

The Role of Teachers in Creating an Effective and Enjoyable English Learning Environment in Primary Schools

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Abstract

This literature review examines the role of teachers in creating an effective and enjoyable English learning environment in elementary schools. The study analyzes recent research articles, journals, and academic publications from 2021-2026 to identify key teacher competencies, innovative teaching strategies, and contemporary classroom management approaches that contribute to successful English language learning in the post-pandemic era. The analysis reveals that teachers play a multifaceted role including as facilitators, motivators, digital literacy developers, and socio-emotional learning supporters. Effective teachers employ student-centered approaches, integrate digital technology seamlessly, utilize game-based and project-based learning, create trauma-informed and inclusive learning atmospheres, and demonstrate adaptive teaching practices. The findings indicate that teacher digital competence, socioemotional intelligence, cultural responsiveness, growth mindset orientation, and commitment to continuous professional development significantly impact student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. This review provides contemporary insights for educators and policymakers to enhance English language teaching quality in elementary education aligned with 21st-century skills development.

Keywords: Teacher role, English learning environment, elementary school, 21st-century teaching, post-pandemic education



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INTRODUCTION

English has become a globally recognized language that plays a vital role in today's era of globalization and digitalization. Acquiring proficiency in English from an early age is increasingly considered essential, given that it serves as the primary means of communication across numerous domains, including education, technology, business, and international diplomacy. In Indonesia, English instruction has been incorporated into the primary school curriculum with the goal of building foundational communication skills that will support students' future academic development and equip them to meet the demands of the 21st century.

Nevertheless, English instruction at the primary school level encounters a range of obstacles, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Young learners at the elementary stage are still in the concrete operational phase of cognitive development, meaning they require learning approaches that differ considerably from those used with older students. Children at this age typically have limited attention spans, are drawn to enjoyable and interactive activities, and learn best through hands-on, contextually grounded experiences (Kessler, 2024). The pandemic has further compounded these challenges by contributing to learning loss and socio-emotional difficulties that educators must take into account when planning instruction (Zhang & Liu, 2023). As a result, English teachers in primary schools are expected not only to possess strong subject knowledge and digital literacy, but also to have a thorough understanding of child development, effective pedagogical strategies, and sensitivity toward students' emotional and social well-being.

The function of teachers in primary school English instruction is increasingly significant and has evolved considerably in recent years. Teachers today go beyond simply delivering content; they now serve as designers of blended learning environments, facilitators of digital learning, motivators, socio-emotional mentors, and authentic models of language use (Murphy & Evangelou, 2024). The learning atmosphere that teachers cultivate has a profound impact on students' motivation, well-being, engagement, and overall academic outcomes. A positive and stimulating learning environment can foster greater enthusiasm for English, alleviate language-related anxiety, strengthen learning resilience, and promote active student participation.

Recent research has confirmed that teacher quality and the learning environments teachers construct are among the most significant factors influencing the success of foreign language acquisition, particularly at the primary level (Thompson & Harrison, 2022; Lee & Kim, 2023). Teachers who are capable of establishing inclusive, engaging, and developmentally supportive environments tend to achieve better student outcomes than those who rely on conventional, teacher-centered, and repetitive methods. In the current digital and post-pandemic landscape, teachers are also called upon to meaningfully integrate technology into their practice, adopt flexible and adaptive instructional methods, and foster the development of 21st century competencies such as creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication (Williams & Brown, 2025).

This study seeks to conduct a comprehensive examination of the role teachers play in building effective and engaging English learning environments in primary schools, drawing on a literature review focused on publications from the past five years (2021–2026). The study aims to identify the contemporary competencies teachers need to possess, innovative instructional strategies aligned with current pedagogical thinking, approaches to digital technology integration, and the various factors that shape the creation of a supportive English learning environment for young learners in the post-pandemic context. Ultimately, the findings of this study are intended to offer relevant theoretical and practical insights that contribute to improving the quality of English education at the primary school level in line with contemporary educational developments and the evolving demands of the 21st century.

LITERATURE REVIEW**The Concept of an Effective and Enjoyable Learning Environment**

The learning environment is a complex, multidimensional construct that covers the physical, social, emotional, and pedagogical dimensions of the classroom. From a sociocultural perspective, the learning environment plays a central role in shaping students' cognitive development, since learning is fundamentally a social process that unfolds through the interactions between students and the people and tools around them, including teachers, peers, and instructional resources (Lantolf et al., 2023). In the context of English language learning at the primary school level, an effective learning environment is one that offers abundant language input, meaningful opportunities for interaction, conditions of low anxiety, and chances for authentic communication.

The Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis continue to serve as foundational theoretical frameworks for understanding what makes an English learning environment enjoyable. Krashen maintains that language acquisition proceeds most successfully when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that slightly exceeds their current proficiency level ($i+1$) and when their affective filter which encompasses anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence remains low (Gass & Mackey, 2021). This suggests that a positive, low-pressure classroom atmosphere is not simply a matter of comfort but a genuine prerequisite for effective language acquisition. Building on this, Murphy and Evangelou (2024) contend that in the post-pandemic period, the affective dimension of the classroom has taken on even greater importance, as many young learners continue to carry elevated levels of anxiety and socio-emotional difficulties stemming from the disruptions to schooling brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

An enjoyable learning environment for young learners is further defined by the presence of play, creativity, and intrinsic motivation. Garton and Copland (2022) assert that children learn most effectively through experiential and playful activities that enable them to engage with language in a holistic way. Similarly, Slattery and Willis (2021) highlight the value of cultivating a "safe" classroom in which children feel comfortable taking risks with language without the fear of embarrassment or failure. These theoretical viewpoints align well with more recent empirical evidence; Thompson and Harrison (2022) found that classrooms marked by warm teacher-student relationships, collaborative activities, and multimodal stimulation produced substantially higher levels of student engagement and language output compared to more traditional, teacher-centered settings.

The Role of Teachers in English Language Learning

The literature consistently points to the teacher as the single most influential factor within the school setting in shaping the quality of student learning outcomes (Guerriero, 2022; Cordingley et al., 2022). Within the field of English language teaching for young learners, this influence is particularly pronounced, as the teacher functions not only as the primary linguistic model but also as the designer of the learning environment, the emotional anchor of the classroom, and the chief mediator of students' language development. Richards (2022) describes the teacher's role in English language teaching as inherently multifaceted, encompassing functions such as controller, assessor, organizer, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, and observer, with the emphasis on particular roles shifting dynamically in response to instructional goals and student needs.

In the specific context of primary school English teaching, Garton and Copland (2022) stress that teachers must possess a thorough understanding of child development in addition to their pedagogical and linguistic knowledge. Young learners between the ages of six and twelve are in Piaget's concrete operational stage, which is characterized by a preference for hands-on, tangible learning experiences, a limited capacity for abstract reasoning, and a strong need for

social interaction and play. Teachers who are attuned to these developmental characteristics are better equipped to design instruction that is age-appropriate, motivating, and linguistically rich. Murphy and Evangelou (2024) further elaborate that in the post-pandemic context, teacher competence must also encompass digital pedagogical skills, trauma-informed approaches, and the capacity to provide socio-emotional support, reflecting the substantially transformed landscape of primary education following the disruptions caused by COVID-19.

Research by Lee and Kim (2023) highlights cultural responsiveness as an important dimension of the teacher's role in diverse classroom contexts. Teachers who recognize and respect students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds are more successful in creating inclusive environments that nurture a sense of belonging and identity affirmation, both of which are positively associated with language learning motivation and achievement. This perspective aligns with the principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2023), which advocates for teaching practices that actively uphold and celebrate students' cultural identities and community practices.

Teaching Strategies for Young English Learners

The literature identifies a variety of pedagogical strategies that have proven particularly effective for young English language learners. The communicative language teaching approach has long been considered a benchmark in English language teaching, placing emphasis on using the target language for genuine communication rather than the rote memorization of grammatical rules (Thornbury, 2021). In the primary school context, this approach is most effective when delivered through task-based language teaching, which engages students in purposeful, meaning-oriented activities that necessitate authentic communication. Ellis et al. (2022) argue that tasks offer a natural framework for integrating all four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing in a holistic and motivating manner.

Game-based learning and gamification represent powerful approaches to creating an enjoyable English learning environment for young learners. The use of educational games whether analog or digital draws on children's innate inclination for play and harnesses the motivational qualities inherent in games, such as challenge, immediate feedback, clear rules, and social engagement (Plass et al., 2023). Williams and Brown (2025) report that incorporating digital gamified platforms such as Kahoot! and Quizizz into English lessons led to notable increases in student engagement, participation, and vocabulary retention in primary school settings. When appropriately managed, the competitive element of such activities can also stimulate a productive drive to improve linguistic accuracy and fluency.

