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Classroom Guidance and Strategies to Support EAL Learners

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Abstract: English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners in U.S. higher education face multifaceted linguistic and academic challenges that require informed classroom guidance. This study adopts an integrated mixed-methods approach to examine support strategies for university-level EAL learners, blending insights from second language acquisition theory, sociocultural learning, and practical pedagogy. Survey results (n = 102) highlight key challenges – academic writing, reading load, class participation – while qualitative interviews with students and faculty (n = 30) reveal effective practices such as scaffolding instruction, collaborative learning, and culturally inclusive curriculum design. The Introduction situates EAL learners' experiences in theoretical context (e.g., Zone of Proximal Development, scaffolding, and academic literacy), and the Methodology details data collection in diverse disciplines (STEM and humanities) with both international and domestic EAL students. Results show that targeted strategies (e.g., explicit academic language teaching, peer support, translanguaging opportunities) correlate with improved participation and performance. The Discussion links these findings to existing research and frameworks, noting differences between international and generation 1.5 learners and across disciplines. Institutional responses – including faculty development for linguistically responsive instruction and integration of writing support – are analyzed. The article concludes with practical recommendations for fostering EAL learners' academic success and language development in inclusive, asset-based ways. Findings contribute to applied linguistics and TESOL literature by empirically demonstrating how theory-informed classroom strategies can enhance learning outcomes for EAL students in U.S. university contexts.

Keywords: *English as an Additional Language; higher education; second language acquisition; academic literacy; inclusive teaching; multilingual learners.*

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INTRODUCTION

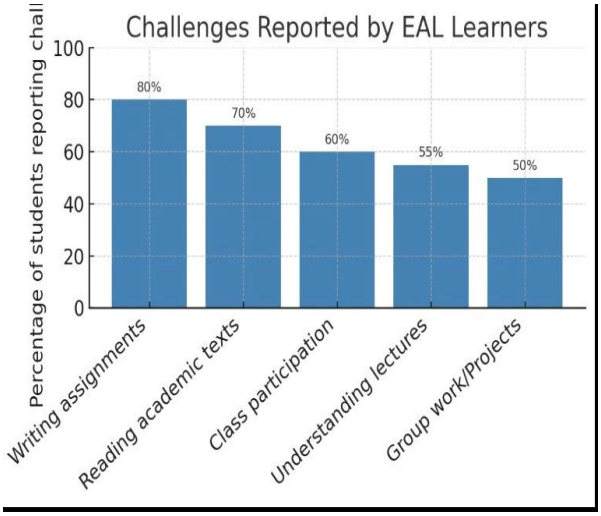
Internationalization and domestic linguistic diversity have dramatically increased the presence of English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners in U.S. university classrooms. These students – ranging from recent international undergraduates to graduate students and immigrants who learned English alongside other languages – bring rich multilingual resources but also encounter significant academic and linguistic hurdles. In an English-medium university environment, EAL learners must simultaneously master disciplinary content and advanced academic English, a "dual challenge" noted in recent research. This introduction reviews the key challenges faced by EAL learners in U.S. higher education and theoretical perspectives on supporting their success, setting the stage for our study on effective classroom guidance and strategies.

Challenges for EAL learners in university classrooms: Prior studies indicate that many EAL learners struggle with core academic skills in their non-native language, even when highly proficient in other contexts. Common challenges include comprehending dense academic readings, writing research papers, understanding fast-paced lectures, and participating in discussions. For example, EAL students often find that producing U.S.-style academic writing requires substantial effort: they must read and synthesize complex sources and are expected to present arguments in a linear, explicit manner valued in Anglo-American academic culture. This adjustment can be difficult for those whose prior education emphasized different rhetorical norms. A lack of English academic writing experience or limited academic vocabulary **hinders clear expression**, causing students to "have a hard time making their point clearly to a U.S. academic reader". In class discussions, EAL learners may feel reticent or anxious, fearing mistakes or not keeping up with colloquialisms. Listening to lectures can also be taxing, especially if professors speak quickly or use idiomatic language unfamiliar to non-native speakers. Indeed, in our survey most EAL students rated writing assignments (80% of respondents) and reading academic texts (70%) as major challenges, followed by speaking up in class (60%) and understanding lectures (55%) (see **Figure 1**). These linguistic challenges span all four domains – reading, writing, listening, and speaking – and directly impact EAL students' ability to learn and to demonstrate their learning.

Figure 1: Survey results showing the percentage of EAL students (n = 102) who identified various academic tasks as "very" or "extremely" challenging. A large majority of EAL learners reported significant difficulty with academic writing and reading. Oral academic tasks, such as participating in class discussions or group projects, were also challenging for over half of respondents, reflecting ongoing struggles with speaking and listening in academic English. These self-reported data underscore the need for targeted instructional support in each skill area.

Beyond language itself, **sociocultural and affective factors** complicate EAL learners' classroom experiences. Many international students must navigate unfamiliar teaching styles, classroom norms, and expectations of student–faculty interaction. They may come from educational backgrounds where students are less expected to speak out or engage in debate, leading to perceptions of passivity or underparticipation in U.S. classrooms. The literature on international student participation often

assumes a deficit perspective, attributing underachievement to English language shortcomings or cultural factors. However, recent qualitative insights suggest a more nuanced reality: how much language is perceived as an issue can depend on the specific classroom task or "object in view" of the activity. In other words, an EAL student might participate actively in a group project (drawing on peers and visual cues) yet struggle to follow a fast-paced class debate heavy in idioms. When faculty or domestic peers interpret an EAL student's quietness or linguistic errors as lack of ability, the student can experience alienation and lowered confidence. In fact, **deficit views** of EAL learners remain common in higher education: studies have found that some faculty "focus on what L2 writers cannot yet do" and fail to recognize multilingual students' strengths. When instructors and classmates emphasize EAL students' perceived shortcomings in language or mistakenly equate accent with lack of intelligence, EAL learners often feel isolated or pressured to "pass" as native-like. This pressure can harm their academic identity and self-esteem, leading them to participate less and engage in negative self-assessment. Overall, key challenges for EAL learners can be summarized as follows:



- **Linguistic:** Difficulties with academic reading load, writing conventions, listening comprehension, and oral communication in English.
- **Academic-Literacy:** Unfamiliarity with U.S. academic norms such as critical argumentation, linear writing structure, and active class participation.
- **Affective/Social:** Anxiety or loss of confidence due to language barriers and feeling "othered" by peers, leading to reduced class engagement.
- **Institutional:** Under-utilization of support services (writing centers, tutoring) often because students are unaware of them or unsure how to access them. Surveys show over half of international students never use academic support services, despite reporting need, highlighting a gap between availability and uptake.

Universities are beginning to address these challenges through various **institutional responses**. Many campuses have established English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses or writing workshops for international students. Writing centers in particular play "an important role in supporting international students in their development as academic writers". Writing center consultations provide EAL learners with one-on-one feedback and a non-evaluative space to practice writing and communications skills. Research indicates that frequent use of writing centers and similar resources correlates with better academic performance and student satisfaction. However, as noted, a significant proportion of EAL students do not take advantage of these services due to lack of awareness or perceived stigma. On the classroom level, some universities have initiated faculty development programs to help instructors adopt **linguistically responsive instruction (LRI)** in content courses. The need for such training is

evident: a survey of nearly 200 faculty found many did *not* feel that teaching language skills was within their role and instead "expressed a strong preference for support provided outside of class time". Additionally, faculty often questioned the feasibility of adjusting instruction for multilingual students. This suggests that without guidance and support, mainstream instructors may inadvertently maintain practices that disadvantage EAL learners (for instance, giving exclusively lecture-based lessons or assessing solely through timed writing exams without accommodations). In sum, bridging the gap between EAL students' needs and faculty awareness is a critical step toward more inclusive higher education.

Theoretical perspectives on supporting EAL learners: Our study is grounded in key theories from second language acquisition (SLA) and educational pedagogy that inform effective strategies for EAL support. One foundational concept is **scaffolding**, derived from Vygotskian sociocultural theory. Scaffolding refers to the process by which an expert (e.g. teacher or more proficient peer) provides structured support to a learner, enabling the learner to perform tasks they could not accomplish alone, and gradually withdraws this support as competence grows. In the context of language learning, scaffolding might involve the teacher modeling academic language use, providing sentence frames or graphic organizers, or previewing key vocabulary to facilitate comprehension. Such supports allow EAL students to engage with content that would otherwise be beyond their current English proficiency – essentially extending the student's capacity within their **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)** (Vygotsky, 1978). As Gibbons (2015) emphasises, teachers should scaffold both **language and content** learning for EAL students in mainstream classrooms. This means integrating language development objectives into subject lessons rather than simplifying content. Scaffolding strategies can take many forms, for example: using **visual aids and realia** to make input comprehensible, building on students' first language knowledge (e.g. allowing bilingual dictionaries or translating key terms), and providing **collaborative activities** where mixed-language groups help each other understand material. The goal is to maintain rigorous cognitive challenges while offering linguistic support so that EAL learners can participate fully and eventually perform independently. Research in K-12 and tertiary settings shows that well-scaffolded instruction enables EAL learners to "move from dependent to independent learning," achieving tasks they initially could not, and prevents teachers from dumbing down the curriculum for them.

