REVIEW

Small Private Online Courses (SPOCs) in English Language Education: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Small Private Online Courses (SPOCs) have emerged as a promising instructional model in English language education, offering structured, flexible, and scalable learning opportunities within blended or hybrid contexts. This systematic review synthesises 36 empirical studies published between 2015 and 2025 to examine how SPOCs have been pedagogically designed, methodologically investigated, and evaluated in diverse educational settings. The studies were identified through a comprehensive search of Scopus and Web of Science and analysed thematically in terms of methodological approaches, instructional strategies, and reported learning outcomes. Findings reveal considerable methodological variation, including qualitative case studies, quasi-experimental designs, mixed-methods inquiries, and design-based research. Pedagogically, SPOCs were most frequently implemented in flipped classroom models and integrated with skill-specific scaffolding, adaptive technologies, gamified features, and collaborative or reflective tasks. These designs were aligned with communicative and learner-centred approaches to language teaching. Reported outcomes spanned linguistic, cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains, with most studies indicating gains in grammar, vocabulary, writing, and speaking, as well as enhanced learner autonomy, motivation, and metacognitive awareness. The review underscores the pedagogical value of SPOCs when thoughtfully integrated into language curricula and supported by appropriate technological and instructional design. It highlights the potential of SPOCs to personalise learning, support skill-specific development, and

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promote active, reflective, and autonomous learning. These findings offer timely guidance for educators, instructional designers, and policymakers aiming to enhance English language education in increasingly hybrid and digital environments.

Keywords: SPOC; English Language Education; English Teaching; L2; Digital Learning Environments

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, the integration of digital technologies into education has fundamentally transformed how learning is delivered, accessed, and experienced. From traditional computer-assisted language learning systems to mobile learning and AI-driven applications, the digitalisation of education has prompted educators and institutions to rethink the design and delivery of instruction[1, 2]. In language education, these changes have been particularly pronounced, as learners increasingly turn to online platforms and blended environments for flexible, accessible, and personalised learning opportunities[3, 4]. English language education, in particular, has witnessed a surge in technology-mediated innovations[5], spurred by the global demand for English proficiency in academic, professional, and cross-cultural contexts.

Among the various forms of digital instruction, online course models have evolved significantly—from asynchronous learning management systems to synchronous video-based classes and, more recently, to hybridised models that combine the strengths of both[6, 7]. One such model is the Small Private Online Course (SPOC), a format originally introduced as a response to the limitations of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Unlike MOOCs, which target a broad, often anonymous audience, SPOCs are designed for limited enrolment, allowing for more structured interaction, personalised feedback, and higher levels of instructor involvement[8, 9]. In English language education, SPOCs have been leveraged in diverse ways—from supplementary modules in university courses to flipped classroom platforms in secondary schools—highlighting their adaptability across educational levels and settings[10, 11].

Despite this growing interest, the empirical evidence on SPOC applications in English language education remains scattered and inconclusive. Studies have reported a variety of benefits, such as enhanced learner autonomy[8, 12], increased motivation[13, 14], and improved language proficiency[15, 16]. However, these findings are often context-specific and differ widely in terms of scope, instructional design, and evaluation criteria. Moreover, there is limited clarity on how SPOCs are pedagogically structured to support language learning, what research methodologies are used to evaluate them, and what learning outcomes they are most effective in fostering[17, 18]. The lack of a systematic synthesis of these studies has created a knowledge gap, making it difficult for educators, researchers, and policy makers to make informed decisions about integrating SPOCs into language education practice.

To address this gap, this systematic review investigates the landscape of SPOC implementation in English language education by analysing empirical studies conducted over the last decade, from 2015 to 2025. The review is guided by the following research questions:

- What research designs and methodological approaches have been employed in empirical studies on SPOCs in English language education?
- What pedagogical designs and instructional strategies have characterised SPOC implementations in English language teaching and learning?
- What learning outcomes have been reported in SPOC-based English language education?

Examining the methodological approaches provides insight into the robustness and credibility of the existing evidence base, revealing how SPOC-related innovations have been studied and what types of data have informed conclusions[19]. Analysing the pedagogical designs sheds light on how SPOCs are actually implemented in practice—what instructional features are used, how they align with language learning principles, and which strategies are most commonly adopted for optimizing English language education[7]. Evaluating the learning outcomes offers an understanding of the tangible impacts of SPOC use on English language proficiency, learner motivation, autonomy, and engagement[20]. By synthesising findings across these three dimensions, the review offers a comprehensive and critical overview of how SPOCs have been designed, evaluated, and integrated into

English language education. The results are intended to inform not only theoretical and pedagogical developments but also the future design of evidence-informed, context-sensitive SPOC interventions that meet the evolving needs of learners, educators, and institutions.

