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Inclusive education strategies for the EFL teaching context

Estrategias de educación inclusiva en el contexto de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera

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Abstract

This article addresses the impact of inclusive education strategies in the EFL context at public institutions located in Bogota, Colombia. The paper reports an action-research study

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on inclusive education by contrasting in-service teaching practices while adjusting the curriculum regarding disabilities. Data gathering was conducted through documental inquiry, preservice teachers' narratives, and a survey. Initial findings review how preservice teachers enhance their teaching patterns by modeling academic content to specific diverse encounters. In sum, exposing future language teachers to the challenge of curriculum adjustment concerning disabilities may elicit a good domain of classroom management, the shaping of instruction, and blossoming creativity in the act of teaching.

Keywords: Curricular adjustment, disabilities, EFL, inclusion, pre-service teachers.

Resumen

Este artículo aborda el impacto de las estrategias de educación inclusiva en el contexto de la



enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera en instituciones públicas ubicadas en Bogotá, Colombia. El documento informa sobre un estudio de investigación-acción sobre educación inclusiva al contrastar las prácticas de docentes en formación ajustando el currículo en relación con las discapacidades. La recopilación de datos se llevó a cabo a través de una investigación documental, narrativas de profesores en formación y una encuesta. Los hallazgos iniciales revelan que los profesores en formación mejoran sus patrones de enseñanza al adaptar los contenidos académicos a encuentros diversos y específicos. En resumen, exponer a los futuros profesores de idiomas al desafío de ajustar el currículo en relación con las discapacidades puede fomentar un buen dominio de la gestión del aula, dar forma a la instrucción y fomentar la creatividad en el acto de enseñar.

Palabras clave: Ajuste curricular, discapacidad, ILE, inclusión, profesores en formación.

1. Introduction

The investigation of inclusive education strategies for the EFL teaching context is a crucial topic due to ensuring equal access to education, enhancing learning outcomes, fostering empathy and tolerance, addressing language barriers, and promoting teacher professional development. By exploring and implementing inclusive practices, teachers can create inclusive learning environments that cover the diverse needs of learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or disabilities. Investigating inclusive education in the EFL context can create an equitable education, encouraging the development of inclusive teaching approaches that empower learners to achieve their full potential and teachers to create the best environment for all students no matter their condition.

Adapting to the learning environment is a crucial factor that all teachers should consider, unfortunately, some educators tend to overlook this essential aspect, which becomes even more concerning when we talk about children who have special needs. Bertills (2023) exposed that Inclusive compulsory education creates inclusive learning environments that offer equal opportunities for all students to actively participate in their educational journey. It acts as a significant framework for children with disabilities to experience the benefits of participation parallel to their peers. To address the unique needs of diverse learners, it is necessary to provide specialized support such as adjusting the environment, modifying the context, and offering individual assistance. This requires an adjustment in attitudes regarding adaptation to the learning environment to accommodate the learner, rather than expecting the learner to conform to the traditional teaching methods.

The increasing importance of understanding othering is leading teachers to optimize inclusive encounters from curricular adjustments. Thus, National policies in Colombia guarantee a reasonable institutional plan of adjustment (PIAR) must be carried out every time a disability is diagnosed within a mainstream classroom. However, the exaggerated number of students, the complexity of didactics regarding a low level of proficiency, the socio-economic barriers, and the challenging features of autism spectrum disorder result in the lack of knowledge and guidance language teachers deal with in the domestic context.

Discrimination has become an important issue in the last decade and some influential figures and leaders at national and international levels actively have participated in this battle, alongside various patients, their families, and professional organizations. (Lauber,2008) Nevertheless, students with special educational needs (SEN) used to face discriminatory treatment as



members of a minority group, research done in this area has revealed that SEN students tend to have more negative perceptions according to their interactions with teachers and peers compared to non-SEN students. Moreover, SEN students are more susceptible to laughter and bullying within school environments; other studies showed that some primary schools in Hong Kong documented instances where teachers identify and neglect SEN students; these cases of alienation and rejection have been observed to appear as early as elementary school. (Kuen-Fung, Lan & Frank Tian-Fang, 2023)

In this context, the term “adaptivity” refers to the ability of teachers to use a range of teaching approaches that provide suitable assistance for individual learning processes (Gerlach and Leupold, 2019, p. 93). It implies that EFL teachers must change the traditional ways in which they teach and take out the pre-establish methods known as “good” to create new ways of teaching that supplied the needs of each type of learner. As an alternative, we have the option to select a sequential, systematic, and cumulative multisensory approach that encompasses structured and repetitive exercises aimed at developing phonological awareness, the metacognitive aspect of vocabulary, or activities that specifically target explicit textual structure.