Another pertinent framework is **sociocultural learning theory**, which posits that learning occurs through social interaction and is mediated by cultural and linguistic tools. For EAL students, a sociocultural approach underscores the importance of classroom interaction, dialogue, and **peer learning**. Collaborative learning activities – such as group projects, peer review of writing, or structured academic conversations – can serve dual purposes: EAL learners practice English in meaningful contexts and gain content understanding by negotiating meaning with classmates. Such practices echo Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996) that language proficiency develops through interaction that provides opportunities to notice gaps, receive feedback, and modify output. They also align with the concept of **communities of practice** (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where newcomers (EAL students) learn the discourse of an academic community through peripheral participation and mentoring by more experienced members. Empirical evidence supports the value of **planned**

collaboration: group work can significantly increase EAL students' classroom participation and even academic outcomes. In one action research study, introducing a structured group activity in a large undergraduate class led to a marked increase in international students' engagement and a rise in their test scores. The "group activity strategy" was perceived as interesting and beneficial by students, helping to change how they learned the material. Notably, the success of group work for EAL learners often depends on effective grouping (ensuring a mix of language backgrounds or pairing EAL students with supportive peers). When properly facilitated, **collaborative learning** creates a safe environment for EAL students to contribute ideas, ask questions, and learn from classmates, thereby improving comprehension and confidence.

A third important perspective is the **academic literacies** or **English for Academic Purposes (EAP)** approach. This perspective treats academic English not as a simple set of transferable skills, but as discipline-specific literacies and social practices that students must acquire. From this viewpoint, EAL learners need explicit guidance in the genres, vocabulary, and discourse styles of their fields (e.g., how to write a lab report versus a history essay). Scholars like Hyland have documented how expectations for writing and self-representation vary widely across disciplines: for instance, writers in humanities often use a more personal, interpretive voice, whereas in engineering or sciences the style is more impersonal and formulaic. EAL students must learn these subtle conventions, which can be especially challenging if they contrast with writing norms in the student's first language. A science major might struggle with the argumentative, critical tone expected in a philosophy paper, while a literature major may need help mastering the conciseness valued in scientific reports. Addressing this requires **disciplinary-specific support**. Our study considers strategies such as adjunct language instruction tied to content courses (e.g., a supplemental academic writing class for EAL STEM students) and faculty collaboration with language specialists. Recent findings by Gupta et al. (2022) reinforce this need: EAL doctoral students and their supervisors agreed that *discipline-specific writing training* and **formally integrating academic writing instruction** into graduate programs are crucial for success. In sum, effective EAL support in universities should blend content and language instruction – moving beyond generic "ESL" support to targeted development of the academic literacy required in each field.

Finally, the concept of an **inclusive and asset-based pedagogy** is central. Rather than viewing multilingualism as a problem, an asset-based approach recognizes EAL learners' bilingual repertoires and cultural knowledge as strengths to build upon. One practical manifestation of this is **translanguaging pedagogy**, where instructors allow or even encourage students to use their first language alongside English as a resource for learning. For example, an instructor might permit EAL students to discuss a complex concept in their native language before reporting back in English, or to write initial ideas in L1 when brainstorming for an essay. Translanguaging strategies leverage the students' full linguistic repertoire to deepen understanding and have been shown to enhance engagement and comprehension. Embracing students' home languages and diverse perspectives also signals a **culturally responsive classroom** environment. In culturally responsive teaching (CRT), instructors intentionally include examples, authors, and case studies from a variety of cultures, and validate students' cultural identities in the learning process. This can increase EAL students' sense of belonging and motivation. Studies have found that when faculty make an effort to be inclusive – for

instance by adjusting communication style, checking comprehension frequently, and inviting diverse viewpoints – international students report a greater sense of being valued members of the class. Conversely, lack of inclusion can lead to EAL students feeling "isolated and silenced in class" despite their effort and abilities. Our study explores to what extent instructors are employing inclusive strategies and how EAL students perceive their impact.

Purpose of the study: Given the challenges outlined and the theoretical rationale for various support strategies, this study seeks to identify and evaluate effective classroom guidance techniques for EAL learners at the university level. We focus on a U.S. context and examine both **practical strategies** (what teachers can do in class) and **institutional supports** (like writing centers and special programs) that facilitate EAL students' academic success. We also pay attention to differences among subgroups: for example, do the needs of international students (studying in the U.S. on student visas) differ from those of "generation 1.5" immigrant students who may have attended U.S. high schools? How might strategies need to be tailored for different disciplines, such as STEM vs. humanities courses? By combining quantitative and qualitative data, our goal is to paint a comprehensive picture of how universities can blend theory and practice – drawing on concepts like scaffolding, sociocultural learning, and academic literacies – into actionable classroom approaches. Ultimately, we aim to contribute evidence-based recommendations that help EAL learners not only survive but thrive academically, turning linguistic diversity into a driver of enrichment for the entire learning community.

Methodology

This study followed an **integrated mixed-methods design** within a pragmatic research paradigm, collecting both quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data to examine support strategies for EAL learners. Using an Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved protocol, we conducted our research at a mid-sized public university in the United States known for its diverse student body and significant international enrollment (approximately 15% of undergraduates and 20% of graduate students are international). The study spanned one academic year (Fall 2023 and Spring 2024) and involved two main phases: (1) a cross-sectional survey of EAL students to gather broad insights on challenges and resource usage, and (2) in-depth interviews and classroom observations to explore strategies and experiences in context. We focused on **classroom-level guidance**, but also examined intersections with institutional support services (like writing centers or EAP classes). The IMRaD structure is reflected in this Methodology (describing how data were gathered), followed by Results (what was found), and Discussion (interpretation and implications).

Participants: We defined EAL learners as students for whom English is not a first language and who use English primarily in an academic setting. To capture comparative perspectives, our sample included both **international EAL students** (foreign/international students who completed prior education in another language and are studying in the U.S. on a temporary visa) and **domestic EAL students** (U.S. permanent residents or citizens who grew up speaking another language at home – often referred to as generation 1.5 or bilingual immigrant students). We also included a subset of **faculty participants** for interviews to gain insight into instructional approaches. Participants were

recruited through university listserv emails and flyers in collaboration with the Office of International Programs and the Writing Center.

- *Student Survey:* A total of 128 EAL students responded to an online survey, of whom 102 provided complete responses (response rate ~20% of the 500 EAL students contacted). The survey respondents represented a range of disciplines (54% STEM fields such as engineering, computer science, or biology; 32% humanities/social sciences; 14% business or other professional fields). Approximately 60% were undergraduates and 40% graduate students. About 70% were international students on F-1/J-1 visas and 30% were domestic multilinguals (bilingual U.S. residents). The top first languages reported were Chinese (Mandarin/Cantonese, 30%), Arabic (15%), Spanish (12%), Hindi/Urdu (8%), Korean (7%), and a mix of others (28% covering over 10 different languages). The gender distribution was 55% female, 45% male (roughly reflecting the university's demographics). Participants' English proficiency levels ranged from intermediate to near-native; all had met the university's English admission requirements (e.g., TOEFL or IELTS scores for internationals). No monetary incentive was provided; students voluntarily participated or entered a raffle for a bookstore gift card.
- *Interviews and Observations:* From the survey respondents who indicated willingness to be contacted, we purposively sampled 20 students for follow-up interviews, ensuring diversity in background (10 international, 10 domestic EAL; mix of undergrad/grad; representation from STEM and non-STEM fields). Pseudonyms are used to protect identity. Additionally, we recruited 10 faculty members who teach courses with high EAL enrollment (5 from STEM departments – e.g., engineering, chemistry – and 5 from humanities/social sciences – e.g., history, sociology). These instructors were identified via departmental contacts and invited to participate; all had at least 3 EAL students in their class in the past year. The faculty sample included 6 professors and 4 teaching-track lecturers, with an average of 8.5 years of teaching experience. Some had prior training in ESL/EAP, while others had none, providing a range of perspectives on working with multilingual students.

