



# Exploring inclusive teaching practices of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in higher education (HE): a systematic review and narrative synthesis

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## Abstract

This systematic review examines inclusive teaching practices of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in higher education (HE), a critical yet underexplored area for supporting international students that is often overlooked in broader discourses on equity and diversity. Conducted as part of a wide scale project, funded by BALEAP—The Global Forum for EAP Professionals, the review synthesises theoretical and empirical evidence to identify effective approaches and frameworks that enhance inclusivity in EAP education. Using a rigorous methodology, the review analyses studies across diverse contexts to uncover five key strategies: inclusive curriculum design that addresses diverse student needs, culturally responsive and social justice pedagogy fostering critical awareness, equitable assessment practices mitigating bias, intercultural communication strategies promoting collaboration, and decolonial and multilingual practices validating linguistic diversity. These strategies are anchored in robust frameworks such as intercultural competence, culturally responsive pedagogy, and decolonial theories, highlighting the transformative impact of inclusive education in EAP. The review highlights the need for actionable recommendations to translate these insights into practice to create supportive learning environments and promote equitable academic success. By guiding educators and policymakers, the findings offer a roadmap for advancing inclusive EAP practices, ensuring fair access and engagement for diverse student populations.

**Keywords** Inclusive teaching practices · English for academic purposes · Higher education

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## Introduction

### Background

Social justice is a multifaceted and evolving concept, frequently linked to principles of human rights and fairness (Bates, 2007). Central to social justice is the pursuit of equality, which is essential for fostering democratic societies, emphasising the fair and equitable allocation of resources, opportunities, and values within a community (Singh, 2011). In higher education (HE), the interplay between education and social justice is both profound and complex. Educational institutions simultaneously reflect and shape societal dynamics, making them critical spaces for advancing social justice ideals (Singh, 2011). This relationship is further strengthened through pedagogical approaches that prioritise inclusion and equity in learning environments (Osman et al., 2018).

Recent research has underscored the critical need for inclusive teaching and learning approaches in higher education (HE), with inclusion and equity emerging as dominant themes (Dewsbury & Brame, 2019; Shaeffer, 2019; Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021). This emphasis on inclusion is closely tied to the importance of widening participation and fostering academic cultures that respect and accommodate diverse learners (Bradley & Miller, 2010; Grace & Gravestock, 2009). Inclusive practices, also known as inclusive education, frame the learning experience around such diversity. They aim to foster environments that address and support diverse needs, promote equitable access to educational opportunities, and enhance student engagement and success (Equality Challenge Unit, 2013). These practices are essential in ensuring that all students can thrive in HE settings.

However, inclusivity itself is a complex and contested term that requires careful consideration. Rather than assuming a shared understanding of inclusivity, this study acknowledges that the concept is interpreted in varied ways, often shaped by social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Scholars have highlighted that inclusivity is not a fixed or universally agreed-upon notion but is instead fluid and evolving, reflecting broader ideological and pedagogical shifts (Ainscow, 2020; Krishler et al., 2019). In the context of EAP, inclusivity is particularly significant, as language education inherently involves power dynamics related to linguistic capital, access to knowledge, and academic gatekeeping (Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 2002).

Drawing on existing literature, inclusivity in this review refers not only to the equitable participation of all students in learning but also to the systemic changes needed to address linguistic, cultural, and academic barriers in EAP education (Mortenson, 2021, 2022). This study aligns with the perspective that inclusive education in EAP must go beyond mere accommodation or the provision of additional support; rather, it necessitates a critical re-examination of curriculum design, assessment practices, and institutional policies that may implicitly disadvantage certain groups of learners (Holliday, 2020; García & Li, 2014). Thus, inclusivity is understood as an ongoing process that challenges the status quo and seeks to create learning environments that are genuinely responsive to the diverse needs and identities of students.

Furthermore, it extends beyond simply widening access to education to encompass transformative practices that challenge traditional pedagogies and institutional biases (Kubota & Lin, 2006; Lin & Luke, 2006). Inclusive teaching practices in EAP must critically engage with issues of linguistic imperialism, the dominance of English as the academic lingua franca, and the marginalisation of non-dominant language varieties and academic traditions (Mizumura, 2015; Phillipson, 1992). By framing inclusivity within this

broader critical lens, this study underscores the importance of reimagining EAP pedagogy in ways that empower students from diverse backgrounds rather than merely assimilating them into pre-existing academic norms.

While inclusivity is widely recognised as a fundamental principle in education, it is not only understood in different ways but also enacted variably in practice, leading to challenges in implementation. Literature on TESOL has addressed issues like racism and settler colonialism (Kubota & Lin, 2006; Lin & Luke, 2006; Sterzuk & Hengen, 2019; Von Esch et al., 2020), but empirical evidence on inclusive practices in EAP is limited (Mortenson, 2021, 2022), highlighting the pressing need for further research and systematic investigation into inclusive EAP teaching practices to develop guidance that would translate into comprehensive and actionable recommendations for practice.

Additionally, the very premise of EAP as a discipline has been subject to critique in critical literacy and decolonial studies. Scholars argue that EAP often reinforces linguistic hierarchies by positioning a specific form of academic English as neutral, universal, and separate from the broader academic curriculum (Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 2002). This positioning has been challenged for perpetuating social injustices, as it assumes a deficit-based model where multilingual students must “catch up” to native English-speaking norms rather than acknowledging their linguistic repertoires as legitimate academic resources (Ortega, 2019; Li & Garcia, 2022). Thus, while this review focuses on inclusive teaching practices, it also acknowledges that inclusivity should be critically examined in relation to its potential to either disrupt or reinforce systemic inequalities in higher education.

## Context and rationale

This systematic review is part of a wide-scale research project aimed at “Exploring Inclusive Teaching Practices of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in Higher Education (HE)” (Bakogiannis & Papavasiliou, 2023). This project, funded by BALEAP—The Global Forum for EAP Professionals, under the *Enacting Social Justice in EAP Funding Scheme* launched in 2021, seeks to develop a framework of recommendations that will foster inclusivity in EAP classrooms, enhancing student engagement, improving learning outcomes, and contributing to overall academic success.

The review complements the two-phase empirical research already conducted within the project (Bakogiannis, 2025a). By synthesising existing literature, this review serves to triangulate findings and provide a robust evidence base for developing recommendations (Dźwigoł & Dźwigoł-Barosz, 2020). It aims to identify and analyse established approaches and frameworks that may not have surfaced during the empirical phases, further enriching the proposed framework. This integrative methodology ensures that the findings are comprehensive and applicable, offering valuable insights for fostering inclusive practices of EAP in HE.

Recognising the multifaceted nature of inclusivity, and in alignment with how the concept was framed in the wider project, this review adopts a broad and flexible approach to inclusive teaching practices in EAP. Rather than prescribing a rigid definition or prioritising specific conceptual lenses such as translanguaging, critical approaches, social justice, or diversity, this review examines how inclusivity and, more specifically, inclusive teaching practices are conceptualised across various studies. As highlighted in previous research, EAP students face distinct challenges related to linguistic proficiency, cultural adaptation, and academic literacy expectations,

necessitating targeted pedagogical strategies that extend beyond generic inclusivity measures (Mortenson, 2021). By maintaining a more encompassing perspective, this review ensures that the recommendations developed remain pedagogically sound, adaptable, and widely applicable across varied institutional and pedagogical contexts. Avoiding rigid theoretical frameworks allows for a more holistic and practice-oriented discussion of inclusivity, one that is responsive to the diverse and evolving realities of EAP education. In doing so, this broad framing positions inclusive teaching practices as actionable and context-sensitive, offering a meaningful foundation for educators and institutions to engage with inclusivity in ways that align with their unique educational environments and student needs.