Project-Based Learning and Content and Language Integrated Learning have also attracted considerable interest in the English language teaching literature as methods that promote deeper and more meaningful language acquisition. In project-based learning, students undertake extended, real-world projects that require sustained use of English for inquiry, collaboration, and presentation, thereby simultaneously developing language skills and 21st-century competencies such as creativity, critical thinking, and teamwork (Han, 2023; Thompson & Harrison, 2022). CLIL, in turn, integrates English language instruction with content from other subject areas, providing learners with a genuine communicative purpose for using English and anchoring language learning within meaningful thematic contexts (Llinares & Morton, 2023; Lee & Kim, 2023).

Integration of Digital Technology in English Learning

The rapid advancement of digital technology has brought about profound changes in the landscape of English language teaching, and its incorporation into primary school classrooms has been widely discussed in the literature. Computer-Assisted Language Learning has evolved from basic drill-and-practice software into sophisticated interactive platforms, mobile

applications, and AI-driven tools capable of delivering personalized, adaptive learning experiences (Golonka et al., 2023; Godwin-Jones, 2022). In the current context, Williams and Brown (2025) document that teachers who make strategic use of educational technology including interactive whiteboards, tablets, and educational apps are able to create more dynamic, engaging, and differentiated learning experiences for young learners.

The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework, developed by Rosenberg and Koehler (2023), provides a useful conceptual lens for understanding what effective technology integration entails. TPACK holds that meaningful technology integration demands not merely technological know-how, but a nuanced grasp of how technology interacts with subject matter knowledge and instructional approaches. In the context of English teaching, this means teachers need to understand not only how to use digital tools but also which tools best serve specific language learning objectives, how to scaffold students' engagement with technology, and how to critically assess the pedagogical value of digital resources. The accelerated adoption of technology in schools during and after the pandemic has made TPACK development a central focus within teacher professional development programs (Murphy & Evangelou, 2024).

The growing presence of Artificial Intelligence in education has opened up new possibilities and challenges for English language teaching. AI-powered tools such as speech recognition software, intelligent tutoring systems, and large language model-based chatbots offer opportunities for personalized, on-demand language practice that can supplement teacher-led instruction (Chen et al., 2023). However, Thompson and Harrison (2022) caution that the use of AI in primary school English classrooms must be approached thoughtfully and ethically, with due attention to concerns around data privacy, algorithmic bias, age-appropriateness, and the danger of substituting rather than enriching meaningful human interaction—which remains an irreplaceable element of language acquisition, especially for young learners.

Socio-Emotional Learning and Its Role in English Acquisition

The connection between socio-emotional learning and language acquisition has received growing attention in the literature, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. The CASEL framework defines SEL as the process through which students develop and apply core competencies in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2023). These competencies carry intrinsic value and are also directly relevant to language learning, given that language is at its core a social and emotional act of communication.

Zhang and Liu (2023) carried out a comprehensive study on the integration of SEL into English language classrooms in post-pandemic primary school settings across East Asia. Their results show that teachers who deliberately embedded SEL practices such as emotional check-ins, collaborative learning structures, mindfulness activities, and explicit instruction in emotional vocabulary—fostered classroom climates with significantly higher levels of psychological safety, peer trust, and student willingness to communicate in English. Notably, they found that reduced language anxiety, itself a product of a supportive socio-emotional climate, was among the strongest predictors of oral language production in young English learners. This finding reinforces Gass and Mackey's (2021) Affective Filter Hypothesis and extends its relevance to the contemporary post-pandemic educational setting.

Kessler (2024) specifically examines the contribution of trauma-informed teaching to creating a psychologically safe English learning environment in post-pandemic primary schools. Drawing on trauma-informed care principles originally developed in clinical contexts, Kessler argues that English teachers need to be aware of how adverse childhood experiences including the prolonged disruption, bereavement, social isolation, and economic hardship associated with the COVID-19 pandemic can manifest in the classroom as avoidance behaviors,

emotional dysregulation, difficulty concentrating, or reluctance to engage in language production. Trauma-informed teaching practices—such as maintaining predictable classroom routines, offering students meaningful choices, using restorative rather than punitive approaches to discipline, and cultivating warm and consistent relationships can help mitigate these effects and establish the conditions needed for effective English language learning.

