



A Systematic Qualitative Review of Challenges, Benefits, and Pedagogical Strategies of Multilevel EFL Classrooms

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Article info	Abstract
Article type: Research article	Multilevel EFL classes are increasingly common in EFL contexts and Iranian university settings. This study aims to identify and categorize the benefits, challenges, and possible solutions related to multilevel EFL classrooms through a systematic review of the existing literature.
Received: 2025/04/19	Following PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, which offer structured steps for systematically identifying and selecting articles through employing strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, the researchers collected 141 articles from Google Scholar, Academia, Web of Science, and ResearchGate.
Accepted: 2025/06/09	After they were screened in three stages, 80 articles were included in the final content analysis. A thematic content analysis with manual open coding was applied to both conceptual and empirical studies, mainly authored by EFL experts and practitioners, to identify the recurrent themes across the literature. The analysis resulted in three categorized lists, including benefits such as active learning environment and classroom community, professional growth for teachers; challenges including classroom management difficulties and unequal participation, diversity and meeting needs; and solutions like differentiated instruction and active learning strategies. The findings aim to help teachers maximize the benefits, anticipate and manage the challenges, and apply targeted strategies to foster more effective and inclusive learning environments.
	Keywords: benefits, content analysis, multilevel EFL classes, pedagogical challenges, solutions

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1. Introduction

One of the big challenges for EFL teachers worldwide is managing classrooms where students demonstrate diverse levels of linguistic proficiency, motivation, engagement, and prior exposure to the language (Bazimaziki et al, 2024; Chukhno, 2023; Gustiani, 2018). Carr (2005) points out that whenever language educators voice their teaching fears and challenges, the complexity of multilevel classes is a recurring topic. Additionally, scholars such as Ur (2012) affirm that no two language learners acquire a second language in exactly the same way, reinforcing the notion that variation is an inevitable feature of any language classroom.

However, a number of important factors lead to the creation of multilevel English classrooms. Ur (2005) and Roberts (2007), for instance, identify several factors contributing to this diversity, including language learning ability, cultural background, prior educational experiences, motivation, confidence, and learning preferences. Verma (2011), on the other hand, emphasizes that EFL learners' social, cultural, and educational backgrounds shape their attitudes and language proficiency. Moreover, recent research suggests that prior exposure to the language learned is central to language proficiency (Godwin-Jones, 2018; Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

When the multilevel classes are created, teachers and students encounter severe challenges. Ensuring student engagement while accommodating the heterogeneous needs of learners at various proficiency levels presents a central challenge in multilevel teaching (Pourdana & Shahpouri, 2017; White & Vibulphol, 2020). In other words, the diverse range of abilities, backgrounds, and learning styles within a single group can make it difficult for educators to provide effective and personalized instruction (Al-Subaiei, 2017; Tomlinson, 2001).

Besides challenges, many experts argue that multilevel classes can offer significant opportunities for both students and teachers (Banstola, 2023; Syathroh et al., 2019). Haley (2008) highlights that learners at different proficiency levels and ages often benefit from learning together in a smaller setting as they can share knowledge and support each other. This peer interaction can encourage collaboration and enhance language development for all students (Ellis, 2012). For instance, advanced students may reinforce their understanding by helping those at lower levels, which not only helps the less proficient learners but also deepens the advanced students' knowledge. Nevertheless, to overcome the challenges of multilevel teaching, it is essential to focus on the advantages through implementing effective strategies (Richards & Schmidt, 2014; Tomlinson, 2001). Therefore, recognizing the potential benefits and adapting teaching methods accordingly is key to the success of multilevel English classes.

While multilevel classes present a series of challenges as a consequence of the various abilities, prior knowledge, and learning styles of students, they also offer significant opportunities for both learners and educators. Teachers must continuously adjust their instructional methods to ensure that all students are adequately supported, while also fostering a collaborative learning environment. Therefore, embracing the unique challenges and focusing on the potential benefits of multilevel classes can lead to positive educational outcomes and a more inclusive learning environment. Taken as a whole, this study is intended to shed light on the most commonly reported benefits and challenges associated with teaching multilevel English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes, while also investigating the range of strategies and solutions that have been suggested by scholars in the relevant academic literature.

2. Literature Review

Multilevel classes have been a focal point of educational research for decades, especially within the framework of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and teaching (Chen & Hung, 2017; Doğan et al., 2020). Many factors are discussed in the literature for the creation of multilevel English classes. Doğan et al. (2020) state that cognitive differences, like working memory capacity, rate of mental processing, and problem-solving abilities can exert influence on the rate at which learners acquire a second language. This variability means that some students may grasp new language concepts quickly, while others need more time and repetition. According to Leung et al. (1984), socio-cultural backgrounds also have a profound impact on how students approach language learning. Learners from collectivist cultures may prefer cooperative learning methods, while students from individualist cultures may excel in independent tasks.

Motivation has always been recognized as a critical factor in foreign language learning, and recent studies have shown that intrinsic motivation, along with a high level of self-belief, directly correlates with language learning success (MacIntyre & Gardner, 2016). Students who are more motivated and confident in their abilities tend to participate more actively in class discussions and make faster progress, which can create a disparity in proficiency levels in multilevel classrooms. The extent of a student's prior access to the target language is a significant factor influencing language proficiency. Students with formal language instruction tend to outperform those who have learned the language informally, as structured language education often provides more systematic exposure to grammar, vocabulary, and academic language (Godwin-Jones, 2018). This disparity among the students increases the need for having a better understanding of multilevel classes. The following

empirical studies will discuss the benefits of, challenges in, and solutions to multilevel classes in more detail.

2.1. Benefits of Multilevel EFL classes

Several researchers point out the advantages of multilevel classes (Adhikary, 2023; Banu, 2015; Huang, 2014). Syathroh et al. (2019) and Banstola (2023) emphasize that the diversity of learners enriches the classroom with varied knowledge, ideas, and interests, making instruction more engaging and student-centered. These settings also promote cooperative learning, peer support, and increased learner autonomy, as students work independently, collaborate, or even teach one another. Teachers, in turn, are encouraged to grow professionally by adapting their methods to meet diverse needs (Nusrat, 2017). Similarly, Huhn and Davis-Wiley (2023), through a national survey of the U.S. world language teachers, found that multilevel classes benefit both beginner and advanced learners. Beginners gain motivation and exposure to more complex language use, while advanced students reinforce their knowledge by supporting peers. The dynamic environment fosters confidence, peer learning, and a strong sense of classroom community, ultimately contributing to a richer, more interactive learning experience.