Through a rigorous and comprehensive examination of the existing body of literature, this systematic review aims not only to address critical gaps in the conceptualisation and implementation of inclusivity within EAP but also contribute meaningfully to the advancement of inclusive EAP education, creating more equitable and supportive academic environments by aligning empirical findings with existing theoretical and practical knowledge. Furthermore, it acknowledges the distinction between social inclusion and social justice, recognising that while inclusion efforts often focus on assimilation into existing academic norms, a social justice perspective demands transformative change that challenges and restructures these norms (Tuck & Yang, 2018). Thus, this review advocates for inclusivity that is not merely integrative but critically engaged with decolonial and anti-oppressive pedagogies.

Evidence from this review will complement and guide the development of research-informed, evidence-based, and practical steps (*actionable recommendations*) for fostering inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE, representing the primary deliverable of the BALEAP-funded research project to which this systematic review contributes.

## Aims and questions

This systematic review has two primary aims: first, to identify and document the recommended approaches for fostering inclusivity in the EAP classroom, and second, to examine the theoretical frameworks that underpin the inclusive teaching practices of EAP within higher education settings. To achieve these aims, two main questions will be addressed, as follows:

- What are the recommended approaches for promoting inclusivity in the EAP classroom within higher education?
- What theoretical frameworks inform inclusive practices of EAP in higher education settings?

## Methods

The systematic review protocol, which outlines the objectives, rationale, review questions, methodology, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and analysis plan for the review, has been registered with the International Database of Education Systematic Reviews (IDESR) under the ID IDESR000149 (Bakogiannis & Papavasiliou, 2024).

## Research design

A systematic review methodology was employed to achieve a comprehensive, transparent, and reproducible synthesis of the existing literature on inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE. Unlike narrative reviews, which may be subject to selection bias and lack rigour in methodology, systematic reviews employ explicit criteria for searching, selecting, and appraising studies, minimising bias, and enhancing the reliability of findings (Higgins & Green, 2011). Additionally, while scoping reviews are useful for mapping broad topics and identifying gaps in research, they do not provide the detailed, critical analysis and synthesis that systematic reviews offer (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Meta-analyses, another review type, focus on statistically combining results from quantitative studies, which may not be applicable in fields dominated by qualitative research like this one (Egger et al., 1997). Therefore, a systematic review was considered the most suitable approach to rigorously evaluate the diverse body of evidence and produce the evidence required to support the development of a robust framework of actionable recommendations that could be utilised to enhance inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE.

## Philosophical positioning and research paradigm

While systematic reviews are commonly associated with positivist paradigms that emphasise objectivity and reliability, they are increasingly used in qualitative and critical research to synthesise conceptual developments and critically examine dominant discourses (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015). The rationale for employing a systematic review in this study is not to 'prove' that EAP must adopt inclusive pedagogies, but rather to analyse how inclusivity is framed in the existing literature and what theoretical and pedagogical implications arise from these discussions. This approach enables a structured engagement with the discourse surrounding inclusivity in EAP while maintaining the flexibility needed for critical interpretive inquiry.

From an ontological perspective, this review aligns with a critical interpretivist stance (Willis, 2007), acknowledging that teaching practices in EAP are not neutral but embedded within broader socio-political and historical frameworks that often privilege certain linguistic and cultural norms. By systematically mapping and analysing studies that critique exclusionary EAP practices and advocate for inclusive pedagogies, this review identifies dominant patterns and tensions within the literature. Although the study does not explicitly adopt a critical realist framework, it shares the recognition that empirical patterns in the literature can inform normative arguments—highlighting how existing teaching structures in EAP education create barriers for multilingual students and where alternative frameworks may foster more inclusive learning environments. This distinction is crucial in ensuring that the review does not make deterministic claims but instead offers a well-substantiated perspective that contributes to the ongoing discourse on inclusivity in EAP education.

Furthermore, this methodological approach allows the study to bridge the descriptive and the normative, addressing both "what is" in current EAP teaching practices and the broader implications of these findings. The systematic review does not seek to prescribe a singular, definitive model for inclusive teaching but rather to provide a structured and evidence-based critique that situates EAP pedagogical practices within a broader agenda of social justice in higher education. In doing so, this study extends beyond simple calls for inclusivity and critically examines how EAP teaching can evolve to challenge

assimilationist and monolingual ideologies, fostering greater equity for multilingual learners.

## Data sources

A comprehensive search strategy was utilised to identify relevant literature from a variety of sources. Five electronic databases were systematically searched including Education Research Complete, Education Abstracts, Educational Administration Abstracts, Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC), and Web of Science, to account for any papers published in journals outside the field of education. These platforms were purposively chosen for their extensive coverage of educational, linguistic, and social science research, ensuring that key studies within the field of EAP and inclusivity were captured. In addition to database searches, grey literature, retrieved through the Social Science Research Network (SSRN) Electronic Library and the Data Archiving and Network Services (DANS) EASY, was examined to include non-traditional sources that might offer valuable insights into the topic. The reference lists of included studies were also hand-searched to identify additional relevant publications, thereby minimising the risk of overlooking critical evidence. This multi-pronged strategy ensured the review incorporated a diverse range of perspectives, guaranteeing that no significant contributions to the field were excluded.

## Search strategy

In consultation with an academic librarian with expertise in systematic reviews, the search strategy was carefully designed and tested to balance comprehensiveness with specificity. Initial searches using narrowly focused terms, such as “recommended approaches” and “theoretical frameworks”, yielded limited results, prompting the adoption of a broader search string. The final search string included key terms reflecting the central domains of the review: “inclusive teaching practices”, “EAP”, and “higher education”. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to systematically combine these terms, facilitating the retrieval of studies addressing multiple facets of the research topic. The final search string was as follows: (“inclusive education” OR “inclusive teaching” OR “inclusive practices” OR “inclusive pedagogy”) AND (“English for Academic Purposes” OR EAP OR “academic English” OR “academic language skills”) AND (“higher education” OR “tertiary education” OR “university education”). This approach successfully captured a wide array of studies relevant to the review’s aims, ensuring that the resulting analysis was both robust and inclusive.

## Inclusion and exclusion criteria

A comprehensive set of predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied to guide the selection of studies for this systematic review. The review prioritised studies that involved primary research or reported on primary data, as these were considered essential for inclusion. Additionally, reviews, conceptual papers, and discussion papers were deemed relevant and were included in the analysis. The review focused on literature published over the past 30 years, beginning in 1994—a pivotal year in the development of inclusion in higher education. This timeframe was selected to align with the publication of the UNESCO Salamanca Statement, a landmark document advocating for inclusive education

systems worldwide. The Salamanca Statement emphasised the responsibility and obligation of mainstream schools to include and support all learners, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other circumstances (UNESCO, 1994). This foundational moment significantly influenced inclusive practices across all levels of education, including higher education. To maintain linguistic consistency, only studies published in English were included. No restrictions were imposed on study design, setting, or geographical location, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the subject.

To maintain academic rigour and relevance, certain publications were excluded. These exclusions encompassed books, book chapters, editorials, commentaries, and newsletters, as well as studies published prior to 1994, to focus on the period when inclusion in higher education began to gain prominence. Furthermore, studies addressing inclusive teaching practices in contexts other than English for Academic Purposes (EAP), such as Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) or Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), were excluded. Similarly, research relating to primary, secondary, or further education was omitted to concentrate exclusively on higher education. Studies published in languages other than English were also excluded to ensure consistency throughout the review process.

This rigorous selection process was designed to include only the most pertinent and high-quality studies, ensuring that the systematic review provides valuable and focused insights into inclusive teaching practices of EAP in higher education.

## Study selection

The study selection process followed a rigorous, multi-phase approach to ensure transparency and objectivity. All retrieved articles were imported into EndNote 2.0 for deduplication. The deduplicated dataset was then uploaded to Rayyan, a specialised web-based platform for managing systematic reviews (Ouzzani et al., 2016). The review followed the standardised process of conducting systematic reviews (Booth et al., 2016), where initial screening was conducted based on titles and abstracts before progressing to full-text review. This approach ensured an efficient and systematic filtering of studies while maintaining methodological rigour.

