UNRAVELLING THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDE STUDENTS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: FROM TEACHERS' VIEWPOINT

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ABSTRACT

Students' effective learning and course learning outcomes (CLOs) are of constant concern for teachers, students, parents, and institutions, regardless of academic levels and contexts. To this end, teachers employ varied techniques and methods in soliciting the expected learning outcomes and students' academic skill developments, but very often some factors are found to be liable and barriers to the success of this mission. Behind such a teaching and learning perspective, this paper attempts to explore the factors that impede students' English language learning (ELL) and CLOs at Jazan University, Saudi Arabia, with the intent of finding new vantage points that augment students' effective learning outcomes. To this end, the present study devised a survey questionnaire for teachers (Appendix 1) to collect data and observations to determine the ground reality of the issue undertaken for this study. The population participants were 25 EFL teachers. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively. Finally, the analytical result of this paper unveils that teachers should drive "needs analysis" to diagnose the learners' lack of motivation, TBLT practice in the classroom, and their training for techno-pedagogical professional skill development. It also reveals some other implications and effective recommendations for making a learner-centric EFL teaching and learning curriculum. The findings of this paper contribute to the fields of ELT, TEFL, learning outcomes, curriculum design, pragmatics, and ELL paradigms.

Keywords: Learning outcomes, Learning motivation, English Language learning learners, Data analysis, Pragmatic curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Learning a new language, such as EFL or ESL, is a rewarding venture for students or any professional. Some may learn quickly and easily but some may find detours and hums in their learning journey. What makes their learning difficulties? There are factors, such as teaching methods, learners' individual differences, learning styles, personality traits, or materials that are liable to impede the speed and acquisition of English language learning (ELL) skills. In other words, students' learning difficulties may refer to ". many reasons and factors like academic, cultural, institutional, situational, financial, or related to the complexity of instructional materials as far as the learner groups are concerned" (Liton, 2016). By understanding "how the learners learn.,teachers (can) determine their philosophy of education, their teaching style, approach, methods, and classroom techniques (Brown, 2007). In this connection, Cook (2016) opines that "the proof of teaching is in the learning" (and) "all successful teaching depends upon learning" (p. 9). However, if teachers, parents, and school leaders understand these factors, it can help generate a supportive environment for ELLs and enkindle learners' increased learning outcomes. Behind such a teaching and learning perspective, the objective of this paper is to explore and unravel the factors that impede students' ELL at Jazan University from teachers' viewpoints toward creating an effective learning paradigm.

Jazan University of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the leading seats of learning by international standards. It is highly dedicated to preparing nation-building, outstanding professionals in various disciplines, with a special emphasis on science and technology. To meet global workplace needs and the evolving digital economy, it strongly focuses on students' academic competence as well as effective professional communication skills in English. The English Language Institute takes care of teaching and learning English by introducing various practical programs, such as EAP, ESP, business communication, English for Career, e-learning programs, students' support learning program, and so on. The aim is to increase students' skills in English, but sometimes it is found that tardy progress and affects learners' effective learning outcomes. Behind this scenario, the current research aims to unravel the gaps that are liable to cause impediments to effective EFL teaching and learning matters with a view to streamlining fruitful improvements in this regard. In other words, this paper unravels the learners' learning difficulties that refer to their habits, styles, cultural conditions, or lack of focus that lead to low achievement or poor learning outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section of this paper, the author navigates the related literature previously published pertaining to challenges and factors that impact students' learning English language skills at the tertiary level in any EFL context, particularly in the Saudi context.

