



A Study On Challenges In ESL Reading And Writing: Comparative Global Trends And Indian Educational Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the global and Indian challenges associated with developing English as a Second Language (ESL) reading and writing skills among learners. While international research highlights the growing use of technology, digital feedback tools, and innovative pedagogies to enhance literacy outcomes, these methods are not always accessible or effectively implemented. In India, multilingual classrooms, limited resources, variations in teacher effectiveness, and uneven digital access further complicate the development of reading comprehension and writing proficiency. By comparing global best practices with India's local educational realities, this study identifies key gaps in instruction, feedback, and learning environments. The findings suggest that combining teacher training, context-sensitive pedagogies, and structured technological integration can significantly strengthen ESL reading and writing outcomes. The study concludes with recommendations for more inclusive, scalable, and culturally relevant strategies to improve literacy skills in diverse learning contexts.

Keywords: *ESL Reading, Writing Skills, Digital Learning, Teacher Effectiveness, Multilingual Classrooms*

1. Introduction and Conceptual Background

Across the world, English as a Second Language (ESL) learning experience has changed significantly due to technology, pedagogy, and the individual and social needs of learners. One of the basic skills that a language can provide is reading and writing. These have always been and still are, a major challenge for learners. Borg (2022), global trends show that teachers and learners are facing issues such as digital transition, unequal access to resources and the need for feedback mechanisms for skill improvement. In India, the situation has an added twist. The same child is presumed to learn Hindi while using Hindi as the medium of instruction. Due to all these factors, student continue to demonstrate low levels of achievement in reading and writing. More insight into what happens in classrooms, barriers to the instructional practice and context need examination. This study investigates the worldwide trends that shape ESL reading and writing. It also compares the Indian perspective so that we get the context for the existing gaps.



Fig: ESL Reading and Writing Development Flowchart

Source: Own processing

All over the world, the change to digital and remote modes of education accelerated by COVID-19 has changed the teaching and practice of ESL reading and writing. According to Borg (2022), online training for language teachers was an opportunity which brought challenges too. These challenges were limited digital literacies, uneven trainings and cut opportunities for interactions. Due to these global disruptions, learners' engagement with reading and writing tasks and skill development suffer in many parts of the world.

Within the Indian context, further layering the challenges are the multilingual classrooms and differences in teacher effectiveness. According to research, teachers in India often struggle to provide structured corrective feedback to their students to enhance the accuracy of their writing and improve their reading comprehension. Besides that, differences in teacher effectiveness, which is a main determinant of learning quality (Singh & Abdul Halim, 2023). According to Alam and Khan (2023), differences in teacher effectiveness at the secondary school level directly impact the language learning of students, especially in the skill areas of reading, and writing.

Global and Indian trends together highlight that identification and instruction of ESL learners in reading and writing have to be backed by support of teachers on an ongoing basis, use of technology and learner-centric approaches. The goal of this essay is to identify targeted solutions through an analysis of international best practices and national realities.

1.1 Aim and objectives

The primary aim of this study is to examine the global and Indian challenges associated with developing ESL reading and writing skills, and to analyse how policies, teacher practices, technological tools, and classroom contexts influence literacy outcomes. The study further aims to compare international trends with Indian educational realities to identify practical, context-specific strategies for improving ESL reading and writing proficiency.

Objectives

1. To analyse global trends in ESL reading and writing.
2. To identify major challenges faced by ESL learners worldwide.
3. To examine specific difficulties in ESL reading and writing within the Indian context.
4. To evaluate the role of teachers and technology in ESL skill development.
5. To compare global ESL practices with classroom realities in India.
6. To propose strategies for improving ESL reading and writing skills.

