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Equity in language access and comprehension as a growing priority in EFL education

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Abstract

As equity and justice become central themes in global education discourse, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms are increasingly scrutinised for their role in either perpetuating or dismantling educational disparities. This study investigates how equity and justice-oriented strategies (EJOS) influence language access and comprehension among undergraduate EFL learners in Indonesia, with particular attention to socio-economic status (SES). Using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, the research involved 60 university students and combined pre- and post-test scores, classroom participation data, and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative findings revealed statistically significant improvements in language comprehension and high attendance across SES groups, with no significant differences in baseline proficiency. However, qualitative data uncovered persistent inequities in resource access, instructional clarity, and language policy enforcement. Translanguaging, peer collaboration, and inclusive teaching practices emerged as key enablers of equitable learning. The study highlights the need for institutional reform and pedagogical shifts to embed EJOS meaningfully in EFL instruction. Findings contribute to the ongoing call for culturally sustaining and socially responsive language education.



Introduction

Equitable access to language education has become an increasingly urgent concern in global EFL contexts, particularly in multicultural and socioeconomically diverse classrooms. Since English proficiency is often aligned with academic mobility, economic prospects, and social participation, achievement gaps in language lessons can reinforce wider kinds of inequality. As a result, teachers and researchers have promoted inclusive, justice-oriented pedagogies that attend to the varied needs of learners across cultural, linguistic, and economic fault lines (Chen, 2020; Koçoglu & Öz, 2023; Poteau & Winkle, 2021).

In EFL classrooms, fairness in language comprehension extends past the simple alignment of the curriculum or clarity of instruction; it requires a reconceptualisation of the points of intersection among the practices of instruction, institutions' policies, and learners' daily lives. Studies have been turning towards EJOS to observe how teachers can effectively teach all learners, particularly learners from disadvantaged lives (Tanner, 2013; Freire, 2018; Cothorne, 2018). Those strategies—culturally responsive pedagogy, translanguaging, collaborative pedagogy, and differentiated instruction—have been associated with stronger academic achievement, increased learner agency, and improved classroom inclusivity (Andujar & Nadif, 2022; Chiu et al., 2022; Subban et al., 2022). In practice, though, their use remains sporadic, particularly in resource-poor EFL settings, wherein system constraints and teacher preparation are highly uneven (Chen & Abdullah, 2023; Grudnoff et al., 2017). In Indonesia, a highly stratified socio-economic situation and highly diversified linguistic repertoire, equity in EFL education becomes a pertinent case study. As a high-stakes subject when taught at the tertiary level, English still dominates, yet resource-based learning access and linguistic mediation are often dependent upon learners' socio-economic status (SES). Previous literature has indicated that low-SES learners are disproportionately affected by rigid pedagogic policy, paucity of material, and absence of ethno-educationally appropriate mediation (Ghodbane & El Achachi, 2019; Cheah et al., 2023). Such disadvantages are compounded when pedagogy insists upon rigid English practice only or fails to take advantage of the cognitive advantage of learners' first language use.

This study bridges the gap in the current evidence base by monitoring the ways equity and justice-related approaches play out in Indonesian EFL contexts and their influence upon learners' access to, as well as understanding of, English. Specifically, it aims to find the degree to which learners' socio-economic positions dictate their experiences of linguistic study, engagement, and resource access. Adopting a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, the study documents both quantitative outcomes and subjective experiences, gaining a multi-faceted understanding of equity practice. Findings aim to guide pedagogic reform, contribute to teacher training programs, and feed into the broader discussion about how to develop more inclusive, socially interactive EFL settings.

Literature review

Teaching for social justice directly connects with ensuring educational equity, as teachers work towards building equitable and inclusive classrooms for all learners regardless of social and cultural differences (Chen, 2020; Körögöl & Öz, 2023). As the globe struggles to become a more democratic and environmentally friendly society, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education becomes the core of addressing social inequalities and spreading educational equity all over the globe (Körögöl & Öz, 2023; Murray, 2020; Poteau & Winkle, 2021). Consequently, teachers are now requested to foster learning environments that not just accommodate learners, yet offer equal learning opportunities to all (Lindner & Schwab, 2020; Lachance et al., 2019). Despite the idealism behind the provision of justice-oriented pedagogy, however, such pedagogy holds much complexity. Equity in EFL classrooms frequently requires teachers to work through structural inequalities as much as pedagogical difficulties (Dyches & Sams, 2018). Equity and justice-oriented strategies (EJOS) are an area of increasing academic interest, with studies investigating the ways these strategies promote inclusive, culture-valorising, and socially conscientious classroom life.

