

Curriculum Adaptations and Teacher Preparedness for EFL Learners with Hearing and Visual Impairments (A Case Study of Georgian Universities)

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ABSTRACT: Students with vision and hearing impairments face unique challenges in inclusive English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, particularly in higher education, where instruction relies on visual and auditory input. The primary objective of the current paper was to explore current curriculum accommodation practices among English language teachers in Georgian universities and to emphasise the necessity of professional training to foster inclusive teaching. A structured survey was conducted to evaluate the awareness, preparedness, and implementation of inclusive strategies among 40 EFL teachers from a variety of universities. The findings indicate that most teachers lack familiarity with effective methodologies for teaching students with sensory impairments, underscoring the critical need for training in these methodologies and adapting the curriculum. Keywords:

KEYWORDS: Inclusive education, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), vision impairments, hearing impairments, curriculum accommodation, teacher training

I. INTRODUCTION

A core tenet of inclusive education lies in the concept of full integration of all students, including those from traditionally underserved groups such as ethnic language speakers and disabled children living within mainstream schools and classrooms, to receive an authentic educational experience. Organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) play a particularly instrumental role in safeguarding basic human rights as societies strive for equality and development. Over recent decades, perceptions of disability—particularly sensory impairments— have shifted significantly, recognising the capabilities and active roles of persons with disabilities in society. Despite this progress, many still face barriers to equal access in essential areas such as education, highlighting the ongoing necessity for robust legislative action at both national and international levels.

Challenges in Higher Education Enrolment and Retention

Despite legislative advancements and the expansion of support programs for students with disabilities in many Western countries, enrolment in higher education remains low, and attrition rates after the first year are significant. This can be attributed to factors such as inadequate school access, insufficient support services, negative societal attitudes, social isolation, and financial constraints (Dutta et al., 2009; Mpofu & Wilson, 2004). Data from 49 countries further reveals that individuals with disabilities often experience educational inequity, characterised by lower rates of school attendance, higher dropout rates, and lower levels of educational attainment compared to their non-disabled peers (UNICEF, 2018).

The Georgian Context: Legislation and Implementation Gaps

In Georgia, the Law on Higher Education explicitly assigns universities the responsibility of creating suitable learning conditions for students with disabilities. Accreditation standards mandate that universities develop appropriate infrastructure, employ and train qualified personnel, and procure necessary equipment and resources. However, the practical implementation in many Georgian universities often falls short, with adapted environments frequently limited to ramps and accessible bathrooms. The Ministry of Education and Science in Georgia does not mandate that higher education institutions provide retraining for professors, employ specialists in inclusive education, or adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

In Georgia's education system, learning English as a foreign language is essential for developing globally competitive skills, with a focus on both knowledge and performance. Proficiency in English can open up greater opportunities for citizens in both national

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and international job markets. As a result, English is included as a subject in the curriculum. However, the English language courses offered at higher education institutions may not be adequately designed to meet the needs of sensory-impaired students.

Theoretical Foundation

In contemporary educational approaches, "adaptivity" empowers teachers to employ diverse teaching methodologies that effectively cater to the individual learning styles of all students (Gerlach & Leupold, 2019, p. 93). This necessitates that EFL teachers re-evaluate traditional teaching habits and embrace innovative methods that address the varied needs of all learners. Ainscow et al. (2019) define it as a process focused on addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners. In EFL settings, this often translates into differentiated instruction and the application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. The adoption of UDL in EFL classrooms is a promising strategy for accommodating diverse learners, including those with vision and hearing impairments. Research by Courey et al. (2013) has shown that UDL-based lesson planning enhances engagement and learning outcomes for students with various disabilities.

Technology Implementation

Building on UDL principles, assistive technologies are increasingly important in inclusive EFL classrooms. Huang et al. (2020) found that text-to-speech software, closed captioning, and interactive whiteboards significantly improve learning experiences for students with disabilities. Orsini-Jones et al. (2017) reported success using 3D-printed materials for teaching English grammar to visually impaired students, while Koenig and Holbrook (2021) advocate for combining Braille with screen readers and audio materials.

