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**“FACTORS AFFECTING CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION IN ESL/EFL  
CONTEXTS: TEACHER AND LEARNER PERSPECTIVES ”**

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DOI: <https://doi-10.1555/ijarp.6423>**ABSTRACT**

It is well known that classroom participation in the LSIA is one of the most important elements involved in the successful English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Nevertheless, there are barriers of various types that present obstacles to learner engagement in class interaction in various learning contexts, including psychological, linguistic, pedagogical, and socio-cultural. This research was an attempt to review systematically the various factors influencing classroom participation of both teachers and learners in ESL/EFL context. This study aimed to gain insight into what drives involvement, to explore factors impeding engagement, and to draw insights from effective practices that increase classroom engagement. The study was based on a qualitative inductive systematic literature review design. Predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to withhold high-quality research papers for each peer-review journal published from 2014 through 2025, from major academic databases. Thematic analysis was used for studying the 42 relevant articles of which they investigated various international and Asian contexts of ESL/ EFL. Anxiety, apprehension, negative evaluation, limited knowledge of language, and pronunciation difficulties emerged as important factors that greatly inhibit the participation of learners in the classroom. Learner engagement is also very much subject to the student-teacher relationship, including aspects related to teaching approaches, feedback provided, classroom management and communication strategies. Further, socio-cultural norms and education systems that focus on passing examinations and classroom conditions were identified as large participation related problems. The review also revealed good practice in the development of collaborative learning lessons, supportive teacher behaviour and communicative instructional strategies for improving participation. The research findings indicate that classroom involvement in

ESL/EFL learning is by nature more multidimensional and context specific. To achieve more effective learner involvement and language development, teaching practices which foster supportive, learner-centred and communicative classroom atmosphere are critical.

**KEYWORDS:** Classroom participation, ESL/EFL education, learner engagement, thematic analysis, communicative language teaching.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is considerable focus on classroom participation in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction as it is strongly correlated with language learning, communicative competence and academic success. Usually, language classrooms are defined by learners' verbal and non-verbal interactions with language activities that involve answering questions, participating in discussions, group activities, presenting work, talking to peers and teachers (Lee, 2019). However, the important feature of communicative approach are participation, because language learning can be acquired not through receiving knowledge but through meaningful Communication and negotiation of meaning (Richards, 2006). Participation in class has thus gained increased visibility within the field of pedagogy in today's classrooms in a variety of educational contexts.

The factors affecting participation vary in ESL/EFL contexts and are not mutually independent but rather intertwined, having to do with the learners, with the teachers, with social-cultural issues, with language, and with institutionality. The feeling of confidence, language competence, anxiety, learners' motivation, willingness to communicate, and self-efficacy are often related to learner participation (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015). Meanwhile, the teacher's teaching style, feedback strategies, classroom management, task design and emotional support are all important factors that determine students' participation (Mercer and Dörnyei, 2020). Also, barriers of socio-cultural norms concerning authority, face-saving and collectivism can often impact on students' interactions, in many Asian educational settings where teacher-centred learning norms are still deeply entrenched (Liu and Jackson, 2008).

The idea of classroom participation is closely related to the interactionist and sociocultural theories of language learning. The Interaction Hypothesis proposed by Long (1996) suggests that language development takes place when interaction allows learners to discuss meaning and get comprehensible input. In the same way, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is based upon the notion that learning is socially mediated and is best accomplished through collaborative

interaction within the learning environment (Vygotsky, 1978). The views in this section emphasize the need to attend to the participation of children in communication in the classroom setting and to their involvement in their learning of the language. Participating in ESL/EFL classes, therefore, to a limited extent can have negative impact on students' speaking competence, confidence, critical thinking and communicative competence.