Considering that the focus of the review was inclusivity in EAP education, the primary search term used was *inclus\**—a truncation technique (also known as wildcard searching) that allowed for all possible variations of the root term to be captured, including “inclusive”, “inclusivity”, and “inclusion”. This strategy was carefully developed in consultation with the subject librarian, who oversaw and advised on the database searches to ensure comprehensiveness and relevance.

Titles and abstracts were independently screened by two reviewers to evaluate their relevance according to the inclusion criteria. To prevent the exclusion of potentially relevant studies too early in the process, a structured approach was applied to articles where the title and abstract alone did not provide sufficient clarity regarding their relevance. In cases where reviewers were undecided on whether a study should be included or excluded at this stage, the study was labelled as ‘maybe’ within the systematic review software and was automatically directed to the full-text screening phase for further assessment. This ensured that decisions were not made prematurely based on limited information and that studies with potential relevance received a more thorough evaluation before being excluded.

Articles deemed potentially relevant underwent a detailed full-text review to confirm their eligibility. This allowed for a more nuanced evaluation of studies, ensuring that

relevant literature that may not have explicitly mentioned key terms in titles or abstracts but still contributed to the discourse on inclusivity in EAP was included. This comprehensive approach ensured that the review did not exclude pertinent literature solely based on abstract-level keyword matching but rather incorporated all studies that meaningfully engaged with inclusive teaching practices in EAP contexts. Discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion, with consultation from a third, independent reviewer when necessary.

## Data extraction

A standardised data extraction form was employed to systematically capture relevant information from the included studies. The form documented study characteristics, including author(s), publication year, geographical location, and participant demographics. It also detailed the inclusive teaching strategies, interventions, and theoretical frameworks discussed in each study. This systematic approach facilitated the identification of patterns and themes, enabling a comprehensive synthesis of findings.

## Quality assessment

The Gough weight of evidence (WoE) framework (Gough, 2007) was applied in this systematic review to ensure a rigorous, transparent, and structured quality assessment of the included studies. This framework was selected because it provides a comprehensive and nuanced evaluation, rather than applying rigid inclusion or exclusion criteria based on study design or methodology. Unlike many appraisal tools that predetermine the acceptability of certain research methods, the WoE framework assesses each study holistically across four key dimensions: methodological quality (WoE A), relevance to the review question (WoE B), methodological appropriateness for the review (WoE C), and an overall weight of evidence rating (WoE D), which synthesises the three prior assessments. This approach ensures that each study is evaluated on its actual merit, rather than being dismissed based on methodological type alone. By integrating qualitative and quantitative research, diverse data collection techniques, and different analytical methods, this review was able to capture a more complete picture of inclusive EAP practices in higher education. The final overall rating categorised studies as high, moderate, or low quality, ensuring that only methodologically sound and contextually relevant studies contributed meaningfully to the synthesis. A standardised critical appraisal form was utilised to ensure a systematic, consistent, and transparent evaluation of the included studies, reinforcing the reliability of the appraisal process, and ensuring that all studies were assessed objectively and according to uniform criteria.

The application of the WoE framework followed a structured multi-step process to systematically appraise and weight the quality of each study. First, methodological rigour (WoE A) was assessed by examining key elements such as research design, data collection methods, and analytical transparency. No study was automatically excluded based on these characteristics; instead, those exhibiting methodological weaknesses—such as insufficient sample sizes, a lack of methodological transparency, or poorly justified analytical approaches—received lower ratings. Next, relevance to the research question (WoE B) was evaluated to ensure that studies meaningfully contributed to understanding inclusive EAP practices. This ensured that only studies directly engaging with the core themes of inclusion, multilingualism, culturally responsive pedagogy, or equitable assessment were

weighted more significantly in the synthesis. In parallel, methodological appropriateness (WoE C) was considered by examining whether the research approach was well-suited to the study's objectives. This step was critical, as some smaller qualitative studies offered significant theoretical and contextual contributions, while some larger quantitative studies lacked depth in engagement with inclusive education principles. The final overall rating, WoE D, integrated these assessments into a comprehensive categorisation of each study's contribution, ensuring that studies were not excluded outright due to a single limitation but were instead evaluated as a whole, with their strengths and weaknesses carefully considered.

The Gough WoE framework was ultimately chosen because of its systematic yet flexible approach, allowing for a balanced and inclusive quality assessment without pre-emptively eliminating certain study types or data collection methods. This adaptability was particularly crucial given the variety of methodologies used in research on inclusive EAP practices. By applying the WoE framework with a structured evaluation template, the review ensured that each study underwent a consistent, transparent, and reproducible assessment.

## Data synthesis

A narrative synthesis approach, following the framework outlined by Popay et al. (2006), was adopted to analyse and interpret the data extracted. This method enabled the identification of common themes, patterns, and variations across studies, providing a comprehensive overview of inclusive teaching practices and theoretical frameworks in EAP within higher education. The choice of narrative synthesis was particularly appropriate given the diversity of study designs, methodologies, and theoretical orientations in the included literature. By systematically identifying and categorising key findings, this approach facilitated a coherent synthesis that directly addressed the research questions.

Specifically, the analysis followed a staged approach in accordance with Popay et al.'s (2006) guidelines. First, studies were coded for recurring themes related to inclusive EAP practices, student engagement strategies, and institutional support mechanisms. Second, relationships between these themes were explored, identifying variations across different educational contexts, disciplinary perspectives, and institutional policies. Third, a critical reflection was undertaken to assess how these findings aligned with existing theories and frameworks of inclusive education in higher education. This process ensured that the synthesis was not merely descriptive but analytically rigorous, uncovering deeper insights into how inclusivity is operationalised in EAP settings.

Contextual factors and gaps in the literature were also explored, offering insights for future research. For example, a notable gap identified was the limited research on how inclusive teaching practices in EAP are adapted to accommodate students with diverse linguistic and cognitive needs. By synthesising findings across studies, this review was able to highlight critical areas where further empirical investigation is needed, thereby contributing to the advancement of the field. Additionally, thematic analysis revealed discrepancies in how inclusivity is conceptualised across different institutional settings, with some studies emphasising pedagogical adaptations while others focused on broader policy-level interventions. These nuances were captured through the iterative synthesis process, ensuring that findings provided a multidimensional perspective on inclusivity in EAP.

Findings were reported in accordance with PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009), ensuring transparency and clarity in the presentation of the review process and results. The PRISMA framework also facilitated the systematic organisation of studies, reinforcing the

credibility of the synthesis by documenting each stage of the review process, from study selection to thematic extraction. This rigorous approach allowed for a clear audit trail, showcasing how each included study contributed to answering the overarching research questions.

Through this synthesis, the review will provide a foundational evidence base that will complement the empirical findings generated through the large-scale BALEAP-funded research project. By integrating existing literature with new empirical data, this project aims to develop a robust, evidence-informed framework for inclusive EAP practices in higher education. This review serves as a key milestone in achieving the project's core objectives by mapping out current research trends, identifying gaps, and establishing a theoretical and conceptual foundation upon which the project's empirical work will build. The findings from the review will inform the development of practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and institutions, ensuring that the final outcomes of the BALEAP project contribute meaningfully to the advancement of inclusive EAP pedagogy.

### **Ethical approval**

Ethical approval was not required for this systematic review, as all data sources used were publicly available and accessible. The review relied solely on existing literature from academic databases, journals, and conference proceedings, without involving primary data collection or human participants. As no ethical risks were associated with the use of publicly available data, ethical approval was unnecessary. The research adhered to established ethical guidelines for systematic reviews, ensuring integrity, transparency, and rigour throughout the process.

