



# Rethinking Inclusion: English Language Teachers' Representations Towards Functionally Diverse Students<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article challenges the discourses and practices embedded in inclusive education in Colombia as enacted in policies and biological, social, and moral models of human rights. Drawing on critical disability theory, it unsettles the domesticated conceptualization of disability(ies) provided by inclusive teaching policies and deficitarian human rights-based models. This pedagogical stance enables the exploration of English language (EL) teachers' representations of functionally diverse (FD) students in inclusive settings. The article grapples with contradictions in the educational system that render inclusionary practices, structure, terminologies stemmed from a pathologizing education of the FD children. These contradictions generate representational tensions, meanings, and implications for the teaching of English as a foreign language. The data collection instruments were semi-structured interviews, written narratives, and official texts. The findings suggest that EL teachers normalize and denaturalize inclusive discourses and deficit views derived from inclusive education. The study concludes that EL teachers resist and transform institutionalized inclusive practices through a pedagogical self-discovery, that is a EL personal discursive construction(s) situated within their views of inclusive education.

**Keywords:** ESL, functional diversity, human rights, inclusive education, representations

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# Repensar la inclusión: las representaciones de los profesores de inglés hacia estudiantes con diversidad funcional

## Resumen

Este artículo cuestiona los discursos y prácticas arraigadas en la educación inclusiva en Colombia, tal como se promulgan en las políticas y los modelos biológicos, sociales y morales de los derechos humanos. A partir de la teoría crítica de la discapacidad, se discute la conceptualización domesticada de la(s) discapacidad(es) que proponen las políticas de enseñanza inclusiva y los modelos deficitarios basados en los derechos humanos. Esta postura interpretativa permitió explorar las representaciones que tienen los docentes de inglés de los estudiantes con diversidad funcional en entornos inclusivos. El artículo aborda las contradicciones del sistema educativo que dan lugar a prácticas, estructuras y terminologías inclusivas derivadas de una educación que patologiza a los niños con diversidad funcional, generando tensiones de representación y significados, así como implicaciones para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera. Los instrumentos de recolección de datos fueron entrevistas semiestructuradas, narrativas escritas y textos oficiales. Los resultados sugieren que los profesores normalizan y desnaturalizan discursos inclusivos y visiones deficitarias derivadas de la educación inclusiva. Como conclusión se plantea que los profesores de inglés se resisten y transforman las prácticas inclusivas institucionalizadas a través de un autodescubrimiento pedagógico, es decir, una construcción discursiva personal situada dentro de sus visiones de la educación inclusiva.

*Palabras clave:* diversidad funcional, derechos humanos, educación inclusiva, ESL, representaciones

## Introduction

This article reports on a large-scale study that aimed at exploring English language teachers' representations of students with functional diversity, considering their practices, experiences, and perceptions within inclusive pedagogical settings. In turn, this proposal aims to build activism through resisting dominant discourses and forms of positivist knowledge that has been reproduced within educational Colombian norms (e.g., school for abnormal, Law 24, 1931). In this regard, the notion of inclusive education in Colombia has been framed through a polymorphous normative rhetoric, which legitimizes the why and the how inclusion must be taught in all regions of the country (Law 115, 1994; Decree 2082, 1996; Law 762, 2002; Decree 470, 2007; Decree 366, 2009; Sentence C-293/10; Law 1346, 2016; Decree 1421, 2017). These policies have framed people's moral, biological reasoning, and social attributions within institutional logics through human rights-based models that have circumscribed deficitarian representations (e.g., disabled students, students with special needs, PIAR students, people with disabilities).

In this study, I propose a local vision on functional diversity from the Global South by recognizing the identities of EL teachers and students with functional diversity as part of a horizontal relationship in which experiences, opinions, and viewpoints construct transformative pedagogical practices and enable social and educational change. I departed from the term of *functional diversity* (hereafter FD) (Románach & Palacios, 2008) to resist rehabilitation models, whose role is to treat students in psychiatric and biological limitations (Conde, 2014; Evans et al., 2017). Following this line of thought, I challenge political intervention and social model that view disablement as an individual pathology (Oliver, 1990; Rioux & Valentine, 2006).

Thus, this paper encourages English Language (EL) teachers to use the term of functional diversity to name and value the variety of ways people function (Románach & Palacios, 2008), without reducing students to fixed traits, diagnostics, or assumptions. Furthermore, adopting a critical disability epistemological stance allowed me to rethink norms and systems that define what is considered capable, normal, and intelligent in inclusive settings. Therefore, this research explored EL teachers' representations of FD students, including the influence of inclusive education policies and teaching practices. To establish the analytical foundation, the paper begins by contextualizing how inclusive policy is interpreted within the Colombian educational framework, followed by the theoretical and methodological principles that guided this project. It concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings for EL teachers' representations of functional diversity.

