

## **English Slang in EFL Classroom Interactions: A Scoping Review of Usage Patterns, Perceptions, and Learning Outcomes**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Rapid exposure to digital communication has increased students' use of English slang, yet its role in EFL classroom interaction remains insufficiently mapped across diverse contexts. Although studies have examined isolated aspects such as usage patterns or motivational effects, evidence remains fragmented, geographically uneven, and inconsistent in its implications for pedagogy. Responding to this gap, the present scoping review synthesizes two decades of research on the use of English slang in EFL classroom interactions, examining usage patterns, perceived benefits and challenges, and links to motivation and participation. A systematic search across four databases identified 23 eligible studies published between 2004 and 2024. Narrative and thematic synthesis revealed that slang use is pervasive in peer interaction and strongly shaped by social media exposure, with students demonstrating pragmatic awareness by shifting between formal and informal registers depending on context. Strong evidence indicates that slang can enhance engagement, social connection, confidence, and willingness to communicate, while also reducing language anxiety. However, students frequently struggle with determining appropriate contexts for slang use, and teachers express uncertainty regarding instructional boundaries. These findings suggest that slang represents an authentic linguistic resource that, when addressed through explicit instruction in register and pragmatic competence, can support communicative development. While methodological limitations and uneven research contexts remain, this review provides the first comprehensive mapping of the field and identifies a clear agenda for future inquiry into classroom practice, teacher training, and long-term learning outcomes.

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**Keywords:** Engagement Slang, EFL classroom interaction, Pragmatic competence, Student Motivation

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

English language learning has undergone significant transformation in the digital age, with students increasingly exposed to informal language through social media, streaming platforms, and online communication. Slang—informal, colloquial expressions that evolve rapidly—has become ubiquitous in digital communication, particularly among younger generations. Terms such as "LOL" (laugh out loud), "OMG" (oh my god), and "FOMO"

(fear of missing out) permeate online interactions, creating a linguistic landscape markedly different from the formal English traditionally taught in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms.

This presents both opportunities and challenges for language educators. Slang represents authentic, contemporary language that students naturally encounter and wish to master. However, educators face uncertainty about whether, when, and how to address informal language in curricula designed around standard English. Contemporary language learning theories emphasize authentic materials and meaningful communication (Canale & Swain, 1980; Vygotsky et al., 1978), suggesting that understanding how slang functions in EFL contexts has become increasingly important as digital communication reshapes language learning.

Research on informal language in EFL contexts has evolved considerably. Lutviana & Mafulah (2021) analyzed WhatsApp transcripts from Indonesian EFL classes, identifying 32 distinct slang terms used predominantly in peer interactions, suggesting that social media exposure drives slang acquisition. The (Mahfud & Rahmat, 2024) identified five factors influencing slang usage: social status, age, social distance, situational context, and media influence, highlighting the socially-mediated nature of slang use.

Motivational aspects have received considerable attention. (Wang et al., 2021), in a large-scale study (n=428), demonstrated that authentic materials including informal language significantly enhanced intrinsic motivation in EFL learners. (Lee & Drajadi, 2023) found positive correlations between Informal Digitally-mediated English (IDLE) and student engagement among Indonesian students ( $r=.45$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Van Batenburg et al. (2019) demonstrated that oral interaction including informal registers significantly reduced foreign language classroom anxiety ( $p<.05$ ), supporting (Krashen, 1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis.

Research on pedagogical perspectives reveals mixed attitudes. Elsherif and Nuseir (2015) discussed challenges in determining which slang expressions merit classroom attention, given rapid evolution and regional variation. (Preply, 2024) documented contradictory views, with 40% of teachers opposing slang prohibition while 78% desired control over language use. This tension reflects broader debates about linguistic prescriptivism in language education.

Despite these valuable insights, several critical gaps persist. First, research remains fragmented across different journals, disciplines, and geographic regions. No comprehensive synthesis has mapped existing evidence or identified consistent patterns. Second, most research focuses on online contexts rather than face-to-face classroom interactions, limiting practical applicability. Third, research concentrates heavily on Western contexts, with limited attention to Asian EFL settings where the majority of learners reside. Fourth, conflicting findings across studies have not been adequately reconciled, leaving educators without clear guidance. Finally, rapid digital evolution means older studies may describe contexts no longer relevant.

These gaps suggest an urgent need for systematic literature synthesis that maps existing evidence, identifies patterns and contradictions, evaluates evidence quality, and establishes a research agenda for future investigation.

