

STRATEGIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE FOR STUDENTS WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

ESTRATEGIAS EN ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS COMO IDIOMA EXTRANJERO PARA ESTUDIANTES CON TRASTORNO DE DÉFICIT DE ATENCIÓN CON HIPERACTIVIDAD

Ronaldo Andrés Palacios Delgado ^{1*}

¹ Estudiante de la Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi, Extensión Pujilí. Ecuador. ORCID:
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1367-2212>. Correo: ronaldo.palacios7809@utc.edu.ec

Ángel Gabriel Prado León ²

² Estudiante de la Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi, Extensión Pujilí. Ecuador. ORCID:
<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1330-2470>. Correo: angel.prado8455@utc.edu.ec

Dra. Gina Silvana Venegas Alvarez, PhD ³

³ Docente investigador de la Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi, Extensión Pujilí. Ecuador. ORCID:
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3263-6225>. Correo: gina.venegas@utc.edu.ec

* Autor para correspondencia: gina.venegas@utc.edu.ec

Abstract

This research investigates instructional approaches for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), who encounter particular challenges like issues with focus, organization, and impulsivity. The primary aim was to outline and identify the most effective methods for teaching English to ADHD-affected students. To accomplish this, a qualitative methodology was employed, which included surveys and interviews with both pre-service and in-service educators, alongside a review of contemporary academic literature. The findings indicate that strategies such as established routines, multisensory teaching, project-based learning, Total Physical Response (TPR), and the integration of technology facilitate the engagement and learning of these learners. Nevertheless, there was an identified gap in specific training and confidence among educators to consistently implement these methods, leading to inconsistent teaching practices. The study concludes that continuous professional development, curriculum



Esta obra está bajo una licencia *Creative Commons* de tipo (CC-BY-NC-SA).

Sociedad Ecuatoriana de Investigación Científica. E-mail: revistaalcon@gmail.com

modifications, and collaborative efforts among educators, families, and institutions are vital for providing inclusive and effective EFL education for students with ADHD.

Keywords: ADHD, teaching strategies; inclusive education; EFL; multisensory learning

Resumen

El actual análisis estudia las técnicas de enseñanza del idioma inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) enfocadas en alumnos diagnosticados con Trastorno por Déficit de Atención e Hiperactividad (TDAH), quienes presentan dificultades específicas en atención, organización y control de impulsos. El propósito fundamental fue identificar y describir las estrategias que resultan más eficientes para la enseñanza del inglés a estudiantes que presentan TDAH. Para alcanzar esto, se utilizó un método cualitativo que incluyó encuestas y entrevistas a profesores en formación y en práctica, además de un examen de la literatura científica reciente. Los hallazgos muestran que enfoques como rutinas bien definidas, enseñanza multisensorial, aprendizaje basado en proyectos, Respuesta Física Total (TPR) y la incorporación de tecnología mejoran tanto la participación como el aprendizaje de estos alumnos. No obstante, se observó una carencia de capacitación específica y de autoconfianza en los profesores para implementar de manera consistente estas técnicas, lo que da lugar a prácticas educativas dispares. Se concluye que la formación continua, la adaptación del currículo y la cooperación entre educadores, familias e instituciones son fundamentales para asegurar una educación inclusiva y eficaz en entornos de EFL para alumnos con TDAH.

Palabras clave: TDAH; estrategias de enseñanza; educación inclusiva; EFL; aprendizaje multisensorial

Fecha de recibido: 16/05/2025

Fecha de aceptado: 10/07/2025

Fecha de publicado: 16/07/2025

Introduction

This academic research examines the difficulties encountered by students diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, a topic of increasing significance in educational research and practice. ADHD, as detailed by Martella et al. (2022), is a neurodevelopmental condition marked by inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity, which adversely affects students' academic achievements, language learning, and emotional health. Despite the rising number of ADHD diagnoses and the pressing need for inclusive educational practices, there exists a substantial lack of consistent, evidence-supported research regarding effective EFL teaching techniques adapted for ADHD learners.

