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A systematic evidence synthesis of disability and inclusive pedagogy in initial teacher training in English as a Foreign Language

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

Keywords:
Systematic literature review
English as a foreign language
Pre-service teachers
Disability
Inclusive pedagogy

A B S T R A C T

This systematic review considers recent evidence of the preparation of inclusive education implementation in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education across different countries. The study comprised of a comprehensive search of multiple databases which are accessible for scholars with visual impairments working with an open-source screen reader application: British Education Index, Education Source, ERIC subscription, Scopus, and Web of Science Core Collection. The searches generated 508 studies from January 1 2002, to December 31 2022,. 73 duplicated studies were removed, leaving 435 records to be screened for inclusion. 430 of these were rejected for not meeting the selection criteria, leaving five studies for inclusion. One additional relevant study from author’s personal collection of references was also included in the review. The review discovered that the issue of disability and inclusive pedagogy in initial EFL teacher education scholarship is extremely under-studied. Only four relevant studies were conducted in the Global North, two in the Middle East, and none in the Global South, where an expanding population of pupils learning English are located. The findings of this study provide insights and recommendations for policy and practices of initial EFL teacher education.

1. Introduction

The term “inclusive pedagogy” has been adopted only recently in Higher Education discourse. Stentiford and Koutsouris (2021) discovered that most studies on inclusion and inclusive pedagogy in Higher Education were conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom. Most focused on the inclusion of disabled students, while a few had a wider remit of inclusion to embrace students from other minority groups. Two-thirds of the studies in their review were published between 2010 and 2018, with the earliest study published in 2002. The majority of the studies (12 out of 31) were about university courses or programmes on inclusion, nine were about general ideas for inclusive practices, nine were about staff and inclusion, which were associated to the deficit model of disability. Only one study embraced the students’ perspectives regarding the implementation of inclusive education.

Inclusive pedagogy is a concept that focuses on individuality. This disregards the focus of the dominant majority which continuously ‘other’ individuals labelled as different. In this way, inclusive pedagogy provides an approach to education which positions every learner as an equally unique individual deserving of enhanced learning opportunities and support (Florian, 2015a). By emphasising equality, this concept positions everyone as the same in terms of being unique from one another. As such, variation in teaching is required to serve all students, rather than simply targeting certain student groups with an inflexible approach. Inclusive pedagogy emphasises how all teachers can respect and respond to human difference to include all learners, rather than exclude them (Florian, 2015b). Inclusive pedagogy is distinct from inclusive education by placing emphasis on the act of teaching rather than simply increasing participation and reducing exclusion at an institutional level (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Given its epistemic rarity, inclusive pedagogy is evident in mainstream education. Studies on ‘teachers’ beliefs about inclusivity’ reveal, in general, that teachers report that they believe that supporting disabled students requires specialised teaching (Lyser et al., 1994; Avramidis et al., 2000; Marshall et al., 2002; Campbell et al., 2003; Lambert et al., 2005; Lambe & Bones, 2006; Sharma et al., 2008). However, the competence in delivering successful pedagogical practices in special educational classes is reported to be similar to that required in mainstream settings (Davis & Florian, 2004; Florian, 2008; Florian & Linklater, 2010; Hegarty, 2007; Lewis & Norwich, 2005; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003). Furthermore, Florian and Linklater (2010)
argue that it is difficult to retain the idea that, for teachers to be able to
teach disabled learners in inclusive classes, they require a competence
distinct from the one needed to teach non-disabled learners because
effective practices in special education originate in, and are also found
in, mainstream education already. While many schools and teachers do
not report positive beliefs about including disabled learners in main-
stream classes, due to not having specialised expertise and facilities,
others, this is not always the case. It is reported that inclusive schools,
are more successful in extending what is ordinarily available in main-
stream classes to all learners, having the result of increased participation
and achievement for all, including those labelled as having special
educational needs (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Inclusive pedagogy in the context of English as a Foreign Language
(EFL), however, is problematic. There are issues in English as a Foreign
Language (EFL) teachers’ understanding of, and attitudes towards,
disability. Inclusive classroom practices are reported to be difficult
(Smith, 2006), or even impractical (Rezai et al., 2018). For example,
most teachers of EFL interviewed in a recent study by Rezai et al. (2018)
reported that disabled students caused classroom management difficul-
ties. Understanding of inclusive pedagogy and reasonable adjust-
ments was limited, and did not follow reported models of best practice
in inclusive pedagogy reported by Florian (2015b). Attitudes towards
students with disability were negative, with such students being
described as a burden to mainstream EFL classroom pedagogy. This was
the majority view within the sample of 30 interviewed EFL teacher
participants who had the experience of interacting and working with
students with disability. The same study surveyed 254 EFL teachers. Of
these, 18.5% reported positive efficacy toward the inclusion of students
with a disability, 78.7% were neutral, and 2.8% reported negative ef-
ficacy towards inclusion. This means most teachers held neutral views
on inclusion, despite many legislative and educational systems requiring
inclusive practices be adopted and embedded within pedagogy (Hallett
& Hallet, 2010). Such practices would also be supported by the UN
Conventions on Rights to an Education and Rights of Persons with Dis-
abilities (Messiou, 2017).

These findings are reflected in other studies. Smith (2006) discov-
ered that professional English teachers across 60 accredited British En-
lish language schools, despite being generally supportive of inclusive
education, mostly held negative attitudes in terms of inclusive classroom
practices. The same has been observed for EFL teachers in Taiwan
(Chien, 2015), Saudi Arabia (Abduljalil Alabsi, 2021), Bangladesh
(Islam & Ahsan, 2022), and Turkey (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020), all of
whom held positive attitudes towards including disabled students which
were not reflected in their practice. The root causes of this are a lack of
understanding of disability and limited competence with respect to
pedagogy. Studies conducted in Spain Pérez-Valverde et al. (2021) and
Serbia (Savić & Prosić-Santovac, 2017) contribute to the picture of
widespread negative attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled stu-
dents. The global demand for English proficiency has led many countries
to make English learning a compulsory element of their national
curricula (Nunan, 2003; Rixon, 2013). As such, the lack of support for
disabled students in EFL classrooms places them at a severe disadvan-
tage.

The negative picture of EFL in-service teachers’ understanding about
disability foregrounds the continuum of ableism and disability. Ableism
is a condition where the world is seen and favoured from ableist per-
spectives always in reference to able-bodiedness. What able-bodied people
are assumed normative standard. This indicates the stage of normative positivisms, the first phase of the Tripartite model of
disability by Bolt (2013; 2015; 2017; 2018), where the dominant ableist
views, or “normative positivisms” in Bolt’s term, are in power, favour
assumed normalcy, marginalize alternative lenses, and eventually lead
to ableism. This sets the stage of the second phase of “non-normative positivisms”, which for Bolt are assaults to disability (Bolt, 2017).
Disability or “non-normative positivisms” can be seriously detrimental
to disabled students of EFL. Non-normative positivisms flag the stage
where abilities regarded as deviating from the assumed normative
standards are given negative associations. Students who identify or are
labelled as disabled are singled out as requiring exceptionally additional
supports and specialist expertise (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020; Rezai et al.,
2018; Smith, 2006). Seeing disability as a deficit or incapacity, many
EFL in-service teachers feel that they lack competence in working with
disabled students (Abduljalil Alabsi, 2021; Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020;
Blume et al., 2019; Chien, 2015; Islam & Ahsan, 2022; Nijakowska,
2019; Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022; Smith, 2006; Sowell, 2020), while
successful inclusive pedagogies are performed by extending what is
apparently ordinarily available on a day-to-day basis to supporting all,
argues pedagogy in inclusive classrooms must be approached in a way in
which every learner is seen as equally unique and likewise deserving of
enhanced opportunities and supports. This concept of inclusive peda-
gogy echoes the third component of Bolt’s Tripartite model which sug-
gests considering “non-normative positivisms” where everyone is seen
as equally different, in a positive light, and as equally contributing to a
richer collective learning outcome. From this perspective, a sight loss in
dominant view, for instance, can be framed as a potential gain which
may drive collective improvement of verbal communicative competence
of an EFL classroom community (Effendi et al., 2021; Bolt, 2017).