This paper describes the research experience of one hundred twenty pre-service teachers from a public University who adjusted the EFL international teaching standard curriculum towards enhancing inclusive educational strategies at public institutions.

2. Methodology

This qualitative research aimed to approach the curricular adjustment that inclusive education encounters after exploring research problems from the perspective of the population involved. Mack et al. (2005) suggest that this research

methodology is appropriate for acquiring knowledge regarding various cultural and individual aspects of specific populations. By using this research approach, researchers can go deep into the unique characteristics, values, beliefs, and practices of different groups that define cultures and individuals. Recognizing this diversity is crucial for fostering inclusivity and promoting cross-cultural understanding.

According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research enables thorough investigation into the field of educational research, facilitating in-depth exploration. Qualitative research methods, such as documental inquiry and surveys, are specifically used to go deeply into educational phenomena.

Buns (2015) states that action research examines social situations and encourages the active and cooperative involvement of participants. This type of study goes beyond traditional research methods as it actively involves the individuals who are affected by the research findings.

According to Zapata and Rondán (2016), action research methodology aims to establish supportive elements that contribute to social transformation, involving individuals in the process. By actively involving individuals in the research process, this method ensures that their voices are heard, their experiences are considered, and their perspectives shape the outcomes.

For this article, the instruments used were three. The first one is documental inquiry; for this, it is important to talk about data analysis, whose objective is to sketch the various stages presented in the methodology. This process guides a comprehension of the researched information (De Andrade et al., 2018). According to Carrillo (2020), documentary research involves a lot of significant processes, such as the gathering, comparison, and analysis of specialized knowledge concerning a specific phenomenon.



The second instrument used was preservice teachers' narratives. Carrillo (2016) mentioned that narratives cover significant aspects of our existence, including our beliefs, actions, culture, and even thoughts. By examining narratives, we not only gain a deeper understanding of the essence of a problem but also explore the complexity and variations that explain why an event manifests in a particular way. Another point to highlight is what Pereira Pérez (2011) said about data gathering. For him, data gathering involves the collection of various components, including verbal, nonverbal, and visual components, such as narratives and images.

The third and last instrument used, and maybe one of the most used, was a survey. On the one hand, surveys, according to Ros (2004), are considered an effective instrument for describing the reality of the participants. On the other hand, López-Roldán & Fachelli (2016) said that surveys act as valuable tools in the field of research, allowing us to discover the unexpressed truth of the people surveyed.

3. Results

Data inquiry was settled through the compilation of sixty scientific articles in which inclusive education was approached through teaching practices, disabilities, and curricular adjustment. Atlas Ti was used to codify information about the features addressed in the inquiry. It was found that disability exploration conveyed different nuances of challenges for teachers, and strategy development tends to focus on a particular disability every time. Therefore, the analysis of 90 narratives of EFL pre-service teachers revealed the persisting uncertainty regarding curricular adjustment, indicating that further exploration in this area is necessary. The narratives highlighted the challenges and complexities of adapting curricula to meet the needs of diverse learners in the context of language education. The findings show that further study and discussion are needed to

better understand how curricular changes might be effectively implemented to improve students' language learning experiences.

Furthermore, the investigation demonstrated that most students viewed the experience of teaching in a real-world situation, which was established through an elective at a public university, as extremely important. The opportunity to engage with actual students in an authentic teaching environment allowed the pre-service teachers to apply their theoretical knowledge and gain practical skills. The students' good response implies that this real-world teaching experience had a major influence on their learning and motivation. In-service teachers also voiced support for the continuation of such workshops, acknowledging the need to provide chances for pre-service teachers to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

These findings underscore the importance of ongoing discussions and research on curricular adjustment in EFL education. Additionally, they highlight the potential benefits of providing meaningful teaching experiences in real-world contexts for pre-service teachers. By addressing the uncertainty surrounding curricular adjustments and continuing to provide opportunities for practical teaching experiences, educational institutions can better prepare future language teachers and enhance the overall quality of language education.