2. Literature Review

SPOCs are defined as online courses with limited enrolment, typically designed for specific groups of learners and often integrated into formal education settings [9, 17]. Unlike MOOCs, which are freely accessible to large-scale audiences [21], SPOCs are closed, instructor-led environments that allow for more personalised instruction, feedback, and interaction [16]. They may be used as stand-alone learning modules [22] or embedded within blended or flipped classroom models [18], offering flexibility while retaining pedagogical structure. In the context of language education—particularly English language learning—SPOCs offer a promising middle ground between technological scalability and instructional intimacy. Particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, SPOCs gained renewed relevance as institutions sought scalable yet pedagogically responsive solutions to disrupted classroom instruction [15, 16]. In contrast to the often impersonal nature of MOOCs, SPOCs enabled educators to maintain continuity in teaching while fostering meaningful learner engagement through moderated discussions, timely feedback, and tailored learning paths [21]. SPOCs also facilitated the integration of multimodal materials and interactive tasks that aligned with communicative language teaching principles [13, 14], offering learners opportunities to practise language skills in contextually rich, digitally mediated environments. As such, SPOCs not only supported instructional resilience during a time of global uncertainty but also catalysed long-term shifts toward more flexible, learner-centred approaches in technology-enhanced language education.

In English language education, SPOCs have been adopted in various instructional contexts, such as secondary and tertiary institutions [11, 18], adult education programmes [23], and teacher training initiatives [24]. They have been implemented to support a range of linguistic skills including grammar, vocabulary, writing, listening, and speaking. For instance, some institutions use SPOCs to deliver pre-class grammar tutorials in flipped classrooms, while others deploy them as supplementary platforms for writing feedback and pronunciation practice [25, 26]. Their modular design and capacity for self-paced progression make SPOCs particularly attractive in contexts where learners need flexibility and targeted instruction.

Pedagogically, SPOCs vary considerably in design, but commonly include components such as video lectures, online quizzes, scaffolded tasks, formative assessments, peer discussions, and automated feedback mechanisms [27]. These features are often aligned with communicative language teaching and task-based learning principles [28]. In some cases, SPOCs are enhanced with gamification, adaptive pathways, and learning analytics to provide real-time feedback and tailor the learning experience to individual needs [29]. Instructors may play an active role through synchronous check-ins, feedback videos, or discussion moderation, helping bridge the gap between online delivery and personalised support.

Empirical studies have reported a mix of learning outcomes. Positive impacts include improved vocabulary acquisition [23], increased writing fluency [9], greater learner autonomy and motivation [12], and enhanced listening comprehension [10]. These outcomes are often attributed to the multimodal input, flexibility, and structured progression that SPOCs provide. However, challenges have also been documented. Some learners struggle with digital fatigue [17], lack of self-regulation [18], or inconsistent engagement—especially in contexts where learner autonomy is underdeveloped or technological infrastructure is weak [27].

Despite growing interest in SPOC-based instruction, the literature remains fragmented in several respects. Definitions of SPOC are not always consistent [23], with some studies applying the term loosely to any small-scale online module. Research designs also vary, with most studies being qualitative or quasi-experimental [9, 17, 26], and few adopting large-scale, comparative, or longitudinal approaches [10, 15]. Furthermore, there is little agreement on the key pedagogical components that define effective SPOC use in English language education, nor is there a comprehensive mapping of the skills most positively affected.

Given these inconsistencies, there is a need for a systematic review that consolidates empirical findings from the past decade, with a focus on SPOCs in English language education. Such a review can clarify how SPOCs have been designed, evaluated, and integrated, while identifying the

research gaps and practical considerations that shape their success. This will help educators, researchers, and instructional designers make evidence-informed decisions about using SPOCs to support language learning in increasingly digital and hybrid educational contexts.

3. Methodology

This systematic review was conducted to synthesise empirical evidence on the implementation, pedagogical design, and learning outcomes of SPOCs in English language education. Following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines[30], a rigorous and transparent process was adopted to identify, screen, and analyse relevant peer-reviewed studies published over the past decade. Two major academic databases—Scopus and Web of Science (WoS)—were selected for the literature search. Scopus was chosen due to its comprehensive indexing of peer-reviewed journals across the social sciences, education, and applied linguistics, as well as its strong international coverage, which ensured access to a broad spectrum of studies relevant to technology-enhanced language education[31]. WoS was included for its long-standing reputation for indexing high-impact research and its robust citation tracking features, which enhanced the ability to identify influential studies and related works within the field[31]. The combination of these two databases was intended to provide both breadth and depth, ensuring a wide yet academically rigorous capture of empirical studies on SPOCs in English language contexts.

The search was conducted in April 2025, using a combination of keywords and Boolean operators. The search string included the terms: ("SPOC" OR "Small Private Online Course") AND ("English" OR "English language" OR "English learning" OR "English education"). The search was restricted to titles, abstracts, and keywords within the databases between 2015 and 2025 to reflect the contemporary development and application of SPOCs in language education. This timeframe was selected to capture the post-MOOC era when SPOCs began gaining attention as an alternative[13], more pedagogically grounded form of online learning.