Collaborative Model

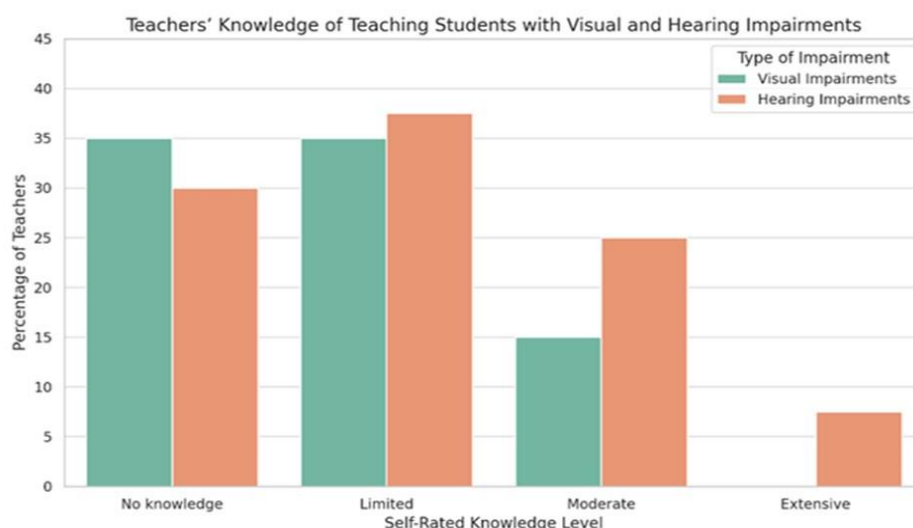
Beyond technological solutions, co-teaching models, where EFL teachers collaborate with special education specialists, have proven effective. Li and Wang (2018) demonstrated in Chinese EFL classrooms that collaborative teaching improved outcomes for students with disabilities while fostering overall classroom inclusivity.

II. RESULTS AND DATA DESCRIPTION

Data were collected via a 20-item questionnaire analysing teachers' self-rated knowledge of teaching EFL to students with sensory impairments and their views on curriculum accommodations. Four ordinal variables were recoded (1-4 scale):

- Knowledge about teaching students with vision/hearing impairments (1 = No knowledge to 4 = Extensive knowledge);
- Perceived necessity of curriculum accommodations for vision/hearing impairments (1 = Not necessary to 4 = Extremely necessary)

The chart below illustrates that teachers reported limited expertise in addressing students with sensory impairments. For visual impairments, 35% reported no knowledge and 0% extensive knowledge, while for hearing impairments, 30% reported no knowledge and 7.5% extensive knowledge. Results indicate most teachers lack necessary preparation, particularly for visual impairments, though some show moderate confidence with hearing impairments.

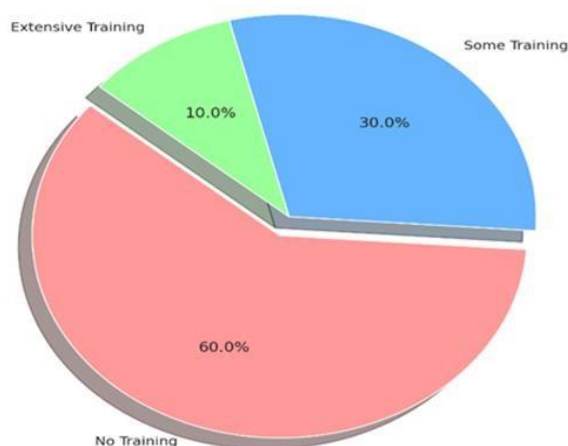


The pie chart reveals a concerning disparity in the level of teacher training related to instructing students with visual and hearing impairments. A majority of respondents (60%) reported no training, highlighting a widespread gap in foundational preparation for inclusive education. Another 30% indicated they had received some training, suggesting that while awareness and efforts toward

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professional development are emerging, they remain insufficient. Alarming, only 10% of teachers reported extensive training, underscoring how rare it is to find instructors with deep, specialised expertise in inclusive teaching, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms.

Teacher-Reported Training for Teaching Students with Impairments



III. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study demonstrates a significant disconnect between the recognised importance of inclusive EFL education and the actual preparedness of educators in Georgian higher education institutions.

To address these challenges, Georgian universities should implement structured professional development programs focused on inclusive pedagogy, the development of accessible EFL teaching resources, and ongoing support systems for English Language lecturers. Systematic investment in inclusive education training represents both an institutional responsibility and a social imperative to ensure equitable access to quality language education for all students in Georgian higher education.

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