



BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUDING DISABILITY STUDIES IN EFL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENİ YETİŞTİRME PROGRAMLARINA ENGELLİLİK ÇALIŞMALARINI DAHİL ETMEK İÇİN EN İYİ UYGULAMALAR

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Abstract

Social justice can be accomplished if all individuals are treated equally without any discrimination based on their identities. Identity can be composed of several components such as age, race, gender, and nationality. Understanding disability-related issues, including the nature of disabilities and the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in their daily lives, is crucial for societal development. Although there has been some acknowledgment of the importance of integrating disability studies into educational frameworks, there is still a need for more robust and effective implementation strategies. This paper argues that the inclusion of disability studies should not be confined to special education alone but should be an integral part of curricula across all educational domains. Particularly in the field of English language teaching, incorporating disability studies can be a significant step towards fostering social justice. The effective integration of disability-related issues into the English teaching curriculum necessitates their inclusion in English language teacher education programs. This approach is pivotal for equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to promote inclusive practices, with a focus on individuals with disabilities. Drawing on existing literature, this study proposes specific practices for the inclusion of disability studies in English language teacher education programs, with a particular emphasis on Türkiye. These practices aim to empower educators in fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment, thereby advancing the cause of social justice through education.

Öz

Sosyal adalet, tüm bireylerin kimliklerinden kaynaklanan herhangi bir ayrımcılığa maruz kalmadan eşit muamele görmesiyle sağlanabilir. Kimlik, yaş, ırk, cinsiyet ve milliyet gibi çeşitli unsurlardan oluşmaktadır. Engelliliğin doğası ve engelli bireylerin karşılaştığı zorluklar gibi engellilikle ilgili konuların anlaşılması, sosyal gelişim için son derece önemlidir. Engellilik konularının eğitime dahil edilmesinin önemi bir nebze kabul edilse de bu konuyla ilgili hala etkili uygulama stratejilerine ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır. Bu makale, engellilik çalışmalarının sadece özel eğitim alanıyla sınırlı kalmaması, tüm öğretim alanlarının müfredatına dahil edilmesi gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Özellikle de İngilizcenin öğretimi alanında engellilik çalışmalarının dahil edilmesi sosyal adaletin yaygınlaştırılması bakımından önemli bir adım olabilir. Engellilikle ilgili konuların İngilizce dersi müfredatına etkin bir şekilde dahil edilmesi, bu konuların İngilizce öğretmen yetiştirme programlarının müfredatına konmasını da zorunlu hale getirmektedir. Bu yaklaşım, engelli bireyleri odak noktası yaparak, öğretmenleri kapsayıcı uygulamaları teşvik etmek için gereken bilgi ve becerilerle donatma noktasında önem arz etmektedir. Mevcut alanyazına dayanarak, bu çalışma, özellikle Türkiye’de olmak üzere, İngilizce öğretmeni yetiştirme programlarına engellilik çalışmalarının dahil edilmesi için uygulamalar önermektedir. Bu uygulamalar, eğitimcilerin daha kapsayıcı ve adil bir öğrenme ortamı oluşturmalarını sağlayarak, sosyal adaletin gelişimine katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

1. INTRODUCTION¹

Social justice entails creating a society where all community members are treated equally regardless of their identities. It addresses numerous aspects to guarantee a fairer world. Among these aspects is disability. Social justice is very important in promoting equality for individuals with disabilities. Moreover, their equal inclusion in every aspect of social life is a key aspect of social justice. However, despite various endeavors to empower social justice and inclusion for marginalized student groups, the rate of progress has been slow within the educational sphere (Keefe, 2022). Schools, therefore, play an essential role in encouraging social justice by incorporating Disability Studies (DS). As English as foreign language (EFL) classes provide extensive content for teaching the language, they can serve as suitable venues for emphasizing matters concerning disability.

The language of instruction in EFL classrooms is English. Consequently, there can be a wide array of themes and topics that can be addressed in EFL classrooms. This means that while the learners learn about vocabulary and grammar, they can also concentrate on the information and discussions focusing on disability. Thus, disability as a part of social justice could be incorporated into the language curriculum and EFL teachers could explore disability themes with the help of particular methods and materials. However, EFL teachers must be knowledgeable in addressing such topics. For this reason, EFL teacher education programs should include DS in the curriculum to advance social justice. Nevertheless, various general education teacher training programs are limited to offering one course about special education, and pre-service teachers are introduced merely to disability types in this course (Cosier & Pearson, 2016). In this way, teacher education programs may not adequately prepare prospective teachers to accommodate the needs of learners with disabilities. Thus, EFL teacher education programs should also expand their coverage of DS. This study, therefore, has significant implications for EFL teacher education programs considering international and national contexts. The recommendations from this study will also serve as a basis for future studies.

2. SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DISABILITY STUDIES

Oxford Learners' Dictionaries (2022) define social justice as “*the fair distribution of wealth and opportunities within a society.*” The concept entails establishing a society where

¹ This study was partly presented at the “International Symposium on New Trends in Language Studies” which was held in Ankara/Türkiye between the dates of 28-29 April 2023.

equality serves as a basis for all individuals. However, social justice is not a natural endowment; therefore, individuals should receive a good education for empowering it (Clark, 2006). They should grasp the content of social justice and be provided with opportunities to cultivate it in the community.

As equality lies at the heart of social justice, equal treatment of people with disabilities should also be recognized. Consequently, it can be understandable that social justice and DS go hand in hand (See Tschanz, 2018). Addressing DS, therefore, is needed to accomplish social justice. Many arguments have been advanced to find ways of accomplishing social justice in education (Francis et al., 2017). Thus, one effective way of achieving it in education can be through EFL classes. In EFL classrooms, the course content is mainly operated in English. Thus, a pile of knowledge and discussions can be conducted to teach English. While conveying the instructional practices in English and practicing vocabulary and grammar, the learners can also give their attention to the social justice content. DS can be incorporated into language teaching programs and implemented by EFL teachers using appropriate language teaching methods and resources (Arslan, 2021). This is particularly relevant as disability-related pedagogy has recently gained prominence among educators (McKinney, 2016).

3. INTEGRATION OF DISABILITY STUDIES IN EFL CLASSES

The integration of disability-related issues into the curriculum has been dominated by the field of special education (Connor et al., 2015). However, a cross-disciplinary approach should be employed in addressing these issues. Among them, English language teaching is an ideal field to raise many important social issues.

First, if there is a learner with any form of disability in the class, then it is essential to emphasize and discuss materials that focus on topics of disability, rather than dismissing and ignoring them. However, this should be done without offending the learner and strengthening the stereotypes. Although some related studies point out the value of simulations in enhancing awareness of disabilities, they also warn that such interventions in classes could be offensive or frustrating for learners with disabilities (See Griffin et al., 2007). Having a disability should be considered and emphasized as an identity, such as being a member of a race, ethnicity, culture, or gender (Lalvani & Bacon, 2019). This shows how diverse the classroom environment is. In parallel with this thinking, EFL teachers should be meticulous in choosing the right activities in the class.

EFL teachers can address disability-related issues in some ways. For example, they can inform the learners about disability-related content. This can include some concepts such as able-bodied, disabled, and disability. In so doing, the learners can develop an understanding of these concepts. This would be helpful to dismiss any misconceptions and develop an awareness of the issues of concern. In addition, raising voices against discrimination and taking the initiative for attending projects for social justice is necessary. For example, in the EFL context, volunteer activities can be organized by the EFL teachers. EFL learners can visit some disability organizations and they can then write their reflections in English about such visits. This can be a part of journal writing, depending on the learner outcomes.

Conducting such activities in EFL classes promotes inclusivity in the classes by empowering the representation and inclusion of people with disabilities in society. However, the EFL field should move beyond incorporating disability-related activities. EFL teachers should also gain an understanding of disability as a pedagogical construct. This means accommodating instructional approaches to the diverse needs of learners with disabilities. Subsequently, the teachers can identify the most suitable methods of teaching English and ensure a more participatory and inclusive learning venue for all students.

4. IMPORTANCE OF DISABILITY STUDIES IN EFL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Despite numerous efforts to foster social justice and inclusion for marginalized students, the rate of progress is slow and the representation of students with disabilities is too low in the educational arena (Keefe, 2022). Consequently, teachers play a crucial role in addressing this problem as they are the first encounters for students with disabilities. They are essential agents to initiate an inclusive environment for students with disabilities by considering their needs. For this reason, DS need to be integrated into teacher education programs. However, it should be understood that DS are not the monopoly of special education teacher training programs. As DS fall into a cross-disciplinary subject, general education teacher training programs should also involve them. Coupled with this thinking, Cosier and Pearson (2016) indicate that many general education teacher training programs involve only one course about special education where the teacher candidates are introduced to categories of disabilities. They thus maintain that DS are not synonymous with, and are limited to special education and that teacher educators can promote social justice in education if they can motivate them to make a critical analysis of the disability issues. Teacher educators from all fields of teacher preparation programs need to raise awareness of DS to promote non-ableism.

