INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGIES & PRACTICES OF ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES (EAP) IN HIGHER EDUCATION (HE): A FOCUS GROUP STUDY

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Abstract: This study investigates inclusive pedagogies and practices in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) within higher education (HE), addressing a critical gap in existing literature. Funded by BALEAP, the research employs a qualitative sequential exploratory design, incorporating nominal group technique and focus group discussions to capture diverse stakeholder perspectives. The study identifies key themes across micro, meso, and macro levels, providing comprehensive insights into best practices for fostering inclusive EAP teaching. At the micro level, recommendations include redefining needs analysis, implementing differentiated assignment briefs, challenging linguistic and cultural stereotypes, and promoting reflexivity among educators. Meso-level strategies emphasise decolonising the curriculum, integrating EAP into disciplinary courses, enhancing collaboration between EAP and subject-specialist tutors, and investing in continuous professional development. At the macro level, the study highlights the necessity of providing additional resources, fostering top-down collaborations, and introducing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives. The findings underscore the importance of coordinated efforts among educators, institutions, and policymakers to advance inclusive teaching practices in EAP. This research contributes significantly to the discourse on inclusive education by offering actionable recommendations for enhancing the inclusivity of EAP programs in HE, ultimately aiming to create a more equitable and supportive learning environment for diverse student populations. The study's robust methodological approach and diverse participant representation ensure the reliability and relevance of its conclusions, paving the way for future research and policy development in this crucial area of higher education.

Keywords: Inclusive teaching, English for Academic Purposes, Higher Education, BALEAP

Introduction

Background

In higher education, the growing recognition of inclusion as a critical quality indicator marks a pivotal shift in global educational strategies, enhancing institutions' reputations and societal integration. This evolution is reflected in the escalating international focus on incorporating inclusion into educational agendas, underscoring its significance not only for individual benefits but also for its broader societal implications (Redpath et al., 2013; Baltaru, 2020).

Efforts to define inclusion have been influenced by diverse contextual factors, encompassing the promotion of gender equality, diversification of campuses, and better accessibility for marginalised or disabled students. However, the historical focus primarily on students with disabilities is expanding to a broader understanding (Tienda, 2013; O'Shea et al., 2016; Moriña, 2017; Collins et al., 2019).

A transformative perspective has recently emerged, challenging the traditional view of inclusive education as primarily for marginalised groups. This new trend advocates for inclusive education as a continuous, transformative process, shifting from a deficit-focused approach to enhancing effective practices that engage all students (Opertti & Zhang, 2014; Phasha & Dei, 2017). This transformation aims to increase active participation and engagement among the entire student body (Martins et al., 2018).

Despite widespread agreement on the necessity of developing robust quality indicators for implementing inclusive education, challenges remain in defining and understanding inclusion (Ainscow 2020). The ongoing debate and lack of clarity in the academic and practical realms highlight the need for consistent, effective approaches to inclusive teaching that transcends merely increasing student numbers, focusing instead on educational quality, scrutinising teaching practices, intended learning outcomes, and student experiences. This ongoing evolution illustrates the complexity and crucial nature of fostering inclusive environments in higher education settings.

Aim

This paper reports on findings from a wide scale research project, funded by BALEAP - The Global Forum of EAP Professionals, designed to address and explore inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to critically explore recommended approaches to promoting inclusive education from a range of key stakeholders involved in the teaching and learning of EAP in HE (including but not limited to subject tutors, course/programme leads, learning developers, academic skills advisors, coordinators, and directors).

Methods

Design

This qualitative follow-up study employed a sequential exploratory approach to delve into the complexities of inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). The study design combined nominal group technique, capturing diverse individual perspectives on inclusive teaching strategies, challenges, and innovative approaches from a range of stakeholders and focus group discussions, leveraging the collective dynamic to validate, refine, and amplify these individual perspectives (Varga-Atkins et al., 2017). This sequential approach allowed for a layered exploration, starting from individual reflections, and culminating in group interactions, fostering a comprehensive understanding of inclusive teaching practices within the higher education context.