2. Review of literature

Author(s)	Year	Aim of Study	Objectives	Scope	Findings
Alam, M., & Khan, M. A.	2023	Study teacher effectiveness in secondary schools	Assess teachers' instructional effectiveness and its impact on student outcomes	Secondary schools in India	Variations in teacher effectiveness influence student learning outcomes in language skills
Alam, S., & Usama, M.	2023	Explore e-feedback impact on ESL writing errors	Assess effectiveness of electronic feedback on minimizing writing errors	ESL learners using digital platforms	E-feedback reduces writing errors and improves learner engagement and writing quality
Anderson, J., & Lightfoot, A.	2021	Study translingual practices in ESL classrooms	Explore perceptions and possibilities for translingual instruction	Indian classrooms	Translingual practices support comprehension but are inconsistently applied due to English-only expectations
Anil, B.	2021	Study WhatsApp-enabled language teaching	Explore mobile tasks to improve speaking skills	Indian ESL classrooms	Mobile-based tasks enhance speaking skills and engagement; application to writing remains limited
Bordoloi, R., Das, P., & Das, K.	2021	Examine online/blended learning perceptions during COVID-19	Analyze learner and teacher perspectives on digital learning	Indian higher education	Access issues, digital literacy gaps, and reduced interaction limited effectiveness of online learning
Borg, S.	2022	To examine the shift to online language teacher education during COVID-19	Explore how language teachers adapted to online professional learning	Global and online language teacher education	Online teacher education accelerated adoption of digital tools, but challenges included limited interaction and uneven preparedness
Borg, S., Lightfoot, A., & Gholkar, R.	2020	Explore professional development through teacher activity groups	Assess collaborative approaches to teacher development	Language teachers globally	Collaborative professional development enhances teaching quality and classroom effectiveness
Boruah, P., & Mohanty, A.	2022	Examine English-medium education policy in India	Assess challenges in multilingual policy implementation	English-medium schools in India	Neoliberal policies prioritize English over local languages, creating gaps in literacy skill development
Bose, P., & Gao, X.	2022	Analyze cultural representation in textbooks	Explore how Indian culture is represented in English language textbooks	Indian ESL textbooks	Textbooks often lack cultural relevance, affecting learner engagement and comprehension
Chandras, J.	2023	Examine perceptions of Teach for India fellows during COVID-19	Explore pedagogy and technology adaptation in remote teaching	Indian remote ESL classrooms	Remote learning highlighted technology opportunities but revealed challenges in engagement and access
Chen, W., & Liu, G.	2021	Study teacher perspectives on corrective feedback	Investigate effectiveness of feedback strategies in ESL	Global classroom settings	Teachers acknowledge feedback's importance but face barriers in

					large classes and mixed proficiency levels
Dapkekar, A.	2023	Examine role of English teachers for engineering students	Explore teacher contribution to language skill development	Engineering higher education in India	Teachers play a crucial role in improving writing, comprehension, and professional communication skills
Das, E.	2020	Explore “edutainment” in English language teaching	Investigate combining entertainment and learning to enhance skills	Indian ESL classrooms	Edutainment increases motivation and engagement, supporting better learning outcomes
Devi, R.	2021	Revisit teaching-learning pedagogy from students’ perspective	Assess effectiveness of instructional strategies in ESL	Indian higher education	Student-centered pedagogy enhances engagement and learning effectiveness
Dinesh, A.	2019	Examine collaborative language learning (CLL) in regional-medium classrooms	Assess impact of CLL on ESL learners	Regional Indian schools	CLL improves engagement and learning, but large classes and varied proficiency hinder consistent implementation
Fan, N.	2023	Investigate effects of automated written corrective feedback (AWCF)	Evaluate AWCF on EFL students’ writing quality	EFL classrooms using automated tools	AWCF improves writing quality, promotes learner autonomy, and supports frequent revision
FICCI	2022	Analyze future of higher education in India	Explore vision, reforms, and strategies for technology integration	Indian higher education sector	Focus on digital infrastructure, flexible learning, and learner-centered approaches to improve outcomes
Indrarathne, B., & McCulloch, S.	2022	Examine English teaching, learning, and assessment in Sri Lanka	Analyze policies and practices in schools	Sri Lankan school system	Emphasis on policy-practice alignment is critical; teacher preparedness affects skill outcomes
Kalia, P.	2023	Study ESL trends and challenges in India	Identify current trends and challenges in teaching English	Indian education context	Technology, teacher quality, and policy gaps are key challenges in improving ESL outcomes
Singh, A. K., & Abdul Halim, H. B.	2023	To address challenges in language teaching in India	Investigate the role of corrective feedback in enhancing learning	Indian ESL classrooms	Corrective feedback significantly improves learner accuracy and writing quality, but implementation is inconsistent

