

# EFL Teaching in Kinshasa: Challenges in International Baccalaureate Schools

Jérôme Shako Loseke

University of Kinshasa, DRC

[jeromeshako@gmail.com](mailto:jeromeshako@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** This study explores the difficulties faced by English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in International Baccalaureate (IB) schools, with a focus on Kinshasa. Here, the growing demand for English proficiency meets challenges like limited resources and a diverse student population. While there are some research on language education, the specific issues that EFL teachers encounter in IB settings have not been thoroughly examined. Using qualitative methods such as interviews and classroom observations, this research seeks to answer two key questions: what are the main challenges do EFL teachers face in IB schools, and what strategies can effectively address these challenges? The findings indicate that teachers often deal with insufficient resources, large class sizes, and varied linguistic backgrounds, all of which impact their teaching effectiveness. To tackle these issues, the study suggests adopting culturally responsive teaching methods, providing ongoing professional development, and encouraging resource-sharing among schools. As a result, this research aims to improve English language teaching and foster intercultural understanding within IB frameworks, offering practical insights for educators and administrators to navigate the unparalleled challenges of EFL instruction in diverse settings.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the complexities of teaching English in International Baccalaureate (IB) schools have attracted growing scholarly attention, reflecting both the global expansion of the IB framework (Miller, 2020) and the increasing linguistic diversity of its student populations (Byram, 1997).

Jenefer Philp and colleagues (2013) point out that as IB schools work to promote both intercultural understanding and academic success; English teachers face some unique hurdles. These challenges call for creative teaching methods and adaptable strategies. Even though there's already a lot of research on language education, there's still not enough information about the specific difficulties that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers deal within IB schools-or about the best ways to tackle these challenges.

This study addresses these gaps by exploring the lived experiences of EFL teachers in IB schools, focusing on the multifaceted challenges they encounter and the strategies they employ to support student success (IndonesiaMlathi Paramesthi et al. 20 23). Drawing on qualitative methods, the research seeks to answer two central questions: What are the primary challenges faced by EFL teachers in IB schools, and how can these challenges be effectively addressed? By synthesizing insights from interviews, classroom

observations, and relevant literature, the study aims to provide practical recommendations for educators and administrators seeking to enhance English language instruction in IB settings (Roberts, 2023).

### ➤ *Research Problem:*

The research problem for this research paper is the identification of challenges faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in International Baccalaureate (IB) schools in Kinshasa, where increasing demand for English proficiency is met with limited resources, large class sizes, and diverse student backgrounds (Elizabeth R et al., 2018). Despite these hurdles, the specific challenges and coping strategies of EFL teachers remain largely unexamined, which impedes efforts to enhance the quality and effectiveness of EFL education in this context.

### ➤ *Research Questions:*

In qualitative research, studies are guided by research questions rather than objectives or hypotheses. These questions generally come in two types: a main central question and several sub-questions. The central question focuses on the main topic or phenomenon and is explored using methods such as interviews, observations, or document analysis (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the following questions seek answers:

- What challenges do EFL teachers face in IB schools?
- How can these challenges be overcome?

### ➤ *Hypotheses:*

Here we define a hypothesis as **the core idea in scientific research, around which all investigation and experimentation are organized**. Below are the hypotheses for this research topic:

The following responses related to research were yielded in advance:

First, there are different challenges faced by EFL teachers teaching in IBS such as: Limited Resources, Large Class Sizes, Diverse Student Language Backgrounds, Cultural Differences, Pressure of IB Curriculum, etc.

Second, to overcome these challenges, EFL teachers are supposed to: Utilize Collaborative Teaching Strategies, Engage in Continuous Professional Development, Implement Differentiated Instruction, Foster a Supportive Classroom Environment, Seek Administrative Support, etc.

### ➤ *Research Objectives:*

The goal of this study is to examine the different challenges faced by EFL teachers teaching in IBS. As objectives, the following can be mentioned:

First, to identify different challenges faced by EFL teachers teaching English at IBS.

Second, to provide solutions on the way to overcome those challenges.

## II. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study approach is used to provide an in-depth understanding of the experiences of EFL teachers in Kinshasa's IB schools. Case study methodology is suitable as it allows for the exploration of a phenomenon (EFL teaching challenges) within its real-life context (IB schools in Kinshasa).

## III. OUTLINE

The current paper contains three parts. The first one deals with teaching English in IBS. The second one deals with challenges faced by EFL teachers. The last one emphasizes solutions to overcome those challenges.