The initial search yielded a total of 81 records from Scopus and 46 from WoS, with 11 duplicate entries manually removed (**Figure 1**). Of the remaining 116 records, 5

were excluded for not being peer-reviewed publications (e.g., retraction notices in WoS), resulting in 111 records sought for retrieval. Despite efforts to obtain full texts, 8 records were ultimately inaccessible. The remaining 103 records were assessed based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) they reported original empirical research; (2) they focused explicitly on the use or evaluation of SPOCs in the context of English language education; and (3) they were published in the English language. Publications made in languages other than English were excluded because the review aimed to synthesise findings that are accessible to an international academic audience and to ensure consistency in the interpretation of pedagogical terminology and research reporting conventions. Consequently, 46 records were excluded for not reporting any empirical evidence, 16 for not being related to the use of SPOC in English teaching, and 5 for not being published in English.
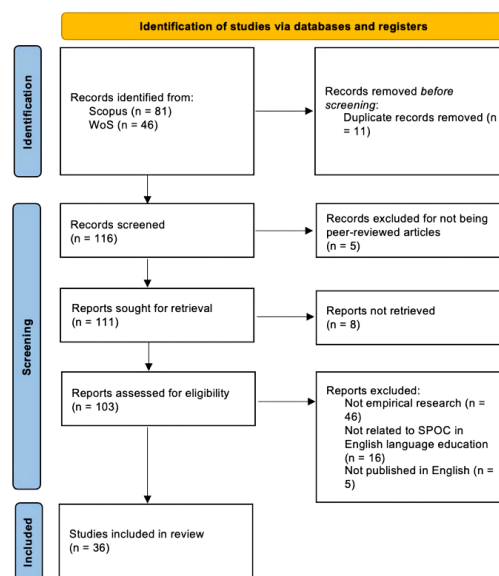

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Chart for the Review.

Following the screening process, a total of 36 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final review. To ensure the quality and reliability of the synthesis, a two-stage quality assurance procedure was applied. First, each included study was independently reviewed and coded by two researchers to confirm its relevance, clarity of methodological reporting, and alignment with the review's focus. Discrepancies in coding or inclusion decisions were discussed and resolved through consensus. Second, a quality

appraisal checklist (**Appendix A Table A1**) adapted from established criteria for educational research (e.g., transparency of research design, appropriateness of data collection and analysis, and clarity of outcome reporting) was used to assess each study. While no study was excluded on the basis of quality alone, these appraisals informed the interpretation of findings and were used to identify patterns in methodological robustness across the reviewed literature.

Thematic analysis was then conducted to synthesise findings in relation to the review's guiding research questions. Before analysis, the 36 selected records were organised into a data extraction matrix, which included key fields such as author/year, publication type, research setting, methodological approach, sample size and characteristics, instructional design features of the SPOC, assessment tools, and reported learning outcomes. This organisation facilitated cross-case comparison and ensured consistency in coding. Consequently, a matrix of the studies was generated, as shown in **Appendix A Table A2**[32–67].

4. Findings

4.1. Research Designs and Methodological Approaches

Based on the summary presented in **Appendix A Table A1**, the methodological designs of previous research on SPOCs in English language education reveal a diverse range of research approaches, with a strong presence of both qualitative and quantitative traditions, as well as emerging interest in mixed-methods and design-based approaches. A clear majority of studies adopted either qualitative or quantitative methodologies. Within qualitative research, common designs included case studies, classroom observations, interviews, and narrative inquiry, often used to explore learners' experiences, perceptions, and identity development[32–34]. These studies tended to focus on the contextual, behavioural, and affective dimensions of SPOC use, offering insight into learner engagement, reflection, and interaction patterns.

Among quantitative studies, a significant number employed quasi-experimental or true experimental designs with pre- and post-tests[35–37], aiming to measure the impact of SPOC interventions on specific language skills such as grammar accuracy, vocabulary acquisition, or oral fluency. Other quantitative designs included survey-based studies and correlational studies[38, 39], which were used to examine learner attitudes, behavioural patterns, or relationships between learning activities and outcomes.

A growing body of research employed mixed-methods designs[40–42], integrating both quantitative measurement and qualitative insights to provide a more comprehensive understanding of SPOC implementations. These studies often examined learning outcomes alongside learner experiences and feedback, allowing for triangulation of data sources.

Furthermore, several studies adopted a design-based research or instructional design framework approach[43–45], reflecting an interest in the iterative development and evaluation of SPOC models in authentic educational settings. These studies focused on aligning pedagogical design with theoretical frameworks and evaluating the instructional effectiveness of the SPOC over multiple cycles or contexts. Lastly, action research appeared in a smaller number of studies[46, 47], typically led by classroom practitioners aiming to improve their own teaching practice through the integration of SPOCs.

