

### An Exploration of Practices Adopted by EFL Teachers for Learners with Low-Incidence Disabilities in Inclusive Classes

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**Abstract:** English language is arguably one of the life prerequisites in this information era and more individuals around the world than ever before are involved in learning English language as an international language of education and business. Learners with disabilities are not excluded from this mainstream; however, they face barriers in learning English. As such, we aimed in this phenomenological multiple case study, underpinned by the social constructivist view of disability, to identify factors affecting EFL teachers' inclusive practices provided for learners with low-incidence disabilities and reveal the compatibility of such practices with Vygotsky's social constructivism. To this end, four inclusive classes were observed for 88 sessions (12 sessions per class) and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 45 EFL teachers. We used the data collected from observation notes and interview transcripts to extract major themes describing factors affecting such practices in EFL settings. Drawing on the collected data, we plotted a conceptual framework, and then examined the compatibility of the inclusive practices adopted by the EFL teachers with Vygotsky's social constructivist theory. We concluded with a discussion on the study's implications and recommendations for practitioners.

**Keywords:** EFL Teachers; Inclusive Practices; Learners with Low-Incidence Disabilities; Inclusive Classes.

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## Introduction

English language is arguably one of the life prerequisites in this information era and more individuals around the world than ever before are involved in studying and learning English language as an international language of education and business. Learners with disabilities are not excluded from this mainstream; however, they face barriers in learning English. In EFL settings where there are learners with varying educational backgrounds, types of motivation for language learning, nationalities, and language backgrounds, diversities are naturally expected and often taken as a pedagogical tool in the classroom; consequently, disability is the last issue addressed in the pursuit of establishing a truly inclusive environment. To put it in other words, EFL learners with disabilities have been left out of the conversation in spite of noticeable breakthroughs in the field of ELT.

Theoretically speaking, social constructivism as a framework to support education for all students points out the well-documented fact that human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others. Revealed in his earliest works, Vygotsky, as the leading figure of social constructivism, was fond of the psychology of children with disabilities and believed that "an understanding of how children with disabilities learn was an indispensable aspect of the general theory of human development" (Kozulin, 1990, p. 195).

Inclusive education has opened the doorway for a large number of individuals with disabilities to be educated. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to these learners suffers from a number of shortcomings including lack of trained, well-prepared, and experienced teachers, poor quality of inclusive practices, lack of quality teacher training programs, and insufficient qualified models. In Iran, many individuals with varying types and severity of disability are included in regular English language classes held in private language institutes and EFL teachers cannot refuse to accept them in their classrooms. Hence, regular English language classes include both non-disabled and disabled language learners, making the field a rich one for research. With reference to the Iranian EFL context, a thorough review of literature yielded no studies on teachers' inclusive practices in EFL classes. The study of EFL teachers' practices in inclusive classes addresses the paucity of research documenting such practices when teaching EFL learners with disabilities.

In this study, we investigated EFL teachers' practices in inclusive classes containing learners with low-incidence disabilities. Specifically, we aimed to identify and extract factors affecting EFL teachers' decisions on the use of practices in inclusive EFL classes. Moreover,

we attempted to reveal the extent of compatibility between EFL teachers' practices in inclusive EFL classes and the Vygotskian perspective in social constructivism.

### Literature Review

Different perspectives have been put forward by many theorists on disability and inclusive education; however, they are underpinned by social constructivism evolved from the works of Vygotsky (1896-1934). Vygotsky, as the leading figure of social constructivism, was fond of the psychology of children with disabilities believing that "an understanding of how children with disabilities learn was an indispensable aspect of the general theory of human development" (Kozulin, 1990, p. 195). Vygotsky, aiming for an egalitarian social order, began his work with war victims and children with different types of impairments in hearing, language, and vision. He believed that these disabilities have socio-cultural limitations in addition to organic ones (Daniels, 1995). He noticed that learners' performance is enhanced when there is a promoted sense of belonging and that learners' strengths are reinforced when a proper collaboration is provided to them. At this stage, he highlighted the role of society in learners' development. For Vygotsky, human cognitive and affective development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others.

According to social constructivists, what enhances such engagement is the context where learning occurs and learners interact with each other during the process of learning. Existing perspectives in the social constructivist framework all highlight the need for collaboration among learners and practitioners in the society if learning processes are to be developed and facilitated (Gredler, 1997). Vygotsky suggested that organically impaired individuals exposed to a socialized learning environment develop in accordance with their potentials; however, those deprived of such a socialization opportunity evolve towards social impairments and reveal distortions in their higher psychological functions.