## **Results**

### **Selection process**

Electronic database searches yielded a total of 2931 records from multiple sources with an additional 2287 records being identified through grey literature sources, though initial domain-specific searches returned no results, leading to broader search criteria. After removing duplicates, a total of 4723 records (2436 from electronic databases and 2287 from grey literature) were screened by title and abstract, resulting in the exclusion of 2404 and 2281 records, respectively, for not meeting the inclusion criteria. This substantial exclusion rate was anticipated due to the broad initial search strategy, which was designed to maximise coverage of studies potentially related to inclusivity in EAP. However, many of the retrieved records were found to focus on broader topics such as general inclusion policies in higher education, second language acquisition theories, or English language learning outside of the specific EAP context.

Following this rigorous screening process, 32 full-text records from electronic databases were assessed for eligibility. Of these, 25 were excluded for falling outside the scope of EAP-specific inclusion-related topics or being conducted in an inappropriate setting. The exclusion of these full-text studies was not arbitrary but based on a detailed evaluation of their relevance to the review's research focus. For instance, while some studies explicitly examined inclusive pedagogies, they did so within primary or secondary education settings rather than university-level EAP instruction. Others, despite

discussing linguistic diversity, did not provide insights into EAP pedagogical strategies or student experiences within academic English courses. Similarly, six full-text records from grey literature were excluded for not meeting the EAP-related inclusion criteria.

Ultimately, seven studies met all inclusion criteria and were retained for the review. While this number may seem small, it reflects the stringent inclusion criteria required to ensure that only studies directly relevant to EAP and inclusion were analysed. The final selection included studies from 2020 to 2024, reflecting the recent and emerging scholarly focus on inclusive pedagogies in EAP. A review of studies published between 1994 and 2019 revealed that earlier research primarily focused on international student support, language policies, or general access to higher education rather than inclusive teaching approaches within EAP programmes. These studies, although valuable in broader discussions of linguistic diversity, did not align closely enough with the research objectives to be included in the final analysis.

No additional records were identified through the manual searching of reference lists from included studies, resulting in a final sample of seven studies included in the review (see Fig. 1). No studies were excluded during quality assessment.

## Study characteristics

All included studies were published between 2020 and 2024, capturing contemporary perspectives within the review's broader timeframe of 1994 to 2024. The research spans multiple countries, including Australia, Canada, the USA, Sri Lanka, the UK, and China, indicating a global commitment to advancing inclusive teaching practices in English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The studies employed diverse research designs, including mixed methods, concept papers, case studies, multi-study dissertations, and literature reviews. This range of methodologies underscores the multifaceted nature of EAP research, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine a range of key issues such as intercultural competence, culturally responsive pedagogy, social justice, and translingual practices. This variation in design and geographic scope provides a holistic view of inclusive EAP practices across varied educational and cultural contexts (see Table 1).

## Risk of bias

Quality assessment of studies included in this review, evaluated using the Gough Framework, reveals a generally high standard of methodological rigour and relevance, though some variation is evident across studies. Several studies scored high across all assessed dimensions, indicating strong methodological consistency and direct relevance to inclusive teaching practices in EAP (Khoo & Huo, 2022; Pravini, 2024; Xie & Sun, 2024). Other studies showed more variability, particularly in methodological rigour, with moderate adherence to quality standards in some areas (Bodis, 2020; Price, 2024). Studies with mixed scores reflect limitations in alignment between their aims, data collection, and analysis methods, which may introduce potential bias (Kim, 2021; Mortenson, 2022). While the overall quality of evidence remains robust, these variations in methodological rigour and relevance underscore the need for careful interpretation of certain findings.

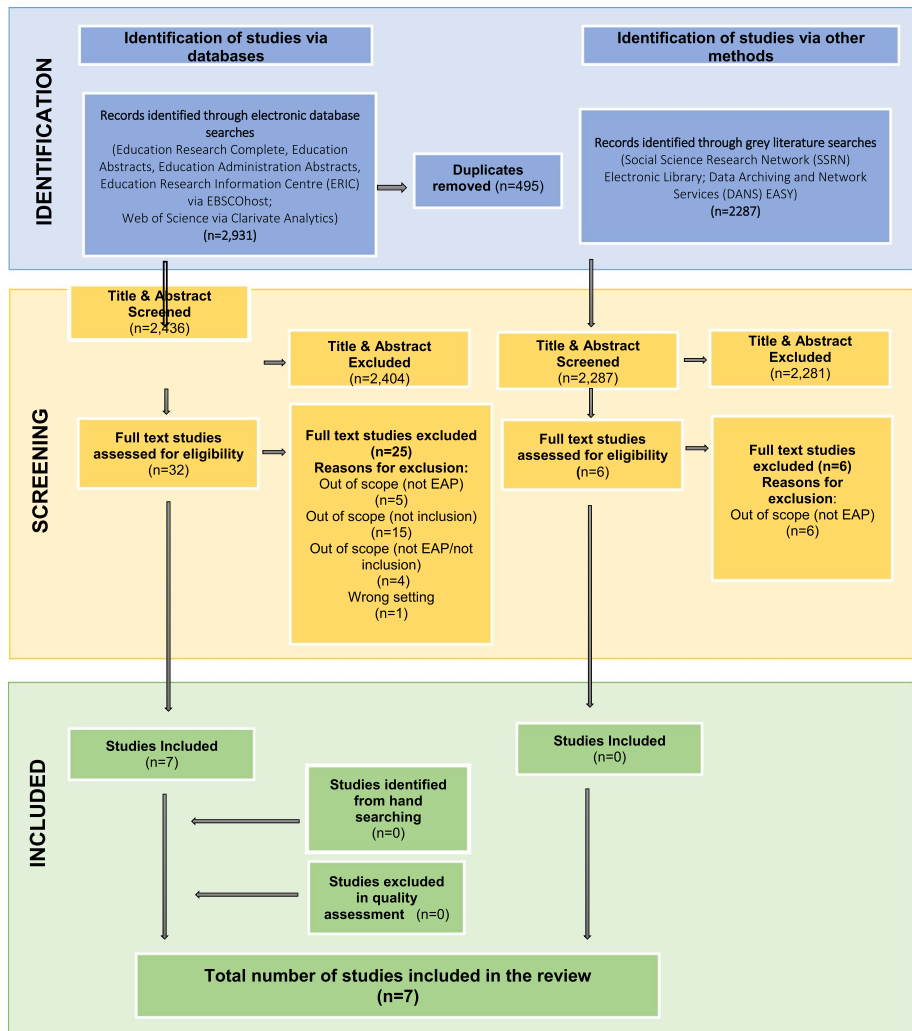


Fig. 1 PRISMA flowchart of the study selection process

## Narrative synthesis

### Approaches to promote inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE

In terms of approaches to fostering inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE, five core themes were identified, including *inclusive curriculum design*, *culturally responsive and social justice pedagogy*, *equitable assessment and language support*, *intercultural communication and campus environment*, and *decolonising and multilingual language practices*. These themes represent a range of strategies implemented across different levels in educational institutions, underscoring a comprehensive framework for enhancing inclusivity (see Table 2).