The literature is replete with examples of the difficulties of using classroom participation to a high degree in a wide variety of ESL/EFL settings around the globe. In East Asian countries like China, Japan and South Korea, the students have been reported to have fears of failure, low self-confidence, language anxiety, and expectation of silence and respect for authority (Peng, 2019; King and Harumi, 2020). Additionally, barriers to active classroom interaction, in Middle Eastern and South Asian contexts, focus on traditional education systems that are based on tests rather than on students and teacher-dominated pedagogy (Al-Hebaish, 2012; Sultana, 2014). Likewise, research in countries in Southeast Asia shows that the factors influencing students not to participate in oral involvement are limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, peer evaluation, and the lack of situations for communicative practice (Suryati and Watson, 2018). Nowadays, classroom participation is emphasized more than ever in Sri Lankan ESL/EFL education, in view of the ongoing importance and focus of English language competency in higher education and employment. Despite English being taught since primary education onwards, it was reported that learners' oral communication ability is limited and the level of involvement of learners in the classroom is low, especially in rural and state sector educational institutions (Karunaratne, 2003). In Sri Lankan universities and schools, several factors have been identified as causing language difficulties: teacher centred teaching, examination oriented learning, anxiety over negative assessment, lack of experience in using English in the outside world, and socio-economic differences (Wijesekera, 2015; Ranasinghe and Samarasinghe, 2019). Besides, students from rural areas may feel more anxious and less confident than their peers from urban educational environment in which the exposure to English is relatively higher than in rural environment (Perera, 2017; Premaratne, 2017).

Even though academic literature on classroom participation is growing, earlier researchers tended to focus on single factors (e.g. anxiety, motivation or teacher, learner approaches) rather than consider the topic as a whole from a teacher's and learner's perspective. Furthermore, studies are often sub-segmented and context-specific, making it harder to create a comprehensive overview of the multi-faceted issues around participation within the ESL/EFL contexts. Previous reviews also are usually quite generic in their focus on speaking or classroom interaction and fail to systematically review and synthesize the various factors

influencing learner participation. Hence, it is still crucial to need an additional systematic review that rigorously investigates ERFs, LRFs and their effects on ESL/EFL classroom participation.

Also, most studies have not included the systematic use of thematic synthesis as a tool to uncover similar patterns or conceptual relationships across study in diverse classrooms and cultures. By identifying common barriers, enabling factors, and pedagogical implications from several different studies using a thematic analytical approach, the phenomenon can be presented with a deeper interpretive understanding (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This has been especially useful when doing ESL/EFL research, as participation is influenced by a series of complex psychological, pedagogical and socio-cultural factors.

In view of this, the purpose of systematic review is to collect and synthesize recent literature about factors influencing the participation of students in the classroom in the ESL/EFL setting, identifying teacher's and learner's perspectives. The aim of the review is to understand what are major obstacles and motivators of the classroom engagement and what are the ways in which pedagogical practices, learner features and situation could influence participation patterns in a language classroom. The goal of this study is to make a contribution to the field of understanding challenges in participation of ESL/EFL learners based on the findings from various international and Asian contexts, which is applicable to South Asian educational context.

It is hoped that the findings of this review will have implications for the language education community—language teachers, curriculum developers, language policy makers, and language researchers—who want to create more interactive and learner-centred classrooms. In addition, the study can help to inform the design of pedagogical approaches that promote learner confidence, communicative interaction, and inclusive participation pedagogies in the realms of ESL/EFL instruction.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify the major learner-related and teacher-related factors affecting classroom participation in ESL/EFL contexts.
2. To examine the socio-cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical barriers influencing student participation in ESL/EFL classrooms.
3. To synthesize existing literature thematically in order to identify effective strategies that enhance classroom participation and learner engagement in ESL/EFL education.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Research Design

The study used a qualitative research design with inductive approach as a systematic means to study the factors influencing classroom participation from both the teacher's and student's points of views in ESL/EFL classroom. Qualitative systematic literature review (SLR) was chosen since the research was aimed at synthesising and interpreting existing knowledge instead of measuring statistical relations. Qualitative systematic review takes aspects of patterns, meanings and contexts being observed/identified across several studies and critically analyzes them with a transparent and methodologically sound process of selecting the literature and analyzing the data (Snyder, 2019).