From another perspective, Wills and Jackson (1996) concerned the same issue and introduced it as the "social inclusion" of individuals with disabilities in mainstream education. In line with the proclaimed principle of inclusion, there has been an ongoing attempt to provide quality education to all learners, including ones with special needs. Wills and Jackson (1996), however, believed that inclusion is much more than mere attendance in regular classes and that the successful implementation of inclusion in educational settings involves three integral components: Physical inclusion, social inclusion, and curriculum inclusion. Physical inclusion refers to disabled learners attending the same class or

educational setting as their non-disabled counterparts and having access to the same educational facilities and opportunities at the same time like non-disabled peers of the same age. Disabled learners' physical attendance in classes is the prerequisite to their social inclusion, i.e. being socially welcomed. In order for the social inclusion to be realized, some strategies and practices should be adopted by teachers and others involved. They include promoting caring for others, friendship, collaboration, cooperation, and the like. The third component of inclusion, as the most complicated one, necessitates the involvement of disabled learners in the regular curriculum of the class. Accordingly, teachers should pay close attention to individual needs and skills of all learners. Two out of the three components highlight the role of teachers and their inclusive practices in inclusive education.

Meanwhile, teachers ought to think seriously about the consequences of their educational preferences on disabled learners, if egalitarian view is of concern (Brantlinger, 1997). As Hornby (2014) asserted, inclusion will lead to success if teachers are aware of different types of disabilities and have knowledge about different teaching practices and learner preferences for each specific category of disability. Teachers' negative attitudes, feelings, and perception as well as their lack of knowledge, experience and competence generate inclusive practices that do not meet the needs of learners with disabilities. An inadequate teacher preparation can threaten the language learning and teaching system, revealing unfair discrimination against EFL learners. Despite much debate found in the literature on the admission of disabled learners in regular classes, the necessity of identifying the most effective strategies and practices to nurture the social and educational growth of these learners in the field of EFL learning and teaching is the one seriously in need of research. Therefore, we attempted to observe and report EFL teachers' inclusive practices, and also to examine compatibility of such practices with Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism to contribute to the existing literature on inclusion in EFL settings.

## **Method**

### ***Participants and Setting***

Convenience sampling method was used to collect data from four inclusive EFL classes held in three English language institutes located in Tehran, Iran. The foremost inclusion criterion for the institutes was that they had inclusive classes including at least one EFL learner with low-incidence disabilities. The profiles of the four observed EFL teachers are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Demographics of the Four Observed EFL Teachers*

Teachers	Gender	Age	Years of Experience	Level of Education/Major	Types of Disability Included in Class
1	Male	28	6	MA/TEFL	Vision Impairment
2	Female	25	5	BA/Translation	Hearing and Vision Impairment
3	Male	30	7	MA/TEFL	Vision Impairment
4	Female	33	12	PhD/TEFL	Speech Impairment

According to Table 1, the teachers (two males and two females) had a teaching experience of 5-12 years, with a mean experience of 7.5 years. Moreover, the participants had experience of teaching EFL learners with low-incidence disabilities without receiving special training on inclusive teaching, and were undergraduate (one participant) and postgraduate (three participants) in the fields of English language teaching and translation. The participants' minimum and maximum years of age were 25 and 45, respectively. The disabled EFL learners included in their observed classes suffered from at least one type of low-incidence disability (namely vision impairment, hearing impairment, and speech impairment).

Moreover, 45 EFL teachers (including the four previously observed EFL teachers) selected by purposeful random sampling took part in focus-group interviews to provide deeper understanding of EFL teachers' inclusive practices accommodated for learners with low-incidence disabilities in inclusive classes.

**Table 2.** *Demographics of the Interviewed EFL Teachers*

EFL Teachers	N	Gender		Receiving Specific Training on Inclusion		Mean Years of Experience	Experience of Teaching EFL Students with Disabilities		Level of Education		Age Range (Years)
		Male	Female	Yes	No		Yes	No	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	
	45	30	15	0	45	8.2	45	0	20	25	10 29 6

Table 2 shows that the male (n=30) and female (n=15) teachers had experience of teaching EFL learners with low-incidence disabilities. Regarding the teachers' age range, there were 10 teachers aged below 25 years, 29 teachers aged between 25-45 years, and 6

teachers aged above 45 years. The teachers had received no special training on inclusion, and they were randomly selected from metropolitan cities (10 teachers from Arak, 5 teachers from Mashhad, 25 teachers from Tehran, and 5 teachers from Shiraz). Since these cities contain individuals from different rural and urban areas, the representativeness of the sample was to some extent ensured. To control the effect of mediating variables and provide novice teachers with more efficient study implications, the participants had at least five years of experience in teaching English language; five years of experience is regarded as a commonly accepted criterion in the selection of experienced teachers (Tsui, 2003).

### *Instruments*

A combination of qualitative instruments was used for the data collection process in this study.

