Attitudes towards inclusive education in teaching English as a foreign language: an academic review

Actitudes hacia la educación inclusiva en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera: una revisión académica

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Resumen

Enseñar inglés como lengua extranjera es un trabajo desafiante que implica aplicar diferentes estrategias en el proceso, ya que enseñar una L2 no es nada fácil. Los docentes deben aprender a utilizar diversas metodologías para desarrollar las cuatro habilidades de manera efectiva. Por lo tanto, enseñar inglés a alumnos con necesidades educativas especiales es un gran desafío que incluye no solo formación y conocimientos, sino también una actitud positiva por parte de los docentes. Desde esta perspectiva, este artículo presenta una revisión de la literatura sobre las actitudes de los docentes hacia la educación inclusiva en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera. Se realizó una búsqueda de artículos en la base de datos de Google Scholar utilizando palabras clave como NEE, inclusión, enseñanza, inglés y perspectivas. En base a estas variables de búsqueda, se seleccionaron 7 artículos. Los resultados de esta revisión indican que la mayoría de los docentes tienen una actitud positiva hacia la educación inclusiva en la enseñanza del inglés, pero existe una gran falta de conocimiento y formación en los futuros docentes, docentes en servicio y estudiantes en este campo. Entonces, es por eso que hoy en día aplicar estrategias y metodologías para un aula de inglés inclusiva no funciona de manera efectiva.

Palabras clave: perspectivas, inclusión, NEE, inglés, maestros.

Abstract

Teaching English as a foreign language is a challenging job that implies applying different strategies in the process, since teaching an L2 is not easy at all. Teachers must learn to use various methodologies to develop the four skills effectively. So, teaching English to students with special educational needs is a big challenge that includes not only training and knowledge, but also a positive attitude from teachers. From this perspective, this article presents a literature review about teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education in teaching English as a foreign language. A search of articles was carried out in the Google Scholar database using keywords such as SEN, inclusion, teaching, English, and perspectives. Based on these search variables, 7 articles were selected. The results of this review indicate that most of the teachers have a positive attitude toward inclusive education in teaching English, but there is a great lack of knowledge and training in pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and students in this field. So, that is why nowadays applying strategies and methodologies for an inclusive English classroom does not work effectively.

Keywords: perspectives, inclusion, SEN, English, teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion of all people without distinction is a human rights issue; equality, equal opportunities, and non-discrimination must be our today's society's challenges. Thus, an inclusive school and family education that promotes diversity in flexible ways, promotes integration and combats school failure by working for the educational success of all citizens (López, 2016). In addition, goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote opportunities for lifelong learning for all (Unesco, 2021).

In this regard, there is a law in Ecuador that develops and deepens the rights, obligations, and constitutional guarantees in the educational field, which sets up that Ecuador's aim is to educate everyone, including students with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities, whether physical, intellectual, or psychological, who speak a different language, come from different ethnic groups, are afflicted, have mobility issues, are victims of violence or addiction, and so on (Ley Orgánica de educación intercultural, 2015).

So, research on educational inclusion has become a popular topic and a necessity in the educational field (Salazar et al., 2017). However, there is a lack of knowledge from teachers about how to deal with students with special educational needs. When finding this kind of student in the classroom, most teachers almost always do not know what strategies to apply in the teaching-learning process. So, for English teachers, it is even more challenging to make these students acquire the language. To meet the demands of inclusive education, teachers must be properly trained to teach in institutions with a wide range of special educational needs (Jiménez et al, 2015). In this respect, the question that guides this study is the following: what are teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education in EFL classrooms?

Consequently, the objective of this research was to carry out a review of the literature on teachers' and students' attitudes towards inclusive education in the EFL. This article is divided into four sections: the introduction, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is a theoretical review that allows knowing the perspectives of teachers about inclusive education in EFL classrooms; which has a qualitative approach. To collect the articles that were part of the literary review, a search was made in the Google Scholar database. The search criteria used were the use of keywords such as inclusion, attitudes, perspectives, English, methodologies, and education; with a temporal delimitation of the last 5 years (2017-2022); citable documents, and type of literature (articles). The search was carried out in the month of August 2022.

Once the search was carried out with the aforementioned criteria, special emphasis was placed on titles referring to the process of teaching and learning the English language. Each article's summary (abstract), results, and conclusion were read in order to select those that met the investigation's criteria: articles that presented research on inclusive methodological strategies in the teaching-learning process of the English language, and articles that focused on perspectives, attitudes, and opinions about these methodologies. Articles published before 2017 and those whose methodology was applied to the teaching of any other subject except English as a foreign language, were specifically excluded.

