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TEACHING ENGLISH TO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

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Summary. *This study explores the evolving landscape of English instruction at the university level, highlighting key challenges and possible solutions to them. It also discusses the diverse proficiency levels among students and the need for differentiated instruction. Specifically, the article emphasizes the impact of technological advancements, globalization, and student-centered learning. It outlines such key challenges that language instructors and students may encounter in contemporary English classrooms: diverse language proficiency levels, student engagement in the digital age, cultural sensitivity and globalization, the influence of English as a global lingua franca, language anxiety and lack of confidence, teaching critical thinking and writing skills, assessment issues, and the need for ongoing teacher training and professional development. To address the delineated challenges, the study suggests strategies such as differentiated instruction, multimedia integration, intercultural competence training, and a focus on communicative competence rather than grammatical perfection. In addition, it advocates for alternative assessments like project-based learning and peer reviews. Besides, the article pinpoints that by integrating digital tools, collaborative learning methods, and real-world applications, educators can create more effective and inclusive English language instruction within the university curricula. The study emphasizes the importance of adapting to the abovementioned challenges to effectively prepare students for success in an increasingly globalized world. It cites various sources to support its claims and suggestions, highlighting the need for educators to stay current with best practices and technological advancements in the field of English language teaching. The study concludes that strengthening research-based practices and empirical support can further enhance teaching strategies and learning outcomes.*



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The main focus of this study is to delineate contemporary issues that both teachers and students may encounter in English classrooms and suggest feasible solutions to them.

Teaching English at the university level has experienced significant transformations over the past few decades. These changes have been driven primarily by technological advancements, the internationalization of education, and the shift towards student-centered learning. The requirements placed on English educators have evolved, craving the adaptation to these changes while simultaneously addressing conventional challenges faced by students.

Among the difficulties that foreign language teachers and students may face, the most typical comprise diverse language proficiency levels, engagement in the digital age, cultural sensitivity and globalization, the influence of English as a global lingua franca, language anxiety and lack of confidence, teaching critical thinking and writing skills, assessment issues, teacher training and professional development. These challenges require cursory specification.

1. Diverse Language Proficiency Levels

University classrooms are composed of students with varying linguistic backgrounds and different levels of English proficiency and expertise. This diversity may pose a significant challenge for teachers, as lessons must be designed to cater to both beginners and more advanced students. Beginners often struggle with foundational grammar and vocabulary, while advanced learners seek more complex linguistic assignments, such as mastering academic writing and more formal speech registers. The evolving challenge, therefore, is to ensure that all students, regardless of their English proficiency and expertise, receive effective instruction that pushes them forward in their incremental language acquisition and further refinement [12].

Solution: to address the foregoing issue, educators are supposed to increasingly turn to differentiated and more personalized language instruction, where activities are tailored to diverse needs of learners. For instance, in a mixed-ability classroom, teachers might assign different tasks to students based on their proficiency levels, making sure that each student is appropriately challenged without being overwhelmed. Moreover, the employment of language learning apps and online resources may become integral. These tools will provide individualized learning trajectories, assisting learners in language progressing at their own pace. In particular, platforms like Duolingo, Memrise, and Quizlet offer personalized activities that embrace vocabulary acquisition, grammar practice, and pronunciation [12].

2. Engagement in the Digital Age

In today's technology-driven world, students are often distracted by the constant influx of digital content from social media, smartphones, and gaming. This



presents a challenge for English educators, as conventional methods of instruction may no longer be as engaging as they once used to be. Besides, the shift to online learning platforms and virtual classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the difficulties of maintaining student engagement in the digital age [12].

Solution: to combat disengagement, foreign language educators are supposed to be able to increasingly integrate multimedia resources and interactive teaching methods into their lessons. Particularly, incorporating video clips, podcasts, and virtual reality tools can enhance the learning experience, making it more dynamic and appealing to digital-native students. Specifically, using platforms like YouTube to supplement lessons with short video clips on a variety of topics allows students to explore language in context, providing them with authentic listening practice. Additionally, online games and quizzes (like Kahoot!, Quizlet Live) can make vocabulary learning more interactive and competitive, thus increasing students' motivation and engagement [12].

It is also important to acknowledge that digital tools are not just a distraction; when utilized effectively, they can become powerful allies in teaching. Online resources like Grammarly can help students with grammar and writing mechanics, while platforms such as Edmodo and Google Classroom may facilitate collaboration and communication among students, helping them to stay engaged with course material even outside the classroom [7, p. 321].

3. Cultural Sensitivity and Globalization

As higher education becomes more globalized, university language classrooms are getting increasingly diverse, with students from a range of cultural, social, and educational backgrounds. This cultural diversity enriches the learning environment but also introduces challenges for English language teaching. That is why, teachers are expected to be able to navigate the complexities of cultural sensitivity while fostering an inclusive classroom atmosphere [18, p. 47].