To address these gaps, this scoping review systematically maps existing literature on English slang usage in EFL classroom interactions. This review aims to: (a) synthesize evidence regarding how EFL students use English slang in classroom interactions; (b) analyze documented benefits and challenges associated with slang use in English learning; (c) assess relationships between slang use and student motivation and classroom participation.

This study employs scoping review methodology, following the framework established by (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) and the (Institute, 2020). This approach is appropriate when research questions are broad and the goal is mapping rather than meta-analysis. The review systematically searched four databases (Google Scholar, ERIC, ResearchGate, and academic journals) using predetermined search strings. Inclusion criteria specified studies published 2004-2024, addressing EFL learners, examining slang or informal language, and relating to educational contexts. Data extraction employed standardized forms, and synthesis used narrative and thematic approaches organized by research questions. The PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR; Tricco et al., 2018) guided reporting to ensure transparency and rigor.

This scoping review makes several important contributions representing new value to the field. First, it provides the first systematic synthesis of literature on slang in EFL classroom contexts, offering a comprehensive evidence base previously unavailable. While individual studies have examined specific aspects (usage patterns, teacher attitudes, motivational effects), this review integrates disparate research across disciplinary

boundaries—sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, educational psychology—into a coherent framework.

Second, by employing rigorous scoping review methodology with transparent procedures, it models best practices for evidence synthesis in applied linguistics. Third, practical implications drawn from synthesized evidence directly inform pedagogical decision-making, curriculum development, and teacher education with actionable recommendations. Fourth, by highlighting the Indonesian EFL context alongside international research, it brings attention to understudied populations representing a substantial proportion of global English learners. Finally, the identification of specific research gaps and methodological limitations establishes a clear agenda for future investigation, potentially catalyzing new research addressing critical questions.

The innovation lies in moving beyond fragmented individual studies to provide a comprehensive mapping of the evidence landscape, enabling evidence-based decision-making in EFL practice and policy.

This review proceeds from the assumption that slang represents a legitimate dimension of authentic English communication that EFL educators must address thoughtfully rather than ignore or prohibit. We argue that effective pedagogy neither uncritically promotes nor categorically rejects slang, but instead equips students with pragmatic competence to navigate informal registers appropriately. The evidence synthesized in this review demonstrates that slang use, when understood and managed thoughtfully, can enhance motivation and engagement while supporting communicative competence development, though not without challenges requiring pedagogical attention.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a scoping review methodology following the five-stage framework established by (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) and refined by (Levac et al., 2010). Scoping reviews are appropriate for mapping broad research areas where evidence is heterogeneous (Munn et al., 2018). The review adhered to the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) reporting guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018).

To identify relevant studies, systematic searches were conducted across four electronic databases: Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), ResearchGate, and direct academic journal searches. The search was conducted in November 2025 and covered publications from January 2004 to November 2024. This 20-year timeframe was

chosen to capture both historical context and contemporary developments in digital communication.

Search strings combined three key concept groups using Boolean operators:

- 1) Concept 1 (Slang): "slang" OR "informal language" OR "colloquial English" OR "internet slang"
- 2) Concept 2 (EFL): "EFL" OR "English as Foreign Language" OR "English language learning"
- 3) Concept 3 (Context): "classroom interaction" OR "classroom" OR "student motivation" OR "participation"

For example: ("slang" AND "EFL" AND "classroom interaction")

Studies were included if they: (1) focused on EFL learners (not ESL); (2) addressed slang, informal language, or colloquial English; (3) related to classroom interaction, motivation, or learning; (4) were published 2004-2024; (5) were available in English or Indonesian; and (6) were peer-reviewed or from reputable sources.

Studies were excluded if they: (1) focused solely on ESL contexts; (2) had no classroom or learning context; (3) focused purely on linguistics without pedagogical implications; (4) were not accessible in full text; or (5) were low-quality non-academic sources.