Sampling and Recruitment

Participants were purposively selected based on the responses provided in the online qualitative survey (Bakogiannis & Papavasiliou, 2023), ensuring improved methodological rigour and trustworthiness through a diverse representation of stakeholders within the higher education

landscape (Campbell et al., 2020). The sampling strategy aimed to encompass a range of roles, including faculty members, administrators, and students, with varying years of experience across institutions within the UK and abroad. Through purposive sampling, efforts were made to include individuals who demonstrated rich experiences and insights regarding inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE, thus ensuring a comprehensive representation of perspectives. This approach aimed to capture a broad spectrum of voices, experiences, and expertise, enhancing the study's depth and breadth regarding inclusive teaching practices in higher education within diverse institutional contexts.

Ethical Approval

The study protocol, participant information and consent procedures were approved by the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Law Research Ethics Committee of Teesside University, UK [Reference No: 7080, March 2022].

Data collection

The study employed distinct yet complementary data collection methods combining nominal group technique and focus group discussions to gather comprehensive insights into inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE. The nominal group technique, a structured brainstorming approach, involves gathering individual input through a systematic and controlled process (Harvey et al., 2012). It employs anonymity to generate a wide array of ideas without group influence, allowing participants to contribute freely and independently. The rationale for incorporating nominal technique lies in its capacity to capture diverse individual perspectives on inclusive teaching practices. It facilitates the identification of a broad range of viewpoints, concerns, and suggestions from participants, providing rich qualitative data that can serve as a foundational framework for subsequent discussions and analyses (Harvey et al., 2012).

In conjunction with the nominal technique, focus group discussions were utilised to deepen the exploration of inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE (Gundumogula & Gundumogula, 2020). These discussions brought participants together in a group setting, fostering interactions that enabled the exchange, elaboration, and validation of ideas shared during the nominal technique session. The rationale for integrating focus group discussions lies in their ability to amplify individual perspectives through group dynamics, allowing for the exploration of shared experiences, debates, and nuanced insights (Varga-Atkins et al., 2017). These discussions enabled the validation of findings, identification of common themes, and elucidation of divergent viewpoints, offering a holistic understanding of the complexities and nuances surrounding inclusive teaching practices within the higher education context. The combination of these methods harnessed the strengths of both individual reflection (nominal technique) and collective interaction (focus group discussions), facilitating a comprehensive exploration of inclusive teaching practices.

Two online events/workshops ran via MS Teams comprising 6 participants and lasting for 90 minutes each. Each workshop was structured as follows: For the Nominal Group Technique, two questions were posed to the participants. The first question aimed to elicit individual written responses from each participant, which were copied from the MS Teams chat box on to a word document and made visible to all to read. The second question prompted participants to read all responses and prioritise them in order of importance. In the focus groups discussions that followed, the moderator asked an introductory open-ended question which prompted an in-depth discussion of ideas and opinions. Open-ended prompt questions were used when required for further probing and clarification. The workshops were video recorded with participants permission and recordings were transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using an inductive approach to thematic content analysis (Straus & Corbin, 1990), allowing for the exploration of patterns, themes, and insights emerging directly from the data without imposing preconceived categories. The process began with familiarisation, involving multiple readings of the transcripts to immerse in the data. Following this, initial codes were generated, systematically identifying meaningful segments related to inclusive teaching practices across the dataset. Subsequently, these codes were organised into potential themes, iteratively refined through constant comparison and groupings of similar codes (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). The inductive approach was chosen for its flexibility in allowing themes to emerge organically from the data, enabling a nuanced understanding of the diverse perspectives, experiences, and challenges expressed by participants (Terry et al., 2017). This method facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the richness and complexity within the dataset, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in participants' narratives and fostering a deeper understanding of inclusive teaching practices within the higher education context.

The comprehensive and detailed description of this study, including aims/objectives, methodology, and ethical considerations, can be accessed in the published research protocol (Bakogiannis & Papavasiliou, 2023). The protocol provides a thorough outline of the study's design, data collection methods, analysis procedures, and ethical approval processes, offering an in-depth resource for understanding the study's framework and procedures.

To increase trustworthiness, an audit trail was catalogued, to monitor and retain a record of techniques used throughout the data analysis process. To ensure explicit and comprehensive reporting, the COREQ (Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research) checklist was used (Tong et al., 2007). Carefully chosen illustrative quotes were purposively selected from the qualitative data to highlight both convergence and divergence in reported perspectives, showcasing patterns, similarities, and differences among participant viewpoints. These quotes have been thoughtfully edited, where necessary, to enhance readability without compromising the essence of the original expressions, ensuring clarity and accessibility while preserving the authenticity of the participants' voices.