A) Class observation: It allowed the researchers to collect data on the classroom processes and teachers' practices in inclusive classes and facilitated a more emic perspective to be adopted. Using observations, we could observe whether the teachers were actively providing opportunities for enhanced inclusion. One of the researchers observed the classes for 48 sessions (12 sessions per class) as a non-participant observer and did not intervene with normal courses of processes and practices in the classes. No audio or video recording was allowed; hence, we used some checklists and notes to carefully capture the complexity of what was going on. Any question or feedback was delayed until the class was over.

B) Checklists: A checklist adopted from "Quality Indicators for Effective Inclusive Education" (New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education, 2000) was utilized while observing the classes to keep the record of the EFL teachers' inclusive practices during the observation period. This scale assesses 11 areas of practice; however, only the areas relevant to teachers and teachers' practices (namely leadership; scheduling and participation; curriculum, instruction and assessment; individual student supports; collaborative planning and teaching; professional development; and planning for continued best practice improvement) were focused during the observation sessions. Furthermore, the checklist "A Classroom Checkup: Best Teaching Practices in Special Education" (Sikorski, Niemiec, & Walberg, 1996) was used as a guide since it assesses specific teaching practices in more details. This checklist consists of four major categories and 40 subcategories. The main categories include (1) introducing the lesson; (2) presenting the lesson; (3) student participation; and (4) corrective feedback (Sikorski et al., 1996).

C) Interviews: To collect data in this qualitative study, one of the researchers carried out focus-group interviews with the EFL teachers. As an alternative to traditional one-to-one interviews, the focus group interview is a “carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment” (Krueger, 1994, P. 6). The interview questions were validated using Simon’s Survey/Interview Validation Rubric for Expert Panel. Clarity, balance, wordiness, use of technical language, and negative wording were the criteria, based on which the validity of the questions was ensured. The questions were first pilot tested through one-to-one interviews with five randomly selected teachers. Main themes were extracted and submitted to three university professors. Based on their comments, the most relevant interview questions addressing the main concerns of the research were kept. The mean length of the interviews was about 50 minutes.

### ***Procedure***

In line with the objective of this study, in the first phase, four classes were observed for twelve 90-minute sessions (a total of .... minutes)) The institutes’ heads/supervisors did not allow audio/video recording, and thus the observer used checklists, narrative comments, and notes. Subsequently, the observer retrospectively interviewed the four observed EFL teachers so that they could provide some clarifications regarding the instructional practices and decisions made in their inclusive classes. This helped us to ensure the validity of the class observation findings through such a triangulation technique.

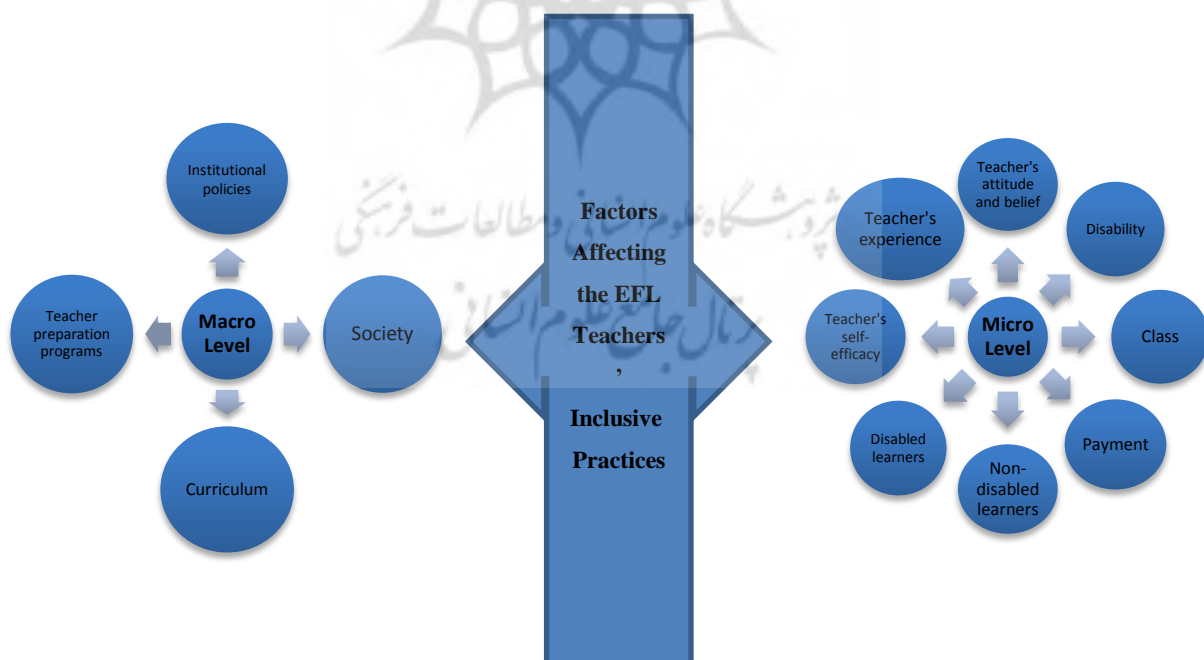
In the second phase, 45 EFL teachers participated in focus group interviews. First, we formed 7 gender-heterogeneous groups (4 groups with 6 participants and 3 groups with 7 participants). Then, the interviewer initiated the interview with some warm-up statements like greeting and some questions about the interviewees’ demographic specifications in order to establish a rapport and make the group members familiar with each other. Subsequently, the questions were asked and discussed by the group members. The interviewees were allowed to answer the questions using their own native language in order to control the effect of fluency/accuracy. Within the discussion, follow-up questions were also posed by the interviewer to let the interviewees elaborate more on the aspects that were not fully explained. At the end, the participants were asked whether they had any further comments. The data was transcribed verbatim in order to facilitate further content analysis. Finally, open and axial coding as well as Broome’s ..... descriptive phenomenological method was used