### *Exploring a Legal History of Inclusive Education in Colombia*

Inclusive education in Colombia has undergone major transformations within the political and social context of its constitutions from 1910 to 1991 (Barrero, 2024). Throughout its history, Colombia's sovereignty has been shaped by supranational entities, from Spanish colonization to contemporary forms of global governance as a member of the United Nations since 1945. Colombia has adhered to intergovernmental policies such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (hereafter UDHR), which states that "everyone is entitled to education" (UN, 1948, art. 26). In 1975, the United Nations proclaimed that "disabled persons have the right to education to develop their capabilities and skills to the maximum and will hasten the processes of their social integration or reintegration" (2006, para. 14). This proclamation was later embraced within the Ibero-American region through the *Declaration of Cartagena de Indias* (1992), which states that "people with disabilities need the access of the school integration" (para. 38).

Following these international commitments, the Republic of Colombia (1994) formally established its initial regulations for the education of students with disabilities through Law 115, specifically in Articles 46, 47, and 48. Since then, Colombia has developed a legal framework that institutionalizes inclusive education in order to provide educational for people with disabilities or exceptional talents (Decree 2082, 1996), and to create educational parameters and services tailored to their needs (Law 762, 2002). Bogotá's disability policy (Decree 470, 2007) formalized these services for students with disabilities (Decree 366, 2009). The Decree was followed by the Convention on the Rights of the Person with Disabilities (Sentence C-293/10; Law 1346, 2016), as well as a single regulatory document for the education sector (Decree 1075, 2015). The regulatory framework of inclusive education based on Universal Design for Learning (Decree 1421, 2017) was then exercised in all educational settings through the Individual Plan of Feasible Adjustment (*PIAR*, in its Spanish acronym) and promulgated in inclusive orientation guides as of 2019 to the

date (e.g., inclusive pedagogical resources enacted by [MEN, 2020](#)). Thus, while these Colombian inclusive education policies have rhetorically reframed representations of educational reality, their implementation continues to operate through a top-down model of political legitimacy grounded in able-bodied normativity.

## Theoretical Framework

This paper posits that the concept of inclusive education in Colombia has been framed within the discourse of human rights ([Barrero, 2024](#)). This interpretation can be understood through three interrelated constructs: the medical, social, and moral models. The first legitimates inclusion through educational nomenclature and typology (e.g., special, segregated, inclusive, and integrated education). The second disseminates inclusionary policy and meaning-making without bureaucratic consensualism in the social environment. The third model alienates institutional nomenclature from its educational attributions. Collectively, these models construct *representations of disability* through multiple discourses in educational scenarios.

Given the nature of this study, the discussion is situated within the epistemological framework of critical disability ([Cohen et al., 2018](#); [Kincheloe, 2008](#); [Shildrick, 2012](#)). Within this framework, reality is conceived as a space of struggle against power, privilege, identity, and oppression ([Cohen et al., 2018](#)), as well as between disabled and non-disabled. I use this epistemological interpretive framework to empower FD students and EL teachers ([Kincheloe, 2008](#)) to change illegitimate power structures and political interests through emancipation of the disempowered ([Cohen et al., 2018](#)).

### *Fragile Representations: From Pupils to Patients*

The Colombian legal framework is characterized by a deficit-oriented nomenclature (e.g., students with *limitations or needs*, Law 115, 1994; students with *disabilities*, Law 1346, 2016; students with *exceptional* abilities or talents, Decree 2082, 1996; students with *PIAR*, Decree 1421, 2017), portraying students as “a medical problem that resides in the individual” ([Olkin, 1999](#), p. 26). This framing molds an inclusive typology that tries to capture the essence of the students by using biological terminology ([Barrero, 2024](#)). Such legal nomenclature constitutes an *essentialist discourse*, creating a dichotomy between those considered able and those considered *not able*.

[Vlachou-Balafouti \(2013\)](#) contends that in education, *ability* is viewed as a defining attribute of normality. In contrast, [Siebers \(2008\)](#) emphasizes that *ability* represents a form of acceptance and admission. Thus, policymakers hold authority in determining the inclusive policies within pedagogical settings, employing constructed narratives that legitimize students’ legal status as social objects. [Moscovici \(1961\)](#) points out that

objectification refers to the way in which the new object is quickly simplified, translated into images, and schematized by means of communication. In this process, objects are extracted from their context and subjected to a selection based on normative criteria. (p. 56)

Indeed, students’ objectification becomes increasingly pervasive when the disability system enacts medical policies that manipulate their biological conditions and traits within a pedagogical framework. This approach constructs state interventions and biomedical realities that, in turn, legitimize the categorization of FD students into in-groups and out-groups. Consequently, these medical representations are grounded in a positivist paradigm and technocratic formulations that reflect a broader pathology.