As EJOS, teachers can direct their energies towards the learners with whom they can do the most good, thereby making educators themselves the advocates for justice (Tanner, 2013). EJOS implore teachers to recognise and respect the lived experiences of the disenfranchised (Cothorne, 2018). Perhaps the two approaches the most discussed are critical pedagogy (Freire, 2018) and culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000). Cooperative pedagogy (Richards & Lockhart, 1994) comes next.

Each of these approaches centres the learners' cultural and linguistic wealth and pursues the creation of diverse-learning environments conducive to social transformation.

Recent studies substantiate the transformational possibilities of EJOS for the capacity building of EFL teachers and the enhancement of learners' achievement. Research demonstrates how such strategies improve the motivation, social awareness, and academic achievement of learners, as well as foster a deeper understanding of social reality and enable students as agents of transformation (Andujar & Nadif, 2022; Chen, 2023; Chiu et al., 2022). EJOS have been found to promote a sustaining and inclusive learning setting wherein the students' identities are validated and utilised as the springboard for real understanding (Chen, 2023; Subban et al., 2022). Despite their promise, the integration of EJOS into EFL classrooms is filled with difficulties. An evident challenge is the lack of specialised education in the values of equity and justice, thus leaving teachers unprepared (Chen & Abdullah, 2023; Grudnoff et al., 2017). Compounding the issue, teachers have scant access to pedagogy-related material, a condition which perpetuates the already existing inequalities, particularly in weakly resourced schools (Chen, 2023; Subban et al., 2022). Teacher disposition can similarly be a major setback; as in a couple of cases, teachers have implicit biases or are resistant to practices involving cultural inclusion, adversely impacting the effort to educate linguistically and culturally diverse learners (Chen, 2023; Subban et al., 2022).

In order to create a truly inclusive and equitable space for learning, a deeper understanding of the challenges and barriers in the process of implementing EJOS are needed (Hult et al., 2018). While studies have advanced the disciplinary discourses, a shortage of studies probing EJOS in various sociocultural as well as sociolinguistic contexts prevails (Awada, 2021; Awada et al., 2021). Integration of learners' as well as other stakeholders' voices are needed to design a conducive system for equitable pedagogy (Chen, 2023; Wanti et al., 2022). Furthermore, whereas equity in inclusive education (Subban et al., 2022) has been investigated via systematic reviews, teacher education (Liao et al., 2022; Mills & Ballantyne, 2016) has been researched, together with higher education (Wanti et al., 2022), a noticeable absence continues to be a comprehensive review specifically addressing EJOS as it happens in EFL contexts. Addressing that gap continues to have considerable relevance to pedagogic reform and teacher preparation attuned to social justice purposes.

Citing Hossain (2018), the infusing of equity-oriented practices in English language pedagogy holds prime significance given the multicultural and plural nature of EFL learners. Uptake of equity-oriented strategies nurtures the eradication of barriers to learning as well as the inclusive and sustained growth of all learners. Educators have advanced pedagogic approaches like the culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) as pivotal to the same. Gorski (2016) contributes the equity literacy framework, which includes identifying biases, addressing inequalities, and creating inclusive learning environments. Critical pedagogy (Freire, 2018), with its focus on empowering learners through critical consciousness, also represents a key alternative to traditional, often exclusionary, teaching practices (Ayoub Mahmoudi et al., 2014). Additional models include differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2001), universal design for learning (Rose, 2000), and collaborative pedagogy (Richards & Lockhart, 1994), although many of these remain more conceptual than practical (Moyer & Clyme, 2009).

From a practitioner's perspective, researchers encourage teachers to actively see themselves as equity advocates who help foster inclusive and democratic learning settings (Chen & Abdullah, 2022; Cho, 2018). Ruan and Zheng (2019) emphasise promoting learners' critical thinking as foundational to equitable instruction. Banks' (1995) equity pedagogy supports this vision by framing the classroom as a space for intellectual and social engagement. Similarly, Dyches and Sams (2018) recommend a reflective teaching approach rooted in the philosophy of "pedagogical idealism", seeking equity for all students, echoing Schreiner's (2014) call for multidimensional learner engagement. Equitable classroom practices have been shown to eliminate learning barriers and support student agency. For instance, Ghodbane and El Achachi (2019) report that EFL teachers' just practices significantly improve student outcomes. Through culturally affirming pedagogies, teachers can enhance learners' participation and achievement by valuing their identities and creating meaningful educational experiences (Cheah et al., 2023; Cockerill et al., 2021; Ortega, 2019; Stevens & Martell, 2019).