2.2. Challenges of Multilevel EFL Classrooms

Scholars have identified various challenges associated with multilevel EFL classrooms in the literature (Altohami et al., 2022; Gedamu & Gezahegn, 2022). Heng et al. (2023) note that one of the main issues is addressing the needs of both fast and slow learners as materials are often designed for an average student. This leaves slower learners struggling and faster learners unchallenged. Large class sizes make it even harder for teachers to manage the classroom, meet individual needs, and keep students motivated (Sasidhar & Aruna, 2024; Sevy, 2016). These challenges can lead to teacher frustration and a drop in motivation. Similarly, Zakarneh et al. (2020) explore how managing multilevel classrooms can be tough, especially when trying to keep students engaged. Fast learners may lose interest due to unchallenging material, while slower learners may struggle to keep up. Designing lessons that address the diverse needs of all learners requires considerable effort, and developing resources for diverse learners can be challenging (Chea & Kuon, 2024).

2.3. Solutions to EFL Multilevel Classroom

Many solutions have been put forward by researchers in previous literature (Kottacheruvu & Jampa, 2024; Nusrat, 2017). Luspa (2018) and Adhikary (2023) highlight various strategies for effectively managing multilevel EFL classrooms and enhancing student engagement. Luspa (2018) emphasizes the importance of differentiation, recommending methods such as

assigning tasks based on students' skill levels, allowing them to choose their learning resources, and modifying activities to suit different proficiency levels. Grouping students by their ability and continuously monitoring their progress also help maintain appropriate challenges. Interactive teaching methods like games, debates, and drama further engage students, while open-ended tasks promote critical thinking. Adhikary (2023), on the other hand, stresses the value of incorporating diverse topics and innovative teaching methods to boost student participation. Grouping students by proficiency level and encouraging pair work fosters comfort and collaboration, while small group activities ensure inclusivity. Customizing lessons to align with students' strengths, needs, and interests, along with providing continuous feedback, helps reinforce learning and improve academic outcomes.

Chea and Kuon (2024) stated that scaffolding strategies can be taken as another solution to help teachers overcome the challenges in multilevel EFL classrooms. Scaffolding, a key interactional process in learning, has been widely discussed across numerous studies and has been extensively utilized as a supportive and effective approach in facilitating successful instruction (Kamrani et al., 2023). Originally introduced by Bruner (1980) and inspired by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the concept has gained significant prominence in the context of second and foreign language education. In its original sense, scaffolding refers to a temporary support structure used during the construction of a building, which is removed once the building becomes stable, and self-supporting (Kim & Kim, 2005). Applied to education, scaffolding involves instructional strategies such as modeling or coaching that assist learners as they acquire new skills or understand unfamiliar concepts. Once learners reach a sufficient level of competence, these supports are gradually withdrawn, allowing them to continue learning independently (Gibbons, 2015).

Despite an increasing amount of research on multilevel EFL classrooms, the majority of research primarily concentrates on particular aspects, such as challenges, strategies, or benefits in isolation. There is a lack of a comprehensive, consolidated overview that brings together the full range of challenges, advantages, and practical solutions in one accessible format. Therefore, this study aims to compile a comprehensive list of these factors, providing English language teachers with valuable insights on how to effectively manage multilevel classes. By increasing teachers' awareness of the challenges, they may face and equipping them with practical strategies to address the issues, their confidence and instructional effectiveness will be enhanced. Additionally, understanding the advantages of multilevel classrooms can help educators develop a more informed perspective and a more positive outlook, ultimately leading to a more efficient and welcoming

learning environment. By all means, this research sets out to address the following key questions:

1. What are the potential benefits of multilevel EFL classrooms?
2. What are the challenges faced by teachers and learners in multilevel EFL classrooms?
3. What are the practical solutions that can be implemented in order to effectively manage multilevel EFL classrooms?

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive and systematic methodology to carefully analyze the benefits, challenges, and potential solutions associated with multilevel EFL classrooms. A descriptive research design is a systematic methodology that aims to investigate, interpret, and present various aspects of a phenomenon without manipulating variables. It allows researchers to identify patterns, relationships, and trends, providing a comprehensive overview of the subject matter (Knupfer & McLellan, 2001).

Given the limited scholarly attention devoted to the complexities of multilevel EFL classrooms, particularly in the context of EFL instruction, this study also assumes an exploratory nature. The main objective was to conduct a systematic content analysis to obtain a more thorough understanding of the teaching challenges, benefits, and possible solutions for managing heterogeneous language proficiency levels in EFL settings. This analysis, in fact, aimed to develop a structured framework that could inform educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers about effective teaching strategies in linguistically diverse classrooms.

3.2. Data Collection Procedure

To systematically investigate the benefits, challenges, and solutions of multilevel EFL classrooms, this study adopted a systematic review approach guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Page et al., 2021). PRISMA ensures a transparent and replicable data collection process by outlining clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, a structured screening process, and a comprehensive data extraction strategy. PRISMA, in fact, enhances readers' understanding of how articles are systematically identified, screened, and selected.

Additionally, the selection process under the PRISMA framework involved a careful review of articles retrieved from major academic databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Web of Science, and Academia. The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2000 and 2025 to ensure the inclusion of both recent and relevant research. Although articles were drawn from a wide range of journals, some of the most frequently

appearing ones included the *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, *Research Scholar Journal*, *World Journal of English Language*, and *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*. These journals were chosen based on their high relevance to the field of EFL and the frequency with which they appeared in keyword-based search results. The search and selection process involved multiple screening stages including title and abstract review, full-text assessment, and application of inclusion/exclusion criteria aligned with PRISMA guidelines.

3.2.1. Search Strategy

An extensive literature review was performed across several high-impact academic databases, including: Google Scholar, Academia, Web of Science, and ResearchGate. To refine and enhance the precision of the search, a combination of keywords and Boolean operators was applied. The primary keywords included Multilevel, mixed ability, large or crowded classrooms, challenges, benefits, solutions, strategies, techniques, advantages, disadvantages, EFL teaching, and language learning. An example of the Boolean search query applied in databases was "multilevel" OR "mixed ability" OR "large classroom" AND "challenges" OR "benefits" OR "solutions".

3.2.2. Eligibility Criteria (Inclusion and Exclusion)

Following the PRISMA guidelines, the retrieved studies underwent a rigorous eligibility screening process. The inclusion criteria included publication date referring to studies published from 2000 onward to ensure contemporary relevance, language which refers to only studies published in English, context which refers to research explicitly examining multilevel classrooms in EFL settings and study type that provides empirical studies, case studies, meta-analyses, and theoretical discussions related to multilevel EFL classrooms.