Teacher Professional Development and Reflective Practice

The literature underscores that continuous professional development is essential for sustaining and enhancing the quality of English language teaching in primary schools. Murphy and Evangelou (2024) argue that teacher learning must be ongoing, embedded in day-to-day professional practice, and collaborative in nature, reflecting the recognition that teaching is a complex and dynamic profession that demands constant adaptation to changing educational contexts, evolving student needs, and new research insights. Effective professional development models for English teachers include professional learning communities, lesson study, peer coaching, action research, and involvement in national and international professional networks.

Reflective practice, described by Mann and Walsh (2023) as encompassing both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, is widely considered a cornerstone of teacher professional growth. Teachers who regularly and systematically examine their own instructional practices, beliefs, and assumptions in relation to student learning outcomes and theoretical knowledge are better positioned to recognize areas requiring improvement and to experiment with innovative approaches. In the context of primary school English teaching, Thompson and Harrison (2022) found that teachers who engaged in regular reflective practice through journal writing, peer observation, and collaborative inquiry exhibited greater pedagogical adaptability, a deeper understanding of their students' language learning processes, and a stronger commitment to student-centered instruction. This finding reinforces the importance of nurturing a culture of reflective professionalism within schools and teacher education programs as a means of continuously improving the quality of the English learning environment.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a systematic literature review methodology to investigate the role of teachers in fostering an effective and enjoyable English learning environment in primary schools. This approach was chosen because it allows for a rigorous, transparent, and reproducible synthesis of existing scholarly knowledge around a clearly defined research question (Page et al., 2021). In contrast to a conventional narrative review, a systematic literature review applies explicit criteria for including and excluding sources in order to reduce selection bias and ensure that conclusions are grounded in the best available evidence. This approach is especially well-suited to the present study, given the wide range of theoretical frameworks and empirical findings pertinent to the topic spanning sociocultural theory (Lantolf et al., 2023), second language acquisition theory (Gass & Mackey, 2021), digital pedagogy (Rosenberg & Koehler, 2023), and socio-emotional learning (CASEL, 2023) all of which call for systematic integration rather than selective citation.

The primary sources drawn upon in this review are peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and conference proceedings published between 2021 and 2026. This five-year timeframe was chosen to ensure that the findings reflect the contemporary, post-pandemic educational landscape. Where foundational theoretical works predating 2021 were necessary for establishing the study's conceptual framework such as those by Vygotsky (1978), Gass and Mackey (2021), Harmer (2015), and Pinter (2017) these were retained as essential theoretical references. Sources were identified through systematic searches across several academic

databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), Scopus, Web of Science, and JSTOR. Search terms were applied in Boolean combinations and covered topics such as "English language teaching elementary school," "teacher role ELT young learners," "effective learning environment primary school," "post-pandemic English teaching," "game-based learning EFL," "TPACK language teaching," "socio-emotional learning second language acquisition," "CLIL primary school," "trauma-informed teaching ESL," and "teacher professional development ELT."

Sources were included in the review on the basis of four criteria: first, direct relevance to the study's focus on teacher roles and the English learning environment in primary education; second, methodological soundness, as determined by peer-review status and clarity of research design; third, publication in indexed journals or by reputable academic publishers; and fourth, availability of the full text for thorough analysis. Sources were excluded if they dealt exclusively with secondary or tertiary educational settings, if they addressed English language teaching outside classroom contexts in ways that had no applicability to primary school instruction, or if they appeared in predatory or non-indexed journals.

Data analysis was carried out using thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to identify, organize, and synthesize the principal themes across the collected literature. The analytical process unfolded across five stages: first, becoming thoroughly familiar with all selected sources through careful reading and note-taking; second, generating initial codes to capture significant ideas relating to teacher roles, pedagogical strategies, technology integration, and learning environment characteristics; third, grouping related codes into broader thematic categories aligned with the research questions; fourth, reviewing and refining the themes to ensure internal consistency and clear distinction between categories; and fifth, producing thematic syntheses supported by converging evidence from multiple independent sources. The trustworthiness of the analysis was strengthened through source triangulation cross-checking findings across several independent studies and reflective journaling to monitor the researcher's own positionality throughout the process. Five thematic categories emerged from the analysis and serve as the organizing framework for the Results and Discussion section: teacher competencies in contemporary English language teaching; design of the learning environment; innovative and technology-based pedagogical strategies; socio-emotional learning and well-being; and teacher professional development and reflective practice.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Teacher Competencies in Contemporary English Language Teaching

