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Literature Review: The Importance of Inclusiveness in TESOL Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the importance of inclusiveness in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), focusing on its significance, theoretical foundations, challenges, and effective strategies. With increasingly diverse classrooms, inclusiveness is essential for ensuring equal learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their background. The article stresses that inclusivity in TESOL is not just a pedagogical choice but an ethical imperative, deeply connected to language, culture, and identity. It defines inclusiveness in TESOL by emphasizing multilingualism, cultural identity, and flexible instruction. The article explores key frameworks such as Culturally Responsive Teaching, Funds of Knowledge, and Sociocultural Theory, which advocate for classrooms that affirm cultural identities and challenge inequities. The review also highlights challenges to inclusiveness, including rigid curricula, inadequate teacher training, and implicit biases. Addressing these barriers requires systemic changes, professional development, and increased self-awareness among educators. Effective strategies, such as Differentiated Instruction, Translanguaging, using Inclusive Materials, and fostering collaboration with families, are discussed as ways to support diverse learning needs and enhance language acquisition outcomes. In conclusion, the article calls for a shift in TESOL practices towards more inclusive, culturally responsive approaches, offering recommendations for educators, schools, and policymakers to prioritize inclusivity in language education.

Key words: TESOL, inclusiveness, English language, diverse classroom

1. Introduction

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the demand for English language proficiency continues to grow. English, as a global lingua franca, is

taught in diverse classrooms across the world, where students come from a wide array of linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This diversity presents both a challenge and an opportunity for educators to create learning environments that are not only effective but also inclusive. Inclusiveness in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) is not merely a desirable feature of language education but a necessity for ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have equal access to learning opportunities, support, and academic success.

Inclusiveness in TESOL refers to the deliberate efforts to create a learning space that respects, affirms, and values the diverse identities and experiences of all students. It is about recognizing and responding to the multiplicity of languages, cultures, and abilities within the classroom and developing pedagogical strategies that are equitable and effective for every learner. While inclusiveness is often discussed in educational discourse, its true meaning in the context of TESOL requires more than abstract ideals; it demands concrete actions that address the unique needs of English language learners (ELLs). This includes accommodating diverse learning styles, using culturally relevant content, providing resources in multiple languages, and fostering a classroom atmosphere where every student feels seen, heard, and respected.

This literature review seeks to explore the multiple dimensions of inclusiveness in TESOL classrooms, analysing both the theoretical underpinnings of inclusive practices and the real-world barriers that educators face when trying to implement them. By examining the challenges, such as institutional limitations, insufficient teacher preparation, and biases, this review aims to highlight the complexity of making inclusiveness a central tenet of language education. However, it also emphasizes the potential for transformative change within TESOL through the adoption of inclusive strategies. Key strategies such as Differentiated Instruction, Translanguaging, Inclusive Materials and Content, and Collaboration with Families and Communities have proven effective in supporting diverse learners and can serve as models for best practice in TESOL. These strategies are not isolated interventions but interconnected elements that, when combined, provide a holistic approach to inclusive education.

The theoretical frameworks of Culturally Responsive Teaching, Funds of Knowledge, and Sociocultural Theory offer critical insights into how TESOL educators can conceptualize and operationalize inclusivity in their classrooms. These theories underscore that teaching language is not a neutral activity but one deeply embedded in issues of power, culture, and identity. Understanding these frameworks allows educators to create more empathetic, supportive, and engaging environments where all students, regardless of their linguistic background, are empowered to succeed academically and socially.

However, the road toward truly inclusive TESOL classrooms is not without obstacles. Systemic challenges—such as rigid curricula, limited professional development opportunities, and implicit biases—persist in many educational contexts, limiting the ability of teachers and institutions to embrace inclusiveness fully. Recognizing and confronting these barriers is

the first step toward bridging the gap between the ideal of an inclusive classroom and the reality faced by many educators. By addressing these challenges through targeted interventions, ongoing teacher training, and a commitment to equity, TESOL educators can begin to foster classrooms where diversity is not only accommodated but celebrated.