4.2. Pedagogical Designs and Instructional Strategies

The pedagogical designs adopted in SPOC-based English language education are marked by considerable diversity, reflecting varied instructional goals, learner profiles, and technological affordances. Despite this variety, several recurring design patterns and instructional strategies emerge across the reviewed studies, indicating a set of dominant pedagogical orientations that characterise SPOC implementations in this field.

The most prevalent design across studies is the SPOC-supported flipped classroom model. In this design, core instructional content is delivered asynchronously through SPOCs—typically in the form of video lectures, multimedia explanations, or task prompts—while face-to-face classroom time is dedicated to application, practice, and interaction. This model was employed in numerous studies[32, 40, 48, 49], and often included structured pre-class SPOC activities such as grammar tutorials, listening drills, pronunciation models, and short quizzes, followed by in-class oral discussions, debates, or collaborative writing tasks. This dual-mode structure was reported to enhance learner autonomy, preparation, and confidence, while making in-class sessions more in-

teractive and student-centred. Several studies highlighted the benefit of this design for oral English development, as learners could first absorb input at their own pace and then practise speaking with peers and instructors during live sessions[50, 51].

Another dominant feature is the integration of SPOC with skill-specific language scaffolding, particularly in writing, vocabulary, grammar, and reading. For writing, SPOC platforms were used to support process-based writing instruction, with students engaging in stages of planning, drafting, receiving peer feedback, and revising[46, 52]. These designs were often complemented by writing strategy videos, example texts, and teacher modelling embedded in the SPOC platform. In vocabulary learning, SPOCs were employed to provide adaptive drills, lexical sets, spaced repetition, and contextualised exercises[53, 54]. Reading instruction typically combined pre-reading vocabulary support, guiding questions, and online comprehension checks, followed by post-reading discussion or summarisation tasks in class[38, 55].

Moreover, several studies implemented adaptive learning systems or algorithm-driven SPOC designs to tailor instruction to individual learner profiles. For example, Wang used machine learning analytics to provide real-time feedback and adjust the difficulty of exercises based on learner progress[56]. Similarly, Shu adopted AI-generated grammar and vocabulary exercises that dynamically responded to user input[36]. These adaptive SPOCs were often reported to enhance learning efficiency, motivation, and learner self-regulation, particularly among students with varied proficiency levels.

To sustain learner engagement, a number of studies also incorporated gamification features within the SPOC environment. These included badges, leaderboards, level progression, and interactive challenge tasks[37, 57]. Such elements were often paired with formative feedback and social comparison mechanisms to increase participation and persistence. Gamified SPOC designs were particularly common in grammar and vocabulary learning modules, where repetitive practice can be enhanced by elements of play and reward.

Many SPOC designs also integrated collaborative learning activities, both online and face-to-face. For instance, studies by Ma and Wen and Li used SPOCs to facilitate project-based learning, where learners completed complex tasks such as presentations, reports, or debates, often in groups[34, 58].

SPOC content prepared students for these tasks, while online forums, peer review tools, and discussion boards enabled ongoing collaboration. Similarly, SPOCs designed for task-based instruction[59, 60] provided structured communicative scenarios or simulations aligned with vocational or professional English use.

A smaller cluster of studies placed emphasis on learner reflection, self-assessment, and metacognitive development. For example, Sun employed a narrative inquiry approach within a SPOC design that included learner storytelling, reflection journals, and self-directed projects, aiming to foster learner identity and critical thinking[33]. Other studies embedded self-evaluation checklists, goal-setting tools, and peer feedback protocols into the SPOC structure to enhance metacognitive awareness and learner responsibility[61].

Lastly, some SPOC interventions were designed as part of teacher-led action research, where educators used SPOC platforms to experiment with instructional strategies and improve classroom practice[46, 47]. These studies tended to be practice-oriented, focusing on teacher reflections, student feedback, and iterative adjustments to the SPOC design.

4.3. Learning Outcomes

The reviewed studies report a wide spectrum of learning outcomes associated with the integration of SPOCs into English language education. These outcomes span linguistic, cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains, reflecting the multifaceted impact of SPOC-supported instruction. The findings suggest that SPOCs contribute not only to measurable language gains but also to shifts in learner autonomy, engagement, motivation, and critical thinking.

A substantial number of studies documented clear linguistic gains, particularly in grammar, vocabulary, speaking, and writing proficiency. Learners showed improved grammatical accuracy after engaging with SPOC modules that featured video explanations, scaffolded exercises, and formative online assessments[35, 62, 63]. Vocabulary development was a consistent theme in studies utilising adaptive learning technologies or mobile SPOC platforms, which allowed learners to engage in targeted vocabulary practice at their own pace[53, 54]. Writing proficiency also improved across multiple studies, particularly where SPOCs supported process-based writing tasks, including strategy training, peer

feedback, and iterative revision [46, 52]. In oral language development, learners demonstrated increased fluency, pronunciation accuracy, and speaking confidence following SPOC-enhanced flipped classroom activities [32, 39, 40].