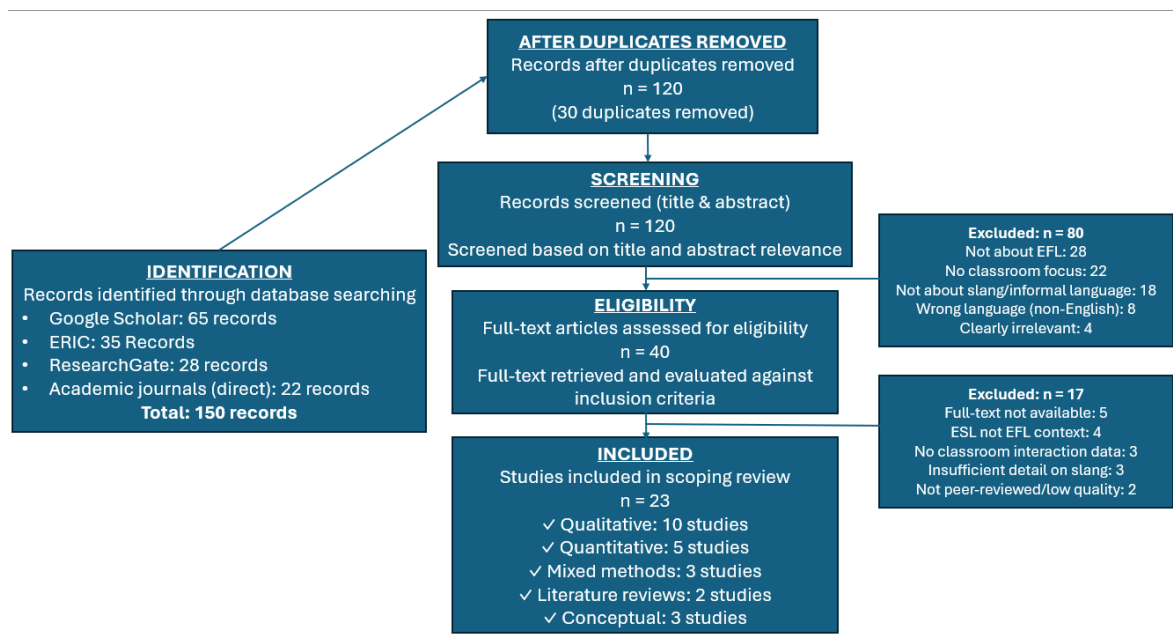


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process

The selection process followed four stages as documented in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1). Initial searches yielded 150 records. After removing 30 duplicates, 120

records underwent title and abstract screening. Subsequently, 40 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, with 17 excluded for not meeting inclusion criteria. The final sample comprised 23 studies.

Data extraction was conducted by a single reviewer using a standardized extraction form, with findings systematically documented in Microsoft Excel to facilitate organization, synthesis, and analysis. A structured spreadsheet was developed containing the following columns: (1) Study ID and bibliographic information (author, year, title, journal); (2) Study design and methodology (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods); (3) Setting and context (country, educational level, sample size); (4) Data collection methods (surveys, interviews, observations, document analysis); (5) Key findings organized by research question (RQ1: usage patterns; RQ2: benefits and challenges; RQ3: motivational effects); (6) Direct quotes or statistical results supporting main findings; and (7) Quality assessment ratings. This Excel-based system enabled sorting and filtering by multiple variables (e.g., geographic region, methodology, year), facilitating pattern identification across studies. Each study was assigned a study ID (e.g., 001, 002) to maintain traceability throughout the analysis process. The spreadsheet also included a separate worksheet for tracking methodological characteristics and another for making prisma flow diagram.

Quality assessment employed criteria adapted from established frameworks, evaluating: (1) clarity of research objectives; (2) appropriateness of methodology; (3) adequacy of sample size; (4) rigor of data analysis; (5) clarity of findings; and (6) peer-review status. Studies were rated as Very High, High, or Medium quality based on these criteria. No studies were rated as low quality; such studies had been excluded during eligibility assessment.

Synthesis employed narrative and thematic approaches. Findings were organized according to the three research questions, with themes identified through iterative analysis. For RQ1 (usage patterns), data were categorized by frequency, types, contexts, sources, and functions. For RQ2 (benefits and challenges), findings were grouped into benefit categories and challenge categories. For RQ3 (motivational effects), data were organized by impact areas including motivation, participation, anxiety, and engagement.

Evidence strength was assessed using explicit criteria that synthesized across multiple studies, going beyond individual study quality ratings to evaluate the cumulative weight of evidence. Three dimensions were considered: (1) quantity—the number of studies

supporting a finding; (2) quality—the proportion of high-quality studies among supporting studies; and (3) consistency—the degree of concordance across diverse contexts, methodologies, and populations. Findings were classified as "strong evidence" when supported by seven or more studies, with the majority rated high or very high quality, demonstrating consistent results across different geographic contexts and educational levels (e.g., both Asian and Western settings). "Moderate evidence" required 4-6 supporting studies of mixed quality, or high-quality studies showing generally consistent results with minor contextual variations. "Emerging evidence" indicated support from three or fewer studies, medium-quality studies, or inconsistent results suggesting context-dependency. For instance, "social media as primary slang source" received a strong evidence classification based on seven high-quality studies spanning Indonesia, China, and international contexts with consistent findings regardless of whether studies used surveys, interviews, or discourse analysis. This classification system, distinct from individual study quality assessment, enabled transparent differentiation between well-established findings and those requiring further investigation.