### A. *Part I: Teaching English At Ib Schools*

Teaching English at IB schools is always evolving, thanks to the special mix of challenges and opportunities that come up in classrooms full of students from different cultures and languages (Baker & Wiseman, 2015). In this overview, we'll look at what teaching methods work best, how cultural diversity affects the classroom, and how curriculum expectations influence the way teachers teach.

### ➤ *Key Concepts in IB English Education: Contextual Definitions*

To understand how English is taught in IB schools, it is essential to define core concepts as they function within the IB's inquiry-driven, globally focused framework. Below, terms like "teaching," "learning," and "challenge" are

explained both as abstract ideas, and as they manifest in the day-to-day practices of IB classrooms.

#### • *Teaching*

Brown (2014) defines "Teaching" as a deliberate process of knowledge.

In IB schools, teaching English isn't just about the usual lessons. It's more about guiding students to explore language through real-life situations and different cultures, using an inquiry-based, student-focused approach. Teachers help students make connections between English and their own lives, helping them develop the critical thinking and communication skills they'll need to be global citizens.

#### • *Learning*

Gagné (1985) defines "Learning" defined as "Knowledge constructed through experience" or "a change in an individual caused by experience" (Slavin, 2003).

Learning English within the IB framework is an active, collaborative journey. Students construct meaning by engaging with diverse texts, participating in discussions, and reflecting on their understanding. The IB's emphasis on approaches to learning—such as research, self-management, and social skills—supports students in becoming independent, lifelong learners who can adapt their language skills to various contexts.

#### • *Teacher*

A "teacher" is a knowledge sharer and values instiller. Freire et al. (1970) point out that IB English teachers are more than just instructors—they're facilitators, mentors, and guides who encourage students to be curious and take responsibility for their learning. Instead of just giving out information, IB teachers work alongside students, helping them build knowledge and adapting lessons to fit each student's needs, all while promoting inclusivity and cultural awareness.

#### • *Learner*

According to Piaget et al. (1951), a "learner" is someone who actively takes part in building knowledge. In IB English classes, students are engaged participants who use language both as a subject to study and as a tool for making sense of the world. They're encouraged to ask questions, reflect, and share their ideas, which help them develop not only language skills but also a deeper understanding of other cultures and the ability to empathize with others.

#### • *International Baccalaureate (IB) School*

To understand the educational context of this research, it is essential to define the characteristics and core values of an International Baccalaureate (IB) School. According to the mission statement of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), IB Schools are committed to developing "inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect" (IBO, 2021). IB schools provide a distinctive learning environment

where English is taught as part of a well-rounded, globally-focused curriculum. Here, learning English is connected to developing global citizenship, working on projects that cross subject areas, and thinking about ethical issues.

- *EFL, ESL and EAL*

The acronym "EFL" refers to the learning of English by non-native speakers in countries where English is not the primary language. According to McDonough (2016), EFL education emphasizes the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary, but EFL learners often lack opportunities for authentic social interaction. "ESL" refers to the learning of English by non-native speakers in countries where English is dominant, benefiting from language immersion that enhances their linguistic competence (Krashen, 1982). The term "EAL," which stands for English as an Additional Language, encompasses both EFL and ESL learners, recognizing the complex linguistic realities of today's learners (Wright, 2010).

Within IB schools, English may be taught as a first, second, or additional language, depending on students' backgrounds. The IB recognizes the diverse linguistic realities of its learners, offering tailored support for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as an Additional Language (EAL) students. This ensures equitable access to the curriculum and values the multilingualism present in the school community.

- *Challenge*

Challenges are often perceived as obstacles, but according to Dweck (2006), they can be opportunities for learning and growth. Challenges foster innovation and encourage collaboration.

Learning English in an IB context involves embracing challenges as opportunities for growth as pointed by Dweck. Students are encouraged to tackle complex texts, engage in debates, and reflect on their learning process. Teachers support students in overcoming language barriers and developing resilience, fostering a growth mindset that values effort and perseverance. (What is an IB Education: Approaches to Teaching and Learning?)

- *Curriculum*

As defined by Dominic et al. (2024), curriculum is the planned learning designed to help students reach set goals. It is also defined as a framework for delivering knowledge, skills, and values. A carefully designed curriculum is the backbone of effective learning, equipping students with adaptable skills and perspectives to navigate a changing world. The IB English curriculum serves as a blueprint for meaningful language learning. It integrates literature, language acquisition, and communication skills, ensuring students are equipped to express themselves confidently and thoughtfully in a variety of contexts. The curriculum is designed to be flexible and responsive, adapting to students' needs and interests while maintaining rigorous international standards.