### *Social Representations Turn into Shackles of Power*

[Oliver \(1990\)](#) emphasizes that “the social model defines disability in terms of oppression, barriers and breaks” (p. 33). From this perspective, inclusive education demands multiple strategies (i.e., personal, technological and infrastructural support) to make some facilities accessible to FD students. These strategies are aligned with the Universal Design of Learning (*Diseño Universal para el Aprendizaje*, hereafter DUA) ([Secretaría de Educación Bogotá, 2020](#)), which fosters a barrier-free spirit. The Colombian Ministry of Education (MEN) states that:

Inclusion is a group of processes oriented to eliminate or minimize the barriers that limit learning and participation of all students. Inclusion aims for all students to be under the same conditions in terms of educational opportunities, and get appropriate instruction taking into consideration their needs and personal characteristics. (2022, p. 9)

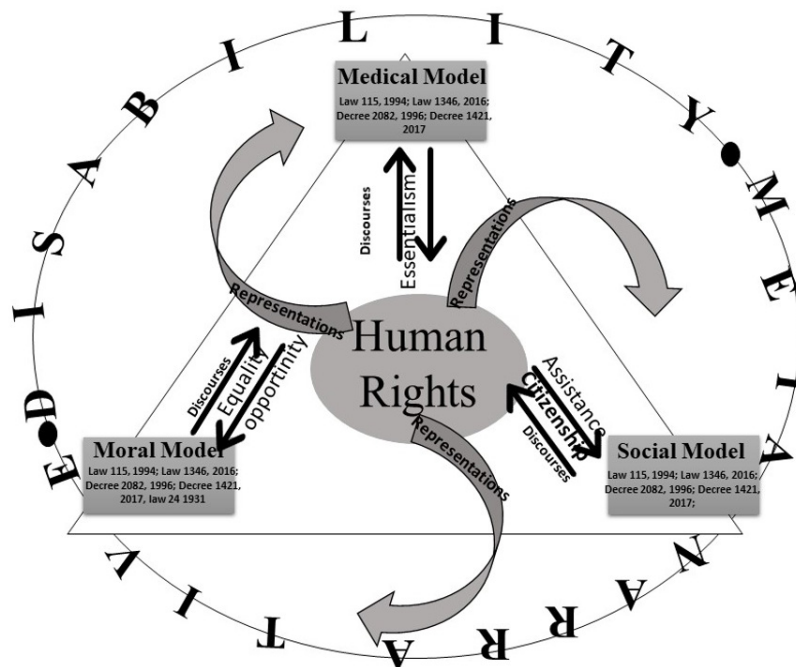
Inclusion, therefore, entails the democratization of the subjects within educational settings (Aldana, 2024), yet it simultaneously fosters a discourse of paternalism. In this sense, the social model compensates for the inclusionary status through the exercise of power that legalizes their distribution, participation, and opportunity. The social model is thus deployed to justify political, ideological, economic, and cultural interventions, generating a certain dependence on the state and a new definition of citizenship. The latter is defined as a “relationship between the individual and the State” (Rioux & Valentine, 2006, p. 55). However, this conception does not ensure the reduction of barriers. The social model assumes that “disability is a consequence of a social structure and the social determinants of disability can be identified and addressed” (p. 51). Accordingly, representations of FD students are shaped by political and institutional actors—such as Ministry of Education (MEN)—who institutionalize environmental modifications in an attempt to accommodate students’ differences. This perspective emphasizes that the limitations faced by FD students result not solely from societal barriers but also from the complex interaction between individuals and their environments.

As Moscovici (1961) asserts, “to represent a thing or a state is not in fact to unfold, repeat, or reproduce it; it is to reconstruct it” (p. 56). In this context, FD students are often materialized as teachable objects within pedagogical scenarios under the premise of providing assistance. Such representations tend to translate into paternalistic decision-making and programs that ultimately create confusion and exacerbate tensions between educational actors by establishing a hostile and restrictive view of individuals with FD.

### Unboxing Moral Representation of Inclusion

In the context of the human rights-derived moral model, disability is defined through cultural and social attributes ascribed to individuals in need of integration, participation, and legitimation (Barrero, 2024). This underscores *normative norms* and *normalistic forms* (Waldschmidt, 2005) that enforce the power of social and legal mechanisms to regulate normative bodies through official discourses of inclusion. The United Nations (2006) defines disability as “an evolving concept resulting from the interaction between people with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that prevent their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (para. 5). This interaction creates a *cultural product* (Evans et al., 2017), in which national and supranational inclusive policies reproduce and mold meaning-making through mainstream discourses of equality, opportunity, and infrastructure, as well as through cultural representations (e.g., cultural text). Thus, people with functional diversity become consumers of able-bodied norms that define and classify the inclusive education within human rights.

These human rights-based models serve as catalysts for reproducing power structures, political agendas, meanings, material realities, and systems of knowledge (Aldana, 2024). They are embedded within social, medical, and moral frameworks that broadly articulate deficit-based representations through various discourses, such as ability, equality, opportunity, paternalism, and normalization. I posit that disability discourses function as metanarratives, prescribing representations of disability within a top-down relationship. According to Barden and Walden (2021), a metanarrative is “a globalizing or totalizing cultural narrative schema that orders and explains knowledge and experiences” (p. 15). Moreover, representations of deficit rooted in human rights frameworks contribute to the objectification of FD students and the instrumentalization of English Language (EL) teachers through power relations and political decisions. This dynamic fosters a deficit-oriented lens within inclusive contexts, leading to the objectification of FD students. As a result, the agency of EL teachers remains conditional and potentially limited, as their capacity for discursive reform is constrained within these dominant frameworks. Figure 1 illustrates this theoretical framework.