Several methodological limitations should be noted. First, the review was conducted by a single researcher without independent verification by a second reviewer, which may introduce bias. Second, the restriction to English and Indonesian language publications excludes potentially relevant research in other languages. Third, the search was limited to four databases, though these represent major sources for educational research. Finally, as with all reviews, publication bias may favor studies with positive findings.

### **3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

#### **3.1. Results**

The systematic search yielded 150 records across four databases. After removing 30 duplicates, 120 records were screened based on title and abstract. Forty articles underwent full-text assessment, with 23 studies meeting inclusion criteria (Figure 1). These studies represented diverse geographic contexts: Indonesia (21.7%), International/Multiple (34.8%), China (13.0%), USA (8.7%), Europe (8.7%), Africa (8.7%), and Other Asia (4.3%). Nearly half (47.8%) were published 2020-2024, indicating growing scholarly attention.

Methodologically, qualitative designs dominated (43.5%), followed by quantitative (21.7%), mixed methods (13.0%), literature reviews (8.7%), and conceptual papers (13.0%).

University-level studies comprised 52.2% of the sample. Quality assessment revealed that 73.9% achieved high or very high ratings, supporting the credibility of findings.

### **3.1.1. Patterns of Slang Usage**

Eighteen studies (78.3%) addressed usage patterns. Social media emerged as the primary acquisition source across seven studies (Alkamel, 2024; Lee & Drajadi, 2023; Li et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2023; Lutviana & Mafulah, 2021; Mahfud & Rahmat, 2024), with Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter providing daily exposure. Internet slang dominated usage patterns, with LOL, OMG, ASAP, and FOMO appearing most frequently.

Students demonstrated clear contextual variation, using slang significantly more with peers than teachers. Four studies documented this differential pattern (Agustine et al., 2021; Lutviana & Mafulah, 2021; Rullu, 2018; Wahyu, 2022). (Lutviana & Mafulah, 2021) identified 32 distinct slang terms in online EFL transcripts, concentrated in peer communication rather than formal instruction.

Five functions were documented: creating intimacy (5 studies), practicing native-like speech (4 studies), facilitating efficient communication (3 studies), appearing cool (3 studies), and concealing information (2 studies). (Mahfud & Rahmat, 2024) identified five influencing factors: social status, age, social distance, situations, and media/popular culture exposure.

Indonesian studies revealed mixed L1-English slang patterns, demonstrating code-switching behaviors unique to Indonesian contexts (Lutviana & Mafulah, 2021; Mahfud & Rahmat, 2024).

### **3.1.2. Benefits and Challenges**

Twenty studies (87.0%) addressed perceived impacts. Benefits received stronger support from high-quality studies compared to challenges.

Motivation and engagement appeared in eight studies, with students reporting increased interest and enjoyment. (Preply, 2024) found 48% of teachers interested in teaching slang. Communication skills improvement was documented in seven studies, with students perceiving slang as essential for sounding natural. Social connection benefits appeared across seven studies, including peer bonding and comfortable classroom atmospheres.

Cultural understanding (4 studies) and vocabulary expansion (3 studies) represented additional benefits documented less frequently.

Appropriateness issues constituted the primary challenge across eight studies. Students struggled distinguishing appropriate contexts for slang use. Comprehension difficulties appeared in five studies, with (Huang, 2004) documenting students' struggles understanding professors using slang in lectures.

Teaching challenges emerged in seven studies, including teacher uncertainty about which slang to teach and curriculum constraints. The Preply Survey (2024) revealed contradictory attitudes: 40% of teachers opposed banning slang while 78% wanted control over its use, and 33% of parents opposed classroom slang.

Academic concerns (4 studies) and rapid evolution challenges (4 studies) were documented less frequently.

### 3.1.3. Motivational and Participatory Effects

Fifteen studies (65.2%) examined these effects, consistently demonstrating positive associations.