Phonemic sound factors

The research in the Saudi context on EFL teaching and learning has reflected varied aspects of factors that impede students' ELL and their learning outcomes. Saudi EFL learners experience difficulties with various linguistic skills, like phonemic sounds. They encounter pronunciation difficulties because of L1 influence and the absence of some sound systems in Arabic phonemic sound. Hussam Rajab finds that students confused the sounds between the alternations of letters —P/and —B/. Nearly 50% of the students were not able to distinguish between these two letters in writing, spelling, or pronouncing (words having –P/or –B/in them). The fact is that Arabic language lacks the/ p/-sound, and therefore there is an approximate nearest Arabic letter (ب)/B/"which is allophonic to/P/(qtd. in Rajab, 2013, pp. 653-659). It confuses them in spelling as well as writing and speaking forms. To review other Arab learners" experiences in this regard, it reveals phonological and articulatory problems for Jordanian learners and syntactic problems for Sudanese and Egyptian learners (qtd. in Khatib, 2013, pp. 28-43; Al-Khatib *et al*., 2012).

Teachers and parents' motivation

Parents have an important role in motivating their children for educational success. If parents emphasize "that language skills and

proficiency are important and desired, children are more likely to be motivated to achieve these goals. While extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are important for children's success, motivation from parents is a separate form of motivation that has a more direct and positive influence on student achievement" (Butler, 2014). On the other hand, teachers create positive teacher–student relationships in classrooms that are culturally inclusive, which may spark learners' learning motivation. To be frank, for ELLs' academic success, parents, teachers, and students must work together to create an optimum learning environment and opportunities for student achievement (Hanus, 2016).

Lexical factors in writing

Saudi EFL learners go through some difficulties in writing skills because of the opposing styles of English and Arabic written and spoken forms. Ahmed Othman, in his study at the University of Tabuk in Saudi Arabia, found some factors impacting learners' effective ELL, such as grammatical errors (43%), lexical errors (24%), semantics (15%), mechanical errors (16%), and syntactic errors (2%) (Othman, 2017). Another research undertaken by Javid and Umer revealed that Saudi EFL learners face difficulties in their academic writing due to their weaknesses in using appropriate lexical items, organizing ideas, and correct use of grammar. The other weaker areas include the wrong use of prepositions, spellings, irregular verbs, articles, punctuation, suffixes, and prefixes (Javid and Umer, 2014, pp. 164-180). Huwari and Khasawneh (2013), in their study, found that some "Factors attributing to these differences include: (a) differences in alphabets and (b) differences in writing styles as well as Arabic tends to have more metaphoric phrases and lengthier sentences than English does" (pp. 1-9). In addition, Ryhan (2014) underlines that Arabization is also a major contributing factor in making the situation difficult. Students and instructors encounter a high level of challenges and obstacles during the course of classroom instruction at the beginning of the tertiary level (pp. 140-148).

Authentic materials

Authentic and suitable textual materials can influence learners' learning goals and outcomes. The textual materials should be relevant to learners' choice, interest, level, and cultural fit if we want to reflect on ELLs effective learning in their academic venture. In this regard, Rivas (1999) and Mishan (2005) claim that learners' interests and needs are the most essential factors in the choice of authentic texts. Again, Little *et al.*, (1989) state that "The more texts are related to learners' personal concerns and interests, the deeper and more rapid the processing will be" (qtd. in Mishan, 2005). Lee opines that "a careful and wise selection of materials focused on learners is a must if we want a positive response from them" (Lee, 1995, pp. 323-328). Bacon and Finneman (1990) emphasize that "the texts should be culturally relevant to the experience of the students" (pp. 459-473). Berardo provides three criteria for choosing authentic texts, such as suitability of content, exploitability, and readability (Berardo, 2006, pp. 60-69). Brown and Eskenzai assert that the primary criteria for selecting appropriate authentic text should be the reader's current vocabulary knowledge and the desired vocabulary knowledge throughout the curriculum, in addition to grammar difficulty and text cohesiveness (Brown and Eskenazi, M., 2004). To select authentic learning materials for EFL learners, "we must always remember that our goal is for the students to be able to interact freely with others: to understand what others wish to communicate in the broadest sense, and to be able to convey to others what they themselves wish to share" (Rivers, 1978, pp. 3-4). In this regard, Liu (2003) opines that the ultimate goal of language instruction is to equip learners with the ability to use the language for their communication. In fact, an authentic and suitable textbook is a motivating factor to immerse students in learning activities and engage them in teaching and learning in the classroom tasks. To address adverse factors that imped the ELLs in their effective learning, a variety of text types can be selected, such as interviews, poems, application forms, articles, advertisements, and brochures. To this point, Richards suggests texts should contain task-based communication activities to support communicative activities, from language-based realia such as signs, magazines, and newspapers to graphic and visual sources such as maps, pictures, symbols, graphs, and charts (Richards, 2001). So, authentic texts should be selected by considering learners' learning styles, choices, interests, and socio-cultural background.

