The Challenges of Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract:

This systematic literature review examines the multifaceted challenges encountered in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) within higher education globally. This study analyses addressing new and creative e-course approaches, language diversity policies, inclusive pedagogies, and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on remote learning to illuminate complexities faced by educators and students. Notable investigations include (Sumtsova et al.s') focus on collaborative learning benefits in Russian technical schools and (Hamel et al.s') exploration of language diversity policies in Latin American universities, contributing to Language Policy and Planning perspectives. (Motschenbacher) advocates sociocultural theory in understanding linguistic inclusion, contrasting with Li and Li's critique of cognitivist approaches. The review also encompasses studies on blended learning, student engagement, motivation of instructors, challenges for non-English-speaking academics, virtual TEFL Ph.D students' university identification, collaboration skills in higher education, and strategies for EFL instructors during the shift to remote learning. Synthesizing these findings underscores the necessity for nuanced strategies to navigate diverse TEFL challenges in higher education. The comprehensive insights offer valuable guidance for educators and administrators seeking effective approaches to enhance TEFL practices within higher education settings.

Keywords: TEFL challenges, higher education, collaborative learning

Introduction:

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in higher education presents multifaceted challenges across global contexts. This introduction explores key studies addressing diverse aspects of TEFL challenges, including innovative e-course approaches, language diversity policies, inclusive pedagogies, and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on remote learning. These studies collectively illuminate the complex dynamics shaping English language instruction and underscore the need for nuanced strategies to overcome the challenges faced by educators and students alike.

Literature review:

Several studies contribute significantly to our understanding of the challenges encountered in TEFL within higher education settings. (Sumtsova et al.), delve into the complexities of teaching English in Russian technical schools, emphasizing the benefits of collaborative learning for engineering education. (Hamel et al.), explore language diversity policies in Latin American universities, specifically in Mexico and Brazil, shedding light on the broader context of Language Policy and Planning. (Motschenbacher) investigates the linguistic perspective of inclusion, advocating for sociocultural theory and addressing various exclusion-related dimensions.

Li and Li highlight the limitations of cognitivist approaches in achieving inclusivity, proposing sociocultural theory as a more effective alternative. (Kuzmina et al.), discuss the challenges and benefits of blended learning for foreign students' integration, emphasizing its positive impact on language skills. (Alkhannani's) review underscores the positive correlation between student engagement and learning outcomes, calling for collaborative approaches in Asian and Middle Eastern classrooms. (Ansyari et al.), investigate the degree of motivation of non-permanent English instructors, providing insights into the factors influencing motivation in a TEFL environment at an Islamic institution.

(Dang and Vu) investigate challenges faced by non-English-speaking background (NESB) academics in English-medium instruction, utilizing Vygotsky's socio-cultural perspective. (Salimi and Banitalebi's) study on Student-University Identification (SUI) among virtual TEFL Ph.D. students in Iran offers recommendations for enhancing students' professional development. (Jaleniauskienė et al.), delve into collaboration skills in higher education, emphasizing the need for explicit teaching and diverse tasks. Finally, (Choi

and Chung's) (year) case study explores strategies employed by EFL instructors in South Korea during the abrupt shift to remote learning, offering practical suggestions for educators and administrators. (Talbot and Mercer's) investigation into the mental well-being of ESL/EFL tertiary-level, American, Japanese, and Austrian teachers provide valuable insights into managing emotional well-being in the teaching profession.

Research Question: What are the difficulties in teaching English as a foreign language in higher education?

Objective: Systematic review literature on the challenges of teaching English as a foreign language in higher education.

Methodology:

Systematic literature review using PRISMA method (Tolossa and Negussie). Extraction of data: in the data extraction stage, 19 papers were retrieved and limited to the following requirements (Dawit Negussie and Dr. Jabe Bekele Hirgo; Dilipkumar Suthar; Suthar).

Articles must be either original, review papers or published reports.

1. The reviewed article must be in English and from the fields of social sciences, arts and humanities.
2. Systematically reviewed articles were published between the range of 2015-2023
3. The extracted paper was from all countries.
4. The database used to extract the articles was from Scopus database.
5. Keywords used to extract the articles are higher education, teaching, English as a foreign language.

Data Collection Tools:

The researchers took the data for this study in textual form; in other words, they used the secondary data. On December 19, 2023, Data from the Scopus academic search engine (https://www.scopus.com) were obtained. Additionally, 'Advance' search terms were used through Title-Abs-Key(challenge And teaching And English And as a foreign language AND higher education) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 And (Limit-To (Doctype,"ar") And (Limit-To (Pubstage,"final") And (Limit-To (Language,"English") And (Limit-To (Subjarea,"Soci") Or Limit-To (Subjarea,"Arts") And (Limit-To (Exactkeyword,"Higher Education") OR Limit-To (Exactkeyword,"Teaching") Or Limit-To (Exactkeyword,"English As A Foreign Language").