Recent research emphasizes the necessity of creating and applying teaching strategies that cater to the cognitive and behavioral characteristics of these students. Methods such as structured routines, multisensory instruction, task-oriented learning, and the use of contemporary technological tools like interactive whiteboards and tablets have shown beneficial impacts on student engagement and language learning results



Esta obra está bajo una licencia *Creative Commons* de tipo (CC-BY-NC-SA).

Sociedad Ecuatoriana de Investigación Científica. E-mail: revistaalcon@gmail.com

(Vojtková & Kašpárková, 2019; Vu & Nguyen, 2020). However, as Govor (2021) and Cedillo Tello & Argudo-Serrano (2024) note, the absence of systematic teacher training and a limited comprehension of ADHD-specific techniques often lead to variable classroom implementations, causing distress for both teachers and students.

The pressing need to tackle these deficiencies is further underscored by the growing population of students with ADHD in mainstream education environments. Educators frequently face obstacles related to time limitations, emotional and behavioral regulation, and the modification of teaching methods (Indrawati, 2024). Nevertheless, studies indicate that when teachers utilize established routines, provide clear instructions, incorporate visual aids, and engage students in movement-based activities, those with ADHD demonstrate increased engagement and academic achievement (Cedillo Tello & Argudo-Serrano, 2021; GTEFL, 2025).

This piece seeks to analyze and assess the existing literature on ADHD within EFL contexts, pinpointing pedagogical strategies that promote effective learning and inclusivity. The importance of this analysis lies in the acknowledgment that inclusive education benefits not only students with ADHD but also enriches the overall classroom atmosphere, fostering empathy, diversity, and collaboration among all learners. By integrating research outcomes and practical classroom insights, this essay presents a collection of strategies aimed at crafting accessible and equitable learning environments.

Technological Tools, Task-Based Learning (TBL), Multisensory Approach, and Classroom Arrangement were specially used by teachers as the main strategies to improve the learning process of English as a Foreign Language. It was noticed that there is not a specific teaching strategy followed by teachers, instead they applied different strategies in their classrooms. However, the final results showed that those strategies are very useful to improve English knowledge, based on pre-service teachers' answers. Therefore, all teachers implement several important-useful strategies in order to improve the academic performance of their students.

Materials and methods

The current study utilized a qualitative research methodology with the goal of identifying and articulating effective methods for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to learners diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In line with Pritha Bhandari's (2025) definition, qualitative research entails the collection and analysis of non-numerical information to achieve a deeper understanding of ideas, perspectives, or experiences. Thus, this research employed a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate and outline the teaching strategies that can improve the instructional skills of pre-service educators at the Technical University of Cotopaxi when working with ADHD students.

The study's population included 20 pre-service English teachers enrolled in the National and Foreign Languages Pedagogy program at the Technical University of Cotopaxi. All participants were in their eighth semester, with ages typically ranging from 21 to 24 years. The selection was made using convenience sampling, ensuring that participants had relevant experience with teaching practices in inclusive environments.

Data gathering was conducted through a survey designed to identify the most effective techniques utilized by pre-service teachers in instructing students with ADHD in EFL classrooms. Surveys are widely acknowledged as a dependable method of collecting information about the characteristics, preferences, opinions, or beliefs



of specific groups (Bhandari, 2025). The choice of this instrument was influenced by its accessibility and its ability to provide valuable, generalizable insights into current teaching practices.

This methodological structure offered a comprehensive perspective on the strategies used by upcoming educators, emphasizing both their strengths and areas for further professional growth in meeting the needs of learners with ADHD.

Results and discussion

The vast majority of participants (nineteen out of twenty) indicated that they have taught English to children with disabilities. Figure 1 shows that pre-service educators are gaining considerable experience in inclusive education settings throughout their training. As noted by Florian (2021), "genuine interaction with students with disabilities during training establishes a core belief in inclusive education." This kind of experience is essential for cultivating inclusive teaching philosophies and effective strategies.