**Table 1** Characteristics of included studies

| Study               | Country   | Study aim(s)                                                                                                                                                                                      | Study design             | Participants                                               | Data collection method(s)                                | Data analysis method(s)                        | Quality appraisal score |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Bodis (2020)        | Australia | To outline steps for integrating intercultural competence (IC) into course curricula, specifically tailored to programme outcomes, and aimed at fostering global citizenship                      | Concept paper            | N/A                                                        | N/A                                                      | N/A                                            | M/M/M/M                 |
| Kho0 and Huo (2022) | Canada    | To assess culturally responsive pedagogy's effectiveness in enhancing engagement and learning for low-proficiency international students in online settings                                       | Mixed methods            | 154 students across eight intervention groups              | Surveys, interviews, writing samples, engagement metrics | Qualitative coding and quantitative analysis   | H/H/H/H                 |
| Kim (2021)          | USA       | To examine the values and social implications of post-entry language assessments (PELA) and their alignment with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals in US higher education institutions | Multi-study dissertation | 50 institutions, 9 faculty members, 129 online forum posts | Document analysis, interviews, discourse analysis        | Thematic analysis, critical discourse analysis | H/M/H/M                 |

**Table 1** (continued)

| Study              | Country   | Study aim(s)                                                                                                                                                                                          | Study design      | Participants                                                   | Data collection method(s)                                               | Data analysis method(s)                         | Quality appraisal score |
|--------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Mortenson (2022)   | USA       | To explore how integrating social justice content in EAP instruction impacts emergent bilinguals' engagement and understanding of societal issues, particularly around race and inequality in the USA | Case study        | Emergent bilingual (EB) students in an academic writing course | Classroom observations, content analysis of student writing, interviews | Thematic analysis                               | M/M/H/M                 |
| Pravini (2024)     | Sri Lanka | To assess and improve the Academic Literacy (ACLT) course's alignment with the diverse needs of first-year science students                                                                           | Mixed methods     | Undergraduate students and course lecturers                    | Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews                              | Thematic analysis                               | H/H/H/H                 |
| Price (2024)       | UK        | To explore the role of intercultural spaces on campuses for fostering social justice and inclusion among diverse student populations                                                                  | Literature review | N/A                                                            | Critical literature review                                              | Reflexive analysis                              | M/M/M/M                 |
| Xie and Sun (2024) | China     | To investigate translingual practices in English Academic Writing (EAW) as a decolonising approach in language education, advocating for linguistic inclusivity and diversity                         | Case study        | A multilingual student in a Sino-US joint venture university   | Interviews, reflective journals                                         | Narrative analysis, critical discourse analysis | H/H/H/H                 |

**Table 2** Approaches to promote inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE

| Theme                                              | Sub-theme                                     | Synthesis of approaches                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Inclusive curriculum design                        | Task-based and discipline-specific content    | A curriculum that combines task-based staging (Bodis, 2020) with discipline-specific content (Pravini, 2024) tailors learning tasks to cultural, linguistic, and academic needs                |
|                                                    | Bilingual and interactive instruction         | Using bilingual support, varied assessments, and interactive activities engages diverse students effectively and enhances accessibility (Khoo & Huo, 2022; Pravini, 2024)                      |
|                                                    | Identity and learner agency                   | Culturally responsive pedagogy fosters student identity construction and agency, improving learner satisfaction and engagement (Khoo & Huo, 2022)                                              |
| Equitable assessment and language support          | Social justice and critical awareness         | Incorporating social justice themes, especially in EAP, promotes students' critical thinking on societal issues, creating a more inclusive and socially aware classroom (Mortenson, 2022)      |
|                                                    | Inclusive and socially responsible assessment | Socially responsible assessments, such as restructured PELA, reduce bias and align with DEI values, supporting multilingual students equitably (Kim, 2021)                                     |
|                                                    | Socially conscious evaluation in EAP          | Socially conscious assessment practices in EAP ensure that content and evaluation promote fairness and inclusion (Mortenson, 2022)                                                             |
| Intercultural communication and campus environment | Intercultural and Shared Campus Spaces        | Viewing campuses as shared intercultural spaces fosters inclusivity and social justice by integrating academic and social interactions between local and international students. (Price, 2024) |
|                                                    | Translingual approaches in academic writing   | Translingual practices in English Academic Writing (EAW) support linguistic diversity and challenge monolingual ideologies, empowering multilingual students (Xie & Sun, 2024)                 |

## Inclusive curriculum design

Inclusive curriculum design is central to promoting equity in EAP, especially through task-based and discipline-specific instruction. This approach focuses on developing curricula that align with students' cultural, linguistic, and academic backgrounds, enhancing their ability to engage meaningfully with content. Bodis (2020) examined the effectiveness of curriculum auditing strategies within EAP courses in Australian universities, finding that a structured review of course materials for cultural and linguistic inclusivity significantly improved student engagement and comprehension. Similarly, Pravini (2024) highlighted how embedding discipline-specific modules in EAP courses fosters more relevant and applied learning for students across different fields. The integration of discipline focused EAP ensures that linguistic instruction does not occur in isolation but is embedded in students' professional and academic aspirations, reinforcing motivation and practical application.

For example, task-based staging of intercultural competence skills and curriculum audits are used to ensure that course content is accessible and relevant to students from diverse backgrounds, while discipline-specific content provides contextualised learning that speaks directly to students' future professional fields. This curriculum design is further reinforced through bilingual and interactive instruction, allowing students from varying linguistic backgrounds to engage actively and make the content more accessible, ultimately fostering a more inclusive classroom environment (Bodis, 2020; Pravini, 2024).

## Culturally responsive and social justice pedagogy

Culturally responsive and social justice pedagogy highlights the importance of creating an inclusive classroom by recognising and incorporating students' cultural references and perspectives. Khoo and Huo (2022) analysed pedagogical interventions that centre on identity formation, revealing that students who saw their linguistic and cultural backgrounds represented in EAP coursework displayed higher confidence and participation levels. This aligns with Mortenson's (2022) findings, which highlight that students who engaged with social justice-oriented EAP content not only improved their academic language skills but also developed stronger critical thinking abilities.

Culturally responsive pedagogy fosters identity construction and learner agency, helping students feel more connected to the learning process and promoting greater satisfaction and engagement. By integrating social justice themes into EAP, students are encouraged to develop critical thinking skills, particularly around societal issues that may impact their fields of study. This approach not only facilitates a deeper understanding of language but also supports the cultivation of students' social and political awareness (Khoo & Huo, 2022; Mortenson, 2022).

## Equitable assessment and language support

Equitable assessment and language support emphasise the need for socially responsible and inclusive assessment policies. This approach is particularly relevant to post-entry language assessments (PELA), which can be redesigned to align with diversity, equity, and

inclusion (DEI) principles, supporting multilingual students more effectively. Kim (2021) conducted a comparative analysis of traditional and modified PELA frameworks, suggesting that incorporating flexibility in assessment structures significantly reduces failure rates among linguistically diverse students. Mortenson (2022) further substantiated these findings by examining the impact of social justice-oriented rubrics, which enhanced fairness in grading for multilingual students in EAP courses.

Socially conscious evaluations within EAP are essential to mitigate bias and allow a fairer assessment of students' academic language proficiency. These practices ensure that the evaluation methods and criteria are equitable and accessible to students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, promoting a level playing field for academic success (Kim, 2021; Mortenson, 2022).

## Intercultural communication and campus environment

Intercultural communication and campus environment support fostering inclusion by viewing university campuses as shared intercultural spaces. This approach leverages the social and academic diversity within the student body to create an environment that values intercultural interactions. Price (2024) investigated bottom-up, student-led initiatives to promote intercultural engagement, finding that peer mentoring programmes significantly improved students' sense of belonging and cross-cultural confidence. The study also highlighted the importance of inclusive extracurricular programmes that complement classroom instruction, providing informal settings for students to apply their linguistic and intercultural competencies.

Promoting bottom-up approaches, such as encouraging cross-cultural engagement and community building within academic spaces, supports students in navigating shared environments and increases their sense of belonging. These initiatives are integral to supporting international students, enabling more inclusive and equitable educational experiences (Price, 2024).

## Decolonial and multilingual language practices

Finally, decolonial and multilingual language practices address the need to dismantle monolingual ideologies in EAP and recognise the linguistic diversity of students. Xie and Sun (2024) analysed multilingual writing strategies within EAP, revealing that students who were allowed to incorporate translanguaging approaches in academic writing tasks produced richer, more nuanced analyses. This study reinforces the notion that embracing students' multilingual repertoires does not dilute academic rigour but rather enhances cognitive engagement and conceptual clarity.