Figure 1: PRISMA Diagram

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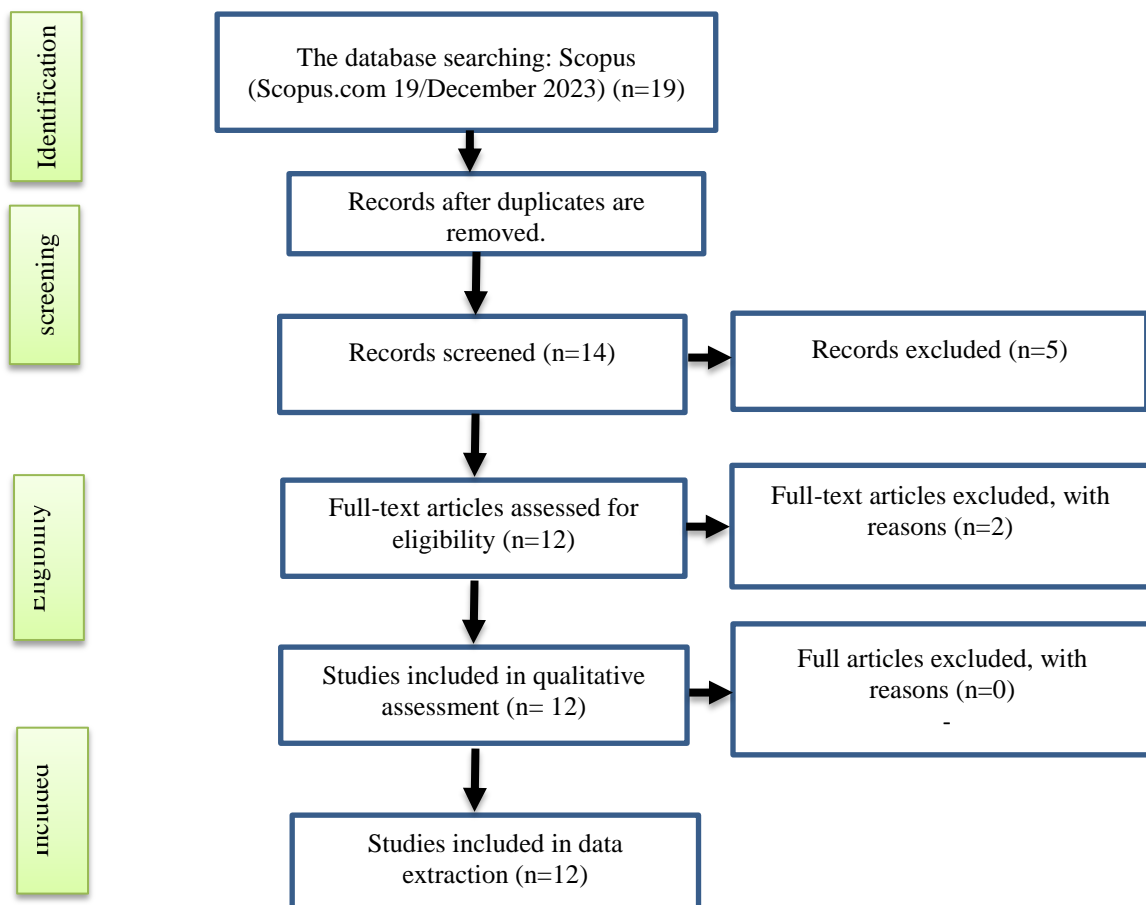
Analysis:

Figure 2: Document by year
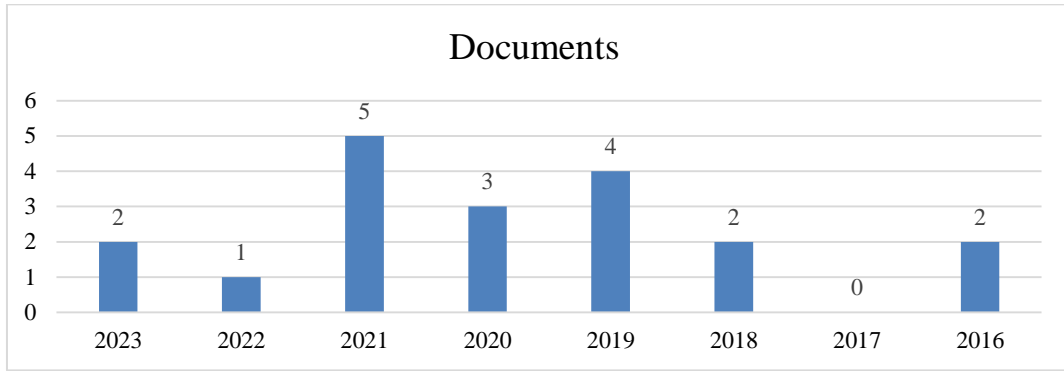
The graph presents a distribution of documents over the years from 2016 to 2023. Notably, there were no documents published in 2017. From 2018 to 2020, the number of documents varied, ranging from 2 to 3 per year. The year 2021 witnessed a substantial increase with 5 documents published, followed by a slight decrease in 2022 with only 1 document. In the current year, 2023, there are already 2 documents published. This histogram provides a visual representation of the annual publication trends, highlighting fluctuations and patterns in the number of documents over the specified timeframe.