Nonetheless, the literature still lacks comprehensive examinations of EFL teachers' equitable practices and their influence on learner outcomes. Estaji and Zhaleh (2021) underscore this research gap, stressing the need for empirical studies to define what constitutes effective EJOS in real

classroom settings. Expanding this knowledge base will contribute to a deeper understanding of how inclusive teaching can be standardised and adapted across educational contexts. Challenges to EJOS implementation extend beyond teacher training and material resources. Teachers' own beliefs, biases, and attitudes can negatively affect their engagement with equity principles. Some educators label or blame students, reinforcing deficit perspectives (Dimitrellou & Male, 2020; Stanforth & Rose, 2020). Gender-based biases in particular remain prevalent (Louiza & Hanane, 2020; Minasyan, 2017; Santosa, 2020), creating a hostile environment for marginalised learners.

Another issue here is the lack of system-level support. Educators have been known to work in schools wherein school administration does not have knowledge about, or does not promote, equity-oriented goals, hence limiting the possibilities of long-term, system-level change (Chan & Lo, 2017; Oranje & Smith, 2018). Additionally, restricted access to school facilities as well as facilities for education may add to the inequalities among learners, particularly the disadvantaged, or the minorities (Chen, 2023; Opie & Southcott, 2018; Ralejoe, 2021). In spite of the reality that the literature acknowledges the effectiveness of EJOS in EFL contexts (Cheah et al., 2023; Cockerill et al., 2021; Ghodbane & El Achachi, 2019), it similarly pinpoints various unresolved issues. Comprehensive understanding of the pedagogic practices as well as institutional conditions holds the key to equitable education in practice. Addressing the limitations will not only benefit teacher practice, but ensure a changed and inclusive process of education for all learners.

Methodology

Participants

The study involved 60 undergraduate English Education students enrolled at a university in Indonesia. They were purposively sampled to capture a cross-sectional distribution of socioeconomic status (SES) levels, low, middle, and high, so as to investigate equity-related gaps in language access and comprehension. Self-identified parental income and the availability of pedagogic resources were utilised to classify the participants' SES as low, middle, and high. All participants had finished a minimum of a year of English education course work.

Research design

A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was adopted to study equity and justice-oriented strategies (EJOS) used during EFL lessons. Through such a design, the researcher could simultaneously gather and interpret quantitative and qualitative data and arrive at a deep understanding of the impact of structural as well as pedagogical factors facilitating equitable understanding of language. Quantitative data consisted of language comprehension achievement (pre- and post-test scores), resource access (textbook ownership, use of the school library), and class engagement (attendance rates). Qualitative data were collected through interviews with the learners and open-ended queries about translanguaging, teacher practices, and peer help.

Procedure

The study took place over one academic semester and comprised three phases:

Initial quantitative assessment

At the start of the semester, students completed a pre-test assessing their baseline understanding of English grammar, vocabulary, and reading. Concurrently, a background survey captured data on SES, personal textbook ownership, access to library resources, and prior attendance records.

Instructional period and data collection

During the semester, all classes followed the standard curriculum. Teachers were not asked to implement any specific intervention but were observed for naturally occurring equity-oriented practices such as translanguaging, collaborative tasks, and classroom language policies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subsample of 20 students, balanced across SES groups, to gather in-depth insights into learners' experiences with language accessibility, instructional clarity, peer interaction, and policy enforcement. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure clarity and authenticity, then transcribed and translated into English for thematic analysis.

Final assessment and triangulation

At the semester's end, students completed a post-test that mirrored the pre-test in content and difficulty. Final attendance figures, updated reports on resource access, and post-intervention reflections were also collected. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential

statistics to examine the relationship between SES and comprehension development. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis through a hybrid inductive–deductive coding process.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the relevant institutional ethics committee (Approval No: EDU/ETH/2025/0147). All participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form explaining the study's aims, procedures, voluntary nature, and confidentiality protocols. Participation was self-selection, with a guarantee that students' academic records wouldn't be affected. Anonymity was maintained through the use of specially assigned participant codes, and all recordings of interviews were safely retained and destroyed after transcription. As a way of ensuring linguistic and cultural inclusivity, all interviews and questionnaires were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. Researchers adopted a culturally respectful and responsive method when collecting the data. Additional care was taken to allow the participants to review their transcripts for the accuracy of their responses.