Intrinsic motivation increases were documented in six studies. (Wang et al., 2021), in a large-scale study (n=428), found intrinsic motivation was a stronger engagement predictor than extrinsic motivation, with authentic materials including slang significantly boosting intrinsic motivation.

Willingness to communicate (WTC) increases appeared in seven studies. (Lee & Draji, 2023) found positive correlations between Informal Digitally-mediated English (IDLE) and engagement among 350 Indonesian students ( $r=.45$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

Anxiety reduction was documented in four studies. (Van Batenburg et al., 2019) demonstrated statistically significant FLCAS score decreases when oral interaction included informal registers ( $p<.05$ ).

Engagement behaviors improved across eight studies, including increased active participation and on-task behavior. Confidence increases appeared in five studies, and improved peer interaction quality in seven studies. Classroom atmosphere benefits were documented in seven studies, with classrooms becoming more relaxed and enjoyable.

Teacher attitudes emerged as significant mediators in five studies. Social dynamics, including negotiation pressures between formal and informal English, were documented in five studies.

Table 1. Evidence Strength for Major Findings

<b>Finding</b>	<b>Studies (n)</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Strength</b>
Social media as primary source	7	High	Strong
Slang increases engagement	8	High	Strong
Improved peer interaction	7	High	Strong
Increased motivation	6	High	Moderate-Strong
Appropriateness main challenge	8	Mixed	Moderate-Strong
Anxiety reduction	4	High	Moderate
Comprehension difficulties	5	Medium	Moderate
Vocabulary expansion	3	Medium	Emerging

Table 1 summarizes evidence strength for major findings. Strong evidence supported social media as primary source (7 studies), slang increasing engagement (8 studies), and improved peer interaction (7 studies). Moderate-strong evidence supported increased motivation (6 studies) and appropriateness challenges (8 studies). Emerging evidence included vocabulary expansion (3 studies).

### 3.2. Analysis

The predominance of social media as the primary slang source demonstrates that EFL learners increasingly acquire authentic language through incidental digital exposure rather than formal instruction. This finding aligns with contemporary digital learning theories (Lee & Drajiati, 2023; Li et al., 2024) and extends sociocultural theory to digital spaces, where platforms function as informal learning environments.

The differential usage patterns—where students use slang with peers but avoid it with teachers—reveal sophisticated pragmatic awareness rather than linguistic deficiency. This code-switching behavior demonstrates developing communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980), suggesting that slang use may support overall language proficiency development. Students' ability to adjust language formality based on interlocutor and context indicates pragmatic competence development.

The mixed Indonesian-English slang patterns reflect broader translanguaging phenomena where multilingual speakers fluidly draw on complete linguistic repertoires (García & Wei, 2014). This challenges traditional L1-L2 separation in classrooms, suggesting that hybrid language practices may represent natural learning processes.

Although benefits and challenges were documented across similar numbers of studies, the quality and consistency of evidence differed substantially. Benefits were supported by larger-scale quantitative studies with robust methodologies (Wang et al., 2021, n=428; Lee & Drajeti, 2023, n=350), whereas challenges were primarily documented in smaller qualitative studies.

This pattern suggests two interpretations. First, positive effects may be more generalizable across contexts, while challenges may be more context-specific or implementation-dependent. Second, publication bias may favor positive findings, though the presence of challenge documentation mitigates this concern.

The appropriateness challenge represents the central pedagogical tension. Students' difficulty determining when slang is appropriate reflects broader pragmatic development challenges (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Rather than evidence against teaching slang, this underscores the need for explicit instruction about register variation—skills essential for genuine communicative competence.

Interestingly, comprehension difficulties emerged not from student slang use but from instructor use of slang in academic lectures (Huang, 2004). This highlights the importance of teacher awareness regarding their own informal language use.

The robust evidence for positive motivational effects aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When slang is integrated into learning, it increases perceived relevance and authenticity, satisfying learners' needs for autonomy and relatedness—key components of intrinsic motivation. (Wang et al., 2021) finding that intrinsic motivation more strongly predicts engagement supports this interpretation.

The anxiety-reduction effects (Van Batenburg et al., 2019) can be understood through (Krashen, 1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis. Slang use may lower the affective filter by reducing formality and perceived risk, thereby facilitating acquisition. When students draw on familiar informal expressions, they feel less vulnerable to judgment, promoting greater risk-taking.