Through translanguaging practices, academic writing instruction in English Academic Writing (EAW) is adapted to include students' multilingual resources. This approach not only validates students' linguistic identities but also challenges colonial frameworks that have traditionally marginalised non-native English speakers. By embracing multilingualism in academic contexts, educational institutions foster a more equitable environment that enables students to express complex identities and contribute more fully to academic discourse (Xie & Sun, 2024).

Collectively, these seven studies highlight the multifaceted nature of inclusive EAP teaching, reinforcing the need for a holistic approach that integrates curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, intercultural engagement, and linguistic diversity. Each study contributes distinct perspectives and empirical evidence that, when synthesised, provide a comprehensive framework for fostering inclusion. The alignment between these studies underscores the argument that inclusive education in EAP cannot be achieved through isolated interventions but requires an integrated and institutionally supported approach. Furthermore, the diversity of research methodologies—ranging from qualitative case studies to large-scale curriculum analyses—supports the robustness of the findings and their applicability across different higher education contexts.

### **Theoretical frameworks underpinning inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE**

Several theoretical frameworks underpinning these approaches, each providing a unique lens through which to understand and implement inclusive practices of EAP in HE, were identified and grouped into four primary themes, including intercultural competence and communication, culturally responsive and social justice pedagogy, decolonial and multilingual practices, and needs-based and contextualised learning. These frameworks collectively offer a robust theoretical foundation for advancing the inclusivity of EAP teaching (see Table 3).

Intercultural competence and communication frameworks, including Deardorff's (2006) intercultural competence model and Stier's (2006) intercultural communication theory, are central to fostering shared understanding and collaboration in diverse educational environments. Deardorff's (2006) model is one of the most widely recognised frameworks for intercultural competence, outlining a developmental process that moves from attitudes (e.g., openness and curiosity) to knowledge and comprehension (e.g., cultural self-awareness), ultimately leading to internal and external outcomes such as adaptability and effective intercultural communication. This model is particularly relevant in EAP contexts, as it highlights the importance of experiential learning and critical reflection in developing students' intercultural skills. The former guides the integration of intercultural competence into curricula, focusing on task-based activities that enhance students' skills in intercultural communication. In parallel, Stier's (2006) intercultural communication theory emphasises how communication is embedded in broader cultural and social structures. His work distinguishes between instrumental (goal-oriented) and transformative (identity- and value-oriented) approaches to intercultural communication, both of which are critical in EAP classrooms where students navigate academic discourse norms shaped by diverse cultural expectations. The latter supports the concept of campuses as intercultural spaces, where both academic and social interactions foster an inclusive environment. These frameworks collectively enable institutions to promote global citizenship and intercultural skills, preparing students for broader societal engagement beyond the classroom (Deardorff, 2006; Stier, 2006).

Frameworks supporting culturally responsive and social justice pedagogy draw heavily on the work of Ladson-Billings (1994) and social justice perspectives in language assessment. Ladson-Billings' (1994) culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) framework is built upon three core principles: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. This approach encourages educators to integrate students' cultural knowledge and lived experiences into the curriculum, moving beyond deficit perspectives of multilingual learners and instead valuing their linguistic and cultural

**Table 3** Theoretical frameworks underpinning inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE

| Integrated theoretical theme                      | Framework                                                        | Application(s) to inclusion                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Intercultural competence and communication        | Deardorff's (2006) intercultural competence model                | Deardorff's model guides the development of task-based and culturally inclusive curricula, focusing on intercultural competence skills to prepare students for global engagement (Bodis, 2020)                    |
|                                                   | Intercultural communication theory (Stier, 2006)                 | Stier's theories support viewing campuses as intercultural spaces, facilitating shared social and academic experiences that connect students from diverse backgrounds (Price, 2024)                               |
| Culturally responsive and social justice pedagogy | Ladson-Billings' (1994) culturally responsive pedagogy framework | Ladson-Billings' framework encourages culturally responsive teaching, enhancing students' agency and satisfaction by recognising cultural assets in learning environments (Khoo & Huo, 2022)                      |
|                                                   | Social justice framework (Ortega, 2019; Shohamy, 2017)           | Social justice theories provide a foundation for language assessments that align with DEI values, creating fairer evaluation practices for multilingual students (Kim, 2021)                                      |
|                                                   | Critical English Language Teaching (CELTe) (Benesch, 2010)       | CELTe supports integrating social justice topics into EAP, promoting critical thinking, and raising awareness of structural inequalities in language education (Mortenson, 2022)                                  |
| Decolonial and multilingual practices             | Decolonial theory in language education (Canagarajah, 2013)      | Decolonial perspectives encourage translanguaging practices in English Academic Writing (EAW), challenging monolingual norms and empowering multilingual students to express complex identities (Xie & Sun, 2024) |
| Needs-based and contextualised learning           | Needs analysis in language learning (Cowling, 2007)              | Needs analysis supports tailoring academic literacy programmes to address specific disciplinary needs, fostering engagement and relevance for diverse learners (Pravini, 2024)                                    |

backgrounds as assets in academic learning. In the context of EAP, CRP ensures that pedagogical approaches reflect students' diverse identities, facilitating a more inclusive and empowering educational experience. Ladson-Billings' framework underpins culturally responsive pedagogy by encouraging educators to recognise and incorporate students' cultural assets into classroom practices, promoting learner agency and engagement. The social justice framework in language assessment (Ortega, 2019; Shohamy, 2017) further guides educators in designing assessment policies that align with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) values. Shohamy (2017) argues that language testing often reinforces societal power structures, disproportionately disadvantaging multilingual learners. Her critical language testing approach calls for assessments that recognise linguistic diversity rather than penalise students for deviations from monolingual norms. Similarly, Ortega (2019) highlights the ethical responsibility of language educators to design assessments that are fair, transparent, and aligned with multilingual realities, ensuring that multilingual students are evaluated based on their communicative competence rather than adherence to native-speaker standards. Together, these frameworks advocate for an education system that values and leverages students' cultural backgrounds and promotes equitable learning opportunities (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ortega, 2019; Shohamy, 2017).

Decolonial and multilingual practices frameworks are grounded in decolonial theories, particularly those of Canagarajah (2013), who advocates for dismantling monolingual ideologies in language education. Decolonial perspectives challenge the historical privileging of English as the dominant academic language, arguing that colonial legacies continue to marginalise students' linguistic identities. Canagarajah (2013) introduces translanguaging as a framework that views multilingual speakers as agentive language users who strategically draw on their full linguistic repertoire to navigate communication in academic and social settings. His work opposes prescriptive monolingual norms, advocating for more flexible and context-driven approaches to academic writing instruction in EAP. By adopting translanguaging practices, academic writing instruction in EAP can be transformed to include diverse linguistic resources, allowing students to express their multilingual identities within academic discourse. This approach challenges colonial assumptions about language and supports a shift towards linguistic justice, ensuring that multilingual students are valued for their unique contributions to the learning environment (Canagarajah, 2013).

Finally, needs-based and contextualised learning frameworks, particularly Cowling's (2007) needs analysis in language learning, support the development of academic literacy programmes tailored to the specific disciplinary needs of students. Cowling's (2007) model of needs analysis emphasises a multi-dimensional approach, incorporating target situation analysis (what learners need to do with the language), present situation analysis (what learners already know), and learning needs analysis (how learners prefer to acquire language skills). This comprehensive approach ensures that EAP programmes are designed with a deep understanding of students' academic and professional requirements, making instruction more targeted and meaningful. This framework ensures that the content and instructional methods used in EAP are closely aligned with students' academic and professional goals, enhancing relevance and engagement. Needs-based approaches also support students' overall academic success by providing them with the language skills required to excel in their chosen fields.