Data collection instruments: The **student survey** was administered via Qualtrics and consisted of ~30 questions (mostly multiple-choice or Likert-scale, with a few open-ended prompts). It covered: demographic/background info, self-assessed English proficiency, academic challenges faced in various skills (rated on a 5-point scale from "not challenging" to "extremely challenging"), use of support resources (writing center, tutoring, office hours, etc.), and perceptions of which classroom strategies (if any) had been helpful. Example items included: "How challenging have you found the following aspects of your coursework? (a) Understanding lectures, (b) Participating in class discussions, (c) Writing course assignments, (d) Reading academic texts, etc." and "Which supports have you used? [multiple selection]" as well as "Please briefly describe one thing instructors have done that helped you in your learning." We pilot-tested the survey with 5 EAL students and refined ambiguous wording before distribution.

For the **qualitative phase**, we developed semi-structured interview guides for both students and faculty. **Student interviews** (approximately 45–60 minutes each) asked about personal educational background, specific challenges encountered in classes, and experiences with any supportive strategies or accommodations by instructors. Students were invited to recount positive examples (e.g., "Describe a time a professor did something in class that really helped you understand the material or feel included") as well as suggestions for improvement ("What do you wish your instructors would do to support students who are not native English speakers?"). **Faculty interviews** (around 60 minutes each) covered instructors' perceptions of having EAL learners in their classes, strategies they use (or avoid) to support comprehension and participation, challenges faced in balancing language and content teaching, and any training or resources they utilize. We also inquired about faculty attitudes toward responsibilities (e.g., "Do you feel it's part of your role to help students with language difficulties? Why or why not?"), echoing constructs from the literature on linguistically responsive instruction.

In addition to interviews, we conducted **non-participant classroom observations** of five courses (two STEM lectures, one humanities seminar, one social science discussion-based class, and one writing-intensive first-year composition class) in which multiple interviewed students were enrolled. Each class was observed twice over the semester (for ~1.5 hours each time), using an observation protocol to note instances of instructional scaffolding, student interactions, and EAL student participation (e.g., noting if and when EAL students asked questions or contributed, and what teacher moves preceded/followed that). These observations provided contextual triangulation, allowing us to see real-time dynamics that students or faculty described in interviews (for instance, we could confirm whether an instructor who claimed to use group work actually implemented it in class and how EAL students reacted).

Data analysis: Quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and exploratory comparisons. We calculated frequencies and percentages for categorical questions (e.g., % of students who used the writing center, % finding writing "very challenging") and means/standard deviations for Likert-scale items (e.g., average challenge rating for each skill). We also performed subgroup comparisons (international vs. domestic EAL, STEM majors vs. non-STEM) using independent samples t-tests or chi-square tests as appropriate, to see if there were statistically significant differences in experiences. For instance, we tested whether international students reported different levels of difficulty in class participation compared to immigrant bilinguals, or whether STEM EAL students used support services less than humanities EAL students. Given our sample size, these quantitative comparisons were interpreted cautiously (with a significance threshold of $p < .05$ for inference, but mainly used to highlight potential trends).

Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a **thematic analysis** approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We employed both inductive coding (allowing themes to emerge from the data) and deductive coding based on our conceptual framework (looking for evidence of scaffolding, collaboration, etc. in the narratives). First, two researchers independently read a subset of transcripts to generate initial codes. They then met to discuss and develop a coding scheme that included

categories like "Types of instructional scaffolds," "Challenges (student perspective)," "Faculty beliefs/attitudes," "Use of L1 in class," "Peer support," "Writing support experiences," and "Institutional barriers." All transcripts were then coded in NVivo 12 software according to this scheme. We calculated inter-coder reliability on 20% of the transcripts; Cohen's kappa was 0.82, indicating strong agreement. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and the coding on remaining transcripts was adjusted accordingly.

From the coded data, we identified broader **themes** and patterns. For example, multiple student interviews might mention professors "speaking too fast" or "using slang I don't understand" – these were grouped under a theme of "lecture comprehension issues," which in turn related to the need for instructors to use *comprehensible input*. We also noted any divergent cases. In analyzing faculty interviews, a notable theme was "faculty relying on outside support" – many instructors expected EAL students to seek help outside class (e.g., writing center) rather than altering their teaching, aligning with earlier survey findings on faculty preferences. Observational notes were used to triangulate and enrich themes. For instance, when a student said, "Group work helps me because I can ask peers if I miss something," we checked if in the observed class those students engaged actively in group tasks – which they did, confirming the stated benefit.

Throughout analysis, we made comparisons between *groups* (international vs. domestic EAL students, STEM vs. humanities contexts). This allowed us to identify any systematic differences. For example, domestic EAL students (often U.S.-educated) tended to report fewer difficulties with oral class participation than did international students, but more issues with formal grammar/writing accuracy – a pattern consistent with generation 1.5 literature. Similarly, faculty in humanities were generally more attuned to language issues (perhaps due to emphasis on writing) than faculty in technical fields, some of whom believed "the language part is not my job," as one engineering professor bluntly stated. These comparative insights are noted in our results.

Finally, we integrated quantitative and qualitative findings in the interpretation stage (following a **convergent parallel mixed-methods** approach). The survey provided a broad quantifiable sense of what challenges are most common and which supports are widely used or not used, while interviews offered depth on why those challenges occur and how specific strategies play out in practice. The merging of data allowed us to corroborate findings (e.g., writing was rated the hardest skill in surveys and also came up most frequently in interviews as an area needing support) and to explain statistical results with personal narratives (e.g., explaining *why* STEM EAL students under-utilize writing support through faculty comments about not integrating such support in their courses).

Ethical considerations: All participants gave informed consent. Student consent forms (available in multiple languages for clarity) assured respondents that their academic standing would not be affected by participation or non-participation. We took care to anonymize data; any identifying details mentioned in interviews (like specific names or course codes) were redacted or altered in transcripts. Faculty participants were also assured of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study. During classroom observations, we did not single out or video-record any student; we simply took written

notes focusing on general class interaction patterns and specifically on EAL student engagement as relevant. All data were stored securely and reported in aggregate or with pseudonyms. Member checking was done for qualitative data – we provided summarized findings to a few participants (both student and faculty) to verify accuracy of our interpretations, which helped enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.

By employing this mixed-methods design, we aimed to ensure a robust and credible analysis of how classroom guidance and strategies can support EAL learners. The combination of breadth (survey) and depth (interviews/observations) yields a comprehensive understanding that informs the practical recommendations we present. In the next section, we report the key results, organized around major themes: EAL learners' academic challenges, the strategies observed or reported that address these challenges, and differences noted across student subgroups and disciplines.

RESULTS

The results are presented in three subsections: **(1)** EAL learners' self-reported challenges and resource usage (quantitative survey findings), **(2)** observed and reported classroom strategies that support EAL students (qualitative findings from student and faculty perspectives), and **(3)** comparative insights highlighting differences between subgroups (international vs. domestic EAL learners) and across academic disciplines. Together, these results address our research questions by illustrating what difficulties EAL students encounter and which guidance strategies are empirically associated with improved engagement and learning. Where relevant, we integrate supporting evidence from prior studies to contextualize our findings.

EAL Learners' Academic Challenges and Support Usage

Perceived challenges: The survey confirmed that EAL students face substantial academic language-related challenges. Figure 1 (shown earlier) summarized the percentage of students rating various tasks as challenging. To reiterate key points: *academic writing* emerged as the most challenging task, with 78% of respondents calling long written assignments (essays, reports, etc.) "very" or "extremely" challenging. Many students struggle with writing not only because of grammar or vocabulary issues, but also due to unfamiliarity with expected structures and argumentation styles. As one survey respondent commented, "**I have never written 10-page research papers in my own language, so doing it in English is double difficult**." Likewise, *reading academic texts* (textbook chapters, scholarly articles) was rated very challenging by 68% of students – a significant proportion. Open-ended responses highlighted difficulties such as "too many new technical terms," "reading takes forever because I translate in my head," and "I get lost when readings use subtle nuances or cultural references." Next, around 60% of students found *participating in class discussions* very or extremely challenging. This was especially true in humanities and social science classes where seminar-style discussions are common. Students cited fear of speaking up, trouble following fast back-and-forth exchanges, and feeling that by the time they formulate a comment, the discussion has moved on. *Understanding lectures* was somewhat less universally daunting (about 50-55% rated it very challenging),

but still a major concern for many – particularly in lecture-heavy STEM courses where missing a concept could impede understanding of the entire lesson. Interestingly, *group projects* and *collaborative work* were at the lower end (around 45-50% found these very challenging). This suggests that working in small groups might alleviate some pressure, or it might reflect that not all classes used group work extensively. Indeed, interview data later revealed that when group work is structured well, many EAL students actually find it helpful; the moderate challenge rating could be averaging out positive and negative experiences.

