

ACTIVE CLASSROOMS AND AGEING TEACHERS IN ESL EDUCATION IN INDIA AND MALAYSIA

CHONG, S. T.¹ – WONG, W. L.² – VASANTHAN, R.³ – HASHIM, H. U.^{4*}

¹ *College of Continuing Education, Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Selangor, Malaysia.*

² *Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia.*

³ *Department of English, Nagaland University, Nagaland, India.*

⁴ *Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Selangor, Malaysia.*

**Corresponding author
e-mail: haidaumiera[at]uitm.edu.my*

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Abstract. This study explores the intersection between kinesthetic learning preferences and the professional challenges encountered by aging female educators in ESL classrooms in India and Malaysia. Drawing on both regional and international literature, it examines how physically active, movement-based pedagogies, widely recognized for enhancing student engagement, participation, and language retention may simultaneously impose significant physical and psychological demands on older teachers, particularly women over the age of forty. While kinesthetic strategies such as role-play, station-based activities, and interactive group tasks are pedagogically effective, they often require sustained physical mobility, vocal projection, and high classroom energy levels. Using a qualitative research design, the study employs focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations to capture the lived experiences of these educators. The findings reveal recurring concerns including joint and muscle pain, chronic fatigue, cognitive overload from multitasking, and emotional exhaustion linked to performance expectations. Many participants expressed pressure to conform to contemporary “active classroom” norms despite experiencing age-related physical constraints. These challenges not only affect teachers’ well-being but may also influence instructional delivery and classroom dynamics. The study therefore underscores the importance of developing age-responsive pedagogical frameworks and institutional support systems to ensure sustainable and inclusive ESL teaching environments.

Keywords: *kinesthetic learning, ageing teachers, qualitative research, experiential learning, classroom management, educational policy*

Introduction

There's increasing understanding that students, especially ESL learners, are more interested in and retain more information when classes include elements of movement and physical engagement. Kinesthetic learners for example benefit from action-based learning which is in line with the multiple intelligences approach and aids in the acquisition of language through physical actions. Active teaching strategies can be especially difficult for older female ESL teachers in India and Malaysia, as they frequently experience mental and physical exhaustion brought on by modern classroom activities. This study looks at the intersection of the requirements of movement based ESL instruction and the lived realities of women educators aged forty and above, dealing with cognitive load, joint aches, emotional fatigue, and general fatigue. This study draws upon qualitative approaches through focus groups, interviews, and observations to understand how these teachers negotiate the physically demanding teaching situations within systemic frameworks. Findings indicate that there is almost

no institutional support for these teachers which emphasizes the need of these teachers for more ergonomic fitting structures, mental health support, and legislative change at the policy level. By addressing these barriers, this study contributes to creating more supportive and inclusive teaching environments for aging ESL educators managing the demands of active, student-centered learning.

Kinesthetic learning preferences in ESL contexts: A global literature review

The study of active learning preferences in historic research indicates an increasing appreciation for the role of physically engaging activities in fostering student interest and achievement, most notably in the context of language learning. In the domain of ESL education, where learners are expected to retain information, acquire vocabulary, and develop fluent communicative skills, active participation in learning has great potential. It is understood that learners who mostly learn by using movements, touch, or other active forms of participation, termed 'kinesthetic learners' require special attention when developing teaching methodologies. Dunn and Dunn (1993) were amongst the first to articulate that instruction should always correspond with the preferred learning style of the individual. They claimed that all learning is performed best with the assistance of physical actions, a claim that supports the pedagogical shift toward learner-centered approaches to ESL instruction. In the same vein, Barbe et al. (1979) suggested that learning would be more effective if teaching methods suited the preferred instructional style of the learners, including kinesthetic teaching.

Fleming and Mills (1992) advanced the VARK model, which enhanced the understanding of active preferences by classifying learners according to the stimuli they preferred most. Based on this model, active learners succeed with real life. Expanding on these perspectives, Othman and Amiruddin (2010) proposed role-plays and simulations as especially effective for ESL learners with kinesthetic preferences, as they promote immersion and practical language use. While Leite et al. (2010) warned against over-reliance on matching instruction to learning styles, their work on the psychometric validation of the VARK model supported the systematic identification of kinesthetic tendencies in learners. Studies by Peacock (2001) specifically addressed the challenges of implementing learning style theories in ESL and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. Both noted that kinesthetic learners often face misalignments between their preferred learning modes and traditional, text-heavy teaching methods, leading to reduced motivation and engagement.