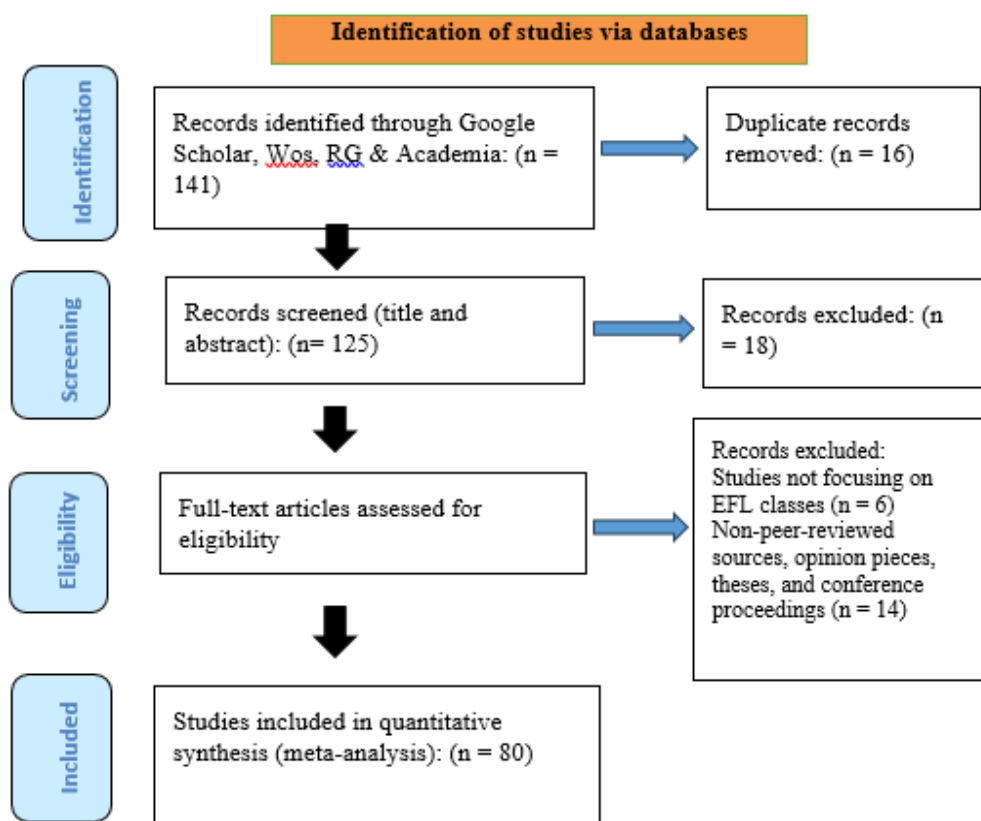
Exclusion Criteria on the other hand included articles published before 2000, studies focused on ESL (English as a Second Language) or bilingual education unless they explicitly addressed proficiency-based differentiation in EFL classrooms, non-peer-reviewed sources, opinion pieces, theses, and conference proceedings and studies on multilingualism without a clear link to teaching strategies in multilevel EFL settings.

3.2.3. PRISMA Flow Diagram

The PRISMA flow diagram (Page et al., 2021) was used to systematically document the screening process. Based on our search, we initially identified 141 articles. After removing 16 duplicate records that appeared multiple times due to being retrieved from more than one database,

125 articles remained. During the screening of titles and abstracts, 18 articles were excluded because they did not mention benefits, challenges and solutions and just focused on reasons, leaving 107 articles for further assessment. In the reports assessed for eligibility phase, 6 articles were excluded for not being related to EFL; it means the articles were about multilevel classes but not EFL ones, 14 articles due to the type of sources for example they were theses, conference papers, non-reviewed articles, or blog posts, and 7 articles for being published before the year 2000. Finally, 80 articles remained for a thorough review for qualitative content analysis.

Figure 1
PRISMA Flow Diagram



3.2.4. Final Dataset and Data Categorization

After applying the PRISMA-based selection process, the 80 selected articles were categorized based on their thematic focus including solutions for multilevel EFL classrooms (64 articles), challenges in multilevel EFL classrooms (40 articles), and benefits of multilevel EFL classrooms (13

articles). Some articles addressed multiple themes, with 27 articles discussing two themes, and 5 articles analyzing all three themes (benefits, challenges, and solutions) and 48 articles discussing just one theme. Additionally, a total of 3,771 words were extracted from the selected studies, distributed as follows: 1,175 words related to challenges, 1,935 words related to solutions, and 661 words related to benefits. The extracted data contained 408 individual items, categorized as follows: 168 items under challenges, 165 items under solutions, and 73 items under benefits. This final dataset, compiled into a structured and reduced corpus of 12 pages (3,771 words), served as the foundation for subsequent qualitative content analysis, aligning with the PRISMA methodology to ensure a transparent, replicable, and systematic approach.

3.3. Data Analysis

The collected data on the benefits, challenges, and solutions of multilevel English language classrooms underwent a rigorous inductive content analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and categories. This systematic approach consisted of multiple phases, including initial coding, thematic refinement, category development, and final validation, ensuring both depth and accuracy in the findings.

In the first phase, all raw data were read multiple times to develop a thorough understanding before beginning the coding process. The dataset initially comprised 73 benefit-related items, 168 challenge-related items, and 165 solution-related items. Open coding was employed, where key phrases, concepts, and ideas were identified directly from the data without relying on any pre-existing framework. To facilitate systematic categorization, Microsoft Word's Track Changes and Comment functions were used, allowing for efficient annotation, labeling, and organization of key terms and phrases. Some of the codes were derived verbatim from the collected data, while the rest were rephrased to maintain conceptual clarity and coherence.

After the initial coding, closely associated codes were combined to create more general themes. While redundant, overlapping or conceptually similar items were merged. This thematic clustering helped refine the data into more structured categories. As a result, the benefits were consolidated into 25 key items grouped into five major categories, the challenges were narrowed down to 34 key items across 8 overarching categories, and the solutions were organized into 66 essential items under a structured thematic framework with 6 categories. Throughout this process, a balance was maintained between data-driven categorization and interpretative analysis, ensuring that both explicit themes and underlying concepts were accurately captured.

