting responsibility from the teacher to the learners. The study highlights both the potential and the challenges of using PBL to foster collaborative learning in Arab-Israeli EFL classrooms.

## 1. Introduction

Group work has become a common recommendation in modern education because it helps students develop not only academic skills but also social and life skills. When learners work together, they share ideas, listen to different perspectives, and solve problems as a team. These abilities are vital for success in school and for preparing students to participate in society. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, group work is also seen to create more chances for communication and meaningful use of the language. However, group activities are not always successful. Sometimes students do not know how to divide the tasks fairly, or they are not used to listening and responding to each other in a productive way. In many cases, one or two learners dominate the discussion while others remain quiet, which reduces the learning

value of the activity. This made us wonder how teachers can design group work that is structured, fair, and beneficial for all students. One method that offers such structure is Project-Based Learning (PBL), where learners plan, design, and present a shared product together.

### 1.1 Teaching Context

This study was carried out during the primary researcher's practice teaching at a Junior High School in Kfar Kanna, Israel. The participants were nine 7th-grade students, divided into three groups of three. Over four lessons of 45 minutes each, each group chose one of three projects: designing a "dream classroom," a "dream library," or a "dream schoolyard." They were asked to work together to produce a plan, and the teacher (primary researcher) provided a design guide with guiding questions to help them brainstorm ideas, divide responsibilities, and stay organized (see Appendices 1, 2, & 3). The students' first language is Arabic, but they also learn Hebrew as a second language and study English as a foreign language. English is rarely used outside the classroom, so the school environment is the main place where they can practice using it. This made the project especially important because it provided them with an opportunity to use English in a way that felt purposeful and creative, rather than limited to grammar or vocabulary exercises.

### 1.2 The Challenge

In Arab-Israeli schools, English lessons are often dominated by textbooks, focusing heavily on grammar rules, vocabulary lists, and reading comprehension texts. While these are important, this traditional approach leaves little room for student-centered activities. Group work is sometimes introduced, but based on our experiences of observing teachers, we found that in many cases it is done randomly without clear goals or structures. As a result, some students take over while others stay passive. This makes it difficult for learners to develop the collaborative skills that are essential in education and in life. In the primary researcher's own classroom observations as part of practice teaching, she noticed that students sometimes became frustrated when roles were not defined or when decisions could not be reached and, as a result, they would stop trying to make group work function well. They often lacked strategies for compromise, negotiation, and persuasion, all of which are important skills for working with others.

This challenge also reminded the primary researcher of her own experience as a learner. When the primary researcher was a school student, she was rarely given the chance to work in groups. Later, when she began college, she suddenly found herself working on many group assignments, and because she had no background in this kind of learning, she struggled to divide the work fairly and to handle differences of opinion. Sometimes she insisted on her ideas and found it hard to accept others'; other times she gave up too quickly. These struggles showed the primary researcher how important it is for students to be introduced to collaboration earlier. As a teacher-in-training, the primary researcher wanted to create learning experiences where students practice these skills now, so they will not face the same difficulties later on.

### 1.3 The Issue to Explore

Based on these challenges, we wanted to explore whether PBL could provide a stronger framework for group work in our classrooms. Unlike traditional group activities, PBL asks learners to plan and create something meaningful together. This requires them to communicate, divide responsibilities, and make joint decisions. PBL also supports the goals of the 2020 Israeli

English curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2020), which highlights the development of 21st-century skills, including collaboration, creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking. By working on a project, students can practice these skills while also using English more naturally. However, despite these policy goals, we have observed from her experiences in schools that many teachers remain hesitant to adopt PBL, perhaps because they have not received sufficient training in its methods. Some seem unfamiliar with how to design and manage project-based tasks effectively, while others find it difficult to implement such approaches in large classes or under the pressure of meeting heavy curricular demands and preparing students for exams.

### 1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action research was to examine how 7th grade EFL Arab-Israeli students experienced collaboration when engaged in a PBL task. We wanted to see whether they would divide responsibilities more fairly, whether quieter students would have more chances to participate, and how they would deal with disagreements. We were also interested in the role of the teacher in guiding and supporting the process. For the primary researcher, this study was not only about testing PBL as a teaching method but also about improving her own practice. She wanted to learn how to create opportunities where all students can feel involved, confident, and responsible for their work. By looking at both the successes and the difficulties of this project, we hoped to discover whether PBL could be an effective approach for fostering collaboration in Arab-Israeli EFL classrooms.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Traditional Learning in EFL

For many years, education has been dominated by traditional, teacher-centered approaches (Tularam & Machisella, 2018). In such classrooms, teachers control the flow of information while students are expected to memorize and reproduce knowledge. While this approach ensures coverage of curriculum content, it leaves little space for creativity, autonomy, or problem-solving (Tularam & Machisella, 2018).

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, this teacher-centered model is still common, with lessons often textbook-driven and emphasizing grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (Bolsunovskaya et al., 2015; Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009; Nguyen, 2011). Although such practices can build linguistic accuracy, they offer fewer opportunities for meaningful communication and real-world use of English (Bell, 2010; Nguyen, 2011). As a result, students frequently work individually on form-focused exercises rather than on fluency and interaction (Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Tularam & Machisella, 2018). In Arab- Israeli schools, where planned classroom work is a primary site for English use, the national curriculum explicitly encourages collaboration and purposeful language use (Ministry of Education, 2020).

### 2.2 Group Work in Education and EFL

Group work emerges as a response to the limitations of traditional learning. Instead of working alone, students collaborate, share ideas, and solve problems together. In collaborative activity, learners co-regulate and ground shared understanding rather than simply splitting tasks (Dillenbourg et al., 1996), and cooperative structures specify how participation and

accountability are organized (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). Research shows that group work can deepen learning and critical thinking when structures and facilitation are present (Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007), but typical challenges include uneven contributions and conflict (Aslanides et al., 2016).

In EFL classrooms, group work creates authentic opportunities to use the target language. As Pinner (2013) explains, authenticity in language learning is not merely about using "real" materials or native-speaker models but about authenticity of purpose; when students use the target language as a tool to learn and communicate meaningful content. In this sense, authenticity is directly linked to learners' engagement, aims, and reasons for communication, making project-based learning particularly effective for promoting purposeful and meaningful language use (Pinner, 2013). Projects can integrate skills and increase motivation (Gibbes & Carson, 2014), and project work has been shown to enhance EFL learners' confidence and independence (Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009). To keep participation balanced, cooperative norms and roles are helpful (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). At the same time, group projects can strain time and workload distribution (Bolsunovskaya et al., 2015; Aslanides et al., 2016). Together, these findings indicate that group work can make EFL learning more meaningful, provided structure and teacher support are in place (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007).

### 2.3 PBL in Education: Origins and Wider Use

The limitations of both traditional teaching and unstructured group work led to more structured, student-centered approaches such as Project-Based Learning (PBL). PBL has its roots in medical education, where Barrows (1986) introduced problem-based learning to prepare students for real cases rather than memorized facts. Dewey's (1938) experiential learning also influenced PBL, emphasizing that students learn best through meaningful, hands-on experience.

Over time, PBL spread across disciplines. Thomas (2000) described it as an extended inquiry guided by a driving question; Gibbes and Carson (2014) demonstrated its capacity to integrate skills and motivate learners; and Nguyen (2011) defined PBL as learning organized around complex tasks, decision-making, and product creation. PBL has also been linked to 21st-century skills such as collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking (Bell, 2010; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). At the same time, studies warn of difficulties: engagement can rise, but implementation often requires significant resources and sustained facilitation to prevent uneven contributions (Aslanides et al., 2016; Bolsunovskaya et al., 2015).

### 2.4 PBL in the EFL Classroom

In language learning, PBL gives learners authentic reasons to use English. Through projects, students plan, negotiate, and present ideas in purposeful ways (Gibbes & Carson, 2014). PBL has encouraged more active participation and confidence in speaking (Karyawati & Ashadi, 2018) and increased teamwork and engagement in EFL classes (Kavlu, 2017). Motivation can improve, but without guidance, participation may become superficial (Bolsunovskaya et al., 2015). Effective teacher facilitation helps keep learners engaged and on task (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007). Very recent studies extend this picture: a quasi-experimental study linked gains in EFL writing performance to project work that strengthened idea generation, organization, and peer cooperation (Andargie et al., 2025). In EFL speaking classes, PBL increased behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, although agentic

engagement (speaking up to shape the work) did not rise without explicit support for autonomy and voice (Zhong et al., 2025).

### 2.5 Teaching Context: The Arab-Israeli EFL Environment

The teaching and learning of English for Arab students in Israel occur within a multilingual environment where English is often a fourth language (Amara, 2014). This complexity begins with Arabic itself, which is diglossic: the spoken dialect differs considerably from Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the formal written variety (Saiegh-Haddad, 2003). Because of this linguistic gap, children encounter MSA in school almost as a second language (Saiegh-Haddad, 2003; Saiegh-Haddad & Henkin-Roitfarb, 2014). Learning to read and write, therefore, requires bridging significant differences between spoken and written Arabic.

In addition to Arabic, students must master Hebrew, the dominant language in education, work, and public life. Proficiency in Hebrew is essential for academic and professional advancement (Amara, 2014). English, meanwhile, is highly valued as a global language of science, technology, and communication, but it competes with Hebrew for instructional time and emphasis.

The national English curriculum applies uniformly to all schools. However, research shows that textbooks emphasize American culture while Arab culture appears in only about 4.5% of the content (Amara, 2017). Teachers note that culturally familiar materials enhance motivation, while an exclusive focus on Western content can reduce engagement (Amara, 2017). This lack of cultural representation partly explains differences in English achievement levels between Arab and Jewish students (Amara, 2014).

Thus, the EFL classroom functions not only as a space for language learning but also as an environment where students navigate multiple linguistic and cultural frameworks (Amara, 2014, 2017).

### 2.6 PBL and Collaboration in Arab-Israeli Contexts

Despite its promise, research focused specifically on PBL in Arab-Israeli junior-high EFL classrooms appears limited; much of the Israeli PBL literature addresses other subjects or mixed settings. At the policy level, the English Curriculum 2020 explicitly promotes collaboration, problem-solving, and creativity and encourages the use of group work and projects to foster these skills (Ministry of Education, 2020). These priorities make it timely to examine how PBL might offer a more structured pathway for equitable participation in Arab-Israeli EFL lessons and how teachers can support students during projects in this context.

### 2.7 Summary and Gap

The literature shows a clear progression: traditional learning builds knowledge but limits autonomy; group work opens possibilities but requires careful structure; and PBL provides a framework that integrates authentic communication, collaboration, and 21st-century skills (Bell, 2010; Karyawati & Ashadi, 2018; Kavlu, 2017; Nguyen, 2011; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The newest EFL evidence (2025) reinforces this, showing measurable gains in writing and broad engagement, while also reminding us that learners still need visible scaffolds to participate equitably (Andargie et al., 2025; Zhong et al., 2025).

This study addresses the gap by exploring how Arab-Israeli junior-high students experienced group work in a PBL project and what supported or hindered collaboration. The research questions were: What is the experience of EFL students in collaborating through PBL? and What is the impact of PBL on developing collaboration and critical thinking skills in the English language for EFL junior high students?

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Design

The researchers' goals were to evaluate the impact of PBL on the development of collaboration and critical thinking skills, as well as the experience of EFL students in collaborating through PBL. Therefore, a qualitative action study design was the most appropriate approach to choose for this research, as it allows for an in-depth, contextual, and participant-centered exploration. Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences (Tenny et al., 2022). Exploratory Action Research (EAR) helps teachers explore, understand, and improve their own practice in context (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018).

### 3.2 Context and Participants

This research was conducted during the primary researcher's teaching practicum at a Junior High School in Kfar Kanna, Israel. The school serves Arab students in grades 7-9. English is taught as a foreign language, alongside Arabic (the mother tongue) and Hebrew (the second language). Students are exposed to English mainly in the classroom, as it is rarely used in their daily lives. The participants were nine seventh-grade students (four boys and five girls) aged 12-13. All were native Arabic speakers with somewhat similar English proficiency levels, though individual differences existed in confidence and willingness to engage and speak. Students were divided into three groups of three. Each group included learners of varying ability, so stronger and weaker students worked together. This arrangement reflected the study's aim, which was to explore collaboration and how students supported or struggled with each other in group work. The project was carried out across four consecutive 45-minute English lessons. The lessons were part of the normal timetable and approved by both the school and the primary researcher's practicum supervisor. The classroom teacher is also the primary researcher in this study/

### 3.3 Procedure

We followed the principles of PBL. Instead of letting students work individually on textbook exercises, we encouraged them to collaborate on a project that required planning, negotiation, and a final product. Each group of the three groups was assigned one of three creative topics: Group A: Design Your Dream Classroom; Group B: Design Your Dream School Library; Group C: Design Your Dream Schoolyard. The time allocated for the project was four lessons of 45 minutes each. To guide their collaboration, the teacher provided a planning guide that included prompts for brainstorming, dividing roles, and writing brief descriptions in English (see Appendices 1, 2 & 3). This ensured the activity had structure and encouraged participation from all group members.

The project unfolded in four stages.

**Lesson 1 (Introduction and Planning)**

The teacher explained the goals of the project and divided students into groups. Each group selected a topic, but we began brainstorming together as a big group so that all groups could help each other with ideas. The small groups then started recording suitable ideas in the planning guide, discussing features they wanted to include in their poster, and the material needed for the project. Students were encouraged to maintain their conversations in English.

**Lesson 2 (Developing Ideas)**

Groups started working on their projects. They began sketching drafts and writing short English sentences. Roles such as "note-taker," "designer," and "idea-giver" were discussed. The teacher moved between groups, prompting quieter students and supporting vocabulary or grammar when needed.

**Lesson 3 (Creating the Product)**

Students created their final posters after making changes and improving the drafts. They wrote sentences in English describing their dream classroom, library, or schoolyard, and illustrated the posters with drawings. The teacher observed how groups negotiated wording, shared responsibilities, and solved disagreements.

**Lesson 4 (Presentation)**

Each group presented its poster to the class. All members were encouraged to speak, even briefly, to describe one part of their project. Classmates asked simple questions, giving presenters more opportunities to practice English.

Throughout the project, the teacher's role was that of a facilitator. She supported and guided students but avoided taking over their work. This allowed students to practice making decisions, practice problem-solving, and taking ownership of the learning process.

### 3.4 Data Collection

We used two methods to document collaboration and critical thinking.

1. **Classroom Observations**

The teacher observed all four lessons and documented behaviors and interactions in a notebook (e.g., how roles were divided, how decisions were made, how disagreements were handled, who participated/silent moments, evidence of planning or justifying choices).

After the lessons, the primary researcher analyzed these observation notes to identify patterns related to collaboration (e.g., equal/unequal contribution, leadership moments, turn-taking, negotiation).

2. **Individual Interviews (one per group)**

After the project, the teacher conducted three individual, open-ended interviews, one student from each group, to explore experiences, perceptions, and reflections on PBL's impact on collaboration and critical thinking.

**The interviewees were purposely chosen.**

**Group A** student worked well with peers and divided work equally.
**Group B** student contributed less and did not hold a critical role.
**Group C** student took leadership, helped move the group from argumentative/chaotic to agreeing/achieving.

Interviews were open-ended (to let students speak freely) and focused on: how roles were shared, how decisions were made, what helped/hindered participation, and when they used critical thinking (e.g., comparing options, justifying choices).

### 3.5 Ethics

We obtained permission from the school principal and the homeroom teacher before collecting data. Students were informed that participation was voluntary and unrelated to grades; pseudonyms were used in interviews to protect privacy. All data is stored privately in a password-protected file with access limited only to the researchers.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

We analyzed the observation notes and the three interviews following Tisdell et al. (2025). First, we coded the data line-by-line to identify actions and ideas linked to collaboration (e.g., role-sharing, participation, negotiation, leadership). Next, we grouped related codes into categories and named them. These categories were not predetermined but emerged inductively from the data as recurring behavioral patterns observed across groups. This approach allowed the analysis to remain grounded in participants' actual classroom interactions rather than in pre-established theoretical frameworks. We then refined or merged categories into a manageable set and checked them across data sources (observations vs. interviews) for consistency. Finally, we linked the categories to the research questions to build the themes reported in the Findings. To enhance the credibility of the findings, data were triangulated through both classroom observations and follow-up interviews, and the emerging interpretations were compared across these sources for consistency.

This study assumes that students' observed behaviors and interview responses authentically reflected their engagement and collaboration throughout the project, since the data were collected in their regular classroom setting over several sessions, and the findings from both observations and interviews were consistent.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Overview of outcomes

All three groups finished their projects on time, and during the final stage, each group presented its project to the other groups. They described their topic, explained the ideas they had developed, and justified their designs by discussing why they selected certain ideas or details to include in their projects**.** Students were speaking mostly in English throughout the process; they would switch to Arabic when they were stuck with words or use gestures or even draw the idea they tried to express, but they used English way more than they would in a traditional lesson. Regarding how the work progressed within the groups, group A moved steadily from the first lesson; they communicated easily and divided roles without prompting. Group B and Group C both stalled early with overlapping talk and quick "no's." In Group B, things shifted after the teacher paused them, set a one-by-one speaking rule, and helped them split roles (writer, idea-finder, designer). In Group C, things improved when one student stepped up to coordinate, assigning turns and tasks. The variations observed among the groups can be explained by differences in group dynamics and individual personalities. Group A's structured organization, led by a student who assumed a leadership role, reflected a task-

oriented approach that supported efficiency and role clarity. Group B's equal participation and smooth cooperation suggest high interpersonal compatibility and shared understanding of the task. In contrast, Group C's less balanced participation highlights how varying confidence levels and social comfort can influence collaboration and task performance. Furthermore, each team developed a distinct design style. Group C was more artistic, while the other groups were better at explaining themselves with words. All three groups demonstrated critical thinking skills and worked well together. In their projects, students were creative and thought deeply about their choices, which reflect their needs and wants in their school. Students thought about the smallest details, like the painting color of the walls and how they want items organized, which shows that they care about the place they spend their time at and want it to feel comfortable. Also, two groups integrated technology in their designs, whether it be a smart TV for the class or an iPad for the library to showcase the books found, which shows how integrating technology in schools is important for this generation.

### 4.2 Participants' Projects (Posters)

Figure 1 displays calm blue walls and small lamps ("blue makes us comfortable and calm"); even ceiling lights; only 15 students ("students concentrate better"); seating so everyone can see; Smart TV by the whiteboard; a reading corner; class rules posted; tall windows; a tray to store phones during class.

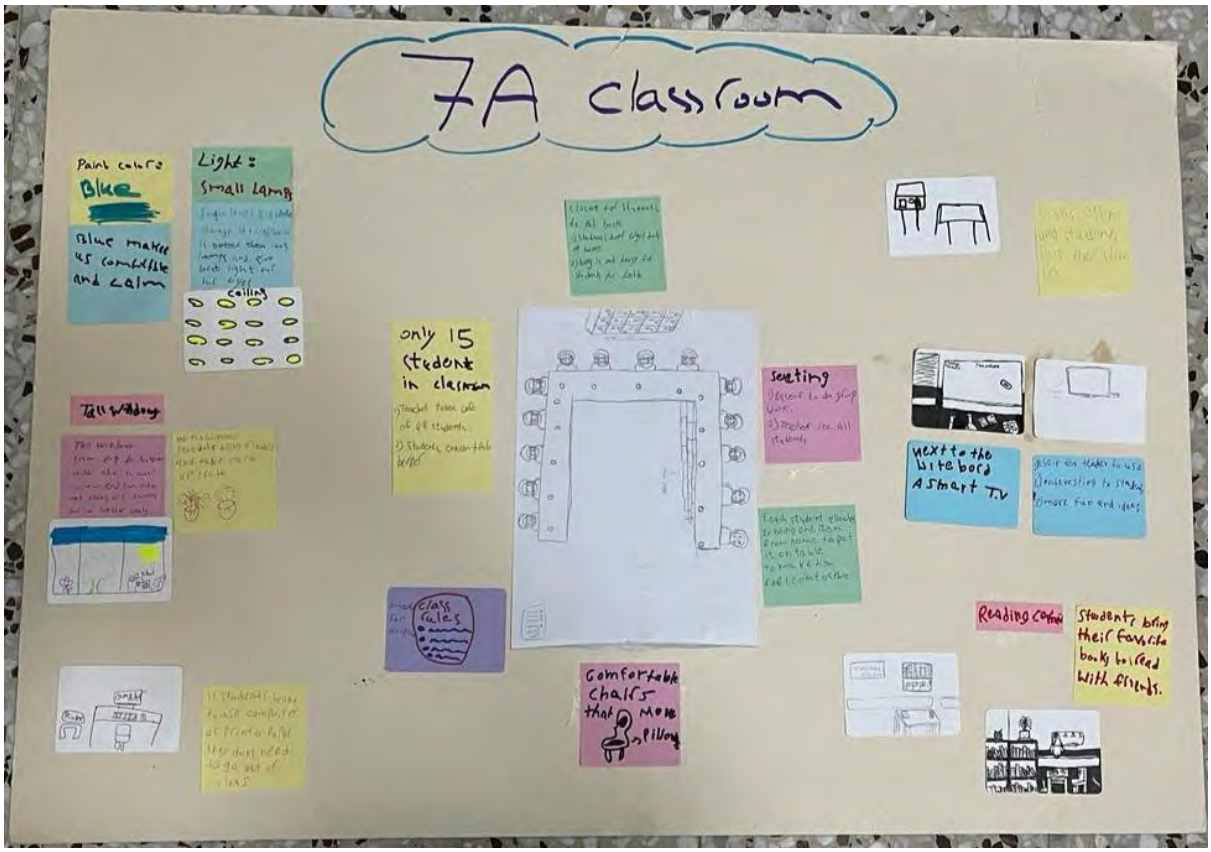



**Figure 1. Group A's Project – Dream Classroom**

Genre shelves, soft couches, a group study room, secretary's desk, noise-cancelling door, cozy stars/planets on the ceiling, warm flooring, and iPad access with rules (cover + lock, opened only by the librarian) are shown in Figure 2.

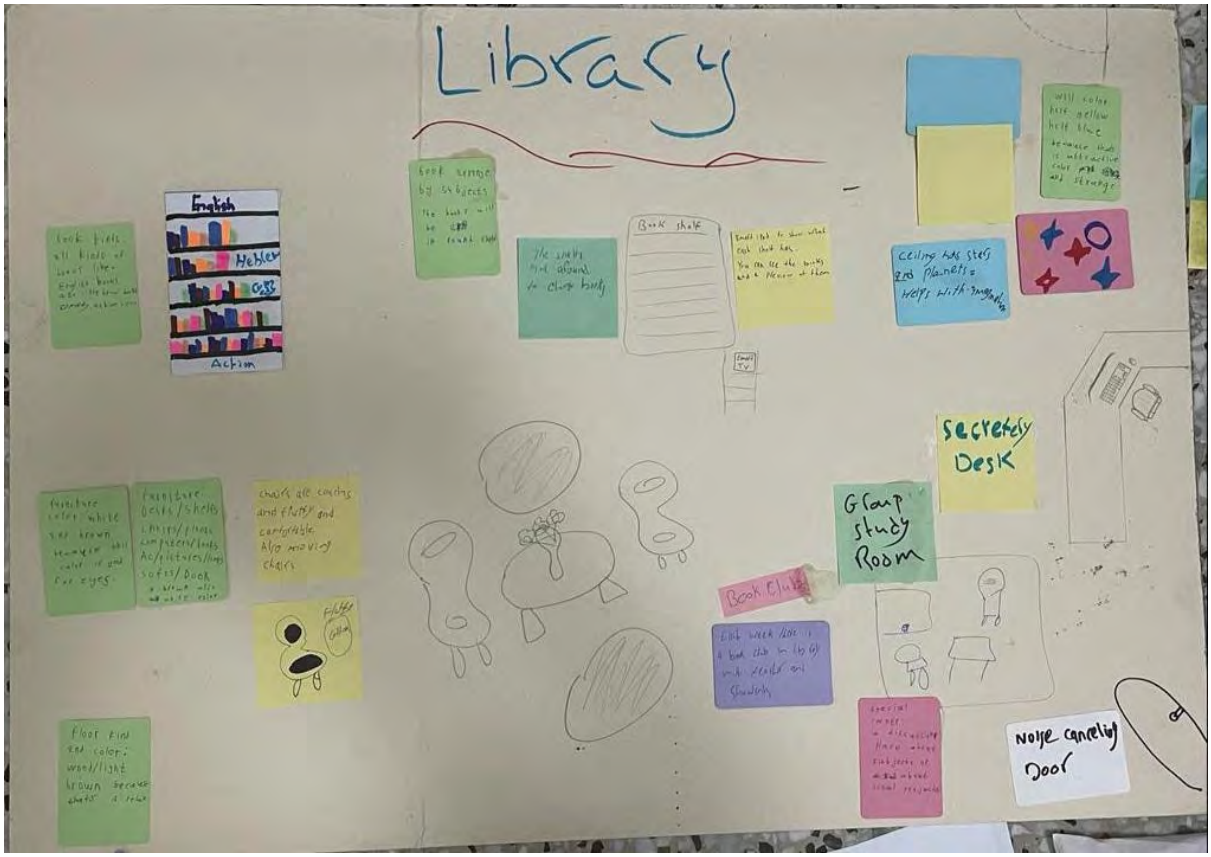



**Figure 2. Group B's Project – Dream Library**


**Figure 3. Group C's Project – Dream Schoolyard**

Figure 3 demonstrates the students' aim for basketball courts, seating zones, student café, first-aid room, restrooms; lots of trees/flowers with a hiking path "to release stress"; chess tables and quiet corners; clear zones for play, rest, and socializing.