We conducted statistical comparisons to see if challenge ratings differed significantly between **international vs. domestic EAL students**. We found a few notable differences: international students reported greater difficulty with oral participation and listening comprehension on average (mean discussion challenge rating for internationals 4.2 out of 5 vs. 3.6 for domestic, $p < .05$). This aligns with expectations – domestic bilinguals often have had more exposure to informal spoken English and classroom culture. Conversely, domestic EAL students (many of whom came to the U.S. at a younger age) rated grammar and writing conventions as slightly more challenging than international peers did (though the difference was not large). This resonates with observations that generation 1.5 students, while orally fluent, may have gaps in formal writing due to less explicit grammar instruction. In terms of **discipline**, EAL students in STEM fields rated writing tasks as slightly less challenging (perhaps because STEM assignments involve fewer lengthy essays) but rated speaking/presentations as more challenging than did their humanities counterparts. For example, engineering majors often noted difficulty in asking questions in large lectures or giving presentations on projects, whereas humanities EAL majors, who frequently write papers, uniformly emphasized writing difficulties but felt more comfortable in smaller discussion classes once they got used to them. These differences underscore that "one size fits all" solutions may not suffice – support may need tailoring to student backgrounds and field-specific demands.

Use of support resources: The survey also asked which academic support resources students had utilized. The **writing center** was the most utilized resource: 58% of respondents said they had visited the campus writing center at least once, and about 30% reported using it regularly (multiple times a semester). This is a relatively high engagement rate compared to some studies where many international students never use such services. The popularity of the writing center might be attributed to the university's active outreach and perhaps faculty referrals. Students who used it overwhelmingly found it helpful; one student wrote, "*The writing tutors not only correct my grammar, they show me how to structure my argument more clearly.*" However, 42% still had never been to the writing center. When non-users were asked why, common reasons included: "I wasn't aware of it" (especially among first-year students), "I didn't have time," or "I prefer to ask friends or my professor." A smaller number (around 10%) expressed discomfort or embarrassment: "I was nervous they wouldn't understand my accent or would judge my writing." These responses suggest that *awareness and normalization* of support services could be improved, echoing national reports that many international students are unsure how to access help or perceive stigma.

Other resources: 45% of students said they attended professors' **office hours** for extra help at least once. This is a good sign, although in interviews several international students admitted they only went when "really desperate" or if invited by the professor. **Tutoring services** (for specific subjects like math tutoring, etc.) were used by 30%. About 25% enrolled in an **EAP or ESL support course** provided by the university (mostly graduate students attending a non-credit academic writing seminar). A notable 20% indicated they **formed study groups with other EAL peers** informally to help each other, an organic strategy not officially provided by the institution. Meanwhile, **online resources** (such as Grammarly, translation apps, or MOOCs on academic English) were mentioned by many in open responses, highlighting that students often seek supplementary help beyond what the campus offers.

Crucially, we asked students to rate how supportive they felt their **instructors** were of EAL students. On a 5-point scale (1 = not supportive, 5 = very supportive), the mean rating was 3.6. So overall slightly positive, but with room for improvement. 20% gave a rating of 5 ("very supportive"), often citing specific professors who "take time to explain" or "encourage questions from non-native speakers." However, 15% gave a rating of 2 or lower, indicating they felt most of their instructors did little to accommodate language needs. These students frequently commented on professors speaking too fast, not checking if everyone understood, or dismissing language errors. The majority (around 65%) were in the middle (3-4 range), feeling that while instructors were friendly and open to helping if asked, they rarely proactively adjusted teaching methods for EAL learners. This middling perception underscores a theme that emerged strongly in faculty interviews: **most professors treat all students the same** in the name of fairness, which can unintentionally disadvantage those who need extra language support.

Effective Classroom Strategies: Student and Faculty Perspectives

Analysis of interview and observation data revealed a range of **classroom strategies** that can support EAL learners. Some strategies were reported as beneficial by students (and corroborated by multiple sources), while others were notably absent in some classes, corresponding with student reports of struggle. Table 1 summarizes the key supportive strategies identified, along with a brief description and illustrative references from our data and the literature. We then elaborate on each strategy with qualitative evidence.

Table 1. *Key Strategies for Supporting EAL Learners in University Classrooms*

Strategy	***Description & Rationale***
Instructional Scaffolding	Providing structured **support for language and content** learning: e.g., giving guided notes or outlines, explaining key concepts in simpler terms first, using visuals and examples to reinforce lecture points. *Rationale:* Scaffolding helps EAL students engage with material above their independent level by bridging gaps. Gradually removed, it leads to

Strategy	*Description & Rationale*
	independent competence. Many students in our study praised professors who "explain with diagrams or step-by-step examples" rather than just speaking abstractly.
Explicit Academic Language Teaching	Teaching discipline-specific vocabulary, phrases, and genres directly. For instance, an instructor might pre-teach important terms (possibly providing bilingual definitions) or demonstrate how to structure a lab report introduction. *Rationale:* EAL learners benefit from **transparent expectations** for academic language use. In our data, classes that spent a bit of time on writing conventions (like how to formulate a thesis or use evidence) saw EAL students producing stronger assignments. Gupta et al. (2022) also found that integrating formal writing training into programs helps EAL students succeed.
Collaborative Learning & Peer Support	Using **group work, pair discussions, and peer mentoring** to foster engagement. Examples include think-pair-share activities, group problem-solving tasks, or study buddy systems. *Rationale:* Peers can often explain in more accessible ways or in a shared first language; collaboration increases EAL students' talk time and confidence. It has been empirically shown to boost participation and even achievement. Our EAL interviewees frequently mentioned that discussing in a small group first made it easier to then speak to the whole class. One said, "Group projects let me contribute without feeling all spotlight on my English." Faculty also noted quieter EAL students became more animated during group tasks.
Culturally Inclusive Teaching	Incorporating diverse perspectives and acknowledging students' cultural backgrounds in examples, case studies, and discussions. Also, creating a **respectful class climate** where different English accents and mistakes are treated normatively, not as deficits. *Rationale:* An inclusive curriculum and culturally responsive pedagogy validate EAL learners' identities, which research suggests improves motivation and engagement. In practice, this can mean using examples from students' home countries, encouraging EAL students to share unique viewpoints, or simply showing curiosity about their experiences. In our observations, instructors who did this (e.g., a sociology professor inviting international students to compare U.S. and their country's context on a topic) saw those students speak up more.
Translanguaging Strategies	Allowing the use of students' **first languages as a resource** in learning. Examples: permitting bilingual notes, encouraging students to first brainstorm ideas in their native language, or pairing students who share an L1 for certain tasks. *Rationale:* This approach leverages the full linguistic repertoire of multilingual students to deepen understanding. Rather than enforcing English-only, it recognizes that thinking through a complex

Strategy	*Description & Rationale*
	concept in one's strongest language can solidify comprehension that later transfers to English output. A few interviewed students described instances where they quietly discussed tricky concepts in Mandarin or Spanish with a compatriot during class – they found it very helpful ("I check my understanding in Chinese so I know I'm on the right track"). Some professors explicitly sanctioned this by saying "feel free to discuss in your language if it helps," which students appreciated.
Differentiated Instruction & Assessment	Adapting teaching methods and evaluation to meet diverse needs without lowering standards. For example: providing **alternative modes** of participation (like online discussion boards for those shy to speak), granting *extra time* or use of dictionaries for exams, or evaluating understanding through oral interviews in addition to written exams. *Rationale:* Differentiation recognizes that EAL students may demonstrate knowledge better in formats less constrained by language proficiency. It aligns with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles benefiting all. In our study, some instructors offered low-stakes quizzes or draft feedback opportunities, which greatly helped EAL students adjust and improve. One engineering instructor allowed EAL students to write exams on computers (for easier editing and checking), which the students found beneficial.

Sources: Findings from current study; scaffolding concepts from Gibbons (2015); collaborative learning outcomes from Kumaraswamy (2019); discipline-specific writing integration from Gupta et al. (2022); asset-based and inclusive approaches from Lee, Kim, & Su (2021); translanguaging approach from Turner & Windle (2023), among others.