Ultimately, the goal of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive overview of the significance of inclusiveness in TESOL, exploring its theoretical foundations, practical implications, and strategies for overcoming the barriers that prevent its widespread adoption. Inclusivity in TESOL is not just about improving language acquisition outcomes but about contributing to a broader societal goal: the creation of more equitable and just educational spaces where every student, regardless of their background or circumstances, can thrive. Through the implementation of inclusive strategies and a commitment to ongoing professional growth, TESOL educators can help create a future where all learners feel empowered to fully participate in the global community.

2. Literature Review

In the current era of globalisation, education, specifically, language education, is undergoing a profound transformation. TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) classrooms are at the forefront of this change, as they serve increasingly heterogeneous populations of students. These learners often come from a wide range of linguistic, cultural, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and they bring with them a complex array of experiences, worldviews, and educational needs. In many urban centres across the globe, it is not unusual for a single classroom to contain students who speak different first languages, have diverse levels of literacy in their home languages, and hold differing cultural assumptions about teaching, learning, and authority. The presence of refugee learners, students with interrupted formal education (SIFE), and those with varying levels of exposure to English further contributes to this diversity.

This multifaceted diversity presents both a challenge and an opportunity for TESOL educators. On one hand, it requires teachers to go beyond traditional, one-size-fits-all teaching models that often cater to an "ideal" learner who is linguistically and culturally like the dominant group. On the other hand, it opens the possibility of enriching the learning experience for all students by drawing upon the linguistic and cultural resources that learners bring into the classroom. To navigate this complexity successfully, educators must adopt pedagogical approaches that are not only inclusive in theory but are also practical, sustainable, and adaptable to the realities of diverse learning environments.

Inclusiveness in TESOL is broadly defined as an educational philosophy and set of practices that ensure equitable access to learning for all students, regardless of their background or circumstances. It encompasses a wide range of considerations, including linguistic inclusivity (valuing students' home languages and dialects), cultural responsiveness (acknowledging and integrating students' cultural backgrounds into instruction), social and emotional safety (creating a learning environment in which all students feel

seen, heard, and respected), and differentiated instruction (tailoring lessons to meet varying levels of ability and prior knowledge). Importantly, inclusiveness is not simply about accommodating students who deviate from a perceived norm; it is about reimagining what is considered "normal" in the first place and designing instruction with diversity as a foundational principle rather than an exception.

The urgency of embracing inclusiveness in TESOL cannot be overstated. English has become a global lingua franca, essential not only for academic and professional advancement but also for social integration and civic participation in many countries. As such, the stakes are particularly high for English language learners (ELLs), whose access to meaningful language education can shape their life trajectories. Research shows that when ELLs are taught in inclusive environments—where their identities are affirmed, their languages are respected, and their contributions are valued—they are more likely to engage in the learning process, perform better academically, and develop stronger social-emotional skills (Cummins, 2001; García & Kleifgen, 2010).

Despite the clear benefits, inclusiveness in TESOL is often more aspirational than actualized. Many TESOL teachers enter the profession with limited training in inclusive education, particularly in how to support learners with special educational needs, trauma histories, or non-traditional educational backgrounds. Additionally, institutional structures—such as standardized curricula, rigid assessment frameworks, and monolingual policies—can restrict the ability of teachers to implement inclusive practices. In some contexts, English language teaching is closely tied to gatekeeping exams, immigration status, or economic opportunity, making the pressure to "teach to the test" particularly acute. This can lead to pedagogical practices that prioritize efficiency over equity, and standardization over sensitivity.

Moreover, there is the issue of bias—both implicit and explicit—in the TESOL classroom. Learners who speak English with non-native accents, use non-standard grammar, or come from marginalized ethnic or religious groups may face discrimination, either overtly or subtly, from teachers, peers, or institutional policies. This discrimination can have a deeply detrimental effect on learners' self-esteem, motivation, and academic performance. Therefore, creating inclusive TESOL environments is not just a matter of pedagogy; it is also a matter of social justice. It requires a critical examination of the power dynamics embedded in language education and a commitment to dismantling barriers that prevent full participation by all learners.

Inclusiveness in TESOL also involves a recognition that language learning is deeply connected to identity formation. As Norton (2013) and others have argued, learners do not simply acquire a new language in isolation from who they are; rather, they negotiate their identities in and through the process of learning. Inclusive TESOL practices therefore must be attuned to the ways in which learners' identities are shaped, affirmed, or challenged by the classroom environment. Teachers who are inclusive understand that language learning is not only about vocabulary and grammar, but also about belonging, agency, and voice.