The widespread pervasion of ableist beliefs is compounded by an
inadequate competence of EFL teachers in many countries. According to
Nunan (2003), despite the growing demand for English teaching in
schools in Asia Pacific countries, teachers possess inadequate competen-
tce in English language and in English Language Teaching. Rixon’s
(2013) study of 64 countries identified that this problem is widespread.
Shifting attention away from disabled students to EFL teachers reveals
that challenges to inclusivity within classrooms is not caused by the
presence of disabled student but by the lack of ability of EFL teachers to
effectively perform their role. In part, this may be attributed to inade-
quate ELT pedagogy (Nunan, 2003; Rixon, 2013) and to incompetent
inclusive pedagogy (Chien, 2015; Nijakowska et al., 2018; Rezai et al.,
2018; Smith, 2006), indicating two strands of pedagogy which must be
improved upon in order to accommodate disabled students.

Addressing these pedagogic inadequacies requires examining how
prospective EFL teachers are trained. There is a reported lack of content
related to inclusive education in existing English teacher training
courses. Smith (2006) indicates that, while some courses touch upon
inclusion education, there is a lack of focus to the extent necessary to
equip prospective teachers with the skills required to appropriately
create an inclusive setting. The same was found in Greece, Cyprus, and
Poland where English teacher education did not seem to sufficiently
prepare student teachers for inclusive teaching (Nijakowska et al.,
2018). This cross-country study pointed out that, while years of teaching
has little to do with inclusive practice, direct and structured contact with
disabled students offers better understanding of how to create an in-
clusive environment. The study thus recommended that direct contact
should be an integral part of EFL teacher education curricula. However,
a study by Rezai et al. (2018) in the same year contradicted these
findings, stating that most EFL teachers who had direct and structured
contact with disabled students complained that the inclusion of disabled
students made classroom management difficult and sometimes impos-
sible. Chien (2015) found that the absence of collaboration affects the
successful implementation of inclusive practices.

One major barrier to successful inclusion, as reported above, is a lack
of understanding of disability and inclusive pedagogy. This barrier has
played a considerable role in current EFL teacher professionalism. This
indicates the need to examine future EFL teachers’ understanding about
these two concepts. How EFL pre-service teachers, as future key players,
understand disability and inclusive pedagogy can help determine the
success of future inclusive practices. Therefore, this present review aims
to discover what existing literature has determined with respect to what
EFL pre-service teachers across countries understand about disability
and inclusive pedagogy. Recommendations for EFL teacher training
2. Methods

This study comprises a systematic review of existing literature. Systematic reviews are an important tool for directing both policy and practice (Siddaway et al., 2019). They involve methodically and transparently searching, selecting, analysing, assessing, and drawing robust conclusions about and implications of relevant studies (Cochrane Collab. 2003). They combine and scrutinise individual studies across different contexts to draw a comprehensive picture of the issue of interest. A systematic review helps to address the findings of similar studies that potentially either agree or contradict each other due to various factors. As a synthesis of a body of evidence, a systematic review allows for better decisions on what constitutes best practice. As the name suggests, a systematic review must be systematic, thorough, transparent, and replicable (Cooper, 2016). To ensure the present review met these requirements, PRISMA guidelines were adopted and a protocol detailing the process was established before conducting the review.

2.1. Search strategy

This systematic review exhaustively searched five databases: British Education Index, Education Source, ERIC subscription, Scopus, and Web of Science Core collection. The decision to limit the review to only five databases was due to make the synthesis manageable within the context of the resource that could be deployed.

A search string was developed in collaboration with author two and author three and a library expert. The following search string was used to search each of the five databases.

Search string:

- ((EFL OR “English as a foreign language” OR ESOL OR “English to Speakers of Other Languages”) OR EAL OR “English as Additional Language” OR TESOL OR TEFL OR TEAL)) AND
- (“inclusive class” OR “inclusive education” OR “regular class”)
- “regular school” OR “regular setting” OR “inclusive pedagogy”
- “inclusive teaching” OR “inclusive instruction” OR “differentiated pedagogy”
- “differentiated teaching” OR “differentiated instruction”)
- AND
- (“disability” OR “impair” OR “special need” OR “student” with “OR “learner” with “OR “pupil” with “))

In order to ensure as full a search as possible, only basic limits were placed on the searches:

1. English language;
2. publication date between January 1 2002, and December 31 2022;
3. peer-reviewed journal articles; and
4. full article availability.

The search results are displayed in Table 1.

The searches, conducted in January 2023, revealed 508 articles across the five databases: British Education Index generated 31 studies; Education Source 27 studies; ERIC subscription 371 studies; Scopus 37 studies; and Web of Science Core Collection 42 studies. The searches were repeated in February 2023 and generated the same number of studies. After deduplication, 435 studies remain for initial screening.

2.2. Eligibility criteria

Relevant studies that were generated from the five databases were examined against the following criteria.

Inclusion criteria

1. The article is written in English. While this is in part due to limitations in temporal, human, and financial resources, English seems most pertinent as the topic of interest is an English language-related issue.
2. The article is published between 1 January 2002 and 31 December 2022. The early 2000s witnessed a fundamental shift worldwide with regards to stronger policies on inclusive education, prompted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education for All held in Salamanca, Spain (June 1994). However, a scoping review by Stentiford and Koutsouris (2021) revealed that the term inclusive pedagogy did not appear in the targeted education literature, is the targeted education level of this present review, until 2002. This period has also seen criticism of the inadequacy of EFL teacher training worldwide (Nunan, 2003; Rixon, 2013).
3. The article is about a study conducted in EFL countries. EFL countries are defined in line with the three concentric circles model (inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle) of English language proposed by Kachru (1986). The expanding circle encompasses countries where English is taught and learned, but not used by society in daily communication (Al-Mutairi, 2020). In these countries, EFL teachers play a greater role in the success of students learning English. While Indonesia, Germany, and Tunisia are examples of EFL countries within the expanding circle, Malaysia, Singapore, India, Ghana, Kenya are examples of those in the outer circle, where English is commonly used in social and official communication as a result of British colonial history. Finally, the inner circle is where English is used as a native or first language, e.g., UK, USA, Australia, and New Zealand.
4. The study examines pre-service EFL teachers. Pre-service teachers are students who are still taking teacher qualifications to work as formal teachers. Synonyms of pre-service teachers include trainee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Records</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>British Education Index</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Education Source</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ERIC subscription</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Scopus</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Web of Science Core Collection</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total records</td>
<td>508</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total records after duplicate records were removed</td>
<td>435</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
teachers, teacher trainees, student-teachers, teacher candidates, and prospective teachers.

5. The study’s focus relates to EFL pre-service teachers’ understanding of disability and inclusive pedagogy. The major challenges in implementing inclusive education is an inadequate knowledge about disability (Nijakowska et al., 2018), and how teachers approach teaching and learning in an inclusive setting (Florian, 2015a).