Results

A series of key themes pertaining to approaches to promoting inclusive teaching practices (recommendations for best practice) emerged, falling under three overarching thematic areas (individual or micro level recommendations, departmental or meso level recommendations, and institutional or macro level recommendations), forming the foundational elements for constructing a results framework. This framework, visually depicted in Table 1, succinctly captures, and organises the identified themes, offering a structured representation of the qualitative findings for a comprehensive understanding of inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE.

Table 1: Results Framework - Approaches to promoting Inclusive Teaching Practices of EAP in HE across levels.

LEVEL	APPROACH	DESCRIPTION
Individual/ Micro	Redefining Needs Analysis	Utilising a comprehensive needs analysis that goes beyond traditional criteria to account for diverse learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and accessibility requirements.
	Implementing Differentiated Assignment Briefs	Developing assignment briefs that allow for multiple pathways to success, accommodating various learning preferences, abilities, and backgrounds.
	Creating an Environment challenging Linguistic and Cultural Stereotypes	Fostering a classroom environment that actively challenges stereotypes and biases related to language, culture, ethnicity, and other aspects of diversity.
	Promoting Reflexivity	Encouraging self-awareness and reflection among educators to continuously examine and adapt their teaching methods, considering the impact on diverse student populations.
Departmental/ Meso	Decolonising the Curriculum	Reviewing and redesigning the curriculum to include diverse perspectives, voices, and contributions, challenging Eurocentric biases and promoting global inclusivity.
	Integrating EAP into the Disciplines	Embedding English for Academic Purposes (EAP) skills seamlessly within subject-specific courses, helping students acquire language skills relevant to their academic field.
	Promoting Collaboration between EAP and Subject-Specialists	Facilitating communication and collaboration between EAP instructors and subject-specialists to ensure language support aligns with the specific needs of each discipline.
	Investing in Staff Training and Continuous Professional Development	Allocating resources for ongoing training and development programs that enhance educators' awareness of inclusive practices, diverse learning needs, and cultural competency.
Institutional/ Macro	Providing Additional Time and Resources	Allocating extra time and resources to educators for the development and implementation of inclusive teaching practices, acknowledging the extra effort involved.
	Fostering Top-Down Collaborations	Encouraging collaboration between institutional leaders, administrators, and educators to create a unified, top-down approach to inclusivity, ensuring institutional policies support diversity.
	Introducing EDI and Social Justice Initiatives	Implementing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives and social justice programs that address systemic inequalities, promote awareness, and actively work towards a more inclusive campus.

Level: Specifies the level at which the inclusive teaching approach is implemented; **Approach:** Describes the specific inclusive teaching approach being discussed; **Brief Description:** Provides a concise overview of each approach and how it contributes to promoting inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE.

At an individual or micro level, four main themes were identified including redefining needs analysis, implementing differentiated briefs, challenging stereotypes, and promoting reflexivity. Illustrative quotes for each theme can be found in Table 1.

Redefining needs analysis in EAP courses within HE was widely discussed, with a shift from standardised approaches to more individualised and contextualised understanding of students' linguistic and academic requirements being particularly highlighted. This would entail comprehensive assessments that consider not only language proficiency but also cultural backgrounds, prior educational experiences, and specific academic goals. Also, by conducting diagnostic assessments at the onset of courses, tutors can identify students' diverse needs, enabling tailored instructional strategies. One of the key recommendations put forward included utilising adaptive assessment tools that accommodate different learning styles and language proficiencies. Additionally, providing individualised support plans based on these assessments can address specific language challenges, enhancing inclusivity by meeting students at their respective learning levels.

Implementing differentiated assignment briefs was also voiced as a critical approach to promoting inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE. This would involve crafting tasks that offer flexibility and accommodate various linguistic abilities and learning styles, requiring tutors to design assignments that allow students to showcase their skills while considering diverse linguistic backgrounds. To foster inclusivity in this context a series of recommendations were raised including developing assignment briefs with clear, adaptable instructions that allow for multiple interpretations or approaches, providing options within assignments, such as different formats for responses or varied topics aligned with student interests, and offer scaffolded support and guidance throughout the task completion process to ensure that all students, regardless of their language proficiency, can engage meaningfully with the coursework.