However, social negotiation pressures (Preece, 2009) introduce complexity, suggesting that slang's motivational effects are mediated by classroom social dynamics. Teacher attitude findings reveal a striking contradiction: 40% oppose banning slang while 78% want control (Preply, 2024), reflecting broader debates about prescriptivism versus student agency.

These findings have important implications for EFL practice. Teachers should consider explicit register instruction rather than merely permitting or prohibiting slang, helping students develop pragmatic competence. Recognizing that students already encounter slang through digital platforms, teachers should incorporate analysis of social media language into classroom activities, building metalinguistic awareness.

Curriculum developers should integrate authentic digital materials and include units on register variation. Assessment should recognize that communicative competence includes informal language proficiency, valuing register variation rather than penalizing all non-standard usage.

Teacher educators need to prepare pre-service teachers to navigate linguistic prescriptivism, understand digital literacies students bring to classrooms, and manage generational gaps in slang knowledge.

Our findings must be interpreted in light of limitations. First, the scarcity of observational studies (only three) means claims about usage patterns rely heavily on self-reports. Second, most studies employed cross-sectional designs rather than longitudinal approaches, preventing understanding of developmental trajectories. Third, the review was conducted by a single researcher, lacking independent verification. Finally, restriction to English and Indonesian publications may exclude relevant research in other languages.

Nevertheless, this review had several strengths. These include systematic search across multiple databases, transparent inclusion criteria, and PRISMA-compliant reporting. The comprehensive scope addressing three research questions provides a holistic picture. The temporal breadth spanning two decades allows trend identification, and geographic diversity enhances generalizability. Most importantly, this represents the first systematic synthesis on this topic, establishing a foundation for future research and evidence-based practice.

Future studies should address critical gaps. First, more face-to-face classroom observation studies are needed, as most current evidence comes from online contexts. Second, longitudinal research should track whether early slang exposure affects long-term proficiency. Third, experimental designs comparing different pedagogical approaches would strengthen causal claims. Finally, research examining relationships between slang use and academic performance would inform assessment practices.

The evidence synthesized presents a nuanced picture where slang represents a significant feature of authentic English communication that EFL educators must address thoughtfully. The strong evidence for motivational benefits, combined with documented appropriateness challenges, indicates that effective pedagogy requires actively teaching students to navigate informal registers strategically rather than ignoring or prohibiting slang use. As digital communication continues reshaping global English use, understanding informal language features in educational contexts becomes increasingly urgent.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This scoping review systematically mapped literature on English slang usage in EFL classroom interactions, achieving the objectives stated in the introduction. Analysis of 23 studies (2004-2024) addressed three research questions regarding usage patterns, benefits and challenges, and motivational effects.

The findings revealed that EFL students' slang usage is pervasive in peer interactions, heavily influenced by social media (Instagram, TikTok, Twitter), with clear contextual variation demonstrating pragmatic competence. Students strategically code-switch between formal and informal registers based on interlocutor and context, challenging notions that slang use represents linguistic deficiency.

Benefits—particularly motivation, communication skills, and social connection—received stronger support from high-quality studies compared to challenges. Appropriateness issues emerged as the primary challenge, though evidence suggests positive effects are more generalizable across contexts. Motivational effects showed robust positive associations: slang use correlated with increased intrinsic motivation, enhanced willingness to communicate, reduced anxiety, and improved engagement, mediated by teacher attitudes and classroom climate.

These findings confirm that slang represents legitimate authentic communication requiring thoughtful pedagogical attention. The research argument that effective pedagogy should equip students with pragmatic competence to navigate informal registers appropriately is strongly supported.

Limitations include scarcity of face-to-face observation studies, predominance of cross-sectional designs, single-reviewer extraction, and language restrictions. Nevertheless, systematic methodology, quality assessment, and evidence convergence across multiple high-quality studies support the core findings.

Critical gaps require attention: (1) direct classroom observation studies; (2) longitudinal research tracking long-term proficiency outcomes; (3) experimental designs comparing pedagogical approaches; (4) studies examining slang-assessment relationships; (5) teacher training intervention research. Teachers should implement explicit register instruction rather than prohibition. Curriculum developers should integrate authentic digital materials with clear frameworks for informal language. Teacher education programs must address digital literacies and generational knowledge gaps. Policymakers should recognize that communicative competence encompasses informal register proficiency.

This review provides the first systematic synthesis on this topic, establishing a comprehensive foundation for evidence-based practice and a clear research agenda. As digital communication reshapes global English use, thoughtfully integrating informal language into EFL education becomes essential for preparing students for authentic contemporary communication.

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