The concept of inclusiveness in TESOL also aligns with broader movements in education that emphasize universal design for learning (UDL), equity-based education, and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017). These frameworks advocate for systemic changes in how curriculum is designed, how teachers are trained, and how success is measured. In this regard, TESOL is not isolated but is part of a larger conversation about how education systems can be made more equitable and responsive to the needs of diverse learners.

In sum, inclusiveness in TESOL is not a peripheral concern but a central one. It is essential for ensuring that English language learners have equitable opportunities to succeed, participate, and thrive in a world where English proficiency is increasingly tied to social and economic mobility. It requires a multifaceted approach that addresses pedagogy, policy, teacher training, curriculum design, and classroom culture. While challenges remain, the growing body of research and practice in this area provides a strong foundation for rethinking TESOL in more inclusive and socially just ways.

This literature review will explore the key dimensions of inclusiveness in TESOL classrooms, analyse the theoretical foundations of inclusive practices, examine the barriers that educators and institutions face, and highlight strategies that have proven effective in promoting equitable language learning. Through this analysis, the review aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how inclusiveness can—and must—be embedded into the core of English language education.

3. Defining Inclusiveness in TESOL

In contemporary educational settings, especially in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), the notion of inclusiveness has become central to effective teaching and learning. Inclusiveness in TESOL refers to the deliberate and systematic practice of ensuring that all learners, regardless of their linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic, or cognitive backgrounds, have equitable access to educational opportunities. These practices aim to dismantle barriers to participation, promote a sense of belonging, and create learning environments where all students are valued, supported, and empowered to succeed.

The Core of Inclusive Pedagogy

Inclusive pedagogy is rooted in the belief that diversity is not a problem to be managed, but an asset to be leveraged for enriching the learning experience of all students. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) define inclusive pedagogy as an approach that does not rely on the categorization of learners but seeks to offer all students access to quality teaching. Rather than segregating or differentiating learners based on ability or background, inclusive pedagogy focuses on extending what is generally available to all students. In the TESOL context, this implies an instructional design that incorporates varied strategies, resources, and assessments that allow English language learners (ELLs) with different needs and identities to thrive.

Inclusiveness is not about creating separate tracks for learners with "special" needs but about building universally accessible learning

environments. It demands that educators recognize the complexity of student identities, including race, language, gender, socioeconomic status, and ability, and respond to these differences without resorting to deficit perspectives. Instead of viewing some learners as lacking or behind, inclusive TESOL reframes student differences as valuable contributions to the learning community.

Linguistic Inclusiveness and Multilingualism

In TESOL, inclusiveness fundamentally involves acknowledging linguistic diversity. Historically, English language education has often been driven by monolingual ideologies that favour native-like English proficiency and suppress the use of students' first languages (L1). Such ideologies not only marginalize learners but also limit the effectiveness of language acquisition. García and Wei (2014) argue for the recognition of "translanguaging," a process in which bilingual students use their full linguistic repertoire to make meaning. By permitting the use of L1 alongside English, educators can foster deeper comprehension, engagement, and identity affirmation.

Moreover, Cummins (2001) highlights the "interdependence hypothesis," which posits that skills developed in a learner's L1 can transfer to L2 acquisition. Therefore, inclusive TESOL teaching should encourage the maintenance and use of home languages as a resource, rather than a hindrance. This could involve bilingual glossaries, peer support in multiple languages, or classroom discussions that draw on linguistic diversity to enrich learning for all students.

Cultural Inclusiveness and Identity Affirmation

Culture and language are intricately linked, and in TESOL, cultural inclusiveness plays a crucial role in identity affirmation. Learners enter classrooms with culturally rooted experiences, beliefs, and expectations about education, authority, collaboration, and communication. According to Nieto (2010), culturally inclusive pedagogy acknowledges these experiences and incorporates them into instructional content and strategies. This is not limited to incorporating multicultural holidays or surface-level cultural traits, but involves a deeper commitment to understanding how power, privilege, and marginalization operate within the classroom.