Solution: One of the best ways to address the foregoing challenge may be incorporating cross-cultural communication training into the curriculum. That implies that English lessons should not only focus on linguistic skills but also on helping students understand different cultural conventions and communication styles. Activities like role-playing and case studies will allow students to explore cultural differences in a safe and structured way. Furthermore, incorporating global perspectives into the English language instruction can deepen students' understanding of the world and shape their worldview, making their learning more relevant and engaging, and close to real-life scenarios [18, p. 49].

Besides, encouraging students to share their own cultural experiences and perspectives in class discussions can also promote mutual respect and

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understanding. This can be further supported by creating practical assignments that require students to delve into and research different cultures, and present their findings in English, thus fostering a deeper appreciation for diversity in communication [18, p. 55].

Additionally, the inclusion of intercultural competence training can also aid students in preparing for the globalized workforce, where effective communication with people from different cultural backgrounds is essential [14, p. 100].

4. The Influence of English as a Global Lingua Franca

In recent decades, English has evolved into a global lingua franca. It is the common language used in international business, diplomacy, science, and technology. The emergence of English as a global lingua franca is rooted in its widespread utility and adaptability. With origins tied to British colonialism and its later proliferation through American cultural and economic dominance, English has become the “global language” of choice for international communication.

English as a lingua franca is seen as more than just a language; it is a global phenomenon. It represents the use of the English language as a bridge for international communication, enabling speakers of different native languages to interact effectively. This concept highlights English not just as a native language for specific countries but as a functional tool for global connection [5]. As a result of this phenomenon, students often encounter different English variants, accents, and expressions in their daily interactions, which can pose a challenge for English language learners, especially for those in non-English speaking countries.

Solution. to address the aforementioned issue, teachers ought to shift their focus from emphasizing grammatical perfection to fostering communicative competence. While traditional English teaching methods are heavily focused on grammatical accuracy and native-speaker norms, the global use of English calls for more flexible approaches to communication. Teachers can focus on helping students develop strategies for understanding different accents and dialects, which is crucial for real-world communication. For example, listening activities that feature speakers from different English-speaking countries (the UK, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, and India) can assist students in becoming familiarized and accustomed to various English accents and improve their listening comprehension skills.

Moreover, incorporating real-world authentic materials such as podcasts, news reports, and interviews with non-native speakers allows students to hear English in diverse contexts. By doing so, learners can better understand the nuances of English as a lingua franca and learn to navigate these variations with confidence [8, p. 220]. Besides, resources on intercultural communication can help students to better overcome these challenges in their studies and future careers [2, p. 231].

5. Language Anxiety and Lack of Confidence

One of the most common emotional barriers to language learning at the university level is language anxiety. Foreign language anxiety, also known as xenoglossophobia, is the feeling of unease, worry, nervousness and apprehension experienced in learning or using a second or foreign language. The feelings may stem from any second language context whether it is associated with the productive skills of speaking and writing or the receptive skills of reading and listening [6].

Due to the peculiarities of the language learning process, language anxiety is defined as a specific and complex structure of self-perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to language acquisition in the classroom. Three performance-related variables—grade anxiety, communication anxiety, and anxiety related to an unknown foreign language test—are the main causes of language anxiety. Thus, academic, cognitive, and social effects are three main categories into which the effects of language anxiety can be divided [15].

Solution: to help students overcome or at least reduce excessive anxiety, teachers are expected to focus more on formative assessment and feedback than on summative assessment at the end of the semester. In this regard, foreign language teachers should be encouraged to enhance students' involvement in class activities and create an environment that fosters and supports language learning [15].

In addition, creating a supportive and low-stress environment in the classroom is crucial for mitigating language anxiety. Encouraging open dialogue, where students are reassured that making mistakes is a natural part of language learning, can promote a safe space for practice. Teachers can use techniques such as positive reinforcement and provide constructive feedback in a way that builds confidence rather than discouraging students. Also, group activities, such as pair work or small-group discussions, allow students to practice speaking in a less intimidating context. These activities help break down social barriers and encourage more active engagement and participation. For example, role-playing activities that replicate real-life situations can help students feel more comfortable using English in practical contexts, reducing their fear of making errors [3, p. 22–35].

To extend the foregoing, employing relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing exercises or guided mindfulness, are seen as techniques that can help students overcome the physical manifestations of anxiety. Creating opportunities for students to share their personal experiences with language learning, either through informal chats or structured classroom activities, also can aid in normalizing their concerns and promote empathy among peers [3, p. 31].

