

Reflective Teaching as a Strategy to Navigate Contextual Barriers in English Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

English Language Teaching (ELT) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context is frequently influenced by various contextual barriers that hinder effective teaching and learning processes. These barriers include students' low motivation, diverse language proficiency levels, limited instructional resources, sociocultural differences, and challenges associated with technology. In response to these complexities, teachers are expected to adopt adaptive and context-sensitive pedagogical practices. This paper aims to examine the role of reflective teaching as strategy for overcoming contextual barriers in English language classrooms. Employing a qualitative literature review approach, the study synthesizes findings from recent studies between 2022 and 2025 on reflective teaching and teacher professional development in EFL settings. The review reveals that reflective teaching serves as an effective strategy for overcoming contextual barriers in English language classroom contexts. Furthermore, reflective practice promotes continuous improvement through self-evaluation, collaborative reflection, and evidence-based pedagogical adjustments. The findings suggest that reflective teaching serves as an effective framework for developing context-responsive pedagogy capable of addressing the dynamic challenges of contemporary English language Education. Therefore, integrating reflective practice into teacher education programs and professional development initiatives is essential for improving the quality and effectiveness of English language teaching.

Keywords: reflective teaching, contextual barriers, English language teaching

INTRODUCTION

English has become the dominant language of international communication, education, science, technology, and global business. As globalization continues to expand intercultural interactions and international mobility, English language proficiency is increasingly regarded as an essential competency for academic achievement and professional success. Consequently, English Language Teaching has become a major educational priority in many countries where English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Richards, 2022). However, despite substantial investment in curriculum reform, teacher training, and educational technology, achieving effective English Language learning remains a persistent challenge in many EFL contexts.

Recent educational research suggests that language learning outcomes are influenced not only by instructional methods but also by contextual factors that shape classroom practices and learner experiences (Ratri et al., 2025). Contextual factors refer to the social, cultural, institutional, technological, and pedagogical conditions that influence teaching and learning processes. In EFL settings, English is primarily learned within formal education environmental, making classroom instruction a critical determinant of students' language development. Unlike learners in English as a second language (ESL) contexts, EFL learners often have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom. Consequently, contextual barriers within educational settings may significantly affect language learning outcome (Farrell, 2022).

Numerous studies have identified various contextual barriers that hinder effective English language learning. These barriers include low students' motivation, language anxiety, diverse proficiency levels, insufficient instructional resources, limited exposure to authentic language use, socio cultural constraints, and unequal access to educational technologies (Budiana et al., 2025; Nguyen, 2023). Students' motivation, for example, has consistently been recognized as one of the strongest predictors of language learning success. However, many EFL learners perceive English as difficult and irrelevant to their immediate needs, resulting in low engagement and reduced participation in classroom activities (Budiana et al., 2025). Similarly, heterogeneous classrooms characterized by varying levels of language proficiency often present significant challenges for teachers attempting to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students.

In addition to learner-related challenges, English language teachers often face institutional and environmental barriers that affect teaching effectiveness. These barriers include large class sizes,

limited teaching materials, inadequate technological infrastructure, and curriculum constraints (Fonkamo & Zeru, 2022). Such challenges are particularly common in developing countries, where educational resources are often unevenly distributed. Moreover, social factors, including local language dominance, attitude toward English, and classroom interaction norms, may influence students' willingness to participate in communicative activities (Salbaş & Ekmekci, 2025). These conditions suggest that English language teaching is highly context-dependent and requires flexible and responsive pedagogical approaches.

Recent studies have shown that reflective teaching supports teacher adaptability and context responsive pedagogy. For instance, Rozimela et al. (2024) found that contextualized reflective practice enhanced Indonesian EFL teachers' pedagogical competence and responsiveness to classroom challenges. Similarly, Karim et al. (2024) reported that reflection on critical thinking incidents strengthened teachers' professional awareness and decision-making skills. These findings indicate that reflective teaching can help educators identify contextual barriers and develop appropriate instructional responses.

Therefore, this study examines reflective teaching as a strategy for overcoming contextual barriers in English language learning. Through a qualitative literature review of studies published between 2022 and 2025, the study explores how reflective teaching helps educators identify contextual challenges, adapt instructional practices, and improve learning outcomes. The study addresses the following research questions: 1) what contextual barriers commonly influence English language learning in EFL classroom? 2) how does reflective teaching help teachers address contextual barriers in English language learning? 3) What pedagogical implication emerge from the implementation of reflective teaching in EFL contexts?