In the subsequent phase, further refinement of categories and subcategories was conducted. Some broad themes were divided into smaller, more specific subcategories, while others were broadened to encompass

multiple related concepts. In cases where similar ideas were expressed using different terminologies, the categories were unified while preserving their distinct conceptual nuances. Additionally, relationships between themes were examined, ensuring that categories were not only comprehensive but also logically structured for clear interpretation.

The final stage involved a thorough review and validation of the categorized data. This included re-reading the dataset to verify category alignment, refining category definitions, and checking for internal consistency. To ensure inter-rater reliability, another member of the research team who had not been involved in the initial round of coding independently coded a subset of 40 percent of the data ($n = 50$). Cohen's kappa was calculated to measure the level of agreement, resulting in a value of .83, which indicates strong reliability. Prior to the coding process, both coders underwent training using a coding manual developed based on preliminary themes from the literature. They practiced on a small sample of data to ensure familiarity with the categories and criteria. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion, leading to a final, validated framework that provided a cohesive and well-structured representation of the benefits, challenges, and solutions associated with multilevel English language classrooms.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

To frame the scope of the study and guide the analysis of the reviewed literature, the following research questions were developed. These questions aimed to identify key patterns related to the benefits, challenges, and practical strategies associated with multilevel EFL classrooms:

1. What are the potential benefits of multilevel EFL classrooms?
2. What are the challenges faced by teachers and learners in multilevel EFL classrooms?
3. What are the practical solutions that can be implemented in order to effectively manage multilevel EFL classrooms?

The analysis procedure of multilevel EFL classes was methodical and involved several key stages including data collection, categorization into subcategories, refinement, frequency analysis, and finally, the creation of a comprehensive checklist. The first step involved collecting a broad set of items by reviewing a wide range of academic articles and literature related to multilevel classrooms. Initially, a total of 73 items were identified under the category of Benefits, 168 items under Challenges, and 165 items under Solutions. Each item was drawn from various sources, capturing diverse perspectives and insights that reflect real classroom dynamics.

Once the data was collected, the next step involved organizing the items into subcategories. This involved reviewing each item and grouping

them into themes that reflected the core aspects of multilevel classrooms. The categorization process aimed to bring structure to the data, allowing identifying commonalities and group related items together. For instance, learning environment and classroom community focused on the social interactions and support systems that are crucial in a classroom with multilevel students. Items relating to how students build relationships and support one another were placed in this category. Furthermore, collaborative learning involved the interactions between students with different abilities, and how these interactions can foster mutual learning and skill development. This phase helped create a clearer structure for the data, categorizing the items into specific themes and subthemes that addressed various aspects of the multilevel classroom experience.

In the refinement phase, we eliminated any redundant or overly vague items and merged those that addressed similar issues or concerns. For example, multiple items that discussed student collaboration were combined under one heading, while those related to peer mentoring were grouped together as well. This step was crucial for streamlining the data, ensuring that only the most relevant and actionable insights remained. By the end of this stage, the number of items was significantly reduced, and the data had been organized into a more cohesive set of categories that accurately reflected the most important themes.

Following the refinement process, a frequency analysis was conducted to identify which themes and items were most frequently mentioned across the dataset. This analysis helped highlight the most significant areas that teachers and students face in multilevel classrooms. For example, classroom management and student participation emerged as major challenges across various responses, pointing to the need for better strategies in these areas. As another example, collaboration and peer-assisted learning were frequently cited as valuable strategies for promoting both social and academic growth among students. The table below provides a detailed overview of all the themes, categories, and subcategories derived from the collected data.

Table 2*The List of Benefits of Multilevel EFL Classrooms*

No.	Benefit	Item/Description	Frequency
1	Learning environment and classroom community	1. Development of a Supportive Classroom Community (3) 2. It fosters learning communities where members can learn from each other's strengths. 3. Cultivation of a more adaptable and empathetic student body. 4. Encouraging a sense of belonging and responsibility in learning (5) 5. Streaming in a heterogeneous group at times adversely affects the students' self-esteem and confidence level. (2) 6. Providing opportunities for exchanging diverse experiences and perspectives. (3) 7. More participation from less able students. 8. Fostering mutual respect and creating a positive learning atmosphere. (3) 9. Creating real-world learning environments that mirror diverse social interactions	20 items
2	Collaborative and peer-assisted learning	1. Students engage in more collaborative learning activities to improve their English language skills. (3) 2. It is possible to improve understanding by fostering collaboration among students with varying skill levels. (3) 3. Enhancing interaction as a tool for improving both language and social skills is possible. (8) 4. Boosting confidence through active participation in group activities (2)	16 items
3	Professional growth for teachers	1. These classes can be viewed as both highly challenging and engaging to teach, offering increased opportunities for creativity, innovation, and overall professional growth. (11) 2. It is an opportunity to facilitate teacher's professional growth and development by constantly searching for a relevant methodology and strategies in the particular learning context.(4)	15 items

4	Enhancing learning processes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthening cognitive and communicative skills through peer interaction (3) 2. Encouraging less able students to engage more through collaboration with more proficient peers (2) 3. Providing interactive learning opportunities that support better comprehension. (2) 4. Advanced learners can enhance their language abilities by supporting their less proficient peers. (3) 5. A forum to promote the learner's past achievement or performance alongside individual accountability and teacher's roles during different stages of cooperative learning. 6. It promotes mutual scaffolding, constructive feedback, and the exchange of experiences, which in turn deepens comprehension. 	12 items
5	Utilizing diversity in abilities and perspectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Utilizing the rich human resources in multilevel classrooms (5) 2. Benefiting from different worldviews and values to create diverse educational experiences. 3. Student-Centered Learning 4. Promoting learner autonomy(3) 	10 items

As it is shown in table 1, the analysis revealed five key categories of benefits in multilevel EFL classrooms, totaling 73 items. The most frequently cited category was related to classroom community and learning environment (20 items), followed by peer-assisted learning (16) and teacher professional growth (15). Other benefits included enhancing learning processes (12) and making use of diverse abilities and perspectives (10). These findings highlight the potential of multilevel settings to support both learner engagement and instructional development.