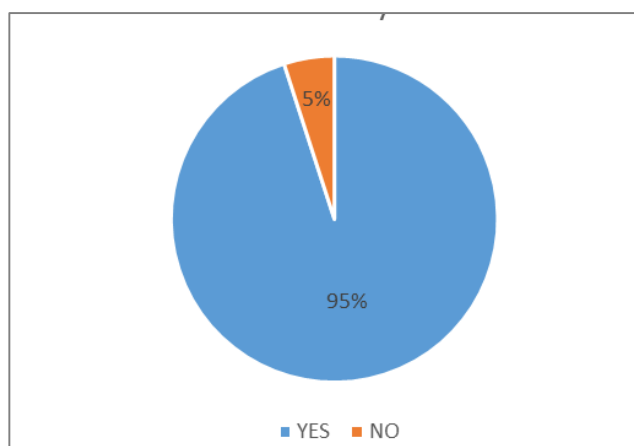


Figure 1. Have you ever taught English to children with any disability?

Among the various disabilities identified, ADHD, Autism, and Dysgraphia were the ones most commonly cited. Figure 2 underscores the variety of needs present in English language classrooms and the significance of equipping pre-service teachers to assist students with diverse cognitive and behavioral characteristics. Forlin and Chambers (2021) highlight that familiarity with different disabilities fosters empathy and enhances professional preparedness among upcoming educators, allowing them to be more responsive and flexible in their teaching approaches.

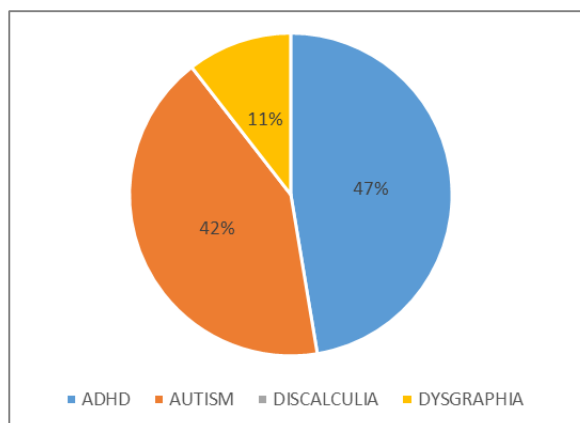


Figure 2. What kind of disability does the student have?

Curricular modifications for students with ADHD were applied in varying degrees: six pre-service teachers indicated they used them "always," four "sometimes," while nine reported using them "rarely" or "never." This variation in Figure 3 demonstrates an inconsistency in the implementation of inclusive strategies, which may be due to insufficient training, time constraints, or a lack of confidence. DuPaul and Chronis-Tuscano (2021) suggest that "consistent curricular modifications that are tailored can act as a protective factor for the academic success of students with ADHD." In the absence of such adaptations, many students with ADHD may face risks of disengagement or underperformance.

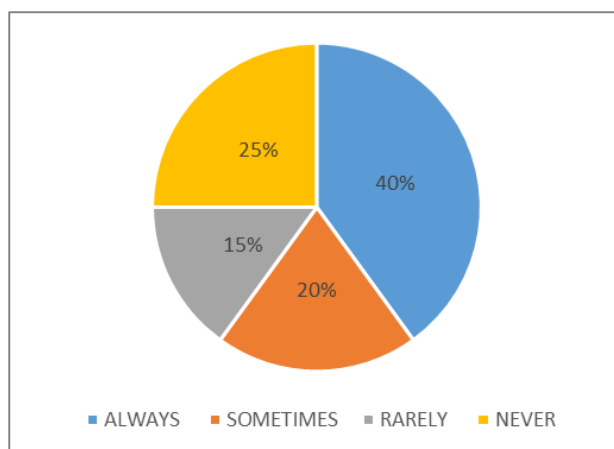


Figure 3. How often do you use curricular adaptations to students with ADHD?