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Results

This section reports the results obtained from both the quantitative and the qualitative data sources, giving a complete picture of the academic achievements and the learning process of the students. Quantitative findings describe shifts in test performances and engagement after the intervention, whereas the qualitative report discusses the students' views about equity, access, and classroom interactions among the socio-economic groups.

Quantitative findings

To explore how the process of learning affects academic achievement and students' motivation, a series of statistical tests were applied, e.g., a one-sample t-test, a one-way ANOVA, and post hoc comparisons by Tukey's HSD versus socio-economic status (SES). As shown in Table 1, results from the one-sample t-test indicated that the mean pre-test score ($M = 58.66$), post-test score ($M = 66.76$), and class attendance ($M = 86.88$) were all significantly greater than zero, $t(59) = 62.08$, $p < .001$; $t(59) = 61.22$, $p < .001$; and $t(59) = 107.55$, $p < .001$, respectively. These findings suggest a statistically

significant improvement in students' performance and consistently high attendance, reflecting strong engagement across the sample. To determine whether SES influenced pre-test performance, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted, see Table 2. The analysis showed no significant differences in pre-test scores across SES categories, $F(2, 57) = 0.50$, $p = .608$, indicating that students entered the learning experience with comparable levels of proficiency regardless of socio-economic background. Follow-up analyses using Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) test confirmed the absence of statistically significant pairwise differences in pre-test scores among the SES groups, see Table 3. For example, the mean difference between low SES and middle SES groups was 1.07 points, which was not statistically significant, $p = .872$. Confidence intervals for all comparisons included zero, further supporting the conclusion that SES did not significantly affect students' initial test performance.

Table 1

One-Sample Test

Test Value = 0

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Pre_Test_Score	62.082	59	.000	58.6600	56.769	60.551
Post_Test_Score	61.223	59	.000	66.7617	64.580	68.944
Class_Attendance	107.552	59	.000	86.8817	85.265	88.498

Table 2

ANOVA test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	54.733	2	27.366	.502	.608
Within Groups	3105.811	57	54.488		

Total	3160.544	59			
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Table 3

Multiple Comparisons

(I) SES_Group_Num	(J) SES_Group_Num	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
		Difference (I-J)			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1.00	2.00	1.0690	2.1455	.872	-4.094	6.232
	3.00	-1.5091			-8.177	5.159
2.00	1.00	-1.0690	2.1455	.872	-6.232	4.094
	3.00	-2.5781			-8.868	3.712
3.00	1.00	1.5091	2.7709	.850	-5.159	8.177
	2.00	2.5781			-3.712	8.868

Qualitative findings

The qualitative data, drawn from semi-structured interviews with students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, revealed four major themes. These themes reflect the lived experiences of learners navigating English language instruction through the lens of equity and access.

Table 4

Equity in language access and comprehension in EFL

Theme	Description	Illustrative Quote
Translanguaging as a bridge to comprehension	Students reported that using Bahasa Indonesia in English classes helped them better understand grammar, vocabulary, and academic texts.	“When our lecturer explains some parts in Bahasa, I finally understand the concept.” (Participant 16, Low SES)

Socioeconomic disparities shape access to language support	Lower-income students struggled to access textbooks and supplementary materials, limiting their opportunities for extended learning.	“Most books we need are expensive, and the library copies are not enough.” (Participant 3, Low SES)
Instructional pace and English-only policies hinder equity	Fast-paced instruction and strict English-only rules excluded learners who needed more time or linguistic support.	“If I ask a question in Bahasa, I get told to speak English. But I’m still not ready.” (Participant 38, Middle SES)
Peer interaction supports equitable learning	Collaborative learning and peer explanations in Bahasa provided learners with opportunities to clarify difficult concepts and feel more supported.	“Group work helps. We mix Bahasa and English and support each other. It feels fairer.” (Participant 54, High SES)

Translanguaging as a bridge to comprehension

Students across SES backgrounds consistently emphasised the critical role of translanguaging, particularly the use of Bahasa Indonesia, in supporting their understanding of complex English language concepts. For many, the use of their first language allowed them to break down difficult grammar structures and decode academic vocabulary that felt abstract when presented in English alone. As one participant explained, *“When our lecturer explains some parts in Bahasa, I finally understand the concept. English alone is too abstract sometimes”* (Participant 16, Low SES). Similarly, a student from a middle-income background remarked, *“I often translate difficult sentences into Bahasa to understand them better before writing in English”* (Participant 29, Middle SES). These responses illustrate how translanguaging fosters deeper comprehension by allowing learners to process new content through familiar linguistic frameworks. This strategy appeared especially important in contexts where instructional content was dense or cognitively demanding.