Table 3*The List of Challenges of Multilevel EFL Classrooms*

No.	Challenge	Item/Description	Frequency
1	Classroom management	1. Teachers should assist students in establishing clear behavioral guidelines. 2. Teachers in these classrooms need to coordinate and oversee multiple activities at the same time. 3. Difficulties arise in capturing the attention of all learners in a multilevel classroom. (to mark students' homework, correct mistakes) (10) 4. The teacher found it challenging to monitor each student's learning progress individually. 5. Keeping students on task and speaking in English 6. Students who progressed at both faster and slower rates exhibited disruptive behavior, making it difficult for the teacher to manage the class and requiring additional time to address discipline issues. (11) 7. Creating a positive learning environment would be sensible. 8. The domination of proficient and self-confident students. 9. Excessive 'check' work 10. Large class sizes (3) 11. Negative Environment	32 items
2	Interest and motivation	1. Frustration arises when teaching a multilevel classroom due to the low motivation of struggling students. (11) 2. Some weak students lose interest quickly. (2) 3. Simplifying lessons for slower learners can reduce the interest of faster learners. 4. It is difficult to make sure that all students are challenged and interested.(15)	29 items
3	Methodology and designing activities	1. Teaching and learning methodology (8) 2. Absence of effective strategies to manage a multilevel class. 3. Successful differentiation of instruction 4. Creating well-structured cooperative activities. (16) 5. The inability to maintain a consistent learning pace. 6. Insufficient training in teaching multilevel classes. 7. Guide the progression of events in each learning experience.	29 items
4	Diversity and meeting needs	1. Big gap between students' levels and skills (11). 2. Different Learning Styles (6) 3. Diverse Learning Needs (10)	27 items

5	Materials	1. Consistently designing or adapting various materials is challenging. (10) 2. Teacher's guide does not help. (2) 3. Materials (13)	25 items
6	Participation of students	1. Most students could not communicate well. (13) 2. The interaction between teachers and students is limited. 3. Student participation in various activities is either very low or uneven. (2)	16 items
7	Lesson plan	1. Difficulty in designing lessons (6)	6 items
8	Evaluation	1. It is difficult for Teachers to evaluate students' progress. (3) 2. There can be cheating and noise.	4 items

Table 2 shows that a total of 168 challenge-related items were classified into eight main categories. The most frequent challenges involved classroom management (32 items), interest and motivation (29), and methodology and activity design (29), highlighting issues such as discipline, student engagement, and lack of appropriate strategies. Other notable categories included diversity and meeting needs (27), materials (25), uneven student participation (16), lesson planning (6), and evaluation difficulties (4). These findings reflect the complexity of addressing varied learner profiles and maintaining balance in multilevel EFL settings.

Table 4

The List of Solutions to Multilevel EFL Classrooms

No.	Solution	Item/Description	Frequency
1	Differentiation	1. Designing specific tasks tailored to different proficiency levels helps maintain student engagement and enhance their learning capabilities. (24) 1.2. Grouping students according to their proficiency levels and assigning tasks accordingly. (2) 1.3. Teachers should employ effective techniques for selecting tasks that accommodate varying proficiency levels. 1.4. Choosing diverse activities is important, as different tasks can spark interest in different learners. 2. To make lessons more engaging and boost student participation, learners expect fresh topics along with diverse teaching methods and strategies. (25) 2.1. Tiered Tasks	62 items

		<p>2.2. Using flexible responsibilities that accommodate varying language proficiency tiers is powerful.</p> <p>2.3. Teachers can prepare parallel lessons for learners at different levels.</p> <p>3. Facilitating different learning styles. (5)</p> <p>4. Provide them with different materials. (7)</p> <p>4.1. Allow students to make choices about what material they are going to work with.</p> <p>4.2. Varying of teaching aids.</p> <p>4.3. Teachers need to identify each learner's needs and learning goals.</p> <p>5. Assessment (DIA) approach.</p>	
2	Active learning	<p>1. Task-based learning (2)</p> <p>2. Role-play</p> <p>3. Foster student involvement by providing opportunities to share their learning needs through reflective tools like dialogues, surveys, and personal writing.</p> <p>4. Guide students in developing self-reflection skills and equip them with techniques for both self-assessment and peer evaluation.</p> <p>5. Instruct learners in effective techniques to enhance their proficiency and foster active learning. (4)</p> <p>6. Open ended task (5)</p> <p>7. Appropriate designing of language games. (4)</p> <p>8. Project-based learning and thematic instruction.</p> <p>9. Self-Management Strategies (encouraging students to assess their own understanding and outcomes, and assisting them in developing a plan to complete tasks)..(3)</p> <p>10. Holding Strategies (repeating information, engaging in reflective thinking, seeking confirmation, and pretending to need clarification).</p> <p>11. Culturally responsive teaching incorporates students' cultural backgrounds into the educational process.</p> <p>12. Students need to be resourceful.</p> <p>13. Students should be allowed to interview one another and talk to the teacher in the classroom.</p> <p>14. An all-inclusive curriculum</p> <p>15. Promote creativity by using a variety of tasks.</p> <p>16. Changeable chores or questions</p>	36 items

		<p>17. Students love fun activities, competitions and dramatization. (5)</p> <p>18. Promote learner autonomy by offering self-access materials. (2)</p>	
3	Scaffolding and peer learning	<p>1. Collaborative Group Work or pair work. (11)</p> <p>1.1. Advanced learners will help enhance the skills of average learners while also benefiting from the experience.</p> <p>1.2. A mentoring relationship between learners and someone they trust.</p> <p>1.3. Pair work is more effective in allowing students to share and exchange ideas without hesitation.</p> <p>2. Scaffolded learning (11)</p> <p>2.1. The negotiation of meaning is major scaffolding technique.</p> <p>2.2. The use of translation as a scaffolding technique in the classroom and the language acquisition process is becoming increasingly common.</p> <p>2.3. Task Scaffolding Strategies (using advanced language with visual support, combining visual and verbal instructions, and encouraging extended verbalization).</p> <p>2.4. A Vygotskian Perspective in teaching multilevel classes (Scaffolding and peer tutoring)</p> <p>2.5. Scaffolded guidance offers brief assist and shape to help students in completing responsibilities.</p> <p>3. Creating well-structured cooperative activities (8)</p>	30 items
4	Classroom Management & Environment	<p>1. Class management (2)</p> <p>2. Ensuring equal attention is given to both advanced and average students. (4)</p> <p>2.1. Ensuring students' involvement</p> <p>3. Providing feedback throughout the learning process enhances learning and improves student outcomes. (3)</p> <p>4. Recognize students' varying abilities in acquiring the foreign language and the time they require for comprehension. (4)</p> <p>4.1. The needs assessment at the beginning enables a teacher to identify common areas of interest, shared perspectives, and students' general background.</p> <p>5. Foster a positive relationship with students to alleviate their fear and anxiety about learning a foreign language. (5)</p>	25 items