On the other hand, Figure 4 shows that Pre-service teachers often reported using Total Physical Response (TPR), Audio-Lingual methods, Task-Based Learning (TBL), and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) when working with students with ADHD. The popularity of TPR and TBL indicates an acknowledgment of the necessity for active, movement-oriented, and engaging approaches that suit students with attention to challenges. Richards and Rodgers (2021) state, "TPR accommodates the kinetic learning style of students with ADHD, assisting in attention regulation through organized movement." In a similar vein, Willis and

Willis (2022) point out that TBL fosters sustained attention by integrating language acquisition into meaningful contexts.

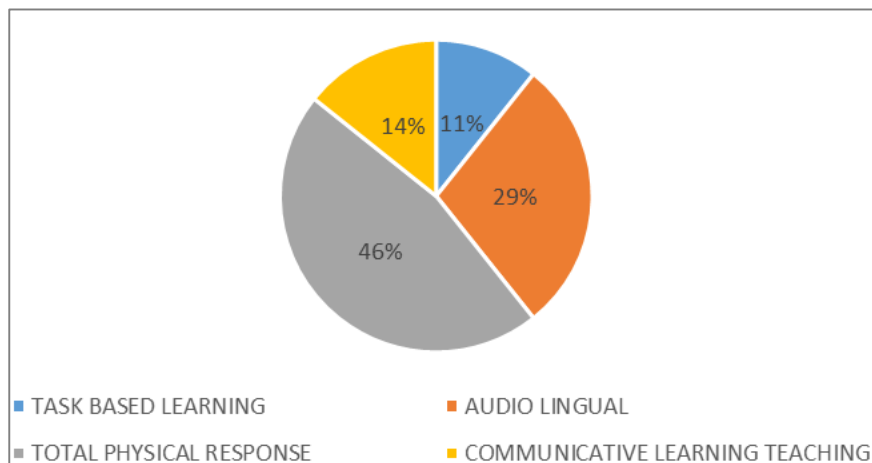


Figure 4. What of the following methods you use to teach students with ADHD?

Although Task-Based Learning has its advantages, a significant number of participants (eleven out of 20) indicated that they seldom or never used it, with only three respondents claiming they used it “always” and five saying “sometimes”, as it can be evidenced in Figure 5. This indicates that, even though TBL is viewed as an effective approach, it might not be consistently implemented in practice, potentially due to a lack of familiarity, adequate training, or support from the institution. Nguyen and Pham (2023) found similar results, stating that “pre-service teachers frequently refrain from employing TBL due to limited exposure and the lack of practical models in their coursework.”

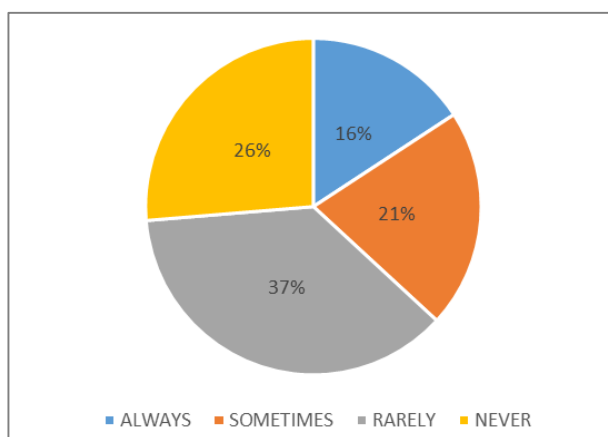


Figure 5. How often do you use Task Based Learning?

When asked if TBL is effective for students with ADHD, most responses of Figure 6 were positive, although there was a range of certainty: several participants selected “sometimes” or “always,” while none indicated it was never beneficial. This suggests that pre-service teachers acknowledge the potential of TBL but may not

have enough solid evidence or experience to reliably assess its effects. According to Rogers et al. (2022), “when TBL incorporates ADHD-friendly approaches—such as immediate feedback and promoting student autonomy—it can greatly boost engagement.”