An inductive approach was chosen since it was hoped that general conceptual understandings would emerge as a result of recurring patterns that were found in the literature examined. As Thomas (2006) claimed, deductive analysis is used when there are pre-made hypothesis or codes to be tested, whereas inductive analysis allows the researchers to interpret his or her data and create a pattern based on them. Classroom involvement in ESL/EFL education has been affected by a myriad of psychological, pedagogical, linguistic and socio-cultural factors, and hence seeking to explore the plurality of the results yielded by previous studies, the technique of an inductive approach was found to be appropriate.

### 2.2 Systematic Literature Review Procedure

The study was designed in accordance with the guideline of a systematic literature review (SLR) which was structured to achieve a holistic, transparent and repeatable identification, selection and synthesis of scientific literature. Xiao and Watson (2019) report that "Systematic reviews are useful in educational research to reduce selection bias and offer a good synthesis of the evidence in an area. This review was conducted in the present study with the four-step approach: Firstly Identification, Screening, Eligibility Assessment and, finally, Relevant Article Selection.

Relevant literature was searched through major academic databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, ScienceDirect, ERIC, and Taylor & Francis Online. The search process used combinations of keywords such as "classroom participation," "ESL learners," "EFL students," "student engagement," "language anxiety," "teacher perspectives," and "classroom

interaction.” Boolean operators including AND and OR were used to refine the searches and increase the relevance of retrieved studies.

The main criterion for review was that the articles reviewed should be peer-reviewed and published between 2014 and 2025 to reflect recent developments and prevailing viewpoints surrounding ESL/EFL classroom participation. Yet, some prior works on theories and concepts about classroom interactions and participation were incorporated into the earlier mentioned consideration of theoretical implications and definitions. Using a database search initially about 120 articles were found. Using the duplicate record, screening of titles and abstracts, 68 articles were retained for further analysis. Following this, screening of the full-text documents was done using the pre-stated inclusion and exclusion criteria and 42 articles were included in detailed analysis.

The inclusion criteria required studies to:

1. Focus on ESL/EFL classroom participation or learner engagement;
2. Discuss factors influencing participation from teacher or learner perspectives;
3. Involve school, university, or language institute contexts;
4. Be published in English; and
5. Contain empirical or substantial theoretical findings relevant to the research objectives.

Studies unrelated to language learning contexts, conference abstracts, unpublished dissertations, and articles lacking sufficient methodological clarity were excluded from the review.

The studies selected offered varied geo-linguistic contexts such as East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Middle East and selected African ESL/EFL contexts. Asian contexts are of special priority due to them being represented by specific participation challenges, including teacher-centred learning, anxieties and/examinations-driven learning, which are greatly common in these places (King and Harumi, 2020). The selection of studies from various regions allowed for a comparative understanding and greater context for the findings of this review.

### **2.3 Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis was the method used to analyse the literature that was selected. Thematic analysis is a technique used to find, recognize, categorize and interpret common themes/concepts within qualitative text that have been present repeatedly (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This analytic technique was judged to be suitable because the purpose of the project was

to “cross-cut” a multiplicity of findings and to determine conceptual similarities between various ESL/EFL settings.

Analysis involved several phases: First familiarity with selected studies, initial coding, identification of recurrent category, development of theme and finally, interpretation of relations among themes. In the coding process, a number of factors that affect classroom participation were presented in wider categories, for the example, there are classifications of factors related to learners, factors related to teachers, linguistic barriers, psychological factors, classroom environment and socio-cultural factors. These themes have been further developed and shaped in the context of the review objectives.

Because of the flexibility in analysing heterogeneous qualitative findings, and the ability to interpret the different aspects of educational experiences and contextual realities, themed analysis was found to be an appropriate method for this study (Nowell et al., 2017). In addition, thematic synthesis enabled the researcher to highlight similarities and differences between the international contexts of ESL/EFL, and to develop an overall picture of the multi-dimensionality of classroom participation.