**Figure 1.** *Human rights models constructs*  
*Note.* Created by the author

## Research Framework

### *Method*

This study used narrative inquiry as a main source of data. The term narrative inquiry is defined as a “methodology that provides access to language teaching and learning as a lived experience” (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014, p. 12). Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2018) propose an expanded definition of narrative inquiry, stating that it “includes oral and written narratives ranging from short topical stories about particular events to extended accounts about significant aspects of life” (p. 947). This research method enabled me to gain an understanding of functional diversity from the perspective of the ELT professionals. Elliott (2005) advances the notion that “the self is better understood as multiple and continually under construction rather than being a fixed set of characteristics or traits” (p. 124). In this sense, narrative inquiry allowed me to co-narrate multiple constructions of ELT teachers’ lives, knowledges, and professional experiences in relation to inclusive education embedded in political discourses and abled-bodied normative practices within mainstream education.

### *Data Collection*

The first source of data consisted of written narratives (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014) produced by four English language teachers to “describe the events and objects into a meaningful whole” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 986). These four narratives provided the voices, perceptions, and experiences of the ELT teachers regarding functional diversity. I adapted *story templates* (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014) to collect detailed stories through an exploratory process. These templates helped reduce misinterpretations and play a role in the interpretation process.

The second data source was semi-structured interviews, Cohen *et al.* (2018) argue that “interview is a particular medium for enacting or displaying people’s knowledge of cultural forms” (p. 507). In this study, EL teachers point out the contradiction among current constitutional rights, legislation, and administrative policies regarding inclusive education. To address this, I conducted semi-structured interviews in the following stages. First, I applied the



*thematizing technique* to formulate preliminary questions based on my research question and teacher's narratives collected. Second, I used a *designing technique* to adapt questions, based on the piloting stage. Third, I applied the *prompts and probes technique* to clarify topics or questions to the interviewee and to provide detail afterwards. I also refined *question formats* to minimize wording and proposed a sequence for these questions. Subsequently, I conducted an interview to collect the relevant data to answer the research question ([Cohen et al., 2018](#)).

### *Description of the context*

This research was conducted at a private school located in the neighborhood of Engativá, Bogotá. The school has implemented an inclusion program for students with disabilities since 2017, known as the Individual Plan of Feasible Adjustment (PIAR, for its Spanish acronym). This program is promoted by the Colombian government through Decree 1421 of 2017. The PIAR was reproduced by the institutional improvement plan (PMI, for its Spanish acronym) stemmed from the universal design for learning ([MEN, 2017](#)). In this context, students with functional diversity attend classes with their peers in regular classrooms at primary and secondary levels.

Encounters with participants were organized in two modalities: face-to-face and virtual. The sessions were scheduled within the school day to facilitate direct interactions between English language teachers. These in-person meetings fostered dialogue about their experiences and perspectives related to functional diversity, starting from their written narratives. The school environment proved conducive to the interviews, enabling the collection of both verbal and non-verbal dialogical exchanges.

Virtual meetings were held via platforms such as Google Meet, Teams, and Zoom. These online sessions allowed me to clarify some previous concepts, notions, experiences related to students with functional diversity. These meetings allowed me to go beyond essentialist meanings and see the complexity and fluidity of English language teachers' representations regarding functional diversity.

### *Participants*

The participants were four in-service English language teachers from a private school in Bogotá who were encouraged to raise awareness about disability. The term *participant* is used here to identify the person whose experiences are narrated and interpreted in this research. They started as stakeholders who received an invitation to participate in this study. Then, they became beneficiaries who contributed to this study. Subsequently, they transformed into participants who cooperated in this study through their narratives and *co-interpretations* ([Charmaz, 2006](#)). This collaborative process reflected a *horizontal relationship* ([De Jong et al., 2023](#)) that allowed reciprocal learning about disability and inclusive education through interpreting their opinions, perceptions, and perspectives about disability and inclusive education. The participants share specific characteristics: they are Colombian English language teachers who work with functionally diverse students, including those with hemiparesis, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, Asperger's syndrome, clubfoot, social anxiety disorder, and congenital scoliosis.

### *Researcher's role*

In the context of this qualitative study, my role as a researcher was defined as a co-narrator reflecting on the dialogical process of knowledge co-construction and the dynamic powers of EL teachers' realities, opinions, and perceptions of functional diversity. Accordingly, I co-interpreted and constructed a reflexive analysis of situated knowledge derived from teachers' written narratives and semi-structured interviews. This horizontal relationship involved active engagement and mutual participation. Thus, I discussed participants' representations about their functionally diverse students and interactions around inclusive policies and education, while also having the opportunity to reflect on my personal experiences.