## 4.3 Codes and themes

### 4.3.1 Collaboration and Working Together

All groups demonstrated real collaboration; sharing ideas, dividing tasks, and keeping the work moving. Students described enjoying the process, especially with friends (Group A). A good example is Group A's debate over the "culture corner" seen in Figure 1. Rather than getting stuck, the group listened, compared options, and reached an agreement: *"We divided the work… one searched on Google, one came up with ideas, one wrote everything down."* (Student 1). The teacher also noted moments where collaboration sped up after students gave themselves a deadline; a student in group C said to his teammates, "We have ten minutes to finish coming up with ideas and then move to writing", and the teacher noticed that this deadline made them work faster. Group B needed a little push from the teeacher to work; they disagreed a lot and were not listening to each other, so she intervened and divided roles, and from that moment on, they collaborated much better.

### 4.3.2 Leadership and Responsibility

Responsibility looked different across teams. Group A showed rotating responsibility: the writer took the lead during drafting, the designer during layout. Also, in group C, when a leader emerged, everything started to take place, *"I divided the work… I came up with ideas and directed everything… We were fighting all the time; I had to organize them and listen to everyone. I always do."* Once the leader summarized, invited input, and set turns, pace improved and agreement increased. We researchers could also see the importance of a leader in group B. Since they lacked leadership, they had more disagreements and pauses than the other groups. We also realized the importance of a teacher figure. Even though she only monitored to keep the role facilitative rather than controlling, students still needed her to help them work more cooperatively.

In all cases, leadership that organized (rather than controlled) lifted participation.

### 4.3.3 Listening and Communication

Listening and clear talk were essential. In Group B, Student 2 struggled to get a hearing and became passive: *"I did not share as much as the others… I tried; they did not agree."* The atmosphere changed when we introduced turn-taking. Student 2 recalled after being fed up: *"I stopped them and told them to talk one by one… I did not allow someone else to talk before everyone gave their opinions."* Once turns were predictable, more ideas were fed into the discussion and stayed.

### 4.3.4 Patience, Negotiation, and Compromise

Students practiced patience as they argued, justified, and adjusted. Student 1 tried to keep the culture corner: *"I tried to justify… they did not get convinced; then they convinced me with a different idea."* Negotiation led to practical compromises across groups, e.g., Group B's iPad station as seen in Figure 2 gained approval after a safety plan (*"cover and lock, only the librarian opens it"*), and Group C scaled back extra sports areas after hearing *"this is a school, not a summer camp."* These moments showed flexibility as students accepted reasons and moved on.

#### 4.3.5 Individual Contributions and Frustration

At times, individuals held back. Student 2 describes the slide from effort to withdrawal: *"I did not share as much… I did not justify… When they did not listen to me, I did not listen to them."* Later, once turns were enforced and the writer role was assigned, the same student re-entered: *"They came up with ideas and I wrote them."* That role gave a concrete way back in without needing to "win" the debate. However, this compromise could sometimes make students feel dissatisfied with the outcome. For example, Student 2 revealed in the interview that he had an idea of building the library in the schoolyard with greenery all around it. This idea shows creativity, but unfortunately, he did not share it with the group because he feared they would laugh at him!

#### 4.3.6 Reflection and perception of Group work

Group make-up mattered. Group A moved smoothly and needed few prompts. Group B struggled with a shy member until norms were established. Group C illustrated the value of a designated coordinator; once someone summarized options and allocated turns, disagreement shifted to being a decision. According to the teacher's notes, quick time checks and posted steps also helped groups reflect and self-correct. Also, by the final lesson, students spoke positively about the experience. *"So fun! I want to share our ideas with our homeroom teacher…"* (Student 1). *"Tired, but happy and proud of myself."* (Student 3). Students also noted that groups were faster and produced more ideas than working alone. This shows that students realize the benefits and enjoyment of group work.

#### 4.3.7 Creativity and Innovative Solutions

Creativity appeared in purposeful ways. Group B suggested iPads to display book information (which could be seen in Figure 2); technology tied to access and organization. Group C treated the schoolyard like a park, seen in Figure 3 (jogging path, more seating, greenery) to reduce stress. Group A rearranged seating into a rectangular formation for visibility and added a culture corner to celebrate languages/cultures, as seen in Figure 1. Student 2 extended the idea further: *"I would make the library in the yard with flowers and trees… it is better to read in nature; you feel like you are in the story."*

#### 4.3.8 Justification and Standing up for oneself

Students often needed to stand by an idea and justify it. Clear reasons (or quick sketches) changed minds. For example, Student 1 had this idea of a culture corner and said, *"They thought it would be boring… when I drew it and gave an example, they liked it."* Student 2 had a similar experience with the iPads and explained, *"They thought students would break the iPad; I said there is a cover and a lock, and only the librarian can open it."* And student 3 convinced his friends with the greenery the same way: *"They thought it would be muddy and buggy, but when I drew it, they agreed."* I also heard the challenge: Student 2 sometimes avoided defending ideas, *"I did not [justify]… I told them and they said no."*, showing how justification skills are still developing.

#### 4.3.9 Listening to Others and Reluctance

Without norms, reluctance grew quickly. Student 2 admitted mirroring the group: *"When they did not listen to me, I did not listen to them."* Once turn-taking and brief "because…" statements were expected, more ideas stayed on the table and were judged on reasons rather than volume.

#### 4.3.10 Not Working Well with Others When Uncomfortable

Comfort influenced voice. Student 2 said they would work in groups again, "*but with people I am more comfortable with.*" The teacher also saw natural pairs form within groups, which sometimes left a third member quiet until she prompted a check-in. Small seating shifts and specific roles helped balance participation.

#### 4.3.11 Productivity and Passiveness

The teacher observed surges of productivity after micro-goals (e.g., "choose two ideas and justify them"). Students themselves noticed: "*When we knew the steps, we worked.*" Passiveness rose when steps were vague or after repeated rejections, again pointing to the need for visible steps and gentle re-entry roles for quieter students.

#### 4.3.12 Group Environment and Individual Preferences

Productivity often reflected the environment. Groups that sat closer to each other and who made sure they had markers and sticky notes around all the time, generated and captured ideas quickly. Posters with clear labels/zones (e.g., rules, reading corner, tech station) showed that students valued organization. Preference mattered too; liking your partners often meant more initiative, while discomfort pulled some students toward observing rather than leading.

## 5. Discussion

Our goal, as stated in the research questions, was to see what collaboration really looks like for our students when working in groups to create a project. What the teacher saw, and what students told her, points to a simple truth with big consequences for our classrooms. Collaboration did not appear because the teacher asked for it; it appeared when the work was made visible. Once roles, turn-taking, and small next steps were clear, groups behaved like teams, very much the kind of structure cooperative learning recommends (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). When those supports were not in place, talk overlapped, decisions stalled, and one or two voices carried too much weight, which matches Dillenbourg et al.'s (1996) warning about weak mutual regulation. This pattern is also noted in recent EFL work. PBL lifts participation when roles and next steps are visible; without those scaffolds, some voices still fade (Zhong et al., 2025).

Group A showed the cleanest version of this. From the first lesson, they said, in Student 1's words, "we divided the work… one searched on Google, one came up with ideas, one wrote everything down," and then they just kept going. That visibility, who does what, seems almost trivial, yet it unlocked steady progress and kept everyone inside the task, which matches Johnson & Johnson's view on the importance of clear roles and individual accountability in group work (1987). Group B and Group C taught us the same lesson in reverse. Early on, they were noisy and circular; ideas were thrown out quickly and just as quickly dismissed. The moment the teacher named a simple routine ("one person speaks at a time") and asked them to split roles, the whole climate changed. Student 2 even described calling that pause herself: "I stopped them and told them to talk one by one." After that, participation widened and ideas began to move somewhere, exactly what the light, just-in-time scaffolds in PBL are meant to do (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007), and in line with 2025 evidence on the value of explicit participation supports (Zhong et al., 2025).

Leadership mattered, but not the "I will do it" kind. In Group C, one student stepped up, and the group finally found a rhythm, but what worked was how he led. He did not take the

marker and own the poster; he listened, summarized, gave turns, and kept time. “I divided the work… I directed everything… I had to organize them and listen to everyone,” he said afterwards. That facilitative style balanced pace with inclusion, which fits guidance on guided facilitation in collaborative inquiry (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007) and the cooperative-learning focus on promotive interaction rather than task capture (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). When leadership slid toward fixing things alone, others stepped back; when it stayed focused on organizing the work, more students stayed engaged, and decisions came faster.

The mechanism that turned arguments into decisions was justification. Over and over, a short reason or a quick sketch settled debate better than repeating the same point. The “culture corner” in Group A was accepted only after Student 1 drew it and showed what would happen there. Group B’s iPad station became acceptable when a safety plan appeared: “a cover and a lock… only the librarian can open it.” Group C’s greenery won students over only when Student 3 drew it and showed how it would look. In each case, a brief “because…” replaced personal preference with something the group could evaluate. That mattered for language learning, too. Project work is argued to make language purposeful and audience-focused (Bell, 2010; Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009), which we saw here in explanations, comparisons, and polite persuasion, and it aligns with 2025 evidence linking PBL to gains in EFL writing via stronger idea generation and organization (Andargie et al., 2025).

At the same time, the data reminded us how fragile participation can be. Student 2’s arc in Group B is a good example. After a few early rejections, she moved from trying to not trying: “I did not share as much… I did not justify… when they did not listen to me, I did not listen to them.” No speech about “speak up” would have solved that. That student was frustrated with her group, and perhaps her shyness did not allow her to speak up for herself, so it was obvious that the teacher needed to intervene so that she would not end up being marginalized. What worked was structural, a predictable speaking order and a concrete role, writer, brought her back without having to “win” an argument. This is precisely why simple interaction norms and individual accountability matter (Johnson & Johnson, 1987), and it echoes the 2025 finding that agentic engagement does not automatically rise without explicit support for autonomy and voice (Zhong et al., 2025).

Moreover, emotions were not a side story in this study. Students named the highs and lows plainly: “So fun!,” “tired, but happy and proud of myself,” and “it makes me angry sometimes, but it teaches me to be patient.” We noticed that frustration spiked when next steps were fuzzy and dropped as soon as we posted a micro-goal or agreed on turns. In other words, the same structures that supported fairness also stabilized the classroom mood long enough for everyone to finish well and feel ownership of the product. In our context, where English is rarely used outside school, this kind of stable, purposeful space matters.

Another thread running through the projects is that students moved from decoration to design. When the teacher kept asking “why?”, the posters shifted toward needs and guided students to show creativity. Figure 1 shows comfort (blue walls, small lamps), focus (seating so everyone can see), safety (lockable tech), inclusion (a culture corner), and Figure 3 shows wellbeing (trees, paths, quiet corners). Students were not just adding nice features; they were solving problems, very much in line with PBL accounts that highlight problem-solving, decision-making, and tangible products (Bell, 2010; Nguyen, 2011) and with EFL studies reporting higher engagement and purposeful language in project work (Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009). This also sits well with recent results that connect PBL cycles to

measurable gains in writing when idea generation and organization are emphasized (Andargie et al., 2025).

Context still mattered. Group A benefited from being friends; they had trust and easy communication from the start. Group B showed how quickly discomfort can push a student to the edge of the task, and how quickly a simple routine can pull her back in. Group C showed the value and the risk of a "head"; when the job was to invite voices and move decisions, the role helped everyone; when the job slid toward doing the task, engagement shrank. Across all three, small physical choices (sitting close, having markers and sticky notes ready) made it easier to externalize thinking and keep everyone's ideas visible. These observations sit alongside critiques of traditional, teacher-centered patterns that can limit autonomy unless participation is intentionally redesigned (Tularam & Machisella, 2018). This is also the direction encouraged by the English Curriculum 2020 for junior-high EFL (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Pulling all this together, our main takeaway is practical. Structure made fairness possible. Roles, turn-taking, and a steady expectation of "give me a reason" turned "being in a group" into doing group work. When those pieces were visible, quiet students tried again, active students started to listen, and groups produced designs they were proud to defend, like a culture corner that convinced others after a sketch, an iPad plan that felt safe with a simple rule, and a green yard that won support once it was drawn. At the same time, the findings showed us how sometimes things might not go the way we want them to; the teacher wanted all students to work comfortably, but Student 2, who had some frustration, showed her that group work cannot be perfect and that some students naturally shine in group work while others take on the passive role, which recent EFL evidence also notes. Overall engagement can rise under PBL, while agentic participation still needs explicit scaffolds (Zhong et al., 2025). For us, that is the bridge between the literature and her classroom. PBL gives a clear purpose, and small, visible structures make that purpose equitable and doable in our setting.

## 6. Reflection

This project made us more convinced that group work is essential in the classroom and showed us that it needs structure and a goal, which are things PBL contains. This research has also changed the way the teacher sees her role. The teacher (primary researcher) went in hoping students would "work well together when they have a structure"; she came out realizing that her job is to build the conditions that make that possible. We also realized that small details could make a huge difference in group work dynamics; naming roles, asking for one voice at a time, posting the next tiny step. When the teacher did that, groups behaved like teams. When she did not, talk overlapped, decisions stalled, and one or two voices carried too much weight. Watching one student slide from trying → rejected → silent taught the teacher to act during the task, not after it is done! Because she used to think that the teacher should not intervene while students are working, but some cases require us to step in and change things up.

The teacher also changed her mind about several things. She used to worry that appointing a "group head" would silence others; this study showed her that when leadership is framed as facilitation, inviting, summarizing, and changing decisions, it actually opens space. The teacher used to fear that norms would kill creativity but realized that a few light norms like turn-taking, clear roles, and a short 'because' for every choice freed creativity, because ideas were finally heard and judged on reasons, not on volume. And she no longer reads silence as

"has nothing to say." In this research, she noticed that silence often meant "needs a way in"; a routine and a concrete job were usually enough to unlock that voice. Finally, the teacher underestimated how persuasive quick visuals can be. A 30-second sketch, the culture corner, the iPad station with a lock, the green yard, changed minds faster than long talk and produced better language for persuasion!

This research also taught us that group work cannot go perfectly as planned! No matter how hard we try, some students will still take passive roles while others shine. Sometimes it is due to group dynamics, while other times it is related to abilities. The teacher just has to do her best and try to make things work and intervene when necessary.

If we ran this research again, we would keep the heart of the task but front-load the structure the teacher ended up inventing mid-stream. The primary researcher would give more time to explaining how the groups will work and come up with a better rationale behind dividing the groups. We could create role cards (facilitator, recorder, time-keeper, researcher) and state the simple rule of one-at-a-time talk. We would post a visible task board: Ideas → Select → Justify → Draft → Finalize, with short time boxes so pace is shared, not carried by the teacher alone. We would put sentence starters on the table (*We chose ___because ___. This solves ___ by ___.*) and add a quick "sketch before we decide" moment whenever a proposal is contested, because drawings moved the groups forward without argument. Before any final choice, the teacher would run a brief check-in, starting with the quietest voice, so participation does not depend on confidence alone. She would encourage stopping midway through to reflect on what happened and how we can fix things.

Most of all, we are leaving this project more convinced that purpose and light structure are the right recipe for our classrooms. PBL gave the students a reason to collaborate; the small routines made collaboration fair, efficient, and learnable. When the structure was visible, quiet students tried again, active students listened, and the room felt steady enough for everyone to be proud in the end of what they built.

## 7. Limitations

Since the participants were the primary researcher's students, whose levels of English and characters she knows, no pre-test or post-test were conducted to check if their language improved or if their critical thinking advanced. She just noticed through their group work that they were showing critical thinking skills they had not shown before and were using the language in a way they never did in their normal classes. However, a researcher who is not familiar with their participants would find it more effective to run tests to check improvements. Also, in terms of generalizability, we would not claim these results could be broadly generalizable. As Stake (1995) describes, this research can be understood as an intrinsic case study, where the goal is to explore a particular teaching situation for its own sake rather than to generalize findings to other contexts. The value of the study lies in the insights it provides into one teacher's classroom and the practical understandings that may inspire other educators facing similar challenges. That said, some patterns definitely feel transferable, for example, dividing clear roles, using turn-taking to keep talk fair, having to present an outcome, and handling disagreements either through brief teacher intervention or peer leadership that facilitates, not controls. Moreover, this research will interest teachers because the findings make group dynamics visible, identifying which routines fostered collaboration and which conditions led some students to the sidelines. The study shows why it matters to prepare simple

structures (who does what, in what order, by when) while leaving room for creativity and student responsibility. It also suggests that PBL can lift ordinary group work to the next level by giving a real purpose for collaboration and a natural reason to justify choices. In short, the context is specific, but the strategies are easy to adapt.

## 8. Recommendations

It would be interesting for teachers to look closely at the points that made group work better: giving students a light structure, asking them to take turns when speaking, and dividing roles so everyone knows what to do. These small moves made a clear difference in the researcher's class, and they were easy to adapt. It would also be useful to explore how groups are formed. Should students choose their own teams, or should the teacher assign them? In our project, Group A were friends and worked smoothly, but that will not always be the case. Sometimes friends may stall more than they work or lean on each other unevenly and one ends up doing most of the work. Paying attention to these patterns can help teachers plan groups more intentionally. It would also be interesting to research a few related questions. For example: How do existing friendships shape participation, do they help or hide unequal effort? How do different learning styles inside one group support or challenge collaboration? What role can technology play in making group work richer and more organized? And what are the long-term effects? Does collaborative work, especially within PBL, strengthen students' thinking skills and their attitudes toward working with others over time? We could also check how different ages interact with the PBL method. Looking at these questions in real classrooms will give us practical answers teachers can use right away.

## 9. Conclusion

To conclude, this study was a turning point for the primary researcher. It was the first time she paused to ask what really sits behind "group work" and how she could make it work better. When the primary researcher did this research, she was still a teacher in training. She wanted her students to do more of the talking and thinking, not just watch her talk throughout the lesson. But whenever she tried quick, mid-lesson group tasks with random group choices and no adequate roles for everyone, things got messy. Voices overlapped, a few students carried out the work, and they ended with weak outcomes, which made the teacher and her students frustrated. The teacher was not against group work; she was missing the pieces that make it function.

This project helped us see those missing pieces and gave her practical habits we can carry forward. The teacher learned that if she wants real collaboration, she should design it by setting a simple structure, making space for every student, and giving the task a purpose strong enough to pull them in. Going forward, the primary researcher will use group work more often, but also more purposefully, with clear guidelines, roles that include everyone, and steps that make progress visible. The teacher is confident her students will get more out of it because they will know how to begin, how to listen, and how to decide.

We also believes group work in Arab schools in Israel deserves more attention. Teachers in our context may recognize the same patterns the teacher struggled with: friends who work smoothly one day and unevenly the next, quiet students who disappear when talk gets loud, "quick" group tasks that do not add up to much. Her hope is that colleagues reading this will

find at least one concrete idea they can adapt to improve how groups are formed, how roles are shared, and how decisions are made. Finally, we see PBL as a natural way to raise the level of group work in our classrooms. It gives students a reason to collaborate and a product worth defending. With that purpose, and a few simple routines, group work can move from a side activity to a central part of learning.

1

## References

Amara, M. (2014). Policy and teaching English to Palestinian students in Israel: An ecological perspective to language education policies. In D. Gorter, V. Zenotz, & J. Cenoz (Eds.), *Minority languages and multilingual education: Bridging the local and the global* (pp. 136–149). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7317-2_7

Amara, M. (2017). The representation of cultural elements in English-language textbooks in Israel: Implications for Arab students. *Israel Studies in Language and Society, 10*(1), 101–128.

Andargie, A., Amogne, D., & Tefera, E. (2025). Effects of project-based learning on EFL learners' writing performance. *PLOS ONE, 20*(1), e0317518. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0317518

Aslanides, C. D., Kalfa, V., Athanasiadou, S., Gianelos, Z., & Karapatsias, V. (2016, September). Advantages, disadvantages, and the viability of project-based learning integration in engineering studies curriculum: The Greek case. *Proceedings of the 44th SEFI Conference* (pp. 12–15). Tampere, Finland. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17021001

Barrows, H. S. (1986). A taxonomy of problem-based learning methods. *Medical Education, 20*(6), 481–486. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2923.1986.tb01386.x

Bell, S. (2010). Project-based learning for the 21st century: Skills for the future. *The Clearing House, 83*(2), 39–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098650903505415

Bolsunovskaya, L. M., Phillips, C., Korotchenko, T. V., Matveenko, I. A., Strelnikova, A. B., & Ulyanova, O. S. (2015). Project-based method in teaching foreign language for specific purposes. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 215*, 176–180. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.615

Dewey, J. (1938/1976). *Experience and Education.* Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Co. https://dn720204.ca.archive.org/0/items/experienceeducat00dewe_0/experienceeducat00dewe_0.pdf

Dillenbourg, P., Traum, D., & Schneider, D. (1996, September). Grounding in multi-modal task-oriented collaboration. In *Proceedings of the European Conference on AI in Education* (pp. 401–407). https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327809jls1501_9

Fragoulis, I. & Tsiplakides, I. (2009). Project-based learning in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Greek primary schools: From theory to practice. *English Language Teaching, 2*(3), 113–119. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v2n3p113

Gibbes, M., & Carson, L. (2014). Project-based language learning: an activity theory analysis. *Innovation in language learning and teaching, 8*(2), 171-189. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2013.793689

Hmelo-Silver, C. E., Duncan, R. G., & Chinn, C. A. (2007). Scaffolding and achievement in problem-based and inquiry learning: A response to Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark (2006). *Educational Psychologist, 42*(2), 99–107. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520701263368

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1987). *Learning together and alone: Cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning* (5th ed.). Allyn & Bacon. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003106760-3

Karyawati, A., & Ashadi, A. (2018). Innovation in the classroom: Engaging English as a foreign-learning students using project-based learning. *LingTera, 5*(1), 61–67. https://doi.org/10.21831/lt.v5i1.17067

Kavlu, A. (2017). Implementation of project-based learning (PBL) in EFL classrooms in Fezalar educational institutions (Iraq). *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies, 4*(2), 67–79. https://doi.org/10.23918/ijsses.v4i2sip67

Ministry of Education. (2020). *English curriculum 2020: For junior high school (February 2020).* https://meyda.education.gov.il/files/Mazkirut_Pedagogit/English/CurriculumIntermediate2.pdf

Nguyen, T. V. L. (2011). Project-based learning in teaching English as a foreign language. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *27*(2).

Pinner, R. S. (2013). Authenticity and CLIL: Examining authenticity from an international CLIL perspective. *International CLIL Research Journal, 2*(1), 44–57. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429032332-6-7

Saiegh-Haddad, E. (2003). Linguistic distance and initial reading acquisition: The case of Arabic diglossia. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 24*(3), 431–451. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0142716403000225

Saiegh-Haddad, E., & Henkin-Roitfarb, R. (2014). The structure of Arabic language and orthography. In E. Saiegh-Haddad & R. M. Joshi (Eds.), *Handbook of Arabic Literacy* [Literacy Studies 9]. Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-8545-7_1

Smith, R., & Rebolledo, P. (2018). *A handbook for exploratory action research*. British Council. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications/resource-books/handbook-exploratory-action-research

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Sage Publications.

Thomas, J. W. (2000). *A review of research on project-based learning*. Autodesk Foundation.

Tisdell, E. J., Merriam, S. B., & Stuckey-Peyrot, H. L. (2025). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* John Wiley & Sons.