Norton and Toohey (2011) emphasize that identity in language learning is constructed socially and is shaped by learners' interactions and the power relations in which they are embedded. Inclusive TESOL practices, therefore, must actively support learners in negotiating positive identities as competent users of English. This includes avoiding stereotypes, challenging native-speakerism, and fostering classroom practices where all voices are heard and respected.

For example, including texts, examples, and activities that reflect diverse cultural perspectives can provide students with opportunities to see themselves represented in the curriculum. Such representation can have profound effects on self-esteem and motivation. When learners feel their backgrounds are acknowledged and respected, they are more likely to participate actively and confidently in their education.

Inclusiveness Through Instructional Design

Inclusive TESOL instruction also involves differentiation and flexibility in teaching methods. Tomlinson (2001) suggests that differentiated instruction—adjusting content, process, and products based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles—is essential in diverse classrooms. While differentiation is often associated with special education, in TESOL it is a universal necessity due to the wide range of language proficiencies, prior education levels, and cultural backgrounds among learners.

In addition, applying principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) helps teachers create instruction that works for all learners from the outset. UDL encourages the provision of multiple means of representation (e.g., visual, auditory, and written formats), engagement (e.g., collaborative and independent activities), and expression (e.g., verbal and written responses). For TESOL students, this might involve using visual aids, graphic organizers, simplified texts, or allowing oral over written assessments for those with limited literacy.

Technology can also support inclusive teaching. For instance, speech-to-text tools, online translation, and multimedia platforms can aid students with varying proficiency levels or learning needs. These tools also help teachers offer instruction in more interactive and differentiated ways.

Teacher Beliefs and Institutional Support

Inclusiveness in TESOL is not solely the responsibility of individual teachers; it also relies on institutional support and systemic change. However, teacher beliefs play a central role in shaping classroom culture. Teachers who hold deficit views of learners—seeing them as lacking rather than capable—are less likely to adopt inclusive strategies. Conversely, teachers who embrace a growth mindset and who view diversity as a strength tend to implement more equitable practices (Gay, 2010).

Professional development is essential in equipping TESOL educators with the skills and knowledge necessary for inclusive teaching. Unfortunately, many teacher preparation programs provide limited training in working with linguistically and culturally diverse learners (Ball & Tyson, 2011). Schools and teacher education institutions must prioritize inclusion as a core competency, providing ongoing opportunities for teachers to reflect on their biases, learn culturally responsive strategies, and collaborate with peers.

Defining inclusiveness in TESOL requires us to go beyond broad ideals and adopt concrete pedagogical, linguistic, and institutional strategies that promote equity, respect, and meaningful learning for all students. It means valuing multilingualism, affirming diverse identities, designing flexible instruction, and creating an environment in which every learner feels seen and supported. As language classrooms continue to diversify, inclusiveness must become a central guiding principle, not only to improve academic outcomes but also to ensure that English language education contributes to a more just and inclusive society.

4. Theoretical Frameworks

The concept of inclusiveness in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) is grounded in a number of well-established educational theories. These frameworks help educators understand how language learning is influenced not only by cognitive processes but also by cultural, social, and institutional factors. Rather than treating inclusiveness as an add-on or supplementary practice, these theoretical lenses emphasize that inclusivity must be embedded into the very fabric of language education. They provide insight into how teachers can structure classrooms that are equitable, affirming, and effective for diverse learners.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

One of the most influential theories supporting inclusiveness in TESOL is Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), popularized by Geneva Gay (2010). CRT asserts that effective teaching must be responsive to the cultural contexts of learners. Gay argues that when students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles are used as conduits for teaching, instruction becomes more relevant, effective, and empowering.

In the TESOL context, CRT involves recognizing that students come from various cultural backgrounds that shape their communication styles, perceptions of authority, and learning strategies. For instance, students from collectivist cultures may thrive in cooperative learning settings, while others may prefer independent tasks. Teachers who adopt culturally responsive pedagogy tailor their methods to reflect these differences, ensuring that all students are able to engage meaningfully in the learning process.

CRT also encourages the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives in the curriculum. In TESOL, this may involve selecting texts from a range of cultural backgrounds, discussing social justice issues related to language and identity, or exploring global Englishes rather than emphasizing a single "standard" form. Such approaches foster a sense of belonging and increase student motivation, especially among marginalized or underrepresented groups.

