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Artículo

Bridging the Inclusion Gap in Colombian Language Classrooms: A Literature Review¹

Characterization of informal French language practice spaces in Medellín, Colombia.

Caractérisation des espaces de pratique informelle de la langue française à Medellin, Colombie

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Abstract

Inclusive classrooms are a priority for educators, as they are responsible for ensuring equal opportunities for all students. Previous research in Colombia focuses on specific aspects of inclusion, and there is a need for a comprehensive overview that offers a broader perspective of the state of inclusion within the country. This article addresses this gap by reporting findings of an analysis of thirty-three articles published in eight Colombian journals from 2000 to 2024 regarding the issues of inclusion and the use of differentiated instruction in second and foreign-language classrooms. This study aims to identify the types of inclusion commonly addressed, the main pedagogical strategies used, the possible use of differentiated instruction practices, and the difficulties reported. Furthermore, the article contributes suggestions for inclusive practices in the language classroom and identifies gaps for future research.

Keywords: Colombia; EFL; inclusion; differentiated instruction; special needs; literature review.

Resumen

La inclusión en el aula es crucial para los educadores, quienes deben asegurar la igualdad de oportunidades para todos los estudiantes. Investigaciones previas en Colombia han explorado aspectos específicos de la inclusión, pero se necesita una visión más amplia. Este artículo aborda esta brecha informando los hallazgos de un análisis de treinta y tres artículos de ocho revistas colombianas entre 2000 y 2024 sobre las cuestiones de inclusión y el uso de la

enseñanza diferenciada en el aula de lenguas extranjeras. Este estudio tiene como objetivo identificar los tipos de inclusión comúnmente abordados, las principales estrategias pedagógicas utilizadas, el posible uso de prácticas de instrucción diferenciada y las dificultades reportadas. El aporte del presente trabajo radica en las sugerencias de prácticas inclusivas en el aula de idiomas así como la identificación de vacíos para futuras investigaciones.

Palabras clave: Colombia; ILE; inclusión; instrucción diferenciada; necesidades especiales; revisión de literatura.

Résumé

L'inclusion en classe est cruciale pour les éducateurs, qui doivent garantir l'égalité des chances pour tous les élèves. Des recherches antérieures en Colombie ont exploré des aspects spécifiques de l'inclusion, mais une vision plus large est nécessaire. Cet article comble cette lacune en rapportant les résultats d'une analyse de trente-trois articles provenant de huit revues colombiennes entre 2000 et 2024 sur les questions d'inclusion et d'utilisation de l'enseignement différencié dans la classe de langues étrangères. Cette étude vise à identifier les types d'inclusion couramment abordés, les principales stratégies pédagogiques utilisées, le recours éventuel à des pratiques pédagogiques différenciées et les difficultés signalées. La contribution du présent travail réside dans les suggestions de pratiques inclusives dans la classe de langue ainsi que dans l'identification de lacunes pour les recherches futures.

Mots-clés : Colombie ; EFL ; inclusion ; enseignement différencié ; besoins particuliers ; revue de la littérature.

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, Inclusive Education (IE) research has been increasing over the last decades, covering topics such as IE in higher education contexts, the training of pre-service teachers and their attitudes towards inclusion, teaching strategies for fostering inclusion, ongoing professional development in IE, and the practices and principles underlying IE (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2020). Knowing how Colombian practices align with the global increase of IE research could

help shed light on inequities and barriers faced by marginalized groups, provide evidence-based recommendations useful for policy making changes, and contribute to international knowledge in the topic. Moreover, analyzing and understanding the Colombian scenario is likely to offer lessons for other settings that share similar socio-cultural and educational configurations.

A significant example of current educational trends aiming at inclusive pedagogies is UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4). Its purpose is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2016, p.11). SDGs have greatly impacted how some countries create inclusive education development plans that benefit their citizens. Following UNESCO's guidelines, Colombia has established some goals and strategies to achieve SDG-4 (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, n.d.).

According to the Ministerio de Educación Nacional inclusive education is a permanent process that recognizes, values, and responds appropriately to the diversity and expectations of students (MEN, 2018). This concept is supported by the Colombian Ley General de Educación (1994), which establishes that education must be guaranteed to all Colombian citizens. While the legal framework and expectations are clearly defined, implementation remains challenging due to frequent disruptions in inclusion efforts. These challenges stem from a lack of knowledge, skills, and methods (Sowell & Sugisaki, 2021), as well as attitudes (Lindner et al., 2023), that teachers, school directors and policymakers struggle to develop. On the grounds of this, finding ways to materialize inclusion and equity in the classroom effectively is paramount.

For inclusion to be successful, obstacles present within the educational system need to be addressed. This means recognizing difficulties, removing barriers created by those difficulties in the learning environment and providing appropriate support. This approach ensures meeting the needs of language learners and applying the most efficient language teaching techniques for maximal inclusion in educational settings.

Furthermore, the fact that students are different should be not only acknowledged but also embraced (Felder & Brent, 2005; Kormos, 2020), because inclusion is related to the diversity that arises from multiple factors, such as ability, race, class, gender, religion, and age, among other variables; hence, it is clear that a group of students in a regular classroom is not commonly homogeneous. In a foreign or second language classroom, students may also exhibit differences regarding their language level in one or more skills, their background knowledge, and their learning profile. Some of these differences influence the learning process more than others, placing demands on the teacher to develop strategies to help their students. One proposal for approaching this situation is the implementation of differentiated instruction (DI), which

invites teachers to modify the curriculum, methods, resources, activities, and student products as a way to maximize students' learning opportunities (Bearne, 2006; Blaz, 2016; Tomlinson et al., 2003).