### *Ethical issues*

Ethical issues in this study were addressed through the adoption of a horizontal power structure with participants. This approach reduced hierarchical dynamics and ensured that participants had decision-making agency throughout

the research process ([Cohen et al., 2018](#); [Aldana, 2024](#)). This horizontal approach was adopted to ensure that participants were not placed in a subordinate and predetermined position. Ethical considerations were taken into account when inviting teachers to participate in this study. Participants were invited to join the project via a shared Google Docs file. I then met with the school principal and the academic coordinator to explain the research intention. Following this, I handed out the informed consent form to the teachers and the school. Crandall (1978, as cited in [Cohen et al., 2018](#)) argues that consent form “is a set of procedures for an individual to choose whether or not to participate in research once they have been told what is about and what it requires, all those factors which might influence their decisions” (p. 122). The consent form guaranteed privacy and confidentiality of information provided.

As a researcher, I assured to participants that their personal data would be treated confidentially and used solely for academic purposes. In doing so, I used anonymity as a strategy to remove any means of identification through the use of pseudonyms. Plummer (1983, as cited in [Cohen et al., 2018](#)) refers to anonymity as a way to “prevent acquaintances of participants discovering their identity” (p. 130).

## Results and Discussions

This study involved the inductive concept-building orientation and comparative analysis approach known as *grounded theory* (Charmaz, 2006). My role as a co-narrator researcher illuminated situations related to functional diversity both within and beyond the classroom, uncovering hidden networks of deficitarian representations and inclusive education agenda. I used qualitative narrative research to interpret “how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” ([Merriam & Tisdell, 2016](#), p. 15). My epistemological stance was critical disability theories ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#); [Barnes, 1991](#); [Oliver, 1990](#)), which provided a framework for exploring the plurality of English language teachers’ representations of functionally diverse students in multiple realities. The grounded theory was schematized in order to facilitate persistent interaction with data collected through written narratives and semi-structured interviews. The following analytical process was employed:

### *Open Coding*

I organized the data collected from participants’ written narratives and semi-structure interviews, employing numbering and color-coding to identify similar pieces of data and themes. *In vivo* codes captured implicit meanings from participants’ perspectives, aligning with [Charmaz’s \(2006\)](#) approach to preserve participants’ views. I then applied focused coding to synthesize broader data segments, selecting significant codes based on relevance to the research question about teachers’ perceptions of disability.

### *Axial Coding*

[Charmaz’s \(2006\)](#) approach, which has received considerable methodological attention, emphasizes that “axial coding relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis” (p. 60). This step enabled me to explore my data and to refine categories and subcategories.

### *Theoretical Coding*

This strategy helped establish links among categories and discover variations within them, and even in the form of outliers. I decided to use diagramming strategy to provide a visual representation of my categories and their relationships. [Charmaz \(2006\)](#) points out that “diagrams can enable you to see the relative power, scope, and direction of the categories in your analysis as well as the connection among them” (p. 118).

These methodological and epistemological decisions led me to challenge the philosophical assumptions of canonical positivist understandings of inclusive education. As illustrated in [Table 1](#), the sequent research stages were implemented through the implementation of the grounded theory approach ([Charmaz, 2006](#)).



**Table 1. Research Process**

STAGE	DESCRIPTION
1. OPEN CODING	Organizing the transcripts of semi-structured interviews and written narratives.
	Numbering the data by lines.
	Exploring implicit and explicit concerns about my research question data.
	Employing color coding to make visible the chunk of data.
	Breaking the data into a set of text segments.
	Building commonalities into a set of text segments.
	Clustering points of intersections to provide logical sets of codes.
2. AXIAL CODING	Assigning names to each code. (i.e., tacit meanings)
	Managing the codes through color coding.
	Refining the codes into main themes.
	Assigning names to each theme.
	Making connections of participants' themes.
	Forming subcategories and categories of data.
	Analyzing themes, subcategories and categories of data.
3. THEORETICAL CODING	Organizing themes into subcategories and categories.
	Eliminating redundant themes.
	Refining categories and subcategories through visual representation (e.g., diagramming strategy).
	Contrasting themes, categories and subcategories.
4. BUILDING OF INTERPRETATION	Constructing categories and subcategories.
5. REPORTING THE FINDINGS	Making sense of the meanings of data gathered.
	Building my interpretation to shed light on the research question and objectives.

*Note.* Created by the author

These coding stages facilitated the refinement of categories through the lens of my epistemological stance embedded in critical disability theory (Charmaz, 2006). This perspective challenges ableist assumptions and rejects monolithic understandings of disability, with the aim of integrating ideas analytically. Consequently, I was able to synthesize emerging theoretical insights from the data to develop nuanced categories by thoroughly examining participants' views, opinions, and perceptions within educational settings. This process enabled the theorization of English language teachers' representations. As illustrated in Table 2, I delineate and exemplify the main category, its subcategories, and their defining properties.

**Table 2. Categories from Data Analysis**

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORIES	PROPERTIES
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' REPRESENTATIONS: THE INCLUSIONARY MODELS AND POLICIES IN TEACHING FUNCTIONALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS IN EDUCATIVE SETTINGS.	Human rights-centered inclusionary models in ELT.	Assigning meanings from resisting to accepting inclusive discourses.
		Idealization of inclusive education.
	Inclusive discourses as policy drivers in educative settings.	Transforming the nature of inclusive knowledge(s) by self-discovery.
		Deficitarian objectification from ELT teachers.
		Detachment of the pathologizing pedagogy.