#### **2.4 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations**

Peer reviewed and academically accepted sources were used in the analysis offering greater credibility and trustworthiness to the review. To eliminate bias and gain uniformity during the review process, a systematic screening process was undertaken, along with clear and specific selection criteria. Further, the appropriate use of referencing and citing were observed to ensure academic honesty and prevent plagiarism. As a result of the study's undertaken research which depends simply on secondary data groups which has been published, a human participant was not involved and followed the normative ethical clearance system.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 RESULTS**

Several factors that had emerged as a result of the thematic analysis of the literature selected were found to be inter connected with regards classroom participation in contexts of ESL/EFL. The results showed that there are different influences that affect participation, namely based on learners' characteristics, teacher characteristics, language, psychology, socio-cultural, and the classroom environment. Finally, it was observed from various studies that the perceived factors that affect why students accept participation are complex and multi-faceted, such that neither is there a single factor to determine whether the student will accept participation or not, nor is there a single variable that determines the student's willingness to accept participation.

### **Learner-Related Factors Affecting Classroom Participation**

The question of whether classroom participation is affected by learner related psychological variables was one of the consistent and common themes identified in the reviewed literature. Extensive studies have corroborated various factors that were found to hinder students' participation in classroom interaction, namely language anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low ability in language and limited self-efficacy.

In Chinese EFL setting, Liu and Jackson (2008) concluded that students' hesitation to participate in class was mainly attributed to the potential negative assessment of their English and embarrassment when speaking English aloud in front of their peers. Peng (2019) also concluded that the willingness to communicate of Chinese university students was strongly correlated with communicative competence and self-confidence. Students who valued themselves highly, expressed healthy participation in the discussions and classroom speech.

Fear of losing face and anxiety were also highlighted as important factors in the Japanese and South Korean studies. King and Harumi (2020) noted that the reason behind the parents' refusal to participate in the context was due to cultural considerations of modesty, accuracy and respect for authority among many of the East Asian learners. Rebuilding question-bank and topics are learnt in silence. In many instances learners preferred to not make errors in public or face criticism from peers. The results section is also similar to that of Yashima et al. (2018) who reported that higher anxiety scores predicted lower communicative involvement in EFL classrooms by the Japanese learners.

Motivation popped up as yet another important factor, that affects participation in class really a lot, Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) basically pointed out that learners who had stronger intrinsic motivation and generally positive attitudes toward learning English were more likely to jump in actively during communicative tasks. Then in Indonesian EFL settings, Suryati and Watson (2018) also saw something similar, students who felt that English could help them later in academic and professional paths tended to participate more during oral classroom activities.

Another thing, language proficiency, it also had a strong effect on how much students participated. A number of studies noted that learners who had limited vocabulary, pronunciation troubles, and not enough grammatical knowledge often hesitated to speak. Tsui (1996) claimed that students with lower proficiency frequently try to avoid participation, because they fear giving responses that are incorrect. Similar tendencies showed up in Sri Lankan contexts too, where learners from rural schooling backgrounds had less confidence and, as a result, took part less in oral work due to fewer chances to meet English outside the classroom (Perera and Premaratne, 2017).

### **Teacher-Related Factors Influencing Participation**

Teacher behaviour and the way instruction happens, plus classroom management practices, came up as a major theme affecting participation. The reviewed literature generally agreed that teaching that is supportive and interactive does something to learner engagement, it makes it better.

Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) stressed that when teachers are emotionally supportive, they can build psychologically safe classrooms, so students feel more free to share their ideas. Positive teacher attitudes, encouragement, and feedback that is constructive were linked to higher confidence and greater readiness to communicate. But when teaching becomes too critical or authoritarian, classroom interaction drops and learner anxiety rises, like you can see the difference pretty clearly.

Some studies also underlined communicative teaching approaches as useful for participation. Richards (2006) argued that learner-centred methods—like group discussions, pair work, role plays, and task-based learning—open up more chances for genuine interaction. In Saudi Arabian EFL classes, Alrabai (2015) reported that students tended to participate more when teachers used collaborative activities and toned down excessive correction during speaking tasks.