Thus, EFL teacher education programs should also incorporate DS. The inclusion of DS in EFL teacher education programs can provide the pre- and in-service EFL teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to create an inclusive learning environment. In this way, EFL teachers may know about the challenges and difficulties that learners with disabilities experience. They may become aware of the discrimination they are exposed to, and create opportunities for the learners to collaborate with disability organizations. This understanding allows them to eliminate stereotypes stemming from ableist thinking. When the EFL teachers embrace learners with disabilities as a form of identity such as having a difference in race, religion, and language, social justice and inclusive education could be empowered. In this way, the needs of learners with disabilities can be adapted according to the pedagogical approaches employed by teachers. The recognition of individual differences is important, which may entail using additional pedagogical implementations. As suggested by Karagiannidis et al. (2020), speech recognition software can be considered as part of assistive technologies to support learners with disabilities.

Sowell and Sugisaki (2021) argue that identifying learning disabilities may be complex within EFL education settings. Therefore, EFL teachers should gain familiarity with disabilities. If they get informed about disability-related issues, they become more knowledgeable about learning styles and strategies to be adopted for supporting students with disabilities. Then, teachers could develop and implement instructional practices that cater to the unique needs of all learners in their EFL classrooms, which can create a more inclusive classroom.

5. NATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CHALLENGES IN TÜRKİYE

In Türkiye, the National Disabled System lists more than 2,5 million disabled people (Ministry of Family and Social Services of the Republic of Türkiye, 2022). In addition to that, data obtained from the Ministry of National Education shows that there are nearly 473,000 students in special education institutions in the country (MoNE, 2021). This statistical information highlights the importance of acknowledging the needs of individuals with disabilities in Türkiye in the realms of social services and education. It presents the importance of creating awareness in the society. This can be feasible through empowering pedagogical understanding, acceptance, and inclusivity.

Although there are several endeavors to create an inclusive educational environment in Türkiye, the extant literature shows that inclusive philosophy has not yet been understood and implemented (Sakız & Woods, 2015). Therefore, teacher educators must embrace DS in teacher

education programs. Equipping teachers with relevant skills and knowledge can aid in effectively teaching students with disabilities.

Türkiye also emphasizes inclusion in education for students with disabilities in the country's 2023 Education Vision and underscores the need to provide in-service education programs for teachers from all branches to promote inclusive education (MoNE, n.d). Therefore, it is primary for teacher education programs to include disability and inclusion-related courses (Sakız & Woods, 2015). Considering that DS have a cross-disciplinary nature, one ideal venue for incorporating disability-related issues can be EFL teacher education programs.

In Türkiye, Council of Higher Education (CoHE) updated the EFL teacher education program in 2018 (CoHE, 2018). In this recent program, the courses are distributed over two semesters in four years. All courses are divided into three categories:

(1) *General teacher education courses*: These courses are offered in all teacher education programs including Mathematics teacher education, Turkish teacher education, and Science teacher education. They include obligatory and elective courses such as educational sociology, educational psychology, instructional technologies, and counseling.

(2) *Subject-specific teaching courses*: They are primarily related to EFL teaching and include obligatory and elective courses including English teaching methods, language acquisition, and teaching English to children.

(3) *Core courses*: They include elective courses including nutrition and health, human rights and democracy education, and media literacy.

Turkish EFL teacher education program includes some courses that primarily prioritize disability-related issues and they are elective general teacher education courses including Special Education and Inclusion, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Education of Hospitalized Children and Inclusive Education, Learning Disabilities, Individualizing, and Adapting Instruction.

Therefore, there is a pressing need to augment the number of obligatory and elective courses enlisted in subject-specific and core courses in the EFL teacher education program. The additional courses may be varied and related to different aspects. For example, a course on language assessment methods could be developed specifically for students with disabilities. With the help of this course, the EFL teacher candidates could be introduced to various tools for assessing disabled students' language performance. Another course could be on instructional

technologies, providing teachers with the knowledge and skills for providing language support for students with disabilities. Such courses can address the particular needs and challenges of them.