### *English language teachers' representations: The inclusionary models and policies in teaching functionally diverse students in educative settings.*

Inclusive education in Colombia reproduces vague understandings of the concepts of inclusive schooling by representing the FD students through personal or institutional symptoms—for instance, student needs and academic adjustments according to FD students. This framing materializes a reductionist notion of redistribution and recognition, grounded in a positivist conceptualization of disability in relation to inclusive Colombian legal framework (Law 115, 1994; Decree 2082, 1996; Law 762, 2002; Decree 470, 2007; Decree 366, 2009; Sentence C-293/10; Law 1346, 2016; Decree 1421, 2017). Such legislation both legitimizes and regulates inclusive education and its influence on health conditions, pedagogical assumptions, and prescribed teaching practices aligned with institutional expectations.

### *Human rights-centered inclusionary models in ELT*

The first subcategory responds to English language teachers' representations in relation to the traditional models of inclusion (i.e., special, inclusive education, integration models), which describe what functionally diverse students *can be, do, and learn*. Exposure to notions of medicalization, rehabilitation, and adjustment reflects discursive practices that shape ELT teachers' knowledge of FD students and their lived experiences of disability, thereby constructing a fixed reality for those who teach, learn, share, and work with functionally diverse students. Consequently, discourses of inclusion are re-presented or mediated through standardized inclusive curriculum (i.e., the *PIAR* program) within shared institutional contexts that prescribe how disability should be addressed in schools.

### *Assigning meanings from resisting to accepting inclusive discourses*

Misunderstanding the nature of functional diversity often leads to the academic practice of pathologizing the individual in multiple conditions. Thereby, "individualized procedures perpetuate practices which focus on *managing* and *controlling* difference within a system" (Vlachou-Balafouti, 2013, p. 113). English language teachers disagree with the traditional terminology associated with disability (i.e., *crippled, retarded, handicapped*); however, new inclusion approaches (integrational approach, human-rights approach, *PIAR* approach) have distorted the understanding of inclusive education within the frameworks established by current policies, norms, and laws. This distortion has a form of state paternalism that serves to justify political agendas and legitimate inaction, as emphasized in these excerpts.

#### **Excerpt 1**

Interviewer: Tell us about your pedagogical settings

"I have ten students with disabilities" (Participant 4, semi-structured interview September 18th, 2023. My translation from Spanish).

#### **Excerpt 2**

Interviewer: Tell us about your pedagogical settings

"I have students with special needs" (Participant 3, semi-structured interview September 18th, 2023. My translation from Spanish).

Excerpts 1 and 2, show a different inclusive terminology used by English language teachers; the vocabulary proposed by inclusive approaches brings confusion and a political perspective to see the subject within an "inclusionary" context. I use quotation marks around the adjective *inclusive* to ironically highlight how normative terms attempt to capture the essence of the students by using biological and social terminology. English language teachers come to know the students through their conscience and self-knowledge in which students' identities are bound by bio-power (Foucault, 1978) and legal terms that transform human beings into subjects, while producing teacher representations.

These traditional and alternative inclusive terminologies are rooted in neoliberal language, inclusive policies, and norms that construct abstract and concrete representations of inclusion. These representations become students' essences as marketized product of beings, configuring inclusive education as a political accommodation through neoliberal technocratic rationality (Excerpts 1 and 2). English language teachers cope with subtle negotiations within their professional status, knowledge, and personal expertise. In this regard, [Foucault \(1978\)](#) suggests that “the law operates more and more as a norm, and ... the juridical institution is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical, administrative, and so on) whose functions are for the most part of regulatory” (p. 144).

### *Idealization of inclusive education*

English language teachers' *spaces*—academic, mentoring, and training—are influenced through inclusionary approaches (e.g., *PIAR* approach, integration model, human-rights based inclusion education, and *Education for All* programs) that create tensions among teachers' perceptions, views, and opinions. These spaces operate within the parameters of abled-bodied normativity and normalcy contexts that mystify the disabled figure through ideological representations enacted in school policies. From this perspective, EL teachers shed light on the idealization of inclusive education, which is grounded in deficit-oriented normativity and discursive normality.

### **Excerpt 3**

If I compare Colombian education than American education, it is obvious that is not ready for this kind of change in inclusive learning, I think that we are just starting to make this kind of change, but I think that we are not ready for this kind of change. (Participant 2. Semi-structured interview- September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023. My translation from Spanish).

Looking at Excerpt 3, we can see that English language teachers tend to idealize and compare education between countries. An idealized education creates roles and demands on English language teachers that determine the space for decision-making and conditions practices of inclusion. This “drives discourses on inclusion in an impulse of homogeneity” ([Tremain, 2005](#), p. 19). The latter labels FD students on power driven categories, such as binary terms between ability and disability. Thus, the idealization of inclusive education introduces an additional layer of complexity, as it presents a fixed portrayal of disability. This, in turn, creates and reinforces stereotypes and stigmas based on human right models (i.e., social, medical, moral) that can impact the treatment of students with functional diversity.