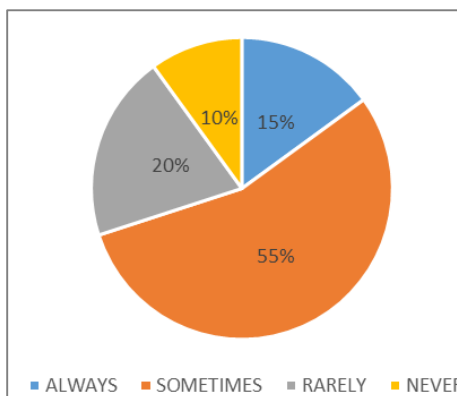


Figure 6. Do you think task-based learning(TBL) engages ADHD students in English lessons?

In addition, it can be seen that Figure 7 says that Pre-service teachers employ various approaches for learners with ADHD, with the most frequently used being “Language Focus,” “Assessment,” and “Task Selection.” These approaches are designed to streamline instruction, clarify goals, and assess student comprehension, which are critical when teaching students with attention difficulties. Barkley and Murphy (2020) highlight the significance of having clear, structured routines and intentional assessment, asserting that, “Executive dysfunction in ADHD students necessitates predictable and supportive classroom settings.”

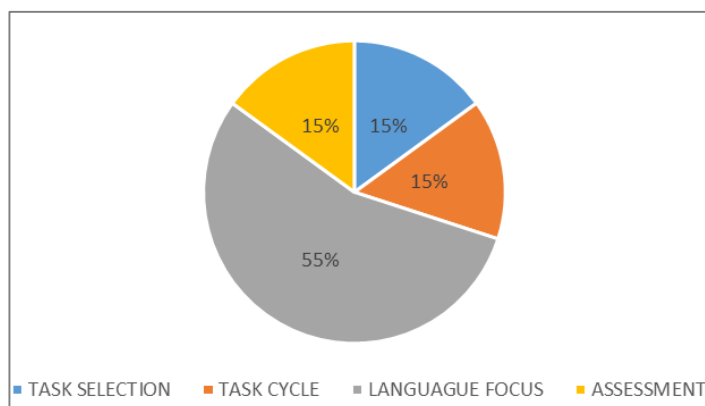


Figure 7. What strategies do you use for students with ADHD?

The application of educational technology in TBL environments showed considerable variation, with merely three respondents indicating they used it “always,” while the others were divided among “sometimes,” “rarely,” or “never” and it can be noticed in Figure 8. Although some educators make use of applications such as Kahoot, Quizlet, and Play Quiz to boost student engagement, many are still reluctant, possibly due to limited access or insufficient training. Recent findings by Salas and Baralt (2023) indicate that “digital games

and tools enhance sustained attention and minimize behavioral disruptions in students with ADHD when integrated into structured learning sequences.”

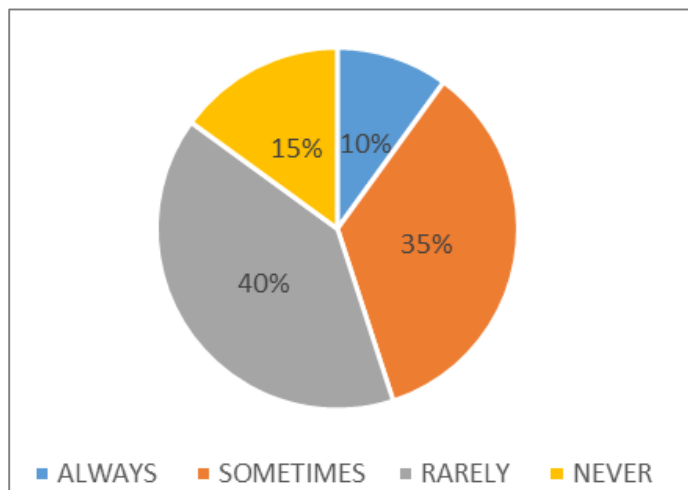


Figure 8. How often do you use computer-based activities or educational technology in TBL for students with ADHD?