Differentiation can be applied to maximize learning opportunities for all students since it adapts to various needs by engaging “students in instruction through different approaches to learning, by appealing to a range of interests, and by using varied rates of instruction along with varied degrees of complexity and differing support systems.” (Tomlinson, 2014, pp. 3-4). Despite DI being popular in education (AM et al., 2023), useful in second/foreign language learning (Blaz, 2016) and commonly used as a strategy to increase inclusive practices in the classroom (Blaz, 2016; Kormos, 2020; Tomlinson, 2014), its use in Colombia is yet to be documented.

Currently, a vast majority of articles related to inclusion in the second or foreign language in Colombia report on empirical studies developed in particular contexts and aimed at specific types of inclusion (e.g., just special needs or gender). Within the minority, one finds literature reviews of studies related to inclusion in Colombia where the scope is limited to one journal (Mosquera et al., 2018; Robayo Acuña & Cárdenas, 2017), and a few are reflective articles about Colombian inclusion policies (Ochoa, 2017; Usma Wilches, 2009). As for the use of DI, no Colombian articles systematizing its use in the English as a foreign language (EFL) or Spanish as a second language field were found. A general compilation of what has been researched and published in journals is missing because no previous literature reviews have examined multiple Colombian journals on this particular topic. Such a compilation could be helpful for teachers looking for inclusion strategies, researchers seeking gaps in the field, and policymakers willing to transform current schemes. Therefore, this work aims to analyze articles published in Colombian journals from 2000 to 2024, that explore the state of inclusion in second or foreign language classrooms, focusing on types of inclusion, identifying strategies, examining the role of DI, and noting challenges. Specifically, this article seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What types of inclusion have been addressed in Colombia's foreign and second language classrooms?
2. What are the main pedagogical strategies and suggestions for inclusion in the second and foreign language classroom? Is DI one of them, and if so, in what specific contexts has it been utilized in language classrooms?
3. What are some difficulties faced when addressing inclusion in the second and foreign language classroom?

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This work focuses on documenting what has been published regarding inclusion in the foreign/second language classroom; it can be considered a descriptive review since its goal is to find patterns and trends in the collection of selected articles (Paré & Kitsiou, 2017). The procedure for this type of review is systematic and transparent, as it includes structured searching methods, screening, and classifying studies that are each treated as a unit of analysis (Paré et al., 2015; Paré & Kitsiou, 2017). The steps proposed by Paré and Kirsiou (2017) were followed to create this review article: (i) formulating the research questions and main objectives of the work; (ii) searching the extant literature in well-known Colombian journals related to language teaching and learning; (iii) screening for inclusion, based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria; (iv) assessing the quality of primary studies, which was quickly done since the studies selected were all published in double-blind peer-reviewed journals; (v) extracting data, primarily based on the initial research questions; and (vi) analyzing and synthesizing data, a process involving collating, summarizing, organizing, and comparing the collected information.

To explore the state of inclusion in foreign and second language classrooms in Colombia, studies from eight peer-reviewed Colombian journals with a focus on foreign language teaching and learning were analyzed. Thus, all data originated from publicly available published articles. All the available volumes, published between 2000 to 2024, of the following journals were included: Folios, How Journal, Lenguaje, Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura, GiST – Education, and Learning Research Journal, Enletawa Journal, and Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal (their short names will be used onwards).

Six of these journals were indexed at the moment of this study, with indexation rankings ranging from C, B, A2, to A1 (A1 being the highest category), and two of them were not. All of them are still active and publish from two to three issues a year (refer to Table 1). Most of these journals are affiliated with university presses, except for How Journal, a publication by the Colombian Association of English Teachers (ASOCOPI). The eight journals selected in this study focus on research in the field of applied linguistics, literature, translation, and language teaching and learning and are well-known in Colombia; additionally, they are listed as Language Journals by ASOCOPI.

Table 1. General Information about the Journals

Journal	Indexation to date	Active since	Volumes to date	Publishing Entity
Profile	A1	2000	26	Universidad Nacional
Íkala	A2	1996	29	Universidad de Antioquia
CALJ	B	1998	26	Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas
Folios	B	1990	60	Universidad Pedagógica Nacional
How	B	1996	31	Asociación Colombiana de Profesores de Inglés
Revista Lenguaje	C	1972	52	Universidad del Valle
Enletawa	-	2008	17	Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia
Gist	-	2007	28	Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Data-based studies, theory-based research, and pedagogical experiences were taken into account, but only Colombian studies from 2000 to 2024 related to foreign or second language teaching and learning that cover one of the following topics were selected:

- Experiences of inclusion in foreign or second language learning and teaching
- Colombian policies regarding inclusion in the foreign or second language classroom
- Reflections regarding inclusion in the classroom

Besides foreign language learning/teaching (English for most of the cases), second language learning/teaching was included since there are articles related to indigenous and deaf communities and their acquisition of Spanish. However, articles about regular Spanish classes in schools where Spanish is not taught as a second language were excluded. Articles related to a specific group of people (indigenous groups, gender, LGTBQ+ community, race) where the main focus was identity instead of inclusion were not taken into account, and neither were articles that, although discussing inclusion, focus more on (critical) interculturality, social justice, decolonization, critical thinking, multiculturalism, and culture.