Creating an environment that challenges linguistic and cultural stereotypes was perceived to be pivotal in promoting inclusivity within EAP classrooms. This would involve incorporating diverse perspectives, narratives, and examples into coursework to challenge biases. Recommendations include promoting open discussions that encourage cultural exchange, mutual respect, and understanding among students. Encouraging critical thinking about stereotypes through readings, discussions, and assignments can dismantle misconceptions and cultivate a more inclusive atmosphere. Emphasising the value of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds within the classroom enriches the learning experience and empowers students to embrace their identities while appreciating others'.

Finally, the crucial role of reflexivity in promoting inclusive teaching practices, when applied as a critical approach, was highlighted. It was largely discussed that, in the context of EAP, tutors need to be aware of their own biases, assumptions, and cultural perspectives, and continuously reflect on how these may impact their teaching. This self-awareness would enable tutors to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that caters to diverse linguistic backgrounds and learning styles. In practice, this might involve incorporating varied instructional methods, providing additional language support, and embracing culturally responsive pedagogies. Moreover, fostering open communication channels with students allows for a better understanding of their unique needs, with recommended practices in reflexive teaching including ongoing professional development, engaging in peer collaboration, and seeking feedback from students.

Table 2: Illustrative quotes for themes identified at individual or micro level

THEME	QUOTE
Redefining Needs Analysis	"So last year we tried to kind of co-design or co-construct the syllabus with students and every two weeks we just kind of stopped we reflected on what we've covered in the previous two weeks, and we looked ahead at the proposed syllabus and students got back to us and they said no, we think we've had enough of that. We think we need more of this. So that kind of needs analysis seemed to work quite well". BP2 (432-437)
Implementing Differentiated Assignment Briefs	"That's why it is that thing about discourse, because I think a lot of the, what could be easy wins which you know using the VLE effectively, thinking about how you present in information in the class, thinking about how you're setting up tasks, how you're clarifying tasks, how you're making it clear, how you gonna assess those tasks" AP5 (549-553)
Creating an Environment challenging Linguistic and Cultural Stereotypes	"Obviously the teachers do need to make a bit of an effort to, I suppose, attempt to pronounce it so that they don't feel awkward because then the other thing they said is, you know, teachers make such a fuss about how difficult our names are. And that makes us feel worse" BP1 (671-674)
Promoting Reflexivity	"So, I did actually make a research project for me and two other colleagues earlier this year and we used collaborative autoethnography to reflect. So, we basically reflected after our sessions and it was how we're creating safe spaces for students like physically, emotionally, and pedagogically" AP3 (784-787)

When it comes to a departmental or meso level, four main themes were also identified including decolonising the curriculum, embedding EAP into the disciplines, promoting collaboration between EAP tutors and Subject-specialists, and investing in staff training. Illustrative quotes for each theme can be found in Table 2.

To start with, decolonising the curriculum within higher education institutions was largely commented on as an approach to addresses inclusivity by broadening the representation of perspectives and knowledge systems. This would involve critically reviewing and diversifying course content, including readings, case studies, and assessments, to encompass a wider range of cultural and linguistic experiences. Various recommendations for best practice were put forward including collaborating with diverse stakeholders to identify gaps in the curriculum and introduce texts, authors, and concepts that reflect a more inclusive and global perspective and encouraging critical discussions that challenge dominant narratives and foster appreciation for diverse viewpoints aiding to create an inclusive learning environment that values multiple forms of knowledge.

Special emphasis was placed upon integrating EAP methodologies and support directly into disciplinary courses aimed at merging language support with subject-specific content, enhancing students' language proficiency within the context of their academic disciplines. This would include creating collaborations between EAP tutors and discipline-specific staff to design modules that integrate language learning strategies into the curriculum. Staff development programs focusing on language-sensitive teaching methodologies can equip subject tutors to incorporate language support seamlessly into their courses. Furthermore, establishing interdisciplinary teams that develop and assess these integrated modules ensures a cohesive and effective approach, ultimately benefiting students by bridging language gaps within disciplinary learning.

Beyond the context of integration, promoting collaboration between EAP and subject-specific tutors was also independently and more thoroughly discussed as an approach to promote inclusive education. This would involve establishing platforms for ongoing dialogue and joint

planning between EAP specialists and subject-area tutors. Some of the proposed recommendations put forwarded included organising regular meetings or workshops where tutors from both domains collaborate on designing inclusive pedagogical strategies that integrate language support within subject-specific content. Implementing shared resources and communication channels between EAP programs and disciplinary departments facilitates a coordinated approach, ensuring that language learning and subject mastery are complementary, ultimately benefiting students' academic success.