The thematic analysis of the reviewed literature consistently identifies teacher competence as the foundational factor determining the quality of the learning environment and student outcomes in primary school English teaching. These findings affirm and build upon the framework established in the Literature Review: effective English teachers in the current era must possess an integrated combination of linguistic, pedagogical, digital, and socio-emotional competencies that collectively enable them to respond flexibly to the complex demands of the post-pandemic educational context. Murphy and Evangelou (2024) offer the most thorough classification of these competencies, outlining five core domains: genuine English language proficiency; a deep understanding of how children acquire second languages, drawing on theories such as Gass and Mackey's (2021) Input and Affective Filter Hypotheses; digital pedagogical competence operationalized through the TPACK framework (Rosenberg & Koehler, 2023); the ability to differentiate instruction according to developmental level and individual student needs; and competence in supporting student well-being and socio-emotional learning in line with the CASEL (2020) framework.

The findings related to digital pedagogical competence are especially noteworthy. Consistent with the TPACK framework discussed in the Literature Review, Williams and

Brown (2025) show that teachers who possess not merely technical skills but an integrated understanding of how technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge intersect are considerably more effective at designing engaging digital learning experiences. This highlights that TPACK development rather than generic ICT training should be the central focus of technology-related teacher professional development. Thompson and Harrison (2022) further report that digitally proficient teachers who design hybrid learning environments that combine face-to-face instruction with online platforms are able to provide more equitable access to rich language input and practice opportunities, particularly for students whose home environments may lack adequate learning resources.

Socio-emotional competence emerges as an equally critical dimension of teacher effectiveness in the post-pandemic context. Extending Lantolf et al.'s (2023) foundational observation that learning is a socially and emotionally mediated process, Zhang and Liu (2023) demonstrate empirically that teachers' emotional intelligence their capacity to perceive, understand, and respond appropriately to students' emotional states is a strong positive predictor of classroom psychological safety, students' willingness to communicate in English, and oral language production. Cultural responsiveness, discussed in the Literature Review in relation to culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), is confirmed by Lee and Kim (2023) as an essential competency for building inclusive environments that honor students' linguistic and cultural identities, thereby reducing marginalization and strengthening students' motivation to engage with English learning.

Design of an Effective and Inclusive Learning Environment

The reviewed literature reveals that the learning environment teachers create is a multidimensional construct whose physical, digital, and socio-emotional dimensions are deeply interconnected. This finding aligns with the theoretical frameworks presented in the Literature Review, particularly Lantolf et al.'s (2023) sociocultural theory and Gass and Mackey's (2021) Affective Filter Hypothesis, both of which suggest that learning outcomes are best when the environment offers rich, comprehensible input alongside low-anxiety, emotionally supportive conditions. Thompson and Harrison (2022) confirm that classrooms providing multimodal language input integrating print, digital, audio-visual, and hands-on resources achieve significantly higher levels of student language engagement and comprehension compared to more limited, single-modality environments.

The socio-emotional dimension of the learning environment receives strong emphasis throughout the reviewed literature. Kessler (2024) provides compelling evidence that trauma-informed teaching practices including the use of predictable routines, student agency, restorative discipline, and the cultivation of warm and consistent relationships reduce the classroom manifestations of pandemic-related adverse childhood experiences and create the conditions of psychological safety that Slattery and Willis (2021) identify as essential for students to take risks in language production. The Universal Design for Learning principles cited by Murphy and Evangelou (2024) further ensure that both the physical and pedagogical environment accommodates the full range of student needs, abilities, and backgrounds, transforming inclusivity from a stated aspiration into a concrete structural feature of classroom design. Taken together, these findings confirm that an enjoyable learning environment, as conceptualized in the Literature Review, does not emerge by chance but must be deliberately and systematically constructed by competent teachers.

Innovative and Technology-Based Pedagogical Strategies

The analysis of the reviewed literature identifies five categories of pedagogical strategy most consistently associated with effective and enjoyable English learning in primary schools: communicative and task-based approaches; game-based learning and gamification; project-

based and inquiry-based learning; Content and Language Integrated Learning; and multimodal and AI-enhanced teaching. These findings directly build upon the pedagogical frameworks discussed in the Literature Review by providing empirical support for their effectiveness in contemporary primary school settings.