Related to the last question, the majority of participants felt that gamification enhances English instruction for students with ADHD as well, with many responses falling into the categories of “sometimes” and “always”, which are represented in Figure 9. This supports an increasing consensus that game-based learning boosts motivation, focus, and engagement, particularly in learners who find conventional teaching challenging. As noted by Hamari and Sarsa (2020), “gamification has demonstrated reliable outcomes in improving motivation and learning results among students with attention-related issues.”

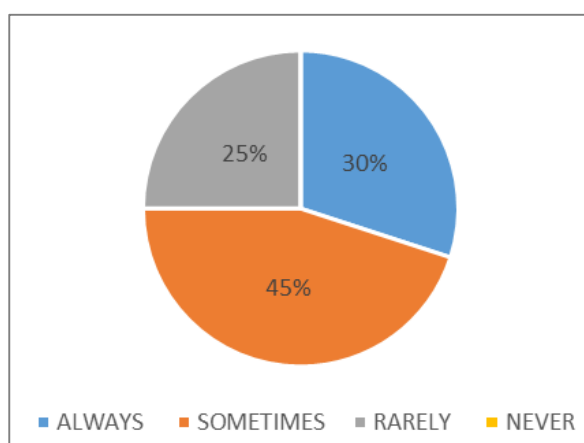


Figure 9. Do you consider “Gamification” improves the development of teaching English to students with ADHD?

A significant number of pre-service educators represented in Figure 10 recognized that the configuration of the classroom impacts the effectiveness of English instruction for students with ADHD, indicating

“sometimes” or “always.” The physical setup influences movement, accessibility, and the degree of distraction—key elements for students facing attentional difficulties. Wills and Mason (2022) noted that “well-organized classroom environments with distinct visual indicators aid self-regulation and diminish environmental stress for learners with ADHD.”

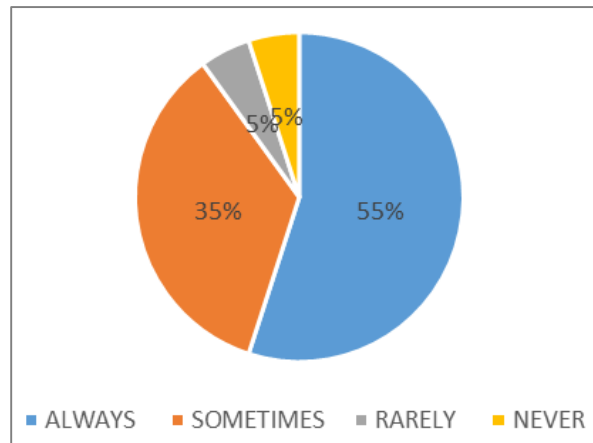


Figure 10. Do you consider classroom arrangement influence in the development of teaching English to students with ADHD?

With regard to Figure 11, it demonstrates that pre-service teachers frequently used multisensory methods, particularly visual tools (such as flashcards), auditory stimuli (like songs and chants), kinesthetic experiences (games), and tactile resources. This indicates an impressive grasp of how instruction enriched with sensory experiences can support students with ADHD by strengthening memory and engagement through various learning pathways. Sousa (2021) emphasizes that “multisensory instruction stimulates several areas of the brain, improving information processing and retention for learners with ADHD.”