Article selection

A procedure described by [Álvarez-Valencia \(2014\)](#) was followed to select the articles. First, the tables of contents of 207 issues (from eight different journals) were browsed to discover potential articles by the wording in the title. This initial selection was confirmed by using the search tool within the online page of each journal with various terms that could be related to the topic (inclusion / inclusive practices, functional diversity / special needs SEN / disabilities,

differentiated instruction / differentiation, equity) to make sure no crucial articles were left behind. From this initial identification, 53 articles were screened by reading their abstracts and keywords to confirm the inclusion and exclusion criteria. 48 articles were chosen for eligibility, but after reading them, only 33 were selected for the study (See **Figure 1**)

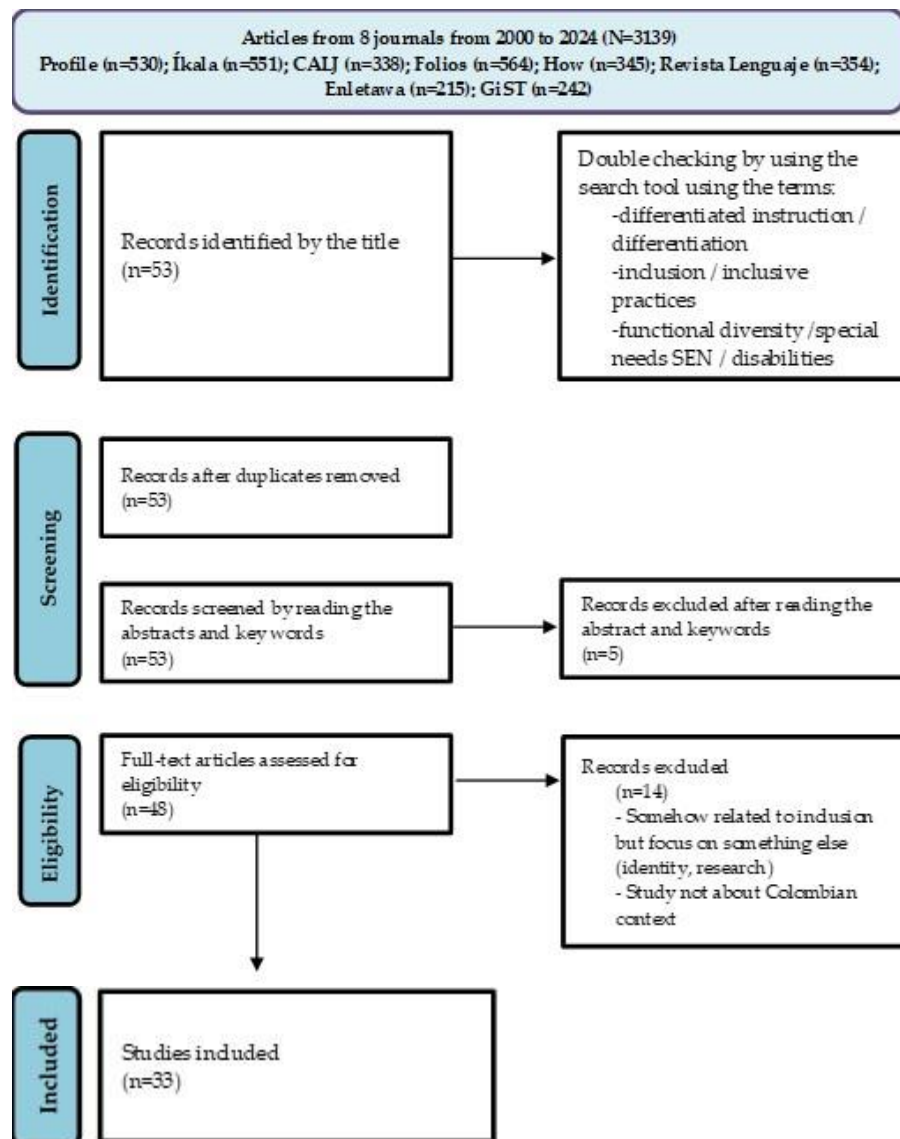


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for article selection

A matrix in Google Sheets 2023 was used to visualize and organize the information. The matrix consisted of the following criteria: general information (title, authors, year, journal, main topic, eligibility criteria), the components of the article (abstract, methodology, context, data collection-analysis, results, conclusions), and the guiding questions of this study (types of inclusion, pedagogical strategies or suggestions, use of DI, difficulties). Each article was read and the content was fed into the matrix in a concise manner.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data since it is a “method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). To conduct the analysis, the phases proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed: 1) reading the articles thoroughly allowed for familiarization with the data; 2) initial codes were generated, and the search for themes began; 3) in addition to themes that emerged from the dataset, further themes were proposed based on the research questions; 4) the themes were clearly defined and associated with the research questions; and 5) the writing process of the findings commenced. Table 2 is an inventory of the selected journals, their trajectory, volumes analyzed, total published articles, and the number of articles selected for this review. As shown in the table, the percentage of studies related to inclusion is quite low across all journals (ranging from 0.7% to 1.5%). Given the relatively small number of articles on inclusion (33) compared to the total published (3,139), there may be an underrepresentation of inclusion-related discussions in these academic spaces, which represents a potential area of study research.

Table 2. Inventory of Journals, Trajectory, Volumes and Selected Papers

Journal	Period analyzed (in years)	Volumes analyzed	Total articles	Articles chosen	Percentage of articles related to inclusion
Profile	24	26	530	7	1.3
Íkala	24	24	551	4	0.7
CALJ	21	21	338	5	1.5
Folios	24	48	564	5	0.9
How	24	24	345	4	1.2
Revista Lenguaje	20	20	354	3	0.8
Enletawa	16	16	215	3	1.4
GiST	16	28	242	2	0.8
Total		207	3,139	33	

Main topics

Articles covered a variety of topics regarding inclusion, such as students with special needs (blindness, deafness, hearing impairment, autism, Down syndrome), students belonging to

Indigenous groups, the LGTBIQ+ community, gender differences, and English proficiency levels. A thorough reading of the articles revealed four themes:

General inclusion in the classroom

Papers in this theme belong to educational policy monitoring (Ochoa 2017; Robayo Acuña & Cárdenas, 2017; Usma Wilches, 2009), personal characteristics that may influence students' learning (Vera Rodríguez, 2000), pre-service teachers' views about inclusion (Vélez Latorre, 2013), and a proposal of reforming the educational system to address inclusion (Soler Martin et al., 2018).