### ➤ *IB Schools: History and Mission*

The International Baccalaureate (IB) program is dedicated to developing "inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect" (IBO, 2017). Established in response to dissatisfaction with traditional educational models, the IB emerged between 1962 and 1967, influenced by progressive theorists like John Dewey and Jean Piaget. Pioneers like Alex Peterson, Robert Leach, John Goormaghtigh, and Kurt Hahn played a key role in shaping the IB Diploma Program, focusing on developing students' critical thinking and encouraging them to take charge of their own learning, rather than relying on rote memorization. Since its inception, the IB has expanded globally, introducing programs like the Middle Years Program (MYP) in 1994 and the Primary Years Program (PYP) in 1997, completing its educational continuum (Smith, 2015). The introduction of the Learner Profile in 1997 outlined ten attributes aimed at fostering intellectual curiosity and ethical awareness among students. While the IB is praised for its rigorous academic experience, it faces criticism regarding potential academic stress and burnout (Johnson, 2018; Martinez, 2019). The IB programs play a vital role in enhancing English language proficiency and cultural understanding, particularly in urban centers like Kinshasa, where effective teaching methodologies are essential (Savigno, 2002).

Founded in Geneva in 1968, the IB aims to meet the needs of internationally mobile families by blending academic rigor with personal growth and community involvement. The IB offers four programs tailored to different age groups: Primary Years Program (PYP), Middle Years Program (MYP), Diploma Program (DP), and Career-related Program (CP). Notable contributors like Marie-Thérèse Maurette have significantly impacted global education, with IB graduates often sought after by universities (UC, 2020). However, challenges remain, including the demanding curriculum that may not suit all learning styles, leading to stress among students and educators (IB Educators, 2023). Central to the IB philosophy is the Learner Profile, which cultivates attributes such as inquirers, knowledgeable individuals, thinkers, communicators, principled citizens, open-minded learners, caring individuals, risk-takers, balanced persons, and reflective thinkers, all aimed at preparing students for the complexities of modern society.

### *B. Part II. Literature Review On Challenges Faced By Efl Teachers In Ib Schools In Kinshasa*

The rapid spread of International Baccalaureate (IB) programs has underscored the distinctive challenges encountered by educators in diverse and resource-limited environments, particularly in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in IB schools must navigate the intricate balance between the rigorous standards set by the IB framework and the local socio-cultural and linguistic contexts. This literature review pulls together what existing research says about these challenges, categorizing them into pedagogical obstacles, linguistic complexities, resource

constraints, cultural considerations, institutional limitations, and more.

#### ➤ *Pedagogical Challenges*

Johnson and Golombek (2011) emphasize the critical role of mediation in professional development, advocating for the integration of students' native languages and cultural knowledge within linguistically diverse classrooms. Their focus on culturally responsive practices provides valuable strategies for EFL teachers in Kinshasa, where leveraging students' background is essential for effective learning. Hattie (2016) discusses the challenges associated with balancing differentiated instruction and the demands of the IB curriculum, noting that this tension can lead to frustration for both educators and students, especially when learners struggle to meet the rigorous standards expected in international schools.

#### ➤ *Linguistic Diversity Challenges*

IB EFL teachers encounter significant challenges related to linguistic diversity, particularly when addressing the differences between African American English (AAE) and Standard American English (SAE). One major issue is the need to foster an inclusive classroom environment that respects and validates students' linguistic identities while also preparing them for academic success in SAE, which is often perceived as the "standard" form of English (Wheeler & Swords, 2006). Teachers may struggle with misconceptions about AAE, which can lead to biased perceptions of students' abilities and hinder effective communication (Smitherman, 2000). Additionally, the pressure to adhere to standardized assessments that predominantly reflect SAE can create tension, as students may feel compelled to code-switch, potentially undermining their confidence in using AAE (Hollie, 2017).

#### ➤ *Resource Constraints*

Deller (2021) highlights the scarcity of pedagogical resources in IB schools, which impedes the implementation of inquiry-based learning and critical thinking. This scarcity is particularly pronounced in Kinshasa, where teachers often rely on outdated materials. L. Wang (2022) notes that without adequate resources, educators may revert to traditional methods, undermining the core philosophy of the IB program.

Hargreaves (2014) highlights resource limitations, noting that schools in Kinshasa struggle with funding, outdated materials, and insufficient professional development, which hinder EFL teachers' ability to effectively implement the IB curriculum.