Socioeconomic disparities shape access to language support

Marked disparities in access to learning resources were evident among students from lower-income backgrounds. These students described a lack of personal ownership of essential materials such as

grammar workbooks or reading texts, which limited their ability to practise and consolidate learning beyond the classroom. Participant 3 (Low SES) highlighted this gap, stating, “Most books we need are expensive, and the library copies are not enough. I just read what’s available online, even if it’s not complete.” Another participant shared, “I borrow my friend’s grammar book because I can’t buy my own” (Participant 20, Low SES). These accounts suggest that material deprivation—rooted in socioeconomic status—acts as a persistent barrier to equitable language comprehension. Despite institutional resources such as libraries, access was not always sufficient, and students frequently relied on peers or incomplete online content to supplement their learning.

Instructional pace and English-only policies hinder equity

Many students reported that fast-paced instruction and rigid English-only policies created further barriers, especially for those still developing their proficiency. These constraints often made it difficult for students to ask questions or clarify misunderstandings in a supportive way.

Participant 11 (Low SES) expressed frustration with the pace of delivery: *“Some lecturers speak too fast and never repeat. I feel lost in class.”* Similarly, another student shared, *“If I ask a question in Bahasa, I get told to speak English. But I’m still not ready”* (Participant 38, Middle SES). These narratives demonstrate how strict monolingual policies can marginalise students who need flexible linguistic scaffolding. Rather than promoting immersion, such policies may unintentionally undermine equitable participation by denying students the tools they need to fully engage.

Peer interaction supports equitable learning

In contrast to the challenges of teacher-led instruction, students highlighted peer collaboration as a powerful equaliser. Informal discussions with classmates, often conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, allowed students to clarify confusing content, review key ideas, and build confidence. One student explained, *“When I don’t understand something, I ask my friend in Bahasa, and she explains it better than the textbook”* (Participant 25, Low SES). Another added, *“Group work helps. We mix Bahasa and English and support each other. It feels fairer”* (Participant 54, High SES). This theme suggests that peer interaction serves as a vital equity mechanism in the classroom, especially when formal instruction

falls short. The hybrid use of English and Bahasa during group tasks allowed students to co-construct understanding and support each other's learning regardless of SES.

Discussion

This study's findings shed light on the complex realities of enabling equity in EFL classrooms, which uncovered heartening trends, as well as remaining structural challenges. Qualitative data indicated statistically significant advances in students' understanding of language in the pre- and post-tests, which demonstrated that the general prevailing condition of instruction, while not necessarily justice-oriented *per se*, allowed for noticeable academic progress. Student attendance was likewise consistent, reflecting strong general engagement. Such findings suggest students regardless of socio-economic status were engaged and apt for progress when given consistent access to instruction. However, these findings in themselves obscure more subtle, yet omnipresent, forms of inequity uncovered through the gathering of qualitative data.

Interviews revealed that the use of translanguaging, specifically blending Bahasa Indonesia and English, was core to the construction of understanding and engagement. Higher and lower SES participants revealed how the use of Bahasa sometimes made abstract ideas about the dictionary and grammar clearer. This confirms Chen (2023) and Paris (2012) in arguing that the classroom must be linguistically inclusive, embracing the first language of the learners as a cognitive resource. The organic emergence of translanguaging in both teaching and peer interaction reflects culturally sustaining pedagogy and mirrors the literature's emphasis on critical and collaborative approaches (Freire, 2018; Richards & Lockhart, 1994). While translanguaging was not formally embedded in policy, it served as an equity strategy that allowed students to access the curriculum more meaningfully. Despite the overall gains in language performance, the qualitative findings highlighted that students from low-income backgrounds encountered substantial barriers in accessing essential learning resources. Several participants cited the unaffordability of textbooks and the inadequacy of library stock, forcing them to rely on incomplete or informal materials. Although the pre-test ANOVA indicated no significant difference in baseline language proficiency between SES groups, the experiences shared by lower-SES students align with broader concerns in the

literature regarding how material deprivation can limit learners' educational opportunities (Chen, 2023; Subban et al., 2022). These accounts bring to life the equity literacy framework proposed by Gorski (2016), which stresses the need to detect and redress systemic disparities that remain hidden behind aggregate academic data.