Figure 3: Document by country or territory
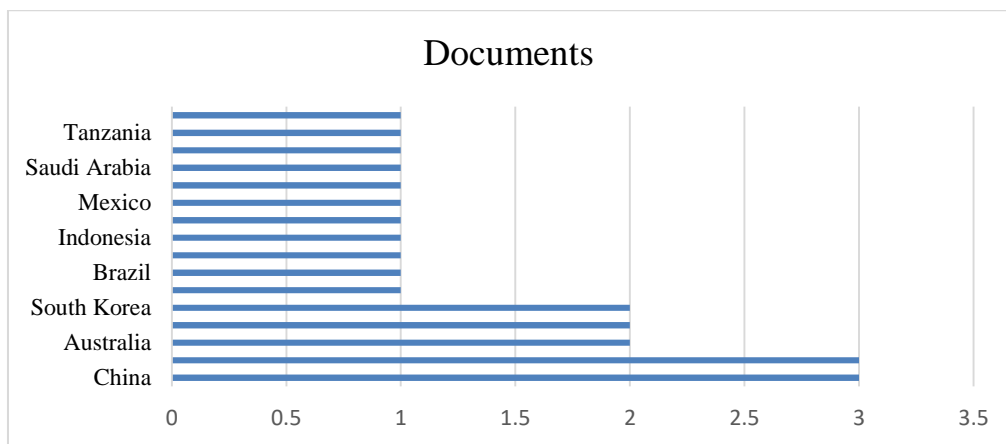
The figure shows the distribution of documents across different countries or territories. China and the Australia, Russian Federation lead with three documents each, suggesting a notable presence or focus on these nations in the dataset. Australia, Lithuania, and South Korea follow closely with two documents each, indicating a relatively consistent representation. Austria, Brazil, Germany, Indonesia, and Iran each contribute one document, showcasing a diverse range of countries with singular occurrences. This distribution suggests variations in the level of attention or emphasis on different regions within the dataset. The table provides a succinct overview of the document distribution across various countries, offering insights into the geographical focus of the associated content.

Figure 4: Document by subject area
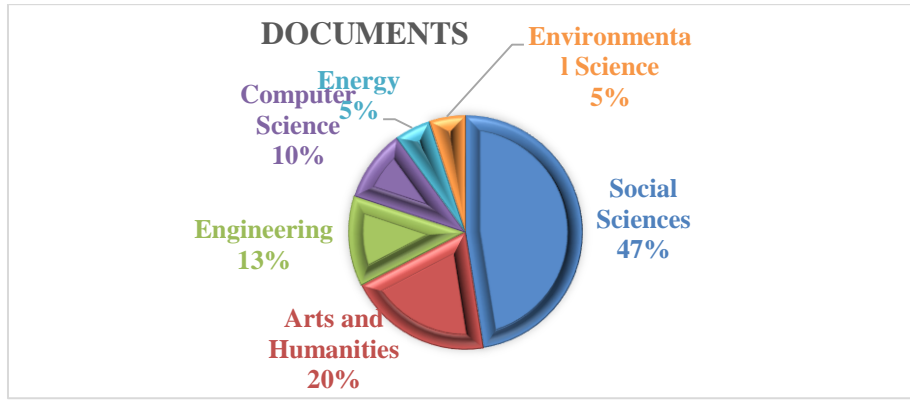
The figure provides a breakdown of documents across different subject areas, offering insights into the distribution of content within the dataset. Social Sciences dominate with the highest representation, comprising 19 documents, indicating a significant focus on topics within this field. Arts and Humanities follow with eight documents, highlighting a substantial but comparatively lesser emphasis. Engineering, Computer Science, Energy, and Environmental Science contribute five, four, two, and two documents, respectively, suggesting a more modest presence in the dataset. This distribution provides a clear overview of the subject areas covered, with a notable concentration in Social Sciences, followed by Arts and Humanities, while the remaining disciplines exhibit a more balanced representation. The data hints at the thematic diversity of the documents, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of the content within the specified subject areas.