Inclusion in the language classroom related to special needs

Articles in this theme deal directly with special education. The topics are related to students who are deaf or hard of hearing (HHs) (Ávila Caica, 2011; Castillo & Florez-Martelo, 2020a, 2020b), visually impaired or blind (Arenas González, 2012; Medina Salzar & Huertas Sánchez, 2008; Perdomo Cerquera & Vergara Novoa, 2009), students with autism and Down syndrome (Giraldo Martinez & Ramos Carvajal, 2021), and functional diversity or special needs in general (Montaño & Vera, 2012; Villarreal Buitrago & Méndez Rivera, 2021).

Challenges a specific group of people face

Studies in this theme are about gender and ethnicity. They portray topics such as the experiences of Indigenous students with EFL (Arismendi & Ramírez, 2019; Arismendi et al., 2016; Cuasilpud, 2010; Escobar Alméciga & Gómez Lobatón, 2010; Usma et al., 2018; Velásquez-Hoyos & Giraldo-Martinez, 2024), Spanish as a second language (Amaya Pérez et al., 2019), difficulties faced by low-proficiency students (Vanegas Rojas et al., 2016), and gender and sexual orientation regarding conflicts and barriers the participants had to overcome in the language classroom (Durán, 2006; Peña, 2008; Rondón Cárdenas, 2012).

Some uses of differentiated instruction in foreign language learning

Even though the label “differentiated instruction” was not always included in the articles, they were categorized in this section due to the strategies described or proposed to address inclusion in the classroom (Barfield, 2003; Dueñas Macías, 2013; Moreno, 2001; Niño Santisteban, 2014; Ramírez Sánchez, 2021; Serna Dimas & Ruíz Castellanos, 2014; Vargas Parra et al., 2018).

Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of articles belonging to each theme. The most common one, representing 33.3%, focuses on challenges a group of people (with a specific characteristic) face, suggesting that much of the research emphasizes particular populations rather than broad inclusion. Studies addressing inclusion of individuals with special needs make up 27.3%, indicating a significant focus on this area. Some use of differentiated instruction (DI) is present in 21.2%, while general inclusion is the least covered theme at 18.2%. This distribution suggests that even if inclusion is addressed in various ways, specific challenges and special needs receive more attention.

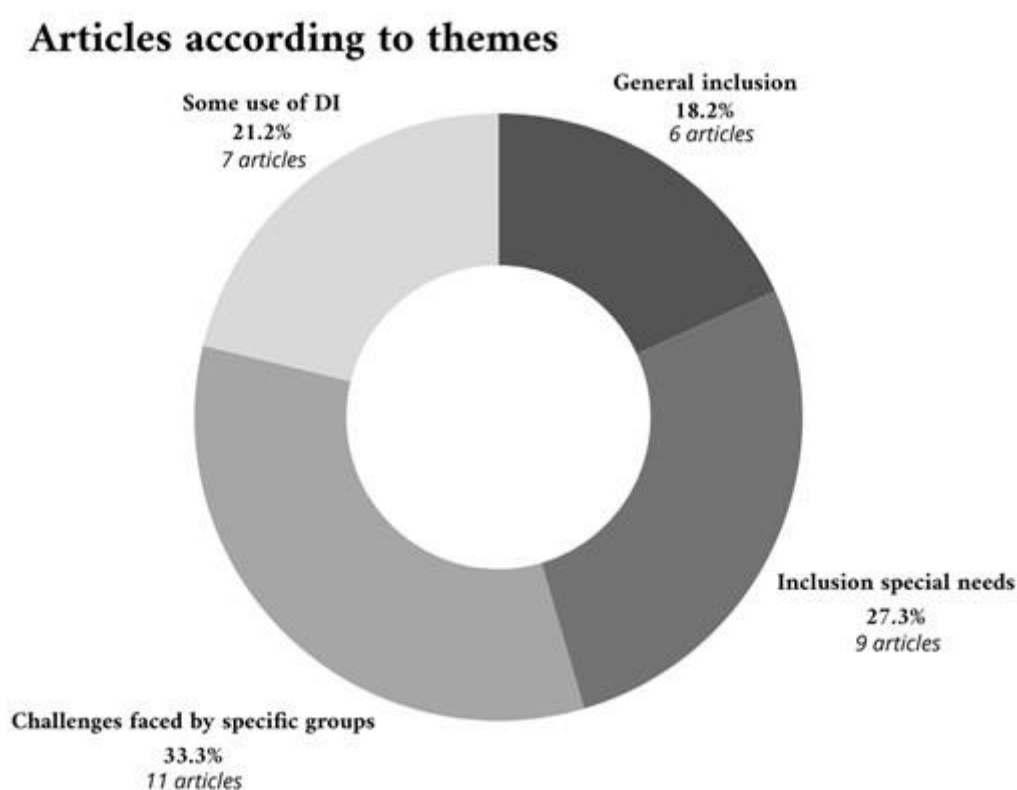


Figure 2. Articles According to Four Themes

Types of articles

From the 33 articles chosen, 10 (30.3%) were pedagogical experiences, 10 (30.3%) were theory-based, and 12 (36.4%) corresponded to data-based studies. The articles that constitute pedagogical experiences describe teachers' narratives of situations related to inclusion practices. The theory-based articles are reflections regarding national policies and the role of inclusion in the classroom. Data-based studies deal with investigations in which participants

share their teaching and learning experiences through the years. Except for one article (Vélez Latorre, 2013), all were qualitative studies.

Context and participants

Macro context

Regarding the geographical areas, some articles were from Bogota (27.3%), others from different places in Colombia (27.3%), and the rest did not report the exact place of the study (45.4%). Considering that Bogota is the capital of the country, it is not surprising that the majority of the studies are carried out there; this may be due to the greater access to information and resources, as well as the large amount of professional development programs, postgraduate study options and other strategies that the government and other institutions offer. These factors contribute to the dissemination of knowledge and motivation among professionals to share their classroom experiences. The number of studies that do not report the geographical area where the study occurred is concerning because it impedes a deep analysis of possible geographical gaps (see Table 3).