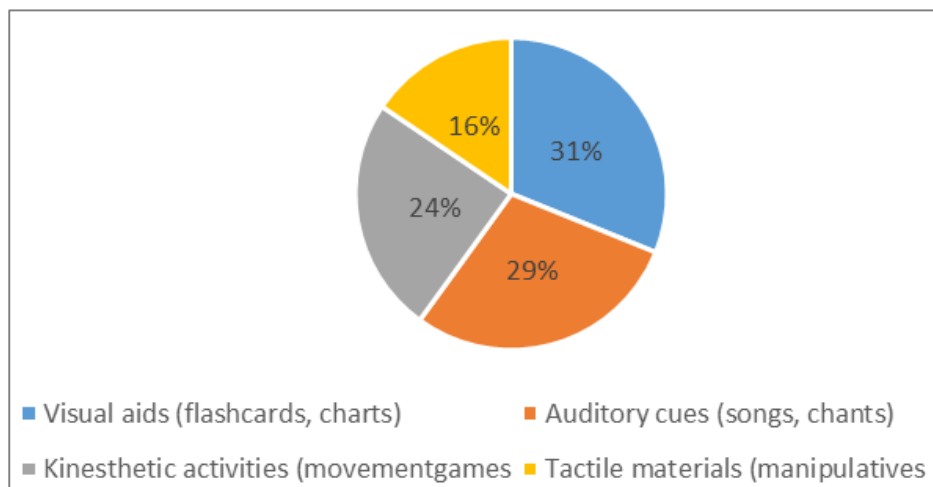


Figure 11. Which of the following multisensory approaches do you regularly incorporate?

At the end, Figure 12 shows that adapted tests were the most frequently taken method of evaluation, with online applications and oral presentations following closely behind. These selections indicate a recognition that conventional assessments might not suit students with ADHD, who frequently find timed, written tests challenging. According to Tomlinson (2021), “equitable assessment is not about treating everyone the same but about providing accessible formats that enable all learners to showcase their understanding.”

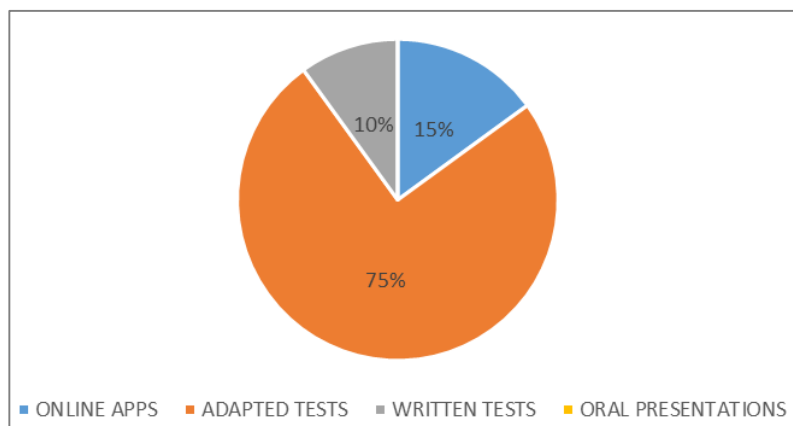


Figure 12. How do you assess the progress of students with ADHD in English language skills?

Conclusions

Educators who assist students with ADHD in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) utilize various strategies, including technological resources, task-oriented learning, multisensory techniques, and classroom configuration, adjusting their approaches to cater to each student’s needs and preferences instead of adhering to a single method. This flexible approach has shown to be effective in enhancing both English proficiency and academic success, as indicated by feedback from pre-service teachers. Additionally, educators customize activities and assessment methods to fit individual learning styles, making sure all students, including those with ADHD, can engage and strengthen their communication skills while keeping the class's overall pace. While the most effective approach may vary based on the specific classroom environment, pre-service teachers have noted that Total Physical Response (TPR) and the Audio-lingual Method (ALM) are particularly advantageous for students with ADHD. Furthermore, some research underscores the effectiveness of Task-Based Learning (TBL), highlighting the necessity for teachers to be well-versed in a variety of strategies to optimally assist students with special needs.