2.1 Research gap

Despite numerous studies on ESL reading and writing, significant gaps remain in understanding how learners develop these skills in diverse educational contexts, particularly in multilingual and resource-constrained environments like India. While global research highlights the role of technology, automated feedback, and innovative pedagogies in enhancing reading and writing proficiency, these strategies are often not adapted to the unique linguistic, cultural, and infrastructural realities of Indian classrooms. Similarly, while corrective feedback

and collaborative learning have shown promise, their consistent and effective implementation remains limited due to large class sizes, uneven teacher preparedness, and varied learner proficiency. Furthermore, most existing studies focus either on isolated interventions, such as digital tools or mobile learning, or on specific skill areas, without exploring the integrated development of reading and writing skills. There is also a lack of comparative analyses linking global best practices with India's local challenges, limiting insights into context-specific strategies that can enhance literacy outcomes. Addressing these gaps requires research that examines the combined influence of teacher practices, technology integration, classroom dynamics, and learner characteristics on ESL reading and writing development, with an emphasis on practical, scalable solutions for the Indian context.

3. Global Trends in ESL Reading and Writing

Tendencies in the ESL education landscape at the global level highlight a turn towards tech-supported literacy practices, especially in reading and writing. A growing trend involves the use of digital corrective feedback tools that can help students with writing. According to the studies, e-feedback is more efficient than traditional feedback in reducing errors in grammar, lexis, and structure. According to Alam and Usama 2023, feedback in the electronic form enhances the learners' accuracy. E-feedback focuses on errors instantly in a consistent way, and ultimately improves the overall quality of writing. The drive to use technology for differentiation and for learners in the classroom is certainly evident.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, another global trend is the transition to distance and hybrid learning programs. The classroom interactions between teachers and students and the use of reading and writing tasks have changed. Chandras (2023) notes that the unexpected shift to remote settings forced teachers to implement new forms of didactics and digital tools, generating opportunities and challenges. Technology made materials easier to access and tasks more interactive. However, it also brought inequalities in terms of access and digital literacy, not to mention creating challenges for maintaining communication-rich contexts necessary for the development of ESL reading and writing skills.

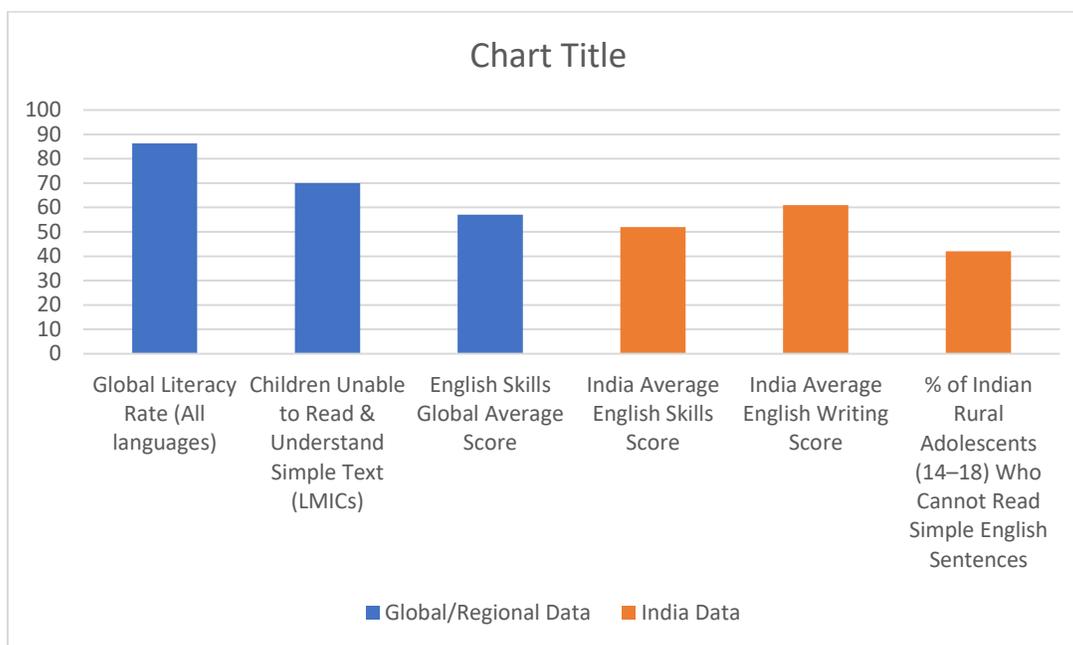
The growing popularity of automated written corrective feedback (AWCF) is changing the way students approach the writing improvement process. Fan (2023) analysis indicates that AWCF not only helps learners enhance their writing quality but also contributes to their autonomy by allowing students to independently revise their drafts. The use of technological advancement encourages regular practice, personalization, and data-driven tracking of writing. In numerous worldwide ESL settings, such tools have become essential for helping students develop confidence, consistency, and linguistic accuracy in writing.