The novelty of this study lies in its conceptualization of reflective teaching as a strategic mechanism for transforming contextual barriers into opportunities for pedagogical adaptation and instructional improvement. By synthesizing recent literature, the study proposes a contextual framework that links contextual barriers, reflective teaching processes, adaptive pedagogical actions, and improved learning outcomes.

Contextual Barriers in English Language Learning

Contextual barriers in EFL classrooms are multidimensional and deeply interrelated. Student motivation remains one of the most persistent challenges, as learners in EFL contexts frequently perceive limited practical relevance of English in their daily lives, resulting in

reduced engagement and effort in the learning process (Ahsanu et al., 2025; Habtamu & Belay, 2023). Compounding this issue is the widespread presence of learner heterogeneity, whereby students with significantly varying linguistic proficiency levels are taught within the same classroom, placing considerable demands on teachers to differentiate and adapt their instructional strategies accordingly (Baluchzada, 2023; Fonkamo & Zeru, 2022). Limited access to instructional resources, including authentic materials, updated textbooks, and digital infrastructure, further constrains teachers' ability to deliver diverse and effective learning experiences, particularly in under-resourced educational settings (Gudeta, 2022; Zadorozhnyy et al., 2025). Sociocultural differences between learners' cultural backgrounds and the pedagogical traditions embedded in English language curricula additionally create tensions that affect classroom participation, communication, and overall learning outcomes (Alisoy, 2024; Thao et al., 2023b). More recently, the increasing expectation for technology-enhanced instruction has introduced further complexity, as disparities in access to digital tools and inconsistent levels of digital literacy among both teachers and learners continue to limit the effectiveness of technology integration in many EFL contexts (Jaya & Susyla, 2024; Yang et al., 2025).

Reflective Teaching

Reflective teaching is grounded in a rich theoretical tradition that positions teacher reflection as essential to effective professional practice. Reflective teaching has emerged as one of the most widely advocated frameworks for supporting this shift (Baluchzada, 2023; Nurkamto & Putra, 2025). Reflective teaching refers to a deliberate and systematic process through which teachers critically examine their instructional decisions, classroom interactions, and student outcomes with the aim of continuously improving their pedagogical practices (Schön, 2017). This concept is rooted in Dewey (1933) foundational notion of reflective thinking, defined as the active, persistent, and careful consideration of beliefs and practices in light of supporting evidence and consequences. Building on this foundation, Schön (2017) introduced the concept of the reflective practitioner, distinguishing between reflection-in-action — the real-time adjustments teachers make during instruction — and reflection-on-action — the retrospective examination of teaching experiences to extract lessons for future practice. These two modes of reflection are complementary and mutually reinforcing, enabling teachers to develop both immediate responsiveness and long-term pedagogical growth.

Structured models of reflective practice provide teachers with practical tools for engaging in systematic self-examination. Gibbs (1988) offers a six-stage iterative process encompassing description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action planning through which teachers can translate subjective classroom experiences into evidence-informed pedagogical decisions. Kolb (2014) similarly positions reflection as the critical bridge between concrete experience and the formation of new pedagogical understanding, reinforcing the view that professional learning is most effective when grounded in direct classroom experience and supported by structured opportunities for reflection (Fonkamo & Zeru, 2022; Wulandary & Amrullah, 2023).

Reflective Teaching and Context-Responsive Pedagogy

Beyond individual self-examination, reflective teaching encompasses collaborative and evidence-based dimensions that further strengthen its capacity to address contextual barriers. Collaborative reflection through peer observation, lesson study, reflective journaling, and participation in professional learning communities enables teachers to draw on collective expertise and diverse perspectives in navigating shared classroom challenges (Rozimela et al., 2024; Tajeddin et al., 2025). Evidence-based pedagogical adjustments, informed by classroom data such as student performance records, learner feedback, and observational notes, allow teachers to make targeted and purposeful improvements to their instructional practice (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024; Thao et al., 2023b). Together, these dimensions of reflective practice constitute what Farrell (2022) describes as context-responsive pedagogy, an approach that is deliberately adapted to the linguistic, cultural, and material realities of a specific teaching environment. This orientation emphasizes the importance of grounding instructional decisions in a thorough understanding of learners' sociocultural contexts, a principle that is particularly relevant in diverse and under-resourced EFL settings (Rochsantiningasih et al., 2025; Rozimela et al., 2024).