6. The study employs a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approach. All of these approaches are considered in order to exhaust the current literature on this topic.

7. The publication is a peer-reviewed, primary research journal article. This provides stronger credibility, as the article will have gone through review prior to publication.

8. The article is available in full document and accessible with NVDA or JAWS screen reader. Full article availability provides complete access to the study, while the articles must be accessible with a screen reader due to the nature of the researcher’s visual impairment.

Exclusion criteria

1. Studies not in English.


3. The participants of the studies are not EFL pre-service teachers in EFL countries.

4. Studies not related to EFL pre-service teachers’ understanding of disability and inclusive pedagogy.

5. Studies not done in regular or inclusive settings in EFL countries.

6. Studies not peer-reviewed primary research journal articles.

7. Studies not available in full article document.

8. Studies not accessible with NVDA or JAWS screen reader.

2.3. Screening phases

The following steps were conducted to gather relevant studies from the five identified databases (British Education Index, Education Source, ERIC subscription, Scopus, and Web of Science). The author visited Queen’s University, Belfast library website and opened the A-to-Z databases entry. He then searched each of the databases. Once on each of the database platforms, he entered the search string and made basic restrictions (i.e., publication period, English language, peer-reviewed journal articles, full document availability). Once results were

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**Fig. 1.** PRISMA flow diagram showing identification, screening, exclusion, and selection of studies.
generated, he downloaded the RIS file of the results. The RIS files from all five databases were subsequently placed in one folder on the laptop prior to exporting them to Zotero, a reference management application.

Afterward, the results were exported from Zotero into a single CSV file. In this single CSV file, 508 records were listed. These records were reordered alphabetically and then deduplicated manually. Zotero in general offers deduplication features, but there was a technical error and inaccessibility issues which prevented this from happening so it was done manually by exporting the CSV file into MS Excel. The 435 remaining studies were each assigned a number from 1 to 435. The PRISMA flow diagram of the review and selection process is outlined in Fig. 1. A full list of studies screened is available from the corresponding author upon request.

3. First screening phase

The remaining records were analysed in three phases. The first phase involved screening the remaining studies based on their title, abstract, and publication type. This first screening was conducted by the author and a colleague at different times. The author ended up with eight relevant studies to be included for a full article screening (Table 2). A colleague was asked to repeat this screening process. Following discussion to ensure they had the same understanding of the eligibility criteria, the second screener ended up with the same selection of eight relevant studies that clearly met the criteria and with eight other studies that he was unsure on. Both screeners discussed and agreed that these studies did not meet the eligibility criteria (Table 3).

Eight studies were eliminated after discussion between the author and co-screener, after agreeing that these studies did not meet the eligibility criteria. Five studies examined in-service teachers of EFL, not pre-service teachers of EFL. These studies were conducted by Indrarathne (2019) (article 26), Nijakowska et al. (2018) (article 138), Lu, Jiang, and Huang (2022) (article 208), Ahmadi, Rezai, and Jabbari (2022) (article 227), and Thwala, Ugwuanyi, Okeke, and Gama (2020) (article 357). Additionally, three studies were excluded due to their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article number</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Indrarathne, Bimali</td>
<td>Accommodating Learners with Dyslexia in English Language Teaching in Sri Lanka: Teachers’ Knowledge, Attitudes, and Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Nijakowska, J.; Tsagari, D.; Spanoudis, G</td>
<td>Cross-country comparison of EFL teacher preparedness to include dyslexic learners: Validation of a questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Nijakowska, Joanna; Tasçi, Dina; Spanoudis, George</td>
<td>English as a foreign language teacher training needs and perceived preparedness to include dyslexic learners: The case of Greece, Cyprus, and Poland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>175</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Nijakowska, Joanna</td>
<td>Foreign Language Teachers’ Preparedness to Cater for Special Educational Needs of Learners with Dyslexia: A Conceptual Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>208</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Lu, J.; Jiang, H.; Huang, Y.</td>
<td>Inclusive EFL Teaching for Young Students with Special Needs: A Case in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>227</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Ahmadi, M.; Rezai, M.J.; Jabbari, A.A.</td>
<td>Iranian EFL Teachers’ Practices for physically disabled Learners in Inclusive English Language Classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>303</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Low, Hui Min; Lee, Lay Wah; Che Ahmad, Aznan</td>
<td>Pre-Service Teachers’ Attitude towards Inclusive Education for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>357</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Thwala, S.; Ukungu, K.; Ugwuanyi, Christian S.; Okeke, Chinedu I. O.; Gama, Nombuso N.</td>
<td>In-service teacher participants, hence excluded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2**

First screening result.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article number</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td>Kaçar, Isil Günseli</td>
<td>A Case Study of Turkish Pre-Service Teachers of English in an International Exchange Program: ELF and WE Perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Shaaban, S.S.A.; Shaat, M. A.</td>
<td>An Investigation of Prospective Language Teachers’ Knowledge and Attitudes towards Inclusive Education in Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Ataç, Bengii Aksu; Tasci, Samet</td>
<td>A Scenario-Based Learning Approach for Enhancing Al-Azhar University-Gaza Student-Teachers’ TEFL Practices in Inclusive Education Classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Polat, Nihat; Mahalingappa, Laura; Hughes, Elizabeth; Karayigit, Cebreil</td>
<td>Change in Preservice Teacher Beliefs about Inclusion, Responsibility, and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy for English Learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>178</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Nijakowska, J.</td>
<td>Foreign Language trainee teachers’ concerns and preparedness to implement inclusive instructional practices with learners with special educational needs: training induced changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Roval, A; Pfingsthorn, J</td>
<td>Good Foreign Language Teachers Pay Attention to Heterogeneity: Conceptualizations of Differentiation and Effective Teaching Practice in Inclusive EFL Classrooms by German Pre-Service Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>290</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Moya, EC; Cara, MJC</td>
<td>Perceptions of EFL trainee teachers about attention to diversity issues in their initial training as Secondary Education teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>309</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Belda-Medina, Jose</td>
<td>Promoting Inclusiveness, Creativity and Critical Thinking through Digital Storytelling among EFL Teacher Candidates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
irrelevance (i.e., article number 87 examining instrument validation instead of EFL pre-service teachers (Nijakowska et al., 2020), article number 175 conducting literature review instead of primary research (Nijakowska, 2020), and article number 303 studying ESL country context instead of EFL country (Low, Lee & Che Ahmad, 2018)). The following table illustrates this phase.

### 4. Second screening phase

The second screening phase involved examining the full text of the eight studies listed in Table 2 above. This phase was conducted by the main author in collaboration with his two co-authors. All agreed that four studies met the eligibility criteria and should be included in the review. A study by Kaçar, and Isil Günseli (2021) (article 3) was removed as it contained no research about disability. The following articles were also eliminated:

- a study by Polat, N., Mahalingappa, L., Hughes, E., and Karayigit, C. (2019) (article 65), which was not conducted in an EFL country;
- a study by Moya, E. C. and Cara, M. J. C. (2022) (article 290), which, while title and abstract were written in English, was not in English itself; and
- a study by Belda-Medina, J. (2022) (article 309), which examined pre-service teachers majoring in early childhood education, not English as a Foreign Language.

Four studies met the eligibility criteria:

- Shaaban, S.S.A. and Shaat, M.A. (2022) article number 16;
- Ataç, B. A. and Tasçi, S. (2020) article number 39;
- Nijakowska, J. (2022) article number 178; and

These studies were then included in the review. This screening phase is illustrated in Table 4.