Table 3. Macro context

Macro context N=33 (%)	
Bogotá	9 (27.3%)
Other places	9 (27.3%)
Not mentioned	15 (45.4%)

Institutions

At a more specific level, some studies mention the type of institutions. Public institutions (36.4%) are considerably more prominent compared to private ones (15.2%). Regarding the educational level, there is a balance between the studies that took place at schools (33.3%) and at universities (33.3%). The number of studies at institutes or private classes (6.1%) suggests a potential gap in exploring inclusion in these contexts. A considerable number of articles (27.3%) do not mention the micro context, mainly because they focused on reflections on the subject rather than on an experience or a data-based study (see Table 4).

Table 4. Type of institutions

Type of institution N=33 (%)	
Schools	11 (33.3%)

Universities	11 (33.3%)
Language institutes or private classes	2 (6.1%)
Not mentioned	9 (27.3%)

Authorship

Regarding authorship, most of the authors were university lecturers, authoring alone (56.3%) or co-authoring with graduate students (9.4%); a majority of university lecturers may focus on publishing due to their research conditions (time and resources) and publishing incentives compared to other types of authors. Schoolteachers (15.6%), researchers (6.3%) and language institute teachers (3.1%) also contributed to the studies. Some articles do not present information about the authors (9.4%) (see **Table 5**).

Table 5. Authorship

Authors N=32* (%)	
University lecturers	18 (56.3%)
School teachers	5 (15.6%)
University lecturers + graduate students	3 (9.4%)
Researchers	2 (6.3%)
Language institute teachers	1 (3.1%)
Unreported or unclear	3 (9.4%)

***Note.** Although 33 articles were selected, there are two articles written by the same authors.

Participants

Finally, in terms of study participants, the majority (57.6%) of studies focused only on students (12.1% out of them on pre-service teachers), a portion of them (24.2%) addressed different school community members (students, teachers and others), few do not have participants because are reflection articles focused on teachers' views (6.1%) and the rest (12.1%) do not mention the participants. Since inclusion in the classroom is a student-centered topic, highlighting the participation of students was expected (see **Table 6**).

Table 6. Participants

Participants N=33 (%)	
Students	19 (57.6%)
Different school community members	8 (24.2%)
No participants (teacher's views)	2 (6.1%)
Not mentioned	4 (12.1%)

RESULTS

The articles were analyzed through a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to answer the initial interrogations. The responses are presented below.

What types of inclusion have been addressed in Colombia's foreign and second language classrooms?

The selected papers dealt mainly with two types of inclusion, students who are disadvantaged due to personal or contextual characteristics and inclusion that considers students' general differences and interests.

Students who are disadvantaged due to personal or contextual characteristics

Articles in this category addressed different types of student groups.

- *Gender and sexual orientation:* Durán (2006) and Peña (2008) explored gender differences and their influence in the foreign language classroom at a school level. Through class observations, the authors analyzed students' participation and behavior patterns. Keeping in mind the age difference of the participants (pre-school and high school students), the authors came to different conclusions that somehow complement each other. Durán (2006) identified imbalances in male and female students' engagement levels during communication, evident through both spoken and nonverbal behaviors; and Peña (2008) argued for reducing the influence of discourses that marginalize girls and favor boys, which can be seen as useful advice to avoid the imbalances Durán (2006) mentions.

As for sexual orientation, Rondón Cárdenas (2012) presented a study in which, through short-range narratives, students shared memories of foreign language classroom situations where comments and attitudes regarding exclusion were present; in their stories, students experienced homophobic discourse, heteronormative assumptions and

marginalizing moments that created unpleasant learning environments. The author explained how anxiety regarding fear of rejection or disclosure of their identity could influence students' performance and invited teachers to be careful, assertive, and tolerant of all students.

- *Indigenous students:* One article was about Spanish as a second language teaching/ learning experience (Amaya Pérez et al., 2019) in which the teacher-researcher shared the strategies used to improve writing in the classroom, such as the use of didactic games like a “linguistic roulette” and the use of Task-based learning. Contrastingly, the rest of the papers from this category portrayed students’ voices regarding their English learning process (Arismendi & Ramirez, 2019; Arismendi et al., 2016; Cuasilpud, 2010; Escobar Alméjiga & Gómez Lobatón, 2010; Usma et al., 2018). These articles mentioned the challenges indigenous university students face primarily due to differences in background knowledge compared to university students who go to mainstream schools. The barriers they face are not only related to readiness levels but also to identity-related issues that come from different situations these students have experienced during or before their undergraduate studies.
- *Students with special needs:* Teachers who adapted their teaching practices to include one or several students with special educational needs (SEN) and guarantee their learning, as well as SEN students who learned or are learning English, shared their experiences to guide others and create awareness. The articles addressed experiences where students who are deaf or hard of hearing (Ávila Caica, 2011; Castillo & Florez-Martelo, 2020a, 2020b), blind or visually impaired (Arenas González, 2012; Medina Salazar & Huertas Sánchez, 2008; Perdomo Cerquera & Vergara Novoa, 2009), have autism or Down syndrome (Giraldo Martinez & Ramos Carvajal, 2021) take English classes. There were also studies with general reflections about SEN students in the EFL classroom (Montaño & Vera, 2012; Villarreal Buitrago & Méndez Rivera, 2021). All the articles in this category narrated teaching and learning journeys and participants’ perceptions, attitudes, obstacles, and accomplishments. Research questions 2 and 3 below will focus on strategies and difficulties presented by the authors.
- *Students with low proficiency level:* Vanegas Rojas et al. (2016) focused on linguistic discrimination inside the English language classroom due to standard

language idealization, native speakerism, professor and peer pressure, and self-disesteemation. The authors highlighted the negative consequences these factors have in students' learning since they lead to invisibilization (and thus lack of participation), disrespect from peers, negative comparison among students, idealization of native speakers and particular dialects or accents, and language stratification.