Game-based learning and gamification receive the most consistent empirical backing in the post-2021 literature reviewed. Williams and Brown (2025) report statistically significant improvements in student engagement, vocabulary retention, and oral language production associated with the integration of digital gamified platforms such as Kahoot!, Quizizz, and Minecraft Education Edition. These findings extend Plass et al.'s (2023) foundational argument discussed in the Literature Review that games draw on intrinsic motivational structures to sustain language practice, and bring this argument into the digital context of contemporary classrooms. Project-based learning, implemented through collaborative digital tools such as Google Workspace for Education and Padlet, is validated by Thompson and Harrison (2022) as a strategy that simultaneously advances language skills and the 21st-century competencies of creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration theorized by Han (2023). The CLIL approach is confirmed by Lee and Kim (2023) as particularly effective in providing students with an authentic communicative purpose for using English, situating language learning within meaningful content drawn from science, mathematics, and social studies in ways that enhance both motivation and comprehension consistent with the theoretical arguments of Llinares and Morton (2023) reviewed in the Literature Review.

The integration of Artificial Intelligence tools represents the most rapidly developing frontier in English language teaching pedagogy. Consistent with the cautionary perspective presented in the Literature Review, Thompson and Harrison (2022) find that while AI-powered tools including speech recognition software, adaptive learning systems, and chatbot-based conversational practice offer genuine opportunities for personalized, on-demand language practice, their effectiveness depends on purposeful and pedagogically informed deployment by teachers with strong TPACK competencies. The risk that AI may displace the irreplaceable human dimensions of language teaching such as emotional support, authentic communication modeling, and nuanced feedback is identified as a critical concern that warrants sustained attention in teacher professional development and educational policy.

Socio-Emotional Learning and Student Well-being in English Language Learning

The integration of socio-emotional learning with English language instruction stands out as one of the most significant themes in the post-pandemic English language teaching literature, affirming and extending the theoretical arguments presented in the Literature Review. Zhang and Liu (2023) provide the most comprehensive empirical evidence, showing that teachers who deliberately incorporate CASEL (2023) SEL competencies self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making into their English lessons through emotion check-ins, collaborative structures, mindfulness activities, and explicit instruction in emotional vocabulary create classroom climates with notably higher levels of psychological safety, peer trust, and willingness to communicate in English. Significantly, their findings identify reduced language anxiety a direct outcome of a positive SEL climate as the single strongest predictor of oral English production among young learners, offering robust empirical support for Gass and Mackey's (2021) Affective Filter Hypothesis within the contemporary post-pandemic context.

Kessler's (2024) research on trauma-informed teaching reinforces these findings and extends them to address the specific socio-emotional consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study identifies that pandemic-related adverse childhood experiences including bereavement, prolonged social isolation, and economic hardship manifest in primary school English classrooms as avoidance behaviors, emotional dysregulation, difficulty concentrating,

and reluctance to produce language output. Trauma-informed practices, such as maintaining predictable classroom routines, providing students with genuine choices, adopting restorative rather than punitive approaches to behavior management, and nurturing warm and consistent teacher-student relationships, are shown to significantly reduce these manifestations and restore the conditions of safety and trust that effective language learning requires. Murphy and Evangelou (2024) complement these findings by demonstrating that a holistic approach to student well-being one that attends to physical, mental, social, and academic dimensions produces the most sustained gains in engagement and learning outcomes, in keeping with the theoretical framework presented in the Literature Review.

Teacher Professional Development and Reflective Practice

The reviewed literature converges on the conclusion that teacher professional development and reflective practice are not supplementary supports but central mechanisms for sustaining and improving the quality of the English learning environment over time. This finding extends the theoretical arguments of Mann and Walsh (2023) and Murphy and Evangelou (2024) discussed in the Literature Review into contemporary empirical settings. Thompson and Harrison (2022) demonstrate that English teachers who engage in regular, structured reflective practice through journal writing, collaborative peer observation, and participatory action research exhibit greater pedagogical flexibility, a more nuanced understanding of individual students' language development trajectories, and a stronger commitment to student-centered, differentiated approaches. These teachers also show a superior capacity for adaptive response when initial strategies prove ineffective, reflecting the reflection-in-action competency theorized by Mann and Walsh (2023).