The results of the implementation of a semi structured survey revealed that students thoroughly enjoyed the inclusive education encounter. Many of them said that they had never experienced such an inclusive approach before and appreciated the opportunity to learn in a diverse and inclusive environment. However, it became evident that there was uncertainty among the students regarding how to continue adjusting the curriculum to cater to specific disabilities and contexts. They acknowledged the importance of these adjustments but



admitted a lack of knowledge about effectively implementing them. Despite this, the students emphasized the significance of English language classes in facilitating speaking and writing skills, underscoring the importance of practical language use in their learning journey. These findings highlight the transformative impact of inclusive education while emphasizing the need for further guidance and support in understanding and implementing curricular adjustments for diverse learners.

4. Discussion

Regarding the initial findings of the documentary inquiry, it is feasible to determine the increasing importance of inclusive education. As Lopez et al. (2021) say, this is how educators can respond and cover any divergence a student could present in a classroom. By doing this, the educator can prevent marginalization students experience when treated differently. Inclusive education understands that each student has unique needs, helping break social barriers and fostering a culture of respect in the classroom. Even though inclusive education is more popular nowadays, a lack of access to a high level of education for people with disabilities is evident. Pawlik et al. (2023) developed research with autistic adolescents and mentioned that when a school does not have the right educational environment, considering their interests, diverse needs, and abilities, this directly affects their educational process and success. There is concern about the conditions provided for students in schools because this could build a barrier for them to access quality education. If they do not receive the correct attention and conditions to study, this would limit their academic and personal development.

On the one hand, international standards point out the urgent need to create opportunities for the inclusion of all learners, and this could be possible by providing curricula and activities that are designed to allow different ways of

representation, expression, and engagement (King-Sears, 2008). This was established in the Universal Design for Learning framework written in 1984 as they started to recognize how important it is to adjust the instructional materials, methods, and assessments to be accessible, engaging, and effective for a wide range of learners. Then, in 1994, the UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action stated that all learners should be accommodated in mainstream schools regardless of their physical, intellectual, or emotional needs and differences or their home language. (Engelbrecht, 2019) This statement emphasizes not only the importance of modifying schools to meet the requirements of kids but also the importance of providing instructors with the required training and professional education so that they can meet the needs of all students.

The Convention on the Rights of Individuals with Disabilities (CRPD) was established in 2006 to promote, defend, and safeguard all individuals with disabilities full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as to encourage respect for their inherent dignity (Lang et al. 2011). It is also worth noting that the CRPD was built on pre-existing human rights principles, particularly the ones concerning non-discrimination.

This principle ensures that disabled people are not discriminated against; as Article 24 says, all countries must respect, protect, and guarantee an inclusive and quality education for all people, without exception.

On the other hand, national policies established in Decree 1421 of August 29, 2017, emphasize the necessity to develop "PIAR" in schools. The acronym PIAR stands for "individualized plan for reasonable accommodations." PIAR is the most important tool to materialize inclusion as it requires teachers to know their students and plan their activities by supporting and adjusting each exercise to their needs. This process demands



interaction between family, school, teachers, and support teachers (Carrillo, 2020).

Therefore, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) seems to encompass a bunch of features that EFL is not prepared to challenge. ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterized by challenges in reciprocal social communication and the presence of restricted and repetitive behaviors (Belen, 2023).

Understanding and supporting people with ASD includes adopting strategies that can facilitate communication with them, which could promote positive behaviors. Tenerife et al. (2023) stated that children with ASD frequently exhibit these negative behaviors to get attention, implying that this is a direct result of the child's difficulties with verbal communication. It is critical to recognize that these actions are a kind of nonverbal communication utilized by ASD children to communicate their needs or desires and by addressing them, we can better understand ASD children and provide what they require.

People with ASD often have difficulties interacting with others; they do not use appropriate body gestures or facial expressions, and they also cannot share their feelings or even understand others' emotions. Therefore, teachers need to search for strategies that could improve communication, as most of them are visual as their visual skills are more developed, so that could be a good strategy for ASD children (Tenerife et al., 2023). Creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for ASD children can contribute to enhancing their comfort and supporting their social interactions and how they communicate.