From the point of view of cognitive science, research by Shams and Seitz (2008) offers convincing evidence for multisensory learning, emphasizing that incorporating tactile and physical elements can enhance memory encoding and retrieval. This suggests that kinesthetic strategies are not only beneficial for kinesthetic learners but can improve overall learning outcomes. In the digital realm, Moallem (2007) demonstrated how interactive and experiential components in online learning environments effectively support kinesthetic engagement, underscoring the potential for inclusive instructional design in both in-person and virtual ESL classrooms. Nonetheless, critiques such as those by Pashler et al. (2008) urge caution, warning against rigid adherence to learning style categorizations without strong empirical backing. They advocate for a more balanced approach that incorporates learner diversity without oversimplifying pedagogical decisions. In conclusion, while it is essential to avoid pedagogical determinism, the literature strongly supports integrating kinesthetic elements, such as role-playing, real-world simulations, and tactile tasks, into ESL

instruction. These methods align with multiple intelligences theory and provide dynamic, engaging experiences that enhance language acquisition, especially for learners who benefit from physical interaction with content. A thoughtful, flexible application of these insights can make ESL education more responsive to learner needs and more effective overall.

Kinesthetic learning preferences in India and Malaysia

Kinesthetic learning, defined by a student's physical interaction with content as well as hands-on activities, has become popular among learners in both India and Malaysia. In terms of learning styles and multiple intelligences, kinesthetic approaches have pioneered in the scope of English language learning, where active engagement propels memory retention and acquisition of the language. In India, there are quite a number of works that emphasize the value of kinesthetic approaches at the secondary and higher education levels. Urban adolescents strongly endorsed activity-oriented classes, thus supporting the need for movement and hands-on learning in schooling. Also, Tulsi et al. (2016) noted that engineering students preferred labs and workshops to lesson-based classes, which was also the case with Prithishkumar and Michael (2014) for medical students who deemed clinical training as the most valuable learning experience. Kinesthetic learners significantly outperformed their peers in problem based learning environments.

For primary learners, the literature is scant but shows some support for the benefits of movement-based learning. The positive impact of activity-based teaching on comprehension and retention in primary school learners. Similarly, the teaching of English as a second language to primary school students, advocated for the consideration of English language learners' kinesthetic needs. Karunanithi et al. (2020) pointed out that metacognition facilitates the development of speech skills in storytelling and role-play activities in ESL environments. Compared to other countries, Malaysia seems to have more balanced gaps in research at all educational levels. At the tertiary, university and polytechnic students exhibited strong preferences for kinesthetic approaches to learning, particularly in technical and vocational fields. There was also a link between enhanced academic and employability performance and project-based learning, fieldwork, and simulation activities (Bazirizii, 2022; Maya et al., 2021). As for primary learners, research indicated that Malaysian primary school learners were most engaged in learning through movement, drama, storytelling, and interactive multimedia, in other words, through physical activity.

Regardless of these considerations, both India and Malaysia continue adopting the integrated approach which relies heavily on visual and oral teaching methods and neglects the needs of kinesthetic learners. In ESL settings, this creates a gap for students who learn best through hands-on activities, as teaching methods do not align with their preferred learning styles. It is clear that all levels of education incorporate kinesthetic techniques, increases inclusivity in teaching and improves the effectiveness of teaching English.