Moreover, CRT highlights the importance of high expectations and rigorous instruction. Contrary to deficit-based assumptions that learners from certain backgrounds are less capable, culturally responsive educators challenge all students while providing the support necessary to succeed. As Gay (2010) notes, "Culturally responsive teaching is not simply about validating culture—it's about making learning meaningful and effective."

Funds of Knowledge

Closely aligned with CRT is the concept of Funds of Knowledge, developed by Moll, Amanti, Neff, and González (1992). This theoretical perspective posits that students bring with them valuable cultural, linguistic, and intellectual resources from their households and communities. These "funds" include informal knowledge systems, family traditions, and life experiences that are often overlooked or undervalued in mainstream education.

In TESOL classrooms, funds of knowledge provide a powerful basis for inclusive pedagogy. Many English language learners have rich experiences—ranging from transnational mobility and bilingualism to complex problem-solving in community or family contexts—that can inform classroom

instruction. Recognizing and incorporating these experiences allows teachers to bridge the gap between home and school, making learning more authentic and relevant.

For example, a TESOL teacher might ask students to write narratives about their cultural heritage or conduct interviews with family members in their first language, followed by sharing those stories in English. These practices not only build language skills but also validate students' identities and affirm their contributions to the classroom.

Funds of Knowledge also challenges educators to reflect critically on the assumptions embedded in the curriculum. Often, school knowledge is framed through a Eurocentric or middle-class lens, rendering other ways of knowing invisible. By drawing on the lived experiences of students and their families, educators can reframe curriculum content in more inclusive and equitable ways (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

Sociocultural Theory

A third major theoretical framework supporting inclusiveness in TESOL is Sociocultural Theory (SCT), originally developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978). SCT posits that learning is a fundamentally social process that occurs through interaction with others and is mediated by cultural tools, including language. Rather than viewing learning as an isolated cognitive activity, Vygotsky emphasized the importance of collaboration, dialogue, and the social context of development.

A core concept in SCT is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the difference between what a learner can do independently and what they can do with guidance or support. In inclusive TESOL classrooms, this concept underpins scaffolding—providing learners with the right amount of support to perform tasks they could not complete alone. Teachers act as mediators, gradually transferring responsibility to the learner as their competence increases.

SCT also underscores the significance of language as a tool for thinking and meaning-making. In multilingual classrooms, this means allowing students to use all their linguistic resources—including their first languages—to support their learning. García and Wei's (2014) concept of translanguaging, which builds on SCT, emphasizes the dynamic and fluid use of languages by bilingual students to communicate and learn. Translanguaging not only aids comprehension but also affirms students' identities as competent bilingual users.

Furthermore, SCT highlights the need for authentic communication and social interaction in the classroom. Inclusive TESOL practices based on SCT encourage group work, peer teaching, and real-world tasks that require negotiation of meaning and collaboration. These practices not only enhance language development but also build a sense of community among learners with diverse backgrounds.

Beyond Individual Theories: Toward a Holistic Understanding

While each of the aforementioned theories provides distinct insights into inclusive practices, they are most powerful when integrated holistically. Together, they reinforce several key principles:

- Learning is social and cultural: Students do not learn in a vacuum; their cultural and social experiences fundamentally shape how they engage with new content.
- Students bring valuable knowledge: Every learner possesses prior knowledge and experiences that can be harnessed in the classroom.
- Language learning is identity work: Language learning is intertwined with how students see themselves and how they are seen by others. Inclusive practices must therefore affirm students' identities.
- Instruction must be adaptable: No single method works for all. Inclusive pedagogy requires flexibility and responsiveness to learners' needs.

This holistic understanding of inclusiveness shifts the focus from remediation to transformation. It challenges the deficit model that views ELLs as needing to be “fixed” and instead positions them as active agents in their own learning. Moreover, it calls on educators, institutions, and policymakers to reimagine curriculum, assessment, and teacher education through the lens of equity and inclusion.