		5.1 Support students and be enthusiastic to help students feel confident during English classes. 5.2. Learning students' names promotes good basic human relationship. 5.3. Regarding teaching methodology, teachers should encourage student speaking, incorporate engaging topics, and maintain a friendly rapport with students. 5.4. Teachers should use body language for better expression, and students should be encouraged to relax while speaking. 5.4. Diplomacy in questioning 6. Classroom settings designed for language instruction. (3) 6.1. Establishing a positive learning environment through effective classroom management is a key strategy. 6.2. Supporting Learning Environment 7. Proper teaching materials and environment (2) 8. Motivating students 9. Teachers should prioritize topics over linguistic skills.	
5	Flipped Classroom Mode	1. Designing a Flipped Learning Model for Teaching EFL Students Facing Multi-Level class Challenges. (7)	7 items
6	Technology Integration	1. Use of Technology 2. Incorporating smart devices into the process of teaching and learning process. 3. Audio visual aids (2) 4. Computer programs that provide both simple and complex activities, suitable for students of varying proficiency levels.	5 items

A total of 165 solution items were grouped into six main categories. Differentiation was the most frequent (62 items), focusing on adapting tasks and materials for different proficiency levels. Active Learning (36 items) and Scaffolding and Peer Learning (30 items) emphasized student involvement and support through collaboration. Classroom Management and Environment (25 items) highlighted ways to create a positive, balanced atmosphere. Flipped Classroom (7 items) and Technology Integration (5 items) introduced innovative and tech-based strategies.

The final step involved compiling the refined data into a comprehensive checklist. This checklist consolidates the identified benefits, challenges, and solutions into clear, actionable points, offering educators a practical resource to navigate and address the dynamics of multilevel classrooms. The checklist is organized based on the frequency and significance of the themes discovered earlier, allowing teachers to focus on the most

important issues and solutions that can improve the effectiveness of their teaching and enhance the outcomes of students learning. The following tables present the final themes and items for each category, followed by interpretations to clarify the content.

Table 4

Benefits of Multilevel EFL Classrooms

No.	Benefit	Item/Description	Frequency
1	Learning environment and classroom community	1. Fostering mutual respect 2. Creating a positive atmosphere. 3. Developing a supportive community	20 items
2	Collaborative and peer-assisted learning	1. Enhancing interaction 2. Boosting confidence 3. Social skills improvement	16 items
3	Professional growth for teachers	1. Creativity 2. Professional development 3. Adapting teaching strategies	15 items
4	Enhancing learning processes	1. Cognitive strengthening 2. Peer interaction 3. Boosting participation	12 items
5	Utilizing diversity in abilities and perspectives	1. Promoting autonomy 2. Benefiting from diverse worldviews 3. Student-centered learning	10 items

In Table 4, five key categories of benefits for learning in multilevel classrooms are outlined; highlighting how these advantages can be utilized to enhance the overall educational experience. Each benefit contributes to fostering a supportive learning environment, improving social interactions, and strengthening learning processes.

The category "Learning Environment and Classroom Community" highlights the importance of creating a supportive classroom atmosphere. with 20 mentions. It underscores the importance of mutual respect in cultivating a sense of belonging, which not only strengthens social interactions but also positively impacts academic outcomes. A positive and respectful classroom community is foundational for success in multilevel classes.

"Collaborative and Peer-Assisted Learning" (16 mentions) stresses the value of student collaboration and peer interactions in promoting cognitive development and confidence. To ensure success, it is vital to maintain balanced participation among students to avoid dominance by more proficient learners.

The category "Professional Growth for Teachers" (15 mentions) emphasizes the necessity for teachers to continually adjust their strategies to address the diverse needs of students in multilevel classes. Ongoing professional development is key to improving teaching quality and helping teachers grow in their careers.

Lastly, "Enhancing Learning Processes" (12 mentions) underlines the importance of increasing participation and promoting peer interactions to strengthen cognitive abilities and engage students actively. Additionally, "Utilizing Diversity in Abilities and Perspectives" (10 mentions) highlights the significance of recognizing and leveraging the diversity of students' abilities and perspectives to foster autonomy and create a more inclusive learning environment.

Table 5

Challenges Related to Multilevel EFL Classrooms

No.	Challenge	Item/Description	Frequency
1	Classroom management	1. Managing activities	32 items
		2. Maintaining attention	
		3. Discipline challenges	
2	Interest and motivation	1. Frustration	29 items
		2. Low motivation	
		3. Ensuring student engagement	
3	Methodology and designing activities	1. Lack of effective approaches	29 items
		2. Differentiation challenges	
4	Diversity and meeting needs	1. Gaps in proficiency levels	27 items
		2. Diverse learning needs	
5	Materials	1. Difficulty in adapting materials	25 items
		2. Challenges with teacher's guide	
6	Participation of students	1. Low interaction	16 items
		2. Uneven participation	
		3. Difficulty in communication	
7	Lesson plan	1. Difficulty in designing lessons	6 items
8	Evaluation	1. Difficulty in assessing progress	4 items

In Table 5, eight major challenges in multilevel classrooms are identified, with each challenge affecting the overall learning experience. The frequency of these challenges indicates the extent to which they are encountered in practice and their potential impact on both teaching and learning. Difficulty in managing classroom was identified as the most important challenge for teachers.

Classroom management, with 32 mentions, is the most significant challenge identified, as it involves managing diverse needs and behaviors in a multilevel classroom. Student interest and motivation, mentioned 29 times, also present a challenge, with students often feeling frustrated or disengaged when lessons are either too easy or too difficult. The challenge of methodology and activity design, with 29 mentions, centers on finding appropriate approaches and instructions. Additionally, the diversity of students'

proficiency levels, with 27 mentions, presents challenges in meeting their individual needs. Teachers must also manage the challenge of adapting materials (25 mentions) to meet the varied proficiency levels, which can consume the time and requires flexible resources. Student participation, as another challenge, mentioned 16 times, arises when some students dominate discussions, leaving others struggling to engage. Finally, lesson planning (6 mentions) and evaluation (4 mentions) are challenges that require careful instruction and varied assessment methods to ensure fair and effective tracking of student progress.