Learning motivational factor

Effective teaching and learning activities are filtered through students' learning motivation, which is a very important factor for EFL learners' language acquisition. Motivation affects their zeal for learning or learning objectives. Research in the Saudi EFL context revealed that Saudi EFL classes suffer from a sheer lack of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. If learning materials are not culturally relevant to the target learners, it affects the learners' learning motivation, so far as the socio-cultural spirit of the target language is concerned. To this end, Omran Akasha rightly says that in effective ELL, "teachers and students can pay attention to cultural awareness and authentic tasks" (Akasha, 2013, pp. 12-31).

Pedagogical factor

The way teachers teach and apply methods affects students' engagement in the learning process both positively and negatively. Nguyen *et al.* showed that some teachers did not provide clear instructions for students' activities in the class. Consequently, the students misunderstood and could not complete the tasks or did the tasks differently. Besides, large class-sizes, teachers' inability to manage the class well, text-driven grammar activities, and insufficient time to perform communicative activities affect the learners' learning process (Nguyen *et al.*, 2014). Carless (1999) pertains to this point: "Teachers are the individuals who implement, adapt, reject, or ignore curriculum innovation.they are the core of the innovation process (Carless, 1999: 374). Liton (2015) finds that the EFL teaching approach in Saudi Arabia is more teachers centered than interactive or self-directed learning practices (p. 69). Khan (2011) found that despite sound planning, purposive curriculum, suitable textbooks, qualified teachers, and effective administration, the teaching and learning process seems to be ineffective…because of the traditional approach to the teaching of English (p. 1248).

L1 influence

Saudi EFL learners encounter a considerable amount of difficulties as "a consequence of the degree to which their native language differs from English. It has been noticed that most ELLs often commit linguistic mistakes of syntax and pronunciation as an effect of the interference of their L1. This is popularly known as L1 transfer or "inter-lingual error" (Khan, 2011). Liton (2012) pertinently spells out that L1 has more or less interference or assistance while learning a foreign language. It is also part of the motivational drive for the new learners of a language. Due to some basic functioning differences between English and Arabic, it is quite difficult for Arabic-speaking learners to learn English as a target language.

Teaching methodological factor

There are a variety of teaching methods to teach English in the EFL classroom. It affects students' learning if it is not selected wisely according to the nature of the learning environment and the students' level. English-medium instruction sometimes becomes a barrier to the prep-year Saudi students who were not exposed to ELL much in their pre-university education. Mr. Khan cites that students face problems in learning due to the reason that they do not study English in the early stages and do not use English as a medium of instruction except in certain higher education courses (Khan, 2011). Liton (2015) finds that the EFL teaching approach in Saudi Arabia is more teacher-centered than learner-centered self-directed learning practices (p. 69). Khan (2011) also revealed that despite sound planning, a purposive curriculum, suitable textbooks, qualified teachers, and effective administration, the teaching and learning process seems to be ineffective because of the traditional approach to the teaching of English (p. 1248). Liton (2012) recommends that for a sustainable

development of linguistic competence in English, native Arab speakers should follow the communicative approach, as this method is widely used across the country's and nation's education systems.