to extract main themes. The findings were rechecked by two other experts to ensure the inter-coder consistency. In the case of any controversy, the points were discussed until an agreement was achieved.

## Results

### Factors Affecting the EFL Teachers' Inclusive Practices

As it was previously mentioned, EFL teachers present different types and levels of practices in inclusive classes; however, the reasoning behind the way they reach their decisions is not yet clear. The collected data from the interviews revealed that a large number of factors affected the EFL teachers' inclusive practices. A total of 000 entries were extracted, and the overlapping themes were placed in the same category. Finally, the influential factors were classified into two major categories at macro and micro levels (Fig. 1). The macro-level factors were related to broader scopes (e.g., institutional policies, society, curriculum, and teacher preparation programs) while the micro-level ones consisted of narrower issues (e.g., teacher's attitude and belief, payment, non-disabled learners, disabled learners, level of competence, teacher's experience, and teacher's age and gender.. Each factor is briefly described below.



**Figure 1.** Factors affecting the EFL teachers' inclusive practices



## Macro-Level Factors

The macro-level factors were classified into four categories, as described below:

### *Institutional Policies*

A majority of the EFL teachers agreed that their effort was not valued in language institutes, and that they should not be hard on themselves for making inclusive classes work.

Interviewee 31: *A large number of Iranians are eager that they or their children fully learn a foreign language, particularly language. The same comes true for parents with disabled children. Hence, they spent money in language institutes. On the other hand, the institutes are economic agencies and pay more attention to financial revenues than teaching*

### • *Society*

Generally speaking, when a society is not inclusive and regard disabled individuals as outliers, it believes that those who look, talk, walk, hear, and act different should stay home and be cared for by those who are not different. Many of the teachers perceived that learning a language does not help disabled individuals to be successful in the society. Some others asserted that individuals with disabilities are not to be accepted in a class like normal individuals even if they are competent in a foreign language. On the contrary, a small number of teachers were aware of the adverse effects of negative stereotypes and stigmatization on the special need learners' success, internal stress, and social/emotional issues and attempted to treat such learners with the utmost respect and fairness in terms of their right as EFL learners participating in inclusive classes. In this way, the teachers were to compensate for the negatives of such stigmatization and discrimination. The interviewee 13 noted,

*You see, they are in a world in which they should make a stand. All people, including their classmates, may judge and ridicule them. They are labeled as blind, deaf, abnormal, and so and so. Their parents and teachers impose pressure on them and ask them to be and act like normal individuals when they do not even know the difference between a normal and abnormal person. I mean, we all make them believe they are disabled and labeled. As a teacher, I try to have teaching practices and strategies in a way they are treated with respect and openness.*

### • *Curriculum*

Teachers need to think seriously about the consequences of their teaching practices when developing syllabi or observing curricula. In the case of English as a foreign language, private language institutes design a curriculum containing books, chapters, and materials,

which needs to be fully covered so that learners can proceed to next language levels. Accordingly, EFL teachers are sometimes obliged to sacrifice quality in order to obtain quantity. To do so, they ignore individualized instruction as they are heavily overwhelmed by a large bulk of stuff to cover within a semester.