Ageing in asian women teachers

Given that teaching requires a high level of physical stamina, emotional engagement, and cognitive resilience, the ageing of Asian women teachers is becoming a more significant research concern. Ageing female educators frequently face a variety of

physical, psychological, and emotional changes that impact their professional lives, according to studies conducted in a number of Asian nations. (1) **Physical Difficulties.** Women teachers over forty-five years old often report joint pain, chronic fatigue, decreased stamina, and musculoskeletal disorders, according to several studies. Inadequate workplace ergonomics and prolonged standing during lectures can worsen ailments like varicose veins, arthritis, and back pain. Accordingly, 62% of senior female teachers in India reported having chronic joint pain, and roughly 48% said their decreased stamina affected their ability to teach. (2) **Psychological and Emotional Changes.** In densely populated nations with large class sizes, such as China, Malaysia, and India, older female teachers frequently experience psychological stress and emotional burnout. The combined weight of family obligations and work demands is associated with emotional burnout. Compared to their younger counterparts, older female teachers in urban Indian schools reported much higher levels of emotional exhaustion. Menopause-related hormonal changes also exacerbate mood swings, anxiety, and cognitive fog, making it more difficult to manage emotions at work.

(3) **Fatigue and Cognitive Strain.** Fatigue among ageing women teachers is compounded by cognitive pressures such as adapting to new technologies (especially post-COVID digital transitions) and keeping pace with curricular changes. Teachers in Malaysia and Indonesia have highlighted the struggle to sustain mental alertness and enthusiasm amid increasing administrative workloads and continuous professional development expectations. (4) **Social and Cultural Factors.** Many Asian societies place cultural pressure on older women to balance work and family obligations without much institutional assistance. In collectivist cultures, where taking care of ageing parents or grandchildren in addition to teaching is common, this "double burden" is particularly heavy. According to research, older Asian women teachers are susceptible to a complicated interplay between psychological exhaustion, emotional stress, and physical illnesses. To maintain the productivity and well-being of this essential workforce, there is an increasing need for focused workplace policies, such as ergonomic interventions, mental health support, and flexible teaching roles.

Kinesthetic learning strategies

In order to engage kinaesthetic learners, those who learn best through hands-on activities, experiments, and role-plays, teachers should use active learning strategies, such as these, as opposed to passive listening (Fleming and Mills, 1992). Since traditional static setups hinder their learning, a flexible classroom environment that permits movement, standing, or the use of manipulatives is essential (Dunn and Dunn, 1993). Combining touch, movement, sound, and visuals, such as when lab experiments are paired with diagrams, are examples of multisensory techniques that improve retention. While allowing for physical expression through models or dramatisations provides alternative assessments, real-world applications, such as project-based tasks, aid in solidifying abstract concepts. Differentiated instruction accommodates a range of needs by allowing project submissions instead of written tests, and regular movement breaks prevent restlessness. Collaborative learning through group work and interactive simulations fosters engagement, and adaptive technology like VR labs enhances experiential learning. Lastly, teachers must provide positive reinforcement and maintain an energetic demeanor to support the need of kinesthetic learners for dynamic interaction (*Figure 1*).