6. APPROACHES AND BEST PRACTICES IN LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

Although there are many endeavors to emphasize social justice in teacher education programs, these programs often fail in empowering students' learning as they hinge on a specific political ideology (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Acknowledging this limitation, teacher education programs need to employ an inclusive approach as DS are part of promoting social justice. However, from the perspective of language teacher education, few models are specifically developed for inclusive second-language teacher education (Blume et al., 2019).

For example, Chan and Lo (2016) make some recommendations for accomplishing inclusive education in the EFL profession. First, they point out the need to provide EFL teachers with autonomy in order to enable them to implement inclusion in their classes. Second, a collaborative environment should be created, providing the EFL teachers with the opportunities to learn and act together for inclusive teaching. Third, they maintain that language teacher education should not only rely on a purely technical approach but should incorporate a sociocultural perspective by allowing EFL teachers to make reflections as inclusive teachers.

Furthermore, within the framework of the community of practice, Blume et al. (2019) developed a seminar for pre-service EFL teachers to promote inclusivity. Accordingly, the seminar included themes such as defining inclusivity in the realms of EFL, the use of task-based language teaching for inclusive EFL settings, addressing some language difficulties (dyslexia), and the use of technological tools to empower inclusivity in EFL classes.

Another remarkable endeavor is by Ali (2018) who explored in-service EFL teachers' needs with respect to inclusive education. The findings reveal that they need to know the methodology, curriculum development, and classroom management to effectively teach EFL learners with special education needs. Thus, the researcher indicated the need to develop professional development programs for EFL teachers in order to familiarize them with the essential strategies to manage these students.

Overall, although there are some meaningful initiatives to promote inclusive education, there is a scarcity of models adopted for inclusive foreign language teacher education. Thus,

more inclusive approaches that are autonomous and comprehensive are needed to encourage inclusive education and non-ableism.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE IN EFL TEACHER EDUCATION

Drawing on the study by Ashby (2012), the first step is to adopt an inclusive curriculum design for EFL teachers. Teacher candidates should have the knowledge of methodology and strategies to teach students with disabilities. Assessment methods, teaching techniques, and instructional technologies should be customized to meet the needs of students with disabilities. For example, the adoption of different technological tools such as text-to-speech technology can help learners with visual impairments. In addition to such technological tools, modified assignments and materials should also be promoted in EFL classrooms to ensure equal opportunities. For instance, if needed, EFL teachers may need to add subtitles to videos or create documents with suitable fonts and contrasts (Sowell, 2023). Therefore, related courses through which pre-service EFL teachers are introduced to such knowledge and skills should be added to the EFL teacher education programs. Considering the current EFL teacher education program in Türkiye, it would therefore be beneficial to increase the number of courses concerning inclusive education.

In addition, Sowell and Sugisaki (2021) suggest some strategies for promoting inclusive classrooms. These strategies include encouraging guided note-taking, using extra time, and offering explicit instruction. Through guided note-taking, the learners can be more focused on the language tasks. The use of extra time and explicit instruction could also facilitate the language learning process for learners with different needs. While providing explicit instruction, EFL teachers need to use visual support. These strategies may be necessary for meeting the learning needs of diverse learner groups. Therefore, EFL teacher education programs should focus on integrating such strategies in order to promote inclusion.

Gilham and Tompkins (2016) included DS in a pre-service teacher education program. In that program, the researchers gave some tasks concerning disability to pre-service teachers. For example, the pre-service teachers were invited to explore the university campus for finding out whether/to what extent the campus was accessible to the disabled. The researchers think that such tasks are beneficial for creating awareness of disability and accessibility issues. Drawing on this study, these tasks could be adapted to EFL teacher education programs. Considering the EFL teacher education program in Türkiye, school practicum courses could

include such tasks where the pre-service EFL teachers are assigned to schools and investigate them to see how well they accomplish inclusion in terms of accessibility. Alternatively, as part of the Community Service Practice course, pre-service EFL teachers may have the chance to visit different social settings such as markets, hospitals, and stations and be asked whether the facilities are available for people with disabilities. This will help the teacher candidates to become aware of the challenges the disabled people experience.