**Interviewee 32:** .. m mfff f ff e ee eiaa aaaaiceooo oo ooo oo@ eooiii ii ii ddd  
*I should observe the curriculum to be completed.*

#### • **Teacher Preparation Programs**

Teachers shall be aware of different teaching practices meeting language needs of disabled learners and their non-disabled peers in an inclusive classroom. Consequently, comprehensive teacher training programs might assist teachers in selecting the most effective inclusive practices. Such comprehensive programs should equip teachers with abilities and skills to promote disabled learners' self-confidence and motivation and encourage them to take part in events and interact with their peers. Teachers should also be taught how to cater and support learners with disabilities and how to accommodate and adjust materials and practices to be balanced with disabled learners' needs. Unfortunately, none of the EFL teachers had received relevant instructions on the abovementioned issues. They felt bewildered how to adjust their teaching practices with the variety of needs observed in inclusive classes. The interviewee 5, for example, was confused with lots of questions in his mind and said,

*I passed a five-week intensive TTC course and received a certificate. But I did not learn anything about the situation like what I am struggling with. How should I teach a blind language learner? How can I teach him reading, listening, speaking, or writing? ... Shall I ignore him and treat him as others? I REALLY have no answer to these questions.*

#### **Micro-Level Factors**

The micro-level factors affecting the EFL teachers' inclusive practices are explained below:

##### • **Teacher's Attitude and Belief**

Some opportunities or barriers to inclusive practices in EFL classes were found to be formed by the teachers' perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and attitudes towards the inclusion of EFL learners with low-incidence disabilities in their classrooms. The teachers' willingness to keep a track of new teaching and learning strategies had also an impact on their decision to select the type of practices. How teachers perceive learners' efforts to lead to great

accomplishments also affects the value they place on their EFL learners' needs, goals, and preferences.

**Interviewee 10:** *In my opinion, I am committed to assist them in learning English and always reflect on the classroom, my learners, language needs and the practices to be presented in my class.*

#### • *Disability*

It is rightfully accepted that learners with any types of disability deserve education; however, types and severity of disability affect teachers' inclusive practices. Considering the severity or types of disability, the EFL teachers had some adaptations in time, input, output, level of support, level of difficulty, level of modification and adaptation, and alternate objectives.

**Interviewee 19:** *More sophisticated lesson planning is required when teachers are to teach English to a hard-of-hearing pupil than to a visually-impaired learner.*

#### • *Class*

Another factor was the class size as excessive class load might be imposed on teachers managing large class sizes (Harfitt, 2012). Some of the teachers explained that time is more limited in larger classes since they spend less time with each learner. Since teachers are obliged to teach pre-specified materials within the specified term period, they cannot maneuver as much as they wish to manipulate teaching practices in large classes.

Another class-related factor was the physical condition and area of the classroom. The teachers, for example, asserted that they are not able to have many role plays and tasks when the class is small and no movement around the class is possible. Lighting, air conditioning, and other physical features seem to affect their incentives to use a variety of inclusive practices. A relevant statement is presented below:

**Interviewee 15:** *As a teacher, I am just concerned with finishing the textbook before the term ends. With 18 learners in a class, I have no time to think about the most effective ways to teach one or two disabled learners attending the class.*

#### • *Payment*

Almost all the language teachers complained about low pays for long hours of classes. Some of the teachers used the terms "over-worked" and "low-income" to describe their situation.

**Interviewee 40:** *How come should I spend more time on preparing teaching practices for a class including one or more disabled learners when there is no change in pay? My finance is always low and it was a struggle working and teaching full-time.*

### • *Non-Disabled Learners*

An inclusive classroom consists of both disabled and non-disabled learners. How non-disabled learners interact, cooperate, and communicate with their disabled peers affects the type of inclusive practices teachers select for their classes.

**Interviewee 22:** *In inclusive class, I have a peer teaching system, according to which non-disabled learners help their disabled peers in learning English language.*

### • *Disabled Learners*

In the observed classes, it was also noticed that the disabled learners' motivation and the way they responded to the tasks influenced the teachers' inclusive practices. Furthermore, the inclusive practices somehow depended on these learners' personality traits (i.e., whether they were introvert or extrovert, open or close, and so on). Additionally, a few number of the teachers pointed out that female disabled learners of younger age can better manage to take part in tasks and assignments and adjust themselves to the class conditions; therefore, teachers feel more comfortable to prepare inclusive practices for such learners in inclusive classes.

**Interviewee 18:** *I had a visually-impaired language student who could establish a good rapport with her classmates. And you know, my other students liked him so much and made their best to help her in assignments. In this way, I was also motivated to provide the most efficient inclusive practices to accelerate his learning.*

### • *Teacher's Self-Efficacy*

Teacher self-efficacy indicates how teachers believe in their ability to enhance their learners' achievement and bring about positive learning outcomes. The teachers expressed that they encountered enormous challenges in their inclusive classes, which may seem to originate from their perceived inadequate knowledge, competence, and command of language as well as their limited professional development scopes.