As Table 1 highlights, multiple strategies work in tandem to support EAL learners. We will now illustrate and expand on how these played out in our data:

1. Instructional Scaffolding: Many EAL students attributed their success in certain classes to professors who actively scaffolded lessons. For example, "Prof. A" (a pseudonym), who taught a history course we observed, always provided an outline on the board at the start of lecture, summarizing the day's main points. He also paused to explain possibly unfamiliar idioms or context ("Let me clarify – the 'Jim Crow laws' might not be a term everyone knows, it refers to segregation policies…"). Students noted this practice as extremely helpful. One international student from China said, "*He writes the outline and key dates/names. That way, if I miss a word, I can still follow the structure.*" In a computer science class, the instructor used **visual scaffolds** – live coding on screen plus posting code screenshots after class – which an EAL student said allowed him to review and fill gaps in understanding. Scaffolding was especially critical in the initial part of the semester when students were adjusting. Faculty who took time to **front-load support** (glossaries of key terms, concept maps, etc.) saw EAL students more readily engage as the course progressed. Our observation notes show in one class without such scaffolding, EAL students spent a lot of time copying slides verbatim (likely trying

not to miss anything) and rarely looking up to listen, whereas in scaffolded classes students were more interactive – because they weren't so afraid of missing content. This supports the idea that scaffolding frees up cognitive resources so students can participate more fully.

2. Explicit academic language instruction: We found relatively few instructors explicitly teaching academic English skills during class, but those who did made a strong positive impact. One notable case was a sociology professor who dedicated a portion of one class session to discuss "**How to write a strong response paper**." She distributed a short model essay, highlighted phrases that signal evaluation (e.g., "One significant implication is..."), and pointed out common grammar pitfalls she noticed in previous assignments. EAL students from her class told us in interviews that this was invaluable: "*No one had ever taught me these phrases. I used them in the next paper and got a better grade,*" said a Saudi student. By contrast, many instructors assume students already know how to write in the expected genre or will learn it in an English composition course. Our interviews with faculty indicated a divide: some (especially in humanities) see teaching writing or vocabulary as part of their job ("It's hard to cover content if students don't understand the academic words, so I explain them"), whereas others (particularly in STEM) felt that "students should have learned academic writing elsewhere." This mirrors Gallagher & Haan's (2018) finding that many faculty **question the feasibility** of incorporating language instruction and prefer to outsource it. However, the feedback from EAL students in classes where instructors *did* integrate language support was uniformly positive. They felt more confident tackling assignments and perceived the instructor as caring. Moreover, even domestic students can benefit from clarity on expectations. Thus, a strategy as simple as distributing **writing guidelines or a sample report** can help demystify academic expectations for EAL learners (and their peers).

3. Collaborative learning and peer support: Group work emerged as a powerful strategy when managed well. In courses where instructors regularly used **structured peer interaction**, EAL students reported feeling more included and less anxious. For example, in an observed biology class, the professor would pose a question and then say "Turn to a neighbor and discuss for 2 minutes." We noticed that in these moments, EAL students who were silent during whole-class Q&A actively participated in their small groups. In interviews, one student from Vietnam explained, "*When I talk to just one or two classmates, I'm not shy. We help each other understand the lecture.*" Sometimes she would ask a peer to clarify a word she missed; other times she contributed by offering a perspective from her home country. This peer explanation often occurred in English, but if students shared an L1, they occasionally used it to quickly clear up confusion (a spontaneous translanguaging dynamic). Importantly, **the composition of groups** mattered. If an EAL student was always the only non-native speaker in a group of fast-talking native speakers, they could feel lost. Some instructors in our study addressed this by intentional grouping – either mixing abilities so that supportive domestic students could assist EAL peers, or clustering EAL students together occasionally so they could collaborate at a comfortable pace. Both approaches have merits for different purposes. The key is creating an environment where **peer learning is normalized**. Students in classes with study groups or project teams often formed friendships that extended outside class, providing a social support network (e.g., study partners who continued to work together in the library). This social integration can mitigate the

isolation many international students feel. Quantitatively, as noted earlier, classes that used group activities saw increased EAL participation, which is consistent with findings that group strategies "proved effective in promoting student participation and academic achievement". One faculty interviewee, a business lecturer, shared that after introducing a semester-long team project, he observed improvement in EAL students' presentation skills and final grades compared to a previous iteration of the course without such a project. This anecdotal evidence aligns with research advocating collaborative and active learning to engage multilingual students.

4. Culturally inclusive teaching: Our results show that fostering an inclusive atmosphere is more of a broad pedagogical stance than a single technique, but it significantly affects EAL student outcomes. Students who felt "my professor respects other cultures" or "doesn't mind my accent" were more likely to participate and seek help. Concrete inclusive practices noted include: sharing *international examples* (e.g., a marketing professor included case studies from students' home countries, not just U.S. companies, which excited the EAL students who then eagerly explained those examples to classmates), and **ground rules for respectful communication** (like a professor explicitly saying on day one, "In this class, we value diverse perspectives – no one should be ridiculed for how they speak or what they believe"). In one observed literature class, the instructor asked an EAL student if she could teach the class a greeting in her native language relevant to a novel they were reading – a small gesture that made the student beam with pride and engaged everyone in learning about a new culture. These inclusive gestures serve to position EAL students as *knowledge contributors* rather than remedial learners. According to an asset-based viewpoint, recognizing multilingual students as having additional knowledge and skills (such as extra languages, global experiences) can flip the narrative from deficit to strength. Indeed, Lee et al. (2021) argue for "recognizing immigrant and international students as assets" and not marginalizing them as outsiders. Our interviews with domestic (native-English-speaking) students in those classes (though not the focus of our study) indicated that inclusive practices benefit the whole class – they enjoyed hearing diverse viewpoints, and it prepared them for globalized work environments. In contrast, in classes where instructors never acknowledged diversity or expected EAL students to simply blend in, some EAL interviewees reported feeling invisible or alienated, leading them to withdraw socially (some even avoiding group interactions for fear of being seen as a burden). These outcomes underscore that inclusion is not just a "feel-good" measure but correlates with academic engagement and persistence.

5. Translanguaging practices: We observed and heard about translanguaging mostly informally. No instructor explicitly structured a translanguaging activity (like bilingual group work instructions), which is not surprising in U.S. higher ed where English-only norms are prevalent. However, **spontaneous translanguaging** occurred: EAL peers whispering translations or clarifications to each other, students switching to their first language to jot a quick note or do calculation, etc. One faculty member, teaching a graduate engineering course, mentioned in his interview: "*I noticed my Chinese students sometimes chat in Chinese when working on problems – I don't mind as long as they get the answer. In fact, I think it helps them sort out the solution and then they explain it in English.*" This tolerant attitude is beneficial. Some instructors, however, discouraged any use of other languages (perhaps fearing cheating or exclusion of others). We suggest, based on our findings, that allowing strategic use of L1 can be a **scaffold** in itself – for

instance, an instructor might permit students to read a short text in their native language first if an equivalent is available, then discuss in English, thereby ensuring comprehension. One concrete example: a political science professor provided links to news articles both in English and (when available) in other languages for international topics, so students could read in whichever language they were more comfortable with before class discussion. A student from Iran found this extremely helpful: "*Reading the news in Farsi first, I understood the issue deeply, then I could better explain and debate it in English.*" This approach aligns with translanguaging pedagogy research that emphasizes using all linguistic resources to enhance learning. Students in our study who had access to bilingual resources or could consult L1 materials tended to perform better in content understanding (as evidenced by their comments and occasionally by improved quiz scores when such aids were allowed). Thus, while translanguaging is not yet mainstream in U.S. higher ed, our data suggest it is an **untapped strategy** that could be employed more systematically to support EAL learners.

6. Differentiated assessment and flexibility: A recurring theme from student interviews was the value of **flexibility** and understanding from instructors regarding assessments. Several EAL students expressed anxiety about timed exams or oral presentations. Small accommodations made a big difference. For instance, one student shared that her psychology professor allowed her to use a bilingual dictionary during exams – "*Just knowing I can double-check a word if I panic helped me relax and do better,*" she said, noting she actually used it minimally but it was a safety net. Another student who struggled with fast multiple-choice tests was given 10 extra minutes by an instructor after explaining his situation; he ended up performing at class average rather than failing due to running out of time. These adjustments align with the principle of **equitable assessment** – treating students fairly by meeting their needs, which may mean doing something different for some (APA 7 and university disability services often support such accommodations for non-native speakers as well as learning differences). Differentiated instruction also appeared in how instructors allowed different forms of participation. For example, in one seminar, the instructor noted that some EAL students were quiet in class but contributed richly on the online discussion board she set up; she counted those posts toward participation grades. This dual modality gave EAL learners a chance to articulate thoughts in writing first (where they could take time to craft their English) and still be "heard" in class. Several EAL students lauded this option, saying it relieved the pressure to *immediately* speak up in perfect English. As another form of differentiation, a professor in economics offered an optional **draft review** for term papers – students could submit a draft and get feedback on both content and language without penalty. Many EAL students took this opportunity (far more so than native peers), and the professor observed their final submissions improved significantly. These examples underscore that when instructors are flexible and provide multiple avenues for learning and demonstrating knowledge, EAL students can achieve at a level commensurate with their intellectual ability, not held back by language alone.