Inclusiveness in TESOL is not simply a pedagogical choice—it is an ethical and theoretical imperative. The theories of Culturally Responsive Teaching, Funds of Knowledge, and Sociocultural Theory each provide vital insights into how educators can create classrooms that affirm, support, and challenge all learners. They underscore that language teaching is not neutral but is deeply intertwined with culture, identity, and power. As TESOL educators draw on these frameworks, they are better equipped to foster environments where diversity is celebrated, learners are empowered, and all students have the opportunity to succeed.

5. Challenges to Inclusiveness in TESOL

While the theoretical and moral foundations of inclusiveness in TESOL are well established, translating these ideals into everyday classroom practice is fraught with challenges. The implementation of inclusive education strategies is often hindered by systemic, institutional, and interpersonal factors. These barriers limit educators' ability to design learning experiences that truly serve the needs of all students—especially those from marginalized or underserved backgrounds. Understanding these challenges is critical to developing effective responses and advocating for more equitable and responsive language teaching environments.

Institutional Barriers

One of the most significant obstacles to inclusiveness in TESOL is the presence of **institutional constraints**. These include rigid curricula, standardized assessments, narrow educational policies, and inflexible program structures that limit the ability of teachers to respond to learner diversity. Many educational systems prioritize uniform outcomes and high-stakes testing, which often fail to account for the varying needs and starting points of English language learners (ELLs). This standardization creates pressure to “teach to the test,” reducing opportunities for differentiated instruction, culturally responsive content, and student-cantered pedagogy.

Ball and Tyson (2011) argue that such institutional frameworks are often designed around a monolingual, monocultural norm, which inherently marginalizes students who do not conform to this dominant profile. For TESOL educators, this means having to balance competing demands: meeting mandated curricular outcomes while also striving to create inclusive and affirming learning environments. In some contexts, teachers lack the autonomy or resources to make necessary adaptations to instruction, especially when working in underfunded schools or with limited access to multilingual materials.

Additionally, language policies in some educational systems explicitly or implicitly discourage the use of students' home languages in the classroom, reinforcing a subtractive model of bilingualism. This contradicts inclusive principles that value linguistic diversity and promote the use of students' full linguistic repertoires as resources for learning (García & Wei, 2014). The result is an environment in which students are expected to assimilate linguistically and culturally, often at the expense of their identities and existing knowledge.

Teacher Preparedness

Another major challenge to inclusiveness in TESOL is the issue of **teacher preparedness**. Many teachers enter the profession without sufficient training in inclusive pedagogical practices, or the skills needed to effectively address the diverse needs of their students. This is particularly true in relation to learners with special educational needs, students from refugee or trauma-affected backgrounds, and those with limited or interrupted formal education (SIFE).

Young (2024) found that a large proportion of TESOL educators report feeling unprepared to work in classrooms with significant linguistic, cultural, and cognitive diversity. Often, teacher education programs prioritize second language acquisition theories and grammar instruction over critical issues such as trauma-informed pedagogy, differentiated assessment, or culturally sustaining practices. As a result, even well-intentioned educators may inadvertently exclude students or fail to provide the support necessary for equitable learning outcomes.

This lack of preparedness extends to the practical level. Teachers may not know how to modify instructional materials, integrate students' home languages, or collaborate with specialists such as ESL support staff or school psychologists. They may also lack awareness of how educational inequities—such as poverty, racism, and immigration status—impact students' learning experiences and outcomes. Without targeted professional development and institutional support, these knowledge gaps persist, making it difficult to implement inclusive teaching practices effectively.

Moreover, professional development opportunities that do exist are often optional, sporadic, or overly theoretical. Effective teacher training for inclusiveness must be ongoing, practice-oriented, and contextualized to the realities of diverse classrooms. It should include reflective components that challenge educators to examine their own biases and positionality within the educational system.

Implicit Bias and Linguistic Discrimination

A third and more subtle barrier to inclusiveness in TESOL is the presence of **implicit bias and linguistic discrimination**. These are often unconscious attitudes or assumptions that influence how teachers perceive and interact with their students. In the TESOL context, this can manifest as the privileging of native English speakers, the idealization of certain accents (especially American or British), and the marginalization of students who speak English with a “foreign” accent or who come from non-Western cultures.