**Interviewee 18:** *I am not prepared to teach such sensitive learners. I think, I need further retraining courses in English.*

### • *Teacher's Experience*

The results of data analysis revealed that the EFL teachers' experience of working with disabled learners also affected their choice of inclusive practices. Moreover, the collected data revealed a difference between types of practices provided by the experienced and novice teachers. Additionally, the teachers' years of experience seemed to be affecting the teachers'

perception of self-efficacy, which ultimately influenced the selection and adaptation of practices. The interviewee 17 said,

*On my first days of teaching, I was incredibly nervous and confused. Having a physically disabled learner in my first class was overwhelming, you know, demanding, but after a few sessions, it went better and better. I learned a lot from my experience in that class and from my learners and now, I have no problem handling and managing such integrated classes.*

### **Compatibility between the Teachers' Inclusive Practices and the Vygotskian Perspective**

In addition to further examining the inclusive practices in the EFL classes, the compatibility between the teachers' inclusive practices and the Vygotskian perspective was also explored based on four features.

Vygotsky introduced the social constructivist theory of learning and development, which has been a hotbed of discussion over years. Vygotsky was obsessed with the psychology of children with disabilities and assumed that knowledge of how learning occurs for disabled children is an integral component of human development theory (Kozulin, 1990). In this theory, four salient features underpinning social constructivist perspectives are active construction of knowledge, situated learning, community of learners, and discourse (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989).

Previous experiences and knowledge form the spring board of new learning, even though, deeper understanding and use of knowledge is obtained for learners when there is an active participation in learning (Krajcik et al., 1998). The social constructivist theory, thus, introduces learning as a socially situated activity mediated by more knowledgeable others (i.e., teachers, parents, and peers) through expert scaffolding. Palincsar and Brown (1989) noted that learners build up new skills and knowledge through guided instruction, discussions, discourse and repeated interactions in meaningful contexts. Consequently, learners, including disabled ones, internalize their knowledge and are able to participate in social activities more independently.

Situated learning, as a general theory of knowledge acquisition and outgrowth of the constructivist theory, is a collaborative interaction of peers in an educational setting; hence, it is, thus, a peer based relationship rather than a student teacher based relationship (Henning, 1998; Lunce, 2006). The peer mediation gives the disabled an opportunity to identify their problems and find relevant solutions in a less challenging setting. In this case, learners'

knowledge and experience evolve and they become expert practitioners whose actions are observed.

Another key concept in the constructivist framework is the community of learners. In this theory, it is assumed that learning takes place within a collaborative setting where there is an exchange of knowledge and idea sharing with an aim of making new knowledge. Such a collaboration may occur between teachers, peers and community members (Schneider, Krajcik, Marx, & Soloway, 2002). Four key components of learning community are authentic tasks, negotiation of understanding, public display and shared responsibility for learning and teaching. It is impractical to transfer real world activities into a classroom; however, the EFL teachers reported the simulation of such activities through modeling their structure and dynamics into the classroom.

In the present study, most of the EFL teachers reported the use of real world practices such as discussions, role-plays and video-audio clips in their inclusive classes. The teachers were also focused on authentic tasks since they are situated in meaningful contexts. Furthermore, it was observed that the teachers involved their learners in tasks developed based on daily activities and made them understand the underpinning ideas, reflecting a real life context. In such a learning community, EFL learners, including disabled and non-disabled learners, examine their old knowledge, build new knowledge, debate their opinions and collaborate shared meaning (i.e., negotiation of understanding). Motivated by such cooperation and collaboration, the disabled EFL learners showed and expressed a feeling of belonging to groups, as the teachers noted. When the interviewees were asked to further elaborate on this point, they asserted that the inclusive practices allowed further interactions for the disabled as they communicated with others who were not their mere acquaintances. In the observed classes, the disabled learners participating in inclusive group practices were also observed as group members, who were obviously satisfied by interacting with their peers. Participation in tasks such as group and free discussions that were initiated by the EFL teachers and led by the learners in the classes paved the way for the negotiation of understanding. Public display means supporting learners' endeavors to participate in a learning community, share their ideas and provide feedback for others. More interestingly, the teachers noticed that when the disabled learners found themselves in a situation being obliged to identify their peers' mistakes, they became more aware of their own strengths and language knowledge, resulting in their further self-confidence.

In inclusive classes, teachers no longer stick to the principles of traditional teaching and to their traditional role as knowledge transmitters. Moreover, learners in such settings are not just knowledge receivers and are allowed to construct new knowledge through social interactions and negotiations. Thus, all learners in inclusive classes are equally provided with the right to share their ideas and express their feelings. When constructing a new knowledge based on inclusive practices planned by a teacher, EFL learners take responsibility in learning. When providing peer coaching and feedbacks to other classmates, EFL learners also take responsibility in teaching. Thus, it can be claimed that learning and teaching are a shared responsibility in inclusive EFL classes and teachers play a guide or supporter role, assisting learners in understanding and applying language knowledge. The EFL teachers also reported, although it was observed as well, the use of inquiry-based practices. This type of practices facilitates the promotion of social skills of disabled learners in inclusive classes as peer-interaction is of great importance in a learner-centered environment. This, in turn, promotes social interaction, and consequently learning. In a similar vein, a satisfying and supportive friendship is the consequence of such interactions and learner-centered practices since social negotiations are promoted in such a setting.