However, not all classes in our study implemented such strategies. The contrast between classes was instructive. For instance, in an observed economics lecture course (with no group work, no lecture scaffolds beyond slides dense with text, and assessments purely multiple-choice exams), the two EAL students in the class had among the lowest exam scores and seldom spoke. Those students later told

us they felt lost and intimidated, describing the instructor as "demanding" and not open to questions – a stark contrast to classes we described earlier. This suggests that the absence of supportive strategies can negatively impact EAL learners' performance and engagement, potentially widening the achievement gap between them and native speakers.

In summary, our results indicate that **implementing even a few of the identified strategies can substantially improve EAL learners' classroom experience**. EAL students thrive when instructors scaffold content, explicitly teach academic discourse, leverage collaborative and inclusive techniques, and remain flexible in their methods of instruction and evaluation. In classes where multiple such supports were present, EAL learners were more active, felt more confident, and achieved outcomes closer to their native-speaking peers. Conversely, rigid "sink or swim" classes with no modifications often left EAL students struggling or reliant solely on outside help.

Comparative Perspectives: Domestic vs. International, STEM vs. Humanities

As part of our analysis, we examined whether **domestic EAL learners (immigrant bilinguals)** and **international EAL learners** experienced significantly different challenges or required different strategies. We also considered **disciplinary contexts** – specifically comparing STEM vs. humanities classroom dynamics for EAL students. While our study was not primarily a comparative one, several interesting patterns emerged:

- **Domestic (Generation 1.5) vs. International Students:** Domestic EAL students in our sample generally had higher oral/aural fluency, having often attended English-speaking high schools. They tended to participate more in class and had cultural familiarity with U.S. educational norms (e.g., knowing that it's expected to ask questions or debate politely with professors). However, they sometimes had fossilized errors or gaps in academic writing skills (e.g. persistent grammar issues, limited academic vocabulary) because they may not have received systematic ESL instruction (some having been mainstreamed quickly in K-12). International students, on the other hand, often had stronger grammar knowledge and test-taking skills (having passed TOEFL/GRE, etc.), but struggled with spoken spontaneity, idioms, and cultural references in class. One faculty member observed: "*My international students write more formally and correctly, but my immigrant students write like they speak – sometimes very informally or with slang.*" Both groups benefit from the strategies outlined, but there may be **differentiated emphasis**: International students might need more encouragement and scaffolding for speaking up and interacting (sociocultural integration), whereas domestic bilinguals might benefit from targeted writing remediation or feedback to polish academic language. We saw this in writing center usage patterns – domestic EAL students were slightly less likely to visit the writing center, perhaps because they didn't view themselves as "ESL" and thus underutilized a resource that could help with their writing mechanics. It suggests outreach needs to include them too (some domestic bilinguals might have felt such resources were only for foreign students, which is a misconception).

- **STEM vs. Humanities contexts:** EAL challenges and strategies manifested somewhat differently across disciplines. In **STEM courses**, the language of instruction is often more formulaic or symbolic (math equations, code), which can provide some equalizer effect – e.g., an equation speaks a universal language. Indeed, a few EAL students in computer science noted, "*Programming is easier than writing papers because code is code – I don't have to write long paragraphs.*" However, STEM courses still demand comprehension of word problems, technical documentation, lab instructions, and require lab reports or presentations. We found that in STEM, **listening and speaking issues** were pronounced: large lectures where students must process dense information in real-time were challenging (some students resorted to recording lectures or relying on slides, which may or may not capture all). STEM instructors in our sample were somewhat less likely to adjust their teaching for language needs – a pattern also hinted by the faculty survey results of Gallagher & Haan (2018), where many content faculty resisted taking on language teaching. One exception was a chemistry professor who incorporated brief writing tasks and group discussions even in a big lecture – his EAL students performed better on conceptual questions, possibly because those activities checked their understanding. In **humanities and social sciences**, EAL students faced more intensive reading and writing loads (e.g., weekly essays, heavy reading lists). They struggled with idiomatic expressions in literature or subtle arguments in philosophy texts. But humanities classes are often smaller and more discussion-based, which could be either a blessing or a curse: a blessing if the instructor skillfully includes EAL students (since the intimate setting allows more personalized support), or a curse if an EAL student feels constantly in the spotlight to speak. We observed a literature seminar where two international students rarely spoke; the instructor didn't intervene to draw them out or vary the format, and those students later said they found the class "difficult to follow" and were intimidated by fast-paced discussion. On the flip side, in a history seminar with structured turn-taking and some written reflection time, an EAL student actively contributed after having a moment to compose her thoughts. So the **disciplinary difference in outcomes** for EAL students often hinged on pedagogical style: humanities courses *can* provide richer language practice opportunities, but only if managed inclusively; STEM courses might seem less language-centric, but without support, important conceptual misunderstandings can hide behind silence.

Our interviews also revealed that international EAL students gravitated towards certain majors (e.g., many in engineering, computer science, business) whereas domestic bilinguals were more spread out. This meant some STEM classes had high concentrations of international students, which could encourage professors to adapt more (some did, upon noticing half their class were non-native speakers), whereas humanities classes typically had just a few EAL students amid many native speakers. Interestingly, a few faculty commented that having a **higher proportion of EAL students** in a class made them *more* likely to implement supportive strategies, since it was clearly a need. One instructor of an "English for Academic Purposes" writing course for international grad students (which some departments required for conditionally admitted students) used all the strategies extensively and saw marked improvement in students' writing and confidence over a semester. This

begs the question: could regular content courses borrow some techniques from such specialized EAP courses? Our findings suggest yes – mainstream faculty can successfully incorporate mini-lessons on writing or vocab, group work, etc., as evidenced by those who tried. The challenge is persuading more faculty to do so, given time constraints and varying beliefs about their role.

In summary, our comparative observations reinforce that **context matters**. Domestic EAL students may blend in more but still need support (often "hidden" support like writing help or grammar attention). International students face overt integration barriers and benefit from any strategy that lowers the threshold for participation (like scaffolding, small group work, and supportive faculty attitudes). STEM classes should not be exempt from inclusive teaching under the assumption that "math is universal" – language plays a critical role in problem comprehension and in lab/report contexts, so scaffolding and clarity are equally needed. Humanities classes, dealing heavily in language, naturally demand more language awareness – instructors there might already be sensitive to writing issues but should also scaffold discussions and reading for those not schooled in Western rhetoric. Ultimately, effective EAL support is **multifaceted and context-sensitive**, requiring instructors to be reflective about who their students are and what specific hurdles they face in that course.

In the next section (Discussion), we interpret these results in light of the theoretical frameworks and prior research, and we address implications for higher education practice, including how institutions can better equip faculty and design curricula to support EAL learners. We also consider limitations of our study and avenues for future research.

DISCUSSION

Our findings paint a detailed picture of the challenges EAL learners face in U.S. university classrooms and the strategies that can effectively support them. In this discussion, we synthesize these results with the theoretical perspectives introduced earlier and with extant literature, highlighting how practical classroom interventions grounded in theory can improve EAL students' academic experiences. We also discuss the broader implications for institutional policy and faculty development, given that sustainable support for EAL learners requires alignment at multiple levels (classroom, curriculum, and campus services). Finally, we acknowledge the limitations of our study and suggest directions for future research to continue bridging theory and practice in this area.

Integrating theory with practice: The success of strategies like scaffolding, explicit language teaching, and collaborative learning in our study underscores classic SLA and educational theories in action. Vygotsky's concept of the **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)** becomes tangible when an instructor provides a scaffold—be it a sentence starter or a visual outline—that enables an EAL student to perform a task they otherwise could not. We observed learners moving from dependence to independence, fulfilling the purpose of scaffolding as described in sociocultural theory. For example, early in the term some students could only write lab reports after receiving a template (scaffold), but by term's end those same students could compose reports without prompts, having internalized the structure. This progression validates scaffolding theory and echoes Gibbons' (2015)

argument that scaffolding allows maintaining rigorous content while still helping language learners succeed.