Table 6

Solutions to Multilevel EFL Classrooms

No.	Solution	Item/Description	Frequency
1	Differentiation	Tiered tasks, varied materials, accommodating learning levels	61 items
2	Active learning	Task-based learning, role-play, student self-reflection	36 items
3	Scaffolding and peer learning	Collaborative work, mentoring, peer tutoring	30 items
4	Classroom Management & environment	Feedback, relationship building, managing classroom settings	25 items
5	Flipped classroom mode	Implementation of flipped learning strategies	7 items
6	Technology integration	Use of technology in teaching, integrating smart devices and audiovisual aids	5 items

In Table 6, six major solutions are identified that can help overcome teaching in multilevel classes challenges. These solutions focus on various strategies that enhance learning, engagement, and classroom management, ultimately leading to a more comprehensive and impactful learning environment.

Differentiation, with 61 mentions, is the most frequently mentioned solution, emphasizing the importance of tailoring tasks, materials, and teaching strategies to accommodate students' diverse abilities and learning styles. This method makes sure that students are suitably challenged and can interact with the material at their own speed, addressing the varying needs of multilevel classrooms.

Active learning (36 mentions) focuses on student-centered strategies that enhance engagement and motivation. Techniques like task-based learning, role-playing, and self-reflection encourage students to take part in their learning actively, enhancing comprehension. This approach addresses

challenges related to motivation and interest, keeping students engaged and invested in the material.

Scaffolding and peer learning, with 30 mentions, are crucial for supporting varying proficiency levels and encouraging active participation. Scaffolding provides guidance as students progress, while peer learning fosters a cooperative environment where students can help each other. These strategies ensure all students are engaged and learning from one another, regardless of their proficiency.

Classroom management and environment (25 mentions) highlight the importance of building positive teacher-student relationships and providing regular feedback. A well-managed classroom promotes engagement and minimizes disruptions, creating a supportive and respectful atmosphere that is vital for managing multilevel classes effectively.

The flipped classroom model (7 mentions) reverses traditional teaching methods, allowing students to learn content outside the classroom and engage in interactive activities during class time. This approach promotes personalized learning and lets students advance at their own learning speed, which makes it especially effective in diverse classrooms.

Lastly, technology integration (5 mentions) uses digital tools to enhance learning by providing personalized, interactive experiences. Technology supports differentiation by offering resources that cater to various abilities, making it a valuable tool in multilevel classes, though it was less frequently mentioned.

4.2. Discussion

In this discussion section, the advantages, challenges, and potential solutions associated with teaching multilevel EFL classes are presented in a structured yet interconnected manner. While the benefits are initially highlighted based on both previous research and the findings of this study, they are not accepted blindly. Where certain benefits appear to be context-dependent or limited in practice, they are revisited in the following section as challenges. This deliberate organization reflects a better understanding of the topic, acknowledging that a perceived benefit in one setting may become a barrier in another. By linking each challenge to a previously discussed advantage and subsequently suggesting practical solutions, this structure promotes internal coherence and a more balanced perspective. In sum, benefits are discussed first, followed by challenges that often emerge from limitations of those benefits, creating a coherent and critical flow toward practical solutions.

4.2.1. Learning Environment and Classroom Community

The opportunity to foster a positive learning environment in multilevel classrooms is significant. The results of this study shows the first benefit in multilevel classes is that when students from diverse backgrounds and proficiency levels interact, the classroom community can thrive. This is in agreement with a research by Johnson and Johnson (1999) who found that collaborative and inclusive classroom environments foster mutual respect, empathy, and a belonging sense as a key to academic and social success. This view is supported by social constructivist theory of Vygotsky's (1978), which highlights the significance of social interactions in the development of cognition, Gustiani (2018) who believes that such environments increases the respect among the students, and Altohami et al. (2022) who affirm that multilevel EFL classrooms often arises a sense of belonging and success. However, a significant challenge arises from uneven participation among students. More proficient students often dominate classroom discussions, leading to marginalization of less proficient peers. This is consistent with the findings of Hattie and Timperley (2007), who emphasized that participation disparities hinder effective learning when all voices are not equally heard. Peer-assisted language learning and scaffolding are suggested as a solution to the mentioned challenge in this study. Chea and Kuon (2024) also suggested that scaffolding and peer-assisted learning could reduce this gap. A study by Nuangpolmak (2012) further confirms that peer learning not only fosters academic growth but also strengthens social bonds among students. Therefore, by implementing collaborative group work and peer tutoring, teachers can ensure that all students, regardless of proficiency, are actively engaged, thus promoting a more balanced and inclusive classroom environment. Teachers should therefore recognize the positive environment of multilevel EFL classroom as an opportunity, actively foster it in their classrooms, and be prepared to mitigate the related challenge, which would be uneven participation of the students by scaffolding and peer-assisted learning.

4.2.2. Collaborative and Peer-Assisted Learning

One significant benefit of multilevel classrooms is the chance for collaborative learning. Research by Johnson et al. (2007) shows that students with different proficiency levels can complement each other's strengths, leading to shared knowledge and skill development. Moreover, peer-assisted learning has been shown to enhance academic outcomes while promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, the challenge with collaborative learning is ensuring that the interactions are equitable and productive. The passive behavior exhibited by certain novice learners, along with the prevailing influence of skilled students, presents a significant challenge (Wahedi, 2019). This leads to an imbalanced learning experience.

Tomlinson (2001) argued that differentiated instruction can address this issue effectively by tailoring tasks to students' abilities. This ensures that all students are challenged at their level and prevents more proficient students from dominating interactions.

Collaborative learning in multilevel classrooms, on the other hand, can be meaningfully enhanced through the concept of scaffolding, which is deeply rooted in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Van de Pole et al., 2010). Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of social interaction in learning, particularly through the zone of proximal development (ZPD), where learners can achieve more with the support of a more knowledgeable peer or teacher. Within this framework, scaffolding provides the temporary support that enables students to complete tasks just beyond their current ability. In collaborative settings, this often takes the form of peer-assisted learning, where more proficient learners guide their less experienced classmates through academic challenges.

Furthermore, Banu (2015) emphasized the importance of cooperative learning structures, the third best solution in this study that promotes equal participation among students. This combination of differentiation, scaffolding, and cooperative learning ensures that all students benefit equally from peer-assisted interactions, supporting the development of both academic skills and social engagement.