Socio-linguistic phenomena

The English language is not frequently used in the socio-cultural spheres in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, it demarcates the chances of learning English from social contexts. To this end, Khan (2011) mentions that "Saudi students are not exposed to listening or speaking activities in their daily life interactions neither at home nor at school, college or university, nor in markets or public places. Such conditions dampen the spirit and stunt the growth of the pupils. By virtue of their personal efforts, some students achieve a considerably good level of fluency in spoken English. But they miserably lag behind in another active skill, which is writing".

The above-cited related literature review replicates that the factors related to authentic and learners' culturally relevant textual materials, pragmatic pedagogical practice, L1 influence, teachers, parents, and learners' self-motivation are magna-matter issues in effective EFL teaching and learning. Apparently, this facet of the related literature review reinforces the significance of the current paper.

METHODS

Study context and population

The study was conducted at Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. The purpose of teaching English language at this context is to facilitate "students with a relatively high level of competence in reading and an intermediate level of competence in listening, speaking, writing, and translating so that students can communicate in English" (Team, 1999, p. 01). This study is an attempt to unravel the factors behind the learners' apathy and tardy progress in ELL. The target participants are EFL teachers. They were selected on a random basis. The participants were 25 teachers who attended this study. Seemingly, the research survey at this institution avows available insights into the problems related to effective EFL learning and paves the way for remodeling appropriate course contents for English language syllabi.

Data collection procedure

The data collection device chosen for this study was a one-page written questionnaire for teachers (Appendix 1). The questionnaire was sent to 30 teachers via e-mail and Facebook, and 25 questionnaires were returned similarly between March and May of 2020, representing a response rate of 83%. Some multiple-choice questions were set, as well as a question was asked for short suggestions, offering the participants a willing reflection. The participants answered the questionnaire quite freely. The study questionnaire for this survey aims to gain teachers' self-reported opinions, attitudes, and suggestions as

> "Personal reflections are integral to the emerging analysis of a cultural group, because they provide the researcher with new vantage points and with opportunities to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange" (Marshall and Rossman 2006, p. 100).

RESULTS

Data analysis

The qualitative data analysis method was chosen for this study. From the collected data, the responses of the participants offering the same answer were sorted out into structured answers using MS Excel. In the data analysis processes, the author attempted ". to identify and describe patterns and themes from the perspective of the participant(s), then attempt to understand and explain these patterns and themes" (Creswell, 2003, p. 203). The data analytical results were reported thematically.

Survey questionnaire analysis

In the survey questionnaire, the first question sought to determine the various drawbacks of existing EFL courses with reference to the lack of

motivation. 64% of the participants selected the "Very helpful" option, 20% of them chose the "Helpful" option, and 16% of them responded negatively (Fig. 1).

The above figure reflects the overwhelming result of the fact that 84% of the participants consider identifying the pitfalls of EFL courses helpful in recognizing the causes and factors of the EFL learners' lack of motivation. The analytical point focuses on learners' motivation at the top, and the choice of curriculum materials addressing learners' attitudes and cultural context may be a motivating factor in ELL. It is also relevant to say, "… the teacher has to be well equipped and make "needs analysis" to analyze linguistically the nature and type of difficulties that the Saudi learners face during the course of study" (Khan, 2011a, pp. 68-80). In an EFL teaching and learning context, learners' motivation is a fundamental issue in effective learning and course learning outcomes (CLOs). Motivational differences are the key factors in driving learners' ELL effectiveness. Hence, it is suggestive to drive "needs analysis" to diagnose the learners' lack of motivation to further students' effective ELL outcomes.

The second question is designed to figure out whether large class sizes are a bar of learner-centered task-based language teaching (TBLT) learning. In answer to this question, 80% of the teachers agreed with the positive option, while 20% of the participants answered in the negative (Fig. 2).

The majority (80%) of the participating teachers implicates that large class sizes are a bar of learner-centered teaching and learning. It also provides the fact that TBLT is not possible, even though the learning materials may be qualitatively learner-centered and task-oriented. At Jazan University, each EFL class size is 40-80, or sometimes more or less in number. The presence of 20% of participating teachers' negative responses reflects that they are not involved in the professional pedagogical processes and students' learning simulations, or they do not have adequate knowledge of ELT paradigms and methodologies. Therefore, it is suggestive that teachers' reskilling steps are to be undertaken and class size should be reduced to confirm learners' effective, engaging, and participatory classroom learning.