Trilling, B., & Fadel, C. (2009). *21st century skills: Learning for life in our times*. John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.47-5788

Tularam, G. A., & Machisella, P. (2018). Traditional vs non-traditional teaching and learning strategies: The case of e-learning! *International Journal for Mathematics Teaching and Learning, 19*(1), 129-158. https://doi.org/10.4256/ijmtl.v19i1.21

Zhong, J., Ismail, L., & Lin, Y. (2025). Investigating EFL students' engagement in project-based speaking activities: From a multi-dimensional perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology, 16*, 1598513. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1598513

## About the Authors

**Duaa Abu-Naji** is an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher and graduate student at the Academic Arab College for Education in Haifa, Israel. Her research interests include bilingualism, sociolinguistics, and language pedagogy in EFL classrooms. Email: doaa.abo.naji11@gmail.com

**Dr. Nahla Nassar** is a lecturer and researcher at the Arab Academic College for Education in Israel–Haifa. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in E-Research and Technology-Enhanced Learning from Lancaster University, United Kingdom. Her research interests encompass English language teacher education, technology integration in language learning, and the development of Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) among preservice English teachers. She also teaches and mentors in Exploratory Action Research, promoting reflective and inquiry-based professional learning. Her scholarly work investigates how digital pedagogies and practitioner research contribute to teachers' growth and innovation in technology-enhanced contexts. Email: Nahla.shaw@gmail.com

## Acknowledgments

**Duaa:** I am very grateful first to my seventh graders for their energy, cooperation, and patience. They taught me what real collaboration looks like. Thank you to the homeroom teacher who opened her classroom and to my supervisor and the school principal for giving me their permission and support throughout this project. Special thanks to my mentor, Dr. Nahla Nassar, whose ongoing support for her students continuously opens doors to meaningful opportunities for growth in the field. Her guidance, feedback, and encouragement throughout every stage of this study were invaluable, and her collaboration as a co-author made the experience even more enriching and rewarding. I would also like to thank the *ELT Classroom Research Journal* for recognizing and supporting beginner researchers like myself. Being given the opportunity to publish my first classroom-based study has been deeply motivating and meaningful, inspiring me to continue exploring research in the field of English language teaching.

**Dr. Nassar:** My gratitude goes to my co-author, Duaa Abu-Naji, for her remarkable dedication and thoughtful engagement throughout all stages of this project. Her work reflects curiosity and professionalism that enrich our field. I would also like to express appreciation to the Academic Arab College for Education in Haifa, whose continued encouragement enables students to carry out research as an integral component of their academic studies. Sincere thanks are further extended to MenTRnet and Professor Richard Smith for their ongoing efforts to promote Exploratory Action Research and to nurture teachers as reflective practitioners around the world.

## Author Contributions

The study was conceptualized and conducted by Duaa Abu-Naji as part of her undergraduate research course under the supervision of Dr. Nahla Nassar. Duaa designed the research instruments, collected and analyzed the data, and prepared the initial manuscript draft. Dr. Nassar supervised the study design, guided data analysis and interpretation, and substantially revised the manuscript for publication. Both authors contributed to refining the arguments, ensuring academic rigor, and approved the final version for submission.

## Declaration of Possible Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study. No financial support was received for the conduct or publication of this research. Both authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree with its content and the order of authorship. This submission represents the authors' original work and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

## Appendices

## (Sample Design Guide Questions)

### Appendix 1. Design Your Dream Classroom

**Design your dream classroom!**

What would be your favorite color for the walls and furniture in your dream classroom? Why?

How would you arrange the desks and chairs in your dream classroom? Would you prefer groups or rows? Why?

What kinds of decorations or pictures would you hang on the walls of your dream classroom? What would they show?

If you could choose one special area in your dream classroom, what would it be? Would it be a reading corner, a drawing station, or something else?

What type of technology or electronic devices would you like to have in your dream classroom? How would they help you in your studies?

What would you like to have on your classroom desks to help you stay organized? Would it be pencil holders, folders, or something else?

What kind of seating options would you like to have in your dream classroom? Cushions, bean bags, or regular chairs? Why?

## Appendix 2. Design Your Dream School Library

**Design your dream school library!**

What would you like to see in your dream school library? Books, computers, or both? Why? What technology would you like to have in your dream school library? Computers, tablets, or e-readers? Why?

How would you arrange the books on the shelves in your dream school library? Would you organize them by subject or in alphabetical order, by genre, author, or something else? Why?

How would you decorate the walls of your dream school library? Posters, artwork, or student projects? Why?

If you could choose one special area in your dream school library, what would it be? A quiet reading corner, a group discussion space, or a storytelling area? Why?

What colors would you use for the furniture and walls in your dream school library? Bright colors, neutral colors, or a mix? Why?

How would you make your dream school library a comfortable place to study? Soft lighting, cozy rugs, or quiet music? Why?

How would you organize the library resources in your dream school library? Labels, signs, or a catalog system? Why?

## Appendix 3. Design Your Dream School Schoolyard

**Design your dream schoolyard!**

What kind of plants, or flowers would you like to see in your dream school yard? Why?

How would you like the playground equipment to be in your dream school yard? Swings, slides, or climbing structures? Why?

What kind of seating would you like to have in your dream school yard? Benches, picnic tables, or blankets on the grass? Why?

How would you like to decorate the walls or fences in your dream school yard? Artwork, murals, or colorful banners? Why?

What games or sports would you like to play in your dream school yard? Soccer, basketball, or tag? Why?

How would you make your dream school yard a fun place to relax? Music, outdoor games, or a designated quiet area? Why?

If you could choose one special feature for your dream school yard, what would it be? A small pond, a mini-garden, or a birdhouse? Why?

# Investigating Students' Inability to Speak in English in the Classroom

Mercy Mah Iwuyum
*CAMELTA Research Group*
https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8248-955X

**DOI: 10.23350/eltcrj.224**

**Article History**
Received: Feb 6, 2024
Accepted: Oct 16, 2025
Published: Nov 10, 2025

**Keywords:** interaction; motivation; learners' needs



## Abstract

Teaching English as a Foreign Language successfully requires an interaction between the teacher and learners in the target language but that was lacking in my classroom. This paper investigates strategies that I can use to get my students to interact with me in English, ways in which students can develop appropriate vocabulary they need to interact and methods which I can support shy students to use English in class. Through a qualitative design made up of teacher's journals, interviews, group discussions, and observation, some useful details provided by the students enabled us to design action steps that are gradually developing new classroom atmospheres. Students identified the lack of encouragements when they make efforts, the absence of revision on their part, and the lack of vocabulary to express themselves. With such information, strategies like constant motivation, group exercises and the use of topics of interest were put in place. These have significantly changed classroom interactions, as students now make efforts to construct simple sentences in English and they also have the support of their peers when in difficulty. This research is helpful for the community of practitioners to understand the importance of considering learners' needs in the teaching-learning process.

## Introduction

Currently, with the world becoming a global village, communicating in English is very important as it is widely spoken by many people from different countries. In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms, interaction in the target language, English, cannot be avoided as it permits learners to meet the demands of the evolving world. Seddiki (2022) defines classroom interaction as the taking and giving of information between the teacher and learners as a productive act, and Yu (2008) goes further to say that interaction must be seriously meaningful about matters of serious concern to the participants and, therefore, conducive to a major attempt to communicate and not merely to simulate communication. So, effective communication occurs when messages are not distorted during the communication process and communication serves the purpose for which it was planned or designed (Pal et al., 2016). This paper explores some factors that cause students not to speak using English in class and identifies some solutions which are helpful for the community of practitioners to understand the importance of considering learners' needs in the teaching-learning process.

This paper begins by presenting the background of the learners under study in Kousseri, Cameroon, the realities of the teaching context, the classroom challenge and reflective questions which inspired the choice of data collection tools: interviews, group discussions, teacher's in- class written notes from observation and notes from informal conversations with colleagues. After a qualitative data analysis, the findings are presented on which the action steps are built. The aim of this paper is to investigate strategies that I can use to get my students to interact with me using the target language.

## Learners' Background

I work in Lycée d'Amchédire (Government High School Amchedire) found in the Subdivision of Kousseri in the Far North Region of Cameroon (see maps in Figure 1).

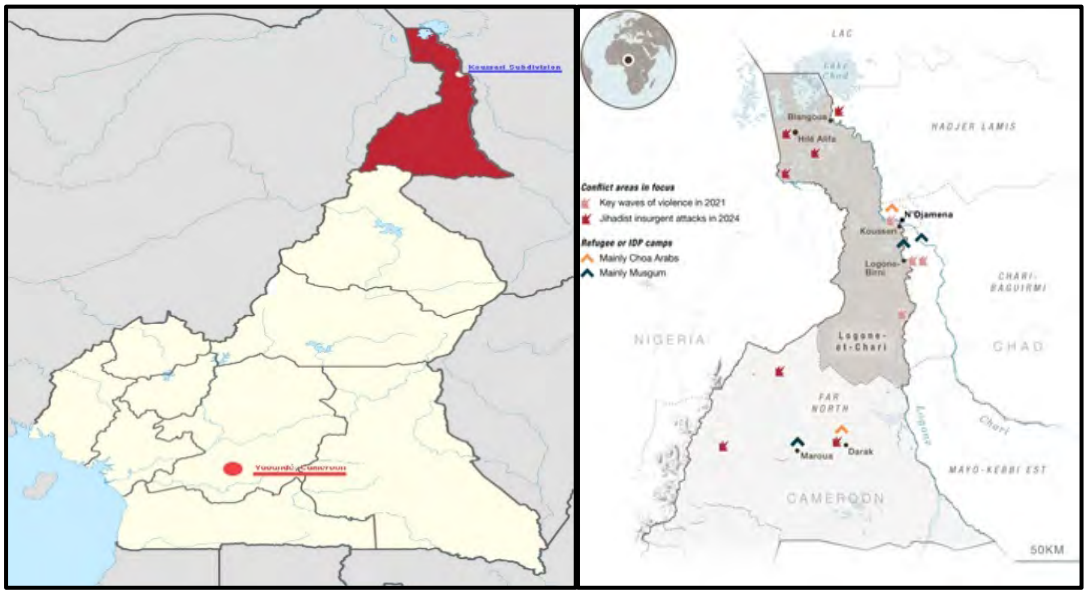



**Figure 1. Image of Cameroon's Far North Region (from Wikipedia Commons)**

In this school, English is taught as a foreign language (in Cameroon, it is called *Anglais*) following the dual system of education in Cameroon. In Article 15(1) of Law No. 98/004 of the 4th of April 1998 on Education in Cameroon, it is stated that "The education system is organised into two sub-systems, one English-speaking and one French-speaking, through which the option of biculturalism is reaffirmed". These systems of education follow the Anglo-Saxon and French systems given that Cameroon was under the control of Britain and France before gaining Independence. So, in the educational process, English-speaking Cameroonians learn French as a foreign language while French-speaking Cameroonians learn English as a foreign language.

The school is found in the outskirts of the town and suffers from the lack of resources. Firstly, there has been no electricity until the year 2024 when solar panels were installed, but still, only the computer laboratory is powered until the present date. Secondly, given that classrooms are not sufficient for the number of class divisions we have, some classes are held under trees on the school campus (see Figure 2). Thirdly and lastly, there is no library that students can exploit in their spare time. With insufficient resources, the teaching-learning process becomes challenging as we struggle to exploit other teaching resources that require electricity, and this limits our exposure especially in the present digital world.

**Figure 2. Image of 10th grade students attending my *Anglais* class** (photo by a student)

In this EFL learning context, education is not a priority for all learners. According to Ruth (2023), in some families, education for girls is not seen as necessary or desirable. If the family has both sons and daughters, the sons will be prioritized for schooling as it is believed that they will become wage-earners, but the daughters will become wives and mothers, and so the culture says that education is not necessary. Similarly, statistics (UNESCO reports, 2015, as cited in Ngong, 2015) show that 31% of girls get married before age 15, in rural communities. Equally, data from the Far North Region of Cameroon show that fewer than 18% of girls attend school. This is the reason why classrooms are made up of 75% male and just 25% female. These statistics are markedly different from UNESCO's goals where gender equality in education is a priority (UNESCO, 2013). My students sometimes say attending school is a means of leaving the home. Most students are from poor backgrounds which accounts for the learners' inability to purchase textbooks or other learning materials which help them read while at home and carry out tasks that consolidate lessons taught.

The dominant language of communication of my learners is "*Arabe Shua*" also known as "*Chadian Arabic*", a language of wider communication that originated in Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria (Chadian Arabic, Ethnologue). There are other languages that coexist with the latter like Kotoko, Borno, Fufulde, Mundang, Hausa, and Gambaye, which learners with corresponding origins speak but these can be heard mostly back at home, in the quarters (local neighbourhoods) or at the market though not as significantly as the "*Chadian Arabic*". The latter can, therefore, be considered both an L1 and a Lingua Franca for learners who are not locals from Kousseri. The French language, one of the official languages in Cameroon, is only partially spoken. It is expected that Cameroonians of the French-speaking regions speak or at least understand French, but it turns out that most of the locals cannot communicate in the said language. Equally, it is the language of instruction from primary through secondary school in the French sub-system of education. The language used on signposts and billboards is French mostly, and Arabic (the classic or standard form) can be seen in some places like mosques, Islamic schools, and some businesses. Conversely, most of the inhabitants of the Islamic religion can read standard Arabic because they attend Koranic schools from childhood before starting school and continue attending these alongside their formal education from the primary to the secondary schools. Moreover, Koranic schools are not formal, and are attended in the local neighbourhoods where the teachers known as "marabouts" live.

Learners' attrition rate is very significant in this context as the number of students enrolled at the primary level drops as they go further in studies. This is justified with the reason that education becomes more demanding as they go further. Also, learners weigh the benefits of engaging in business to be more important compared to attending school and others get married very young (it is common to see girls marry at the age of 14). Learners who sail through high school and who wish to further their studies are obliged to move to other towns for better learning opportunities in universities and professional institutions. Consequently, with the influence of such an environment coupled with the influence of their local language, lack of interest in education and cultural barriers, the English language proficiency level of my learners is very low. As El Metmari et al. (2022) report,

> Environment plays an important role in determining second language acquisition for language learners. It includes everything the language learner hears and sees in the new language. Environment can be varied in terms of the situations, such as conversation with friends or parents, watching television, billboards, reading street signs and magazines, as well as classroom activities".
>
> (pp. 4-5)

Learners in this context start formal education at age 3 and others later. The bilingual system of education in Cameroon warrants that English language is taught as a required subject. Therefore, it is learned from the primary to the tertiary levels in the educational system.

The teaching and learning of English, *Anglais* is challenging because there are little or no external stimuli to the learning of English. Learners can use English mostly only in the classroom. Students who have televisions in their homes can encounter English through certain documentaries and the news on national television channels. Some learners are exposed to English via the internet on their mobile phones, but they exploit the latter mostly for entertainment, that is, playing music, watching videos and using applications that permit them to take pictures and videos of themselves. However, only a few who own smartphones use the internet for research when they are given homework at school.

## Teaching Context

During this research, my classroom sizes ranged from 3 to 80 students. We have difficult learning situations: few benches for students to sit and comfortably write on, no library for students to exploit, and no staff room for teachers to work in. I teach all examination classes, $9^{th}$, $11^{th}$ and $12^{th}$ grades, that is, classes of students preparing for end of year certificate exams which determine their promotion to the next class: secondary to high school and from high school to university. I also teach an intermediary class – $10^{th}$ grade ($9^{th}$, $10^{th}$, $11^{th}$ and $12^{th}$ grades corresponding to *3e, 2nde, 1ere,* and *Tle*[1] in Cameroon). Their ages range between 13 and 25 years. This wide age range is because learners repeat classes and others, we notice, must have started school late probably because they come from other villages which do not have learning opportunities like the town of Kousseri and the absence of a means to attend school because of insufficient finances.

[1] *3e – troisième, 2nde – seconde, 1ere – première, Tle - Terminale*

## Classroom Challenge

I chose to do this exploratory action research based on some challenges I faced in my classrooms. When I teach (using French partly), my students have comprehension difficulties. Some who do understand face difficulties responding to my questions. They mostly resort to the use of French or give up trying. Others do not put in efforts given that almost nothing outside their classroom context encourages them to learn English. Faced with these challenges, I set as objective to investigate strategies that can encourage students to respond to questions and interact in English.

## Research Questions

The challenges identified from my classroom pushed me to reflect on the following questions:

- What accounts for the inability of students to speak and respond to questions in English in the classroom?
- What strategies can I use to build up learners' vocabulary?
- What can I do to encourage students from shying away from using English in the classroom?

## Methodology

The participants in this study are Arts students in the 9th to the 12th grades (*3e*-70, *1e* A-40, *2nde* A-20, *Tle* A-20), 150 students in total. These classes are Arts classes and have more time in the teaching-learning process contrarily to science classes. The 9th grade has a weekly load of 3 hours while the 10th, 11th and 12th have 4 hours. Science students, in the high school (10th,11th and 12th grades), have 3 hours weekly for their *Anglais* lessons. This study follows the exploratory action research (EAR) model proposed by Smith and Rebolledo (2018). They define EAR as, a way to explore, understand and improve our practice as teachers. According to this model, there is a stage of 'exploring' which involves planning questions and how to get data, gathering data and answering questions based on data. Then, the 'acting' phase that involves planning to change, implementing the change, observing to see what happens with data and reflections. The exploratory phase of this research took place over a period of about six months and the action phase, over a period of two months. To answer the research questions, I used four data collection tools: teacher's written notes from observation, notes from informal conversations with colleagues, interviews with students and focus group discussions.

## Lesson Observation

During my lessons, I observed and noted students' behaviour when it comes to speaking in English. These notes were done mostly after lessons to avoid distractions and so that learners did not get rigid or did not react to being observed.

I observed that my learners sought to speak only in their L2, French. They would most often ask and say in French, "*Madame, est-ce que je peux répondre en français? Si c'est en anglais, je ne peux pas.*" Translated in English we have, "Madam, can I answer in French? If it is in English, I cannot do it".

My learners gave incomplete responses during class. When responding to a question, they usually stop and tell me they cannot continue in English. When I ask what the reason is, they tell me that the "Answers come and go" ("*les réponses viennent et disparaissent*"). Others tell me, they get discouraged when they are mocked by their classmates.

My learners had no *Anglais* teacher before my arrival. During lessons, the learners constantly reminded me that they have not had a teacher the previous years, consequently, their English vocabulary is very poor. Although this was true, they said this so that they will be given the opportunity to answer questions in French.

**Community of Practice**

Wenger and Wenger (2015) define communities of practice as groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it as they interact regularly. In this study, the community of practice included language instructors and instructors of other subjects who share a common concern about their students' welfare and performances and so, exchange their worries so that possible solutions can be identified.

In conversations with colleagues both in my school and schools in the same locality, I took some notes which were helpful in this study (see Figure 3). These helped me understand better the learners' background and why they are less motivated to speak in English. The conversations were beneficial as they informed some of the strategies used during the action phase to curb communication breakdown.

- Students lack the will to study.
- The base they should have in English at the primary school was not well established.
- Learners expect teachers to make everything easy and provide them with the required answers they need for their end of year examinations

**Figure 3. Summary notes from conversations with colleagues**

**Interviews**

Interviews with some of the participants (20, a sample of convenience) focused on what hinders them from responding to questions in English during lessons, what they can do to get better and what I can do to help them speak. The questions used in this interview are included in the Appendix. Both interviews and focus group discussions were done in the students' L2 (French) to ease comprehension and let them express themselves freely. According to Kalanzadeh et al. (2013, p. 34), a teacher said "…I think in certain cases using L1 will help me provide a non-threatening environment which is of crucial importance for my English students". For the fact that all students are expected to speak French since it is their language of instruction from the primary to the secondary levels of education and even up to university, the interview interactions between the teacher and the learners happened in French. Students were not informed beforehand about the interview; they were done after a class when the students had free time, and they were told it was for my research.

**Focus Group Discussions**

Group discussions were done with students after lessons without any form of requirement to attend. The classes do not have the same number of students: the 9th grade has about 50 students, the 10th grade has 20 students, the 11th grade has about 40 students and the 12th grade 20 students (these numbers correspond to the students who attend classes regularly). Learners were not selected for the group discussions; each class made up a group. Data was analysed qualitatively from which the findings were drawn.

## Results and Findings from Data Collected

This section discusses the outcomes from the interviews and focus group discussions carried out with the learners and the reflections drawn from the teacher's in-class written notes and discussions with colleagues. Together, the data identified the following problems that students encountered when learning and speaking English.

From the interviews carried out, all 20 participants said they lacked the vocabulary to be able to speak in English. They said when they start to speak, they suddenly get blocked and do not have the words to continue. One respondent, however, spoke up and said that their actual problem is they do not put in the necessary effort to help them get better. They mostly want the easy way out where the teacher gives them everything in class. Responding to the question regarding what they can do to get better in speaking, 10 of the participants spoke of revising their lessons before class. 5 respondents talked about working with their peers out of school. The other 5 talked about getting textbooks, that is, not depending on their friends' textbooks, and getting other English learning books which can help them improve on their speaking skills. The respondents spoke of positive reinforcements from their teacher which encourages them to try speaking more. Two of the respondents said continuous questioning in English and less correction when they interact helps them feel less awkward in class in front of their classmates.

During group discussions, carried out class by class -and following the format of questions and answers, learners spoke about the absence of an English teacher in their school for the past three years before my arrival which has resulted in their inability to understand and speak the language. Consequently, they had no form of encouragement or motivation to learn the language. The learners said they are encouraged when they are motivated after they try speaking. Some students said the English they are learning now in the secondary school seems more complicated because at the primary level, they learned by singing songs and saying rhymes and responding to multiple choice questions which was quite easy for them. They pointed out the fact that when their classmates mock them in class, they get discouraged trying even though they desire to speak.

Findings from my in-class written notes showed that the learners generally see English as a very complicated subject and language. They always say "*l'Anglais, c'est Dieu qui donne*" (English is given by God). In responding to questions in class, they do not take the necessary time to put their answers together but resort to using French. They sometimes start speaking and end up laughing because of their lack of the appropriate vocabulary. They say, "Madam, the answer is coming and going". For example, during a lesson on asking for and giving directions, students were expected to work in pairs to give directions to their homes to a classmate following a model in a dialogue. Students' behaviour and response to the activity were the following: little or no interest to participate, some who had the interest had no

vocabulary to sail through and others complained, "*Madame, on va prendre les mots en anglais où?*" ("Madam, where do we take the English words from?"). I also noted from my colleagues, both language teachers and teachers of other subjects, the lack of the will on the part of the students to put in efforts. Some colleagues also spoke of the poorly established base at the primary level which has left the students lacking.

Generally, findings reveal that a small number of students want to speak the language, but they lack the vocabulary owing to the absence of continuous follow-up from the primary to the secondary levels, lack of will on their part to work, lack of motivation from the teacher, fear of making mistakes in speaking and eventually, no home support from their parents. In this first exploratory phase of my research, my data, somehow, show that learners want the product, that is, speaking in English, but they neither take the time to learn the grammar rules nor revise adequately to retain the necessary vocabulary they are taught in each real-life situation. With very little revision, these learners are unable to use notions previously taught appropriately and it handicaps their spoken English.

## Action Phase

Based on the findings above, strategies proposed both by the learners and me, as the teacher, were put in place and the action phase happened over a period of two months. I kept a journal in which I noted students' responses after implementing each strategy (see Figure 4). Learners expressed excitement, discouragement, interest, disinterest and sadness. This permitted me to draw the conclusions discussed in the paragraphs below alongside the strategies implemented.