Reflective Teaching in Teacher Professional Development

Reflective teaching is also widely recognized as a cornerstone of teacher professional development. Richards (2022) argue that integrating reflective practice into pre-service and in-service teacher education programs equips educators with the metacognitive awareness and adaptive capacity necessary to navigate the evolving demands of language teaching. This is particularly significant in EFL contexts, where teachers frequently operate with limited institutional

support and must therefore rely substantially on their own capacity for self-directed inquiry and problem-solving (Farrell, 2022; Gudeta, 2022). Recent studies have further demonstrated that reflective practice, when sustained and embedded within professional development initiatives, contributes to measurable improvements in teaching quality, learner engagement, and instructional adaptability in EFL settings (Baluchzada, 2023; Thao et al., 2023b; Wulandary & Amrullah, 2023).

Kusumarasdyati and Retnaningdyah (2024) demonstrated that structured reflection improved Indonesian EFL teachers' instructional strategies and enhanced their ability to respond adaptively to classroom challenges. Karim et al. (2024) similarly found that reflection on critical thinking incidents strengthened teachers' professional awareness and decision-making skills, suggesting that reflective practice cultivates the kind of pedagogical agility necessary for effective teaching in complex EFL contexts. Together, these findings indicate that reflective teaching functions not merely as a professional development tool but as an ongoing mechanism through which teachers continuously refine and adapt their pedagogical practices in response to the evolving demands of their specific teaching environments.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative literature review approach to examine the role of reflective teaching in overcoming contextual barriers in English language learning. A qualitative literature review was chosen because it allows researchers to systematically synthesize existing knowledge, identify recurring patterns, and develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon based on previous empirical and theoretical studies (Snyder, 2019). This review specifically focused on recent developments in reflective teaching and context-responsive pedagogy within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting.

Relevant literature was collected from several academic databases using combinations of keywords, including reflective teaching, reflective practice, contextual barriers, and English language teaching. To ensure the relevance, credibility, and quality of the selected literature, several inclusion criteria were established. The review included studies published between 2022 and 2025, peer-reviewed journal articles and reputable conference proceedings, studies focusing on reflective teaching, teacher professional development, or contextual challenges in EFL/ELT contexts, articles published in English, and studies providing empirical findings or

conceptual discussions that were directly relevant to the research objectives. Conversely, studies that did not explicitly address reflective teaching or English language education were excluded from the analysis

The selected studies were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022) The analysis consisted of four stages: (1) familiarization with the literature, (2) coding significant findings, (3) identifying recurring themes, and (4) synthesizing themes into broader conceptual categories. Through this process, patterns related to contextual barriers, reflective teaching practices, adaptive pedagogical actions, and learning outcomes were identified and interpreted.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Reviewed Studies

A review of recent studies published between 2022 and 2025 reveals that contextual barriers to English learning remain a significant challenge across diverse EFL settings. Although the studies were conducted in different countries and educational levels, several recurring themes emerged across contexts.

The barriers identified in the reviewed literature can be categorized into five major, interrelated areas: learner-related barriers, teacher-related barriers, institutional barriers, sociocultural barriers, and technological barriers. These categories are summarized in Table 1 below and elaborated in the subsections that follow.

Table 1. Major Contextual Barriers Identified in Previous Studies

Category	Example of Barriers
Learner-related	Low motivation, language anxiety, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary
Teacher- related	Limited pedagogical competence, traditional teaching methods, insufficient professional development
Institutional	Large class sizes, limited resources, curriculum constraints
Sociocultural	Limited English exposure, local language dominance, negative attitude toward English
Technological	Poor internet access, lack of digital literacy, inadequate technological infrastructure

Learner-Related Barriers

The reviewed studies consistently identified learner-related factors as significant obstacles to English language acquisition across wide range of EFL contexts. The most prominent learner-related

barriers include low motivation, language anxiety, limited self-confidence, and inadequate vocabulary knowledge, all of which interact in ways that compound their negative effects on learning outcomes.

Low motivation emerged as one of the most frequently reported as learner-related barriers. Many EFL learners perceive English as difficult, abstract, or irrelevant to their immediate social and professional lives, resulting in reduced effort, disengagement, and surface-level participation in classroom activities (Ahsanu et al., 2025). Motivation and anxiety are closely interrelated: learners who experience high anxiety tend to develop avoidance behaviors, which in turn reduce their opportunities for practice and success, progressively eroding their intrinsic motivation to engage with the language. Limited self-confidence, which often accompanies both anxiety and low motivation, further exacerbates this cycle by discouraging risk-taking, a behavior widely regarded as essential for language acquisition.