Apart from these initiatives for pre-service EFL teacher education, continuous professional development programs including workshops and short teacher training programs could also be designed for in-service EFL teachers. The programs can address differentiated instruction, supportive instructional technologies, or classroom management techniques. In Türkiye, one to two students with disabilities can attend classes with their non-disabled counterparts (Turkish Legal Gazette, 2006). By attending such programs, the teachers can update their methodological knowledge and skills to address those students' specialized learning needs. Therefore, the Ministry of National Education or other civil teacher education centers should focus on the development of continuous professional development programs for in-service teachers to encourage inclusive practices.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Social justice aims for a society where equality is primary for all members regardless of their identity-related characteristics such as gender and race. Having a disability, whether permanent or temporary, counts as a part of someone's identity. In order to accomplish a justice world, disabled individuals should be treated fairly just like their able-bodied counterparts are. Therefore, there is a need to create awareness of disability and disability-related issues. Individuals need to know the categories of disabilities, disabled peoples' unique needs, and the challenges they face due to disabilities. At this point, the key role of EFL classes in contributing to promoting social justice through including disability should not be underestimated. The EFL teachers can address disability issues through different activities including projects, reflections, discussions, or preparing posters. By using these activities, EFL learners can become aware of disability types, develop empathy toward their related challenges, and challenge their stereotypes.

In order to effectively incorporate these activities into the curriculum, EFL teachers need to gain the necessary knowledge and skills. Therefore, EFL teacher education programs should

incorporate disability-related content. This can include an introduction to the disability term, various assessment methods, teaching approaches, and using supportive technologies for students with disabilities. Considering the EFL teacher education program in Türkiye, the number of courses that address DS can be increased. This would help future EFL teachers promote inclusivity in their classes by acknowledging the different needs of students with disabilities.

While this study has recommendations for including DS within EFL teacher education programs, more research needs to be conducted to see whether/to what extent the pre-service EFL teachers are aware of disability-related issues, and to find out their level of preparedness in teaching English to students with disabilities, particularly in the Turkish context. In addition to that, considering the scarcity of developed models for inclusive second language teacher education (Blume et al., 2019), further research is needed to design successful approaches and strategies to incorporate DS in EFL teacher education programs. Therefore, a needs analysis could be conducted in Türkiye and accordingly, a disability-inclusive program for EFL teachers could be developed. This would be a good example for the curriculum developers in addressing the need for developing inclusive language teacher education programs.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

When all individuals in a society are treated fairly and there is no discrimination based on identity, social justice could be achieved. Components such as age, race, gender and nationality construct identity. Having a disability is also a part of one's identity. Society should be aware of disability-related issues. For example, they should know what a disability is, and what people with disabilities encounter as challenges in their real lives. Social justice and disability studies should be related to each other, as addressing disability studies is preliminary to social justice. In recent years, there has been a recognition of the importance of including disability studies in the educational sphere. However, there is still a need to incorporate well-established endeavors for effective implementation. Therefore, disability studies should not be seen as an extension of special education. All educational branches should handle disability studies in their curriculum extensively. Among them, English language teaching is an ideal venue to include disability studies. EFL teachers can address disability-related issues in different ways, such as by informing the learners about the disability types, the challenges the disabled people face, and providing opportunities for the learners to take part in related projects. Such activities can raise learners' awareness about disability-related issues by empowering social justice. Thus, effective incorporation of disability-related issues into the English language teaching curriculum necessitates adding disability studies to EFL teacher education programs. Then, teacher candidates can be introduced to concepts such as ableism, non-ableism, disability, and different learning styles. Considering the current number of disabled people and students in the special education institutions Türkiye, incorporation of disability-related issues in EFL teacher education programs has become more significant than before. By drawing on the extant literature, this article recommends some good practices for including disability studies in English language teacher education programs in Türkiye. One of them is to adopt an inclusive curriculum design for EFL teachers (Ashby, 2012). In this sense, various technological tools, such as text-to-speech, can be employed to evaluate the language proficiency of learners with visual impairments. Another practice is to give more place to community service practices for teacher candidates to help them understand the problems the disabled people experience (Gilham & Tompkins, 2016). Although this study has suggestions for incorporating disability studies in EFL teacher education programs, further investigations are required to find out whether / to what extent the pre-service EFL teachers know about disability-related issues in the Turkish context. Also, needs analyses can be further implemented to EFL teachers to design disability-inclusive programs for EFL teachers.