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Title

**Teachers' Attitudes, Perceptions, and Practices
Toward Including Physically-Impaired EFL Learners
in Mainstream Classes**

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In the Name of God

The Compassionate

The Merciful

*To my husband for his
endless love,
encouragement, and
patience*

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Abstract

Including individuals with disabilities in mainstream classes has been a growing concern over the past years. With regard to the proclaimed principle of inclusion and inclusive education, equal educational opportunities and access should be provided by policy-makers, practitioners, and teachers to meet the educational needs of all individuals, including the ones with disabilities. Considering teachers as the central pillar of the inclusive education, the present study sought to investigate teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and practices toward the inclusion of physically-impaired EFL learners in mainstream classes. A mixed methodology was used to gather both qualitative and quantitative data from the study sample. First, Opinion Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities Scale (Antonak & Larrivee, 1995) was submitted to 254 Iranian EFL instructors teaching in different English language institutes to measure their attitudes and perceptions toward the inclusion of learners with physically-impaired disabilities in EFL classes. Then, five English language classrooms were observed three times a week for 48 90-minute sessions (a total of 4320 minutes) in order to delve into EFL teachers' adopted practices in inclusive classes. Following observations, 30 EFL teachers were selected for face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Hence, the research ultimately used a combination of all gathered data to shed further light on how EFL teachers perceive the inclusion of these special-need learners in their classrooms and on the type of practices and strategies adopted by these teachers. An examination of the survey data revealed that the EFL teachers held neutral-to-positive attitudes toward inclusion of physically-impaired language learners in EFL classes. Furthermore, the hypothesis indicating that Iranian EFL

teachers hold positive attitudes toward inclusion was confirmed. On the basis of collected data, a conceptual framework of inclusive practices in EFL classrooms was developed, which discussed two types of teacher practices: support-oriented and nonsupport-oriented inclusive practices. Furthermore, the data analysis revealed that four factors (namely learner with disability, institute, environment, and teacher) affect teachers' inclusive practices in EFL classes. The findings are thoroughly discussed and implications and recommendations for further research conclude the study.

Key words: Inclusion, Teacher perception and attitude, Teacher practice, Inclusive class, Learners with disabilities, Learners with physical disabilities

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List of Abbreviations

ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

EHA: Education for All Handicapped Children Act

ELL: English language Learner

ELT: English Language Teaching

ESL: English as a Second Language

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IE: Individualized Education

LRE: Least Restrictive Environment

NCLB: No Child Left Behind Act of 2004

ORI: Opinions Relative to Integration

ORM: Opinions Relative to Mainstreaming

SLD: Specific Learning Disability

SPSS: Statistics Package for the Social Sciences

STATIC: Scale of Teacher's Attitudes toward Inclusive Classrooms

SWD: Students with Disabilities

TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language

TTC: Teacher Training Courses

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

Most people worldwide are engaged with a growing concern voicing the need for learners with disabilities to have equal chance to be eligible members of the mainstream education and least segregated from their learner counterparts (Davis & Braun, 2010). It is commonly accepted that the students with disabilities should enjoy "the same rights as others in the community to achieve maximum independence as adults, and should be educated to the best of their potential toward that end" (Jenkinson, 1993, p. 320). In general, educating individuals with special needs, including the ones with disabilities, alongside their peers has been suggested to be effective, bringing them some social, academic, behavioral achievements (Carter & Hughes, 2005). As Green (2014) declared, a variety of learners with disabilities (e.g., learners with communication disorders, learning disabilities, emotional/behavioral disorders, traumatic brain injury, autism spectrum disorders, physical and health impairments, hearing loss, and visual impairments) participate in mainstream classes where the regular classroom teacher is responsible for the educational program of disabled learners alongside their non-disabled peers and where the education takes place in the regular classroom (Lipsky & Gartner, 1994).

Depending on the type of their disabilities, these learners face a number of problems, the most noticeable of which are participation in group activities and communication and interaction with others (Kaiser & Roberts, 2013). The challenge now, as Slee (1997) points out, is "to consider how we support and legitimate difference through a range of resourcing arrangements, pedagogies, and curriculum

initiatives to expand options for all students" (p. 416), which mounts a new challenge to teachers and pedagogues.

Accordingly, teachers need to have an exhaustive perception of effective practices and methods to support such students' learning and educational developments and to actively involve them in inclusive classes (Beech, 2000; Vaughn, Mathes, Linan-Thompson, & Francis, 2005). Moreover, teachers should make necessary modifications and adaptations to their instruction and schedule interventions to appropriately accommodate learners with disabilities within an inclusive setting (Reed, 2013) and to make education individualized with respects to learners' differences, needs, interests, and learning styles (García & Tyler, 2010).