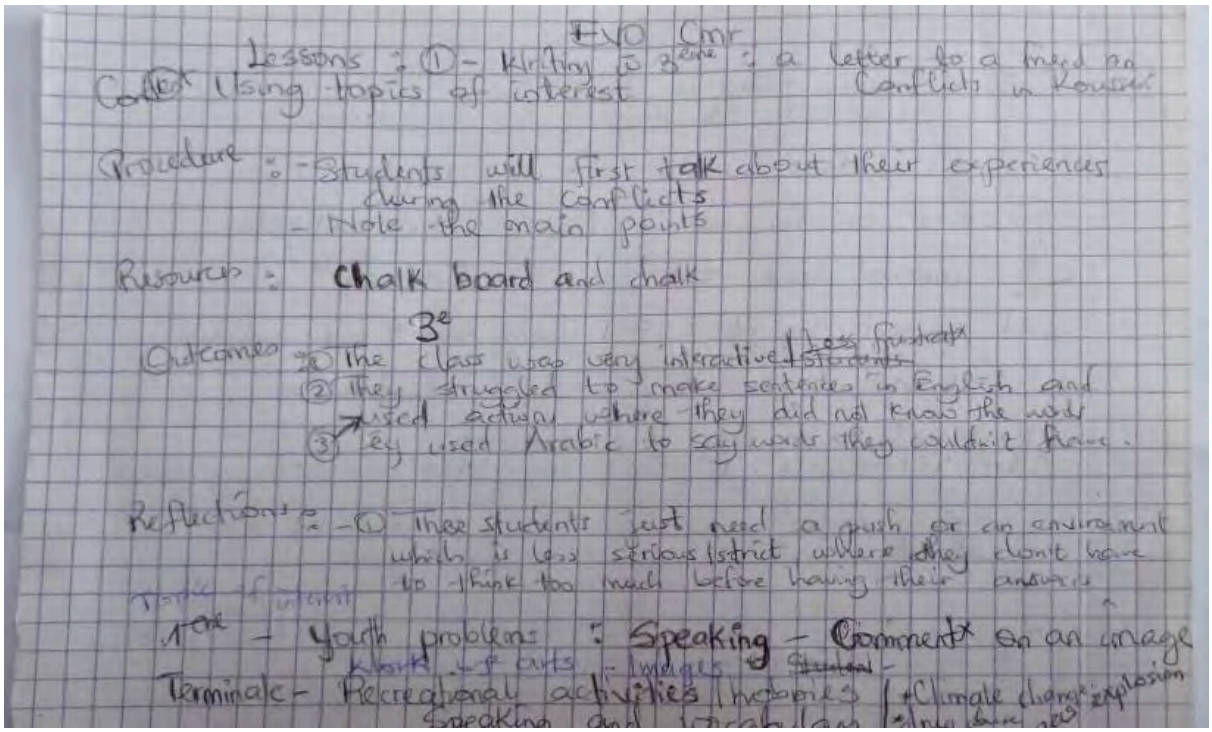



**Figure 4. Image of teacher's written notes (sample) after implementation of findings**

**Strategy One**

I implemented group activities. Group work is beneficial to students as they can freely express themselves among their peers. As Kasim (2015) explains, learning in the context of sharing, responding, and communicating with other students is a major teaching strategy in any teaching context. He further points out that one of the solutions to make the students learning English as a Foreign Language maximise the use of the English is by way of putting students in groups. This strategy is highly beneficial for learners as Kagan and High (2002) enumerate: cooperative learning enhances motivation, peer support, greater language use and lowered affective filters. Tamimy et al. (2022) further say cooperative learning is associated with higher achievement, positive peer relationships and empathy. My learners were grouped based on their seating positions and sometimes their strengths and weaknesses in the language were taken into consideration. The groups ranged between six and eight most often depending on what had to be achieved. They were expected to assign a secretary and one person to represent the group at the end of the exercise.

Students of the 11$^{th}$ and 12$^{th}$ grades did group exercises on youth problems and starting a business (see Figure 5). My learners in the 11$^{th}$ grade were challenged with specific topics that focused on giving advice to youths who have problems, for instance, a young girl of about 17 years who is being pushed by an elderly man of about 50 years to marry her. Another topic was a young boy who has been involved in drug consumption and is looking for a way out. Learners were expected to share ideas and write down their answers. I supervised the work and helped with some difficult words so that each group could understand their given tasks. At the end of the exercise, the appointed secretary read out the advice or answers in front of the class. This was done with the aim of developing student autonomy and to help them peer teach and build vocabulary. Learners were allowed to use bilingual dictionaries (paper-based dictionaries) with which they could translate difficult words from French to English. Some of them also had other English learning grammar texts which informed their choice of words and how they structured their sentences.

**Figure 5. Group activity with my 11th grade students (photo by author)**

The 12th grade students were expected to listen to a passage on starting a business. They were put in two groups, boys and girls. A copy of the text was given them with missing words which they had to fill in after listening to the text read by the teacher. This was done with the aim of building their vocabulary related to business and to check their ability to spell words and pronounce them correctly. The students of the 11th grade complained at the beginning about their difficulties in the language but after some encouragements, they started working. Getting to work with their friends was very encouraging to them. Their L2 (French) helped them have answers. Though they made lots of mistakes, the aim of speaking was achieved. With the 12th grade students, I made it a game between boys and girls. They fought so hard to have the right answers to challenge their opponents. Group exercises, however, failed with learners of the 9th and 10th grades. They complained so much about how difficult the reading tasks were that only about two groups out of ten did the work despite my encouragements. It was also noticed that group activities made them wander off and talk about things other than the task at hand.

**Strategy Two**

I used topics of interest to the students as a strategy which had impressive outcomes. With my 9th grade students, I brought up a topic concerning an intertribal conflict and how it affected them. They were so excited to speak that they had to use actions to express themselves when they did not have the appropriate vocabulary on the topic. They helped each other complete their sentences and the aim of speaking was achieved. With my 12th grade students, we had an exchange on hobbies and recreational activities and how it could bring them financial gain. They interacted freely because these are some of the activities they do to pay for their education. My 10th grade students were also inspired to share their experiences of being involved in accidents or having witnessed one in writing about situations needing emergency help. Generally, students showed very positive attitudes towards this strategy.

**Strategy Three**

Motivating students was a strategy I took up for every lesson coupled with insistence on the use of English. According to Sadeghi et al. (2013), the teacher's role is to create an environment, which stimulates the desired responses and reinforces or discourages those that are supposed to be incorrect or undesirable. Given that my learners always want to use their L2 (French) as an easy option, I intentionally pushed them to speak by encouraging them to use simple words and simple sentences as much as possible. Other times, I let them support each other in building their responses which served as a booster for them to speak in English to the end. Following Gaffer et al. (2022) as reported in Fatimannisa and Jamilah (2024, 59),

> The motivation of students can be enhanced by the implementation of positive reinforcement techniques during the teaching and learning process, hence fostering a greater inclination to engage in classroom activities actively.

Together with my learners, we took out some words from "our dictionary" like *"I cannot"*, *"English is hard"*, *"I do not know what to say"*. At the beginning of the action phase, my students and I decided to stop using the negative words and expressions no matter how difficult a task was. We replaced them with *"I will try"*. Every time a learner used this, the others reminded him or her that they must try. Verbal reinforcement played a vital role in motivating students. As for what is meant by verbal reinforcement, it is, for example, in the form of praise such as 'good, nice, excellent, correct, awesome', and so on (Fatimannisa & Jamilah, 2024). Encouraging little efforts made by students in speaking with *"Good, very good"*, *"Clap for*

*him", "You can do better*" rather than *"No"* made the students feel more confident trying. This agrees to what Rumfola (2017) says, that students want to feel confident about their work and actions in the classroom.

**Strategy Four**

Using topic-related images was an engaging strategy. I realized that when students are presented with images, they can easily pick out the words in English to be able to describe or talk about what they see. Communication was better, the class more interactive and lesson more attractive. In my 9th grade class, using images on climate change and its effects, and hygiene and sanitation helped students answer questions related to the topic.

My 12th grade learners commented on images related to the ability of women doing the types of jobs considered in their community as work meant only for the men. In the 10th grade class, images on signs to be respected at the workplace helped students understand why some signs are found in some places and they could easily share their experiences.

During a speaking lesson on youth problems, my 11th grade students commented on images that showed what is plaguing students nowadays such drug and alcohol consumption and they proposed solutions.

In class, since the images were not big enough for all the students to see from every angle, I held them up and moved around the class for the students to have a better view. As Pateşan, et al. (2018) say, "Visual materials can make a lesson more attractive, and the experts agree that they help both the teachers and students in the teaching – learning process" (p. 357). The learning process was smoother, and students could keep these images in mind all through the lesson and use them in communicating their ideas.

During this action phase, I also realized that learners want a fun teaching – learning process. They like activities that will make them relax and not an all-serious classroom. Tongue twister exercises were usually avoided in class as they were thought to be very complicated for my learners until I tried them. With my 10th grade students, I used the tongue twister "*John generally likes jam ginger and garlic*". It was impressive how they responded to this very positively. They had fun and at the end we could identify some consonant sounds and how they are pronounced in different words.

## Reflections

At the end of this research, I learned several things. Classroom research helps the teacher solve problems. As identified by Stremmel (2017), teacher research is designed by practitioners to seek practical solutions to issues and problems in their professional and community lives. For practitioners and educators, it is worth noting that the learners' needs are very vital in the teaching – learning process. Sadeghi et al. (2013) say learners' needs are an umbrella term which refers to a wide variety of information about the learner, the teacher, the language being learned or the context of language learning, and, citing Brindley (1989), there are even more types of needs including demands, wants, desires, expectations, motivations, constraints, lacks, and requirements, just to name a few. These call for dynamic strategies because success in one strategy does not imply that the same be used in every situation. Every classroom and set of

learners will always be different, so, learners' needs must be considered for better classroom practices to be implemented.

**Impact of Research on the Teacher and Learners**

During this investigation, I realized that when my learners have support from their peers, they interact more and better. That is why activities like group work and pair work are used more now in my classroom since they build students' confidence in carrying out tasks. I learned that my students need lots of attention and encouragement in the teaching-learning process. When they are mocked, they easily develop a lack of interest in interacting or in learning the language. From these insights, it was noted that students do not like facing challenges alone. Also, my learners tend to interact better in a less tense environment and on topics that concern them. Learners are now more positive during lessons and are more productive.

When I started teaching in my school, I always thought that my students were not interested in learning English and were just here to make it through the examinations. But getting to interact with my students presently has made me understand that they are in a difficult context, and their needs must be considered in learning English. Some of them always express their wish to travel to one of the English-speaking regions of Cameroon to learn and speak the language. I stopped making assumptions that hindered me from seeing what my learners can achieve. After starting my action plan, I see that my learners have a lot of hidden potential in interactions in English. They can construct sentences in English they did not know they could use and feel very happy and more fulfilled doing so. They are now able to bring me some difficult words they came across outside the classroom and difficult tasks that we tackle together. On the school campus, some of the students make efforts to interact more in English when they meet me and have fun doing so.

When I shared my research with some English language practitioners from another school in the same community, they were pleased and saw this as a means of professional development. They were encouraged not to keep on complaining about their students' poor performances but to investigate problems in their class and identify possible solutions. Some action steps from my research like that on the insistence on the use of English when interacting and motivating students was helpful in their classes. They developed other strategies that addressed their classroom challenges specifically.

For the community of practitioners, it is worth noting that listening to our students is very important as it guides classroom practices. Learners may shy away from classroom interactions just because they are not motivated by their teacher to do better. Classrooms must be a place where students can learn while having fun, where the teaching-learning process is not burdensome and where they can identify with the lessons being taught.

## Conclusion

This paper investigated my students' interaction in English in class and the strategies that I implemented. Analysis of the careful observations, interviews with the learners and conversations with colleagues showed clearly that learners had limited vocabulary with which to interact, little encouragement from the teacher, fear of making mistakes and little will on their part to try to use English. Group activities were used as a strategy which encouraged peer support, greater language use and empathy. Teacher motivation through positive

reinforcements greatly boosted students' confidence to speak more in the target language. Topics of interest to the students had impressive outcomes as learners were able to identify with the context related topics they had to talk about. Topic-related images made lessons more attractive and helped learners communicate their ideas better. Even though these strategies were a success, they do not limit the use of other strategies as learners and classroom realities change. So, other strategies like the use of digitalised visual aids and cooperative learning strategies proposed by Kagan and High (2002) are being envisaged for future use.

## References


Brindley, G. (1989). The role of needs analysis in adult ESL programme design. In R. K. Johnson (Ed.), the second language curriculum (pp. 63-78). Cambridge University Press.

Cameroon. (1998). *Loi no 98/004 du 14 avril 1998 d'orientation de l'éducation au Cameroun* [Law of April 14 1998 on the orientation of education in Cameroon]. Available (in French) from https://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/afrique/cameroun-loi-1998.htm

El Metmari, M., Boughaba, M., & Karim, H. R. (2022). *The impact of the socio-economic background on foreign language learning and acquisition*. Department of English Language Teaching: CRMEF, Tangier (Morocco).

Ethnologue. (n.d.). Chadian Arabic. https://www.ethnologue.com/language/shu/

Fatimannisa, A., & Jamilah. (2024). Improving students' motivation in English learning through positive reinforcement. *International Journal of Contemporary Studies in Education, 3*(1), 50-60. https://doi.org/10.56855/ijcse.v3i1.945

Gaffer, S., Atmowardoyo, H., & Dollah, S. (2022). The effects of positive reinforcement on students' writing achievement in an Indonesian EFL classroom. *Celebes Journal of Language Studies, 2*(1), 9-22. https://doi.org/10.51629/cjls.v2i1.78

Kagan, S., & High, J. (2002, July/Aug.). Kagan structures for English language learners. *ESL Magazine*. https://www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/dr_spencer_kagan/ESL_Magazine_Kagan_Structures_for_ELL.pdf

Kalanzadeh G.-A., Hemati, F., Shahivand, Z., & Bakhtiarvand, M. (2013). The use of EFL students' L1 in English classes. *The International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World (IJLLALW), 2*(2), 33-42.

Kasim, U. (2015). Implementation of group work in the classroom. *Lingua, 12*(1), 97-106. https://doi.org/10.30957/lingua.v12i1.74

Ngong, M. (2015). Educate a woman, Empower a nation. *Presidential Precinct*. https://presidentialprecinct.org/educate-a-woman-empower-a-nation-mirabel-ngong/

Pal, N., Halder, S., & Guha, A. (2016). Study on communication barriers in the classroom: a teacher's perspective. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies, 6*(1), 103-118. https://doi.org/10.29333/ojcmt/2541

Pateşan M., Balagui A., & Alibec C. (2018). Visual aids in language education. *International Conference Knowledge-Based Organization, 24*(2), 356-361. https://doi.org/10.1515/kbo-2018-0115

Rumfola, L., (2017). *Positive Reinforcement Positively Helps Students in the Classroom*. (Education and Human Development Master's Theses, 786). Master's thesis, the College at Brockport: State University of New York. https://soar.suny.edu/handle/20.500.12648/4981

Ruth, F. (2023). Girls face many barriers to education in Cameroon. *Children of Cameroon*. https://www.childrenofcameroon.co.uk/post/girls-face-many-barriers-to-education-in-cameroon

Sadeghi, B., Hassani, M., & Hessari, A. (2013). On the relationship between learners' needs and their use of language learning strategies. *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences, 136* (2014), 255 – 259. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.05.324

Seddiki, Y. (2022). The role of classroom interaction in developing English as a foreign language. *Ennass Journal, 9*(3), 797-811. https://asjp.cerist.dz/en/downArticle/572/9/3/208211

Smith, R., & Rebolledo, P. (2018). A handbook for exploratory action research. *TeachingEnglish.* The British Council. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications/resource-books/handbook-exploratory-action-research

Stremmel, A., J. (2017). The value of teacher research: Nurturing professional and personal growth through inquiry. *Voices of Practitioners, 2*(3), 1-9. https:/www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/pubs/Value%20of%20Teacher%20Research.pdf

Tamimy, M., Rashidi, N., & Ling Koh, J. (2022). The use of cooperative learning in English as foreign language classes: the prevalence, fidelity, and challenges. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 121*, 103915. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103915

UNESCO. (2013). Gender Equality in Education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000222121

Wenger, E., & Wenger, B. (2015). An introduction to communities of practice: a brief overview of the concept and its uses. https://www.wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/

Yu, R. (2008). Interaction in EFL classes. *Asian Social Science, 4(4), 48-48.* https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v4n4p48

## About the Author

**Mercy M. Iwuyum** is a teacher of English and French as foreign languages. She has been into classroom research since the debut of her teaching career and has found this process very enriching in her professional development and fulfilling as a teacher. She has co-mentored other teachers from Cameroon, her homeland, and other African countries in teacher research. She is currently a holder of a bachelor's degree in bilingual letters obtained from the University of Yaounde 1 and a professional master's degree in bilingual letters obtained from the Higher Teacher Training College, Yaounde 1. For the past 5 years, she has been working for her local government and has had the opportunity to work with students from both the Far North and Centre regions of Cameroon. Email: missmah2012@gmail.com

## Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Dr Eric Ekembe and Jennifer Law (Transform ELT) for their guidance and mentorship in the teacher research process. Their time and meticulous efforts ensured the reliability of the research findings in this paper. Their encouragements have been very important in shaping the quality of this study.

I am sincerely grateful to the Editor of the ELT Classroom Research Journal, Prof. Robert J. Dickey, who patiently took us through the process of writing this article. His kind words and availability kept us going even when it was difficult.

I would like to acknowledge the ELT Classroom Research Journal who granted me this opportunity to publish with them and share our experiences with the world. This is such a unique opportunity which will serve as a springboard to other fields of research.

While their identities remain anonymous, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to each peer reviewer who played a vital role in the review process. Their time and expertise input and their feedback are deeply appreciated.

I appreciate the contribution of the members of the teacher research team in my country whose consistency and dedication to work were so encouraging that we had reason not to stop working.

Furthermore, I would like to appreciate my colleagues from my school, Lycée d'Amchedire, who gave valuable information that helped provide data and a general background of my learners as well as the learning context.

Finally, I am sincerely thankful to my spouse who never stopped encouraging me not to give up and who helped me with the adjustment of my work.

## Declaration of Possible Conflict of Interest

I write in my honour to declare that there is no conflict of interest with this paper.

## APPENDIX

**Interview questions**

- What makes you unable to use English when answering questions/ what accounts for your inability to use English when responding to questions?
- Are you shy when you stand to answer a question?
- What can I do to help you speak in English?
- What do you think you can do to speak or respond to questions in English?
- What are some strategies we can implement to help you increase your vocabulary?

# Investigating Strategies that Support Learners' Participation in Writing Tasks

Mayonghe Melanie Kesiki
*Government High School Joss, Douala-Cameroon*
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3217-5597

**DOI: 10.23350/eltcrj.225**

**Article History**
Received: Feb 6, 2024
Accepted: Oct 28, 2025
Published: Nov 10, 2025

**Keywords:** collaborative writing; pre-writing; feedback; engagement; brainstorm; group work; strategies



## Abstract

Teaching writing to students in an EFL context like Cameroon where French is a dominant language, has always been a daunting task for teachers. This difficulty does not only reside with teachers but also translates to the students and has had a negative effect on their motivation and attitude towards English. This has affected their attitudes towards writing activities in general. This recurrent problem led me to carry out this study which is aimed to investigate strategies that can support learners to participate in writing tasks in the classroom and during summative assessments.

This study employed an exploratory research method to investigate the reasons behind students' reluctance to participate in writing tasks. Through the use of questionnaires and informal discussions with students, the research revealed several key factors contributing to this difficulty. Specifically, students cited the following as major obstacles; a lack of adequate vocabulary, topics that failed to cover their areas of interest, severe grading methods whereby the teacher focused more on students' errors and used the red pen abusively, and also inadequate feedback from the teachers.

To address these challenges, targeted strategies were implemented, including collaborative writing and pre-writing activities. The effectiveness of these strategies was recorded through weekly journaling and observation. Notably, collaborative writing and pre-writing had a profoundly positive impact on student engagement. By adopting these approaches, the study demonstrates a potential for teacher-led interventions to enhance student participation and writing outcomes.

## I. Introduction

When I started teaching English as a foreign language over 15 years ago, I really did not pay attention to learners' difficulties and needs. What I focused on was just completing the syllabus and preparing my learners for their official examinations. As the years went by, I felt disappointed with them, whom I saw as not being interested in learning English. I was

disgruntled and regretted choosing the profession. I had never taken time to find out about these challenges and how I could solve them. Whenever I applied any new technique in teaching, I did not take time to evaluate if it was effective or not. Reflection was not a common practice in my journey as an EFL teacher. This made me a disgruntled teacher who often spent time blaming students for their lack of interest in English, and the administration for doing nothing about it. Years went by and my motivation to teach kept dropping until the point when I participated in a workshop in which the presenter elaborately explained the importance of reflective practices in teaching. During the workshop, I was able to brainstorm on the challenges that I encounter in my classroom and how these challenges could be solved through exploratory action research. This was a turning point in my career as a teacher. I immediately subscribed to this school of thought and became intentional about it. I reinforced my knowledge of classroom action research through communities of practice and mentoring programs. As Allwright and Bailey (1991) observe, classroom action research centers on the classroom and simply tries to investigate what actually happens in the classroom. In other words, this actually indicates the action and practice that is carried out in the classroom and how teachers react to students' learning. I became motivated to find effective ways to help my learners to put in more efforts in their learning and for me to reflect on the challenges I faced in my classroom.

In a low-resource EFL context like mine, learners often struggle to participate in Writing activities which is one of the key challenges I identified in my teaching practice. The reasons for this are: limited access to resources, inadequate teacher training and insufficient learner support. As a result, they develop negative attitudes towards writing, leading to decreased motivation and low academic achievement. Carrying out this research on "Investigating Strategies that Support Learner's Participation in Writing Tasks" is crucial in this context because it will help me to develop effective teaching practices, foster a positive writing environment and ultimately improve my learners' outcomes. This study aims to contribute to existing research by exploring context-specific strategies that can enhance learner participation in writing tasks, thereby informing teaching practices in low-resource EFL settings.

## 1. My Teaching Context

As an English teacher at the Government High School Joss-Douala, Cameroon, I work in a complex linguistic environment. The school is situated in Douala, a major port city and the country's economic capital, where students from diverse backgrounds converge. The dominant language spoken in the city is French, although indigenous languages are also present, reflecting the city's cultural diversity. In the classroom, students often interact in French and Camfranglais, a hybrid language that blends English, French, and local languages (Siebetcheu & Machetti, 2019). Despite not being officially recognized, Camfranglais is widely used among youths and students, particularly in urban areas like Douala and Yaounde. Its popularity extends to social media platforms, making it a significant aspect of Cameroonian language use.

Although English is one of Cameroon's official languages alongside French, it has fewer speakers, relegating it to second place. English is spoken amidst a backdrop of approximately 260 Mother Tongues and pidgin English, which can lead to interference in English language learning nationwide. Most students encounter English primarily in the classroom, with limited opportunities for exposure outside of school. While some may listen to English- language radio and television programs, such as those broadcast by the Cameroon National Radio Television (CRTV), or read English-language newspapers like the *Cameroon Tribune*, *The Post*, and *The Guardian*, these resources are not being fully utilized to support language learning. As a result,

students' English proficiency level may suffer due to the limited input and practice opportunities.

As a teacher with over 15 years of experience, I observed that many students in Cameroon, despite being taught English as a compulsory subject, display low proficiency levels. This is surprising, given that English is one of the country's official languages. My students, aged 17-19, in the 7th level of high school are no exception. They take three to four hours of English lessons weekly and have access to English media, but their proficiency level remains low. I believe the lack of intrinsic motivation is a significant factor. Students often view English learning as requirement for exams rather than a valuable skill. This mindset is reflected in the phrase *"C'est Dieu qui donne l'anglais"* ("God gives English"), implying that success in English is a matter of luck rather than effort. This misconception hinders their ability to develop a genuine interest in learning the language.

The previous syllabus's objective-based approach did not prepare learners for communicative competence. In response, the government introduced reforms aimed at equipping French-speaking learners with practical English skills for real-life situations. These reforms introduced the competency-based approach (CBA) to language learning (Law N° 98/004 of 1998 and decree N° 2012/267 of 11th June 2012, each by Cameroon government).

## 2. Literature Review

In the context of my research, the literature highlights several key factors that can influence student engagement in writing tasks. A good command of English, including writing, is crucial in today's competitive world (Jurianto et al., 2015). To address the lack of engagement, several strategies can be employed: *Student autonomy* which allows students to choose their own topics can increase motivation and engagement (Smith & Wilheim, 2002). In practice, this can be achieved by providing students with a range of topics to choose from or allowing them to propose their own topics. *Peer Observation* and collaboration can foster a sense of ownership and dedication in writing (Hattie & Timperly, 2007). This can be implemented through peer review sessions, group writing activities or online discussion forums. *A Supportive Classroom Environment* creates a non-threatening environment where students feel comfortable sharing their writing is essential (Lin, 2016). Teachers can achieve this by promoting a positive and respectful classroom culture, encouraging constructive feedback, and improving opportunities for students to share their work. *Using model* texts can help students familiarize themselves with target genres and jointly construct texts. (Peloghitis & Ferreira, 2018). Teachers can use sample texts to demonstrate writing techniques, structure and style. Providing *Explicit Instruction* on writing strategies, such as brainstorming, outlining and revising, can help students develop necessary skills and confidence (Graham & Perin, 2007). Teachers can incorporate explicit instruction into lessons, providing step-by- step guidance and feedback.

While these strategies have been shown to be effective, it is essential to consider the unique contexts of my students and their environment. By using these strategies in a low resource context like mine, students will be provided with the support and guidance they need to develop their writing skills. The strategies have been seen to meet the unique needs and challenges of the learners.