Another approach to promoting inclusive education that was particularly emphasised was the need for investing in staff training and professional development programs at the departmental level to ensure that staff are equipped with the tools to effectively implement inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE. This would involve offering comprehensive training sessions focusing on inclusive pedagogy, cultural competency, and language-sensitive teaching methodologies. To this end, recommended approaches included organising workshops, seminars, and mentoring programs that emphasise strategies for supporting diverse student populations, understanding cultural nuances, and implementing inclusive assessment practices within disciplinary contexts, as well as incorporating ongoing support mechanisms such as peer learning communities and mentorship programs that enable continuous learning and exchange of best practices among staff, contributing to a more inclusive learning environment.

Table 3: Illustrative quotes for themes identified at departmental or meso level.

THEME	QUOTE
Decolonising the Curriculum	"Before we can decolonise the curriculum and assessments you have to decolonise ourselves and our own assumptions and kind of really dig deep into what we think, why we think it and where these beliefs have come from before we could really think about changing anything. So, for me it's awareness". BP1 (209-213)
Integrating EAP into the Disciplines	"So, I think that the idea of raising awareness amongst lecturers, talking about lecturers of different disciplines is important. I think one thing that we find is, if we can only feed into the existing structures that lecturers are going into in terms of their CPD. AP6 (585-592)
Promoting Collaboration between EAP and Subject-Specialists	"There's also, what we're trying to implement is that as a team of people that we build relationships with the specific department. So that one individual over the period of a couple of years gets to know that department, or two people get to know that department well so that in, in a sense, the support becomes more bespoke" AP5 (664-667).
Investing in Staff Training and Continuous Professional Development	"So, one thing we've done now is developed a workshop on international classrooms and the principles of teaching in diverse classrooms where diversity is a resource rather than seen as a threat. And we run those four times a year within the HEA teaching fellowship structure, which means we reach people we wouldn't normally reach, probably because they're not always people who would, because there's certain people who would choose for that kind of workshop, you know, because that's where they're interest lies. But they're not necessarily the people you need to reach because they're already the converted people, as it were. And so, if there's a way into those kind of structures in your institution so that you can contribute to conversations without creating an extra time load for those lecturers, I think that's very that's very beneficial. It's not easily done because it's taken me 2 years to get to the point where I'm delivering 4 sessions a year" AP6 (588-600)

Finally, at an institutional or macro level, three main themes were identified including providing extra time and resources, fostering top-down collaborations, and introducing EDI and Social Justice initiatives. Illustrative quotes for each theme can be found in Table 3.

Providing extra time and resources at an institutional or macro level was highlighted as a strategic and proactive approach to promoting inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE. This would involve allocating additional time for assignments, exams, and coursework, institutions can accommodate students with varying needs, including those who may require extra time due to learning disabilities, language barriers, or other challenges and providing supplemental resources,

such as tutoring services, language support programs, and assistive technologies, enhances accessibility and levels the playing field for all students. This comprehensive approach would not only address the individual needs of learners but also promote a culture of inclusivity and diversity within the institution aligning with the broader goals of creating an equitable learning environment and preparing students for success in an increasingly diverse and globalised academic landscape, contributing to the development of a more socially responsible and responsive educational system.

Another, highly commented, critical strategy for advancing inclusivity in HE had to do with fostering top-down collaborations. This would ensure that inclusive teaching practices are embedded in institutional policies, strategic plans, and professional development initiatives, also encouraging the alignment of curriculum, assessment methods, and educational resources with the goal of meeting the diverse needs of students. This top-down approach was viewed as essential to facilitate the establishment of institutional structures that support inclusive teaching, such as dedicated support services and staff training programs, sending a powerful message of inclusivity throughout the institution. It was also discussed that to be able to successfully implement top-down collaborations, institutions need to demonstrate a commitment to promoting inclusive education, fostering partnerships with educational policymakers, accreditation and regulatory bodies beyond the institutional level to enable the development of policies that support the integration of inclusive practices within educational frameworks which would be then cascaded through the academic community, reaching from senior management teams to faculty, administrative staff, tutors, and students.