Kubota and Lin (2009) discuss how **native-speakerism**—the belief that native speakers are inherently better language models—continues to permeate TESOL practices, teacher hiring policies, and classroom expectations. This bias devalues the rich linguistic and experiential knowledge that non-native speakers bring to the classroom and can result in feelings of inadequacy or exclusion among learners. When teachers unconsciously favor students who sound “more native” or who conform more closely to dominant cultural norms, they reinforce existing power hierarchies and limit equitable access to participation.

Bias can also influence teachers’ perceptions of students’ abilities. For instance, learners from racialized or marginalized backgrounds may be perceived as less capable or less motivated, even when this is not supported by evidence. These assumptions can lower expectations and reduce the opportunities students receive for leadership, academic challenge, or recognition. Furthermore, microaggressions—subtle, often unintentional comments or actions—can accumulate over time to create a classroom environment where students feel unwelcome or undervalued.

Linguistic discrimination is also embedded in many classroom materials and assessments. Standardized language tests often reflect culturally biased content, making it harder for students from diverse backgrounds to demonstrate their actual proficiency. For example, a reading passage about Western holidays or idioms may disadvantage students unfamiliar with those cultural references, regardless of their English ability. Addressing bias requires deep self-reflection and a willingness to challenge dominant narratives about language, identity, and academic success. It also demands institutional accountability, including recruitment and retention of diverse teaching staff, inclusive curriculum design, and bias training for educators.

Resource Constraints and Workload Pressures

Finally, practical challenges such as **resource constraints and excessive workload** further hinder inclusiveness in TESOL classrooms. Many language educators work in settings with large class sizes, inadequate instructional materials, and limited time to plan or differentiate instruction. In such environments, even teachers who are committed to inclusive practices may find it difficult to implement them consistently. Inclusive education often requires additional planning time, individualized support, and access to specialized resources or personnel. When teachers are overwhelmed by administrative duties, high teaching loads, or lack of institutional support, inclusiveness may become an ideal that is difficult to prioritize in practice.

In low-resource contexts, particularly in developing countries or underserved communities, these issues are exacerbated. Schools may lack basic infrastructure, trained ESL specialists, or culturally relevant materials. Without systemic change and increased investment in equitable education, these practical barriers will continue to undermine the effectiveness of inclusive teaching in TESOL.

The journey toward truly inclusive TESOL classrooms is fraught with significant challenges. Institutional rigidity, insufficient teacher training, implicit biases, and practical constraints all contribute to the gap between inclusive ideals and on-the-ground realities. However, recognizing these barriers is a crucial step in overcoming them. By addressing systemic issues, investing in teacher preparation, fostering critical self-awareness, and advocating for equitable educational policies, educators and institutions can begin to close the gap and create language learning environments that honour and support all students.

6. Inclusive Strategies in TESOL

Implementing inclusive strategies in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) is essential for creating equitable learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of students. These strategies not only enhance language acquisition but also foster a sense of belonging and respect for all learners. Below, we explore four key inclusive strategies: Differentiated Instruction, Translanguaging, Inclusive Materials and Content, and Collaboration and Community Engagement.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated Instruction (DI) is a pedagogical approach that tailors teaching methods, resources, and assessments to accommodate the varying readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles of students. Carol Ann Tomlinson (2001) emphasizes that DI involves proactive planning, flexible grouping, and ongoing assessment to meet the diverse needs of learners.

In multilingual classrooms, DI is particularly effective as it recognizes and values the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students. For instance, teachers can modify content by providing texts at varying levels of complexity, use diverse instructional strategies such as visual aids and hands-on activities, and offer multiple assessment options to allow students to demonstrate their understanding in different ways.

Implementing DI requires teachers to be flexible and responsive to the needs of their students. This may involve adjusting lesson plans on the fly, providing additional support to students who need it, and creating a classroom environment that encourages risk-taking and values diverse perspectives. By doing so, teachers can create an inclusive learning environment where all students can succeed.

Translanguaging

Translanguaging refers to the practice of using all of a bilingual speaker's linguistic resources in a fluid and dynamic manner to make meaning and communicate effectively. García and Wei (2014) argue that translanguaging challenges traditional notions of language separation and promotes a more holistic view of bilingualism.

In TESOL contexts, translanguaging allows students to draw upon their home languages alongside English, facilitating comprehension and expression. For example, students might discuss a topic in their first language before presenting their ideas in English or use bilingual dictionaries and peer support to navigate challenging texts.