### 3. Research Question

This study aims to investigate strategies to encourage student participation in writing tasks. Given the importance of writing skills in reinforcing English understanding, retaining language, expressing thoughts and ideas, and developing critical thinking, I seek to address two key questions:

1. What factors contribute to students' reluctance to engage in writing activities?
2. Which strategies can be employed to enhance students' writing skills?

To explore strategies that facilitate improvement in students' writing abilities, this research will utilize a combination of data collection tools such as classroom observations, questionnaires and informal discussions with the students.

## II. Exploratory Phase

The exploratory phase of my research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges students face in writing activities and identify potential strategies to improve their engagement. This exploratory phase took place over a period of 4 weeks towards the end of the first trimester of the academic year.

### 1. Methods of Data Collection

To investigate challenges learners face in writing, both observation and questionnaires were designed to collect information about their challenges. Informal discussions out of teaching periods were also used to respond to strategies that could be used to enhance students' writing skills.

#### a. Classroom Observations

I observed a number of student - behaviors and participation in writing activities during class time which were: motivation and engagement, reluctance and hesitation to write, asking for help and clarification and interacting with peers. The following aspects were noted in my lesson note book.

- Out of 80 students, about 8 attempted writing activities.
- A good number were not motivated to write so they slept off during writing activities.
- Few who attempted writing volunteered to share their writing, ideas or thoughts or ask questions.
- There was very little interaction amongst the students and the same few students participated in class discussions.

#### b. Student Questionnaires

I administered questionnaires (see appendix 1) to 80 grade 12 students to find out how they find writing activities and to identify the difficulties they face with writing tasks, and also to know their expectations about writing. These were open-ended and yes/no questions which I designed based on what I wanted to get from the students. These questionnaires were written in English and translated orally to French to help them better understand so as to give accurate responses. This activity took two hours because each question was translated and I ensured the students understood the question before proceeding to the next question. The students

responded in French and I later translated the responses in English. The questionnaire helped me to identify the challenges the students faced and also provided some expectations which I later exploited as strategies to help them improve on their writing skills.

**c. Informal Discussions with the students**

I asked students some specific questions out of the regular class time, following which they responded on Post-it notes and later stuck the notes on a flipchart. These questions aimed at getting their expectations on what strategies I could employ to enhance their writing skills. I collected all their responses which guided the actions I took in the classroom.

1. What can Mrs. Kihkishiy do to help you learn better?
2. What can your classmates do to help you learn better?
3. What can you do to learn better?

**2. Exploratory Research Findings**

After collecting the responses from the questionnaires, 63 out of the 80 respondents gave the reasons as to why they are reluctant in taking part in writing activities. These findings are summarized and grouped in Table 1 (below).

During the informal discussions, students responded to questions on Post- it notes as seen on Appendix 2:

The students' responses helped me to make informed decisions on how best to help them learn English and most especially improve on their writing skills. On what would count as relevant and needful classroom strategies I should implement in the classroom; I grouped responses from students into two main categories. The first category is *learner engagement activities* and the second is *pedagogic decision activities*. By *learner engagement activities* is meant classroom activities which can change their behavior and build competencies in writing. *Pedagogic decision activities* were those that required me to make important decisions about what should be taught, explained or done, so as to facilitate comprehension and commitment. These are all summarized and grouped in Table 2 (below). This table helps to respond to the second research question on what strategies to implement in order to enhance students' writing skills.

**Table 1. Exploratory Research Findings**

| | Research Findings | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Students have limited vocabulary related to the topic | 51 | 80% |
| 2. | Students do not understand key words on the topic | 47 | 75% |
| 3. | The composition topics do not cover students' areas of interest | 49 | 78% |
| 4. | The teacher is too severe when grading their compositions, as a result they feel discouraged to attempt writing tasks | 38 | 60% |
| 5 | The students provided the following suggestions on what the teacher should do to enhance their writing skills:<br>• Writing activities should be carried out more frequently in the classroom.<br>• The teacher should provide sample writing tasks from where they can build their own writing.<br>• Teacher should implement group work on regular basis<br>• Teacher should provide relevant vocabulary before they write<br>• Writing topics should cover their areas of interest. | 50 | 79% |

**n = 63.**

**Table 2: Pedagogic Decision Table**

| Learner Engagement Activity | Pedagogic Decision Activity |
|---|---|
| 1. Help learners build more vocabulary | a. Translate difficult words |
| 2. Provide more practice exercises | b. Explain difficult and unknown words |
| 3. Reinforce group work | c. Allow more time to do writing activities |
| 4. Carry out more writing activities | d. Explain keywords |
| 5. Make students write something (however small) every day. | e. Facilitate brainstorming activities in groups. |

## III. Action Research

### 1. Action Plan

Based on the findings above, I created an action plan to address the issues identified. The action plan included strategies supported learners to take part in writing tasks, and this was carried out over a period of eight weeks during the second trimester of the academic year. This gave a total of ten lessons of one hour duration each.

The following topics were suggested by the learner which aligned with the goals and requirements of the curriculum. Then, groups were formed based on the students' preferred topics which included the following: *Preventing drug and alcohol abuse, Recreational Activities, Importance of English at Workplace, Environment, Health, Climate Change, Gender Equality, Democracy, The Quest for Excellence, Digitalization, Sports and Technology etc.* They brainstormed in these groups to elicit ideas for writing.

#### a. Prewriting Activities and Guided Writing

To facilitate student's writing, I engaged them in pre-writing activities based on topics of interest. These activities were designed to generate ideas, while I facilitated the process by:

1. Providing relevant learning resources and language support. (By explaining key words and writing them on the chalk board.)
2. Offering prompts for group discussions to explore ideas and facilitate critical thinking. (I provided students with some prompts to stimulate group discussions on the different topics chosen.)
3. Allowing groups to share discussions and receive feedback.
4. Utilizing visual aids (pictures were gotten from the internet and from around their immediate environment) to pre-teach vocabulary.

#### b. Model Texts and Writing Development

Model texts (letters, diary entries, articles, reports) were used to demonstrate writing structures and principles (Hyland, 2003). These texts were gotten from a variety of sources: internet, magazine articles and newspaper cuttings, and some past essays from students. This enabled the students to:

1. Familiarize themselves with target text types
2. Analyze and imitate good writing
3. Examine text structure and linguistic features
4. Jointly construct texts and receive feedback before working individually.

By combining these strategies, students developed their writing skills and confidence.

#### c. International Exchange Project

I collaborated with Soumahoro Manigolo from Lycee Moderne d'Alepe in Cote D'Ivoire to provide students with authentic writing opportunities. Through this partnership, students from both countries were paired up to exchange letters, giving them a real audience beyond just the teacher. This initiative sparked excitement and engagement as students wrote to share knowledge about themselves and their country. Upon receiving letters from their new pen pals in Cote D'Ivoire, the students were thrilled and filled with enthusiasm.

**d. Assessing Students' Participation in Writing:**

Based on my findings derived from analyzing data, I designed an evaluation checklist that would respond to the different challenges that the learners faced. This checklist (see Appendix 3) assessed five key aspects*:*

1. Engagement and Participation: Students' involvement in individual and group writing tasks
2. Preparedness: Completion of pre-writing assignments before class
3. Collaboration and feedback: peer-to-peer constructive feedback, active listening and teamwork
5. Risk-taking and experimentation: Willingness to try new writing techniques and learn from mistakes and also make use of new vocabulary
6. Reflection and self-improvement: Ability to reflect on the writing process, identify areas for improvement and ask questions.

This checklist provided a comprehensive framework for assessing the effectiveness of the strategies employed to enhance students' engagement in writing activities.

## 2. Results

Prior to implementing new strategies, only 12-15 out of 80 students attempted writing tasks and their scores ranged from 2 - 11 on a total of 20 as demonstrated on Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Impact of implemented Strategies**

| Number of students enrolled | Number of students who attempted writing before research | Range of Scores /20 | Number of students who showed progress after implementation of findings | Range of Scores /20 | Number of students with slight progress |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 80 | 11- 15 | 2- 11 | 65 | 12-16 | 15 |

Outcomes included:

- More students engaged and participated in writing activities.
- Students worked effectively in groups, took notes, asked questions and completed assignments, demonstrating commitment to learning.
- 65 out of 80 students showed improved engagement and grades. With scores ranging from 12-16 on a total of 20.
- 15 students demonstrated little improvement, highlighting areas for further support, such as constructing basic English sentences and appropriate tense usage.

Group work and collaborative feedback enabled students to:

- Plan, draft, revise and edit compositions together (Graham & Perin, 2007).
- Share knowledge and generate ideas for writing.
- Correct each other's work and provide feedback.

The letter exchange activity motivated students to write without fear of poor grades. Allowing students to write drafts and receive feedback, and to rewrite, boosted their confidence in writing.

The new strategies not only improved the grades but also increased students' motivation. One student exclaimed, "I can't believe I have a pass grade in writing! This is the first time this is happening." This anecdotal evidence underscores that the strategies used were effective and actually helped to enhance students' writing skills.

## IV. Discussion of Findings

This study investigated the effectiveness of specific strategies in enhancing student's writing skills in a Cameroonian classroom. The findings of this research indicate that the implementation of the different writing strategies were effective and actually helped to enhance students' writing skills. They suggest that anticipating language needs, using model texts, explicit instructions, peer observation and feedback, and autonomy are effective strategies for improving students' writing skills. The results of this study contribute to existing body of research on writing instruction, highlighting the importance of providing students with a supportive learning environment. The study's findings also underscore the value of peer collaboration and feedback in improving student's writing skills. Furthermore, the study shows that the use of model texts and explicit instructions provides insights into the role of scaffolding in writing instruction.

The findings of this study have several pedagogical implications for teaching writing in the classroom. Firstly, it suggests that teachers should anticipate students' language needs and provide adequate support and scaffolding to help them develop their writing skills. Secondly, that teachers should use model texts to provide explicit instructions to help students develop their writing skills and offer opportunities for peer observation and feedback, collaboration and autonomy to student motivation and engagement. Moreover, teachers can use these strategies to provide students with a clear understanding of what is expected of them to develop their writing skills. Finally, the study suggests that teachers should provide students with regular feedback and encouragement to motivate them and to build their confidence in writing.

While the study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of specific strategies in enhancing students' writing skills, it has several limitations. Given that the sample size was relatively small and the findings may not be generalized in other contexts, future research should aim to address this limitation by conducting the research in a larger scale. Secondly, the study used some specific strategies in a specific classroom context and the findings may not be applicable to other teaching contexts.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated the importance of providing students with a supportive and structured learning environment to enhance their writing skills. The findings have implications for teaching practice and suggest that teachers should use a combination of strategies to support students' writing development. By doing so, teachers can help students develop the writing skills they need to attain academic and professional opportunities.

## V. Conclusion

### 1. What I learned from this Research

I am satisfied with this research outcome, which highlighted the importance of providing support to encourage student participation in writing tasks. The implemented strategies successfully motivated students to engage in writing activities.
By exploring my classes, analyzing root problems and identifying effective solutions, I can now make informed decisions that positively impact student learning.

Some key take aways from the research are:

- This research reinforced the value of classroom research in identifying and addressing teaching challenges and gaining insights into the need to differentiate instruction to meet diverse needs of learners.
- Instead of feeling frustrated, I learned to approach classroom challenges with intentional reflection thereby gaining confidence in my ability to support learners.
- Involving students in the process empowered them to take charge of their learning, fostering motivation and student engagement.
- The research findings informed adjustments to my instructional strategies by refining my teaching practice, ultimately improving student outcomes in writing.

This research experience has positively impacted my teaching attitude, enabling me to approach challenges with a solutions-focused mindset and also empowering me to enhance my teaching practices while growing professionally. However, there are still some ways of improving the research in future.

To improve on this study, future research could consider several aspects. Firstly, increasing the sample size would provide more generalized results. In addition, incorporating a control group would provide a comparison group that would determine the effectiveness of the strategies. Moreso, differentiated instruction would be used by adapting the strategies to meet the diverse learning needs of the students. Finally, incorporating technology would help enhance student engagement and motivation. By addressing these limitations and incorporating these proposals, future research can build upon the findings and provide a more definitive understanding of the strategies that enhance Student's writing.

### 2. Challenges Faced Conducting this Research.

Conducting research in a classroom setting presents a unique set of challenges that can impact the validity and success of the study. I encountered several obstacles while investigating strategies to enhance student writing experiences which were:

**Limited student participation**: Some students were hesitant to participate in the research which could potentially impact the validity of the findings.

**Time Constraints**: Managing the research while teaching posed some time management challenges and having to meet with the expectations of the curriculum.

**Classroom Management:** Integrating research activities into regular classroom routines presented challenges in maintaining a productive learning environment.

**Balancing Research and Teaching Responsibilities**: Managing the dual roles of teacher and researcher was stressful and could impact the quality of both research and teaching.

**Student Motivation**: Some students still lacked the motivation to participate in the writing activities which definitely impacted the effectiveness of the strategies implemented.

**Assessment and Feedback:** Assessing and providing individual feedback to 80 students was quite a daunting task which could affect students' engagement and the effectiveness of the strategies.

This research journey has culminated in a profound understanding that intentional teacher agency is the catalyst for meaningful classroom change. By leveraging research as a problem-solving tool, I identified effective strategies to support students in writing tasks, fostering a collaborative and autonomous learning environment. The research underscores the critical role teachers play in driving classroom innovation and improvement. Also, by involving students in the research process, they developed a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning. This experience has not only enhanced my teaching practices but also instilled a growth mindset, encouraging me to continue exploring innovative solutions to increase student learning. Further areas of research based on these findings could be:

- Investigating the impact of different feedback strategies on student's writing progress and motivation.
- Assessing the impact of the implemented strategies on students' writing skills and motivation.

## References

Allwright, D., & Bailey, K. M. (1991). *Focus on the language classroom: An introduction to classroom research for language teachers*. Cambridge University Press.

Cameroon. (1998). *Loi no 98/004 du 14 avril 1998 d'orientation de l'éducation au Cameroun* [Law of April 14 1998 on the orientation of education in Cameroon]. Available (in French) from https://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/afrique/cameroun-loi-1998.htm

Cameroon. (2012). Decree N° 2012/267 of 11th June 2012 to organize the Ministry of Secondary Education.

Graham S., & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools.* A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York. Washington DC: Alliance of Excellent Education. https://www.carnegie.org/publications/writing-next-effective-strategies-to-improve-writing-of-adolescents-in-middle-and-high-schools/

Hattie., J., & Timperly, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research,77*(1), 81-112. https://.doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487

Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. Cambridge University Press.

Jurianto, Salimah, & Kwary. D.A. (2015). Strategies for teaching writing in EFL at a senior high school in Indonesia. *CELT 15*(1), 43-53. https://journal.unika.ac.id/index.php/celt/article/view/413

Lin, B. (2016). Genre-based teaching and Vygotskian principles in EFL: The case of a university writing course. *Asian EFL Journal, 8*(3), 226-248. Available at The Internet Archive: https://web.archive.org/web/20230203081051/https://www.asian-efl-

journal.com/main-editions-new/genre-based-teaching-and-vygotskian-principles-in-efl-the-case-of-a-university-writing-course/index.htm

Peloghitis, J., & Ferreira, D. (2018). Examining the role of model texts in writing instruction. *Accents Asia, 10*(1), 17-26. https://accentsasia.org/issues/10-1/Peloghitis_Ferreira.pdf

Siebetcheu R., & Machetti, S. (Eds.) (2019). *Le camfranglais dans le monde global: Contextes migratoires et perspectives sociolinguistiques* [Camfranglais in the global world: Migratory contexts and sociolinguistic perspectives]. L'Harmattan.

Smith, M.W., & Wilheim, J.D. (2002). *Reading don't fix no Chevys. Literacy in the lives of young men*. Heinemann.

## About the Author

**Mayonghe Melanie Kesiki is** a seasoned educator with over 15 years of experience teaching English as foreign Language and currently working at Government High School Joss in Douala, Cameroon. She is passionate and enthusiastic about classroom research and mentors teachers from Cameroon and Nigeria. She has presented her own research at IATEFL ReSig online conference. Email: 77maymel@gmail.com / mmayonghekesiki@gmail.com

## Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my mentor, Dr. Eric Enongene Ekembe, for his invaluable guidance, patience and foresight throughout the research period. His mentorship has been instrumental in shaping my research journey.

I also wish to thank my colleagues of the CAMELTA Research Group for their unwavering support and collaboration and for providing a platform to share my research findings. Their encouragements have been a constant source of inspiration.

My immense thanks go to Soumahoro Manigolo from Lycee Moderne d'Alepe in Cote D'Ivoire who agreed to collaborate with me in this project

Finally, I will like to thank the reviewers for their constructive feedback and insightful comments, which have helped improve the quality of this work.

## Declaration of Possible Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

There is no financial interest to report.

I hereby certify that the submission is my own original work and not under review at any other publication.

## Appendix I.

**QUESTIONNAIRES FOR CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH**

**PURPOSE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

This questionnaire aims at helping the teacher in investigating strategies that can help learners improve on their writing skills.

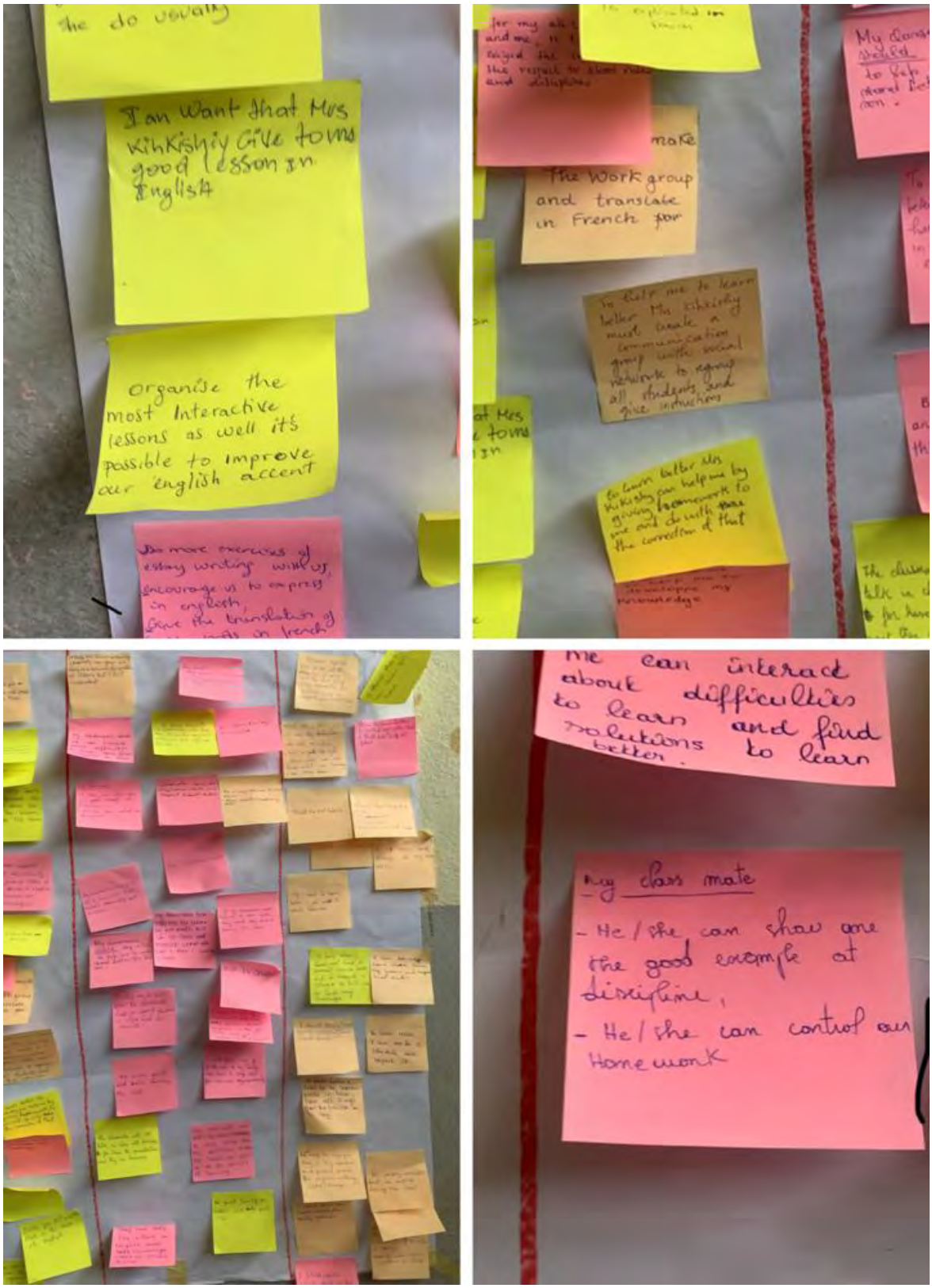
**FOCUS GROUP:** TleESP1 /ITA

Information gotten from these questions will help the teacher to investigate strategies that will help to improve on students' writing skills therefore, students are expected to respond in all honestly and without any pressure or fear.

1. Do you do writing activities in class?
   _____
2. If yes, tick the writing activities that you do?
   a) Sentences
   b) paragraphs
   c) summaries
   d) Essays
   e) others (state here_____)
3. What else do you write in English outside of the classroom?
   _____
   _____
4. How do you find Writing? ( *Tick the correct answer*)
   a) Very easy
   b) easy
   c) difficult
   d) Extremely difficult.
5. What do you think that I can do to make writing activities more enjoyable to you?
   _____
   _____
6. Do you think writing well is important for you? _____
   If yes state how? _____
   _____
   _____
7. What would you love to write about?_____
   _____
   _____

Administered by Mrs. KIHKISHIY Melanie

## Appendix 2


I an Want that Mrs Kihkishiy Give toms good lesson in English
Organise the most Interactive lessons as well it's possible to improve our english accent
The work group and translate in French for
We can interact about difficulties to learn and find solutions to learn better.
My class mate
- He / she can show one the good example at dixipline,
- He / she can control our Home work

**Appendix 3:**

| ***Writing Assessment Checklist*** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Category*** | Criteria | Yes | No |
| ***Engagement and Participation*** | Actively participates in class discussions and brainstorming activities | | |
| | Completes assigned tasks and activities | | |
| | Involves in individual and group writing tasks | | |
| | Shows interest and enthusiasm for learning | | |
| | | | |
| ***Preparedness*** | Comes to class prepared | | |
| | Meets deadlines and submissions | | |
| | Organizes time and resources effectively | | |
| | | | |
| ***Collaboration and feedback*** | Works effectively with peers | | |
| | Provides peer-to-peer constructive feedback | | |
| | Works effectively with team | | |
| | Listens actively | | |
| | | | |
| ***Risk taking and experimentation*** | Takes risks in learning, exploring new ideas and using new vocabulary | | |
| | Tries new writing techniques | | |
| | Learns from mistakes | | |
| | Asks questions | | |
| ***Reflection and self Improvement*** | Reflects on writing progress | | |
| | Identifies areas of improvement | | |
| | Seeks feedback and guidance | | |

# Investigating Ways of Making Reading Comprehension Lessons More Participative and Successful

Ngo Ngué Élodie Gaëlle
*Lycée de Manguen II*
https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2653-7056

**DOI: 10.23350/eltcrj.226**

**Article History**
Received: Feb 6, 2024
Accepted: Aug 15, 2025
Published: Nov 10, 2025

**Keywords:** Exploratory Action Research; Teaching Reading Comprehension; Rural Settings; Reflection



## Abstract

This article explores EFL students' poor participation in Reading comprehension lessons under an Exploratory Action Research model. In Cameroon, English language is a required subject. I teach in a purely French-based rural area, thus making it very challenging both to teach and to learn English. Seventy-five 9th, 11th and 12th grades students, mixed-level students from my three classes, whose ages range from 10 to 21, were participants. The data were collected through a questionnaire and a reflective journal in order to answer three research questions. First, an exploratory practice was carried out to understand what caused students' lack of motivation and passivity. Following the findings of the exploratory practice, an Action Research was carried out with the same three classes in a four-weeks period. Research findings through questionnaires and sample lessons taught revealed that if we move into learners' area of interest with varied activities, teaching and learning will be more effective. The paper closes with self-reflection on what strategies were successful so as to instil the habit of reading and related activities beyond the classroom.