### 5. Third screening phase

Two further studies from the authors’ personal reference libraries were identified for review. The first, by Nijakowska et al. (2018), included the involvement of EFL pre-service teachers, albeit to a minor degree. As such, the study was included. The second study was by Blume (2019). This also met the inclusion criteria. Table 5 lists all studies included in the present review.

#### 5.1. Data analysis

A data charting form was developed specifically for this review, guided by the full-text screening stage. Data charted included: first author, date, country or context, research questions, underpinning theories, study design (participants, methods, data collection and analysis), findings, possible recommendations, credibility of the study, conceptions of disability and inclusive pedagogy. Coding was conducted with respect to the findings of the studies. The codes were “attitude”, “knowledge”, “belief”, “concerns”, “competence”, “suggestions”, and “what matters and what doesn’t”. These codes then turned into themes.

#### 5.2. Demographic summary of included studies

Out of 435 individual studies generated from the five databases, only four studies met the eligibility criteria. Outside of these databases, two were taken from the author’s existing collection of references. All six studies were published within past five years, with the earliest publication first appearing in 2018. In terms of gender-skew, more of the researchers and participants were women rather than men. Most of the studies were conducted in Europe (n = 4 Studies Nijakowska, 2022; Nijakowska et al., 2018; and Blume et al., 2019), with highest frequency occurring in Poland (n = 2-Studies Nijakowska, 2022; and Nijakowska et al., 2018) and Germany (n = 2 Studies Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022; and Blume et al., 2019). The most common study design was a mixed-methods approach. The majority of studies were designed with the objective of examining the outcome of a specific university course. Questionnaires were deployed in all studies, regardless of which design approach was undertaken. Most studies were

#### Table 4

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<tr>
<th>Article number</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Decision note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td>Kaçar, Isil Günseli</td>
<td>A Case Study of Turkish Pre-Service Teachers of English in an International Exchange Program: ELF and WE Perspectives</td>
<td>Excluded: informs nothing about disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Shaaban, S.S.A.; Shaat, M.A.</td>
<td>A Scenario-Based Learning Approach for Enhancing Al-Azhar University-Gaza Student-Teachers’ TEF Practices in Inclusive Education Classes</td>
<td>meets criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Ataç, Bengü Aksu; Tasçi, Samet</td>
<td>An Investigation of Prospective Language Teachers’ Knowledge and Attitudes towards Inclusive Education in Turkey</td>
<td>meets criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Polat, Nihat; Mahalingappa, Laura; Hughes, Elizabeth; Karayigit, Cebrail</td>
<td>Change in Preservice Teacher Beliefs about Inclusion, Responsibility, and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy for English Learners</td>
<td>Excluded, not EFL country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>178</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Nijakowska, J.</td>
<td>Foreign language trainee teachers’ concerns and preparedness to implement inclusive instructional practices with learners with special educational needs: training induced changes</td>
<td>meets criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Rovai, A; Pfingsthorn, J</td>
<td>“Good Foreign Language Teachers Pay Attention to Heterogeneity”: Conceptualizations of Differentiation and Effective Teaching Practice in Inclusive EFL Classrooms by German Pre-Service Teachers</td>
<td>meets criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>290</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Moya, EC; Cara, MJC</td>
<td>Perceptions of EFL trainee teachers about attention to diversity issues in their initial training as Secondary Education teachers</td>
<td>Excluded: not in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>309</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Belda-Medina, Jose</td>
<td>Promoting Inclusiveness, Creativity and Critical Thinking through Digital Storytelling among EFL Teacher Candidates</td>
<td>Excluded: the participants are teacher candidates of Early Childhood Education, not EFL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
concerned with EFL pre-service teachers’ pedagogical competence and all suggestions were directed to providing adequate training and preparation to pre-service teachers of EFL to be able to successfully deliver inclusive pedagogy in their future EFL classes. However, most studies were not informed by disability theory.

6. Findings and discussions

The following section addresses the four aforementioned sub-questions.

Question 1: In what context were the studies on EFL pre-service teachers’ understanding of disability and inclusive pedagogy conducted? (Note-Study numbers correspond to those reported in Table 5)

The studies were published in 2022 (n = 3 Studies Shaaban & Shaat, 2022; Nijakowska, 2022; Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022), 2020 (n = 1 Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020), 2019 (n = 1 Blume, Gerlach, and Roters, 2019) and 2018 (n = 1 Nijakowska et al., 2018). The earliest publication with regard to EFL pre-service teachers’ understanding of disability and inclusive pedagogy thus first appeared in 2018, with increased interest in the issue shown just very recently in 2022. With respect to the countries of research, more studies were conducted in Germany (n = 2 Studies Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022; and Blume et al., 2019). The remaining single-country studies were conducted in Palestine (n = 1 Study Shaaban & Shaat, 2022), Poland (n = 1 Study Nijakowska, 2022), Turkey (n = 1 Study Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020), while one study was conducted across three countries, encompassing Cyprus, Greece, and Poland (n = 1 Study Nijakowska et al., 2018). From this, it is clear that academics conducting research in Germany and Poland have shown interest in this issue. As discussed above, five of these studies were acquired through databases searches, while the author previously identified the sixth (Blume et al., 2019). All of the studies were conducted by academics attached to universities. Seven were female academics (4 in Germany, 2 in Poland, 1 in Palestine) and 6 were male academics (2 in Germany, 1 in Palestine, 1 in Poland, 2 in Turkey). Most of the articles neglected to report when the studies took place, but two did report that they were undertaken during the pandemic (Nijakowska, 2022; Shaaban & Shaat, 2022).

The research questions sought to consider attitudes, beliefs, concerns, perceptions, knowledge, competence, demographic variables, and suggestions of EFL pre-service teachers with respect to disability and inclusion of disabled learners. Interestingly, while Rovai and Pfingsthorn (2022) mention that disability is seen as a socially-constructed barrier to learning, most studies do not incorporate a disability theory in their theoretical framework. Although most articles were written by a group of authors, the theory of disability that serves as a framework of epistemology is neglected. But the studies do collectively portray some picture of how EFL pre-service teachers understand disability and inclusive pedagogy. In total, 789 EFL pre-service teachers participated, covering the full spectrum of study years: first-year students (Shaaban & Shaat, 2022), second-year students (Blume et al., 2019; Nijakowska, 2022), fourth-year students (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020), Bachelor’s and Master’s students without specified year (Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022), and students without specified years and degrees (Nijakowska et al., 2018). Most of these pre-service students were female.

The result of this study clearly reveals that studies on pre-service teachers of English as a Foreign Language rarely understand disability and inclusive pedagogy. Four studies were carried out in the Global North, two in the Middle East, and none in the Global South. This is in line with reviews conducted by Morina (2020) and Stentiford and Koutsouris (2021) who reported that most studies on inclusive pedagogy were conducted in the Global North, with United Kingdom and United States, the inner circle of English language, being the most common countries of interest. While Morina (2020) and Stentiford and Koutsouris (2021) reported that a few studies took place in the Global South, the present review found no studies on inclusive pedagogy and EFL initial teacher education in the region. This seems to suggest that the issue of inclusive pedagogy in EFL initial teacher education in the Global South is not a priority for researchers in this region, at least based on search results from the five target databases. One possible reason may be the fact that teacher education and educational institutions in the region are still struggling with improving the English language proficiency and general pedagogy of EFL pre- and in-service teachers (Nixon, 2013; Nunan, 2002).