Recommendations

Educators should persist in utilizing a variety of effective techniques when instructing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to learners with ADHD or other disabilities, acknowledging that every student has a distinct style and pace that necessitates tailored approaches to enhance both academic achievements and language abilities. Coordination among English instructors is vital to create targeted activities and assessment methods that cater to the diverse requirements of all students, not solely those with ADHD, promoting inclusivity and participation. Additionally, it is essential for educators to have a comprehensive understanding of different instructional methods—including but not limited to Total Physical Response (TPR), Audio-lingual Method



(ALM), and Task-Based Learning (TBL)—to modify and apply them effectively based on the students and context, thereby optimizing learning results and nurturing an inclusive classroom atmosphere.

References

- Barkley, R. A., & Murphy, K. R. (2020). Executive Function and Self-Regulation in ADHD: Implications for Classroom Management. *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 24(3), 345-357.
- Bhandari, P. (2025). Survey research: Definition, examples & methods. *Scribbr*. <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/survey-research/>
- Cedillo Tello, M. E., & Argudo-Serrano, J. C. (2021). Teaching strategies for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in English as foreign language classrooms. *Resistances: Journal of the Philosophy of History*, 2(5), 143–160. <https://resistances.religacion.com/index.php/about/article/download/143/242/458>
- Cedillo Tello, M. E., & Argudo-Serrano, J. C. (2024). Teaching strategies for children with ADHD in EFL classrooms. *RESISTANCES*, 5(9), 2737-6230. <http://doi.org/10.46652/resistances.v5i9.143>
- DuPaul, G. J., & Chronis-Tuscano, A. (2021). Supporting Students with ADHD through Curricular Modifications. *School Psychology Review*, 50(2), 123-138.
- Florian, L. (2021). Inclusive Education: Principles and Practices. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(4), 567-580.
- Forlin, C., & Chambers, D. (2021). Teacher Preparation for Inclusive Education: Empathy and Professional Readiness. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 36(1), 1-15.
- Govor, A. (2021). Teaching a Foreign Language to Students with ADHD. *Govor*, 37, 205-222. <https://doi.org/10.22210/govor.2020.37.10>
- GTEFL. (2025, January 18). Teaching English to children with ADHD: Practical TEFL tips. *GTEFL Blog*. <https://gtefl.com/blog/teaching-english-to-children-with-adhd-practical-tefl-tips/>
- Hamari, J., & Sarsa, H. (2020). Gamification in Education: Motivation and Learning Outcomes. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 107, 106-118.
- Indrawati, I. (2024). Educators' experiences teaching English to ADHD students in inclusive settings: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Special Education*, 39(1), 1-15.
- Martella, D., Aldunate, N., Sánchez, O., & Fuentes, L. J. (2022). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: A pilot study for symptom assessment and diagnosis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 946273. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.946273>
- Nguyen, H., & Pham, T. (2023). Barriers to Task-Based Learning Implementation in Pre-Service Teacher Education. *Asian EFL Journal*, 25(2), 112-130.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2021). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.





- Rogers, S., Smith, A., & Lee, K. (2022). Task-Based Learning and Student Engagement in EFL Classrooms. *Language Teaching Research*, 26(4), 501-520.
- Salas, M., & Baralt, M. (2023). Digital Games and Attention in ADHD Students: Evidence from EFL Classrooms. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 26(1), 88-99.
- Sousa, D. A. (2021). *How the Brain Learns* (6th ed.). Corwin.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2021). *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners* (3rd ed.). ASCD.
- Vojtková, N., & Kašpárková, K. (2019). Teaching English as a foreign language to children with special learning needs at primary school. *Dar An-Nashr for Universities*.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED568128.pdf>
- Vu, H., & Nguyen, N. (2020). Classroom management techniques for teaching English inclusively to ADHD and ASD primary students in Vietnam. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 36(3), 53-69.
<https://doi.org/10.25073/2525-2445/vnufs.4556>
- Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2022). *Task-Based Language Teaching: Insights and Practices*. Oxford University Press.
- Wills, S., & Mason, J. (2022). Classroom Arrangement and Self-Regulation in ADHD Learners. *Learning Environments Research*, 25(3), 273-290.