## Introduction

Reading comprehension is an important skill that enables students to build language comprehension skill to increase their understanding of a text read. It also helps students to learn new information and to employ strategies to interact with the text. Understanding the complexity faced by language learners with reading comprehension, Kendeou, McMaster, and Christ (2016) shares that it "calls for concerted efforts to develop assessments that help identify sources of difficulties and to design instructional approaches to prevent or ameliorate these difficulties" (p.8). I decided to carry out research on making reading comprehension more accessible for language learners because, for a number of years I have been teaching, my students have demonstrated negative attitude towards reading comprehension and lack of willingness to collaborate in reading lesson. Classroom participation was a big issue in my classes – as Turner and Patrick (2004) say, participation in lessons facilitates learning. In their paper, they list various students' participation forms: classic ones include overt, inclusive, voluntary participation. Furthermore, students may also participate without these behavioral indicators of involvement by watching, listening and thinking.

## The Context

### Teaching Context

English language is taught as a compulsory subject at all levels of the education system of Cameroon from pre-nursery to tertiary levels. History records that since 1961, after the Reunification, Cameroon has implemented an exoglossic language policy based on the exclusive use of English and French as the languages of teaching and learning (Chiatoh, 2012; Chumbow, 1990). The law N°98/004 of 14th April 1998 on education in Cameroon, title 1, article 3, clearly says "The State shall enshrine bilingualism at all levels of education as a factor of national unity and integration". French and English were the languages chosen for that purpose. Following the national curriculum, the academic subject of English, referred to as "*Anglais"* in the French educational sub-system is taught three hours per week in middle school classes (that is 6th – 9th grades, all four language-skills included); three hours for Science students and four hours for Art students per week in high school classes (10th-12th grades, all four language-skills included).

Lycée bilingue de Manguen II (Government Bilingual High School Manguen II) is the rural school in the Centre Region of Cameroon where I teach. This means that our school offers both English and French educational sub-systems. Out of the eighteen high schools found in the Matomb division, only three schools are bilingual. I teach French, English language and English literature to students under the Anglo-Saxon educational system on the one hand. And I also teach English language to French-speaking mixed-level students in the 9th, 11th and 12th grades on the other hand. These are examination preparation classes. That is the classes prepare students who will sit for national exams at the end of the school year thus granting them a certificate for entrance to the upper level in their studies. Moving from the 11th grade requires students to pass the national exam and passing the 12th grade national exam allows students to enter university or professional institutions. Indeed, if at the end of the process, results are not successful, the student will repeat the needed class. I am the head of the *Anglais* Department in my school and we have four "*Anglais*" teachers for the entire school.

### Local Community Context

Found in the Center region of Cameroon, precisely in the Nyong-et-Kellé divison and in the Matomb subdivision, Manguen II is the village which hosts the school. Therefore, our school population essentially comes from the latter village and from six neighbouring villages. The languages spoken in the community, all villages included are *Bassa'a* (i.e., local language) and French. Accessed through motor bikes principally and vehicles, the village suffers from lack of constant electricity shortages. Electricity could be present three days in a week. Yes! If you might ask yourself the question, classes go on in the school without light. Because there is no local market, people have to travel to Yaoundé, capital city, about 100 miles away, or go to the subdivision village to add to what their farms produce as food. People living in this community are mostly farmers producing palm oil making, which is the trade mark of the local area. Information and communication tools are limited in the areas as very few homes have televisions and very few students have smartphones.

## Student Community Context

Students show little interest for English. Why? Because their immediate linguistic environment is essentially local: the *Bassa'a* community and formal (that is French): teachers, non-native friends (friends having a different mother tongue than *Bassa'a*) and various administrative structures. That said, the teaching of English language becomes so challenging and somehow frustrating as English is only spoken in the context of the classroom. Regarding the communicative language approach, Swan (1985) made it clear that mother tongue interference hampers L3 (English) acquisition. Yet, Atkinson (1993, 2) pointed out that "It is impossible to talk of a 'right balance' or a perfect model for using L1- it's not that simple. L1 can be a valuable resource if it is used at appropriate times and in appropriate ways". L1 (i.e., *Bassa'a* in my context) selective and limited use and strategies in the course of teaching L3 (i.e., English) have resulted in very little fruits in enhancing learning. Another factor that accounts for students' demotivation regarding English is that students have very limited resources such as course books. Students also have any little to no assistance at home from their parents in their studies. English-speaking educational role-models are lacking in my students' lives and surroundings (e.g. from the discussions I had with them). The few they can name are from informal activities (like selling food crops; selling palm oil; selling palm wine or alcohol in the surroundings). Indeed, English language in this locality is not valued for future economic success.

## The Issue

Many of my students could neither read or decode English text (that is reading the text aloud for pronunciation purposes or engage in silently to extract meaning from written text), nor perform well on reading comprehension tasks. I have noticed that most of the students in my classes have problems in reading comprehension. They fail to predict the meaning of new words; to summarise the text, just to name a few issues. They also have problems answering comprehension questions during class. No matter the strategies I put in place to make learning effective in the reading lesson, I have noticed that they were not participative at all. Grammar translation, as an alternative approach, at some point in time from L3 (English language) to L1 (*Bassa'a* which is my native language too), did not help. Few students engaged enough to follow the lesson; others were busy discussing other topics in French with friends and not paying attention to the lesson. And last but not the least, the performances of students were quite poor in that any section of the reading comprehension content.

What is at stake goes beyond helping students to score good marks and grades in the reading section of the "*Anglais* Paper", which is a two-hour (middle school) and a three-hour high school level exam paper and national exam with four sections of ten marks each: grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension and composition. Students are to write essays on one of the three proposed topics (see Appendix 4). Believing that reflective practice is part of learning, meaning and relevancy is created thus initiating growth and change. Following John Dewey's (1933) famous paraphrased quote "We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflection on experience", I therefore decided to reflect on ways of making reading comprehension lessons more participative and successful.

## Research Objectives

Generally, with the aim of:

- promoting the love of reading inside and outside the classroom
- multiplying strategies that will help students perform any reading task
- equipping students so as to perform well in their papers and more specifically
- getting my students motivated for reading comprehension lessons
- getting them fully engaged in reading comprehension lessons,

I decided to explore ways through which I could render reading comprehension a regular, fun and engaging classroom activity to them. This research project is so important because the truth is that, unconditionally (during class tests and national examinations) students will have to read and to write (talking about the *Anglais* paper which has reading comprehension as one of the four main sections) in order to score marks.

### Exploratory Research Questions

To help me explore the problem, I came up with the following questions:

- Why do my students find reading comprehension lessons boring?
- What challenges do they face in performing reading comprehension activities?
- What helps my students to be more motivated and engaged during reading comprehension lessons?

## Methodology

Working in a public school and under challenging situations, I employed exploratory action research as a research approach. I identified a classroom recurrent challenge (in all my classes), I sought ways to understand the causes for such a situation and I took some actions to improve on the prevailing situation. Exploratory Action Research conceived by Smith (2015) is a type of understanding action-oriented research initiated and carried out by teachers themselves on classroom issues of importance to them in order to gain a better understanding of the dynamic nature of classroom life and possibly to bring about change. It is a two-phase approach: an exploratory research phase (the teacher-researcher explores the problem he/she faces) and an action implementation phase (he/she plans for actions and implement them).

### Respondents

I decided to carry out this research project in all three of my classes given the fact that I noticed the same issues and challenges towards reading comprehension lessons. Again, the overall number of participants being below 100, I chose to study and to interpret the results as one set.

### Research Method and Data Collection Tools

I planned and carried out the entire research project in four weeks (mid-October till mid-November 2023). Through mixed-method design, I used several research tools observation and note making, a questionnaire, reflective journal (where I recorded details concerning the teaching and the learning process) to explore students' lack of motivation, poor participation and poor performances.

**Table 1. Participants' Details**

| | Students per Class | Age range | Male students | Female students | Level of English at the start of the project | Number of students with the class coursebook |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Grade 9** | 23 | 10 -18 | 13 | 10 | High beginner | 6 |
| **Grade 11** | 42 | 12 - 20 | 14 | 28 | Mixed level (low to high intermediate) | 5 |
| **Grade 12** | 10 | 17 - 21 | 3 | 7 | Mixed level (low intermediate to low advanced) | 2 |
| **Total** | 75 | / | 30 | 45 | / | / |

**Weeks 1 and 2: Reading Lessons Observation**

It seemed essential that I could no longer continue to teach like that after observing the attitude of my students during my classes and their performances during tests. I noticed that students did not participate in the class actively no matter the efforts put in.

**Table 2. Notes of the Journal**

| Questions | 9th Graders | 11th Graders | 12th Graders |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. How many students could raise their hands to read the texts spontaneously? | Very few *(Less than 10% approx.)* | Very Few *(Less than 10% approx.)* | Few *(Roughly 10 - 25% approx.)* |
| 2. How focused were the students during reading lessons? | One third of the class | Half of the class | Half of the class |
| 3. How many of them were eager to perform reading tasks? | Half of the class | Half of the class | Three quarter of the class |
| 4. What attitudes they showed during reading activities? | Shyness, inappropriate noise, and nonparticipation | Nonparticipation, inappropriate noise | Average participation |

**Week 3: Test Paper 2, Correction and Remediation**

Marks from the second paper were generally not satisfactory especially in the reading comprehension section (see Table 3). I did correct the paper with the students and had a remediation[1] session with them on essential elements they did not understand: grammar points; reading comprehension questions 'dos and don'ts'; essays methodologies just to name a few.

[1] **Remediation**: After the correction sessions with students (after marking papers, correction takes place with the teacher explaining each question and the correct answers to the whole class). A remediation session is a lesson where the teacher gathers some key aspects which most students did not understand (in their papers) and which caused them to score poor grades. Generally, these are grammar and vocabulary points. The teacher reexplains misunderstood structures.

**Table 3. Details of the Reading Comprehension Section of Anglais Paper 2**

| | Students per Class | Number of questions per text | Reading Comprehension section performances | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Less than 5/10 | More than 5/10 |
| **Grade 9** | 23 | 5 | 16 | 7 |
| **Grade 11** | 42 | 7 | 30 | 12 |
| **Grade 12** | 10 | 8 | 5 | 5 |
| **Total** | 75 | | | |

**Week 4: Questionnaire**

I chose to proceed with a paper-based questionnaire because it enabled me to receive considerable amounts of information from learners in a short period of time. The questionnaire included four different questions addressing the exploratory aspects and focusing on students' perceptions of what reading comprehension difficulties they face. There were three multiple-choice questions following Likert's agreement typology scale and one open-ended question.

1) How much do you agree or disagree with these statements about reading in English?
2) Personal views about Reading comprehension lessons.
3) How do you feel about reading comprehension tasks?
4) What strategies do you put in place in order to answer questions?

I asked the same questions to all my students (across three classes). This was done the following week after the correction and remediation session in my three classes. I took fifteen minutes in each class to administer the translated questionnaire (See Appendix 1). The questions were in French (see Appendix 1 for English translation of the questionnaire). I asked students to answer in French though it had to do with English language. Participants were informed that the result of the questionnaire was for effective teaching and learning. There were no "Name and Age Entry" on the questionnaire: a way to allow them write their answers stress free. For the Action Research phase, I wrote a reflective journal to record the actions that happened in the class during reading activities. I documented what was happening after every class session to make use of it in providing responses to some of the exploratory questions. During the implementation action, my mentor advised me to have a reflective journal which will help me assess the different classes I teach. In the course of doing that I used Jasper's (2013) Experience Reflection and Action model so as to note all teaching and learning changes from before the project (see Appendix 2).

## Exploratory Research Results and Discussion

After collecting the data from the questionnaire, it was analysed through Excel. See results and charts in Appendix 1.

### Question 1: Why do my students find Reading Comprehension lessons boring?

Section 1 of the questionnaire gave precious information. The first question was: "How much do you agree or disagree with these statements about reading in English?" 68% of the students mentioned that they only read in the classroom context and - besides - just their notes;

while 45% of them say that "reading is a waste of time". This means that they do not practice the reading skill. And the students' perceptions related to their personal views of reading comprehension lessons, showed the following. 77% of the students "feel bored" during lessons because some texts (of certain categories) proved to be less appealing to the students than others. Students show big signs of anxiety as 60% of them shy away from reading aloud because they fear to being mocked by their peers. Again, the low participatory level of students during reading comprehension classes lies in the fact that they do not understand the meaning of words in the text and related tasks. No matter the reading approach used (bottom-up or top-down bottom), 57% of the students find the texts we study in class "too long and difficult to understand". Their lack of reading practice accounts for the reason why they are not active during reading lessons.

**Question 2: What challenges do they face in performing reading comprehension activities?**

Concerning the type of activity, some students pointed doing more practical, funnier group activities in classes (31%). Learners (in classes and in examination contexts) switch to French in providing answers or in performing tasks because they have an intern vocabulary (students' L2) as they lack the necessary vocabulary to answer reading comprehension questions (23%) in English. Because learners do not practice reading as a skill, they may find it easier to go back to their L2 (French) to figure out meaning of the target language (22%). Apart from relying on their peers to understand the text and reading activities, others issues are raised in section 2. Results showed that students stopped reading when they met new words (14%). By this, they find it difficult to connect ideas in the text and so, lack concentration while reading. Group work activities will make them gain confidence in themselves; make them feel more responsible because of the need for contributing to teamwork and learn mutually. These affect the intended purpose, for learners never get to acquire nor use the target language effectively. 10% of the students pointed out their difficulty in summarizing the text.

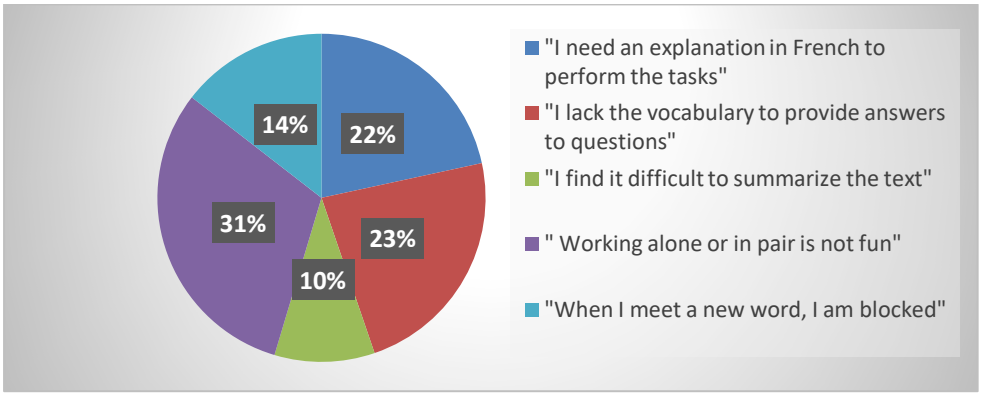



**Figure 1. Students' opinions on reading comprehension tasks**

**Question 3: What helps my students to be more motivated and engaged during reading comprehension lessons?**

Of all the responses I received in this section, the following are the top suggestions given by the 75 students. Students suggested "to increase the reading of short and interesting texts" (80%). They do not have the skills to work independently as required by most of reading strategies. As such, 78% of them want group work activities. "Because I don't understand most

words, I wish to work with … (Names of classmates deleted) to perform reading task and to learn". 58% of the students want more oral practice. This is the reason why they recourse to showing their concern in practicing the language accurately and fluently. 50% of the students need more guided practice and wanted me to vary instructions methods ("*show and tell*", "*teach strategies*" ...).

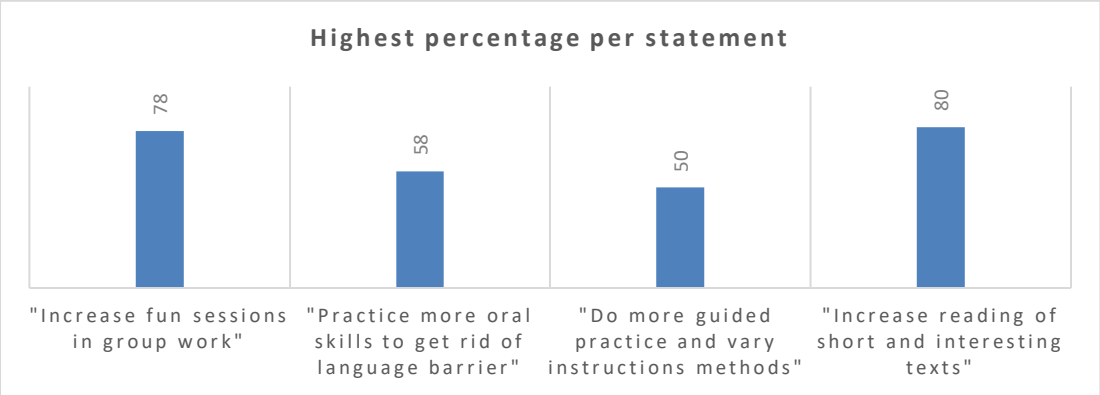



**Figure 2. Students' suggestions on how to solve the problem**

## From Inquiry to Action

### Planning to change

Following what Nunan (1998, 102) says about teaching: "Students learn numerous things simultaneously and imperfectly", I drafted the content of my action research based on three major findings from the exploratory phase (see Table 4). Low proficiency level of my students which doesn't help them process texts from the coursebooks. Lack of reading practice and anxiety they show during these particular lessons. Because students suggested I should bring in appealing content, I produced three special texts as May, Bingham, and Pendergast (2014, 212) refer to texts selection that are "culturally competent". These were the biography of a musician, an illustrated article and gender-based text). See Appendix 5 for further details about the steps in my action research.

### Action and Observation

The following actions were implemented in the lessons (four to be precise) taught in a month's timeline (from mid-February to mid-March 2024). To monitor the effect of the action plan, I kept a reflective journal accounting for what students did and how they performed the tasks throughout the stages of the latter reading comprehension lessons. Were the new strategies used in the course of teaching reading comprehension successful? What accounted for such a change? Koshy (2010) talking about action research states that "in Action Research, findings emerge as action develops and takes place; however, they are not conclusive or absolute, but ongoing" (pp. 1-2). I was also able to observe and to focus on the attitude, the behaviour and feelings of learners. Tables 5 and 6 identify the changes observed from the exploratory phase (*before*) and the action phase (*after*).

**Table 4. Action Plan**

| | Description | Tools/Materials | Lesson stages |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Action 1** | Provide interesting illustrative texts | Pictures, share copies of reading texts. Individual and group reading competitions with small prizes. | Presentation stage |
| **Action 2** | Adapt group work activities according to different learning styles and let students complete the tasks in two forms (oral and written). | Using reading, prior knowledge activation; developing questions, graphic organizers, summarizing and predicting in a group of four students. | Presentation and practice stage |
| **Action 3** | Teach new vocabulary; simplify the instructions and praise students verbally and emotionally for every little improvement they made. | Presenting and modeling the new vocabulary before reading the text and asking them to highlight or to underline difficult words. This would increase understanding and avoid them stopping at new words. Asking one or two students to retell the instruction. | All lesson stages |

**Table 5. Reading Material**

| Before | After |
|---|---|
| The long texts used from the course books caused students to be sleepy and inactive | Producing shorter and most appealing texts brought back students' enthusiasm for the lesson. |

Based on the observation from the teaching process (week1), I observed several changes. It was found that students participated in an active way. Students gladly did the activities and I could observe many hands up to participate in the lesson for both reading aloud and to perform reading tasks). Pictures attached to the text grasped their attention and increased students' reading participation though there were still spelling errors while reading. I mean there were more hands raised during pre-reading, while reading and post-reading activities as compared to the past. Students preferred having (each) a copy of the illustrated biography (see appendix 3). Crump (1995, 10) quoting Hyman (1974) says "regardless of age, most college students enjoy the pleasure of playing, the active participation, and the suspense about the outcome of games". Also, reading the questions before reading the text and discussing them before doing the answering task helped students a lot. They began to use skimming and scanning skills to answer the comprehension questions. By practicing skimming, they understood what the text was about. Generally speaking, students seemed interested in the material read and they were consistently interested in new things. They were able to guess meaning from the context of the material (adjacent words and pictures). They were able to complete the vocabulary activities and so they felt more confident in reading.

**Table 6. Classroom Management**

| Before | After |
|---|---|
| Asking students to perform tasks individually in their books did not help. Some students chose not to work and waited for others to do "the whole job" before copying notes. | Group work happened to be highly effective: students worked together with confidence in performing reading tasks. |

As my planning did not originally include activities in pairs or in group, I had to create a new set of activities for my class that involved collaborative work. This experience helped me to take into account my students' opinion in relation to how they could work in a fun and comfortable environment. Though there was code switching (French and English) plus some spelling and grammar mistakes, I could see how they happily work together. Mindful of the fact that they are in an examination class, the efforts they put in performing the tasks were so encouraging. Fast learners assisted slow ones as they performed tasks.

During data analysis, students mentioned "they need explanations in French to perform tasks" which made me to realise that the instructions I give should be clear and simplified. World Learning (2023), mentioning Thornbury's blog pointed out a similar thing when he said about how repeating a communicative situation or task enable learners to gain confidence, improve fluency. After applying this strategy (Table 7), I observed that students stopped asking for the translation of the instruction in French. The multiple compliments ("*Good boy*!" - "*Awesome*!" - "*Clap for her/him*" - "*There you are!*" - "*Excellent! Have this…*") and helpful feedback I (the teacher) and peers gave boosted their morale. I came to realise (at the end of this action phase) that the activities they liked the most were underlining the correct word, filling in the gaps and presentation of summaries. They still found it difficult to order the information and to answer the last question because it is always an open question. Clarification request (from both the teacher and learners) with repetition were the two techniques which made error corrections not frustrating.

**Table 7. Giving instructions**

| Before | After |
|---|---|
| Most students could not perform reading tasks because they did not understand instructions given. | Modelling and instruction repetition from peers were helpful. |

## Reflection

After teaching for eight years in a rural area with very low resources and students' demotivation towards the English language, I got to understand that self-reflection and reflective practices are the keys for teaching and learning effectivity. Though I didn't compare my learners' external reading activities in other languages (French, Spanish to name a few), I could see how they improved their reading skills. Indeed, learners' motivation and interaction depend on the quality of the lesson plan and the activities therein. The various teaching strategies I used enhanced teaching and learning. More students, spontaneously, read passages aloud as before. Conducting Exploratory Action Research was so beneficial to my students and to my humble self. By implementing some new activities and having seen the changes that occurred in my classes, I got relieved. The burden of carrying the teaching and the learning weight on my shoulders lightened. In my reflective journal, I noted that providing suitable texts for students improved vocabulary acquisition and usage. My students were able to use the vocabulary they learned from reading for comprehension in conversations. I also learned to be mindful that, at some point during the school year, students should be allowed to choose the close reading strategies for specific text through self-monitoring as Cummins (2013) says. The relationship I have with my students got to another level. They cooperated more; got involved in classroom activities more thanks to the compliments and encouragements I showed. Students found it interesting working and learning in groups.

## Conclusion

I experienced some challenges related to reading comprehension lessons in teaching my learners. Students' indifferent attitude towards these particular lessons and in doing related tasks motivated me to conduct my research to alter this tendency. The findings of my exploratory and action level research demonstrate the immense benefits of reading games, predicting, questioning, monitoring comprehension, pre-teaching new words, small presentations to name a few. Group-work based activities are preferable and advisable. I realized that learners can take responsibility for what they learn and how they want to learn.

I was lucky to attend workshops and to get acquainted with teacher research and research projects. I attended several webinars on teacher research and professional development. Thanks to Dr Eric Ekembe (my mentor), I became informed on exploratory action research process and its benefits both to teachers and to students. What I learnt, throughout the whole process is tremendous. I learnt how to identify a classroom challenge and work on it. The opportunity is conducive for teachers to develop themselves in terms of creativity through implementing new ideas or using various adapted techniques in their lessons. The environment in which you find yourself in, students' demotivation and lack of coursebooks should not lure one. But, self-reflection, creativity, lesson planning, follow-up, guidance and advice from mentor or colleagues (not necessarily from your school) will help you find answers to the identified problem. No matter the difficulties you face in your classroom, get your students to talk things out and try doing things differently. You will be surprised by the kind of feedback they give and the positive changes they will produce.

## References

Atkinson, D. (1993). *Teaching monolingual classes*. Longman.

Bochner, A. & Ellis, C. (1996). Talking over ethnography. In C. Ellis & A. Bochner (Eds.), *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing* (pp. 13-45). Alta Mira Press.

Cameroon. (1998). *Loi no 98/004 du 14 avril 1998 d'orientation de l'éducation au Cameroun* [Law of April 14 1998 on the orientation of education in Cameroon]. Available (in French) from https://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/afrique/cameroun-loi-1998.htm

Chiatoh, B.A. (2012). Official bilingualism and the construction of a Cameroonian national identity In G. Echu & A. A. Ebongué (Eds.), *Fifty years of official language bilingualism in Cameroon (1961-2011): Situation, stakes and perspectives* (pp. 65-85). L'Harmattan.