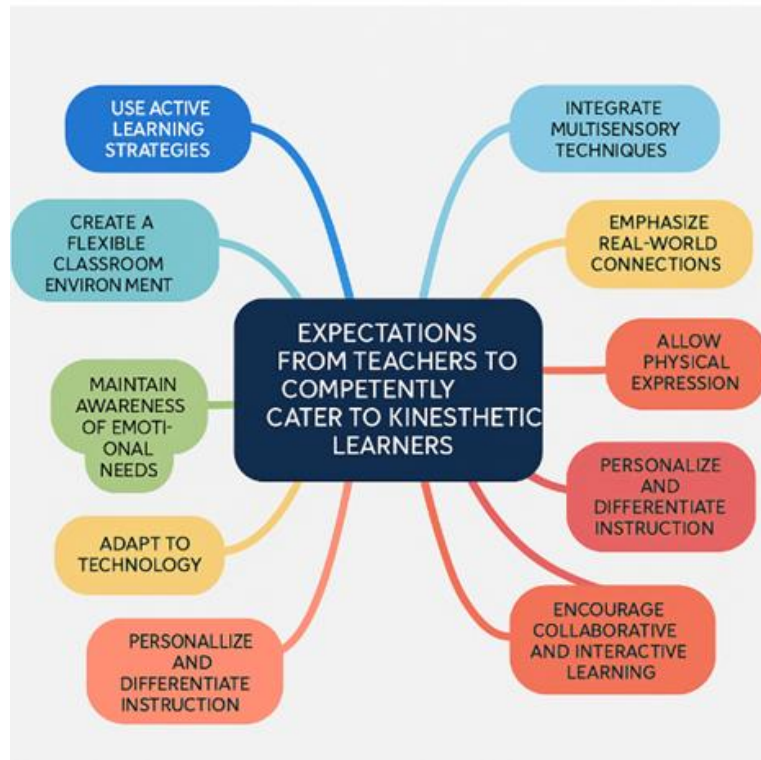


Figure 1. Expectations on teachers to competently cater to kinesthetic learners.

Research objectives

The research objectives are: (1) to identify the physical and psychological challenges experienced by ageing female teachers in ESL classrooms in India and Malaysia; (2) to examine the impact of kinesthetic learning demands on the classroom management practices of these educators; (3) to explore the coping strategies and adaptations employed by ageing teachers to manage the physical and emotional strain; and (4) to propose curricular and institutional interventions that can support ageing educators in sustaining effective teaching while accommodating diverse learning styles.

Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design to investigate the challenges faced by ageing women teachers in kinesthetic learning environments, their coping mechanisms, and potential institutional support systems. The methodology is structured to capture the experiences of teachers through multiple data collection approaches, rigorous sampling strategies, and systematic analysis while adhering to ethical guidelines. To guarantee thorough insights, the study uses three main data collection methods. At each field site (Northeast India and Malaysia), 15–20 female teachers aged forty plus will participate in semi-structured interviews concerning their psychological stressors (e.g., classroom management, generational gaps), coping mechanisms, and physical challenges (e.g., fatigue, mobility limitations). These interviews will be transcribed for in-depth analysis after being audio recorded (with consent). Teachers and educational administrators of various ages will participate in focus group discussions (FGDs), which will supplement the interviews. Themes will include the need for training for educators who are getting older, infrastructure modifications for active learning, and institutional policies on

teacher well-being. This approach will draw attention to possible policy interventions and systemic viewpoints. A multi-faceted sampling approach ensures diverse and representative participation. Purposive sampling will identify teachers with direct experience in kinesthetic pedagogy, while snowball sampling will help recruit additional participants through referrals from initial interviewees. For FGDs, stratified sampling will ensure representation across urban and rural schools, government and private institutions, and various subject specializations (e.g., physical education, science). This stratification will enable cross-comparisons of challenges and support systems across different educational contexts.

Results and Discussion

India

The Indian dataset comprises twenty teachers aged above forty years, predominantly female (85%) working in urban private schools (70%). Most handle large classes of 31–40 students (60%) and have 11+ years of experience (75%). While 50% report moderate-to-severe physical strain (e.g., joint pain, fatigue), only 30% link it directly to active teaching. Classroom challenges include student discipline issues (55%) and administrative pressure (25%). Despite these hurdles, 65% prioritize teacher training to adapt to kinesthetic methods, while 30% request ergonomic furniture. Notably, teachers with 20+ years of experience report higher resilience but emphasize the need for institutional support like reduced hours (20%).

Malaysia

In Malaysia, the forty plus group of teachers (80% female) shows a 10% higher physical strain rate (60% moderate/severe), attributed to larger classes (>40 students in 30% of cases) and parental disengagement (cited by 40%). Unlike India, Malaysian teachers face acute joint pain, with 35% demanding reduced teaching hours and 40% seeking classroom assistants to mitigate workload. Emotional stress is tied to student behavioral issues (50%) and lack of parental support (35%). Only 25% focus on ergonomic solutions, reflecting a preference for human resource support over infrastructure.

Cross-national trends

Both groups highlight large class sizes and student discipline as key points of stress, but Malaysia shows higher physical strain and while in India, training-focused solutions reveal cultural/institutional differences. These insights advocate for localized policy interventions to address the needs of ageing teachers (*Figure 2*).