The modifications in the classroom environment may include actions such as taking a seat away from the window, rearranging the classroom setting, changing the presentation method of materials, or altering the goals of units (García & Tyler, 2010); however, it is not always obvious what types of adaptations, accommodations, or modifications might be beneficial or what types of changes to the curriculum, its presentation, the classroom setting, or student evaluation are required to be made for an individual suffering from disabilities. In this regard, Hannell posed this view:

Being included in a group and feeling included can be two, quite different situations. The effective teacher does not just do inclusive things. The effective teacher builds a classroom community where inclusion is part of the social fabric of the group of pupils and adults who work together. (Hannell, 2007, P. 1)

According to social constructivists, what enhances such engagement is the context where learning occurs and learners interact with each other during the process of

learning. Existing perspectives in the social constructivist framework highlight the need for collaboration among learners and the practitioners in the society if learning processes are to be developed and facilitated (Gredler, 1997). From the perspective of Shade and Stewart (2001), teachers' abilities in meeting the needs of learners with disabilities are reflected in their attitudes toward inclusive education. Teachers who drew positive attitudes toward their profession, classes, and learners can promote educational achievement in their classroom, establish strong teacher-student rapport, and encourage learning. Hence, this doctoral dissertation aims to provide detailed information about EFL teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and practices of inclusion in the field of teaching English language, in which a dearth of clear, relevant, and reliable research evidence is documented, in order to provide comprehensive information about how EFL teachers view inclusion and whether they perceive inclusive education as hinder or facilitator of English language learning and teaching as well as guidelines for these teachers to enable them make appropriate decisions about individualized inclusive practices in English language classrooms.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Fast-paced advances of technology innovations in this information era has dramatically transformed the world over the past decades; thus, the basic requirements of education have been consequently changed. In a similar vein, more individuals than ever before are learning English language as an international language of education and business.

In this context, our mission, as English language teachers, is to promote learning and support education and professional development for our students. In this regard, we need to support EFL learners pursue their dreams of higher education or obtain a good job in English-speaking workplaces. Considering students with disabilities, however, they are facing some barriers such as lack of appropriate instructional materials, low expectations, and lack of encouragement (Green, 2014) and social isolation (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). In other words, irrespective of such a fast-paced expansion of English language, students with disabilities have been left out of the conversation and a fewer number of learners with disabilities can manage to continue their studies and reach their educational goals (Burgstahler & Doyle, 2005).

On the other hand, there are poor teacher preparation programs for EFL teachers to prepare their students for their education in order for them to reach the milestones and greater achievements in the field of English language learning. The likelihood of success enhances for learners with special needs when they participate in supportive educational settings and work with teachers recognizing their potential contributions, not merely zooming their disabilities. Hence, the need for teacher preparation programs providing EFL teachers with practices and strategies to promote the outcomes for students with disabilities in English language fields is highlighted.

While the academic community has extensively explored special education (Skidmore, 1996), previous works have failed to address inclusion in an EFL context. Within the context of Iran, the majority of individuals with any kind of severe impairments are included in regular English classes. Accordingly, EFL teachers are not empowered to disallow learners with disabilities in their regular classes; this makes

the field a rich one for research. Relevantly, the teaching processes involved in such an inclusive setting has not been dealt with in depth.

Despite this interest, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no one with the exception of Razmjoo and Sabourianzadeh (in press) has studied special-need learners participating in Iran's EFL classrooms. These Iranian authors explored EFL inclusive practices adopted by EFL teachers for learners suffering from low-incidence disabilities in inclusive classes; however, the aim of the present work was to broaden current knowledge of inclusion of physically-disabled learners in regular EFL classes through examining EFL instructors' inclusive attitudes and perceptions and practices. This might contribute to resolving one of the major barriers to the successful implementation of inclusion in our country. That is, due to the fact that this specific area has been neglected, Iranian EFL teachers have never received adequate training to be well-prepared for one's role as the instructors of learners with special needs.

1.3 Significance of the Study

From the literature, looking for the development and educational growth of disabled learners is permanently an unfinished project, a story looking for an ending that will never arrive. Accordingly, new approaches and practices which make such kind of learners more inclined toward a continual and ongoing educational and social development will be worthy to be invested (Ornstein, Levine, & Gutek, 2011).

In this study, an investigation of EFL teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and practices in inclusive classes is significant for two reasons. First, this study addresses the paucity