Language anxiety represents an equally pervasive challenge. Students often fear making grammatical errors, being criticized by peers, or receiving negative evaluation from teachers. Such anxiety can reduce learners' willingness to communicate and limit opportunities for meaningful communicative practice, thereby creating a cycle in which reduced participation further impairs language development (Habtamu & Belay, 2023). This is particularly pronounced in speaking activities, where the visible and immediate nature of oral production heightens learners' exposure to social evaluation.

Furthermore, inadequate vocabulary knowledge was reported as a major challenge affecting all four language skills. Learners with limited lexical resources often struggle to comprehend texts, express ideas, and participate actively in classroom interactions, making vocabulary development a foundational priority in EFL instruction (Ahsanu et al., 2025). Together, these learner-related barriers underscore the critical importance of affective and psychological dimensions in English language instruction, calling for pedagogical responses that are sensitive to learners' emotional as well as linguistic needs.

Teacher-Related Barriers

Teacher-related barriers represent another critical factor affecting English language learning. The reviewed studies indicate that many teachers continue to rely on teacher-centered instruction and grammar-focused approaches, limiting opportunities for

communicative language use and authentic interaction. This persistence of traditional methods, despite the well-documented benefits of communicative language teaching, points to a structural gap between pedagogical knowledge and classroom practice, a gap that is particularly pronounced among teachers with limited access to professional development opportunities (Baluchzada, 2023; Wulandary & Amrullah, 2023).

Several studies further highlight insufficient professional development and limited technological competence among EFL teachers. As digital technologies become increasingly integrated into language education, teachers face challenges related to technology adoption, classroom management, and instructional design. Furthermore, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced both opportunities and challenges. These challenges are compounded by disparities in training, institutional support, and access to digital tools, which mean that teachers' capacity to use technology effectively varies considerably across contexts (Jaya & Susyla, 2024).

More recently, the rapid emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in education has introduced a further layer of complexity to teacher-related barriers. Although AI applications, such as AI-powered writing assistants, intelligent grammar checkers, and conversational chatbots, hold considerable promise for providing personalized feedback and adaptive learning experiences in EFL settings, many teachers lack adequate preparation to evaluate, select, and integrate these tools in pedagogically informed and contextually appropriate ways. Without critical reflective engagement with AI, teachers risk either over-relying on these tools without evaluating their pedagogical suitability, or dismissing them entirely due to unfamiliarity. This creates a new professional development priority that teacher education programs have yet to fully address (Thao et al., 2023a).

Institutional Barriers

Institutional constraints continue to impede effective English language learning across many EFL settings. Common barriers identified in the reviewed literature include large class sizes, insufficient instructional time, inadequate teaching materials, and curriculum-related limitations.

Large class sizes represent one of the most widely reported institutional challenges. Overcrowded classrooms significantly reduce opportunities for individualized instruction, targeted feedback, and meaningful student-teacher interaction. In classes of forty or more

learners, a common reality in many developing-country EFL contexts, it becomes structurally difficult for teachers to monitor individual progress, identify learner difficulties, or provide the differentiated support that heterogeneous learner populations require (Fonkamo & Zeru, 2022). Similarly, inadequate learning resources limit students' exposure to authentic language input, constraining the diversity and quality of learning experiences that teachers can offer.

Curriculum constraints present an additional institutional barrier, particularly in contexts where national examinations drive instructional priorities. When teachers are compelled to prioritize test preparation over communicative practice, the result is often a narrowing of pedagogical approaches that reduces opportunities for meaningful language use (Gudeta, 2022). These institutional realities highlight the importance of equipping teachers with the reflective capacity to work creatively and adaptively within structural constraints rather than being immobilized by them.

Sociocultural Barriers

Sociocultural factors emerged as a prominent theme across the reviewed studies, reflecting the deeply context-embedded nature of English language teaching and learning. In many EFL settings, English is rarely used outside the formal classroom environment, resulting in limited exposure and reduced opportunities for authentic communication. The dominance of local languages in everyday life, social interaction, and media consumption often restricts learners' opportunities to consolidate and extend their English proficiency beyond instructional contexts. Mother-tongue influence further manifests in learners' pronunciation patterns, grammatical structures, and vocabulary choices, creating persistent transfer errors that can be difficult to remediate through classroom instruction alone (Alisoy, 2024).

Beyond linguistic factors, some learners perceive English as a culturally alien or ideologically charged language that conflicts with their local cultural identities and values. Such perceptions may reduce intrinsic motivation and emotional investment in language learning, as learners struggle to relate to content and contexts that feel distant from their lived experiences (Thao et al., 2023a). These dynamics are particularly significant in contexts where the pedagogical traditions embedded in English language curricula, including norms for classroom participation, questioning, and critical discourse, differ markedly from local educational cultures. Teachers who are sensitive to these sociocultural tensions are better positioned to develop

learning experiences that honor learners' identities while also fostering intercultural communicative competence.