RESULTS

In this literature review, 7 articles were included that referred to the aforementioned criteria. This sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Analyzed simple

Data base	Year of publication	Authors	Títtle
Scholar Google	2017	Troeva	Inclusive education in foreign language teaching: What is the first step to make it work?.
Scholar Google	2018	Rezai, Jabbari & Ahmadi	Its greatest Benefit of inclusión is its challenge?: EFL teachers' attitudes towards inclusión of learners with disabilities.
Scholar Google	2018	Loor, Ortíz & Aucapiña	Perceptions of the English language teachers about educational inclusion.
Scholar Google	2018	Ávalos, Redondo, Rojas & Salazar	Inclusive learning methologies through use of ICT: Opinions of Costa Rican students and teachers.
Scholar Google	2020	Haggag & Bakr	Teachers' percepctions about language learning difficulties in English as a foreign language EFL classes.
Scholar Google	2020	Aksu & Tasci	An investigation of prospective language teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards inclusive education in Turkey.
Scholar Google	2022	Mendoza, Enriquez & Lopez	Foreign language teachers' attitudes towards inclusive English language teaching to pupils with learning difficulties.

The results of the literary review are described below (look at the Complementary Material):

Because the teacher's attitude toward his students is so important in educational activities, it is essential to recognize those attitudes that may prevent students with SEN from accessing and benefiting from education with equal opportunities (Sucaticona, 2016).

That is why, Troeva (2017), carried out qualitative research, through interviews with thirty Bulgarian teachers of preschool, school, and university; twenty-six were English teachers and four were teachers of other languages. The objective of this study was to identify their attitudes to teach students with SEN. The results showed that the specific disabilities found were dyslexia, deafness, autism, visual impairment, physical impairment, and mental health disorders. In addition, teachers with more teaching experience had a more negative attitude than those with less. One explanation would be that long years of teaching have resulted in a higher number of unsuccessful interactions with students with SEN. The reason could be that the integration of these students, particularly those with more severe learning difficulties, only began a few years ago in Bulgaria.

Moreover, the survey results also show that the majority of participants have reservations about in-class instruction, regardless of their overall attitude toward teaching students with disabilities. That could imply that, while many participants support the wonderful idea of welcoming all students in the classroom, its practical implementation remains elusive to them, possibly due to a lack of preparation. One more factor identified by survey participants in achieving an inclusive foreign language classroom is the support of all foreign language class members for the student with SEN. Not only the teacher's collaboration, the entire class, is deemed necessary to raise awareness of inclusive values among peers.

Rezai, et al., (2018) conducted a qualitative and quantitative study on the issue of inclusion. Surveys were carried out on 254 Iran teachers of language institutes, of whom 35.4% had experienced teaching SEN and 64.4% hadn't. They reported a total of 200 SEN. The surveys showed that EFL teachers in Iran's language institutes have neutral-to-positive attitudes and perceptions about special-needs students in their English classes. In other words, some teachers reported inclusion negatively while others reported it positively.

Furthermore, teachers reported some benefits from including disabled students in English language classes. The most significant advantages were a better understanding of individual differences through group interaction, social and emotional development, improved communication and social life skills, increased motivation, improved teaching knowledge, and others. They also stated that additional training is required to achieve a productive integration of EFL learners with difficulties in English language institutes.

Many institutions do not pay as much attention to SEN students as they do to their regular peers in EFL educational settings (Reiza, et al., 2018). In this sense, Loor-Aldaz, et al., 2018) researched the perceptions of English language teachers about educational inclusion which had a descriptive quantitative approach. The population object of the study included eight Ecuadorian participants, who were English teachers at a primary school. The survey used in this study is a Likert-type scale of eight elements. The results obtained in this study show that the perception of English teachers about inclusion is positive in a high percentage and reveals the importance of the role of the foreign language teacher in inclusive education.

Guerrero (2012) discusses some methodologies, techniques, and resources that can be used outside of the classroom to promote inclusive learning environments, including the use of ICT. In this respect, Avalos, et al., (2018) conducted a comparative analysis of three educational centers in Costa Rica with the goal of investigating the use of various ICT in the teaching-learning processes in Science and English and determining whether such use indicates the implementation of teaching and learning methodologies that favor a comprehensive education and attention to student diversity. The sample of this study was 59 students and 8 teachers.