4.2.3. Teacher Development and Professional Growth

Teaching in a multilevel classroom provides substantial opportunities for professional development. Educators must develop and modify their instructional methods to accommodate the varied requirements of their learners. Syathroh et al. (2019) note that the continuous adaptation required in such classrooms fosters ongoing professional growth of teacher. Furthermore, according to Adhikary (2023) teachers in multilevel classes need to be creative and innovative, resulting in professional development. However, the demand for constant adaptation can be overwhelming. Teachers often experience burnout when faced with the complexity of managing varying proficiency levels while also designing and delivering differentiated lessons. This aligns with Kurnianto's (2021) finding that the complexity of multilevel classrooms can lead to teacher frustration and burnout. There are two solutions, flipped classroom model and active learning, mentioned in this study, which can be applied to overcome this challenge. Alkhalidi (2020) contends that by offering educational materials outside of the classroom and allocating more time for engaging student-centered activities, flipped classroom strategies can reduce this stress. According to Norouzi Larsari and Farrokhi (2025), flipped learning is a modern instructional method that reverses the conventional structure of classroom teaching and homework. Unlike traditional approaches, where students receive lectures during class and complete tasks afterward, flipped

learning shifts content delivery to outside the classroom, allowing in-class time to focus on active learning and practical application. This strategy has proven effective in enhancing both the efficiency and value of classroom interactions. Consequently, active learning strategies help teachers manage diverse needs efficiently, ensuring that they do not become overwhelmed (Verma, 2011). These approaches enable teachers to focus on more personalized teaching, reducing stress while promoting professional growth.

4.2.4. Utilizing Diversity in Abilities and Perspectives

Diversity in abilities and perspectives in multilevel classrooms offers the opportunity to create a structured environment where all students can focus on learning. Adhikary (2023) supports this by stating that different worldviews and values offer a range of experiences and learning styles, and that student-centered teaching methods can be used in the same classroom. Proper classroom management is key to fostering student engagement and motivation, which are critical for academic success (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, managing a classroom with diverse needs presents significant challenges. Teachers must balance the support required by students at different levels while maintaining overall student attention. Hattie and Timperley (2007) found that classroom management difficulties are often exacerbated in multilevel settings, with teachers reporting high stress levels due to the complexity of the task. As a solution, Tomlinson (2001) highlighted the importance of clear expectations, consistent feedback, and relationship-building to manage such classrooms effectively. Teachers who create a positive rapport and establish predictable classroom routines help students stay on task and actively participate. Incorporating technology into classroom management strategies has also proven effective. According to Bergmann and Sams (2012), project-based learning and digital tools enhance student engagement and make learning more interactive. The integration of such tools supports diverse learning needs and facilitates better classroom management, ensuring a positive learning environment for all students.

4.2.5. Enhancing Learning Processes

While the variety of materials and resources available in multilevel classrooms can significantly enhance the learning process by addressing diverse learner needs, this very diversity can also pose a challenge for teachers. Mousavi et al. (2021), stated that when the material is engaging for learners, they are more likely to enjoy the course and actively participate in classroom activities. Moreover, materials play a crucial role in supporting learners by providing essential knowledge, addressing their needs, and fulfilling instructional requirements. According to Tomlinson (2001), a diverse array of resources facilitates different learning preferences and guarantees that every

student is suitably challenged. However, it can be difficult and time-consuming to find or design resources that meet the needs of every student (Al-Shammakhi & Al-Humaidi, 2015; Heng et al., 2023). This challenge is compounded by the continuous need for adaptation as students' abilities progress. Differentiation of materials, along with the integration of technology, can help teachers address this challenge effectively. According to Bergmann and Sams (2012), digital resources give students the freedom to learn at their own speed and skill level, making the process more individualized. Similarly, the use of interactive tools ensures that students engage with content in a manner that is aligned with their abilities. By leveraging technology, teachers can reduce the burden of designing and adapting materials while enhancing the learning experience for students at all proficiency levels.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The dynamics of multilevel EFL classrooms were investigated in this study, focusing on the benefits, challenges, and strategies for addressing them. The main benefits include promoting collaborative learning, creating a supportive classroom environment, and fostering both student and teacher growth. However, challenges like unequal participation, classroom management issues, and the need for differentiated materials and activities are also present in these diverse settings. Despite these challenges, the diversity of students can be leveraged as an opportunity to enrich learning experiences through differentiated instruction and peer-assisted learning.

The solutions identified, such as scaffolding, active learning, and the integration of technology, provide practical strategies for addressing these challenges. Scaffolding, for example, not only helps struggling students but also encourages deeper understanding for more advanced learners through peer support. Technology, when properly integrated, can personalize learning, accommodate various learning styles, and promote collaboration in the classroom. These strategies help to establish a welcoming, stimulating, and productive learning environment where all students, regardless of ability level, can succeed.

Lastly, since effective teaching in multilevel classrooms necessitates constant adaptation and innovation, the study highlights the significance of teachers' ongoing professional development. Teachers need the proper tools and knowledge to manage diverse classrooms and implement differentiated instruction. Educational policies should support the development of resources and training for teachers, ensuring they are equipped to handle the complexities of multilevel teaching. By adopting evidence-based solutions and supporting teachers, schools can create dynamic and inclusive learning environments that benefit all students.

Nonetheless, this study contributes to the field by offering a structured synthesis of existing research that categorizes the benefits, challenges, and pedagogical strategies relevant to multilevel EFL classrooms—something that has been relatively underexplored in prior reviews. Unlike studies that examine a single approach or outcome, this review integrates multiple dimensions of multilevel instruction and presents them through a critically comparative lens. As such, it provides a comprehensive resource for educators, researchers, and policymakers seeking to better understand and support learning in heterogeneous classroom environments.

Despite its systematic approach, this review has some limitations. First, the inclusion criteria restricted the selection to studies published in English, potentially excluding valuable research conducted and published in other languages. Second, only peer-reviewed journal articles were included, which may have led to the omission of relevant insights from other types of sources such as dissertations, book chapters, or conference proceedings. Third, the review primarily focused on studies published within the last two decades, which could have resulted in overlooking earlier foundational work that might still be relevant.

The findings of this study provide several significant implications for educational practice. First, teachers need to be equipped with strategies that not only address the challenges but also capitalize on the opportunities presented by multilevel classrooms. In order to effectively address the varied needs of their students, professional development programs should concentrate on giving teachers the tools they need, such as scaffolding techniques, differentiated instruction, and active learning. Moreover, this study emphasizes how crucial it is to create a classroom environment that is inclusive and collaborative. Instructors ought to receive training on how to foster learning environments in which every student, regardless of ability level, feels appreciated and involved. Peer-assisted learning, scaffolding, and active learning techniques can all be used to accomplish this. Finally, the integration of technology in multilevel classrooms can help address many of the challenges related to material adaptation and classroom management. Teachers should be encouraged to explore and incorporate digital tools that support personalized learning and facilitate collaboration among students.

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