Word Cloud:

The word cloud analysis, focusing on the topic "The Challenges of Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Higher Education," reveals key thematic elements. Words such as "language," "learning," "English," "education," "university," "student," and "teaching" prominently stand out. The prevalence of these terms underscores the central focus on challenges related to language education, particularly in the context of teaching English as a foreign language at the higher education level. The word cloud highlights the significance of topics related to language learning, English instruction, and the educational environment, emphasizing the challenges that educators and students encounter in this specific domain within higher education.

Figure 5: Word Cloud
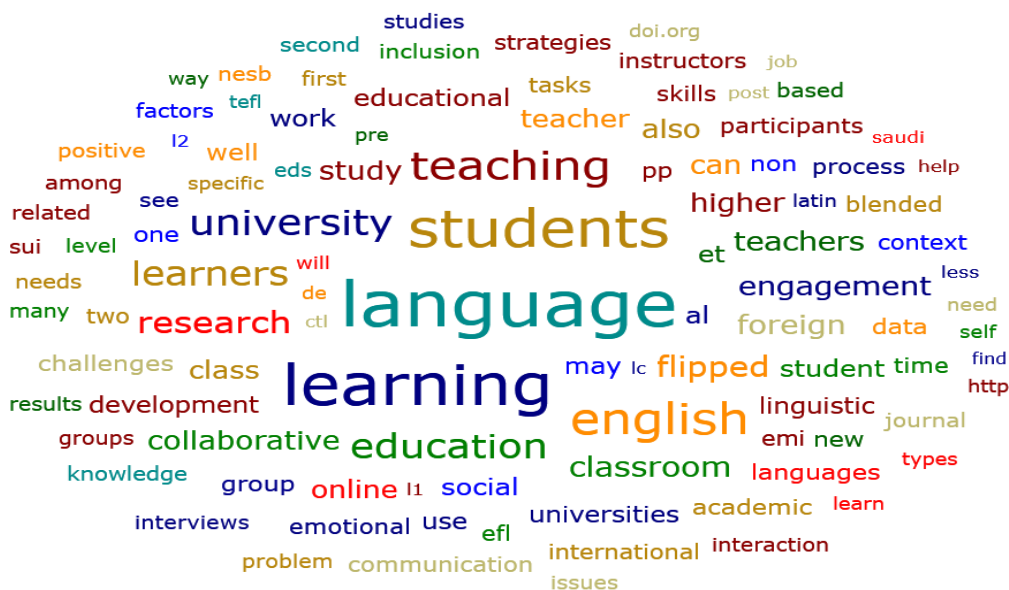
Findings:

The research objectives of systematically reviewing literature on challenges in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in higher education are effectively addressed in the introduction and literature review sections. The introduction provides an overview of the multifaceted challenges in TEFL across global contexts, setting the stage for the subsequent literature review. The literature review

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systematically examines key studies that contribute significantly to understand TEFL challenges in higher education.

(Sumtsova et al.'s) exploration of teaching English in Russian technical schools highlights the benefits of collaborative learning, particularly in engineering education. (Hamel et al.'s) study delves into language diversity policies in Latin American universities, offering insights into broader Language Policy and Planning contexts. (Motschenbacher's) investigation focuses on the linguistic perspective of inclusion, advocating for sociocultural theory and addressing exclusion-related dimensions. (Li and Li) emphasize the limitations of cognitivist approaches, proposing sociocultural theory as a more effective alternative.

The literature review also encompasses studies by (Kuzmina et al., Alkhannani, Ansyari et al., Dang and Vu, Salimi and Banitalebi, Jaleniauskienė et al., Choi and Chung, and Talbot and Mercer), covering diverse challenges such as blended learning, student engagement, motivation levels of instructors, challenges faced by non-English-speaking background academics, virtual TEFL Ph.D. students' identification with the university, collaboration skills in higher education, strategies for EFL instructors during the shift to remote learning, and the mental well-being of ESL/EFL tertiary-level teachers.

Overall, the literature review successfully synthesizes existing research, offering a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced in TEFL within higher education, and highlighting the diverse strategies and recommendations proposed by different studies.

Conclusion:

The literature review on challenges in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in higher education reveals a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted issues encountered across global contexts. The studies examined to address diverse aspects, including collaborative learning, language diversity policies, inclusive pedagogies, blended learning, student engagement, motivation levels of instructors, challenges faced by non-English-speaking background academics, virtual TEFL Ph.D. students' identification with the university, collaboration skills in higher education, and strategies for EFL instructors during the shift to remote learning. The synthesis of these studies underscores the complex dynamics shaping English language instruction, emphasizing the need for nuanced strategies to overcome challenges. The wealth of insights provided by the literature review offers valuable guidance for educators and administrators seeking effective approaches to enhance TEFL in higher education settings.

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