Thus, in service teachers' narratives, they highlight the meaningful experience by adjusting the curriculum to the real context of disability. Inclusive encounters play an important role in teaching practices because teachers in inclusive environments must develop the necessary skills and knowledge to help and teach depending

on the diverse needs of their students by adapting or accommodating different learning styles, abilities, and strengths to create an inclusive learning environment. According to Brown (2017), teaching practices in inclusive encounters are relevant because they may be influenced by training and previous experiences. However, the attitudes of school members, as well as the motivation and expectations of others, affect the application of inclusive practices; it is a learning process for the teacher. Thus, teachers can identify the most effective factors for implementing inclusive practices and learn from their new experiences.

Diversity is a common factor in learning environments, and this is helpful due to the exposition to diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and abilities that help students develop a deeper understanding and conscience of differences while simultaneously enriching some values such as empathy, tolerance, and respect. As Acedo, Ferrer, and Pamies (2009) mentioned, inclusive education can be seen as a new paradigm that moves beyond medical methods and academic inadequacy by focusing on inclusive environments that include diversity. This requires the acceptance of initiatives that face obstacles that come across individuals who attempt to access learning and active involvement rather than perceiving those barriers as limitations. Consequently, it should facilitate a transformation in the organizational structure, culture, and practices of the educational system.

As teachers experience and explore their role, they start recognizing the importance of inclusion and a sense of belonging, which include the acceptance and appreciation of the diverse backgrounds, cultures, perspectives, needs, and identities present in the classroom. In the context of training to become a teacher, certain types of knowledge are more relevant than others; for instance, subject matter knowledge, beliefs, and conceptions about that subject matter and how students best learn it. These experiences



are gained during teacher education programs and become significant in shaping teachers' understanding of effective teaching methods and strategies. (Richardson, 1996).

To sum up, the survey evidenced the modeling perspective of pre-service teachers after real-world interventions. However, they maintain the need to keep reinforcing their professional development by adjusting and implementing a wide array of teaching strategies.

Thus, Agbenyega & Klibthong (2012) mentioned that a deep understanding of the concepts of habitus, field, and capital helps in the development of pre-service teachers' self-reflection and the transformation of their minds and perspectives on teaching. In this way, teachers' perceptions of themselves and their awareness of diverse contexts directly impact their interactions with their students; however, when there is a lack of self-awareness and understanding of others, they may not effectively engage with some children. As a result, self-awareness is a characteristic shared by effective and competent teachers; it allows them to consider the various contexts in which children exist, allowing them to shape the learning environment, provide appropriate resources, and foster inclusive school cultures that value every child. When teachers develop professionally, they are exposed to new ideas, backgrounds, concerns, and educational practices. The desire to support change and adapt their teaching practices allows them to better recognize the various needs of their students.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study investigated the experiences of incoming teachers in an inclusive approach through curricular adjustment preparation, correction, implementation in class, and outcomes in a public institution with a diverse student population that included both students and students with disabilities. The study's major instrument was narrative analysis, which yielded

numerous noteworthy conclusions. To begin, while several studies on inclusive research exist, they frequently focus on disabilities separating them from student competencies, resulting in fragmented perspectives. The identification of various restrictions and opportunities that can be applied through didactics was an important finding, underlining the significance of a holistic and integrated approach to inclusive education.

Secondly, instruments included tales from 90 in-service educators who emphasized the wonderful quality of the event as well as the importance of confronting the reality of inclusive classrooms. Many, however, acknowledged a sense of being unprepared to educate students with impairments in regular classrooms. Challenges noted were insufficient resources, limited budgets, huge class sizes, and a lack of assistance from special educators. These findings highlight the importance of additional resources, training, and support networks for teachers to effectively meet the different needs of kids with disabilities.

The third instrument investigated the survey's impact on participants' ability to alter the curriculum to meet specific disability. While the experience was enjoyable, it also highlighted the difficulty of handling the wide range of disabilities not represented in the sample. Although some students exhibited confidence in modifying the curriculum to accommodate disabilities, they also stated a need for continued help and direction to increase their expertise and abilities in this area.

To sum up, this exploration features the significance of a comprehensive and coordinated way to deal with extensive schooling, where curricular changes are ready, remedied, and executed to meet the different necessities of understudies with handicaps. It highlights the requirement for complete preparation, adequate assets, and continuous help for pre- and in-administration educators. Further exploration is justified to address the holes in information and



comprehension of curricular changes for many handicaps while offering real support and backup to engage educators in standard homerooms. Eventually, these endeavors plan to establish comprehensive learning conditions that cultivate intellectual and social development, everything being equal for each student.

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