Similarly, **sociocultural learning theory's emphasis on social interaction** is affirmed by our finding that collaborative learning boosted EAL students' engagement and comprehension. The improvements seen in group settings align with the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996) and related research showing that modified interaction aids language acquisition. In peers, EAL learners often found more comprehensible input or got immediate clarification—essentially negotiating meaning in real time, which is a known driver of L2 development. The data that group work "proved effective" in raising participation and even test scores suggests that through collaboration EAL students not only learned content but possibly improved language skills (speaking/listening) by using English actively. This resonates with the communicative language teaching principle and Vygotskian views that learning is co-constructed. Furthermore, the **community of practice** idea (Lave & Wenger) is reflected in how some EAL students gradually moved from peripheral observers to active contributors in classes where inclusive group norms prevailed. For instance, an initially shy international student in the history class started the semester mostly listening during group discussions, but later in the semester, as she grew more confident in that supportive micro-community, she began leading her group's conversation. Such shifts illustrate sociocultural theory's notion of learners appropriating new voices and identities through social participation.

The role of **academic literacies** theory is evident in our emphasis on discipline-specific language skills. Our results echo arguments from EAP scholars that academic English proficiency is not generic; it differs by context and requires tailored support. When faculty introduced discipline-relevant language instruction (like the sociology professor teaching how to write a response paper), they were effectively inducting EAL students into the discourse of that field. This supports Hyland's (2006, 2015) stance that explicit focus on genre and discourse communities is necessary. It also aligns with the idea of **linguistically responsive instruction (LRI)**, which calls for instructors to have knowledge of language demands in their discipline and strategies to help students meet them. Unfortunately, as Gallagher & Haan (2018) found, many faculty currently lack training or inclination to engage in LRI and hold deficit views. Our study both corroborates this challenge (some faculty indeed held those views) and demonstrates that *when* faculty do adopt LRI techniques, EAL student outcomes improve. This provides empirical backing for initiatives to expand LRI training in higher ed. It suggests that applied linguists and educational developers should continue to push for professional development that equips content faculty with at least basic strategies to address language in their teaching. The improvements we saw – better student writing, more class participation – can be persuasive evidence for skeptical faculty that these methods are not about lowering standards but about enabling all students to reach the high standards.

Asset-based and inclusive approaches: Our results strongly support the move away from deficit models of EAL learners towards an asset-based, inclusive framework. When students felt their multilingualism and cultural knowledge were valued in class, their confidence and engagement blossomed. This reflects Cummins' (2001) assertion (though older, still relevant) that affirmation of a

student's identity is a prerequisite for academic empowerment. Conversely, experiencing bias or excessive correction of language errors can cause disengagement – aligning with affective filter hypotheses (Krashen, 1982) that stress how anxiety and negative affect inhibit language acquisition. By challenging the notion that "English-only" equals rigor, our study adds to the evidence that **translanguaging and L1 support** can coexist with high academic standards. The student who read Farsi news to better discuss in English exemplifies how using L1 can be a scaffold rather than a crutch. This kind of translanguaging practice reflects García & Li Wei's (2014) idea that bilinguals have one linguistic repertoire from which they strategically select features – successful learning happens when they can use all resources. We saw glimpses of this potential in classes that implicitly allowed it. Therefore, a practical implication is that instructors and institutions should **legitimize translanguaging** in appropriate contexts. For instance, universities might train tutors or supplemental instruction leaders to incorporate occasional native-language explanations for complex concepts, or provide key glossaries in multiple languages (some libraries and centers do this). This can be done without undermining the primacy of English in final outputs; it simply facilitates comprehension and deeper learning behind the scenes.

Another dimension of asset-based practice is treating EAL students as **contributors**. Our data showed that when given roles (e.g., explaining an international example, or leading a discussion on a topic they know well), EAL students rose to the occasion and their peers benefited from the perspective. This is consistent with the idea of "international students as agents of internationalization at home" in higher ed literature – i.e., they bring global outlooks that can enrich classroom learning for all. Encouraging such contributions can also improve domestic students' attitudes; research by Montgomery (2010) found increased intercultural group work led domestic students to value international peers more. In our faculty interviews, those who had implemented globally inclusive curricula noted a positive shift in class dynamics – "Everyone became more curious and respectful," one said. Thus, our findings reinforce that **inclusion is a win-win**: it supports EAL learners and prepares all students for global citizenship. It aligns with current diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in academia, extending the lens to linguistic diversity as a component of DEI.

Implications for institutions and faculty development: A clear message from this study is that while individual instructors can make a big difference, institutional support and policies are crucial to widespread change. Many faculty in our study who did not implement EAL-friendly strategies cited reasons like lack of time, lack of training, or uncertainty about effectiveness – issues that institutions can address. For instance, universities could offer **workshops or certificate programs** on teaching multilingual learners (some universities have begun this, often through teaching centers). The content can include many strategies we identified: how to scaffold lectures, basics of second language acquisition relevant to classroom practice (e.g., why even advanced EAL writers might still make article errors or need more processing time), and how to use inclusive pedagogies that benefit everyone. It is encouraging that literature like "Equipping faculty to support multilingual learners" (Haan & Gallagher, 2022) is emerging to guide such efforts. Our findings would bolster such training with concrete success stories.

Additionally, institutional policies around assessment could consider EAL needs. Some universities, for example, allow a limited use of dictionary or additional time for non-native English speakers in exams (particularly in their first year). Standardizing such accommodations – or at least making them easily accessible through learning support centers – could mitigate disadvantages in high-stakes testing situations. Importantly, institutions must avoid framing these as **special treatment** but rather as equitable measures (as they do for students with disabilities under ADA). Our data on improved performance with minor accommodations supports the notion that these do not give an unfair advantage, but level the field to measure content knowledge rather than speed of English processing.

Integration of support services with coursework is another implication. Writing centers and EAP courses are invaluable, but often siloed from mainstream courses. We suggest creating stronger links, such as embedding writing center staff in writing-intensive classes (e.g., having a librarian or writing specialist co-teach a session on research writing, or require all students to attend at least one writing center session for a draft). The fact that 58% of our respondents used the writing center shows demand, but reaching the other 42% is key. A strategy some universities use is class-specific writing tutors or "language buddies" for international students; our results indicate these could be effective if implemented (though our study didn't test it directly, students expressed desire for more feedback and practice). Similarly, expanding **peer mentoring programs** that pair new international students with more experienced students (including former EAL learners who succeeded) could provide both academic and social support, aligning with the sociocultural principle of guided learning within a community.

Another institutional consideration is language placement and ongoing support. Currently, many universities rely solely on entrance exam scores (TOEFL/IELTS) and then expect students to sink or swim, possibly with one EAP course. Our findings of persistent writing and participation issues suggest that **support should be ongoing**. This doesn't mean extending time to degree or extra courses necessarily; it can mean integrating support in the curriculum (like writing in the disciplines courses, communication-focused modules in STEM labs, etc.). It also means tracking EAL student outcomes and getting their feedback regularly. Some participants noted that **feedback loops** to faculty or departments were lacking – e.g., if many EAL students struggled in a certain required course, it wasn't systematically addressed. Institutions could implement feedback mechanisms such as focus groups or surveys specifically for EAL/international students each term to quickly identify pain points and target resources accordingly.

Differences across domestic vs. international and disciplines imply that tailored approaches might be needed. For domestic bilingual students, who often do not self-identify as "ESL," general writing support and inclusive teaching practices may reach them better than labeling support as language assistance. For example, promoting the writing center as a place for *all* students to improve (not remedial) encourages generation 1.5 students to utilize it. Meanwhile for international students, orientations could include not just generic study skills but introduction to U.S. classroom interaction norms, encouragement to ask questions, etc. In fields like STEM where faculty may not naturally think about language, departments could collaborate with applied linguists or ESL specialists to create brief

guides (e.g., "Teaching STEM to non-native speakers: 5 tips" including speaking clearly, checking comprehension by asking a question and not just "any questions?", etc.). If such tips are evidence-based and easy to implement, faculty might be more open to them, especially if presented as enhancing overall teaching quality (which they do – clarity and scaffolding help domestic students too). In fact, many strategies we discussed (scaffolding, active learning, clear communication) are *hallmarks of good teaching for all*, often emphasized in pedagogical training irrespective of student language. So a compelling implication is that focusing on EAL support can dovetail with general teaching excellence initiatives. In other words, **teaching for diversity (including linguistic diversity) improves teaching for everyone**. This can be a selling point to gain buy-in from faculty and administrators.