Moreover, some learners perceive English as a difficult or foreign subject disconnected from their cultural identities and daily experiences. Such perceptions may reduce motivation and engagement in language learning activities. These findings support contextual and sociocultural theories of language learning, which emphasize the importance of meaningful interaction within authentic social environments.

Technological Barriers

The increasing role of technology in education has generated both significant opportunities and considerable challenges for EFL teaching and learning. The reviewed literature consistently reports that inadequate technological infrastructure, unstable internet connectivity, and unequal access to digital devices continue to affect English language learning, particularly in rural and under-resourced contexts.

Digital literacy disparities constitute an equally important barrier. Both teachers and learners often experience difficulties in navigating online learning platforms, utilizing digital language-learning tools effectively, and managing the technical requirements of technology-enhanced instruction. These challenges are not simply a matter of access to devices, they reflect deeper inequalities in learners' and teachers' prior exposure to technology and the quality of technological support available within their educational institutions (Jaya & Susyla, 2024). Furthermore, the increasing prevalence of AI-powered language learning tools introduces additional complexity, as teachers must develop the critical literacy to evaluate which tools are pedagogically appropriate, contextually suitable, and ethically responsible before integrating them into their practice.

Taken together, the five categories of contextual barriers identified in this review reveal a complex, multi-layered landscape of challenges that EFL teachers and learners navigate simultaneously. Crucially, these barriers do not operate independently: learner anxiety is shaped by teacher practices and institutional norms; technological limitations intersect with sociocultural inequalities; and curriculum constraints compound teacher-related challenges by restricting pedagogical innovation. This interconnected nature of contextual barriers underscores the inadequacy of addressing any single barrier in isolation and points to the need for a holistic, adaptive pedagogical framework. The following Discussion section examines

how reflective teaching can serve as such a framework, enabling teachers to identify, interpret, and respond to these layered contextual realities in systematic and evidence-informed ways.

Discussion

An important finding emerging from this review is that contextual barriers rarely occur in isolation. Learner anxiety may be exacerbated by teacher practices, institutional limitations, sociocultural constraints, and technological challenges. Therefore, addressing a single barrier is often insufficient (Farrell, 2022). Reflective teaching provides a holistic framework for understanding and responding to these complex, interrelated barriers. Through continuous cycles of planning, action, observation, reflection, and revision, teachers can identify contextual challenges and develop context-sensitive solutions (Rozimela et al., 2024).

Based on the reviewed literature, reflective teaching contributes to improved awareness of learner needs, adaptation of teaching methods to local contexts, more effective integration of technology, development of contextualized learning materials, and enhanced learner engagement and participation. Consequently, reflective teaching should not be viewed merely as a professional development strategy but as a pedagogical approach that enables teachers to navigate the complex realities of English language learning in diverse educational contexts.

Reflective Teaching and Learner-related Barriers

The persistence of learner-related barriers including low motivation, language anxiety, and vocabulary limitations, underscores the importance of affective and psychological dimensions in English language instruction. Reflective teaching enables teachers to identify students' affective needs through systematic classroom observations, learners' journals, and reflective discussions (Habtamu & Belay, 2023). By critically examining their own interaction patterns, feedback practices, and classroom climate, reflective teachers can identify conditions that inadvertently heighten learner anxiety, such as error correction practices that are too public or frequent, or participation structures that pressure learners to perform before they feel ready.

Through sustained reflection on students' responses and participation patterns, teachers can develop more supportive learning environments that encourage risk-taking and active communication (Ahsanu et al., 2025). This finding aligns with Lamb et al. (2023), who identified motivation as one of the strongest predictors of language

learning success, and with Salbaş and Ekmekci (2025), who demonstrated that a supportive classroom environment significantly increases students' willingness to communicate. Importantly, the relationship between reflective teaching and learner motivation is bidirectional: as teachers adapt their practices in response to reflective insights, learners experience greater relevance and responsiveness in their instruction, which in turn strengthens their engagement and investment in language learning.

Reflective teachers who systematically evaluate their classroom climate and interaction patterns, for instance, through reflective journaling, peer observation feedback, or analysis of student participation data, are therefore better positioned to make evidence-informed adjustments that reduce anxiety and foster learner confidence over time (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024). These adjustments may include redesigning error correction routines, introducing collaborative speaking tasks that reduce individual exposure, or developing vocabulary-building activities grounded in learners' familiar cultural contexts.