By integrating these diverse theoretical perspectives, this review underscores the importance of a multifaceted approach to inclusive EAP teaching. Rather than relying on a singular framework, the synthesis of intercultural competence, culturally responsive pedagogy, decolonial perspectives, and needs-based learning ensures a more holistic understanding of how to foster equitable and linguistically inclusive academic environments. These

frameworks collectively provide a critical foundation for shaping EAP pedagogies that not only support students' linguistic development but also affirm their cultural and multilingual identities, preparing them to thrive in global academic and professional landscapes.

## Discussion

### Summary of main findings

This review identifies five primary approaches for fostering inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE: *inclusive curriculum design, culturally responsive and social justice pedagogy, equitable assessment and language support, intercultural communication, and campus environment, and decolonial and multilingual language practices*. These approaches collectively support an inclusive, student-centred educational framework. Inclusive curriculum design and culturally responsive pedagogy focus on tailoring content to students' academic and cultural backgrounds, while equitable assessment and language support, such as redesigned post-entry language assessments (PELA), promote fair and socially responsible evaluations. Intercultural communication frameworks and the promotion of campuses as intercultural spaces enhance students' sense of belonging, and decolonising practices empower students' multilingual identities by integrating translingual approaches in academic writing.

The theoretical frameworks identified as guiding these inclusive practices—*intercultural competence and communication, culturally responsive and social justice pedagogy, decolonial and multilingual practices, and needs-based and contextualised learning*—underpin the approaches with robust scholarly support. Theoretical foundations such as Deardorff's intercultural competence model and Ladson-Billings' culturally responsive pedagogy frame curriculum and pedagogy adjustments, while decolonial and needs-based frameworks drive translingual and contextualised learning practices. These frameworks collectively support an EAP approach that addresses students' social, linguistic, and academic needs, empowering them to succeed in diverse learning environments.

### Comparison with existing literature

Evidence from this review reaffirms the scarcity of literature addressing inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE, a gap also highlighted in existing research (Mortenson, 2021, 2022). While inclusivity has been extensively explored in the broader context of higher education (Outhred, 2011; Collins et al., 2018; Tobbell et al., 2020; Salmi & D'Addio, 2020), EAP remains underexamined, despite being a critical area for supporting multilingual and international students who face unique linguistic and cultural challenges. Mortenson (2022) argues that inclusivity in language teaching is often overshadowed by broader discussions of equity and diversity in education, highlighting the need for greater focus on this area. This gap raises significant concerns, particularly as the number of multilingual students entering English-medium higher education institutions continues to grow. The lack of specific research into inclusive EAP practices suggests that current pedagogical frameworks may not fully address the linguistic, cultural, and cognitive demands placed on these students. Given the increasing emphasis on equity in higher education policy, the limited attention to EAP inclusivity underscores an urgent need for educational reform that acknowledges and supports the linguistic diversity of international and multilingual student

cohorts. By situating inclusive practices specifically within an EAP context, this review contributes to a growing but still limited body of work that seeks to bring inclusivity to the forefront of EAP education.

In terms of approaches to promoting inclusive teaching, the findings of this review align with and extend current research on inclusive education in HE by adapting transferable strategies from broader tertiary contexts to EAP. Culturally responsive pedagogy, as discussed by Ladson-Billings (1994), has been shown to validate students' cultural backgrounds, enhancing their engagement and critical awareness (Ford et al., 2014; Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020; Samuels, 2018). This review highlights the importance of embedding cultural references and social justice themes into EAP curricula, indicating how such strategies can address the interplay of linguistic and cultural diversity in language classrooms. However, merely incorporating cultural references does not automatically lead to an inclusive classroom environment. A critical challenge is how such pedagogical adaptations translate into meaningful student engagement and empowerment. Without a deliberate focus on student agency, culturally responsive teaching runs the risk of becoming tokenistic rather than transformative. This review, therefore, argues for an approach that moves beyond surface-level representation to actively involve multilingual students in co-constructing knowledge and validating their diverse perspectives within the academic space. Such a shift necessitates a critical pedagogy that challenges dominant epistemologies and integrates students' lived experiences into the learning process, making EAP a more equitable and dynamic space for knowledge production. By tailoring these approaches to EAP, this review highlights the potential to foster inclusive learning environments that actively engage multilingual students.

Equitable assessment practices are another significant area where the findings of this review intersect with existing literature (Bain, 2023; Scott et al., 2013; Tai et al., 2022). The socially responsible PELA discussed in this review aligns with Shohamy's (2017) framework for assessments that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. This supports calls for reimagining traditional assessments, which often impose monolingual norms and perpetuate deficit narratives for multilingual students (Ortega, 2019). Furthermore, the studies that advocate for challenging monolingualism in assessment and aligning EAP teaching with disciplinary language use contribute to a broader critique of traditional EAP practices. The dominant model of EAP has been criticised for reinforcing colonial hierarchies by positioning English as a neutral, universal medium rather than recognising the epistemological power structures it sustains (Canagarajah, 2013; Lillis & Turner, 2001). By focusing on "academic purposes" in the abstract rather than acknowledging the diverse communicative demands of different disciplines, EAP risks perpetuating a homogenised and exclusionary approach to academic literacy. This review's emphasis on alternative assessment frameworks aligns with a movement towards disrupting these assumptions and repositioning EAP as a field that actively engages with the specific linguistic and epistemological needs of students within their disciplinary contexts.

Despite the growing discourse on equitable assessment, the practical implementation of such frameworks remains inconsistent across EAP contexts. While there is increasing advocacy for alternative assessment approaches, such as formative and process-based assessments, institutional constraints often hinder meaningful change. The reliance on standardised, high-stakes assessments continues to marginalise multilingual students by reinforcing the dominance of native-speaker norms. However, studies that highlight the need for disciplinary-specific language instruction (Turner, 2018; Wingate & Tribble, 2012) provide a way forward by challenging the idea that EAP should serve merely as a remedial program designed to "fix" multilingual students. Instead, these studies advocate for an approach that moves beyond

deficit models towards recognising students' linguistic and epistemological repertoires as valuable resources. Such perspectives shift the focus from assimilationist notions of “academic English” towards fostering linguistic agency and disciplinary engagement.

This review highlights the necessity of reconceptualising assessment as a tool for empowerment rather than exclusion. It calls for a shift from static, product-focused evaluations to dynamic, learner-centred assessments that recognise linguistic diversity as an asset rather than a barrier. By embedding assessment practices within the disciplinary knowledge-making processes of specific academic fields, EAP can move beyond its historically remedial framing and contribute to a broader vision of social justice in higher education. This shift would ensure that assessments not only support multilingual students' linguistic development but also validate their ability to engage meaningfully with the epistemological frameworks of their respective disciplines. In doing so, EAP assessment can transition from a tool of regulation to an instrument of equity and transformation. Without such reforms, assessment practices risk perpetuating systemic inequities that disadvantage multilingual learners in higher education.

By advocating for assessments that serve as supportive tools rather than gatekeeping mechanisms, this review adds to ongoing discussions about reshaping assessment practices to better address inequities in multilingual students' educational experiences. Rather than positioning inclusion as an end goal, these findings contribute to discussions that frame EAP as an agent for social justice—one that not only acknowledges structural inequalities but actively works to dismantle them. These findings reinforce the broader need for educational policies that centre equity and inclusivity in assessment design.