Moreover, the review shows that the issue of inclusive pedagogy in EFL initial teacher education only recently receiving attention despite the fact that the struggle for inclusive education began in the 1970s (Florian, 2014). Half of the included studies (n = 3) were published in only 2022 despite the term inclusive pedagogy being first found in the study by Winiaircyk & Long in 1996, albeit without clear definition (Morina, 2020). Morina usefully explains that this early research was about methodological strategies for inclusive pedagogy. However, the explanation was limited and the original paper was not available. After all, the issue of inclusive pedagogy in general education started to receive more attention between 2014 and 2017 (Morina, 2020) while specifically in higher education, two-thirds of the studies (n = 22/31) on inclusive pedagogy were published between 2010 and 2018 (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021). However, despite the increased attention on general education discourse, the issue of inclusive pedagogy took another couple of years to eventually start penetrating EFL initial teacher education. Considering the extremely limited quantity and recency of relevant studies on inclusive pedagogy in EFL initial teacher education, it is clear that this issue is not yet a priority globally, even in the Global North. More investigation is thus required to make sure that prospective EFL teachers across the globe are better prepared to work with disabled learners in their future inclusive classrooms.

In addition, it is notable that the studies in this review were conducted by mostly women. A majority of the researchers or university lecturers, and more significantly the EFL pre-service teacher participants, were women. Whether or not the views of the studies were
influenced by this gender imbalance is worth investigating. Negative associations towards deviations from ablest standards were evident in most studies in this review. This finding is not quite in line with the study by Camila-Villarreal and Méndez-Rivera (2021) who put forward that female EFL teachers were more positive regarding the inclusion of disabled learners in their regular classes. Camila-Villarreal & Méndez-Rivera reported that the female teachers in their study were actors of change in the attempt to performing a more inclusive pedagogy in their EFL classes while the male teachers in their study were regarded as more passive and uninterested in specialised trainings. Camila-Villarreal & Méndez-Rivera wrote that female participants were more sensitive, comprehensive, and impactful, resulting from the nature of their motherhood. This study sees disability as functional diversity. This is a non-normative positivism view where deviations from assumed standards were not only tolerated but more importantly appreciated (Bolt, 2017). On the contrary, disability in most studies in this review is seen from the view of non-normative negativisms, where deviations from assumed standards are given negative associations such as “difficult”, “disruptive”, “less capable”, etc. For Bolt (2017) this signifies an “insult to diversity”.

Question 2: What methodological approaches were used?

There is variation in the methodological approach of the six studies. As noted above, all studies involved a survey. However, for half of these studies, the survey was connected to an intervention prior to the completion of the survey—i.e., blended inclusive education seminar (Blume et al., 2019), SEN-dedicated online course (Nijakowska, 2022), and inclusive TEFL training sessions (Shaaban & Shaat, 2022)—while the other half simply asked questions about issues related to inclusion without any connected intervention (Nijakowska et al., 2018; Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020; Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022).

Most studies implemented a mixed-method approach (Blume et al., 2019; Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022; Shaaban & Shaat, 2022), while two studies carried out a quantitative approach (Nijakowska et al., 2018; Nijakowska, 2022), and one study adopted a qualitative approach (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020). Despite these distinct approaches, all studies used a questionnaire as a key instrument for collecting data. Questionnaires were deployed to exclusively collect quantitative data (Nijakowska et al., 2018; Nijakowska, 2022), to exclusively collect qualitative data (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020), to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data (Blume et al., 2019; Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022; Shaaban & Shaat, 2022), and to both collect mixed data and carry out summative assessment (Shaaban & Shaat, 2022). Half of the studies administered the questionnaire online (Nijakowska et al., 2018; Nijakowska, 2022; Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022), while the other half did not mention their mode of administration. While most studies attempted to validate their instrument, one study did not (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020). In order to analyses quantitative data, inferential statistics techniques were implemented by four studies, descriptive statistics techniques by two studies, and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) by two studies. As for the qualitative data, content analysis was implemented by two studies and thematic analysis by two studies.

The results of this review show that studies on EFL initial teacher education with regards to disability and inclusive pedagogy offer no information about whether or not EFL pre-service teachers are observably able to deliver inclusive pedagogy. No studies implemented observation techniques and no university training incorporate a teaching experience component. Half of the studies in the review (n = 3) adopted mixed-method design, two studies implemented quantitative design, while only one study solely performed a qualitative approach. This contradicts the finding of Morina’s review regarding the issue of inclusive pedagogy (2020). Morina found out that most studies in her review adopted qualitative design with interviews and observations to collect the data. She concluded that this approach seems to be effective in investigating the issue of inclusive pedagogy. Contrary to Morina’s finding, this present study is in line with the review conducted by Stentiford and Koutsouris (2021) who reported that most empirical studies employed survey techniques. This present review also discovered that most studies on inclusive pedagogy with respect to EFL initial teacher education were linked to related university courses. This echoes the finding of similar studies in the context of general Higher Education (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021). With the choice of the survey technique in all the studies in this present review, it is worth highlighting that this finding hardly captures a more concrete practice of inclusive pedagogy in EFL initial teacher education context. Instruments for qualitative data collection (e.g., observations, journals, interviews, etc.) were clearly absent. Credibility of the conclusion of the studies is still in question due to the absence of instrument validation information (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020; Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022; Shaaban & Shaat, 2022), limited information about the process and results of the qualitative data collection and analysis (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020; Blume et al., 2019; Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022; Shaaban & Shaat, 2022), and absence of data triangulation for richer investigation (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020; Nijakowska et al., 2018; Nijakowska, 2022).

Question 3: What were their major findings?

These studies were useful in shedding light on several key issues, with seven themes emerging. As previously described in the data analysis section, these themes were generated from the five-step procedure of thematic analysis available to a vision impaired researcher with basic IT competence (Effendi, 2021; Effendi et al., 2021; Priyanti & Effendi, 2022). From most to least prevalent, these were:

- EFL pre-service teachers’ competence;
- EFL pre-service teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education;
- EFL pre-service teachers’ knowledge about inclusive education;
- EFL pre-service teachers’ beliefs about inclusive education;
- EFL pre-service teachers’ concerns regarding inclusive education;
- Suggestions given by EFL pre-service teachers;
- What actually matters and what does not in terms of making EFL classrooms more inclusive.

7. EFL pre-service teachers’ inclusive teaching competence

The most prevalent finding was that EFL pre-service teachers lack competence. The studies showed that they were not confident in their ability to include disabled learners. One large survey of 109 prospective teachers in Cyprus, Greece, and Poland indicated a general lower level of confidence when compared to in-service colleagues (Nijakowska et al., 2018). Likewise, a study conducted in Turkey revealed that a lack of relevant training meant that student participants had inadequate expertise in delivering inclusive teaching (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020). Rovai and Pfingsthorn’s (2022) study showed that German pre-service teachers, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, had a similar deficit in competence. The researchers explicitly stated that most participants agreed that competence in creating an inclusive classroom separates good teacher from bad ones although they were still lacking the capacity to become good teachers. Blume et al. (2019) reported that the competence of another group of prospective EFL teachers increased following a one-semester university course on inclusive education. However, there is some doubt if this translated to more inclusive practice. A study, conducted by Shaaban and Shaat (2022) in Palestine, likewise reported that pre- and post-tests showed that a training course, which included scenario-based learning, had a positive impact on prospective EFL teachers’ competence.

This finding confirms that competence is a central issue in determining the success of the implementation of inclusive education (Florian, 2014; Florian & Rouse, 2009). However, the studies in the present review reported that EFL pre-service teachers mostly felt that they lacked necessary expertise in working with disabled learners in EFL classes where disabled and non-disabled pupils learn together. That teaching inclusive classes requires specialist expertise is a common belief for EFL pre-service teachers (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020; Blume et al., 2019), EFL in-service teachers (Rezai et al., 2018; Smith, 2006).
and EFL university academics, as expressed in several papers (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020; Nijakowska et al., 2018; Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022; Nijakowska, 2022).