The third question was designed to accumulate teachers' perceptions and evaluations based on their real experience about the English courses taught and what they found while teaching these courses. If the course contents are in line with the learners' needs, attitudes, and their cultural relevance, it motivates and integrates them into learning engagement. In response to this question, 40% of the participants' opined positively, and 60% of them replied negatively (Fig. 3).

The analytical result of the 3rd question replicates the non-consequential and non-committal appropriacy of the EFL course design that disposes one of the obstreperous factors to learners' effective ELL. In fact, 60% of the participants' perceptions tag a negative bestowal mark on the language curriculum design for not complementing the needs of 21st century learners. Therefore, the changing needs of the 21st century digital learners' learning styles, attitudes, and culturally relevant content materials require integration into EFL courses by focusing on 21st century learning skills (i.e., critical thinking, communication,
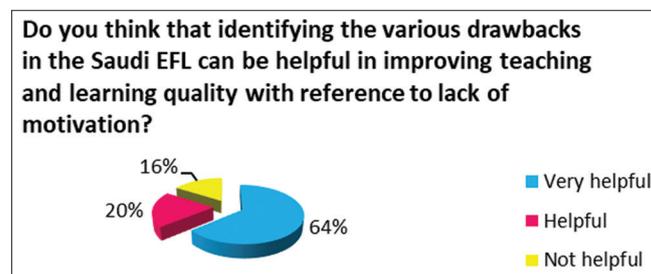

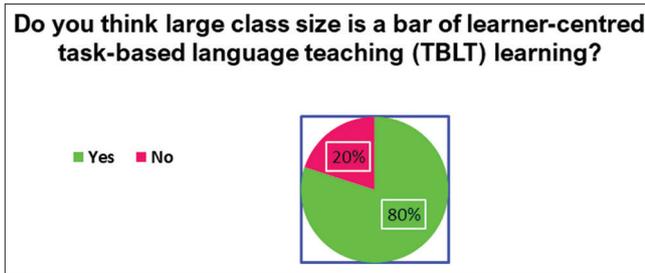**Fig. 1: Reflecting drawbacks on EFL courses**

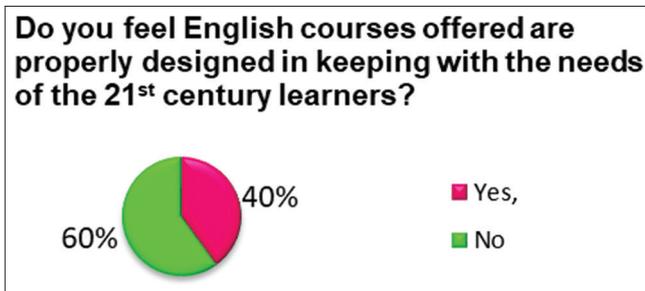**Fig. 2: Large class size affecting learner-centred learning**

Fig. 3: Defective course design affecting learners' ELL

collaboration, and creativity). It is indeed important to cite this from Sara Davila's note on learning:

> "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn" (Davila, 2016).

The fourth question attempts to figure out whether effective EFL classroom learning largely relies on a teacher–student congenial relationship. 28% of the teachers decided on the "Strongly agree" option, while 70% of them selected the "Agree" option. Among the participants, 2% of them disagreed with the issue (Fig. 4).

The overwhelming responses 98% together avowed the essential importance of teacher–student rapport in enhancing EFL classroom teaching and learning. The friendly ties enkindle a positive learning environment and becomes the source of learning inspiration and motivation for difficult and struggling learners.

The fifth question facilitated the participants a free reign to reflect their self-exerted opinions and suggestions, behind the factors that impede learners' apathy and CLOs. Most of the teachers provided useful suggestions based on their experiences. The responses are summarized into structured answers in Table 1.