Fostering top-down collaborations was complemented by introducing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and social justice initiatives at the macro level involves infusing these principles into overarching educational policies and frameworks. This would involve a re-evaluation of educational policies to embed EDI principles within the fabric of higher education systems. Some of the main recommendations put forward included advocating for policies that prioritise diverse representation in academic materials, faculty recruitment, and program development. Additionally, incorporating social justice themes and perspectives across EAP curriculum and assessments was perceived to foster critical thinking and awareness of societal issues, contributing to a more inclusive learning environment. Encouraging research funding and grants for projects focused on EDI in EAP and supporting initiatives that promote social justice within higher education institutions was underlined as a key contributing factor to advancing inclusive teaching practices at the institutional level.

Table 4: Illustrative quotes for themes identified at institutional or macro level.

THEME	QUOTE
Providing Additional Time and Resources	"It's not going to be effective in 1 1/2 hours per week. You need someone on a full-time contract dedicated to your department and working with your students" AP1 (653-655) "There should be budget and the budget should be made visible in terms of time. And that's the struggle, isn't it? That very often that's the step which doesn't happen, so think that's where it's really important to find ways of integrating what you do, let's say, bottom up, isn't it into what is coming down and very often there's a gap between what's, what sort of coming down from those top levels and what and what's feeding up and what's feeding up" AP6 (895-900)
Fostering Top-Down Collaborations	"So, it's not just in the classroom, but it's also in the whole institution, there needs to be a feeling that that people can speak out, people can kind of make those requests to change things to fit student's needs... sometimes students might come to you and ask for changes to this or that. Please always feel free to come and ask the question. It may not be possible to change something, but please always feel you know free and welcome to come and ask us about this, and we'll take it on a case-by-case basis. BP5 (841-850)
Introducing EDI and Social Justice Initiatives	"that's something that I've had to do recently as a personal tutor write emails, chasing departments that are not getting back to some of my tutees or helping them make complaints as well. And I think a lot of these problems, structural problems are, I think they boil down to finance and kind of lack of resource" BP3 (624-627)

Discussion

Summary of main findings

This study suggests that implementing inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE involves considering a series of approaches/recommendations across micro, meso, and macro levels, with implications spanning research, policy, and practice. At the micro-level, promoting inclusivity involves focusing on classroom strategies, curriculum design, and individual teaching practices. Staff development programs are crucial for implementing these approaches, emphasising inclusive pedagogies, personalised support, and the creation of diverse learning materials. Empowering tutors to implement inclusive practices is highlighted at this level. Moving to the meso-level, recommendations extend beyond individual classrooms highlighting the need to decolonise the curriculum by critically reviewing and diversifying course content, collaborating with diverse stakeholders to identify gaps, and fostering critical discussions challenging dominant narratives. Integration of EAP methodologies directly into disciplinary courses is stressed, advocating for collaborations between EAP tutors and discipline-specific staff through regular meetings or workshops, shared resources, and communication channels to ensure a coordinated approach. Additionally, investing in staff training and professional development at the departmental level is crucial, involving comprehensive sessions on inclusive pedagogy, cultural competency, and language-sensitive teaching methodologies. Finally, at the macro-level, recommendations call for systemic changes in educational policies, accreditation standards, and resource allocation to support inclusivity in higher education. Engaging with educational policymakers is essential to advocate for systemic changes developing inclusive policies, diversity initiatives, and practices that prioritise staff diversity to promote inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE.

Comparison with existing literature

This study reinforces what the literature on inclusive teaching practices within the broader context of education or higher education has already established. At an individual level, the study advocates for redefined needs analyses and personalised assessments that consider diverse student backgrounds in terms of language proficiency and cultural context (Bourke and Mentis, 2014; Lindner and Schwab, 2020). These tailored approaches ensure that educational strategies are not one-size-fits-all but instead are sensitive to the unique challenges and strengths of each student. Such strategies align with educational psychology's push for adaptive tools that cater to varied learning styles (Westwood, 2018; Mihovska et al., 2021), which is essential for maximising student engagement and learning outcomes. For instance, by using adaptive learning technologies, educators can provide customised learning experiences that address individual student needs more effectively.

Additionally, the study underscores the importance of differentiated assignment briefs based on principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiated instruction (Garcia-Campos et al., 2018; Sanger, 2020; Gheyssens et al., 2022). UDL principles advocate for creating flexible learning environments that accommodate diverse learning needs, which is crucial for fostering an inclusive educational setting. Differentiated instruction further supports this by allowing educators to modify their teaching methods and materials to meet the diverse needs of their students. Promoting equitable access through these methods helps ensure that all students, regardless of their linguistic or cultural background, have the opportunity to succeed. Moreover, this approach challenges linguistic and cultural stereotypes, fostering a more inclusive and respectful learning environment (Juvonen et al., 2019). This is particularly important in multicultural classrooms where students may feel marginalised or misunderstood. By implementing these inclusive practices, educators can create a supportive environment that values and celebrates diversity, thereby enhancing the educational experience for all students.