Finally, this review situates decolonial and multilingual practices at the heart of EAP, aligning with Canagarajah's (2013) decolonial theory in language education. The adoption of translanguing practices, which challenge monolingual ideologies, enables students to navigate academic discourse with greater flexibility while fostering a more equitable learning environment. Studies emphasise the value of leveraging multilingual students' full linguistic repertoires to enhance academic confidence and inclusion (Li, 2014, 2018; Li & García, 2022). However, while translanguaging offers a promising alternative to dominant monolingual ideologies, institutional resistance to such approaches remains a key barrier to implementation. Many higher education institutions continue to prioritise English-only policies, often under the guise of maintaining academic standards. This raises critical questions about the feasibility of translanguing pedagogies in EAP contexts, particularly where institutional policies conflict with inclusive teaching ideals. The challenge lies in negotiating institutional constraints while advocating for pedagogical practices that acknowledge and harness students' linguistic resources. This review underscores the need for a broader shift in institutional mindsets—one that moves beyond deficit-based perspectives on multilingualism and instead embraces linguistic diversity as a foundation for academic success. By extending these principles to EAP, this review advocates for pedagogical reforms that dismantle colonial legacies in language instruction, empowering students and honouring their multilingual identities. Together, these frameworks underscore the transformative potential of inclusive practices to create supportive and equitable environments for diverse learners in EAP.

## Strengths and limitations

This systematic review brings several strengths to the exploration of inclusive teaching practices of EAP in HE. By focusing on a timely and relevant issue, the review has the potential to make a meaningful impact on evaluating and refining inclusive practices, directly benefiting EAP practitioners, educators, and policymakers. It seeks to feed review

evidence into empirical data to guide the development of a set of actionable recommendations to enhance inclusivity in EAP.

Adhering to the best practices in systematic review methodology, the review follows a structured, rigorous approach, which bolsters the reliability and validity of its findings. Furthermore, the inclusion of diverse data sources—ranging from academic databases to grey literature and reference lists—ensures an extensive literature search, and the two-reviewer system reduces the chances of errors and bias throughout the selection, data extraction, and quality assessment phases.

Nevertheless, the review has a few limitations. It includes only English-language studies, potentially introducing language bias by excluding relevant research available in other languages. Additionally, it does not exclude studies based on quality, potentially affecting the robustness of its conclusions. This inclusive approach provides a broader range of perspectives; however, it also allows some lower-quality studies to contribute to the synthesis, necessitating careful interpretation of findings.

While the timeline set for this review is thorough, it might restrict opportunities for extensive follow-up analyses or iterative reviews. Furthermore, the relatively small number of included studies presents challenges for generalisability. Although the findings align with existing research and contribute meaningful insights to the discourse, they should be interpreted with caution when considering their applicability across diverse EAP contexts. Expanding the search parameters to include a broader range of studies—potentially incorporating grey literature or research published in additional languages—could enhance the comprehensiveness of future reviews.

Lastly, despite efforts to mitigate it, there remains some risk of subjective bias in the screening and data extraction stages. While a systematic approach was applied, including predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, researcher interpretations inevitably play a role in qualitative synthesis. Triangulation methods and transparency in reporting were employed to minimise bias, but future work could further strengthen this by incorporating additional reviewers or automated text analysis tools to enhance objectivity.

These limitations, while notable, do not diminish the potential value and insights the review offers but do highlight areas for careful consideration in interpretation. By acknowledging these constraints, this review provides a foundation for ongoing research, underscoring the need for continued inquiry into equitable assessment practices that account for linguistic diversity and disciplinary specificity.

## Implications for research, policy, and practice

The findings from this systematic review have significant implications for EAP research, policy, and practice. While inclusive teaching strategies have been increasingly advocated within higher education, there remains a gap in empirical studies that systematically investigate their effectiveness in EAP settings. This lack of empirical validation raises questions about the extent to which current approaches are successfully addressing the needs of multilingual students and whether certain inclusive strategies may be more effective than others in different institutional contexts. For research, this review highlights the need for further empirical studies examining the impact of inclusive teaching strategies on diverse student populations in EAP settings. There is a clear opportunity to explore how culturally responsive and decolonial practices influence students' academic success, identity formation, and engagement, particularly among

multilingual and multicultural students. Future studies can build on this foundation, integrating new data and refining inclusive frameworks to better address the evolving needs of students in higher education.

In terms of policy, the review supports the development of guidelines that prioritise equity and inclusion within EAP programmes. However, the implementation of such policies requires careful consideration of institutional constraints, including faculty preparedness, resource availability, and potential resistance to change. Without concrete measures for enforcement and accountability, equity-driven policies may remain aspirational rather than actionable (Bakogiannis, 2025b). It is therefore essential that policies not only outline inclusive principles but also establish clear mechanisms for their execution, such as mandatory training for educators, structured curriculum audits, and student feedback mechanisms to assess effectiveness. Policymakers can draw on the identified practices—such as equitable assessments and translanguaging support—to establish standards that ensure fair opportunities for all students. Institutions could adopt policies that mandate culturally responsive curricula and require regular review of teaching materials to eliminate biases, fostering a more inclusive academic environment for international and multilingual students.

For practice, the review provides a roadmap for educators and programme designers to implement inclusive strategies directly within EAP courses. Practitioners can apply the findings by incorporating diverse cultural references into curricula, utilising multilingual resources, and promoting intercultural engagement on campus. Nevertheless, a critical challenge in practice is the potential misalignment between inclusive teaching principles and institutional expectations for standardised assessment and language proficiency benchmarks. While inclusivity is essential, it must be balanced with academic rigour and learning outcomes, which can sometimes create tensions between student support and institutional demands. Educators must navigate these complexities by developing pedagogical approaches that support multilingual learners while still aligning with broader academic standards. These actions can enhance students' sense of belonging, promote greater academic confidence, and support the development of globally relevant skills. Furthermore, without continuous professional development and institutional backing, educators may struggle to integrate inclusive teaching effectively, highlighting the need for sustained investment in teacher training, curriculum innovation, and interdisciplinary collaboration to support long-term change. Practical implementation of these approaches requires ongoing support and training for educators to adapt their methodologies in line with inclusive teaching standards.

To promote inclusion in practice and further support educators in fostering inclusive learning and teaching environments in higher education, a comprehensive framework of recommendations will be developed. This framework will provide clear, actionable steps to enhance inclusivity within EAP pedagogy, ensuring that educators have practical guidance for implementing inclusive strategies effectively. The framework will integrate and synthesise the evidence from this systematic review with findings from the empirical research conducted as part of the BALEAP-funded wide-scale project, “Exploring Inclusive Teaching Practices of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in Higher Education (HE)”. By bringing together insights from both systematic and empirical investigations, the framework will offer a robust, evidence-based approach to fostering inclusive EAP teaching. This final output (currently in progress), a key milestone of the ongoing project, will serve as a valuable resource for practitioners, curriculum developers, and institutions aiming to embed inclusive principles into EAP instruction in meaningful and sustainable ways.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this review underscores the critical need to advance inclusivity in EAP within HE by addressing the unique challenges faced by multilingual and multicultural students. Through the identification of five core approaches—inclusive curriculum design, culturally responsive pedagogy, equitable assessment practices, intercultural communication, and decolonial and multilingual strategies—the review highlights the transformative potential of evidence-based practices to create equitable academic environments. These approaches, grounded in robust theoretical frameworks, such as intercultural competence, social justice theories, and decolonial perspectives, provide a comprehensive foundation for fostering inclusivity that not only enhances academic engagement but also supports students' broader personal and professional growth. By aligning these findings with existing literature, the review contributes to a growing discourse on embedding inclusion in EAP education.

Moving forward, there is an urgent need to develop a series of evidence-based, actionable recommendations to translate these theoretical insights into practical strategies for educators and institutions. These recommendations should address critical areas, including redesigning curricula to reflect diverse cultural perspectives, implementing socially responsible assessments to mitigate bias, and fostering inclusive pedagogical practices that leverage students' linguistic and cultural assets. Such steps would ensure that EAP becomes a transformative educational space, equipping students with the tools and confidence to navigate academic and professional landscapes while contributing meaningfully to the global community. By prioritising inclusivity in policy, practice, and research, EAP can serve as a model for fostering equitable and inclusive learning experiences.

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## Declarations

**Ethics approval and consent to participate** Not applicable.

**Competing interests** The authors declare no competing interests.

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