This belief is ill-founded, with the competence in delivering successful pedagogical practices in special educational classes reported to be similar to the one performed in mainstream settings (Davis & Florian, 2004; Florian, 2010; Florian & Linklater, 2010; Hegarty, 2007; Kavale, 2007; Lewis & Wong, 2005; Vaughan & Linan-Thompson, 2003). Furthermore, Florian and Linklater (2010) argue that it is difficult to retain the idea that, for teachers to be able to teach disabled learners in inclusive classes, they require competence that is specially different from the that necessary to non-disabled learners because effective practices in special education apparently originate in and are also found in mainstream education (Hegarty, 2007). What is more, while many schools and teachers do not have a positive practice for including disabled learners in mainstream classes due to not having specialised expertise and facilities, others, including those in their early years, prove to succeed in extending what is ordinarily available in mainstream classes by mainstream teachers to increase participation and achievement of all learners, including those labelled as having special needs (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

8. EFL pre-service teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education

EFL pre-service teachers’ attitudes towards disability and inclusion was the second most prevalent theme, being raised in three of the studies. Nijakowska (2022) found that university courses and training on inclusive education may not improve the attitudes of pre-service teachers. There was a disparity in attitudes within the papers. Those teachers from Blume et al.’s (2019) study expressed neutral attitudes towards disability and inclusion, whereas the majority of participants in the studies by Aksu Ataç and Taşçı (2020) and by Nijakowska (2022) were reported to express positive attitudes. For these prospective teachers, teaching disabled learners in an inclusive class is one of the responsibilities of EFL teachers (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020). In contrast, this positive attitude does not necessarily mean that prospective teachers will be inclusive in practice. Many participants were worried that supporting disabled students would place a disproportionate burden on their time and attention, thus “disadvantaging” non-disabled students (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020).

The findings of the studies are not consistent with respect to competence and attitudes. Despite the fact that EFL pre-service teachers in most included studies felt incompetent, their attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled learners in regular classrooms were not reported to be negative. Yet, this was later found to be problematic. The seemingly neutral or positive attitudes changed quite dramatically when EFL teachers, both those pre- and in-service, may reflect positive attitudes towards inclusion, but in practice, the implementation of inclusive pedagogy in mainstream EFL classes remains insufficient. It is worth highlighting that the issue of teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion has caught the attention of scholars since the 1980s (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). It remains a common concern of contemporary scholars in the field of initial EFL teacher education, as reported in half of the studies included in this review (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020; Blume et al., 2019; Nijakowska, 2022), those investigating EFL in-service teachers (Rezai et al., 2018; Smith, 2006), and those in the field of general education (de Boer et al., 2011; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Lambe & Bones, 2006; Parasuram, 2006; Sharma et al., 2006). Taking this fact into account, it is worth emphasising that the greatest challenge and the greatest benefit on the practical level where both pre- and in-service EFL teachers express positive attitudes towards including and helping all learners by extending what is ordinarily available to improve both participation and achievement of all learners including those labelled as having a disability. To this end, it is suggested that attitude is an old factor dating back to three decades ago, yet has been found to prove little, if any, link and significance to classroom reality. For this reason, future research is required to consider the practical implementation of how disability and inclusive pedagogy are understood in terms of EFL classroom practice.

9. EFL pre-service teachers’ knowledge of inclusive education

The theme of EFL pre-service teachers’ knowledge of disability and inclusion was given equal attention as their attitudes towards it. Studies reported that prospective teachers had relatively limited knowledge of disability and inclusion (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020; Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022). Many participants in Aksu Ataç and Taşçı (2020) study were unable to describe inclusive education in detail and did not understand the difference between inclusive education and special education. This lack of understanding meant that many participants believed teaching disabled students was the responsibility of special teachers rather than teachers of all subjects. Rovai and Pfingsthorn’s (2022) study helps explain this in its finding that pre-service teachers lack the knowledge necessary to differentiate the instructions for specific EFL skills (e.g., speaking, writing, reading, listening). Many prospective teachers were also reluctant to use technology to support disabled learners, due to their lack of familiarity with the technological supports. Nijakowska’s (2022) study gestures towards a potential solution to this issue. They found that a Special Educational Needs-dedicated university course, despite being conducted online, substantially contributed to improved knowledge of EFL pre-service teachers, with respect to working with disabled learners and creating an inclusive classroom. Yet, the extent to which this increase in knowledge leads to effective practices in inclusive classes is to be examined further.

It could be concluded that EFL pre-service teachers in the studies were reported to possess an inadequate level of knowledge for working in inclusive EFL classrooms (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020; Nijakowska, 2022; Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022). Although EFL pre-service teachers in the study by Nijakowska (2022) were found to improve their knowledge substantially after taking training on inclusive education, this increase does not necessarily mean that their knowledge will lead to improved practice. University training on inclusive education for EFL pre-service teachers, as reported in three studies, did not provide real practice in which EFL pre-service teachers could gain meaningful and authentic teaching experiences in inclusive classrooms (Blume et al., 2019; Nijakowska, 2022; Shaaban & Shaa, 2022). Rezai et al. (2018) and Smith (2006) raised knowledge as one critical factor for successful inclusion. However, the findings show a clear picture of how prospective EFL teachers in different countries are not properly prepared to carry out their future profession in inclusive EFL classrooms. This confirms why EFL in-service teachers across different countries regret their past initial teacher education prior to embarking on their career. Being a common concern, knowledge of how to work effectively in inclusive settings has
to be a priority for teacher education institutions in designing their initial teacher training. Prospective teachers must be given a teaching experience component to gain authentic learning in every course throughout their initial teacher education prior to their professional life.

10. EFL pre-service teachers’ beliefs about inclusive education

Only two studies reported findings about EFL-pre-service teachers’ beliefs related to inclusive education. Beliefs represent an internal feeling that something is true (even in the absence of evidence). In these studies, beliefs were reported to have improved significantly. This is important as changes in beliefs can change the way in which these are expressed to other people as attitudes. Blume et al. (2019) reported that participants demonstrated more inclusive beliefs about EFL learning. These beliefs were related to the difficulty of language learning, method of language learning, and group-based differences in language learning. Blume et al. (2019) explained that more inclusive beliefs led to the participants being more open-minded regarding language learning. They believed that a language can be learned by anyone through various ways: language learning is not something that only those with gifted linguistic talent or ability can learn and excel at. However, the study did not discuss these beliefs in more detail and, as such, further research into inclusive beliefs in language learning is necessary. Nijakowska (2022) reported similar findings, stating that a SEN-dedicated university course developed more positive beliefs with regards to inclusive teaching practices. This issue echoes the finding regarding the attitudes of EFL pre-service teachers. While their attitudes are positive on a theoretical level, they are not reflected on the practical level. This is also true for beliefs.