Beyond core linguistic skills, many studies reported positive affective outcomes. Learners expressed greater motivation and enjoyment when engaged in gamified SPOC environments that included features such as badges, leaderboards, and interactive challenges [37, 57]. Similarly, studies that focused on speaking and pronunciation training noted improvements in learners' willingness to speak and overall confidence in oral communication [32, 40]. Some studies also documented positive shifts in learner attitudes toward self-paced and blended learning environments, particularly in mobile-based SPOC models [36, 38].

A smaller but notable subset of research focused on cognitive and metacognitive development. Learners involved in SPOC activities that incorporated peer review, self-assessment tools, and formative feedback demonstrated increased metacognitive awareness and strategic learning behaviours [55, 61]. Narrative and inquiry-based studies further highlighted the role of SPOCs in fostering learner identity, critical reflection, and ownership of learning [33, 47]. These studies positioned SPOCs as spaces for developing not only language skills but also reflective and self-regulatory capacities essential for lifelong learning.

In addition, several studies reported enhanced learner autonomy and behavioural engagement. Learners benefitted from the self-directed nature of SPOCs, particularly when platforms allowed for flexible pacing, personalised feedback, and independent access to resources [53, 54]. Studies that tracked learner behaviour through analytics or log data found that SPOC users exhibited higher time-on-task, greater consistency in task completion, and more frequent engagement with instructional content [64]. These patterns suggest that well-structured SPOC environments may foster sustained behavioural investment in learning tasks.

Finally, several studies emphasised the role of SPOCs in developing contextualised communicative competence, particularly in vocational and professional English courses. SPOCs were designed to simulate workplace scenarios and domain-specific communication tasks, supporting learners in acquiring technical vocabulary and performing in authentic contexts [44, 45, 59]. In such cases, SPOCs functioned not only as platforms for skill development but also as pedagogical tools for situated learning that prepared learners for real-world applications.

In summary, the learning outcomes associated with SPOC-based English language instruction are multifaceted and largely positive. Most frequently reported are gains in specific language skills—especially grammar, vocabulary, writing, and speaking—alongside increased learner motivation, confidence, and engagement. Cognitive and metacognitive benefits, such as improved strategy use and self-regulation, were observed in studies that incorporated reflection and feedback mechanisms. Meanwhile, SPOCs designed with workplace relevance were shown to enhance contextualised communicative competence.

5. Discussion

This review set out to synthesise empirical research on the implementation of SPOCs in English language education, focusing on methodological orientations, pedagogical strategies, and reported learning outcomes. The findings confirm that while SPOCs are still an evolving instructional modality, they have already demonstrated considerable versatility and pedagogical value across diverse educational contexts.

First, the methodological diversity observed in the reviewed studies points to a growing academic interest in understanding SPOCs from multiple perspectives. The presence of both qualitative and quantitative research traditions reflects a healthy pluralism in the field, with studies exploring not only measurable language gains but also the learner experience, contextual dynamics, and implementation challenges [32–37]. The rising adoption of mixed-methods and design-based research frameworks suggests a shift toward integrative inquiry that values both evidence-based outcomes and iterative pedagogical refinement [40–45]. However, the relatively small number of longitudinal and large-scale studies indicates that the evidence base remains somewhat fragmented, calling for more rigorous and generalisable research designs in future investigations.

Second, the pedagogical patterns emerging from the studies reveal that SPOCs are most effective when integrated with active learning strategies such as flipped classroom models [32, 40, 48, 49], collaborative tasks [59, 60], and formative feedback systems [33, 61]. Rather than functioning as stan-

dalone digital courses, SPOCs in English language education tend to operate as components of blended or hybrid learning ecosystems. The asynchronous delivery of core content via SPOCs allows for more personalised and flexible access to instructional materials, while synchronous classroom sessions support interaction, negotiation of meaning, and higher-order thinking. This dual-mode approach not only enhances learner autonomy but also facilitates more dynamic in-class engagement. The recurring emphasis on skill-specific scaffolding—especially in writing, grammar, and oral communication—demonstrates that SPOCs can be finely tuned to support targeted language objectives[46, 52].

Importantly, the review also highlights how technological affordances are increasingly shaping SPOC pedagogies. Adaptive learning systems and AI-generated exercises are beginning to offer differentiated instruction that responds to learner profiles in real time[56]. Gamification features are used to enhance motivation and persistence, especially in repetitive learning tasks such as vocabulary drills and grammar practice[37, 57]. However, while these innovations have shown promise, their long-term effects and theoretical underpinnings remain underexplored in the existing literature. Future studies should examine how these technologies interact with learner characteristics, instructional goals, and broader curriculum structures.