Reflective Teaching and Teacher-related Barriers

The finding that many teachers continue to rely on teacher-centered, grammar-focused instruction despite the well-documented benefits of communicative approaches points to a persistent gap between pedagogical knowledge and classroom practice. Reflective teaching addresses this gap directly by encouraging educators to critically examine the alignment between their instructional decisions and their students' actual learning outcomes. Through systematic reflection, whether individually via teaching journals, or collaboratively through peer observation and professional learning communities, teachers can identify ineffective or habitual practices, develop more adaptive instructional approaches, and build the metacognitive awareness necessary for context-responsive teaching (Farrell, 2023; Wulandary & Amrullah, 2023).

This capacity for self-directed pedagogical renewal is particularly significant in contexts where formal professional development opportunities are limited or infrequent. Kusumarasdyati and Retnaningdyah (2024) demonstrated that structured reflection improved Indonesian EFL teachers' instructional strategies and enhanced their ability to respond adaptively to classroom challenges, even in the absence of external support structures. Karim et al. (2024) similarly found that systematic reflection on critical teaching incidents strengthened teachers' professional awareness and

decision-making skills, cultivating the pedagogical agility that effective teaching in complex EFL contexts requires.

With respect to technology and AI, reflective teaching offers a particularly valuable orientation. Rather than adopting digital tools uncritically or rejecting them out of unfamiliarity, reflective teachers develop the disposition to critically evaluate technology's pedagogical suitability before, during, and after integration. Thao et al. (2023b) argue that teachers who engage in reflective evaluation of their digital practices are more likely to integrate technology in pedagogically informed and contextually appropriate ways. In the context of AI, this means developing the critical literacy to assess which AI tools genuinely support language learning goals, such as AI chatbots for low-stakes conversational practice, or AI feedback tools for writing development, and which may undermine the development of learners' autonomous language competence. This reflective orientation toward AI positions teachers as critical agents rather than passive consumers of educational technology.

Reflective Teaching and Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers such as large class sizes, limited resources, and curriculum constraints highlight the influence of broader educational systems on language learning outcomes. While teachers may have limited authority to change institutional policies, reflective teaching enables them to adapt instructional strategies creatively within existing constraints (Fonkamo & Zeru, 2022).

In practical terms, reflective teachers who systematically analyze their classroom data are able to identify structural problems and generate innovative pedagogical solutions. For example, a teacher reflecting on participation data from an overcrowded classroom might recognize that whole-class interaction structures favor more confident learners and disadvantage quieter students. In response, that teacher might introduce structured peer learning activities, such as think-pair-share or small-group discussion tasks, that redistribute participation opportunities more equitably without requiring individualized teacher attention for each learner. Similarly, teachers facing limited access to authentic materials might develop locally sourced or student-generated texts that simultaneously address the resource gap and increase learner engagement by connecting instruction to students lived experiences.

Gudeta (2022) demonstrated precisely this dynamic, finding that EFL teachers in Ethiopia who engaged in systematic reflective practice were more capable of generating innovative pedagogical solutions even when operating in severely resource-constrained settings. These

teachers did not wait for institutional conditions to improve before adapting their practice; instead, they used structured reflection to transform constraints into design challenges, discovering creative workarounds through the process of reflective problem-solving. Thus, reflective practice serves as a mechanism for transforming institutional constraints into opportunities for pedagogical innovation, supporting teachers' professional agency within challenging structural conditions (Rochsantiningsih et al., 2025).

Reflective Teaching and Sociocultural Barriers

Sociocultural barriers, including limited out-of-class English exposure, mother-tongue influence, and learners' perception of English as culturally distant or ideologically alien, require teachers to adopt culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Reflective teaching supports this by cultivating teachers' sensitivity to the sociocultural dimensions of their classrooms and prompting them to continually evaluate the cultural relevance of their instructional materials, task designs, and classroom norms (Alisoy, 2024).

Ratri et al. (2025) and Thao et al. (2023b) emphasize that grounding instruction in learners' local cultural contexts not only reduces the sociocultural distance between students and the target language but also increases motivation and authentic communicative engagement. When teachers draw systematically on their students' cultural resources, community practices, and lived experiences as content for language learning, they create conditions in which learners can engage with English on their own terms, as a tool for expressing their own identities and perspectives, rather than as a foreign cultural imposition. Reflective teachers who are attentive to these dynamics are more effective in designing learning experiences that feel personally relevant and communicatively meaningful (Rozimela et al., 2024). This finding is particularly relevant for curriculum and material development, where contextualization has become an essential principle for promoting meaningful learning.