- *Students from vulnerable groups:* Niño Santisteban (2014) shared a study in which differentiated instruction was used to improve literacy skills in English and Spanish for students (ages 8 to 15) who are victims of internal displacement in Colombia. Due to changes in their lives and the situations they have experienced, these students have poor reading and writing skills (both in Spanish and English) and need to learn and use specific strategies to achieve learning objectives.

Students' general differences and interests

Some authors (Barfield, 2003; Dueñas Macías, 2013; Moreno, 2001; Ramírez Sánchez, 2021; Vera Rodríguez, 2000) addressed the differences in the classroom related to students' levels, interests, learning preferences, and some personality traits. The aspects considered relate to Tomlinson's (2001, 2022) differentiated instruction proposal, in which lessons are tiered according to students' profiles (readiness, interests, and learning preferences). In their articles, the authors mentioned having heterogeneous classrooms with students who share certain characteristics and differ in others.

Vera Rodríguez (2000) addressed whether specific characteristics influence students' attitudes and willingness to learn. The author mentioned that age, self-esteem, and internal and external factors impact language learning. In the same vein, Velásquez-Hoyos and Giraldo-Martínez (2024) proposed contents that align with Indigenous students' interests to make learning meaningful. In addition, Moreno (2001) and Ramírez Sánchez (2021) suggested that paying attention to students' characteristics is a good way to enhance motivation. Ramírez Sánchez (2021) recommends giving some freedom and choice to students so they can work at their own pace and capacity, while Moreno (2001) proposed modifying activities according to students' preferences. Additionally, Dueñas Macías (2013) shared the experience with "learning centers", which are corners in the classroom with multiple activities for students to choose from and develop. These proposals, in which students have some participation in the decision of the

process they will engage in, give EFL teachers ideas of how to consider students' predilections and personal traits, hence promoting inclusion and improving motivation.

What are the main pedagogical strategies and suggestions for inclusion in the second and foreign language classroom? Is DI one of them, and if so, in what specific contexts has it been utilized in language classrooms?

Various strategies to help students develop skills or achieve objectives related to English as a foreign language or Spanish as a second language were reported. The use of interculturality, task-based learning/teaching (TBLT), universal design for learning (UDL), the implementation of technology, and DI proved effective for all the reported pedagogical experiences. These strategies have in common their adaptability for different contexts (school, university), types of students (kids, adolescents, adults, special needs or regular students), and content topics. The flexibility these strategies provide help students have options and a variety of possibilities, creating an inclusive environment where the barriers students may encounter tend to disappear (Kormos, 2020).

Giraldo Martinez and Ramos Carvajal (2021) remarked instruction needs to be multimodal and multisensory to be effective. For this reason, adapting materials was found to be key when including students, particularly those with special needs who may be left behind if said adjustments do not take place (Arenas González, 2012; Medina Salazar & Huertas Sánchez, 2008; Montaña & Vera, 2012; Perdomo Cerquera & Vergara Novoa, 2009). The implementation of audio-visual and multimedia tools aligns with suggestions given when working towards inclusive education, especially in the cases where they complement other modes (like images with text or audio with text), because they help with comprehension and with student engagement (Kormos, 2020; Sowell & Sugisaki, 2021). The construction of specialized material, for example, using braille and textures with high relief for blind students, and a large implementation of visual aids for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, autistic, or with Down syndrome, are clear examples of changes teachers can implement in their classrooms for instruction to be fruitful.

Additionally, building community, working collaboratively, and raising awareness have proved crucial for inclusion. Authors reported more success in the process of inclusion when the rest of the students, parents, and school participants were involved (Castillo & Florez-Martelo, 2020; Medina Salazar & Huertas Sánchez, 2008). This goes in line with collaborative strategies like Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) where students work together for peer tutoring, benefitting both students in their learning process, since one of them receives some

guidance and the other enhances their skills (Sowell & Sugisaki, 2021). Moreover, autonomy and self-confidence are vital for the process (Arenas González, 2012; Perdomo Cerquera & Vergara Novoa, 2009), and teachers should help students develop them if they want their learners to be high achievers.

Regarding suggestions, Soler Martin et al. (2018) advocate for a fundamental shift in the collective beliefs regarding equity and inclusion and the policies created by the government. They propose assuming differences as natural characteristics, as layers of behavior that should be understood and respected without being labeled by hegemonic groups (Soler Martin et al., 2018). This approach aligns with social justice and decolonization practices, which address inequality, challenge power, and promote representation. In the opinion of Ocampo-González (2023), the educational systems in the Global South should evolve towards leaving aside mainstream inclusion practices and towards promoting a change in our thinking habits; however, these modifications could only be possible if there were a change in power. From a more realistic perspective, some authors (Page, 2021; Rico-Troncoso, 2021) suggest addressing decolonization in the classroom through the intercultural competence by strengthening students' knowledge of their own cultures and identities. According to Page (2021), issues of power, equality, and justice are considered in a critical intercultural perspective to teaching, including multiple complementary perspectives, thanks to the frequent use of diverse views and materials distinct from anti-racist and decolonial educational methods.

The purpose of DI is to modify various aspects of the class to reach the necessities of all learners (Gregory & Chapman, 2012; Tomlinson, 2001). Such aspects can be: 1) The *content*, adapting or modifying the material presented, making it clearer or simpler for the students; 2) the *Process*, providing the possibility of letting students decide which and the number of exercises to develop; 3) the *product*, deciding on different assessment paths; and 4) differentiation based on *students' profiles*, acknowledging students' differences in the classroom.