Translanguaging not only aids in language acquisition but also affirms students' identities and cultural backgrounds. It shifts the focus from viewing students' home languages as barriers to recognizing them as assets that enrich the learning environment. By embracing translanguaging, TESOL educators can create more inclusive classrooms that honor linguistic diversity and promote deeper learning.

Inclusive Materials and Content

The materials and content used in TESOL classrooms play a significant role in promoting inclusivity. Sonia Nieto (2010) emphasizes the importance of selecting texts and resources that reflect the diverse cultures, experiences, and perspectives of students. Inclusive materials not only engage students but also validate their identities and experiences.

For instance, incorporating literature, history, and media from a variety of cultural contexts can help students see themselves represented in the curriculum. Additionally, materials that address themes of social justice, equity, and inclusion can foster critical thinking and discussions about diversity and belonging.

Teachers can also adapt existing materials to make them more inclusive by modifying language, adding context, or providing additional resources to support understanding. By carefully selecting and adapting materials, TESOL educators can create a curriculum that is both engaging and inclusive, supporting all students in their language learning journey.

Collaboration and Community Engagement

Building partnerships with families, communities, and other stakeholders is crucial for fostering inclusivity in TESOL settings. Auerbach (1995) highlights the importance of collaboration between schools and communities to support English language learners.

Engaging families in the educational process can provide valuable insights into students' backgrounds, strengths, and needs. For example, teachers can invite parents to share cultural traditions, assist with language support, or participate in classroom activities. Such involvement not only enriches the learning experience but also strengthens the home-school connection.

Community engagement extends beyond the classroom and can include partnerships with local organizations, cultural centres, and other institutions that can provide additional resources and support for students. By working together, educators and community members can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for English language learners.

Implementing inclusive strategies in TESOL is essential for creating equitable and supportive learning environments. By embracing Differentiated Instruction, Translanguaging, Inclusive Materials and Content, and Collaboration and Community Engagement, educators can address the diverse needs of their students and promote a sense of belonging and respect. These strategies not only enhance language

acquisition but also contribute to the overall development of students as confident and competent individuals in a multicultural society.

7. Conclusion

The growing diversity in TESOL classrooms calls for a shift in how language education is approached. As this literature review demonstrates, inclusiveness in TESOL is not just a theoretical concept but a critical necessity for fostering equitable and meaningful learning experiences for all students. By embracing inclusive practices, TESOL educators can create environments that not only improve language acquisition but also empower students, validate their identities, and contribute to the development of a more just society.

However, creating truly inclusive classrooms is far from straightforward. As explored in this review, educators face numerous challenges, including institutional barriers, lack of teacher preparedness, implicit biases, and practical constraints. These challenges, while significant, can be addressed through systemic changes, targeted professional development, and a commitment to equity. Theories such as Culturally Responsive Teaching, Funds of Knowledge, and Sociocultural Theory provide vital insights into how educators can move beyond traditional language instruction and engage with the cultural, social, and linguistic dimensions of their students' lives. These frameworks highlight that language education is deeply intertwined with issues of power, identity, and culture, requiring educators to adapt their teaching practices to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of all learners.

In practice, adopting inclusive strategies such as Differentiated Instruction, Translanguaging, and using Inclusive Materials and Content can help bridge the gap between ideal and reality. These strategies ensure that students' diverse needs are met, and that their linguistic and cultural backgrounds are valued. Collaboration with families and communities further enhances inclusivity, providing learners with a broader support system and enriching the classroom experience.

To move forward, it is essential that TESOL educators receive ongoing training in inclusive pedagogies and are given the autonomy to adapt their instruction to the needs of diverse learners. Schools and educational institutions must support teachers by providing adequate resources, fostering professional growth opportunities, and creating policies that prioritize inclusivity. Additionally, teachers must engage in self-reflection to recognize and address their own biases, ensuring that all students are afforded equal opportunities to succeed.

In conclusion, the journey toward more inclusive TESOL classrooms requires a concerted effort from educators, institutions, and policymakers. By embracing inclusivity as a core principle of language teaching, TESOL professionals can help ensure that all students—regardless of their background—have the tools, support, and opportunities to thrive in their academic and social lives.

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