#### ➤ *Technological and Institutional Challenges*

In "Challenges to EFL Teachers in a Changing Time" (2020), Jia and Zhao explore the evolving challenges posed by technological advancements, highlighting the necessity for EFL teachers to adapt their roles and develop digital literacy to effectively utilize new educational tools. Many teachers face heavy workloads that limit their time for professional development and research, while

simultaneously confronting increasing demands for innovative teaching methodologies.

Institutional challenges, particularly inadequate training in IB methodologies, present significant obstacles. Johnson (2018) notes that without ongoing training, teachers struggle to align their practices with IB principles, leading to inconsistencies in instructional delivery. Smith (2019) observes that varying interpretations of the IB framework can hinder collaboration among educators. Insufficient training also affects teachers' confidence and perceived competence. Brown (2020) argues that without the necessary skills, teachers may feel overwhelmed, negatively impacting their effectiveness. Jones (2017) further notes that without proper training in IB assessment practices, teachers may revert to traditional methods, impeding accurate evaluation of student progress relative to IB goals.

#### ➤ *Cultural Challenges*

Cultural considerations present significant challenges in EFL education. Brown and Nanda (2018) note the complexity of managing cultural differences in the classroom, emphasizing that culture shapes communication styles, learning preferences, classroom behavior, and attitudes toward authority. In the IB program, students from diverse backgrounds bring unique cultural norms, which can lead to misunderstandings if not adequately addressed. Gilmer Javier Ordonez Procel et al. (2023) assert that cultural context significantly influences teaching strategies and outcomes.

The influence of local languages poses significant challenges in EFL instruction in Kinshasa. The prevalence of French and other local languages affects students' English language acquisition, with pronunciation and grammatical differences creating obstacles. Thornbury (2018) emphasizes that language is closely tied to culture, leading to potential misunderstandings in communication. He notes that students often rely on their native language (L1) when speaking, which can hinder real-time processing and fluency in English (L2). While occasional L1 use can aid comprehension, excessive reliance limits opportunities for meaningful L2 practice. Furthermore, local languages carry sociocultural norms that may conflict with English communication conventions, making it essential for teachers to integrate sociocultural knowledge into their instruction.

Another challenge related to culture is the integration of the IB program within local contexts such as Kinshasa. Ochoa (2015) identifies a significant "clash of values" between IB principles and local cultural norms, particularly the traditional respect for authority and conventional teaching methods that often conflict with the IB's emphasis on student-centered learning and critical thinking.

#### ➤ *Large class size challenges*

Large class sizes create several challenges for EFL teachers, making it difficult for them to give personalized attention and support to students, particularly those who may struggle with certain language skills (Harmer, 2007). This often leads to a generic teaching approach that doesn't



address the varied learning needs of students. Moreover, larger classes tend to generate more noise and disruptions, which complicates classroom management and can result in behavioral issues that distract both teachers and learners. Assessing student progress also becomes more difficult, as teachers struggle to provide timely and meaningful feedback while under pressure to prepare students for standardized tests (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2020). Additionally, the demand on resources like textbooks and technology restricts the ability to implement engaging, interactive lessons, and the heavier workload from managing large classes can contribute to teacher burnout and lower teaching effectiveness (Ur, 1996).

Abdul Aziz Mohamed (2023) emphasizes the importance of mentoring in addressing pedagogical challenges, noting that many teachers lack training in modern instructional methods, which limits their ability to engage students. Barriers such as large class sizes and rigid curricula further hinder the implementation of innovative practices.

### C. Part.III. Solutions/Recommendations

#### ➤ Pedagogical Challenges

According to Johnson et al. (2011), EFL teachers should address pedagogical challenges by incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices that integrate students' native languages and cultural backgrounds into the curriculum. Professional development programs must focus on mediation strategies to help teachers balance differentiated instruction with the rigorous demands of the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. This balance is crucial, as it often leads to frustration for both teachers and students when students struggle or feel unchallenged.

To tackle this issue, Tomlinson (2001) emphasizes the need for ongoing professional development centered on differentiation strategies within the IB context. This training should involve hands-on approaches for adapting lesson content, teaching methods, and classroom environments to support all learners. Collaboration is also essential; when teachers work together to plan lessons, they can share effective ideas and resources for differentiation (Vygotsky, 1978). Regular informal assessments, such as quick quizzes or exit tickets, help teachers monitor student understanding and make timely adjustments to their teaching based on student needs. Lastly, employing flexible grouping—where students are grouped according to their needs and learning styles—can enhance the effectiveness of differentiated instruction, ensuring that every student receives the necessary support and challenge to succeed.