With regard to learning outcomes, the review presents a consistently positive picture. Learners demonstrated improvements in grammar accuracy, vocabulary breadth, writing fluency, and oral communication skills across a wide range of SPOC implementations[35, 62, 63]. Beyond linguistic gains, many studies reported affective benefits such as increased learner motivation, confidence, and enjoyment, particularly in environments that allowed for self-paced learning and embedded motivational design[32, 40]. Furthermore, several studies identified cognitive and metacognitive gains, including enhanced strategy use, self-regulation, and reflective thinking—especially when SPOCs included peer feedback, journaling, or self-assessment components[55, 61]. These findings reinforce the view that SPOCs are not merely content delivery tools but can also serve as platforms for cultivating autonomous, self-aware, and critically engaged language learners.

Another noteworthy contribution of SPOCs is their capacity to support contextualised and vocational language learning. By embedding language tasks within authentic, professional, or occupational scenarios, SPOCs have been shown to enhance communicative competence in domain-specific contexts such as business, IT, and maritime navigation[44, 45, 59]. This suggests that SPOCs are particularly well-suited for English for Specific Purposes and technical training settings where traditional classroom instruction may fall short of providing immersive, goal-oriented practice.

Despite these encouraging findings, the review identifies several challenges and gaps. Many studies lacked detailed theoretical grounding or explicit pedagogical rationale for the SPOC designs adopted. In some cases, instructional decisions appeared to be driven more by technological opportunity than by evidence-informed pedagogy. Moreover, issues of access, digital literacy, and institutional readiness—though alluded to in some studies—were generally underexplored[32, 36, 38, 40, 46, 55, 56]. There is also limited attention to how teachers are supported in developing, delivering, and sustaining SPOC-based instruction[42], an area that warrants further research, particularly from a teacher education and professional development perspective.

6. Implications and Conclusions

This review provides a comprehensive synthesis of empirical research on SPOCs in English language education over the past decade. By analysing 36 studies published between 2015 and 2025, the review offers new insights into the methodological approaches, pedagogical designs, and learning outcomes associated with SPOC-based instruction. The findings point toward several practical implications:

- For educators, the review suggests that SPOCs are most impactful when they are integrated thoughtfully into blended or flipped learning environments. The evidence indicates that pre-class SPOC modules—particularly those focused on grammar, vocabulary, or reading—can prepare learners more effectively for in-class collaboration, discussion, and output-focused tasks. Teachers can therefore use SPOCs not merely as digital extensions of their lessons, but as integral components of differentiated, learner-centred instruction. Moreover, studies that highlighted gains in motivation and autonomy underscore the value of leveraging SPOCs to promote learner agency and self-regulation, especially when coupled with feed-

back loops and metacognitive supports.

- For instructional designers, the findings highlight the importance of aligning SPOC features with specific language learning objectives. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all model, effective SPOC designs are those that scaffold skill development, incorporate interactive elements, and use adaptive or gamified tools to sustain engagement. Designers should also ensure that SPOC content is contextually relevant and accessible, particularly for diverse learner populations. Furthermore, SPOCs should be accompanied by opportunities for reflection, peer interaction, and formative assessment, which research shows can significantly enhance learning depth and retention.

- For researchers, this review reveals a methodological landscape that is rich but uneven. While the diversity of approaches—ranging from action research and qualitative case studies to mixed-methods and experimental designs—reflects the growing complexity of SPOC research, there is a need for greater coherence and theoretical consistency. Future research should move toward multi-site, longitudinal, or comparative studies that examine not only short-term outcomes but also long-term learner development and instructional sustainability. Additionally, the underrepresentation of teacher perspectives and professional development processes in the current literature suggests an important area for future inquiry.

- For policy makers and institutions, the findings underscore the need to invest in infrastructure, training, and support systems that facilitate the effective adoption of SPOC-based pedagogy. While the technological capacity to implement SPOCs exists in many institutions, their success depends on institutional commitment to pedagogical quality, ongoing teacher support, and alignment with broader curricular goals. Policies that promote open-access, inclusive, and contextually responsive SPOC development could contribute significantly to narrowing achievement gaps and extending access to high-quality language learning experiences.

This review, while comprehensive, is subject to several limitations. First, the inclusion of studies was restricted to those indexed in Scopus and WoS, potentially overlooking relevant research from regional databases or non-indexed publications. Second, only English-language studies were reviewed, which may have excluded valuable research conducted in other languages, particularly in non-Anglophone contexts where SPOCs are widely implemented. Third, variability in the quality and transparency of reporting across studies—such as missing details on sample size, instructional duration, or theoretical frameworks—limited the depth of cross-study comparisons. Fourth, due to the heterogeneity in study designs and outcome measures, a meta-analysis was not feasible, which restricts the ability to draw generalisable, quantitative conclusions. Finally, as SPOC-related pedagogical and technological innovations are rapidly evolving, recent developments (e.g., mobile-first designs, AI integration) may not yet be fully reflected in the published literature, suggesting a potential lag between emerging practice and empirical evidence. Thus, future endeavours are needed to broaden the scope of data sources, include multilingual and regionally diverse studies, standardise reporting practices, and conduct longitudinal and meta-analytic investigations that can better capture the long-term impact and evolving nature of SPOC-based language education. Future research should also explore how SPOCs function across different learner demographics, including age groups, proficiency levels, and educational backgrounds, to better understand for whom and under what conditions SPOCs are most effective. Comparative studies that contrast SPOCs with other digital learning modalities—such as MOOCs, mobile apps, or synchronous online instruction—would be valuable in identifying relative strengths and pedagogical niches. In addition, further investigation is needed into the sustainability and scalability of SPOC implementations, particularly in low-resource or non-urban contexts where digital infrastructure and teacher training may be limited.