At the departmental level, the research has identified key strategies such as decolonising the curriculum (Walton, 2018; Meda, 2019) and integrating EAP methodologies with disciplinary courses (Maldoni and Lear, 2016; Malone et al. 2020; Tan & Scott, 2021). Decolonising the

curriculum involves critically reassessing and revising educational content to ensure that it includes diverse perspectives, particularly those that have been historically marginalised. This process helps students develop a more comprehensive understanding of their subjects, promotes critical thinking, and fosters a sense of belonging among students from diverse backgrounds. Integrating EAP methodologies with disciplinary courses, on the other hand, ensures that language instruction is not treated as a separate entity but is embedded within the context of specific academic disciplines. This approach helps students to apply language skills directly to their field of study, enhancing their ability to understand and produce discipline-specific texts and improving their overall academic performance.

These strategies reflect an emerging recognition of the need for broader representation and collaboration between EAP specialists and subject tutors (Li, 2021; Alhassan et al., 2021). Such collaboration is essential for creating a cohesive learning environment where language skills and subject knowledge are developed in tandem, thereby bridging the gap between language proficiency and academic achievement. By working together, EAP specialists and subject tutors can design curricula that are both linguistically accessible and academically rigorous, ensuring that all students have the tools they need to succeed. Furthermore, the emphasis on staff training and professional development supports these initiatives by ensuring that educators are equipped with the latest pedagogical skills and cultural competencies (Holmqvist & Lelinge, 2021; Ng'andu, 2023). Continuous professional development helps educators stay informed about new teaching methods and understand the cultural contexts of their students, thereby fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment. This, in turn, helps to create a more equitable educational system where diversity is valued, and all students can achieve their full potential.

Finally, at the institutional level, the study highlights the critical role of allocating additional resources and fostering top-down collaborations to advance inclusive teaching practices in EAP. This includes embedding inclusive practices within institutional policies and collaborating with educational policymakers to ensure comprehensive support for diversity and equity (May & Bridger, 2010; Kelly and Padden, 2018; Horrod, 2020; Salmi & D'Addio, 2020). By integrating these practices into the core policies of educational institutions, administrators can create a supportive framework that encourages and sustains inclusive teaching methods. This might involve providing funding for professional development programs, creating inclusive teaching resources, and establishing dedicated support services for both students and educators. Moreover, fostering top-down collaborations ensures that these inclusive initiatives are prioritised and adequately resourced, enhancing their impact and sustainability.

Moreover, the push for equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives reflects a broader commitment to social justice in education, fostering an academic culture that is reflective of societal diversity and responsive to its needs (Howard et al., 2022; Ramlackhan & Catania, 2022; Watson et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2024). This strategic approach not only addresses the immediate needs of students but also prepares them for success in a diverse and globalised world. By promoting EDI, institutions help to cultivate an environment where all students, regardless of their backgrounds, have equal opportunities to succeed. This includes creating policies that support underrepresented groups, implementing mentorship programs, and ensuring that curricula reflect diverse perspectives. Such efforts contribute to an academic culture that values and leverages diversity as a strength, thereby preparing students to navigate and contribute positively to a multicultural and interconnected world. This holistic approach to inclusion not only enhances the educational experience but also fosters a more equitable and just society.

Strengths and Limitations

This study exhibits several strengths. Firstly, it is the first study to explore recommended approaches to fostering inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE, filling a significant research gap. Secondly, the study represents a crucial extension of a larger, well-funded BALEAP project dedicated to scrutinising inclusivity within EAP classrooms, thus benefiting from and contributing

to an established research framework (Bakogiannis & Papavasiliou, 2023). Methodologically, the study demonstrates robustness by combining the nominal group technique with focus group discussions, offering a nuanced and comprehensive exploration of inclusive teaching strategies. This innovative approach capitalises on the strengths of both methods, ensuring a thorough and insightful analysis (Varga-Atkins et al., 2017). Finally, one of the main study strengths lies in its inclusivity, as it addresses perspectives from a diverse range of key stakeholders involved in EAP across various roles, institutions, and experiences (Fisher et al., 2024).