The study's goal is to look deeper into the differences in opinion between teachers and students from three educational centers regarding the use of available ICT in each educational center, in order to determine whether the use of these resources favors the development of inclusive learning methodologies in Science and English subjects. This research was descriptive and explanatory. Interviews, observation processes using Likert scales, and focus groups were used to gather information.

Following the collection of qualitative data, an electronic questionnaire was administered to the students. In contrast to opinions between students and educators, one of the main findings of the research has been the absence of inclusive practice in the learning that students receive. The latter revealed that teachers' use of technological resources is not inclusive or educational, but rather instrumental. The results also indicated that there is a lack of initiative, rigid planning, ignorance in the subject of inclusion from the use of learning practices supported by various technological resources, and resistance to the change to implement new learning methodologies, seem to be possible causes that make the development of an inclusive learning management system impossible.

Thus, teachers of English as a Foreign Language teachers face particular difficulties when teaching students with learning disabilities along with their peers who do not (Lama, 2019). For that reason, Haggag, et al., (2020) made research about a study on English language teachers' perceptions of English language learning difficulties in their classes. A descriptive analytical approach was carried out, it used a questionnaire divided into four sections: basic concepts, intervention techniques, class barriers, and class assessment techniques. The second tool was an online reflection journal that participants used to record their thoughts on language learning challenges. The participants were 99 English language teachers at various stages in Egypt. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between participants' perceptions of English language learning difficulties and its concepts, intervention techniques, barriers, and assessment techniques. The study's recommendations included incorporating language learning difficulties modules into both pre-service and in-service teacher education and training programs, as well as emphasizing intervention techniques in EFL curricula and learning difficulties assessment procedures and techniques.

On the other hand, when hiring new teachers, it is also important to know the experiences or level of knowledge about teaching students with SEN and the procedures that it involves. Aksu, et al., (2020) conducted research on prospective language teachers' perspectives on inclusive education in the Turkish context. The sample was 20 prospective teachers. It is relevant to highlight that the participants did not take any courses oriented to teaching language in inclusive classrooms or to students with learning disabilities. Some of their methodology lessons, however, covered topics related to teaching students with special needs.

The study applied a qualitative approach. So a questionnaire with open-ended questions was given to the participants. The findings appeared to show that the majority of prospective language teachers understood what inclusive education meant. Although these prospective language teachers had positive attitudes toward inclusive language education, they stated that they lacked the necessary knowledge to succeed. They also emphasized the relevance of both theoretical and practical inclusive education training.

Mendoza et al., (2022) worked on the same line two years later. The purpose of this study was to describe the attitudes of English language teachers in primary schools in Cuba toward inclusive teaching of students with SEN. The method used was descriptive. They polled 50 teachers and interviewed them. A Likert-scale survey was used, with three attitude components examined: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The data from the surveys and the interviews were found to be completely coincidental. The findings revealed that teachers of foreign languages have an indecisive or neutral attitude toward the three components of inclusive teaching English to SEN, owing to a lack of knowledge about SEN and L2 learning.

DISCUSSION

It is extremely important to highlight the significance of raising educational populations' awareness on the subject of inclusion and diversity so that it is understood that this must be present in classrooms and be part of all the elements that integrate the teaching process and learning because we are all part of a diversity with particularities, strengths, and weaknesses, which enriches the classroom in the formation of values and new knowledge from an integrality.

According to the academic review, teacher attitudes and perceptions towards inclusion are the most important factor influencing the successful implementation of inclusion. Various investigations have been conducted in this regard, and some pertinent factors have been presented. This study adds to the body of knowledge by analyzing the complicated system of EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes, as well as their concerns about promoting positive attitudes toward the inclusion of learners with SEN.

It is clearly evidenced that teachers lack education and training scenarios in inclusive teaching English methodologies, which sometimes generates an exclusive attitude toward students with SEN, in addition to a lack of resources and strategies, support and curricular adjustment, and shortcomings in continuous accompaniment. Nevertheless, some teachers showed a positive attitude toward inclusive language education.

To sum up, some urgent actions need to be done to encourage teachers, such as additional training that is required to achieve successful integration of EFL learners with SEN and involve all students in this process. Thus, inclusion in the institutions will foster understanding of individual differences and encourage students throughout the institution to be more supportive of their peers, allowing them to develop in a humanistic setting. They will develop values that will allow them to coexist in a respectful and friendly environment.

As for limitations, there was little current research on this topic, and the data of this study were collected from qualitative researches majority. As a result, it is suggested that future studies supplement qualitative data with quantitative data, and inclusive methodologies in teaching English to students with SEN are studied.

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