### *Inclusive discourses as policy drivers in educative settings*

The second subcategory responds to inclusive discourses embedded in EL teachers' representations. Regarding discourse, [Clarke \(2008\)](#) points out that “the pedagogical discourses structure the student teachers' system of knowledge and belief” (p. 105). For Clarke, power dynamics behind education are produced within a discourse derived from inclusionary agendas. Namely, “the absence of disabled people's voice is a political act that denies access to particular decision making-process” ([Vlachou-Balafouti, 2013](#), p. 111). Thus, educational policy-practices drive inclusionary programs to articulate them in school and curriculum (i.e., Decree 1421 of 2017-*PIAR*). In this context, English language teachers enact the authority of the school-based policies as *supererogatory duty(ies)* ([Harre & Davies, 1990](#); [Kayi-Aydar, 2019](#)). In this way, institutional practices and discourses are reinforced through their enactment by English language teachers. The second subcategory has the following properties.

### *Transforming the nature of Inclusive knowledge(s) by self-discovery*

EL teachers' discourses portray the inclusive knowledge(s) in two-ways. Firstly, knowledge is represented as a dogmatic system that restricts EL teachers' appropriation of inclusive realities. Secondly, knowledge is proposed as a subversive act, to be explored through local and inclusive pedagogy(ies), with the aim of facilitating self-discovery. The following excerpts show EL teachers' challenges and transformations in their pedagogical practices with FD students.

### Excerpt 4

“Making changes to my teaching practice helps me to adapt the activity in each classroom in order to help students understand the other language and try to make it an engaging experience” (Participant 1. Semi-structured interview- September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023. My translation from Spanish).

### Excerpt 5

“I think students with disabilities are a group of students or learners can develop all the communicative competences from their own possibilities” (Participant 2. Semi-structured interview- September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023. My translation from Spanish).

From these excerpts, participants describe the actions they take with functionally diverse students, as well as the behaviors they adopt toward them. In particular, I could perceive a constant change in their teaching practices, pedagogical materials, and assessment through their self-observations expressed during the semi-structured interviews. This continuous change forms a process of self-reflection, which prompts English language teachers to reflect on their professional, personal, and academic dimensions. This process of self-reflection can be described as a *pedagogical self-discovery*, through which English language teachers realize that inclusionary policies often fail to reflect the realities of their classrooms, prompting them to question and challenge these policies and models. English language teachers’ attitudes and views regarding functional diversity challenge inclusionary policies and models. These factors result in a “behavioral intention, which in turn causes the planned behavior to be executed” ([Wagner et al., 2018](#), p. 15).

### *Deficitarian objectification from ELT teachers*

English language teachers’ representations are products of discursive policies and educational norms embedded in human rights models. I refer to inclusive discourses as products because they function as instruments of power ([Fairclough, 1992](#); [Gaertner et al. \(2010\)](#)), resulting from the result of State and supranational policies or processes. These representations categorize people into in-groups and out-groups, thereby facilitating the objectification of students as *PIAR*, *disabled*, *needed children* within an inclusive system. The following excerpt illustrates the objectification of the functional diverse students.

### Excerpt 6

“Because I have PIAR children, who are very smart, while I have others who are not part of this group” (Participant 4. Semi-structured interview September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023. My translation from Spanish).

[Gaertner et al. \(2010\)](#) suggest that “when people or objects are categorized into groups, real differences between members of the same category tend to be perceptually minimized in making decisions or forming impressions” (p. 528), particularly within inclusive education. English language teachers deal with distinctions and distortions between school actions, students, and teaching methodologies (see Excerpt 6). [Rioux and Valentine \(2006\)](#) highlight that “how disability is perceived, diagnosed, and treated, scientifically and socially, is reflected in assumptions about social responsibility toward people with disabilities as a group” (p. 50). Excerpt 6 indicates that interactions between English language teachers and functionally diverse students can result in a discrepancy between the social constructions of disability and the reality of disabled and non-disabled individuals. Social responsibility can interpret the conception of reality by contrasting and comparing their interactions and experiences.

English language teachers are continually confronted with inclusionary models that have the potential to alter their interactions, teaching practices, and behavior. As [Barden and Walden \(2021\)](#) highlight, “people who are perceived as different have also been presented as symbolic of what it is to be human” (p. 78). This deficitarian conceptualization, derived from human-rights models, undermines the independence of *human status*. The latter presents “human rights discourses from more abstract determinations of rights based on membership in a nation-state” ([Rioux & Valentine, 2006](#), p. 183). English language teachers face inclusionary policies that suppress the human status of

subjects embedded in academic responsibilities under the conceptualization of *integration*. These legitimize and recreate a recognition of *humanity*.