In general, worldwide trends are tending towards techno-driven, feedback-enabled and all-inclusive learning environments. The paper argues that the teaching of reading and writing in ESL increasingly relies on digital technology, online teaching experiences and automated feedback, which remain active worldwide.

Table: ESL/English Literacy and Proficiency

Indicator	Global/Regional Data	India Data	Source
Global Literacy Rate (All languages)	86.3% of adults (age 15+) are literate worldwide	—	Global estimate based on global literacy data (DevelopmentAid)
Children Unable to Read & Understand Simple Text (LMICs)	~70% of children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read simple age-appropriate text	—	World Bank literacy crisis report (World Bank)
English Skills Global Average Score	57 (Pearson Versant global average – writing & overall test)	—	Pearson Global English Proficiency Report (Education World)
India Average English Skills Score	—	52 overall (below global average)	Pearson Global English Proficiency Report (Education World)
India Average English Writing Score	—	61 (equal to global average)	Pearson Global English Proficiency Report (Education World)
% of Indian Rural Adolescents (14–18) Who Cannot Read Simple English Sentences	—	42% struggle with basic English reading	ASER 2023 Report (India Today)

Graph: ESL/English Literacy and Proficiency



The data highlights a significant gap in literacy and English proficiency both globally and in India. Globally, 86.3% of adults are literate, yet approximately 70% of children in low- and middle-income countries still struggle to read simple texts, indicating persistent challenges in foundational literacy. Focusing on English skills, the global average score is 57, while India lags slightly with an overall score of 52, though its writing score of 61 matches the global average. Notably, 42% of rural Indian adolescents aged 14–18 struggle with basic English reading, reflecting regional disparities and the need for targeted interventions to improve literacy and language skills, particularly in rural areas.

4. Global Challenges in Developing ESL Reading and Writing Skills

ESL learners in the world are still having difficulties with developing reading and writing skills. These problems are sociocultural, policy related, and pedagogical. There is a clash between globally demanded English-medium education and locally multilingual realities. There is increasing promotion of English as a tool to enhance economic mobility, cultural and global participation. These policies often overlook the language diversity and cultural identities of learners. Boruah and Mohanty's (2022) neoliberal escalation of English medium education puts pressure on multilingual societies as these societies favour English at the cost of local languages that eventually reduces support for mother-tongue literacy. As a result of this imbalance, learners tend to poorly develop their basic skills to read and write in English.

Another global issue is the cultural relevance and representation of English-language learning materials. Textbooks and other print sources used in ESL contexts don't match learners' lived experiences. Bose and Gao (2022) write that the cultural content of an increasing number of Indian English language textbooks relates to students' sociocultural realities in an oversimplified manner or is distanced from it. While the focus of their research is India yet such a claim is made in a number of ESL settings across the world, where local realities and experiences are stripped from imported or standardised material. When students are not engaged in learning, reading comprehension will go down and writing motivation will lessen.

Also, ESL classrooms worldwide often suffer from disparity in resources like unqualified teachers, lack of teaching material, and absence of exposure to real-world English. Due to these structural constraints, learners are unable to take advantage of opportunities to develop critical, analytical and expressive skills to be able to read and write aptly. When these pressures are combined with the culturally distant materials that students are exposed to, it creates gaps between what education systems expect and what learners actually get.

Global challenges in ESL reading and writing are rooted in systemic factors such as policy tensions and cultural mismatches. Addressing these issues requires locally responsive teaching methods, support for multilingual literacy, and culturally inclusive learning environments.