The beliefs reported in the above studies are similar to those held by in-service teachers of English as a Foreign Language in 41 British accredited institutions. Smith (2006) reported that, in general, EFL in-service teachers had relatively positive beliefs with respect to working with disabled learners in their EFL classrooms. They were generally happy with including disabled learners in the class as long as the responsibility of organising and providing the support was shared by another party. However, Smith also noted that the fact that the support systems in private institutions were not actually supportive, with most teachers expressed their negative opinions of working with disabled learners. They felt under-prepared and less competent. Other reasons included their reluctance to perform extra work and their objection to “sacrificing” non-disabled learners. This is in conflict with the belief of one EFL in-service teacher in Iran who felt that non-disabled learners would benefit academically from helping their disabled peers, for example receiving improved pronunciation and enhanced comprehension (Rezai et al., 2018). Adding to the privileging of non-disabled learners by British EFL teachers, Smith also noted that the teachers showed more resentment with respect to more severe disabilities. Overall, it is worth stressing that the positive beliefs of the teachers does not necessarily translate to practical implementation.

11. EFL pre-service teachers’ concern about inclusive education

The theme “concern” appeared only explicitly in the study by Nijakowska (2022), but a similar notion was highlighted elsewhere (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020). Nijakowska (2022) reported that the concerns of EFL pre-service teachers were intensified following university training regardless their increased knowledge and belief about inclusive education. Nijakowska noted that this may have been caused by participants’ limited teaching experience and limited expertise in directly working with disabled learners. Nonetheless, the concerns were apparently indicative of their hegemonic preference to non-disabled learners over their disabled counterparts. They were worried that non-disabled learners might receive less teachers’ time, attention, and support, or lose interest and motivation and consequently experience lower achievement. In fact, this is a concern not only among EFL pre-service teachers (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020) but also their more senior in-service colleagues (Rezai et al., 2018; Smith, 2006). This unexpected intensified concern post-training recalls an earlier study by Forlin and Chambers (2011). This finding stresses that the delivery of university courses or training may contribute to increased knowledge, changed beliefs, and awareness, but this is not to be taken for granted that in practice there will be successful and effective implementation of inclusive education. One would expect that concerns would decrease upon a prospective teacher’s completion of a course, due to gaining enhanced knowledge of disability which would bolster their competence. It may be speculated that this unusual finding was due to a problem in the course curriculum, content, or implementation and, as such, further investigation is required.

12. Suggestions from EFL pre-service teachers

Two studies captured feedback from EFL pre-service teachers which offer suggestions and may, potentially, address some of the issues outlined above. Prospective teachers indicated a need for well-designed training to enable them to create an inclusive classroom. One group of participants suggested that this training should be mandated by both government bodies and educational institutions (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020). Participants from the study in Palestine were specific in their call for the incorporation of scenario-based learning in EFL teacher training curricula (Shaaban & Shaat, 2022). However, as noted earlier, related training or courses for in-service teachers are not necessarily guaranteed to equip them with sufficient practical knowledge and expertise in working with disabled learners in inclusive classrooms. Related training or courses that still suffer from ableist assumptions would hardly guarantee that EFL pre-service teachers could successfully navigate an inclusive classroom. Such ableist assumptions can be seen from the use of the terms to describe disability, the content of the training, and the conception of pedagogy to be carried out in the classroom.

In fact, contrary to the need for relevant training, three studies in the review showed that existing training is insufficient for equipping EFL pre-service teachers with more positive worldviews and sufficient expertise for implementing inclusive classroom practices. The delivery of such training did not incorporate the component of real teaching practice in which EFL pre-service teachers could gain authentic, relevant, contextual, and insightful experience of learning how to perform inclusive pedagogy in inclusive EFL classrooms. Such meaningful experience that was missing from the training is what actually matters in the successful implementation of teachers’ performance in inclusive classrooms (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Linklater, 2016; Nijakowska et al., 2018).

13. What matters and what does not in terms of creating an inclusive EFL classroom?

One study, which involved 546 respondents, 20% of whom were pre-service teachers, reported that experience engaging with disabled students during training is important for supporting them in practice (Nijakowska et al., 2018). While this may seem obvious, it is often ignored when designing and delivering EFL teacher training. The lack of this opportunity is clear in the studies by Blume et al. (2019), Nijakowska (2022), and Shaaban and Shaat (2022), which all demonstrate a lack of proper teacher training courses. Instead, prospective teachers receive teacher training without gaining practical experience. It is once again worth emphasising that the amount of teaching experience an individual has, the amount of training they have undertaken, and the amount of Higher Education qualifications they have does not always translate to an ability or willingness to create inclusive learning environments (Nijakowska et al., 2018). What does count is direct experience of dealing with disabled learners. Early interventions which emphasise the importance of inclusive practices are necessary to avoid leaving this learning gap within prospective teachers’ training (Blume
Question 4: How were the findings related to EFL pre-service teachers’ understanding of disability and inclusive pedagogy?

The studies in this review did not report a straightforward answer to this question. However, it is clear that disability is being interpreted by EFL pre-service teachers in a negative light and that there is a lack of understanding of what inclusive pedagogy entails. This caused several negative impacts. Prospective EFL teachers have themselves voiced concerns (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020; Nijakowska, 2022). They are not confident in their ability to deliver inclusive teaching practice (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020; Blume et al., 2019; Nijakowska et al., 2018). They remain unconfident despite receiving training in inclusive practice (Blume et al., 2019; Nijakowska, 2022). And they lack pedagogical knowledge and expertise at the end of their university training (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020; Nijakowska et al., 2018; Rovai & Pfingsthorn, 2022). All of these factors point to severe problems in how EFL prospective teachers are trained with regards to disability and inclusion. One course highlighted by Blume et al. (2019) failed to mention disability or inclusion in its course outline, indicating that these vital concepts were not considered by the academics delivering the training. It is vital that the theoretical and pedagogical aspects are both addressed in initial teacher education in EFL.

The key consequence is that prospective EFL teachers associate disability with negative connotations. Within this belief, supporting disabled students becomes perceived to be a burden upon teachers and non-disabled students. Participants indicated a belief that supporting disabled students would lead to ‘special treatment’ which would lead to further segregation within schools (Aksu Ataç & Taşçı, 2020), indicating a serious flaw in their understanding of what inclusive pedagogy is. Inclusive pedagogy should consider every student unique and deserving of an equal opportunity. However, for these participants, students with impairments are simply seen as requiring more support than non-disabled students. The belief that disabled students are a burden devalues the student, with trainee EFL teachers placing greater value on non-disabled students. This hierarchical thinking positions disabled students as part of an inferior group, paving the way for inequality and injustice.

For the participants in these studies, disability is viewed as a negative condition and inclusion in the classroom could lead to further negative consequences. As we have seen, these concerns actually increased despite courses attempting to encourage inclusive practice (Nijakowska, 2022). Their worries were classified based on three levels of intensity: extremely worried, moderately worried, and relatively worried. There was only one object of extreme worry: that they may end up providing less attention to non-disabled students, which would demotivate that group of learners. There were four objects of moderate worry: that becoming more occupied with SEN students would lead to injustice; that they would be burdened by additional stressors; that they would have greater workloads; and that they were unprepared to deliver inclusive classes. And there was only one object of relative worry: that SEN students would be isolated within the class and the wider school, which would further disable disabled students.

In that sense, inclusive pedagogy was seen as challenging or even impossible to achieve. Most EFL pre-service teachers had limited experience, limited knowledge, and limited competence and therefore were worried about managing inclusive classrooms where disabled learners and their non-disabled counterparts learn together. The sources of their concerns were not that the presence of disabled learners would bring more harm than good, give more works to teachers, cause less attention and support to non-disabled learners, and lead to lower performance of non-disabled learners. The right to education for disabled and non-disabled learners was not seen as equal. Disabled learners were considered inferior to their non-disabled peers. This suggests the hegemonic dominance of an ableist worldview where the world is made for able-bodied people, not the disabled. This is why, from an ableist perspective, privilege should not go to the disabled, but to an assumed “perfect human” who does not exist. The concept of inclusive pedagogy as an approach to teaching all learners by extending what is ordinarily available in order to improve the participation and achievement of all learners regardless their unique characteristics was hardly present in the minds of most of the prospective teachers.