Reflective Teaching and Technological Barriers

Technology alone does not guarantee improved learning outcomes. Effective technology integration requires adequate infrastructure, meaningful digital competence among both teachers and learners, and pedagogically informed implementation that is responsive to the specific needs and constraints of a given educational context (Yang et al., 2025). Reflective teaching can assist educators in evaluating the suitability and effectiveness of digital tools within specific educational contexts. Rather than adopting technology

uncritically, reflective teachers make informed decisions based on learners' needs, institutional realities, and available resources (Jaya & Susyla, 2024).

Zadorozhnyy et al. (2025) found that EFL teachers who engaged in reflective evaluation of their digital practices were better equipped to navigate ecological barriers to technology integration, such as unequal access and digital literacy gaps. These teachers were also more likely to develop hybrid approaches that combined digital and non-digital resources in contextually appropriate ways, thereby maximizing learning opportunities within existing technological constraints. Rather than defaulting either to uncritical technology adoption or to technology avoidance, reflective teachers use structured inquiry to identify which technological tools genuinely enhance learning in their specific contexts, and which introduce complexity without corresponding pedagogical benefit.

In contexts where AI-powered language learning tools are becoming increasingly available, including intelligent tutoring systems, AI writing feedback platforms, and conversational AI chatbots, reflective teaching is particularly valuable for supporting critical and contextually appropriate AI integration. Teachers who habitually reflect on their technology use are more likely to ask the right evaluative questions: Does this AI tool provide feedback that is accurate and pedagogically sound? Does it support the development of learners' autonomous language competence, or does it risk creating dependency? Is it accessible to all learners in the class, or will it exacerbate existing technological inequalities? By embedding these reflective questions into their professional practice, EFL teachers can position themselves as informed and critical mediators of technological change rather than passive recipients of it (Thao et al., 2023a).

A Contextual Reflective Teaching Framework

Drawing on the synthesis of findings and discussion presented above, this review proposes a Contextual Reflective Teaching Framework that conceptualizes learner-related, teacher-related, institutional, sociocultural, and technological barriers as interconnected factors that together constitute the contextual landscape of EFL teaching. Within this framework, reflective teaching functions as a mediating process through which teachers systematically identify contextual challenges, adapt their pedagogical practices in evidence-informed ways, and work toward improved language learning outcomes. The framework is presented in Table 2 below.

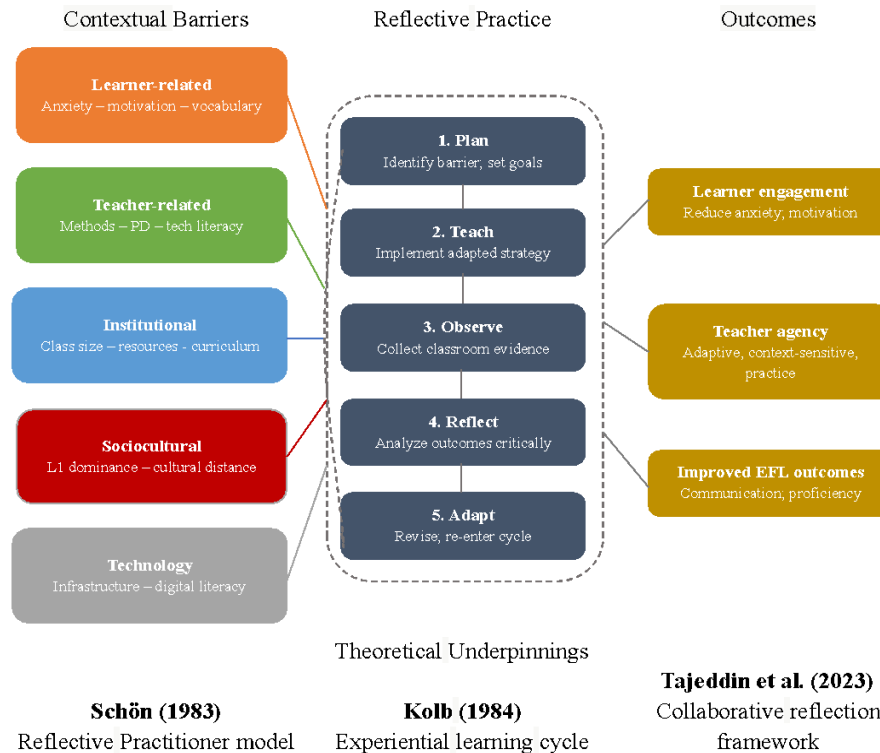
Table 2. The Contextual Reflective Teaching Framework