Even teacher questioning techniques seemed to matter too. Walsh (2011) said that open-ended and referential questions help learners give longer answers, and they expand interaction space in language classrooms. Meanwhile, when classrooms are mostly display questions and long teacher monologues, students end up with fewer openings to speak. Xie (2010) observed something close as well, noting that excessive teacher talk time in Chinese EFL classrooms can really limit opportunities for learner interaction.

The literature also paid attention to teacher immediacy and rapport. Research showed that learners were more prepared to participate when teachers were approachable, patient, and showed respect for students' opinions (Lee, 2019). In many Asian settings, students seemed to view supportive teacher-student relationships as necessary, because it helps reduce anxiety and builds classroom confidence.

### **Linguistic and Communication Barriers**

Linguistic barriers were another prominent theme across the reviewed studies. Lots of learners struggled to participate because their speaking skills were not yet solid, their vocabulary was limited, pronunciation felt risky, and they feared making grammatical mistakes.

In Turkish EFL contexts, Tatar (2005) found that learners often stayed quiet during oral

activities because they couldn't shape their responses quickly enough in English. Likewise, Gan (2012) reported that university students in Hong Kong avoided participation due to weak lexical resources and concerns about fluency. These results point to linguistic insecurity as a serious restriction on classroom interaction.

Pronunciation anxiety showed up strongly in Asian EFL environments. Studies suggested learners were worried about negative reactions from peers tied to their pronunciation and accent. Baran-Łucarz (2014) argued that pronunciation-related anxiety can reduce both oral participation and overall confidence in foreign language classrooms. This problem seemed to be even more visible among students who came from grammar-oriented learning environments, where communicative exposure was limited, and so speaking feels more "unsafe" somehow. Several studies also emphasized reliance on the first language. Learners often fell back on their native language during classroom discussions because they lacked confidence to express complex ideas in English (Suryati and Watson, 2018). This kind of dependence can shrink opportunities for meaningful interaction in the target language, and in practice it reduces communicative participation over time.

### **Socio-Cultural and Classroom Environmental Factors**

The thematic analysis further revealed that socio-cultural norms and classroom environments really, significantly shaped participation patterns in ESL/EFL settings. A bunch of studies done in Asian educational contexts found that cultural expectations of silence, respect for authority, and this kind of passive learning tendency can act as real barriers to active involvement.

Liu (2001) mentioned that learners in Confucian-heritage educational cultures often avoided speaking on their own, because classroom participation was usually seen as teacher-directed, not student-centred. In a similar way Nakane (2007) argued that silence in Japanese classrooms should not always be treated as disengagement, it can be a culturally influenced communication practice instead, just not the "obvious" kind.

Also, classroom size plus institutional conditions came up as key influences. When classrooms are large, individual participation can get squeezed, and teacher-student interaction drops off. In Bangladeshi EFL contexts, Sultana (2014) reported that overcrowded classes and exam-focused teaching discouraged communicative participation. Similar results were also mentioned in Sri Lankan state-sector schools, where limited classroom resources and strict curricula constrained interactive learning activities (Wijesekera, 2015).

Then there's peer influence which nudged participation behaviors too. Some studies showed that learners tended to stay back due to fear of being judged by peers, ridicule, or negative

comparisons. In collectivist educational cultures, keeping group harmony and avoiding embarrassment often makes students less likely to voice opinions publicly (King and Harumi, 2020).

### **Strategies Promoting Classroom Participation**

In the reviewed work, the literature also highlighted several pedagogical strategies that supported learner participation. Communicative and collaborative learning approaches, repeatedly appeared as useful options for boosting classroom interaction, more than the one-size-fits-all routines.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), pair work, small-group talks, and project-related tasks were frequently linked with higher learner engagement (Ellis, 2003). The studies suggested that collaborative learning spaces can lower anxiety and help students practise spoken English in safer and more supportive situations.

Technology-assisted learning was another theme showing up more and more. Zhang and Ardasheva (2019) showed that online discussion platforms and digital collaborative tools encouraged participation among learners who felt reluctant to speak in normal face-to-face classes. Likewise, blended learning environments were reported to strengthen confidence and widen interaction opportunities.