#### ➤ Linguistic Diversity Challenges

Wheeler et al. (2000) emphasize that EFL teachers must foster an inclusive classroom atmosphere that respects linguistic diversity, particularly between African American English (AAE) and Standard American English (SAE). Educators should receive training to combat misconceptions

surrounding AAE and develop strategies that validate students' linguistic identities while preparing them for academic success in SAE. Emphasizing the value of all dialects can help build students' confidence and communication skills.

A significant issue is the necessity of creating an inclusive environment that respects and validates students' linguistic identities, while also preparing them for academic success in SAE, often viewed as the "standard" form of English (Wheeler & Swords, 2006).

#### ➤ Resource Constraints

To overcome resource constraints, schools should seek partnerships with local and international organizations to secure funding and access to updated pedagogical materials. Professional development opportunities should be prioritized to equip teachers with innovative teaching methods that align with the IB philosophy (Deller, 2021; L. Wang, 2022). Collaborative resource-sharing initiatives among IB schools can also enhance the availability of teaching materials.

#### ➤ Technological and Institutional Challenges

EFL teachers should engage in continuous professional development focused on digital literacy to adapt to technological advancements (Jia & Zhao, 2020). Institutions must provide ongoing training in IB methodologies to ensure teachers can align their practices with IB principles effectively. Establishing mentorship programs can help teachers navigate institutional challenges and build confidence in their instructional delivery (Johnson, 2018; Brown, 2020).

#### ➤ Cultural Challenges

To address cultural challenges, teachers should undergo training that emphasizes the importance of understanding and integrating cultural differences into their teaching strategies. This approach can help mitigate misunderstandings that arise from diverse cultural norms (Brown & Nanda, 2018; Gilmer Javier Ordonez Procel et al., 2023). Additionally, integrating local languages and cultural contexts into the curriculum can enhance students' engagement and comprehension (Thornbury, 2018).

#### ➤ Large Class Size Challenges

To tackle the challenges posed by large class sizes, schools should consider implementing smaller class structures or utilizing co-teaching models to allow for more personalized attention. Teachers should be trained in classroom management strategies that effectively engage students and minimize disruptions (Harmer, 2007; International Baccalaureate Organization, 2020). Additionally, leveraging technology can facilitate individualized learning experiences even in larger groups, helping to alleviate teacher burnout and enhance instructional quality (Ur, 1996; Abdul Aziz Mohamed, 2023).

Table 1: Summary of Challenges and Solutions in EFL Education

Challenge	Recommendations/Solutions
<b>1. Pedagogical Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices</li> <li>- Focus on mediation strategies for balancing differentiated instruction with IB demands.</li> <li>- Provide ongoing professional development on differentiation.</li> <li>- Encourage collaboration among teachers.</li> <li>- Use regular informal assessments like quizzes to monitor understanding.</li> <li>- Employ flexible grouping based on students' needs and learning styles.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Linguistic Diversity Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foster an inclusive classroom atmosphere that respects linguistic diversity</li> <li>- Provide training to combat misconceptions about AAE.</li> <li>- Validate students' linguistic identities and emphasize the value of all dialects.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Resource Constraints</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seek partnerships with local and international organizations for funding.</li> <li>- Prioritize professional development for innovative teaching methods.</li> <li>- Implement collaborative resource-sharing initiatives among IB schools.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Technological and Institutional Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engage in continuous professional development focused on digital literacy.</li> <li>- Provide ongoing training in IB methodologies.</li> <li>- Establish mentorship programs for instructional support.</li> </ul>
<b>5. Cultural Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Undergo training to understand and integrate cultural differences into teaching strategies.</li> <li>- Integrate local languages and cultural contexts into the curriculum.</li> </ul>
<b>6. Large Class Size Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implement smaller class structures or co-teaching models for personalized attention.</li> <li>- Train teachers in effective classroom management strategies.</li> <li>- Leverage technology for individualized learning experiences.</li> </ul>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant challenges faced by English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in International Baccalaureate (IB) schools, particularly in Kinshasa. The increasing demand for English proficiency is met with obstacles such as limited resources, large class sizes, and a diverse student population. Through qualitative research methods, the study identifies key challenges and explores effective strategies to address them. Findings suggest that EFL teachers struggle with insufficient resources and varied linguistic backgrounds, which negatively impact their teaching effectiveness. To mitigate these issues, the research advocates for culturally responsive teaching practices, ongoing professional development, and resource-sharing initiatives among schools. By implementing these recommendations, the study aims to enhance English language instruction and promote intercultural understanding within IB frameworks, providing valuable insights for educators and administrators navigating the complexities of EFL teaching in diverse educational settings.

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