More noticeably, the EFL teachers mediated learning in the inclusive classes. They also supported the disabled learners socio-affectively through treating the disabled learners as others, providing mediation and supportive practices, and having the disabled learners perform well and share their potentials and skills (i.e., empowerment). One of the teachers, for example, asked his students to develop interviews and TV shows in pairs or small groups since the teacher found that his disabled learner had a good command of vocabulary in this field. Another relevant measure adopted in this regard was to create a balance in types of inputs and outputs. As stated by the EFL teachers, they limited types of inputs or outputs for the disabled learners with reference to their types and severity of disability. As an example, one of the teachers reported the frequent use of Unison reading because of a stuttering learner participating in his inclusive class. As he claimed, the learner used to feel less nervous when participating in such a task compared to participation in individual reading aloud tasks. The outcome was reduced anxiety and stress along with promoted self-esteem and motivation; this is what is expected from the social constructivism approach to render (Dornyei, 2001).

## Discussion

The moment we as teachers realize that a class consists of a diverse group of individuals, we

must start thinking about how to respond to this diversity individually while teaching a group as a whole. These individuals' reactions to different stimuli are not the same (Harmer, 2007) therefore, teachers are expected to decide on better tasks and activities and serve the needs of different learning styles through determining their learners' strengths and dominant intelligence and features. When the class as a whole includes learners with disabilities who fail to use one or more of their senses, teachers should adopt materials and lesson plans to replace these senses with others since disability does not mean being unsuccessful (Basaran, 2012; Green, 2014).

The results offered unprecedented evidence for the fact that EFL teachers' practices are partially, but not fully, tailored to the needs of learners with disabilities. Corroborating with the Quality Indicators for Effective Inclusive Education checklist, it was found that the EFL teachers partly observed some quality indicators of effective inclusive education such as active engagement of learners, formative assessments, varied instructional and structural strategies by teachers, consideration of diversities, different layouts of chairs and lights, modifications of curriculum as well as lesson plans and ideas shared with other teachers. Furthermore, inclusive EFL classes held in language institutes in Iran, as an EFL context, are featured with different levels of support and difficulty as well as with a variety of tasks to be completed, different time allotted for learning, testing or task completion, various input and output in terms of instructions and how to respond to instructions, modified goals, various levels of participation in inclusive classes for disabled learners, and instructional strategies like frequent monitoring, promoted feedback, repetitions, peer tutoring, simplifications, illustrations, and cooperative learning.

The most remarkable finding was that a large number of factors influence EFL teachers' inclusive practices. The macro and micro-level factors were extracted as the ones affecting the EFL teachers' decisions on types of practices they used in their inclusive classes. The macro level factors are attributed to broader scopes and contain institutional policies, society, curriculum, and teacher preparation programs; however, the micro-level factors are related to a narrower scope and involve subcategories like teacher's attitude and belief, disability, class, payment, non-disabled learners, disabled learners, level of competence, teacher's experience, and teacher's age and gender. This corroborates with the findings of a large number of researchers (e.g., Agran, Alper, & Wehmeyer, 2002; Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Briggs, Johnson, Shepherd, & Sedbrook, 2002; Buljevac, Majdak, & Leutar, 2012; David & Kuyini, 2012; MacFarlane &



Woolfson, 2013; Meyer, Myers, Walmsley, & Laux, 2012; Orelus & Hills, 2010). For example, it is claimed that large classes cause barriers to successful implementation of inclusive education since additional demands in terms of time or attention are placed on teachers in larger classes (Agran, et al., 2002). In South Africa, Ntombela (2011) claimed that teachers are inadequately prepared to implement inclusion in their classes because of their little knowledge. Kocyigit and Artar (2015) investigated teaching English to visually-impaired learners and came to the conclusion that personality traits of visually-impaired learners largely affect the learning/teaching process and that these learners, in spite of their common impairment, have a variety of learning habits and strategies. They also added that trial-error experiences are better to be replaced with teacher training programs and that the engagement of other authorities involved in inclusion (administrators, curriculum planners, classmates, families) seems to be crucial for successful implementation of inclusion for visually impaired learners.