Positive feedback also mattered, along with reducing heavy error correction. Alrabai (2015) found that motivational teaching moves like praise, supportive feedback, and encouragement really improved students' willingness to communicate in EFL lessons. Overall, the results point toward a clear idea: when the classroom feels supportive and student-centred in how it's run, active participation is much more likely to happen.

### **3.2 DISCUSSION**

Based on the results of this systematic review, it can be concluded that ESL/EFL factors that have a bearing on classroom participation are of various levels of complexity involving the learner, the teacher, language factors, psychological, pedagogical and socio-cultural factors. In achieving the problem of study, the present study was able to bring together the evidence from the various international and Asian setting of the education system and to study the classroom participation of the teacher and the learner. In addition, the review accomplished its goals: to find the primary obstacles to participation, to peek at contextual influences, and to spotlight approaches that encourage students to be involved in the ESL/EFL classroom.

The results obtained from the review reveal that the major problem is psychological factors

which include language anxiety, fear of negative evaluation/opinion, low self-confidence and reduced willingness to communicate. Along with our previous research (Liu and Jackson, 2008; Peng, 2019), the results reveal that speaking in a class is not always something that learners like to do due to fear of making mistakes and embarrassment in front of others. This was problematic in Asian educational environments in which cultural norms regarding silence, modesty and the authority of teachers are still prevalent and impact class dynamics. Thus, the review underlines sociocultural perspectives that focus on the role of social and cultural norms in educational settings as well as linguistic competence in shaping participation.

Moreover, the findings show that participation is influenced by teachers' practices as important factors. Lessons with a more learner-centred delivery, positive teacher behaviours, collaborative learning activities, and positive feedback were always linked to greater classroom interactions. However, high levels of teacher dominance, correction and an examination-oriented education decreased students' willingness to communicate in the teacher dominated classes. These results are supportive of a communicative approach to language instruction, and the active role that the learners needs to play in the classroom.

The other major study contribution is the elucidation of the linguistic barriers that impact participation. Low levels of vocabulary and pronunciation anxiety were found to be significant issues in several ESL/EFL settings, and low levels of speaking proficiency were revealed. The results indicate that the presence of participation impediments is not only due to the unwillingness of learning but also due to the lack of language readiness and communicative input.

This review also notes the classroom environment and institutional conditions. In many of these educational contexts, issues of overcrowding in classrooms, lack of opportunity for oral practice, and inflexibility of curriculum were reported as challenges to participation. Not only learner motivation but also the consequences of pedagogical environment and institutional changes to emphasize communicative competence are required for the improvement of participation in the classroom.

In conclusion, the systematic review gives a comprehensive thematic spectrum of the multi-dimensional aspects influencing participation in ESL/EFL classrooms, and it provides significant insights into issues for future classroom language teaching and research.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The present systematic review aimed to discuss the factors that influence students' participation in ESL/EFL classrooms, summarising previous published studies in various educational fields.

The study identified that many factors affect participation in the classroom, and they were interconnected factors such as those of learner anxiety, confidence, motivation, and proficiency in the target language as well as those of the teacher's behaviour, pedagogical strategies, socio-cultural norms and classroom environments. The results show that psychological and linguistic obstacles are one of the major hindrances in the way of learners' involvement in the language classrooms.

The review also illustrated that the facilitating professional practices of teachers, presenting teaching methods as a means of communication, collaborative learning, and positive teacher-student relationships have a significant impact on student participation. Certain education systems in Asia and other developing education systems do not provide learners with sufficient opportunity to interact with their teachers in meaningful ways within the classroom due to the traditional teaching and learning practices and the assessment system that is centered on the teaching.

The study also employed a systematic review and thematic analysis and manages to give the reader an overview of the problems of participation and the general concepts that facilitated learning engagement in the ESL/EFL classroom. The results have important implications for teachers, curriculum personnel, and policy makers who are interested in designing a language instruction setting with multicultural, interactive, and communicative elements. Future studies can be further developed to explore the nature of participation in contexts that are under-represented in educational research and examine the persistence of the effectiveness of strategies that facilitate participation.

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