### *Detachment of the pathologizing pedagogy*

Inclusive standardization implemented in our colombian context (i.e., Decree 1421 of 2017), which is aligned with the principles of DUA enacted by UNICEF ([Secretaría de Educación Bogotá, 2018](#)), destabilizes English language teachers' decision-making. The result is a proliferation of discursive, pathological interventions as opportunities of inclusive educational practices. The following excerpt discusses the detachment of the pathologizing pedagogy.

### **Excerpt 7**

Understanding the particularities of each student, I was scared depending on the type of autism, I am not prepared for that. At school I did not study with children like that. It is something cultural that is coming, it has been transforming, sometimes the schools' diagnoses are frightening, that students have to, that they have all of that. (Participant 4. Semi-structured interview- September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023. My translation from Spanish)

Excerpt 7 reveals a *pathologizing pedagogy*, which I define this concept as political discourse embedded in inclusive education that constructs a deficitarian subject and generates English language teachers' assumptions of disability that evoke demands in the exercise of responsibilities within inclusive education programs. Indeed, the latter endeavors to adapt educational methods as treatments and diverse understandings of disability as prerequisites for teaching. Consequently, the adoption of a pathologizing pedagogy has the effect of polarizing educational policy and practice, thereby engendering a state of confusion and the absence of teachers' voices in the decision-making process

Moreover, English language teachers often express uncertainty about teaching students with functional diversity, as national laws and policies exert pressure on their professional responsibilities. These frameworks construct prescriptive notions of what human rights signify. In this regard, inclusionary discourses are embedded in forms of paternalism, in which the state and policies circumscribe individual, social, and medical pathology. [Riddell and Watson \(2014\)](#) argue that "the socially dominant culture shapes the ways in which disability and impairment are viewed" (p. 1).

However, English language teachers' representations show a transformation by making pedagogical decisions that detach their own views from disability paternalism. "Representations must be seen as the meaning in concerted behaviors by integrating them into a network of relations in which it is bound up with its object" ([Moscovici, 2008](#), as cited in [Wagner et al., 2018](#), p. 133). English language teachers' representations regarding students with functional diversity may change the interaction with the students. They can transform deficitarian representations by negotiating their own pedagogical and professional conceptualizations. However, the ideological construction of inclusive education tends to frame the pedagogical sphere as a site where teachers dispute the essence of students.

## **Conclusions**

This study identified the need to explore English language teachers' representations with regard to students with functional diversity. The findings suggest that some English language teachers' representations are embedded in traditional models of inclusion, which ascribe a canonical and positivist view of inclusive education. These pedagogical representations are enacted through official nomenclature and typology that distort the understanding of inclusive education in the conditions under which policies, models, norms, and practices are institutionalized.

This qualitative narrative study shows that English language teachers' representations as follows. First, English language teachers represent functionally diverse students by assigning meanings to disability through resisting and accepting emergent or predetermined inclusive discourses (e.g., medical, social, and moral discourses,

discourses of opportunity, normalcy, integration). In doing so, the meaning-making mode of representation creates tensions among English language teachers as inclusive discourses enact the figure of disability through national legislation and inclusive education. This leads English language teachers to develop forms of *knowledges* and understanding of functional diversity. This is evidenced by a horizontal, non-essentialist, resilient, and intersectional approach that challenges the reductionist and positivist representations of disability.

Second, English language teachers represent functionally diverse students by idealizing their education based on the recognition of their needs in relation to social and educational conditions through the normalization of functions to guide the students' performance. This idealization is seen in the transition from mainstream education to inclusive education. Here, the recognition of human status marks the influence of English language teachers' representations regarding functionally diverse students.

Third, English language teachers represent functionally diverse students by portraying educative and inclusionary realities. Rather than a "state of heroism for disabled persons by the factor of hype and/or leads to an exaggeration of facts, figures and conditions" (Harrison, 1985, as cited in [Dawn, 2021](#), p. 27), I refer to the concept of pedagogical self-discovery that emerged from the analysis of the category. This one interprets forms of pre-existing or existing English language teachers' representations regarding students with functional diversity through teacher's actions (i.e., curriculum, lesson plan, assessment). Particularly, EL teachers reflect on pedagogical conditions and situational behaviors related to FD students' needs. As a result, teachers can denaturalize deficit views by transforming their teaching practices through *pedagogical self-discovery*. The latter brings clarity to the diffuse articulation between teachers' deliberations and inclusive policies to represent the students. Overall, English language teachers deconstruct their mystification of dominant groups and challenge their views of inclusive education in light of their local realities. For example, EL teachers' *self-discovery*, defining them as personal discursive construction(s) situated within pedagogical practice. These constructions juxtapose their own narratives from past experience to transfigure social realities to the present and future.

Fourth, EL teachers' resistance transforms the monolithic nature of disability and prescribed teaching practices into school-based expectations. This resistance allows teachers to negotiate meaning and the interaction with functional diversity, which in turn plays an important role in the formation and reflection upon students' identities and the detachment from the view of the deficitarian subject (i.e., normative bodies). Similarly, EL teachers manifest in resistance norms that dictate and interpret how functionally diverse individuals should feel, behave, and learn within educational settings (e.g., Excerpts 4 and 5).

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