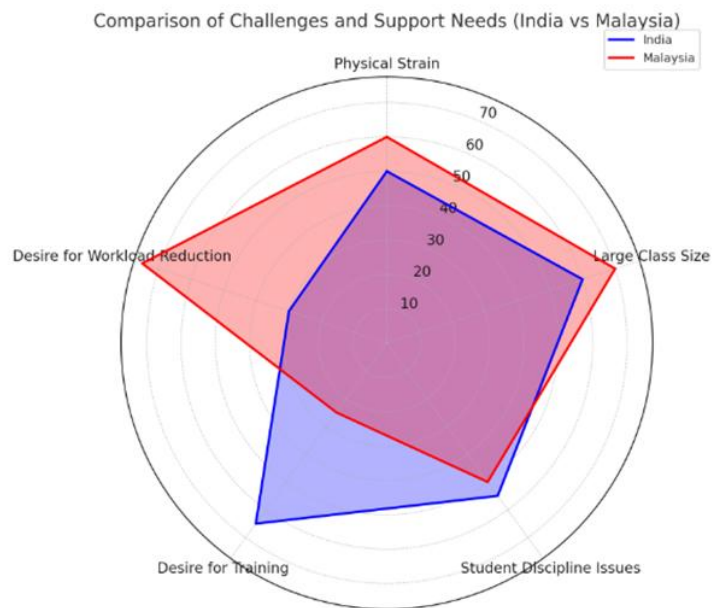


Figure 2. Comparison of challenges and support needs (India vs Malaysia).

Inference from students feedback

In both India and Malaysia, students prefer classes that involve activities and movement, showing a strong inclination toward kinesthetic learning. However, the majority of teachers, especially in India, continue to favor talking for most of the time instead of promoting active participation. In Malaysia, there is a slightly better balance, with more teachers engaging students through group projects and movement-based activities (*Figure 3*). According to the *Figure 4*, students in both India and Malaysia prefer kinesthetic learning: activities, movement, and being active in the classroom makes for a lively and interactive learning environment. Once teachers get older, most of them naturally want to take the least physically demanding route of teaching: lecturing, referring to readings, discussing with students, and referring to visual aids. Students like and benefit from more active modes of learning, but individual older teachers find it difficult to be constantly moving about doing activities with students, given their physical limitations and level of fatigue as the instructional day moves on. There is a greater rift between the expectations of students and the practices of teachers which may be resolved with some institutional supports and training practices

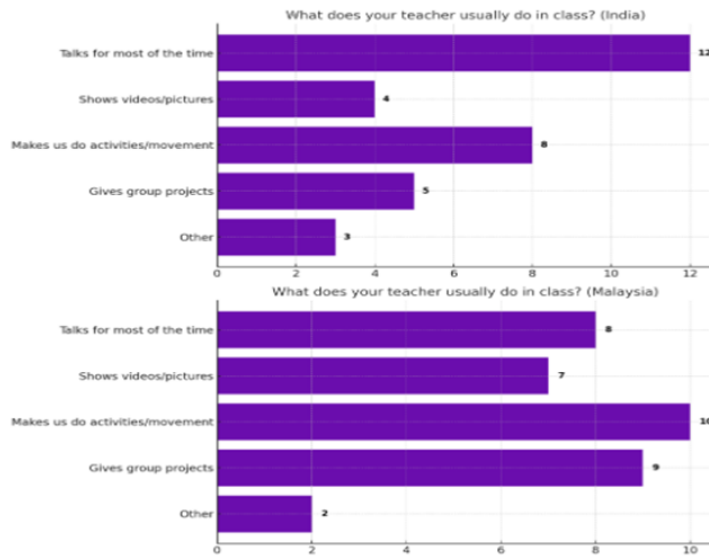


Figure 3. Students' inclination towards kinesthetic learning.