Another reoccurring theme was the unintended harm caused by rigid English-only policies and rapid instruction pacing. Students were often excluded when they were unable to clarify confusion in Bahasa Indonesia or ask for clarification at a slightly slower pace. These classroom expectations appeared to benefit better, more linguistically secure students, unintentionally excluding learners still acquiring proficiency. The literature strongly cautions against such sole-linguistic approaches, with scholars such as Dyches and Sams (2018) and Awada et al. (2021) recommending pedagogy attuned to learners' linguistic diversity and varying speeds of acquisition. These observations by the students suggest that without linguistic accommodation, instruction policies could instill rather than reduce inequality. Notably, interactions with peers became a significant provider of informal equity assistance. Collaborative work enabled the students to switch English and Bahasa use such that comprehension could be jointly shared and group work could yield. Informal equity networking assisted the students navigate challenging material and develop inclusivity as a product of the absence of formal equity programming. As Chiu et al. (2022) and Tanner (2013) suggest, equitable classrooms can occur as much as a result of teacher practice as they can as a result of horizontal peer structures of cooperation.

Collectively, the findings confirm the literature's assertion that despite a variety of equity and justice-oriented strategies remaining vocationally undertaught or variably practiced, learners themselves regularly compensate to create richer inclusive classroom conditions. But such learner-initiated practices must not become a fallback response to structural inequities. That is, EFL pedagogy must intentionally incorporate equity-driven practices, like translanguaging, flexible pacing, and culturally responsive pedagogy, to meet students where they are. These data are consistent with the concerns of Estaji and Zhaleh (2021) about the lack of empirical coherence about what exactly makes effective EJOSs outside the laboratory. The data also compel a need for teacher preparation to expand, language policy to re-design, and material access to improve, particularly for learners

enrolled from under-resourced areas. Although this study demonstrated improvement in student outcomes overall, it also revealed that equity remains contingent on informal practices and individual teacher choices rather than systemic support. The absence of statistically significant SES differences in academic outcomes must be read alongside students' testimonies of uneven resource access and emotional exclusion. Thus, achieving equity in EFL education is not only a matter of pedagogical innovation but also of institutional reform. Without comprehensive efforts to bridge material, linguistic, and relational gaps, educational equity risks remaining more aspirational than achievable.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into equity and language comprehension in EFL classrooms, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted within a single higher education institution in Indonesia, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to broader educational contexts, particularly those in different cultural, linguistic, or institutional settings. Expanding the scope to include multiple institutions or diverse regions could offer more representative insights. Second, the study relied on a purposive sample of 60 students, with qualitative data collected from only one-third of the participants. Although care was taken to balance participants across socio-economic groups, a larger and more diverse sample would enhance the robustness and transferability of the results, especially regarding underrepresented learner voices. Third, teacher perspectives were not included, despite their critical role in shaping equitable classroom practices. This omission limits the ability to contextualise observed practices within broader pedagogical intentions or institutional constraints. Future studies would benefit from incorporating teacher interviews or classroom observations to triangulate findings more comprehensively.

The study adopted a convergent parallel design over a single academic semester, which restricts the ability to assess long-term impacts of equity-oriented strategies. A longitudinal approach could provide richer data on how equity challenges evolve and how students' comprehension and engagement change over time.

Conclusion

This study reinforces the argument that equity in EFL classrooms requires something more than regular instruction or matching resource allotment; it requires a focused attention to the varied lived experiences of students. While quantitative data revealed that students of all socio-economic levels had marked improvements in understanding of language, the qualitative information revealed persistent gaps in accessibility of learning material, instruction inclusivity, and classroom policy. Peer cooperation, teacher-responsive practice, and translanguaging were identified as clinching strategies used to remove these gaps, confirming the applicability of equity and justice-based strategies (EJOS) in real EFL contexts.

The findings demonstrate that equity cannot be assumed based on outcomes alone but must be evaluated through the lens of opportunity, support, and learner experience. Addressing the structural and pedagogical barriers that affect low-SES learners is not only a matter of fairness but a prerequisite for sustainable educational improvement. If EFL educators and institutions are to promote inclusive and transformative learning environments, EJOS must move from theory to systematic implementation. This requires not only pedagogical innovation but also broader institutional commitment to equity as a guiding principle in language education.

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Conflict of interest

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The researcher confirms that there is no conflict of interest associated with this study.

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