In sum, as the boundaries between online and face-to-face learning continue to blur, SPOCs offer a pedagogical model that balances scalability with personalisation, structure with flexibility, and innovation with sound instructional design. Unlike large-scale platforms that often prioritise reach over responsiveness, SPOCs provide a space where targeted language instruction can be aligned with learner needs, institutional goals, and disciplinary practices. Their adaptability makes them particularly well-suited for hybrid and blended English language learning environments, where digital tools must enhance—not replace—interaction, reflection, and skill development. This review affirms that SPOCs are not merely a technological trend but a significant peda-

gogical innovation with the potential to reshape how English is taught and learned in a rapidly digitalising world. When thoughtfully implemented, SPOCs can support more equitable, engaging, and effective language education—helping educators move beyond the limitations of traditional models and meet the evolving demands of 21st-century learners.

Author Contributions

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Data Availability Statement

No new data were generated for this review.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table 1. Quality Appraisal Checklist.

1. Relevance and Focus

- ☐ The study explicitly investigates SPOCs in the context of English language education.
- ☐ The study aligns with the thematic focus of the review (e.g. instructional design, learner outcomes, pedagogical implications).

2. Clarity of Research Design

- ☐ The research questions or objectives are clearly stated.
- ☐ The study design (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods) is explicitly described and justified.

3. Appropriateness of Data Collection Methods

- ☐ Data collection methods are suitable for addressing the research questions.
- ☐ The instruments or tools used (e.g. surveys, interviews, tests) are clearly described and validated or referenced.
- ☐ The sampling strategy and participant demographics are adequately detailed.

4. Rigor of Data Analysis

- ☐ The analysis procedures are clearly explained and appropriate for the data collected.
- ☐ The study demonstrates transparency in how findings were derived from the data (e.g. coding process, statistical tests, triangulation).

5. Clarity of Outcome Reporting

- ☐ The findings are clearly reported and supported by evidence (e.g. quotes, tables, figures, statistical outputs).
- ☐ The implications for practice or future research are discussed and logically connected to the findings.

6. Ethical Considerations

- ☐ Ethical approval or consideration (e.g. informed consent, confidentiality) is mentioned.

7. Overall Transparency and Coherence

- ☐ The study is logically structured, with coherent links between aims, methods, and conclusions.
- ☐ Limitations are acknowledged and discussed.

Table 2. Summary of Reviewed Studies[32–67].

Study	Index	Methodological Designs	Pedagogical Designs/Instructional Strategies	Learning Outcomes
2022[32]	Scopus	Qualitative case study	Blended SPOC and flipped classroom integrating in-class and online modules	Improved English oral skills, enhanced learner motivation and participation