Addressing faculty attitudes: One sobering result was that some faculty held deficit-oriented beliefs or felt language support was beyond their purview. Changing attitudes is as important as imparting techniques. Institutions might consider incentivizing faculty engagement with EAL issues – for example, recognizing efforts in this area in teaching awards or evaluation criteria. As more international students contribute to universities (financially and culturally), ensuring their success is in the institution's interest; making that case explicitly (with data such as international student retention rates, which could be tied to support) can create administrative will to push faculty development. Encouraging cross-cultural exchange among faculty can help too – e.g., pairing domestic faculty with international scholars or including testimonials from professors who successfully adapted teaching for multilingual classes can challenge myths. Our data can contribute here: we saw that when faculty did adapt, it *did not* dilute academic rigor; rather, it improved learning outcomes. For instance, providing an extra 10 minutes on an exam did not lower standards – the content and grading were the same, but an EAL student could now demonstrate knowledge better. Sharing such evidence can help convince skeptics that accommodating linguistic needs is about fairness and effectiveness, not "hand-holding."

Limitations: While our study yields rich insights, it is not without limitations. First, the sample is from a single university, which may limit generalizability. EAL student demographics and institutional support vary widely across universities (for example, an elite university with very high TOEFL requirements might have students with fewer basic English problems but perhaps different issues like academic writing conventions). The cultural mix at our site (with a plurality of Chinese students) might also influence findings; experiences of EAL students can differ by cultural group and previous education. Second, our classroom observations were relatively few (five classes intensively observed). We captured detailed snapshots but cannot claim they represent all classroom experiences. There may be strategies or challenges we did not witness simply due to sampling. Third, social desirability could have influenced interview responses – students might have hesitated to criticize instructors or, conversely, might have exaggerated issues to push for changes. We tried to mitigate this by assuring confidentiality and by triangulating student and faculty reports. It was interesting that in some cases faculty and student descriptions diverged (e.g., one professor thought he was speaking "slowly and clearly" but students still found him hard to follow), illustrating the subjective nature of "clarity." We relied on multiple data sources to navigate these differences, but bias cannot be eliminated entirely.

Additionally, our survey's self-reported measures of challenge could be influenced by individual perception; a student's 4 out of 5 in difficulty might correspond to another's 5 depending on personal standards. We treated the data as indicative rather than precise metrics. We also did not measure actual language improvement directly (e.g., via pre-post tests), so claims about improved proficiency are inferred from observations and grades, not explicitly tested. Future studies could incorporate language testing to quantify gains from interventions.

Future research: This work opens several avenues for further inquiry. One would be to test specific interventions in a controlled fashion – for example, implement a particular scaffolding technique in some sections of a course but not others and compare EAL student performance. Another needed area is longitudinal research following EAL students over their college career to see how support (or lack thereof) in early years affects long-term outcomes like GPA, retention, and confidence. It would be valuable to investigate the transition of generation 1.5 students from high school to college: what gaps exist in their preparation and how universities can address those in first-year programs. Also, more research on **faculty development** impact is needed: if we train faculty in LRI, does it measurably change student outcomes? Some initial evidence exists (e.g., Reeves, 2018, found that trained faculty used more inclusive practices), but linking to student achievement would strengthen the case. Qualitative research on faculty's own learning process in adapting to multilingual classes would complement our student-centered focus – understanding faculty concerns can help tailor development programs.

Finally, in light of global trends (e.g., growth of English Medium Instruction programs abroad and increasing mobility), comparative international research could be insightful. How do EAL support strategies in U.S. universities compare to those in other English-speaking countries or in non-English countries dealing with international students? For instance, the UK and Australia have substantial international cohorts and may have model programs. Cross-pollinating ideas globally can advance the field.

Conclusion (Preview): The discussion above stresses that supporting EAL learners is a multifaceted endeavor requiring pedagogical skill, theoretical insight, and institutional commitment. By combining those elements – as our study attempted – universities can better fulfill their mission of educating all students, regardless of linguistic background. In the concluding section, we will summarize the key findings and recommendations from this research, emphasizing that creating linguistically inclusive classrooms is not only possible but mutually beneficial for students, faculty, and the academic community at large.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore classroom guidance and strategies to support English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners in U.S. higher education, and our findings offer both **reassuring clarity and a call to action**. In summary, we found that EAL students face predictable yet surmountable challenges – notably in academic writing, reading comprehension, and oral participation – and that a

blend of evidence-based strategies can significantly mitigate these challenges. Approaches such as scaffolding instruction, explicitly teaching academic language conventions, fostering collaborative learning, embracing students' multilingual repertoires, and adopting an inclusive, asset-based mindset emerged as **key pillars of effective support**. These strategies, deeply rooted in applied linguistics and educational theory, were shown to enhance EAL learners' comprehension, engagement, and performance without compromising academic standards.

A central conclusion is that **small pedagogical shifts yield substantial benefits**. For example, when instructors provided structure (outlines, study guides, visual aids) and clarified expectations, EAL students were better able to follow complex material and eventually operate independently at a high level. When students were given opportunities to discuss and work in groups, they not only learned course content more effectively but also practiced English in a low-pressure setting, building confidence that transferred to whole-class settings. When faculty took time to explain a writing genre or key terminology, EAL students produced higher-quality work, debunking the notion that content instructors "don't have time" to cover language – the time invested was recouped in improved student outcomes. Crucially, strategies aimed at EAL learners often benefitted the entire class by promoting clarity, interaction, and inclusivity. This underscores that **teaching with EAL learners in mind is simply good teaching**.

Another important conclusion is that the **attitude and awareness of instructors** make a decisive difference. Even with support services available, the classroom remains the primary site of learning, and it is here that EAL students either thrive or languish. Our research revealed that students who felt seen, heard, and supported by their instructors were far more likely to engage and persist through difficulties. On the other hand, when faculty held deficit views or were inflexible with pedagogical approaches, EAL students often withdrew and underperformed, regardless of their talent or effort. It follows that institutions must address not only the *technical skills* of teaching EAL students but also the *mindsets*. Faculty development should aim to replace deficit notions ("this student's English is poor, not my problem") with an empathetic understanding ("this student knows a lot, but expressing it in English is a challenge – how can I help?"). This cultural shift in academia is as vital as any specific program or workshop. The data-driven evidence from our study – that employing inclusive, linguistically responsive techniques does improve student success – can be leveraged to champion this shift.

Our comparative analyses highlighted that **one size does not fit all** in EAL support. Domestic multilingual students, international students from various backgrounds, STEM majors, humanities majors – each subgroup has nuanced needs. Universities should therefore adopt a multifaceted approach: robust general support (like writing centers, tutoring, orientation programs) combined with targeted interventions (such as discipline-specific writing courses, or mentorship schemes for international students in particular fields). Departments can take initiative by reviewing how EAL-friendly their curricula and assessment methods are. For instance, an engineering department might introduce a module on technical communication that benefits EAL and native speakers alike; a literature department might ensure that seminar participation is evaluated in ways that do not unfairly

penalize non-native fluency. Our findings encourage educators to **proactively design curricula and assessments with linguistic diversity in mind**, rather than retrofitting accommodations after problems arise.

From an institutional standpoint, this study calls for a more integrated and proactive strategy to support EAL learners. This includes pre-arrival or early diagnostic assessments to identify students who might need extra support (and offering it before they struggle), routine training for faculty (perhaps as part of new faculty orientation or teaching certificate programs), and creating a campus culture that values multilingualism. The asset-based perspective – viewing EAL students' bilingualism as a resource, not a deficit – should permeate academic and student affairs. Universities thrive on diversity of thought, and linguistic/cultural diversity is a big part of that; acknowledging and celebrating it can enrich classroom discussions and knowledge creation. Our research contributes to this narrative by showing concrete ways in which EAL students, given the right support, contribute meaningfully to academic discourse (for example, bringing in comparative insights, or novel approaches to problem-solving honed in different educational systems).

In conclusion, as U.S. higher education continues to enroll substantial numbers of EAL learners – whether international students or multilingual domestic students – the imperative to foster their success becomes ever more pressing. This study demonstrates that **empirically-supported strategies exist to meet this imperative**. By aligning classroom practice with theories of second language acquisition, sociocultural learning, and academic literacies, educators can create learning environments where EAL students are not only supported in overcoming language-related obstacles, but are also empowered to leverage their unique skills and perspectives. Such environments benefit all learners and reflect the inclusive, globalized academy that higher education aspires to be in the 21st century.

We end with a reminder that the journey of an EAL student in a university is one of tremendous courage and potential – navigating a new language, academic culture, and often a new society simultaneously. The findings and recommendations from this research offer a roadmap for instructors and institutions to guide these students on their journey. By providing thoughtful classroom guidance and strategically crafted support, we can ensure that EAL learners do not merely survive in our universities, but truly **thrive**, achieving their academic goals and enriching our campuses through the diversity of language and thought they bring.

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