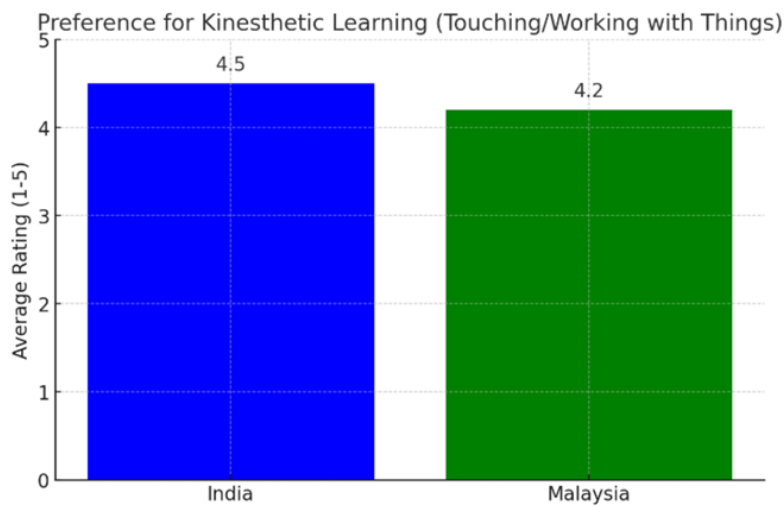


Figure 4. Preference for Kinesthetic learning.

This chart shows the age distribution of teachers for India and Malaysia (20 teachers each) (*Figure 5*): (1) In India, the best preferred teachers are Middle Aged (12 out of 20), and Elderly teachers are very few (2). (2) In Malaysia, there is a more balanced distribution between Young (8) and Middle Aged (10) teachers, with very few Elderly (2). As the age of teachers increases, they tend to rely more on talking and less on activities/movement. Young teachers engage relatively more in activities, while middle-aged and elderly teachers prefer lecturing.

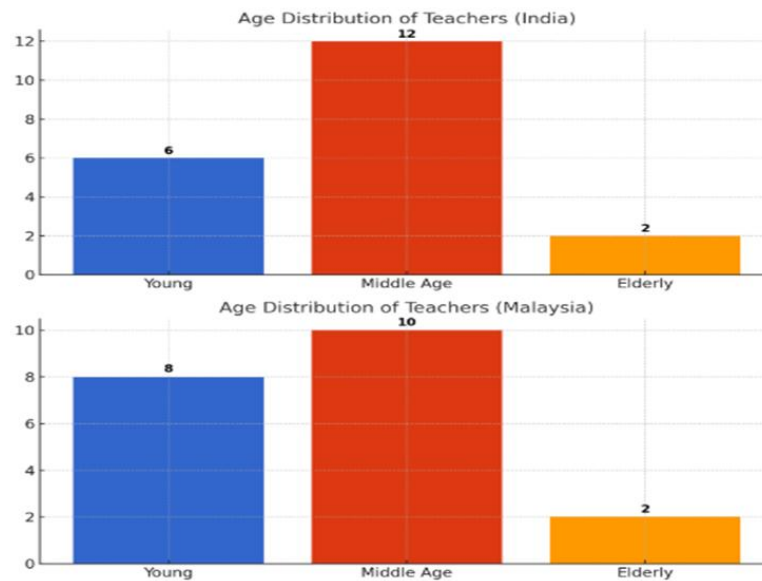


Figure 5. Age distribution of teachers in India and Malaysia.

Conclusion

The advent of stimulating, engaging, and active methodologies in ESL education, particularly those that incorporate kinesthetic and multisensory learning, has increased participation and retention of language in students from India and Malaysia. However, these changes in teaching approach pose significant physical and psychological strain on older female teachers who often have to cope with the amount of energy these methods require. This phenomenon is particularly clear in India where inadequate institutional assistance, overflowing classes, and limited access to health resources greatly worsen the situation. Malaysia demonstrates relatively more favorable results as it has advanced trained personnel, infrastructure, and support systems that address institutional challenges. The two countries illustrate the necessity of balancing learner-centered ESL instruction with practical frameworks and appropriate assistance for more advanced age teachers. With the aim of developing efficient and inclusive ESL classrooms in both countries, education systems should introduce policy changes that help create more tailored health supportive strategies using technology, as well as changing teacher workload. Evidence-driven regional cooperation can lead to improved outcomes. Incorporating tested strategies will also broaden the scope of successful pedagogical approaches. Active participation in ESL classes isn't the only requirement necessary for the students to sustain active participation during classes. Empowering these teachers ensures that learning style demands enrich, rather than exhaust, the educational experience for all stakeholders.

Acknowledgement

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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