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6. Teaching Critical Thinking and Writing Skills

University-level English instruction frequently requires students to engage in critical thinking and produce well-structured written arguments. Developing these skills can be particularly challenging, as it involves not only understanding the language but also synthesizing information, analyzing complex ideas, and organizing thoughts coherently.

Solution. One effective method for improving critical thinking and writing skills is to approach writing as a process rather than a final product. Encouraging students to write drafts, revise their work, and provide peer feedback fosters a deeper engagement with the writing process. Peer review sessions, where students critique each other's work, can help them develop a critical eye and understand different perspectives on writing [1, p. 98].

Additionally, teaching students how to identify key arguments in a text, evaluate evidence, and draw conclusions based on logical reasoning is pivotal. Using materials that require critical analysis, such as opinion articles, research papers, and case studies, can help students practice these skills. For example, a lesson might involve analyzing an editorial piece, identifying its main arguments, and discussing whether the evidence provided supports those arguments effectively. This activity not only develops writing skills but also enhances students' ability to think critically and express their ideas in a coherent and structured manner [1, p. 99].

Moreover, integrating formal academic writing structures into English language lessons is crucial. Teaching students how to write thesis statements, develop an argument, and cite sources correctly will empower them to produce academic papers that meet university standards. Online resources, such as Purdue OWL, provide comprehensive guides on academic writing and citation styles, which can be incorporated into the curriculum to reinforce best practices [13, p. 128].

7. Assessment Challenges

Traditional assessment methods, such as written exams and quizzes, have long been the cornerstone of university-level education. However, these methods may not accurately reflect students' language proficiency or their ability to use English in real-world situations. In particular, exams that focus solely on grammar and vocabulary may fail to capture a student's true communicative competence.

Besides, formative assessments are crucial in monitoring students' progress and adjusting teaching strategies. Regular feedback may ensure that all students, regardless of their level, stay on track and remain engaged in the learning process [11, p. 150-175].

Solution. to address this issue, educators are supposed to incorporate more diverse forms of assessment that measure students' practical language skills.

Presentations, oral exams, and project-based assignments are increasingly being used to assess students' ability to communicate effectively in English. These assessments not only evaluate students' linguistic abilities but also test their skills in critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity.

Alternatively, project-based learning, where students work on real-world tasks or research projects, provides an opportunity for them to apply their English skills in meaningful contexts. For example, a group project that requires students to design a marketing campaign or create a presentation on a specific topic challenges them to use their language skills in a collaborative and practical manner. These projects help bridge the gap between academic language and professional communication [10, p. 85-100].

Peer reviews also serve as an important component of alternative assessment methods. When students review each other's work, they are forced to apply the same critical thinking skills they need to improve their own writing, which reinforces learning. This approach also promotes a sense of shared responsibility in the classroom, as students become more invested in each other's success.

Digital tools, such as online writing platforms and collaborative software like Google Docs, can also support assessment. These platforms allow students to submit their work electronically, receive instant feedback, and collaborate with their peers in real-time. As a result, assessment becomes an ongoing, dynamic process rather than a one-time event [10, p. 94].

8. Teacher Training and Professional Development

In order to address the complex challenges of teaching English at the university level, it is essential that educators remain up-to-date with modern teaching methodologies and technological advancements.

Solution: to fulfil the mentioned above requirement, institutions must prioritize ongoing teacher training and offer opportunities for professional growth. Workshops, seminars, and conferences may provide valuable platforms for teachers to learn about new trends in foreign language instruction, share best teaching practices, and collaborate with colleagues. For instance, attending conferences such as the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) familiarizes teachers with the latest insights into language teaching strategies and materials [8, p. 145-160].

To extend formal training, peer collaboration and mentoring programs can enhance teachers' professional growth. Teachers can benefit from observing colleagues' lessons, sharing feedback, and discussing challenges and successes in a collaborative environment. Universities may also offer incentives for teachers to pursue advanced degrees or certifications in areas such as TESOL (Teaching

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English to Speakers of Other Languages) or CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning), which can further improve their expertise in language instruction [9, p. 210-230].

Further, universities should increasingly incorporate technology into teacher training programs. Online courses, webinars, and virtual classrooms will allow teachers to engage with professional development opportunities regardless of their location. Platforms like Coursera and EdX offer courses on a variety of teaching methodologies, including those specifically focused on English language instruction. By investing in teachers' continuous professional development, universities can ensure that their educators remain adaptable and effective in meeting the diverse needs of their students [9, p. 223].

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges and possible solutions in teaching English at the university level. Strengthening it with empirical data, case studies, and theoretical frameworks would enhance its academic rigor and applicability.

This article is by no means limited to the outlined issues and the ways to solve them. The implications for further research in the delineated area can be considered practical English lesson designs aimed at resolving each specific problem.

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