Surprisingly, the varied suggestions from the participating teachers eschew the negative fallacies of the factors that impede learners' learning outcomes and open a ray of hope for effective and promising teaching and learning practices. 94% of the teachers' suggestions underline the fact that integrated course contents do not focus on the socio-cultural factors of the learners and aver the lack and incongruity of effective course design and formation. The use of translanguaging (48%) can be a chance for the learners to immerse in the learning process by using their own primary language and experiences. The other factors reflected are responsible for the learners' ineffective learning outcomes, such as *large class sizes and teacher-centered teaching practices in place of TBL.* The teachers recommend techno-pedagogy in teaching by embracing technology in EFL classrooms and learner-centered classroom practices to enhance effective ELL.

DISCUSSION

The current paper, through data analysis, comes across no divergence and convergence factors and issues related to effective ELL, but it provides
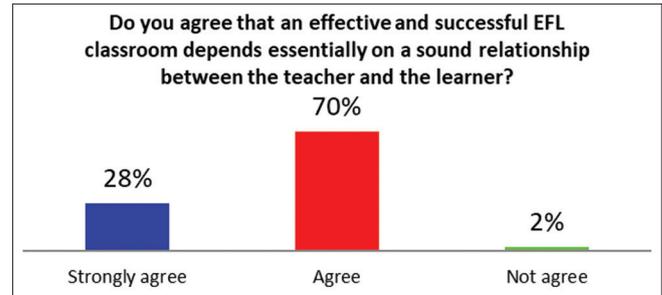

Fig. 4: Necessity of teacher-student rapport in effective learning

Fig. 5: Inclusive and encouraging learning environment (Atkinson, 2021). Source: https://www.edutopia.org/article/tapping-english-language-learners-strengths

Table 1: The participants' self-reported opinions and reflections

S. No	Recommendations	Response Rate (%)
1.	The course contents must focus on learners' socio-cultural factors and their background knowledge level.	94
2.	Translanguaging practice in EFL teaching	48
3	Large class size should be reduced from 20 to 30 in number.	100
4.	Classroom teaching practice needs to be task-oriented (TBLT) and learner-centered.	88
5.	The use of learning technology in EFL teaching can accelerate learners' learning motivational level.	74

some feasible and effective points that implicate positive and effective learning outcomes in future undertakings. This paper analyzed the diverse data analytical results and revealed the following points of hypothesis:

Impeding factors
- The integrated course contents are not in line with the learners' socio-cultural background and large class size. The course is not tailored suitably according to the learners' background knowledge and needs as today's digital learners.
- Motivational differences are the key factors in driving learners' ELL effectiveness.
- A large class size is a bar of learner-centered TBLT teaching and learning practice. Sometimes, the classroom environment is also a responsible factor in learners' learning outcomes.
- Factors related to foreign course contents to learners' socio-cultural background, and the spirit of the target language can be impeding issue in EFL learning motivation.
- Teachers' lack of adequate professional ELT pedagogical knowledge related to methodologies can be a factor behind learners' lack of interest in the learning process, and it influences their learning outcomes.

Remedial measures

Having seen some of the very important factors and issues that can be found directly or indirectly related to the teaching and learning of English, the teacher can do something necessary to cope with the issues. This paper reveals the following viable proposed recommendations for better learning outcomes and effective learning simulation:

Pragmatic course contents

To redesign the integrated course materials by addressing learners' culturally relevant factors in the course and academic needs in meeting 21st-century learning skills, i.e., critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity.

Training for the teaching staff

To update the teachers' pedagogical professional skills, training and up-skilling programs need to be undertaken for professional teaching and learning input.

Engaging inclusive learning

To break away from the impeding factors to learners' effective learning outcomes, it is viable to ensure an engaging, inclusive learning environment to bring back students to learning immersion. The study suggests teachers' reskilling programs and reducing class size in order to confirm learners' effective, engaging, and participatory classroom learning (see an engaging participatory teaching scene).