The findings of the current study are consistent with those of the previous studies suggesting that the inclusion of learners with disabilities is accompanied with teachers' lack of confidence in their competence (Buljevac et al., 2012). Avramidis and Kalyva (2007), Praisner (2003), Schmidt and Ksenija (2015), and Whitaker (2011) also pointed out the necessity of professional development for teachers in order to promote positive attitudes towards inclusion. From their perspectives, EFL teachers, particularly Iranian EFL teachers, have inadequate knowledge and skills to deal with EFL learners with disabilities. Their lack of competence is thus mirrored in their attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with disabilities in their classrooms (Kosko & Wilkins, 2009); EFL teachers who perceive disabled learners negatively view inclusion as a barrier impeding learning and achievement for other non-disabled learners (Hines & Johnston, 1996; Johns, McGrath, & Mathur, 2010).

The findings of the present study were to some extent compatible with the four integral components of social constructivism proposed by Brown et al. (1989). It was reported in the present study that most of the EFL teachers had a variety of practices with different natures, which conformed to situated learning definition and specifications. In the inclusive EFL classes, knowledge transfer was not the mere goal and the teachers paid attention to activities, culture and context as well. In these classes, fewer samples of decontextualized learning were noticed and the teachers highlighted the role of interaction and group activities. This claim can be further explained by a variety of practices like support-based practices, research-based practices, inquiry-based practices, and discovery-oriented practices specified as part of this

research project, which promoted social interaction as a key in Vygotsky's theory. The findings discussed in the previous section also referred to social opportunities provided by inclusive practices developed by EFL teachers. Situated learning provided for the EFL learners with low-incidence disabilities was in accordance with the findings of Palincsar, Magnusson, Collins, and Cutter (2001) and May and Stone (2010), indicating that learning opportunities should be offered to disabled learners through contextualized social interactions to improve their cognitive skills. The other prerequisite of social constructivism (i.e., community of learners) was also observed in the inclusive EFL classes through using real world practices such as discussions, role-plays and video-audio clips. On this path, the teachers mediated language learning and played the role of more knowledgeable others, as specified by social constructivism. The learners with disabilities also debated their opinions and collaborated shared meaning (i.e., negotiation of understanding). Mediation and collaborative inclusive practices observed in the English language classes promote social interaction and positive attitudes towards disabled EFL learners, improve their self-esteem, and thus render language learning efforts to a more successful experience.

In general, "Vygotskian views have caused a great impact on the educational environment, and the ELT world has not been left aside. The main relationship between Vygotsky's ideas and learning a foreign language lies in the social process and social interaction, which supports mediated learning" (Williams & Burden 7777, p. .... The results of this study confirm and add to the findings of research studies discussed in the literature review section.

To sum up, Vygotsky's ideas on disability are observed to be still relevant and practical today. Vygotsky believed that a social environment, in which social collaboration is promoted, determines the nature of an individual's education (Vygotsky, 1997). The main conclusion drawn from the obtained results is that the mediation and collaborative inclusive practices observed in the English language classes promote social interaction and positive attitudes towards disabled EFL learners, strengthening self-esteem of such learners and rendering language learning efforts to a more successful experience. Moreover, the EFL teachers' inclusive practices such as social interaction and negotiation promoted egalitarian learning and performance conditions in the English language classes.

## Conclusion

Larrivee (1985) listed some factors affecting the effective inclusion of disabled learners, including the efficient use of time by both teacher and students, frequent positive feedbacks

towards behavior and achievements, adjusted level of difficulty for tasks assigned by teachers, adopting supportive, but not judgmental, interventions by teachers, frequent monitoring by teachers, and open and positive attitudes towards diversity. Although the abovementioned features were reported and observed in a large number of cases, EFL teachers still face difficulties with the presence of disabled learners in their classroom, indicating that present EFL classes containing disabled learners are still far from successful inclusive classes. In extreme cases, many teachers spend more time for disabled learners and this results in less academic or social/emotional achievements since they ignore other learners' right for equal education. At another end of this continuum, some teachers ignore disabled learners and prefer the majority to the disabled minority; hence, neither comprehension checking nor positive feedbacks are provided to learners with disabilities. This would decrease disabled learners' opportunities to learn English as a foreign language. According to the findings in this study, the following measures should be adopted to reach a fruitful inclusion of EFL learners with low-incidence disabilities in English language classes: planning for extra training to promote positive attitudes towards inclusion among EFL teachers; motivating EFL teachers to take part in conferences and workshops to become more familiar with the needs of disabled learners; paying extra attention to EFL teachers' salary for teaching inclusive classes so that they are encouraged to enhance their knowledge and improve their teaching qualifications; providing necessary learning facilities and provisions required in English language classes as well as counseling services to convince EFL teachers accept, respect and show affection towards disabled students.

The collected data contributes to the field of education, including TEFL; however, some caution must be taken with regard to the small sample size of both the EFL teachers and learners, probable intentional omissions or distortions in their self-report accounts, and design employed in this study as the findings might not be absolutely generalizable to other EFL settings. Future researchers are recommended to address these limitations to provide deeper insight into the nature of the issues addressed in the present study.

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