5. Indian ESL Context: Policies, Pedagogies, and Learning Realities

Factor/Aspect	Description	Impact/Challenge	Reference
Translingual Practices	Learners frequently use multiple languages (regional + English) to aid comprehension during reading and writing	Can increase engagement and understanding but inconsistently implemented due to English-only classroom expectations	Anderson & Lightfoot (2021)
Policy vs. Classroom Reality	National/state instructional guidelines often require English-only instruction	Gap between policy expectations and actual classroom practice hinders reading and writing skill development	Kumar & Rani (2020)
COVID-19 and Online Learning	Rapid shift to online and blended learning in schools and colleges	Unequal access to devices, poor internet connectivity, and limited digital literacy made learning difficult	Bordoloi et al. (2021)
Teacher Adaptation to Online Modes	Teachers had to modify teaching strategies for online delivery	Difficulties in providing real-time feedback, monitoring progress, and personalizing instruction	Borg (2022)
Corrective Feedback	Feedback is crucial for improving writing structure, grammar, coherence, and reading comprehension	Large class sizes, limited time, and diverse learner proficiency make systematic feedback challenging, causing uneven skill development	Chen & Liu (2021)
Reading Comprehension Strategies	Use of guided reading, questioning, summarization, and context cues	Lack of systematic feedback limits students' ability to apply strategies effectively	Chen & Liu (2021)
Teacher Support & Professional Development	Teachers require training in translingual pedagogy, feedback provision, and online teaching	Without adequate support, teacher effectiveness declines, negatively impacting students' reading and writing progress	Singh & Abdul Halim (2023)
Pedagogical Innovations	Introduction of new teaching models and digital tools	Inconsistent implementation across schools; teachers may lack skills or resources to integrate innovations effectively	Borg (2022)
Multilingual Classroom Dynamics	Classrooms often have learners with diverse linguistic backgrounds	Teachers struggle to balance multiple languages while meeting English proficiency goals	Anderson & Lightfoot (2021)
Technology Integration	Digital platforms can provide reading materials, writing exercises, and assessment tools	Benefits limited by unequal access, digital literacy gaps, and insufficient teacher training	Bordoloi et al. (2021)

6. Role of Teachers, Technology, and Classroom Practices in ESL Skill Development

The nature of the teaching practices to use, the technologies to incorporate and the classroom environment will noticeably affect the development of ESL reading and writing skills. The influence of teachers on the language skills of the learners is vital through the teaching selections, comments and efficiency in the profession. According to Borg, Lightfoot and Gholkar (2020), sustained professional development alters the quality of the instruction. Teacher activity groups focus on ways of working together, observing one another and reflecting on their own and one another's methodological skills. A professional development like this is important for building teachers' capacity to teach reading and writing skills that require direct instruction, repeated practice, and informative feedback.