A substantial portion of the selected papers (39%) suggest differentiation as a recommendation or strategy. Niño Santisteban (2014) and Vargas Parra et al. (2018) are the only authors who use the term “differentiated instruction” (DI) in their work. Niño Santisteban used DI to improve literacy skills for school students belonging to internally displaced communities; they focused on the classroom environment by building community and creating a safe place for students; additionally, students' interests, dreams, and aspirations were taken into account for the classes. Vargas Parra et al. (2018) adopted DI through a virtual learning environment (VLE) in their tenth-grade courses, in which the students were grouped according to their level (measures were taken not to affect students' confidence) and allowed to choose the content and

the process they wanted to follow; moreover, students' interests were also taken into account to plan the classes.

Studies in which the use of differentiation was perceived include differentiation of the *content* (Arenas González, 2012; Medina Salazar & Huertas Sánchez, 2008; Montaña & Vera, 2012), of the *process* (Ramírez Sánchez, 2021), using interest centers (Dueñas Macías, 2013), of the *product* (Montaña & Vera, 2012), and differentiation based on *students' profiles* (Barfield, 2003; Moreno, 2001; Serna Dimas & Ruiz Castellanos, 2014; Vera Rodríguez, 2000). For this last aspect (students' profiles), the authors placed a significant emphasis on students' differences and preferences, but it is not always clear how the differentiation was developed. Regarding the contexts where DI has been used, it appears that it has been easily adapted to different scenarios. Differentiation was proposed when working with SEN students, 9.4% (Arenas González, 2012; Giraldo Martínez & Ramos Carvajal, 2021; Medina Salazar & Huertas Sánchez, 2008) and with regular students, 25% (Barfield, 2003; Dueñas Macías, 2013; Moreno, 2001; Niño Santisteban, 2014; Ramírez Sánchez, 2021; Serna Dimas & Ruiz Castellanos, 2014; Vargas Parra et al., 2018; Vera Rodríguez, 2000). It was also used at the elementary school level, 3% (Dueñas Macías, 2013), at the middle and high school levels, 13% (Barfield, 2003; Moreno, 2001; Niño Santisteban, 2014; Vargas Parra et al., 2018) and at the university level, 3% (Serna Dimas & Ruiz Castellanos, 2014).

In general, the literature reviewed shows that DI can improve inclusion and motivation within foreign language classes. When combined with other strategies, such as the use of VLEs, visual aids, and coaching, it not only fosters equity but also assists students in recognizing crucial differences while emphasizing their shared objectives.

What are some difficulties faced when addressing inclusion in the foreign or second language classroom?

Montaña and Vera (2012) mentioned multiple difficulties teachers face when addressing specific students' requirements, particularly those related to special needs. First, they highlighted the importance of communication in the institutions related to the inclusion process since ignoring the procedures has proven to be the first difficulty. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students should all be informed about the steps they can take regarding special needs. Additionally, data analyzed by the authors revealed that specialized support and teacher training (Castillo & Florez-Martelo, 2020) are needed to handle each case properly, as well as favorable adaptations to the facilities for a successful process.

As for the students, lack of technological literacy (Cuasilpud, 2010) and foreign language previous knowledge (Cuasilpud, 2010; Escobar Alméciga & Gómez Lobatón, 2010) are factors that affect not only their learning but also their inclusion process. Students who attend schools in small villages or indigenous schools may not have access to the same amount of technology, and their experience with a foreign language can be very scarce. By the time these students start their university education, the impact of not having the same preparation as their classmates creates a barrier; for this reason, these aspects should be taken into account when creating an inclusion path.

Another factor that had a significant impact on the experiences shared by students and teachers is the attitude of different members of the school community. In some cases, misconceptions and prejudice have been demonstrated to be more exclusive than the disability itself (Castillo & Florez-Martelo, 2020), leading to isolation and lack of motivation in students who need support. Problematic attitudes can be expressed by administrators, teachers, parents, classmates and the students who are facing the barriers, as witnessed below:

1. administrators unwilling to share or make clear parameters for the rest to follow (Montaño & Vera, 2012);
2. teachers promoting exemption rather than adaptation (Castillo & Florez-Martelo, 2020; Vanegas Rojas et al., 2016) or not adapting their materials (Medina Salazar & Huertas Sánchez, 2008);
3. parents having poor participation in students' processes (Montaño & Vera, 2012);
4. classmates failing to build rapport or support classmates who struggle in the class (Castillo & Florez-Martelo, 2020); and
5. students who have difficulties and, because of their low self-confidence, are unable (or do not know how) to ask for help and support (Arenas González, 2012; Montaño & Vera, 2012).

Together, these results provide important insights about inclusive education in second and foreign language teaching in Colombia, a field that needs to continue growing and which merits more research.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to analyze inclusion in language education in Colombia in the past 24 years through a literature review which identified types of inclusion, pedagogical

strategies, and difficulties in second and foreign-language classrooms in Colombia. According to the data collected, raising awareness, building community, changing attitudes, and adapting materials are key to inclusive approaches, which should be considered when proposing and integrating inclusive strategies in the classroom.

This study can guide future research based on the gaps found. First, the types of inclusion found in the articles encompass a variety of categories that portray the heterogeneity of Colombian classrooms. However, it was surprising that just one article focused on internally displaced people, despite this being a significant issue in Colombia. In 2023 alone, the number of displaced children and teenagers was 46,900 according to the Observatorio de Niñez y Conflicto Armado de la COALICO (ONCA, 2024). This phenomenon generates interrupted schooling, which in turn may create barriers in the classroom, leading to low academic achievement. This means that some groups are not being fully addressed. Therefore, it is necessary to focus and increase research on other needs present in the language classroom, such as level of readiness and low achievement.