Table 2. *Cont.*

Study	Index	Methodological Designs	Pedagogical Designs/Instructional Strategies	Learning Outcomes
2020 [33]	Scopus	Qualitative narrative inquiry	SPOC integrated with reflective learning and student storytelling	Deeper learner identity formation and critical thinking
2023 [34]	Scopus	Qualitative classroom observation and interviews	SPOC linked to peer collaboration and problem-solving activities	Increased learner interaction and problem-solving ability
2022 [35]	Scopus/WoS	Quasi-experimental study	SPOC-based instruction with grammar videos and formative online assessments	Significant improvement in students' grammar accuracy
2022 [36]	Scopus	Experimental design with pre-post evaluation	SPOC with adaptive modules and AI-generated exercises	Higher achievement scores and improved digital learning habits
2021 [37]	Scopus	Experimental design with follow-up interviews	Gamified SPOC modules with vocabulary and grammar tasks	Increased student motivation and engagement, moderate language gains
2025 [38]	Scopus/WoS	Survey-based study	SPOC integrated with vocabulary and reading modules using a mobile platform	Positive learner attitudes toward mobile SPOC, moderate improvement in reading comprehension
2024 [39]	Scopus/WoS	Quantitative correlational study	SPOC course with embedded quizzes and learning analytics feedback	Stronger correlation between quiz completion and test scores
2023 [40]	Scopus/WoS	Mixed-methods study	SPOC-based flipped classroom incorporating pronunciation and speaking practice	Improved pronunciation, speaking confidence, and learner satisfaction
2022 [41]	Scopus/WoS	Mixed-methods research	SPOC-enhanced flipped learning environment with group discussions and instructor scaffolding	Improved speaking skills and self-regulated learning
2025 [42]	Scopus/WoS	Mixed-methods study	SPOC-based course with flipped instruction and formative assessments	Improved learning motivation and reading competence
2019 [43]	WoS	Design-Based Research - Model development and pilot implementation	SPOC used in English translation course focusing on scaffolded bilingual tasks	Higher translation accuracy and better cross-linguistic awareness
2021 [44]	WoS	Design-Based Research - Experimental instructional design framework	SPOC-flipped model used in IT English with technology-enhanced collaborative tools	Improved comprehension of technical vocabulary and classroom interactivity
2019 [45]	WoS	Experimental instructional design framework	Vocational English SPOC aligned with industry contexts and online discussion	Contextualised communication skills and improved learner adaptability
2023 [46]	Scopus	Action research	SPOC integrated with writing strategy training and process-based writing tasks	Increased writing proficiency and metacognitive awareness in writing
2017 [47]	Scopus/WoS	Action research	SPOC incorporated with teacher-led reflective cycles and classroom implementation	Enhanced teacher awareness and improved integration of SPOC content in class
2018 [48]	WoS	Qualitative - Case-based applied research	SPOC-based flipped classroom combining online lectures with classroom discussion	Improved student autonomy, speaking participation, and learning initiative
2024 [49]	Scopus/WoS	Mixed-methods case study	SPOC in a flipped classroom combined with in-class debates and feedback	Improved argumentation, critical thinking, and oral fluency
2024 [50]	Scopus	Quasi-experimental study	SPOC with structured modules, quizzes, and reflective learning tasks	Improved reading comprehension and higher learner engagement
2023 [51]	Scopus	Quasi-experimental design	SPOC integrated with speaking modules and real-time feedback	Higher fluency and confidence in oral English
2024 [52]	Scopus/WoS	Mixed-methods study	SPOC-based blended learning with peer feedback and collaborative writing tasks	Enhanced writing accuracy and peer learning effectiveness
2021 [53]	Scopus	Quantitative study using pre- and post-tests	SPOC-supported autonomous learning with adaptive vocabulary tools	Significant vocabulary gains and increased learner independence

Table 2. *Cont.*

Study	Index	Methodological Designs	Pedagogical Designs/Instructional Strategies	Learning Outcomes
2024[54]	Scopus/WoS	Questionnaire and interview-based qualitative analysis	SPOC used to support independent English vocabulary learning	Increased learner autonomy and vocabulary acquisition confidence
2022[55]	Scopus	Mixed-methods exploratory study	SPOC-enhanced reading instruction using peer scaffolding and content-based texts	Improved reading strategies and deeper text engagement
2023[56]	Scopus	Quantitative experimental design using machine learning analytics	Adaptive SPOC learning system with data-driven learner feedback	Enhanced learning efficiency and differentiated instruction based on learner profiles
2021[57]	Scopus/WoS	Quantitative survey design	SPOC with motivational design elements (badges, leaderboards, feedback loops)	Boost in learner motivation and retention rates
2021[58]	Scopus	Case study with focus group interviews	SPOC designed around project-based language tasks	Increased collaboration, task ownership, and contextual vocabulary use
2018[59]	WoS	Qualitative - Task-based classroom implementation study	SPOC platform integrated with TBLT principles and navigation-specific English tasks	Increased learner task engagement and improved domain-specific English
2021[60]	Scopus	Case study analysis	SPOC applied in vocational English training; included scenario-based simulations	Enhanced workplace communication and vocabulary acquisition
2024[61]	Scopus	Interview-based qualitative study	SPOC with integrated self-assessment and formative peer feedback mechanisms	Improved learner reflection, metacognition, and feedback literacy
2023[62]	Scopus/WoS	Experimental design with control group	Grammar-focused SPOC with pre- and post-tests	Statistically significant gains in grammar proficiency
2024[63]	Scopus	Survey and test-based quantitative study	SPOC-supported writing class with peer editing and teacher scaffolding	Improved writing structure, coherence, and grammar accuracy
2025[64]	Scopus	Survey and log analysis	SPOC-based blended curriculum with time-tracked assignments	Greater time-on-task and more consistent learner performance
2020[65]	Scopus	Case study with observational data	Instructor-guided SPOC combining pronunciation practice with feedback sessions	Improved pronunciation, positive learner engagement, better peer interaction
2024[66]	Scopus	Experimental design	SPOC-based English course with oral practice modules and instructor feedback	Significant improvement in spoken English proficiency and learner satisfaction
2017[67]	WoS	Qualitative - Descriptive analysis	Business English taught via SPOC with case-based teaching and bilingual resources	Enhanced business communication skills and vocabulary acquisition

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