14. Conclusion

The findings in this review are indicative of a continuum of normative positivisms and non-normative negativisms. Normative positivisms refer to the constant support and encouragement of ableist standards as assumed normalcy. Such ableist standards privilege an able-bodied, illusive perfect human. Normative positivisms have created “otherness” and therefore generated negative labels towards disabled individuals. In other words, normative positivisms are the cause of all problems. Commonly accepted standards have continuously been determined by ableist elites who are often unknown to society. The elites are those who occupy the top pyramid of society. This minority has the power to determine what standards the powerless majority have to meet. Such apparently minority-driven, commonly accepted standards are not innovative. They base the standards on longstanding ableist assumptions of an imaginary perfect human. This is the main reason why many bodies and minds who do not meet the standards are devalued, discriminated against, excluded, and even eliminated. This is the time where we can see the continuum of normative positivisms and non-normative negativisms signified by disabilism, the production of disability, and the oppression against people who do not meet the standardised normalcy. The minority elites in power gradually put themselves at a great risk of not meeting the traditional standards as they grow older, become more experienced, but suffer natural degradation. They sacrifice themselves for future personal victimisation and discrimination of their own illusive classical standards. Such ableist curriculum standards would continuously disable individuals with different natures and ramify ongoing problems in EFL inclusive classrooms.

The standards (common norms) in the context of initial EFL teacher education scholarship are laden with ableist assumptions. The common use of the negative dictons to describe the nature of disability others disabled learners. This common use renders ableist standard in imagining disability. The normal process that disabled learners experience on a day-to-day basis is seen as abnormal, which results in negative labels. The standard theoretical approach to studying such issue puts little attention on discussing how disability is supposed to be seen. This is contrary to how the issue of inclusive classroom historically originally resulted from the struggle for equality in education where disabled learners could participate and flourish alongside their non-disabled peers. If academics use ableist terms to provide a accessibility description standard, pre-service teachers will retain such terms, potentially giving negative impact to their beliefs and attitudes towards disability. Moreover, the design standard of relevant university training gives little opportunity for pre-service teachers to have a more positive understanding of disability and inclusive pedagogy. Important components of a discussion specific to understanding disability and learning to teach in inclusive classroom practically and contextually were lacking. There is a shared thinking that inclusive pedagogy in EFL classrooms is difficult, challenging, and even impossible, which leads to the classical legacy of disabled learners being segregated. Finally, the extreme rarity of relevant studies and the absence of a thorough conception of disability in course syllabi and research suggests that only minimum attention, if any, has been given to the issue of disability and inclusive pedagogy. This is to say that initial EFL teacher training was not meant for disabled learners.

The ableist standards, i.e., the normative positivisms, in the context of initial EFL teacher education scholarship have led to non-normative negativisms signified by disabilist perspectives. Deviations from ableist normalcy are problematised and the people with such deviations are
labelled as “disabled”. In the EFL classroom context, the different nature of normalcy of disabled learners is viewed as abnormal, difficult and other similar associations which intensifies the worries of EFL pre-service teachers and strengthens the hegemonic privileging of able-bodiedness as a mechanism of self-defence for more advantageous conditions for them. This has resulted in a shared belief in being incompetent, refusal to take on greater workloads, reluctance to sacrificing non-disabled learners, and the belief that disabled learners would learn better if taught by specialist experts in a small groups or in person exclusively in segregation. Disability and inclusive pedagogy were viewed in a negative manner. All this has disabled learners who experience a different form of normalcy. In the end, discriminatory perspectives and practices in initial EFL teacher education against disabled learners would remain evident and endless. This gives little hope for a more positive environment if necessary actions are not taken in the near future.

Innovational standards in initial EFL teacher education scholarship are required to move away from the continuum of academic ableism and disabilism. Innovational standards result from non-normative positivism where a different form of normalcy is appreciated and accommodated for, in order to harvest a richer outcome. Innovational standards allow continuous innovations in designing standards that are constantly relevant, accommodating, appropriate, updated, and adjusted to the diversity of individuals. An innovational standard of understanding the different nature of normalcy would result in a “can-do” mindset network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces optimism that everyone, with their different nature of normalcy, can do what they aspire to and therefore equally contribute to the continuous advancement of civilisation. Can-do mindset-driven innovational standards would direct the minority elites of standard board to do four procedures: 1) persistently hold dialogues; 2) listen to emerging needs; 3) learn from best practices; 4) and make necessary contextual adjustments to innovate their standards to accommodate everyone who is inescapably a potential subject to suffering from one or more forms of disability due to natural degradation or other causes. Such innovational standard of thinking could initiate a constant academic revolution to EFL education scholarship and research respectively.

Limitations

It is important to highlight that we do not claim to have located every peer-reviewed article ever published on the topic of disability and inclusive pedagogy in initial EFL teacher education in this systematic review. What we have done is bring together and synthesise research that has been published during the reported period in five databases using the search string stated above. These five databases were the most relevant and accessible for the corresponding author as a vision impaired scholar using a screen reading application carrying out this review in a limited time. There were inaccessibility issues in the process of conducting this review. One of the most apparent is the standard of reporting a study which clearly flags ocularencism, the dominant hegemony of visual perception in accessing information. Tables and other forms of graphical information without sufficient descriptive verbal explanation send a clear message that journal publications and research reports are not meant for people with vision impairment who work with screen reading applications. This is a shared academic ableism which consequently leads to academic disabilism. Due to the ableist academic standard, vision impaired scholar are disabled. Fuller understanding of the research articles is hampered. Another apparent ableist standard is the structure of the page which sometimes displays two columns of full texts side by side on a single page. When converted into accessible document format, the border disappears, the layout changes, and the two groups of texts are joined together, which causes incoherence. Online platforms and required applications, e.g. reference management and quality assessment, which are not completely accessible, have generated another hurdle. Notwithstanding, given that disability remains an issue in regular EFL classrooms (Rezai et al., 2018), we felt that it was the time to take stock of what current literature can inform us about how EFL prospective teachers understand disability and inclusive pedagogy. We hope that greater attention is paid to this issue and necessary actions will be taken for future improvement.

Implications

The findings of the included studies in this review highlight several implications. First and foremost, due to its rarity worldwide, it is critical for stakeholders (i.e., policy makers, publishers, teacher educators or academics, and researchers) in EFL education scholarship to be more competent and dedicated in the issue of disability and inclusive pedagogy, to start to have “can-do” mindset, and to demonstrate respective commitment in building innovative adjustable standards in response to emerging human differences. Secondly, it is imperative to use descriptive terms that are not laden with ableist or disabilist assumptions. Thirdly, it is urgent to make sure that prospective teachers have adequate, non-disabilist inclusive training or courses that incorporate teaching practice components which allow them to practically, contextually, and insightfully learn to teach inclusive classes. Fourthly, it is critical to make sure that all learners are at the heart of teaching. This is done by seeing all learners as equally unique and equally deserving of enhanced learning supports to maximise the participation and achievement of all learners, including those with a different form of normalcy. Finally, future studies are required to investigate the issue more from a practical lens, so as to capture more concrete and observable evidence of the extent to which initial EFL teacher education institutions are preparing prospective teachers.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Taufiq Effendi: Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. Allen Thurston: Writing – original draft, Methodology. Alison MacKenzie: Writing – original draft, Supervision, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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