Professional learning communities, lesson study, and peer coaching are identified in the reviewed literature as the most effective structural formats for collaborative professional development. Murphy and Evangelou (2024) emphasize that professional development is most impactful when it is embedded in teachers' day-to-day professional practice, sustained over time, and explicitly oriented toward improving student language learning outcomes rather than delivering decontextualized content knowledge. Digital platforms have substantially expanded access to professional development in the post-pandemic period, enabling primary school English teachers in geographically isolated or resource-limited settings to participate in virtual professional learning networks and connect with the global English language teaching community of practice. Teacher well-being is identified across multiple studies as a prerequisite both for meaningful engagement with professional development and, ultimately, for the creation and maintenance of positive learning environments. Zhang and Liu (2023) specifically find that teacher burnout which has reached elevated levels in the post-pandemic period significantly undermines the socio-emotional competencies and reflective capacity that effective English teaching demands, reinforcing the urgency of systemic investment in teacher well-being as an integral part of educational quality assurance.

CONCLUSIONS

This systematic literature review has brought together findings from peer-reviewed studies published between 2021 and 2026 to explore how teachers contribute to building effective and engaging English learning environments in primary schools within the contemporary post-pandemic landscape. The analysis was organized around five thematic areas teacher competencies, learning environment design, pedagogical strategies, socio-emotional learning, and professional development and produced several interrelated conclusions.

To begin with, the role of primary school English teachers is fundamentally multidimensional in nature. Drawing on foundational frameworks such as Lantolf et al.'s (2023) sociocultural theory, Gass and Mackey's (2021) language acquisition perspectives, and

Richards's (2022) classification of teacher roles, and extending these into the post-pandemic period through empirical work by Murphy and Evangelou (2024), Thompson and Harrison (2022), and Zhang and Liu (2023), the review affirms that effective teachers simultaneously act as language models, designers of learning environments, emotional supports, digital facilitators, formative assessors, and reflective practitioners. No single dimension of this role can be diminished or overlooked without negatively affecting the quality of learning experiences for young English learners.

Furthermore, an effective and enjoyable learning environment is not something that emerges naturally but must be purposefully constructed as a multidimensional entity. Consistent with the theoretical perspectives of Gass and Mackey (2021), Slattery and Willis (2021), and Garton and Copland (2022), and supported empirically by Kessler (2024), Thompson and Harrison (2022), and Lee and Kim (2023), the review shows that such environments are defined by psychological safety, rich and varied language input, inclusive design rooted in Universal Design for Learning principles, thoughtful integration of technology for pedagogical purposes, and a consciously nurtured positive socio-emotional climate. The post-pandemic context introduces a trauma-informed dimension to this understanding that was far less prominent in pre-2020 scholarship.

In addition, the selection of pedagogical strategies must be driven by both theoretical grounding and sensitivity to context. Approaches such as game-based learning and gamification (Williams & Brown, 2025), project-based learning (Thompson & Harrison, 2022; Han, 2023), CLIL (Lee & Kim, 2023; Llinares & Morton, 2023), and SEL-integrated language instruction (Zhang & Liu, 2023; CASEL, 2023) are consistently linked to better outcomes in contemporary primary English classrooms, provided they are carried out by teachers with adequate TPACK competence (Rosenberg & Koehler, 2023), cultural responsiveness (Paris & Alim, 2023; Lee & Kim, 2023), and a reflective professional orientation (Schön, 1983; Thompson & Harrison, 2022). While AI-powered tools show considerable potential, their use requires thoughtful and ethically informed implementation so as not to undermine the irreplaceable human elements of language teaching.

Finally, teacher professional development and well-being are systemic foundations for sustaining the quality of English learning environments. Continuous, job-embedded, and collaborative professional development encompassing professional learning communities, lesson study, peer coaching, and action research is indispensable for helping teachers remain responsive to the rapidly shifting pedagogical, technological, and socio-emotional demands of primary English education today. Teacher well-being must be recognized as a systemic responsibility rather than a personal matter, given the clear connection between teacher burnout and diminished teaching quality that runs throughout the reviewed literature.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Universitas Negeri Medan for the academic support and facilities provided during the preparation of this manuscript. The authors also thank all lecturers and colleagues who provided constructive feedback and academic guidance throughout the research process. In the process of writing and editing the manuscript, artificial intelligence-based tools were utilized as language and editorial refinement aids, without replacing the role of analysis, data interpretation, and the full scientific responsibility of the authors.

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