Role of Teachers, Technology, and Classroom Practices in ESL Skill Development

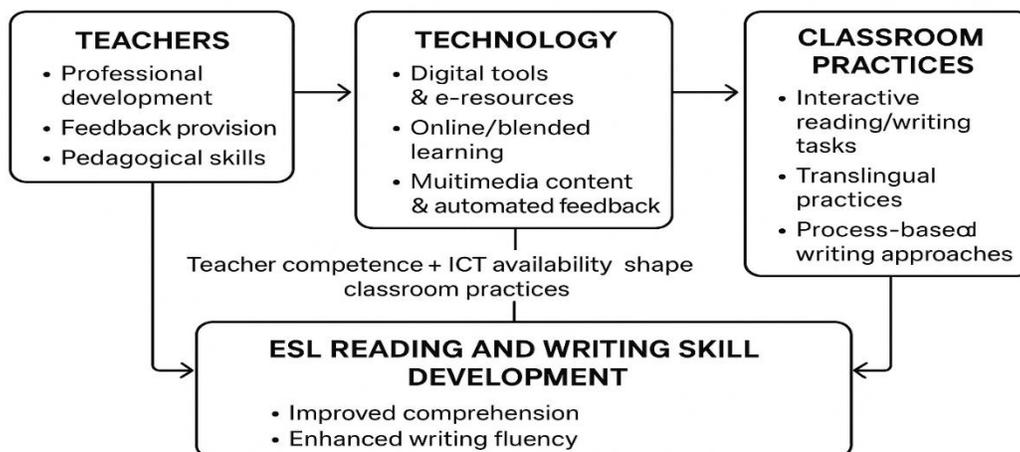


Fig: ESL Skill Development Framework

Source: Own processing

In ESL classes, technology has transformed the teacher's processes and learner's involvement. With the rise of digital learning tools, online methods, automated feedback systems, and multimedia resources, it has become possible to improve reading and writing skills. Digital content allows learners to have access to a variety of texts, practice comprehension skills and engage in interactive writing tasks. India's use of educational technology will remain vulnerable to the vulnerabilities that plague its higher education sector, as global trends suggest. As per the Vision 2047 report by the FICCI (2022), India is moving towards technology driven flexible learning ecosystems with strong digital infrastructure, personalised learning and learner-centric instructional models. One of the reforms supports the greater use of digital tools for ESL and content learning such as e-libraries, e-writing. Blended learning will become a more mainstream strategy for ESL learning.

7. Exchange between Teacher Competences and ICT Availability Shapes Classroom Practices.

An effective ESL classroom actively engages learners through meaningful interaction, scaffolded reading and writing activities, and continuous feedback. Student-centred and interactive pedagogical practices have been shown to improve learner participation and learning outcomes (Devi, 2021). Integrating translingual practices and process-based writing approaches with interactive reading strategies can further enhance learners' comprehension, vocabulary development, and writing fluency by valuing their existing linguistic resources (Kalia, 2023).

However, the effective use of these approaches depends largely on teacher preparedness. Teachers require systematic training to address diverse learner needs, adapt pedagogical strategies, and integrate multilingual and digital practices meaningfully in the classroom (Indrarathne & McCulloch, 2022). In addition, adequate technological infrastructure is essential to ensure that digital tools are effectively utilized rather than remaining underused.

Overall, the combined role of teachers, technology, and classroom practices is crucial for the successful development of ESL reading and writing skills. Strengthening teacher training, improving digital infrastructure, and adopting learner-centred pedagogies can significantly enhance ESL learning across varied educational contexts.

8. Challenges in ESL Reading and Writing in India

Indian ESL learners struggle to acquire fluency in reading and writing skills despite policies and pedagogical changes. One major problem is the linguistic and educational diversity of Indian classrooms. Many students come from regional medium schools and they are not used to using English, which is why it affects their understanding of a text and writing coherently. According to Dinesh (2019), students from these backgrounds are likely to experience difficulties with vocabulary, grammar and sentence construction, thus, Collaborative Language Learning (CLL) activities become important. CLL can be implemented more effectively if the teacher-students ratio is more favourable and proficiency is homogenous.

Merging electronic gadgets and technology enriched learning has also become a concern. Not all mobile-based tools and platforms like WhatsApp can be used for developing reading and writing skills even though using them

for interactive tasks can help develop their language skills. According to Anil (2021), using WhatsApp for language tasks enhances speaking skills and learner engagement, but replicating these benefits for writing skills is not straightforward. Several issues like limited guidance from teachers, low participation and no feedback mechanisms exist.

Moreover, Indian ESL classrooms often face instructional and motivational challenges. Many teachers may not have access to extensive professional development programs on pedagogy for specific skills like reading and writing. The learners, however, have low self-confidence and experience anxiety in the use of English. This situation limits the willingness of the learners to engage with lengthy text or engage in writing activities extensively. The combination of these factors together with lack of exposure to real-life English materials adversely affect the development of critical literacy skills.

The issues faced in India in learning ESL reading and writing are broad and stem from structural, pedagogical and learner factors. Resolving the issues needs specialized teacher training, lessons that are based on technology, collaborative learning interventions and learning materials that are relevant to students' cultures.

9. Comparative Insights and Recommendations

A comparative examination of global and Indian ESL contexts reveals both shared challenges and context-specific differences in the development of reading and writing skills. Globally, technological integration, automated feedback systems, and digitally mediated learning environments have created new opportunities for learners to improve literacy skills (Alam & Usama, 2023; Fan, 2023). However, these trends are accompanied by challenges, including unequal access to digital resources, teacher readiness for technology-enhanced instruction, and maintaining learner engagement in remote or blended formats (Chandras, 2023; Borg, 2022).