Contextual barrier	Reflective teaching process	Pedagogical adaptation
Learner-related		
Language anxiety, low motivation, limited confidence, vocabulary gaps	Reflection-on-action via learner journals, classroom observation, and reflective discussion of participation patterns	Differentiated instruction; affective scaffolding; low-threat communicative tasks; identity-affirming vocabulary activities
Teacher-related		
Traditional methods, limited professional development, insufficient AI/tech literacy	Reflection-in-action; peer observation; critical incident analysis; structured self-evaluation using teaching journals	Communicative language teaching approaches; critical and informed evaluation of AI tools before classroom integration
Institutional		
Large class sizes, limited resources, curriculum constraints, insufficient instructional time	Evidence-based review of classroom data; action research cycles; collaborative problem-solving with colleagues	Peer learning structures (think-pair-share, group tasks); creative resource redesign using local/student-generated materials; teacher agency within constraints
Sociocultural		
L1 dominance, cultural distance, limited L2 exposure, negative attitudes	Collaborative reflection; culturally responsive material review; critical examination of cultural norms vs. communicative teaching expectations	Culturally contextualized and locally grounded materials; identity-affirming pedagogy; hybrid approaches balancing local norms with communicative goals
Technological		
Infrastructure gaps, digital literacy disparities, unequal device access	Reflective evaluation of digital tool suitability, accessibility, and pedagogical outcomes before and after use	Hybrid digital and non-digital strategies; context-appropriate technology selection; critical AI literacy for evaluating AI-powered tools

While previous studies have largely examined contextual barriers independently, focusing on motivation, or technology, or

institutional constraints in isolation, this framework integrates these dimensions into a comprehensive model that positions reflective teaching as a context-responsive strategy capable of addressing the full complexity of EFL instruction (Farrell, 2022; Rozimela et al., 2024). framework makes three specific theoretical contributions. First, it extends Schön (2017) reflective practitioner model by situating both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action within the specific multi-layered contextual realities of EFL teaching environments, rather than treating reflection as a generic professional practice applicable across all contexts equally. Second, it builds upon Kolb (2014) Experiential Learning Cycle by incorporating contextual barrier identification as a distinct and explicit phase of the reflective process, one that precedes and shapes subsequent cycles of pedagogical adaptation and evaluation. Third, following Tajeddin et al. (2025), the framework embeds collaborative reflection as a structural mechanism for shared sense-making and collective problem-solving among EFL teachers, recognizing that many contextual barriers are systemic in nature and therefore require collective rather than purely individual responses.

Figure 1. Contextual Reflective Teaching Framework



The proposed framework has important implications for both teacher education and professional development. Pre-service teacher education programs should incorporate structured opportunities for reflective practice that explicitly engage student teachers with the contextual realities of EFL classrooms, including the sociocultural, institutional, and technological factors that shape teaching and learning. In-service professional development initiatives, meanwhile, should move beyond one-off training workshops toward sustained, collaborative reflective communities in which teachers can collectively analyze contextual barriers, share adaptive strategies, and evaluate the outcomes of their pedagogical adjustments over time. By positioning reflective teaching not as an additional professional requirement but as a fundamental orientation toward the complexities of EFL work, these programs can equip teachers with the adaptive capacity, critical awareness, and professional agency that effective teaching in diverse and challenging contexts demands.

CONCLUSION

This study examined reflective teaching as a strategy for overcoming contextual barriers in English language learning through a qualitative literature review of recent studies published between 2022 and 2025. The review revealed that EFL classrooms continue to face numerous contextual challenges, including low student motivation, diverse proficiency levels, limited educational resources, sociocultural constraints, and technological challenges. These barriers significantly influence the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes and require adaptive pedagogical responses.

The findings indicate that reflective teaching provides an effective framework for addressing such challenges. Through systematic reflection, teachers become more aware of contextual realities, critically evaluate instructional practices, and develop context-responsive pedagogical strategies. Reflective practice promotes instructional adaptability, professional growth, collaborative learning, and evidence-based decision-making. Consequently, reflective teaching enables educators to transform contextual barriers into opportunities for instructional improvement and innovation.

Therefore, it is recommended that educational institutions support the integration of reflective teaching into teachers' professional development programs and encourage regular reflective practices in EFL classrooms. Future studies may also explore the long-term impact of reflective teaching implementation in different educational contexts.

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