While the combination of nominal group technique and focus group discussions offers valuable insights into inclusive teaching practices, it is not without limitations. To start with, the relatively small sample size, consisting of two focus groups with a total of 12 participants, may restrict the generalisability of findings to a broader population within the context of EAP in HE (Faber & Fonseca, 2014). To mitigate this, participants have been purposefully selected to represent diverse roles and experiences within EAP, allowing for a nuanced exploration of varied perspectives despite the limited sample size. Secondly, the reliance on qualitative methods, while rich in-depth information, may lack the statistical power to establish robust generalisable patterns (Prabhu, 2020). This concern was addressed through introducing a triangulation approach to qualitative findings, incorporating diverse qualitative data collection methods, thus enhancing the comprehensiveness of the study's findings (Dźwigoł & Dźwigoł-Barosz, 2020). Thirdly, the influence of group dynamics on individual opinions poses a challenge. Focus group settings might be susceptible to dominant personalities, conformity pressures, or groupthink, potentially skewing or homogenising the diversity of viewpoints expressed (Smithson, 2000). To counteract this, several techniques such as ensuring equitable participation, encouraging dissenting opinions, and employing member checking to validate interpretations were adopted. Finally, synthesising and integrating data from diverse sources can be methodologically challenging. Reconciling or merging findings from nominal technique sessions and focus groups might present complexities in interpretation, potentially affecting the coherence or consistency of the overall analysis (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009). To address this, a rigorous and transparent analytical framework was employed, with careful attention to maintaining the integrity of each method's unique contributions, ensuring a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the inclusive teaching practices in EAP within HE.

Implications for Research, Practice and Policy

The implementation of proposed recommendations to promote inclusive practices of EAP in HE at various levels carries significant implications for further research, practice enhancement, and policy development.

On an individual level, staff engagement in inclusive practices requires continuous support and professional development opportunities. Research could focus on understanding the effectiveness of specific inclusive teaching methods, considering diverse student needs, and learning styles. This individual-level research would contribute valuable insights into tailoring professional development initiatives for tutors, enhancing their ability to create inclusive learning environments.

At the departmental level, the implementation of inclusive practices calls for collaborative efforts and interdisciplinary research. Departments can establish communities of practice to share successful strategies and collectively explore discipline-specific approaches to inclusivity. Research initiatives may delve into the impact of inclusivity on specific academic disciplines, fostering a nuanced understanding of how various fields can tailor their practices to meet diverse student populations' needs. Such research can inform practice enhancement within departments and contribute to a broader understanding of inclusive practices in higher education.

On an institutional scale, policy development becomes crucial to institutionalise and sustain inclusive practices. Institutions should consider incorporating inclusive teaching expectations into faculty evaluations and recognition processes. Research at the institutional level

can assess the overall impact of inclusive practices on student success metrics, campus climate, and retention rates. Policymakers can draw on this research to craft comprehensive strategies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the broader context of EAP in HE. By aligning research findings with institutional policies and practices, higher education institutions can create a more inclusive learning environment that benefits students, staff, and the entire institution.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this qualitative study offers valuable insights into fostering inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE through a multifaceted approach spanning micro, meso, and macro levels. The collective perspectives shared by participants illuminated the significance of adopting inclusive strategies at the micro-level, emphasising individual classroom practices and pedagogical approaches tailored to diverse student populations. Moreover, the meso-level recommendations highlighted the pivotal role of institutional policies and support structures in creating an inclusive learning environment, advocating for inclusive campus initiatives and faculty diversification. Finally, the study underscored the necessity of advocating for systemic changes at the macro-level, emphasizing the importance of national policies and resource allocation to promote inclusivity across the higher education landscape. The synthesis of insights across these levels underscores the interconnectedness and necessity of coordinated efforts among educators, institutions, and policymakers to holistically advance inclusive teaching practices within higher education.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical implementations of inclusive teaching strategies within EAP in higher education. By exploring micro-level classroom dynamics, meso-level institutional support structures, and macro-level policy implications, this research endeavors to offer nuanced recommendations aimed at enhancing inclusivity in EAP classrooms. The findings from this study are anticipated to contribute substantially to the discourse on effective pedagogical practices, enabling tutors, institutions, and policymakers to develop tailored strategies that accommodate the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students engaged in EAP in HE.

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