Chumbow B.S. (1990). Language and language policy in Cameroon. In N. Kofele-Kale (Ed.), *An African experiment in nation building: The bilingual Cameroon Republic since reunification* (pp. 281-311). Westview Press.

Crump, C. A. (1995). *Motivating students: A teacher's challenge*. Paper presented at the Annual Sooner Communication Conference, Norman, OK, April. ERIC Document ED387840. http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED387840.pdf

Cummins, S. (2013). What students can do when the reading gets rough. *Educational Leadership, 71*(3). https://ascd.org/el/articles/what-students-can-do-when-the-reading-gets-rough

Hyman, R. T. (1974). *Ways of teaching*. J. B. Lippincott Company.

Kendeou, P., McMaster, K. L., & Christ, T. J. (2016). Reading comprehension: Core components and processes. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 3*(1), 62-69. https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732215624707

Koshy, V. (2010). *Action Research for improving educational practice. A step-by-step guide*. Sage.

Jasper, M. (2013). *Beginning Reflective Practice*. Cengage Learning.

May, L. A., Bingham, G. E., & Pendergast, M. L. (2014). Culturally and linguistically relevant readalouds. *Multicultural Perspectives, 16* (4), 210-218. https://doi.10.1080/15210960.2014.952299

Nunan, D. (1998) Teaching grammar in context. *ELT Journal, 52*(2), 101-109. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/52.2.101

Smith, R. (2015). Exploratory Action Research as workplan: Why, what and where from. In K. Dikilitas, R. Smith, & W. Trotman (Eds.), *Teacher-researchers in action* (pp. 37-45). IATEFL. https://resig.weebly.com/teacher-researchers-in-action.html

Swan, M. (1985). A critical look at the communicative approach (2). *English Language Teaching Journal, 39*(2), 76-87. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/39.2.76

Tuner, J.C., & Patrick, H. (2004). Motivational influences on student participation in classroom learning activities. *Journal of Teacher College Record, 106*(9), 1759-1785. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9620.2004.00404.x

World Learning. (2023) Module 2 Overview – Ways of mediating grammar encounters in the classroom. OPEN Online Professional English Network. US Department of State and SIT Graduate Institute, World Learning. https://www.studocu.com/row/document/addis-ababa-institute-of-technology/reliability-engineering/module-2-packet-tgc-mooc-spring-2023/59034317

Thornbury, S. (n.d.). An A-Z of ELT. https://scottthornbury.wordpress.com/

## About the Author

**Ngo Ngué Elodie Gaelle** is an EFL teacher in Cameroon with over 12 years of experience in a rural government bilingual high school. She leads the English department of her school for ten years and is a teacher-researcher for four years. After successfully carrying on her EAR project, last year she was placed as a mentor by her supervisor and Outreach Coordinator of the IATEFL Research Special Interest Group (ReSIG). Apart from her administrative functions and her commitment to making teaching and learning effective in her classes, she is actively involved into teacher-research activities with peers, namely mentoring ELT teachers round the country and overseas. Email Address: nnegselodie@yahoo.fr

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Eric E. Ekembe, my mentor, for his invaluable guidance and support throughout this project. I am also grateful to Ana Garcia Stone, MenTRnet official and mentor for her technical expertise and field assistance. This project would not have been possible without the encouragement of my peers (Cameroon co-teacher researchers). Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the participants (my students) who generously shared their insights.

## Declaration of Possible Conflict of Interest

I write on my honour to declare that there is no conflict of interest with this paper.

# APPENDICES

## 1. QUESTIONNAIRE
## (English translation from the original French version)

The following questionnaire aims at getting learners' problems and difficulties in order to improve on the Reading comprehension category of actions. Be assured that the information given in here will remain confidential.

DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THIS PAPER.

**(*Please answer each question by ticking on each row*)**

**Section 1: Personal views and general attitudes towards in reading comprehension lessons.**

**1. How much do you agree or disagree with these statements about reading in English?**

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| « I read only if I have to » | | | | |
| « Reading is one my hobbies » | | | | |
| « I am a good reader » | | | | |
| « To me reading is a waiste of time" » | | | | |

**2. Personal views about Reading comprehension lessons.**

| | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| « You feel bored » | | |
| « You are tired and you want to sleep » | | |
| « You are very excited » | | |
| « You raise your hand to read and to participate » | | |
| « You don't raise your hand because you don't know how to read » | | |
| « You don't want to read because your classmates will mock you » | | |
| « You ask questions to your classmates in order to better understand the text and the activity » | | |
| « You work along with your classmates to perform reading tasks » | | |
| « You perform the reading tasks and call for the teacher to check out your answers » | | |

**Section 2: Challenges and practical difficulties learners face in performing reading comprehension tasks**

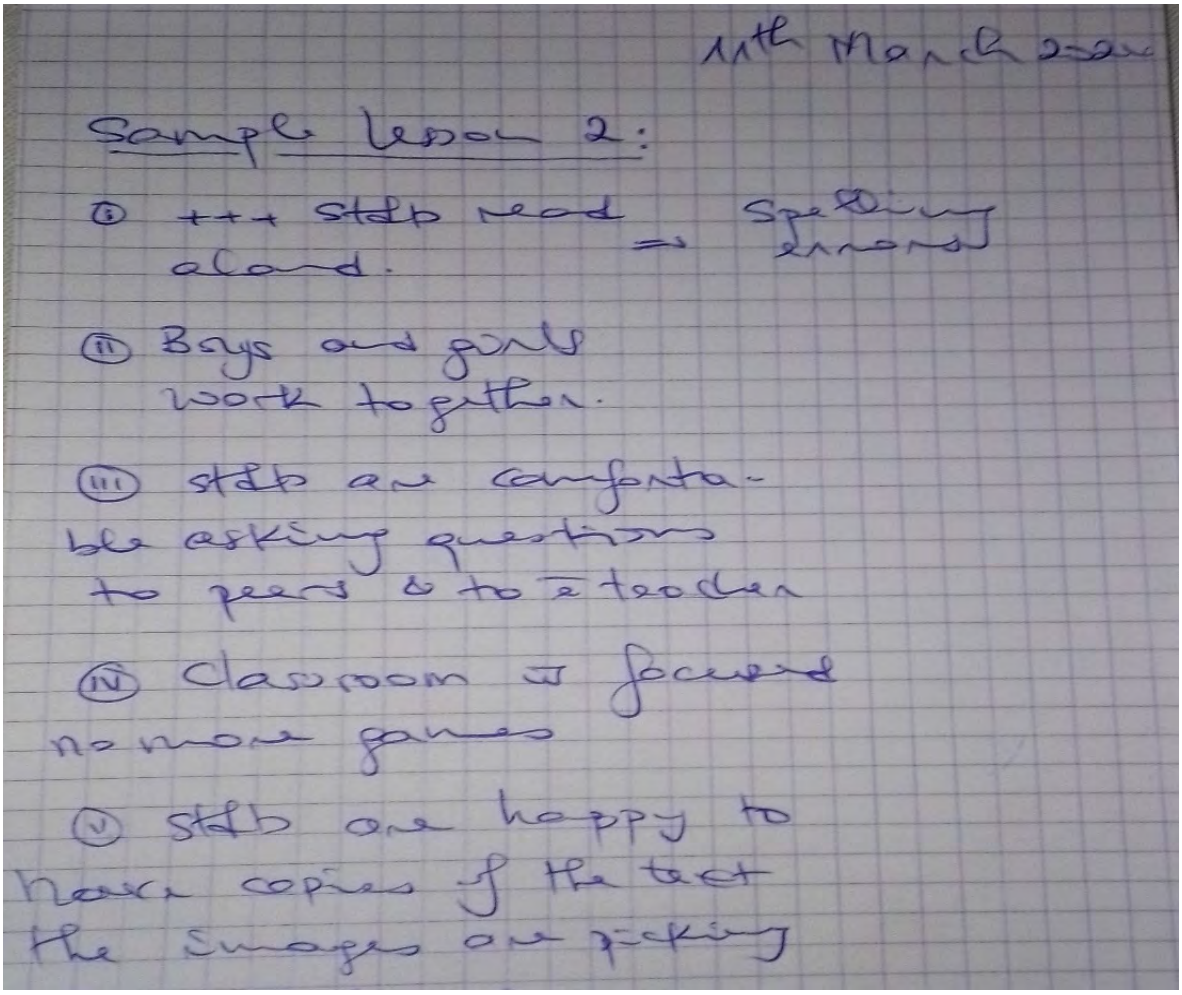
**3. How do you feel about reading comprehension tasks?**

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| « Most of the texts are long and difficult to understand » | | | | |
| « I need the explanation in French to perform the tasks » | | | | |
| « I can't answer questions because I do not understand the question » | | | | |
| « I understand the question but I lack the necessary vocabulary to provide the answer » | | | | |
| « I understand the question but I write the answer in French because I lack the necessary vocabulary to provide the answer » | | | | |

**4. What strategies do you put in place in order to answer questions?**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

## 2. MY REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

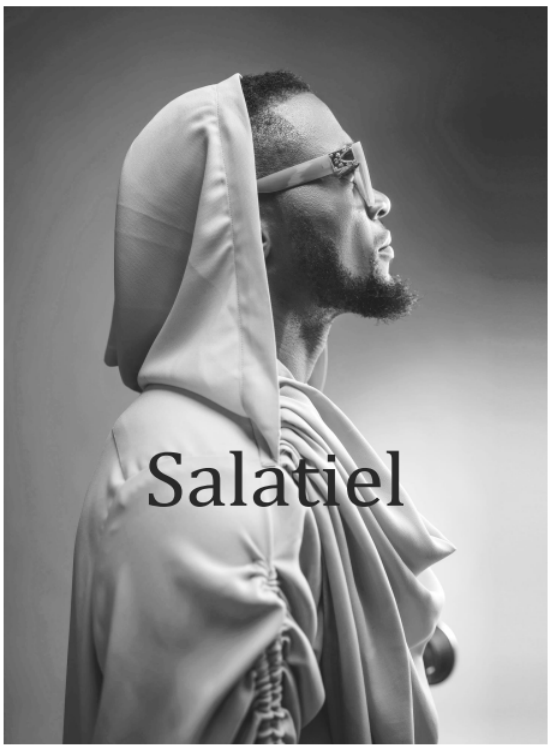



11th March, 2024.

Sample Lesson 2 :

- Many students read the text aloud spontaneously (still some pronouciation errors)
- Boys and girls work together
- Students are comfortable asking questions to peers and to the teacher
- The whole class is focused, no more games.

## 3. SAMPLE TEXT: A BIOGRAPHY OF A FAMOUS CAMEROONIAN ARTIST




**BIOGRAPHY**

Pianist, drummer, singer, songwriter and producer, Salatiel has been passionate about music from an early age on, stemming from both personal desire and vital necessity. He produced songs with internationally renowned artists such as the late Manu Dibango, Youssou N'Dour. Salatiel is probably today one of the greatest African artists and producers of his generation. The child hailing from Tiko, a small town in the Cameroonian South-West Region where he was born on **December 26, 1987,** was chosen by Beyoncé to represent Francophone Africa on the album "The Lion King: The Gift". As a pastor's son, Salatiel thrives on gospel but also feeds on a wide variety of influences, ranging from Afrobeat to classical music, reggae, makossa, bikutsi, coupé-décalé.

**ARTISTIC BACKGROUND**

The musician he is today owes a lot to the,young boy who used to hang out in the streets of his native region of the South-West to soak in very diverse sounds and rhythms. Brought up by a very religious mother with a natural giftfor singing, Salatiel drew part of his inspiration from the source of gospel, especially from artists of the American label "Integrity Music", famous for its worship music. Initiated into playing the piano by one of his older brothers, he pursued on his own, memorising songs that he then played on a virtual piano drawn with a pen on his highschool bench table. When he was 17, Salatiel's parents banned him from playing the family piano as a punishment for not taking his studies seriously. Heartbroken and unspeakably suffering, he had known deep down by then already that music was his way. In 2007, while performing a lot in churches of the region, Salatiel enrolled at Buea University in his native South-West. A few months later, he gave in to his musical calling to become a studio musician and quickly gained recognition as a songwriter and producer. Salatiel developed an exceptional ability for fusing sounds and rhythms Moreover, he conceived, composed and wrote many songs for Cameroonian movies, such as "One by One" for the TV Series "Bad Angel".

**AWARDS AND NOMINATIONS**

In 2010, Salatiel won the Cameroonian competition "Nescafé African Revelations" with his group "Da Thrill" he brought together and produced. For the pan-African finals which took place in Senegal, "Da Thrill" placed second, right behind Nigeria. In 2018, Salatiel won the "Best Male Artist of the Year" award at the Urban Jamz Awards, a special ceremony in the Cameroonian music industry to honour artists. The thoroughly passionate musician and outstanding producer was trained to produce music alongside Emile Ngumbah, founder of M-One Music Studio, one of the best-known record labels in Cameroon.

***Culled from the internet***

## 4. ANGLAIS OFFICIAL EXMANINATION PAPER

*(Anglais is one of the subjects 11th Grade students sit for at the end of the school year. This is only the reading section.)*

**SECTION C: READING COMPREHENSION (10 MARKS)**

***Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow. Use your own words as far as possible.***

People the world over engage in volunteerism for a variety of reasons: to eliminate poverty and to improve basic health and education, to tackle environmental issues, to reduce the risk of disasters or to combat social exclusion and violent conflicts. In all of those fields, volunteerism makes a specific contribution by generating well-being for people and their communities.

Volunteers are motivated by values like those equality, justice and freedom as expressed in the United Nations Charter. A society which supports and encourages different forms of volunteerism is likely to be a society which promotes the well-being of its citizens.

More than one billion people volunteer globally, the majority of them serving in their own countries. Many are in the forefront of efforts to improve the way their fellow citizens are governed and engaged. Moreover, volunteers are playing a vital role in making governments worldwide more accountable and responsive to their citizens. They are working with governments and civil society to hold those in power to account and to represent the voices of those who are often left out of development decisions such as women, youth and marginalized groups. The end result is more inclusive and ultimately more effective development.

Volunteerism is a basic expression of human relationships. It is about people's need to participate in their societies and to feel that they matter to others. The ethos of volunteerism is infused with values such as solidarity, reciprocity, mutual trust, belonging and empowerment, all of which contribute significantly to quality of life.

A healthy society is one in which importance is given to formal and informal relationships that facilitate interaction and engagement and engender a sense of belonging. It is also one in which there is broad participation by all sections of the population. Communities with these characteristics do better in moving forward to meet common aspirations.

Volunteers are more likely to develop civic skills to attach more importance to serving the public interest as a personal life goal and to be more politically active. Thus, going about their volunteer-outlook that contributes to a social environment that nurtures the well-being of all.

***(Source: www.unv.org)***

**Questions:**

1. Give two (2) reasons why people choose to become volunteers. (2 marks)
   _____
   _____
2. How do volunteers influence governments of various countries? (2 marks)
   _____
   _____
3. Name two (2) groups of people whose interest volunteers set out to protect. (2 marks)
   _____
   _____
4. State two (2) values that volunteerism uphold to improve people's quality of life. (2 marks)
   _____
   _____
5. Do you think volunteers can influence governance in your country? Justify your answer (2 marks)
   _____
   _____

3/4

Session 2023

## 5. ACTION

| **Lessons (9th Grade)** | **Weeks** | **Procedure** *(Students will **do** a, b, c etc.)* | **Necessary resources/aid** | **Outcomes** **1. what was the nature of the class?** **2. What did the students do/did not do?** **3. How did they do it?** | **Reflections** **1. What did you notice from their engagement in the implementation of your findings/results** **2. Why was it successful and why was it not?** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 (55 miutes) | **Week 1** | a. **(Pre-reading Activity)**: Students observe then discuss picture<br>b. **While reading:** Reading in turns<br>c. **After reading:** Students work in group, read the questions and answer in their books. | 1. Copies of a biography<br>2. Pictures of Cameroonian celebrities<br>3. Students' background knowledge | 1. **A reading comprehension lesson**.<br>2. Students observed pictures. Students read the biography in turns (row per row). They did not ask me to read the entire text before they start reading.<br>3. After the lead-in (pictures observation), many students were eager to read the texts – the classroom was focused – some students corrected their classmates whenever there were spelling errors. | 1. Students were motivated to read out. There was no insult nor joke that could frustrate them or stop them from speaking out.<br>2. As they observed the pictures, many described them not in a full sentence (S-V-O) but the key items came out spontaneously in English. Because of lack of practice at home a few students showed difficulties in answering the questions (they didn't understand the questions actually). Group work: at this particular step of the lesson, I made them to reflect together before producing answers for the questions. |
| 2 (55 miutes) | | a. Students read out the definitions<br>b. They go back in the texts to find out the correct words | 1. Class/Students<br>2. Coursebook<br>3. Blackboard | 1. A **vocabulary lesson** on Music industry<br>2. Students read the definitions given in the exercise. They discuss to get their meaning. They work out together the matches and. | 1. Some students had in mind the key words of the text. They quickly find out some clues. It means they read at home.<br>2. Group work: some students finished the cloze text and matching activities. They were so happy to have finished first. I had to call their attention on reading back so as tob e sure there is no mistake. |
| ***HW: Copy down these words: "network – prize -single" go back to text and find out their corresponding synonyms.*** | | | | | |

**DOI: 10.23350/eltcrj.227**

**BOOK REVIEW**

# *Disseminating Your Action Research: A Practical Guide to Sharing the Results of Practitioner Research*


Craig A. Mertler (2024).
Routledge, 185 pages
ISBN: 9781003322498

**Reviewed by Irene Simiyu**
*Kibabii University, Kenya*
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5622-5776

In recent decades, teacher-research has been gaining recognition as a professional development tool, used to help practitioners examine and better understand their own practices. When teachers improve what they do in their classrooms, the experiences of their learners are likely to be enhanced, leading to a better-suited learning environment. However, researching the classroom does not have to end with the application of the solutions found. In fact, Burns (2010) lists quite a few benefits of teachers sharing their research. Nevertheless, while there is currently a growing number of published teacher-research reports (https://mentrnet.net/open-access-resources/), the dissemination of research findings remains a daunting step for many teachers. One reason for this might be that there seem to be few resources focusing specifically on the ways in which teacher-research findings can be disseminated. Beyond scanty knowledge about how research findings can be written up, and how far academic conventions should be followed in the case of practitioner research, the number of outlets where teachers can publish is also scarce (Libia Cárdenas, 2025). Craig A. Mertler's book *Disseminating your Action Research: A practical guide to sharing the results of practitioner research* is, therefore, a timely resource for those who may be wary of sharing the results of their research projects or are unsure about how it can be done. In particular, the book is significant for Global South contexts, where AR is increasingly accepted as 'real' research alongside traditional educational research approaches (Ogudugu, 2023; Severino, 2020).

Before we delve into a more detailed review of the book, there is a terminology issue that is worth raising right at the beginning. Namely, the choice of the author to conflate two terms: Action Research (AR) and practitioner research as meaning almost the same thing. According to Mertler, both of these terms refer to "the identical practice of educational practitioners designing and conducting their own research on self-identified problems for the purposes of seeking improvement and change with respect to the phenomenon being investigated" (p. 10). However, Hanks (2017, 2019) has emphatically pointed out that practitioner research is an umbrella term, encompassing all the different ways for the school community to investigate the classroom. Moreover, the term *practitioner research* invites a much broader audience than just teachers, such as learners, teacher trainers, etc., and thus is able to encompass such inclusive research approaches as Exploratory Practice (Hanks, 2017). Using the two concepts as metonyms creates some confusion as to what the actual focus of Mertler's volume is, and suggests that the choice of terms in the practitioner research field is based on opinions and

personal preferences. Such terminological confusion may lead to a lack of clarity in an academic dialogue. As Hanks (2017) puts it:

> the names we give to things are significant. […] Trying to wrap everything up under one name may seem tidy, but in fact such a move fails to recognise the philosophical differences underpinning these different forms of practitioner research […] Those who try to conflate one or more of these, […] might think they are merely being pragmatic, but this loses sight of the distinct identity of each form, and in the end leads to a lack of precision. (p. 28)

Moving onto the contents of Mertler's volume, the author starts the book with an engaging question: "Why should you concern yourself with disseminating the results of practitioner research?" (p. 1). This provides a hint of the book's focus and prepares the reader to expect answers on the forthcoming pages. As Burns (2003) contends, a lot has been written about how to undertake AR but there is not much information about the practical and innovative ways of disseminating classroom research. Mertler's book fills this gap by focusing specifically on the variety and wealth of research dissemination outlets.

The contents of the book are divided into sections with takeaway points, practical guidelines, and examples of good practices that demonstrate how to use the strategies discussed. The sections logically flow into one another to build a compelling argument for sharing practitioner research as a way of informing and influencing others about ways of solving educational challenges.

Section I provides an overview of AR as a methodology and serves as a step-by-step guide on how one can plan and execute an AR project. The author compares AR to traditional education research, pointing out that "action research *is* educational research; however, it is the research that is conducted *by* educators *for* themselves" (p. 8). What is conspicuous in this section, though, is how Mertler appears to mainly draw on his own earlier work, which he references abundantly, while omitting such key works as Burns (2010) or Smith and Rebolledo (2018). Those engaged in teacher-research may also wonder why such pertinent books as Allwright (2009) and Hanks (2017) are not mentioned as reference points. However, what stands out in this section are the numerous benefits for the practitioner. They include the empowerment of educators, which has a ripple effect on the experiences of the learners, as well as professional growth opportunities that arise from continuous learning. A brief example of practitioner research in action included in this section (p. 33) is a useful demonstration of how the outlined research steps can be applied.

Section II discusses the products for disseminating and sharing practitioner research. Mertler gives prominence to written reports (Chapter 3) over other forms of sharing, which highlights the fact that academic writing has been the primary mechanism of presenting research and research findings from time immemorial. However, as Burns (2003) observes, teachers find academic writing daunting because it is hard work and its iterative nature requires a lot of time, which they do not have. To help overcome these challenges, Mertler provides a primer on academic writing, which usefully focuses on the conventions of style, format, and organization. Other formats of research dissemination described in this section include presentations (Chapter 4) and visual ones like posters, infographics and video vignettes (Chapter 5). Importantly, there are ethical implications pertinent to the use of all of these formats, which the author highlights at the end of each chapter. This is important for those practitioners who may not have any training in research and who may find themselves pondering how to share their findings without revealing the identities of the participants. Yet,

even for this dilemma, Mertler offers practical solutions, such as the use of aggregate information to ensure anonymity and getting written consent for sharing videos and pictures.

In Section III, Mertler explores strategies that a teacher-researcher can use to formally or informally share findings from their AR projects. First of all, the author discusses refereed publications and provides useful guidance regarding the process of submitting to such journals (Chapter 6). Next, he turns to face-to-face and virtual conference presentations (Chapter 7), before diving into the plethora of technology-based outlets for sharing research (Chapters 8, 9). The author provides guidelines and best practices in the use of social media spaces like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn and alternative options like vlogs, blogs, podcasts, and personal websites. Of particular interest are such unconventional outlets that are often missing in various resources on practitioner research, such as Tweets, Instagram, Vlogs, Vimeo, Zines, and LinkedIn. In this regard, Mertler provides useful guidelines on how to create and use these platforms.

The last section of the book is aptly labelled: "You can do this (and please do!)", which is an upbeat invitation for practitioner researchers to follow through and follow up on different ways to engage and disseminate the findings of their AR projects. In Chapter 10, the author revisits the initial question "Why should you concern yourself with disseminating the results of practitioner research?" (p. 1). Here, Mertler is in agreement with scholars like Burns (2010) and Smith (2020) that not sharing results makes research incomplete and potentially takes away the opportunity from other practitioners to learn about existing solutions to educational challenges. Disseminating research results is a means of sustaining professional development through the critical consumption of findings that should lead to more inquiry (Burns, 2003; Smith & Rebolledo, 2018). For the teacher-researcher, therefore, disseminating findings is not an end but a means to ensure AR flourishes through further investigation of classroom practices.

While the book is well-organized, there are a couple of structure and content-related aspects, which are worth pointing out. To begin with, I feel that the overview of AR and the primer on conducting it, found in Section I, would be best left for a general research textbook. This information does not reflect the title and focus of the book, which is disseminating practitioner research. In fact, the information in Section I is more useful for a practitioner researcher starting off on their AR journey than someone who has completed the process and is seeking ideas on how to disseminate their findings. In my view, the book would have best begun with Section II in order to meet the expectations of the reader who picks it off the shelf or in a bookstore.