Liton implies that by tapping out the learners' latent aptitude and exploiting it to a sustainable point from where they can streamline the process of learning. A teacher alone can handle and improve a demotivated class environment by tapping out the learners' latent aptitude through inclusive engagement in the learning process (Liton, 2012).

Translanguaging

Translanguaging practice can be adopted to facilitate the use of the learner's experiences and first language in the EFL classroom to be involved in learning the target language.

Reducing large class-sizes

It is an important pointer for the education leader to make a moderate class size by reducing the students' numbers in a class to ensure an engaging and participatory, customizable classroom teaching and learning environment.

Driving "needs analysis"

It is suggestive to drive "needs analysis" to diagnose the learners' lack of motivation to further students' effective ELL outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The current study, through data analytical findings, divulges some effective recommendations and implications about the factors affecting learners' effective ELL and their learning outcomes. First, the integrated course contents do not focus on the socio-cultural factors of the learners, and they reflect the non-consequential and non-committal appropriacy of the EFL course design, which disposes one of the obstreperous factors to learners' effective ELL. Secondly, other factors are responsible for the learners' ineffective learning outcomes, such as large class sizes and teacher-centered teaching practices in place of TBLT. Thirdly, the analytical results show that motivational differences affect learners' EFL learning effectiveness various ways. To divulge the solutions to these factors, this study found some pragmatic suggestions, such as, first, the integrated EFL courses to be redesigned by integrating learners' socio-cultural factors and academic needs. Secondly, the teachers should drive "needs analysis" to diagnose the learners' lack of motivation to further students' effective ELL outcomes as well as bridge teacher–student friendly ties to promote learners' motivation.

Thirdly, to drive teachers' professional training and moderate class size by reducing the students' numbers in a class, it is necessary to ensure an engaging and participatory, customizable classroom teaching and learning environment. Fourthly, the participating teachers also recommend techno-pedagogy by embracing technology into EFL classrooms and learner-centered TBLT classroom practice-oriented to enhance effective ELL. The most distinctive finding of this study is the recommendation for the use of translanguaging to immerse the ELLs in the learning process by using their own primary language and experiences. Finally, it is assumed that after all those suggested modifications, EFL teaching and learning can be viably effective, rewarding, and motivating for learners' effective learning. Furthermore, it is expected that the results of the current study will be a contributing scholarship to the students, ELT researchers, teachers, education leaders, and curriculum designers who hope for effective ELL and CLos.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest that are relevant to the research content, authorship, participants' consent data sharing, or publication of this article. The participants' data are used extensively.

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APPENDIX 1

Dear Participant, the study entitled *"Unravelling the Factors that Impede Students' English Language Learning (ELL)"* is undertaken to find out the factors to determine the successful learning outcomes*.* Authentic data from teachers' observations, reflections, expectations, and practical experiences are significant to designing and developing ELL course materials and syllabi. To this end, l look for your valuable opinions and reflections and so, I request you to attempt this questionnaire. Your participation is cordially appreciated with note of thanks.

Research Questionnaire

(To reflect your opinion choose the best option.)
1. What is your viewpoint to the fact that identifying the various drawbacks in the EFL courses can be helpful in improving teaching and learning quality with reference to the lack of motivation?
   A. Very helpful, B. Helpful, C. Not helpful
2. Do you think large class size is a bar of learner-centred task-based language teaching (TBLT) learning?
   A. Yes, B. No, because a large class size is a bar of this practice, C. I do not know
3. Do you think that EFL courses are properly designed in keeping with the needs of 21st-century learners?
   A. Yes, B. No, C. I do not know
4. Do you think that an effective and successful EFL classroom depends essentially on a sound relationship between the teacher and the learner?
   A. Strongly agree, B. Agree, C. Not agree
5. What is your viewpoint on improving English courses according to your experience?
(Please mention) --