In India, ESL learners face similar pedagogical challenges but compounded by linguistic diversity, infrastructural limitations, and variable teacher effectiveness (Dinesh, 2019; Anil, 2021). Additionally, classroom practices often rely on traditional teacher-centered methods, limiting opportunities for interactive reading and writing tasks. While translingual strategies and mobile-enabled learning show promise (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021; Anil, 2021), inconsistent implementation reduces their impact on literacy skill development.

Based on these insights, several recommendations emerge to strengthen ESL reading and writing outcomes in India:

1. **Integrate Technology Strategically:** Digital tools such as e-feedback platforms, mobile-based language tasks, and multimedia content should be embedded into classroom practices in a structured manner. Das (2020) suggests that "edutainment" approaches can enhance learner engagement while supporting skill development, particularly for writing tasks.
2. **Promote Interactive and Collaborative Pedagogies:** Collaborative learning models, peer feedback, and discussion-based tasks should be prioritized to build reading comprehension and writing fluency. Devi (2021) emphasizes the importance of student-centered pedagogies in increasing learner motivation and participation.
3. **Invest in Teacher Professional Development:** Teachers require continuous training in modern ESL pedagogies, digital literacy, and corrective feedback strategies. Professional development programs, such as teacher activity groups, can enhance instructional quality and help bridge gaps between policy intentions and classroom realities (Borg, Lightfoot, & Gholkar, 2020).
4. **Contextualize Learning Materials:** Reading and writing resources should reflect students' linguistic and cultural realities to improve comprehension and engagement. Aligning materials with learners' experiences reduces cognitive load and strengthens motivation.
5. **Encourage Blended and Flexible Learning Models:** Combining traditional classroom instruction with online and mobile-supported activities can increase access to authentic reading materials, provide opportunities for repeated writing practice, and accommodate diverse learner needs.

In conclusion, addressing ESL reading and writing challenges in India requires a holistic approach that integrates technology, contextually relevant pedagogy, and teacher capacity building. Comparative insights from global trends offer valuable guidance, but successful implementation depends on adapting these practices to India's unique linguistic and educational landscape.

10. Conclusion and Future Directions for ESL Reading and Writing Research

The study of ESL reading and writing development reveals a complex interplay of global trends, pedagogical practices, and context-specific challenges. Globally, technology-enhanced learning, automated feedback systems, and innovative instructional methods have reshaped the way reading and writing skills are taught, highlighting the potential of digital tools to improve accuracy, fluency, and learner engagement. However, challenges such as unequal access to resources, limited teacher readiness, and the need for culturally relevant materials persist across many educational contexts.

In India, ESL learners face additional constraints related to linguistic diversity, infrastructural gaps, and variable teacher preparedness. While strategies such as translingual practices, collaborative learning, and mobile-enabled

tasks have shown promise, these approaches are not consistently implemented, leading to uneven outcomes in reading and writing proficiency. Teacher development, culturally responsive materials, and the integration of blended learning models emerge as crucial factors in addressing these challenges.

Looking forward, future research in ESL reading and writing should focus on several key directions:

1. **Longitudinal Studies:** Investigating the long-term impact of digital tools, corrective feedback, and blended learning approaches on reading and writing outcomes across diverse learner populations.
2. **Teacher-Centered Innovations:** Exploring effective professional development programs, such as teacher activity groups and skill-focused workshops, to enhance instructional quality and learner engagement.
3. **Policy and Pedagogy Integration:** Examining how national language policies and curricular reforms interact with classroom practices to influence ESL literacy development.
4. **Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Materials:** Designing and testing reading and writing resources that align with learners' cultural contexts and multilingual competencies to improve comprehension and motivation.
5. **Equity in Digital Access:** Researching strategies to mitigate disparities in technology access and digital literacy to ensure inclusive opportunities for skill development.

In conclusion, improving ESL reading and writing skills requires a holistic approach that balances global innovations with local contextual realities. Future research should emphasize evidence-based pedagogies, teacher development, technological integration, and culturally responsive practices to build more effective and inclusive ESL education systems.

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