Secondly, in the Introduction Mertler attempts to outline the difference between disseminating and sharing AR results. In my view, there is a thin line between the two terms and bringing this up might confuse readers of the book who may be required to unconsciously keep checking if the strategy being discussed will result in sharing or disseminating findings. Research findings are pieces of considered information and so *dissemination* seems to be a better term, reflecting the process of getting the findings out there. *Sharing* holds the connotation of a less formal activity. Thus, I believe it would have been best for the author to use *dissemination* throughout the book in order to avoid potential confusion.

Despite the issues mentioned above, Craig A. Mertler's volume is still a great read. Mertler's description of the various dissemination strategies is enhanced by the evidence that he has used them himself, making the text inspiring for any reader who may doubt the

practicability of the suggestions made. I highly recommend this book to educational practitioners as well as university-level educators who are seeking practical ways of sharing their research projects or resources for guiding their students.

## References

Allwright, D. & Hanks, J. (2009). *The developing language learner: An introduction to exploratory practice* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230233690

Burns, A. (2003). *Collaborative action research for English language teachers.* Cambridge University Press.

Burns, A. (2010). *Doing action research in English language teaching. A guide for practitioners*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203863466

Hanks, J. (2017). *Exploratory practice in language teaching. Puzzling about principles and practices.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Hanks, J. (2019). From research-as-practice to exploratory practice-as-research in language teaching and beyond. *Language Teaching, 52*(2), 143–187. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444819000016

Libia Cárdenas, M. (2025). Publishing action research by teachers of English. In A. Burns & K. Dikilitaş (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language teacher action research* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 56–68). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003367352-7

MenTRnet blogs website: http://mentrnet.net

Ogudugu, H. (2023). Exploratory action research on improving speaking skills in class. In P. Rebolledo, T. Okoth & I. Simiyu (Eds.), *English connects action research: Learnings from the African classroom*. British Council. https://africa.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/default/files/english_connects_action_research_-_learning_from_the_african_classroom_-_resized_-_v2.pdf

Severino, S. (2020). Blended learning in the English secondary school classroom: An Argentinian experience. In D. L. Banegas, M. De Stefani, P. Rebolledo, C. Rico Troncoso & R. Smith (Eds.), *Horizontes 1. ELT teacher-research in Latin America*. IATEFL in association with British Council. https://resig.weebly.com/uploads/2/6/3/6/26368747/horizontes_ebook.pdf

Smith, R. & Rebolledo, P. (2018). *A handbook for exploratory action research*. British Council. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/pub_30510_BC%20Explore%20Actions%20Handbook%20ONLINE%20AW.pdf

Smith, R. (2020). *Mentoring teachers to research their classrooms: A practical handbook.* British Council. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Mentoring_Teachers_Research_classrooms_handbook.pdf

## The Reviewer

**Irene Simiyu** is a Kenyan teacher educator in Kibabii University, where she teaches education courses and communication skills. She is a member of MenTRnet, a community of teacher-research mentors. Her research interests are in the areas of teacher professional development, teacher learning and Exploratory Action Research. She has mentored teachers in the British

Council project “English Connects Action Research: Learnings from the African Classrooms”.
Email: isimiyu@kibu.ac.ke

**Acknowledgement**

I appreciate the mentorship and support by Elizabeth Bekes and Simona Macenaite in the review writing process. I have learnt so much, thank you!

**Conflict of Interest**

The author has no conflict of interest to declare. There is no financial interest to report. This submission is my original work.

**DOI: 10.23350/eltcrj.228**

**BOOK REVIEW**

# *ELT Research in Action 2024. Critical Conversations: Aligning Research and Practice in ELT*


Edited by Jessica Mackay and Thomas Wogan (2025).
IATEFL, 68 pages.
Online edition available at:
https://resig.weebly.com/uploads/2/6/3/6/26368747/elt_research_in_action_2024_-_critical_conversations_aligning_research_and_practice_in_elt.pdf

**Reviewed by: Valeria Chumbi Landy**
*Universidad Nacional de Educación (UNAE), Ecuador*
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9232-4250

As a member of an international teacher-research mentoring community, MenTRnet (https://mentrnet.net/), I have often wondered how far our experiences are tied to our local context or if there are ideas and experiences that might resonate with other ELT practitioners. While reading *ELT Research in Action 2024: Critical conversations aligning research and practice in ELT*, I felt a strong connection with many of the contributors who addressed the issues of language teaching from both research and classroom perspectives. The book is truly captivating because it opens up the space for various voices and subjects, such as teachers' identity building, inclusion, and the growing concerns around artificial intelligence (AI) in pedagogy and assessment.

Building on earlier editions, the new volume of *ELT Research in Action 2024* carries on with the goal of the series, namely, linking research with classroom teaching in useful ways. All three previous books (Mackay et al., 2018; Mackay, et al., 2020; Mackay & Wogan, 2023) focussed on connecting researchers and teachers in ELT by highlighting how these two communities of practice can work together on shared goals. They emphasize collaboration and reflection as key ideas, showing that working together helps teachers and researchers make a stronger impact.

This latest edition follows the same path by providing new ideas, creative methods, and research-based practices that further connect theory with what happens in classrooms to support a growing number of global reflective educators. The volume also addresses key issues like inclusivity, digital change, and sustainability in education, which have gained special importance after the pandemic. Overall, it addresses a reflective ELT community that adapts its practice to language learners and the needs of a changing world.

The book is arranged in three key sections with 11 chapters, each offering a unique viewpoint from the field. The first section, "Views from Research: Insights from Practice," presents research studies focused on classroom practices and their implications for teaching. The second, "Views from the Classroom: Insider Perceptions," highlights the reflections of teachers and learners through relatable stories offering a more personal account of ELT experiences. The last section, "Views from the Conference: Personal Perspectives," consists of

reflections and narratives from attendees of the ELTRIA conference, emphasizing professional growth and collaborative learning. The present book review centers on three main themes: teacher identity and inclusion, innovative teaching methods, and professional development for educators. These themes encapsulate the central concerns that run across the 11 chapters and represent key dimensions of contemporary English language teaching.

One of the strengths of *ELT Research in Action 2024* is how it raises awareness of teacher identity and the associated emotional, social, and ethical aspects. Chapter 7, authored by Christopher Richards, discusses the real-life experiences of gay male English teachers, and even though the author's analysis may not be very finely-grained, it describes how the work environment around LGBTQ+ teachers, whether it is supportive or hostile, can affect their identities. The examples cited clearly demonstrate how hard and unnerving it can be for LGBTQ+ teachers to work in places where they don't feel safe or welcome. One of the interviewees recalls that he felt safer walking around the streets of Damascus, often perceived to be a dangerous city, than going to his university campus in Western Europe, where he used to teach. In my own teaching context, I found that students have become increasingly accepting of LGBTQ+ identities. Some LGBTQ+ colleagues in Ecuador have shared experiences of intolerance and rejection, especially in strongly religious settings. Such discrimination often silences teachers, forcing them to hide who they are. Are institutions truly supporting diversity, or still reinforcing silence and exclusion? Richards concludes the chapter by sharing the desire to expand the scope of his project. He points out the necessity of future research to be intersectional and collaborative to better reflect the diversity and complexity of queer experiences in the ELT profession.

Inclusivity comprises the use of inclusive language, and there are examples when it is the students themselves that are pushing for change, as they are often more open-minded and accepting than their school's teaching staff and administration. Some students are helping their peers and teachers learn to use inclusive language (Årman, 2021; Santiago-Garabieta et al., 2023). This change in classroom culture poses some important questions: Are we, as teachers, ready to support this new generation and serve as the role models they need? This challenge seems to be closely related to Jim Fuller's ideas in Chapter 5 and Sampson and Pinner's in Chapter 6, which underline that a teacher's identity is shaped not only by what they teach and how they teach it, but also by how they think, feel, and interact with students every day. These chapters remind us that teaching is much more than instruction and also presenting our authentic self in the classroom can create a learning environment rooted in mutual trust.

The volume also invites us to reconsider how we teach, as several chapters highlight innovative teaching methods to make language learning more meaningful, collaborative, and welcoming. In Chapter 1, for instance, Piri Leeck outlines specific innovative teaching strategies implemented in the classroom to promote meaningful learning. Leeck looks at how young learners in Germany were able to bring to class what the author calls "extramural English," in which students were asked to include English words they picked up outside of school. She recounts a project in which students were encouraged to share words they had learned from games, social media, or any context beyond the class. Leeck discovered that through these types of activities, in which teachers acknowledged and valued their students' personal experiences with English, the latter felt more motivated to learn. As Leeck notes, "students feel appreciated when teachers acknowledge their contributions" (p. 18), especially when those contributions are connected to their lives and interests. Ultimately, it is crucial to give students opportunities for dialogue and recognize that language learning is not only about mastering grammar or vocabulary, but also about supporting who the students are becoming.

In Chapter 2, Saif Al-Baimani and Nadia Mifka-Profozic describe how genre-based instruction and collaborative writing can assist EFL students in improving their writing skills. The study shows that writing not only helps people learn a language, but it also makes them more interested in the process, as well as in meaning-making, collaboration and teamwork. Jodi Wainwright's Chapter 3 describes how blended learning affects older adult learners and results in emotional, cognitive, and social benefits. Wainwright stresses that learning isn't just about getting facts; it's also about making connections, building confidence, and being part of a community.

Another theme discussed in the volume is the role of research and reflection in professional growth. Erzsébet Ágnes Békés and Jodi Wainwright, in Chapters 9 and 10, narrate personal experiences from the ELTRIA conference and how these helped them grow as researchers and educators. Békés, an experienced teacher educator, states that maintaining meaningful conversations with other teachers at the conference about aspects of teaching such as teacher intuition, AI, and inclusivity have helped her reflect on how complex it is to teach English these days. Her account illustrates that teachers can continue to learn by engaging in honest conversations and challenging themselves to exceed their limitations. These ideas show that ELT conferences, such as ELTRIA, are spaces where teachers' professional identities can change and where educators can learn to think critically and share knowledge. Exploring the issue of how research and practice are often intertwined, Wainwright (Chapter 10) reflects on her experiences at three ELTRIA conferences, beginning in 2019 when she gave her first presentation. Over time, she developed increasing confidence as researcher and academic speaker, culminating in the presentation of her doctoral study's final findings in 2024. Her story shows how such communities of practice in academia have the potential to assist teachers' professional growth.

Echoing these ideas, in Chapter 11, Richard Smith presents a powerful argument for research conducted by practitioners. He clarifies that effective teaching does not come just from following external "best practices," but rather from educators choosing what is most effective in their classes. He argues that instructors' own "sense of plausibility" p. 64), namely, experience-based understanding of what works in their contexts, should be valued. He also mentions that Exploratory Action Research (EAR) is a well-designed and empowering way for teachers to research the issues that arise in their classrooms. I found the last three chapters (9, 10, 11) especially resonant with me as they emphasize that improving as an educator means more than acquiring or experimenting with new knowledge. It involves remaining interested, taking risks, and thinking critically about what we do in class. The chapters of this slim volume show that meaningful, contextually grounded research may occur in any setting, including under-resourced schools when teacher-researchers are deeply engaged.

The volume combines stories of research and practice and narrates the challenges that teachers encounter. It also provides alternatives for educators to overcome these problems by examining them, generating new ideas, and working together. However, readers could have benefited from a deeper exploration of otherwise compelling topics, both descriptively and analytically. For instance, a more in-depth analysis of Chapter 7's important issues related to LGBTQ+ educators, could have enhanced its impact and relevance, particularly by including theoretical perspectives that explore how identity and teaching intersect in different institutional contexts.

Similarly, Chapter 4 shares interesting experiences about collaborative teacher-research in multilingual classrooms, but it focuses more on describing the teachers' experiences rather

than expanding the analysis on how they understood and dealt with complex issues like language ideologies, translanguaging, or the teachers' own beliefs about language use. It would have been great to learn more about how teachers dealt with the problems of working with children who speak different languages, what they thought about language use, and how they made decisions in the classroom. Likewise, Chapter 1 could have included more concrete examples from classroom interactions or student responses. The absence of children's voices or detailed classroom moments makes it harder to understand the real impact of the research on learning. Such deeper reflections could have made the chapters stronger and more instructive for teachers in similar situations.

That said, the book as a whole is a valuable addition to the field and a useful tool for teachers that want to connect theory and practice. Ultimately, this book makes the reader think of the importance of constant learning and the positive effect of accepting diverse points of view to make learning more meaningful and inclusive. A reminder to us, teachers, that even in places with limited resources, carefully accomplished research and hard work can have an impact and its results are well-worth sharing.

## References

Årman, H. (2021). Affects of verbal hygiene: The impact of language activism at a Swedish high school. *Journal of Language and Politics, 20*(2), 151–171. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-020-09543-3

Mackay, J., Birello, M., & Xerri, D. (Eds.) (2018). *ELT research in action: Bridging the gap between research and classroom practice*. IATEFL. https://resig.weebly.com/elt-research-in-action-2018.html

Mackay, J., Birello, M., & Xerri, D. (2020). (Eds.) *ELT research in action: Bringing together two communities of practice.* IATEFL. https://resig.weebly.com/uploads/2/6/3/6/26368747/eltria2019formattedfinal2.pdf

Mackay, J., & Wogan, T. (Eds.) (2023) *ELT research in action 2022: Working together towards shared goals*. IATEFL. https://issuu.com/iatefl/docs/eltria_2023_ebook_1_

Santiago-Garabieta, M., Zubiri-Esnaola, H., García-Carrión, R., & Gairal-Casadó, R. (2023). Inclusivity, friendship and language learning: Boosting collaboration in interactive groups. *Educational Research, 65*(2), 189–203. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2023.2189433

## The Reviewer

**Valeria Chumbi Landy** is an EFL and ESL professor with over eleven years of teaching experience at both the secondary and university levels. She currently serves as a professor in the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages program at the National University of Education (UNAE) in Azogues, Ecuador. She holds a Bachelor's degree in English Literature and a Master's degree in Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages. She is also a PhD candidate in Education, pursuing advanced research on second language acquisition and pedagogy. Her research interests focus on vocabulary acquisition, teaching-learning processes in second language education, and action research in EFL contexts. Email: valeria.chumbi@unae.edu.ec

**DOI: 10.23350/eltcrj.229**

**BOOK REVIEW**

# *Teachers Researching Their Practice: Explorations in the Georgian Classroom*


Edited by Paula Rebolledo (2024)
British Council, 96 pages.
Online edition available at:
https://www.britishcouncil.ge/en/programmes/english-programmes/english-in-education/developing-teachers-research-skills

**Reviewed by Zeynep Öztürk Duman**
*Karadeniz Technical University, Türkiye*
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7346-5410

Living in my hometown, which lies right next to the Georgian border, I have always felt a special connection to the country, its people and their culture. This sense of closeness made the book *Teachers researching their practice: Explorations in the Georgian classroom* especially relevant to me.

As an English instructor and teacher-researcher dedicated to teacher education, I found the book's emphasis on Exploratory Action Research (EAR) and the presentation of real-life classroom examples a good way of spreading effective practices in English language teaching. Going beyond geographical boundaries and bridging the gap between theory and practice, this concise volume serves as a practical and convenient source for teachers and teacher educators who are committed to continuous professional development.

The book starts with an introduction that highlights the importance of English in Georgia and explains the Exploratory Action Research (EAR) online course developed as an additional component to the Online Teaching Community (OTC), which is a peer-led British Council online platform for English language teachers. The purpose of this course is to let participating teachers learn about and carry out research simultaneously. The book presents specific problems faced by 17 English teachers in their classrooms. Each piece of research addresses a classroom issue related to speaking (7), writing (4), listening (1), reading (1), vocabulary (1), technology integration (1), and learner autonomy (1).

The accounts follow a similar format in terms of introducing the teaching context, the research problems, research methodology, data collection tools, findings, the discussion of the results, and the proposed plans for change. As suggested by Action Research (AR) methodology, each teacher offers solutions to the current issues observed in their classrooms, and if those cannot be satisfactorily resolved, the research process begins again as an upward moving spiral (Mills, 2014). The present review is grouped around key skills in learning English, such as speaking, writing, listening, reading, vocabulary, technology, and learner autonomy.

## Speaking skills

Speaking skill is the most frequently discussed topic in this book. Seven chapters focus on various challenges students face when they intend to communicate. Although the research projects were conducted at different educational levels, and involved students of different ages, four main themes stand out.

*Emotional and psychological barriers*

Several teacher-researchers emphasize that students' fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and shyness reduce their participation in speaking activities (Inga Mdivani, Nino Tsereteli, Nino Kalandia, Nino Sturua). As a solution, teachers recommend creating a supportive classroom environment, giving positive feedback, and strengthening students' sense of confidence.

*Linguistic inadequacies*

Quite a few chapters point out that students' lack of vocabulary and grammar makes it difficult for them to express themselves during speaking activities (Salome Zarkua, Nino Tsereteli). Suggested solutions include teaching vocabulary in advance, displaying important words on the board, and creating opportunities to revise vocabulary.

*Lack of participation and interaction*

Research has identified uneven participation, passive students, and lack of interactive tasks that encourage confidence and participation as significant problems (Inga Mdivani, Ketevan Gogaladze). Recommendations include group work, paired activities, topic selection with students, and nomination strategies.

*Activity type and content selection*

Some teacher-researchers have noted that students are unmotivated due to uninteresting topics or insufficient discussion skills (Tinatin Gabunia, Nino Sturua). As a solution, teachers suggest topics that can appeal to students' interests, discussion videos, role-playing, and presentations, all of which are real-life-related speaking activities.

Altogether, all seven teacher-researchers who set out to explore why their students appear to be reluctant to speak in class, identified causes that may easily apply to classroom contexts far beyond Georgian classrooms (Gnawali et al., 2021; Rebolledo et al., 2023) Fear of making mistakes, low confidence levels, lack of quality feedback, and unengaging topic selection were some of the common reasons mentioned. The teacher-researchers came up with a number of solutions, such as pre-teaching vocabulary, using interactive speaking tasks, offering constructive feedback, choosing interesting topics, and motivating students to build confidence in speaking. What stands out in these chapters is the wealth of practical solutions aimed at enhancing students' communication skills, many of which, I believe, are easily transferable.

## Writing skills

Writing skill is the second most frequently discussed topic in the book. Four chapters focus on lack of motivation in writing, difficulties faced by students, and some of the ways to improve writing.

The research projects by Nino Gurgenadze and Natia Katamadze focus on students' disengagement from writing activities. Gurgenadze found that monotonous writing tasks, lack

of timely feedback, and stress of assessment discouraged students. She came up with the idea of designing more engaging writing tasks, such as creating dialogues and character development narratives. Katamadze concluded that her students had difficulties in writing because of inadequacies in grammar and vocabulary. She now intends to integrate different writing strategies, pave the way for more practice opportunities, and provide more constructive feedback.

In another study, Khatuna Kharkheli focused on improving writing skills in English through formal and informal letters. She discovered that her students had difficulties in spelling, grammar, and generating ideas. To address these problems, she decided to focus more on grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and collaborative writing activities. Consistent with Kharkheli's research, Nato Kldiashvili explored coherence and cohesion in her teenage students' writing. She found that they were in need of using writing strategies, such as brainstorming, planning, and revising. She decided to modify her strategies, such as delivering clear instructions, paying more attention to vocabulary teaching, and allocating sufficient time to complete writing tasks effectively.

In sum, the four chapters on writing, once again, highlight the similarities in the challenges related to writing in a foreign language. After identifying what students felt they were struggling with the most, the teacher-researchers came up with and used (or are planning to use) creative and collaborative writing activities, providing timely and constructive feedback, as well as working on grammar and vocabulary.

**Listening Skills**

There are two chapters focusing on the challenges that students face while learning listening skills. Nana Gelashvili's data revealed that students avoided listening activities due to nervousness, limited vocabulary, unfamiliar words, fast speech, and accents. Drawing on the findings, she decided to pay more attention to teaching vocabulary, especially as a pre-listening activity. Likewise, Lela Tsagareishvili focused on her students' challenges during listening tasks and this led her to finding interesting audio materials to boost their confidence.

Taken together, both explorations suggest that providing affective support, delivering explicit vocabulary instruction, selecting suitable and engaging listening materials can contribute to an improvement in students' listening comprehension.

**Technology Integration and Reading Skills**

Thanks to recent developments in technology, students' overall language proficiency can be enhanced by using digital tools. The research by Rusudan Karkadze focuses on the integration of a Web 2.0 tool to facilitate English learning. Her findings suggest that technology-enhanced learning can improve students' language learning. Similarly, Armenui Bijoyan explores the role of technology in reading comprehension. She assumed that the use of Google Translate and Google Lens apps could contribute to her students' success in reading so she focused on the integration of these tools. Her findings revealed that the use of such tools enhanced students' reading performance, and showed that digital tools can make reading materials more engaging and accessible. In conclusion, both research projects suggest that the integration of technology can contribute to effective language learning.

### Vocabulary Learning

Vocabulary learning plays a crucial role in developing overall language proficiency. The research project by Lika Khurtsilava explored difficulties in vocabulary learning. She found that although she allocated 30 minutes to vocabulary teaching in each lesson through flashcards, audio recordings, visual aids, and the coursebook, most of the students did not pay attention to vocabulary learning outside of the classroom. Based on the findings, she proposes an action plan comprising a print-rich environment by presenting word walls and posters, and intends to create meaningful vocabulary practice opportunities.

### Learner Autonomy

Promoting learner autonomy has recently become a key issue in education since it encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning (Chong & Reinders, 2022). No wonder that at least one Georgian teacher-researcher in the volume chose to explore this topic.

Tinatin Bedoshvili investigated primary school students' autonomous learning skills. After the COVID-19 pandemic, she observed that her students lacked such skills. To this end, she decided to provide simple assessment rubrics for homework, develop time management skills, and encouraged students to finish classwork in time by using stickers as rewards. Bedoshvili's project stresses the importance of introducing ways of self-directed learning habits from an early age with the help of practical classroom strategies and motivational tools.

## Conclusion

Altogether, I found the book *Teachers researching their practice: Explorations in the Georgian classroom* stimulating because many of the classroom issues discussed in the book are quite familiar to me. I also work as a supervisor for English students who are enrolled in a pedagogical formation program. From this perspective, I find the book really valuable since it offers real-life examples of EAR conducted by in-service teachers. I believe it can serve as a useful resource not only for my students but also for other pre-service English teachers in wider geographical contexts because a key issue for them is to connect theory with classroom practice and reflect on real teaching experiences.

The visuals summarizing the studies act as hooks to capture the readers' attention. The layout of the book is reader-friendly and easy to follow. However, the chapters are arranged in no particular order, which may cause readers to lose focus. Instead, they could have been organized according to language skills or themes. Additionally, while these studies offer valuable insights evolving from classroom realities, a brief comparative discussion across cases might have contributed to the strengths of the book. Lastly, all contributing English teachers are female, and even if we are aware that female teachers are highly overrepresented (80%) in the education sector in Georgia (World Bank, n.d.), it would have been interesting to gain some insight into male teachers' classroom practices and perspectives, which may or may not be very different from the overall experiences of the 17 female English teachers.

In conclusion, the book, *Teachers researching their practice: Explorations in the Georgian classroom* sheds light on the power of EAR in language classrooms. As all teachers highlighted in their research, we need to have a closer look at our classrooms to find the real

issues instead of relying on our assumption. This book will contribute not only to teachers' and teacher educators' knowledge base in Georgia but can inform educators in similar contexts around the world by demonstrating how teachers can portray their own classrooms and generate meaningful solutions. It is an engaging and inspiring resource for teachers, teacher educators, policymakers, researchers interested in language education, and anyone intending to get into classroom-based research by following the concise yet informative contents of this volume.

## References

Chong, S.W., & Reinders, H. (2022). Autonomy of English language learners: A scoping review of research and practice. *Language Teaching Research*, *29*(2), 607-632. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221075812

Gnawali, L., Laudari, S., & Shrestha, S. (Eds.) (2021). *Exploratory Action Research: Stories of Nepalese EFL Teachers*. Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA). https://nelta.org.np/uploads/upload/G9ZEun.pdf

Mills, G. E. (2014). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher*. Pearson Education Limited.

Rebolledo, P., Okoth, T., & Simiyu, I. (2023). *English Connects Action Research: Learnings from the African Classroom*. British Council. https://africa.teachingenglish.org.uk/education/publications/learning-from-the-african-classroom

World Bank Group. (n.d.). *Secondary education, teachers (% female)*. Gender Data Portal. https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/se-sec-tchr-fe-zs

## The Reviewer

**Zeynep Öztürk Duman** is a Ph.D. scholar currently working in the Department of Western Languages and Literature at Karadeniz Technical University, Trabzon, Türkiye. Her research primarily focuses on language teacher education, particularly pre-service and in-service teacher education, teacher identity, professional development, educational technology, and AI in education. Email: zeynepozturk@ktu.edu.tr