Additionally, it became apparent that research studies related to special needs are available, and most of them center on students with auditory or visual difficulties, and one on autism and Down syndrome. Articles regarding other types of needs (learning difficulties, dyslexia, neurodiversity, etc.) in the foreign or second language classroom were not found, a gap that researchers could address. Furthermore, future research could also focus on varied types of inclusion in the foreign or second language classroom, although attention and action towards special needs cases are essential and unneglectable.

It is worth clarifying that even though the number of articles found was not large, there was a significant amount of papers related to identity focusing on students' specific traits (gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, personality, ability) and their experiences in the classroom. These articles were not chosen for the present review since their main focus was not inclusion (or exclusion) in the foreign or second language classroom.

In general, it can be said the number of studies about inclusion has slowly but steadily increased since the number of published articles per year related to inclusion has varied between 0 and 3 over the past 24 years. Despite being a hot topic at the international level (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2020), inclusion in the second or foreign language classroom has yet to be a recurrent subject in Colombian journal publications. This could be related to the lack of information and training on the topic, particularly regarding students with special needs (Montaño & Vera, 2012; Villarreal Buitrago & Méndez Rivera, 2021).

Regarding the type of articles, it can be said that there is a balanced distribution among theoretical, practical, and research-based articles. As for the type of research, there is a need for more quantitative and mixed methods approaches (only 3% of the articles are not qualitative research) to produce robust research that could be more generalizable to a broader population. Since previous studies that grouped articles related to inclusion in the language classroom in Colombia (Mosquera et al., 2018; Robayo Acuña & Cárdenas, 2017) focused exclusively on one journal (Profile), this study was able to show a larger picture of inclusion-related articles by expanding the search to eight journals. However, the objective of these previous studies differed from the current one. In one of the studies, the authors focused on Colombian policies and their representation in the selected papers (Robayo Acuña & Cárdenas, 2017). In contrast, in another study, the authors recognized patterns in teaching methods in foreign language instruction and the research strategies used (Mosquera et al., 2018). Based on the inclusion strategies mentioned by Mosquera et al. (2018), this study confirms that TBLT and collaborative and blended learning are part of the techniques teachers use in inclusive education. In contrast to earlier findings, however, no evidence of grammar-translation was detected, while the use of interculturality, UDL, and DI was. Based on these results, it is necessary to conduct more studies where interculturality, UDL, and DI are used to increase inclusion in the classroom to learn more about their use, effectiveness, and results.

As with all types of research, this literature review has its own set of limitations. The first limitation is that there was just one researcher in the study. When selecting, classifying, and labeling the articles, there was no discussion about those articles that partially met some of the selection criteria; thus, the final selection of all the articles came from a single point of view. However, a rigorous process was followed to compare the content of the articles against the inclusion and exclusion criteria and by considering whether each paper tackles the specific issue being investigated and contributes to answering the research questions (Templier & Paré, 2015). Another limitation is that only published articles were used in this review, this may introduce file-drawer effect, a bias that arises “whenever the probability that a study is published depends on the statistical significance of its results.” (Scargle, 1999, p. 3). However, the selected articles underwent a process of peer review before being published, which increases the trustworthiness of each study.

The biggest limitation is the number of journals used for the study. Due to time constraints, only eight journals were selected. These are among the most read and best-ranked journals for the field of second and foreign languages in Colombia. Despite that, many other journals from different universities may contain essential articles related to inclusion in Colombia. Based on

this, even though a wide time span was used for the review, generalizations should be made with caution. Future projects could consider the journals not included in this study to broaden the information.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing 33 published articles related to inclusion in the foreign or second language classroom in Colombia from 2000 to 2024, multiple conclusions can be made. Categorically, a range between 0.7% and 1.5% of the articles published in the selected journals could be classified as reflections and pedagogical experiences, discussing general classroom inclusion, addressing inclusion in language classrooms concerning special needs, examining challenges faced by specific groups in language learning, and exploring the use of DI in foreign language education. This number is alarmingly low and reveals that more studies related to inclusion in the second and foreign language classroom should be carried out to improve the learning experience of students who encounter obstacles in their language learning process.

Regarding the questions posed in this study, it can be concluded that the topics addressed are the inclusion of students facing disadvantages due to individual or environmental factors, along with the overall inclusion that addresses students' interests and preferences. These topics are developed in different contexts and address varied necessities. About the second question, strategies used by second and foreign language teachers include working with the community (Castillo & Florez-Martelo, 2020) to increase their awareness and cooperation, self-confidence and autonomy development, and the use of technology (Perdomo Cerquera & Vergara Novoa, 2009) and specific methodologies, together with material adaptation (Arenas González, 2012; Medina Salazar & Huertas Sánchez, 2008; Velásquez-Hoyos & Giraldo-Martinez, 2024) for effective instruction. DI was implicitly and explicitly included (Arenas González, 2012; Barfield, 2003; Dueñas Macías, 2013; Medina Salazar & Huertas Sánchez, 2008; Montaña & Vera, 2012; Moreno, 2001; Ramírez Sánchez, 2021; Serna Dimas & Ruiz Castellanos, 2014; Vera Rodríguez, 2000) in some of the papers to face a wide variety of contexts and participants. Regarding the last question, inclusion in the classroom comes with many difficulties, and the authors mentioned negative attitudes (Montaña & Vera, 2012; Vanegas Rojas et al., 2016) and lack of communication or resources (Arenas González, 2012; Medina Salazar & Huertas Sánchez, 2008; Montaña & Vera, 2012) as the most challenging obstacles.

Overall, the subject of inclusion can be found in Colombian journals on a broad range of topics, helping the community to learn more about it and to improve their practices to be fairer in the

classroom. Nevertheless, this work needs to continue growing to become more visible and valued in the academic scene as well as in society in general.

Although teachers sometimes seek ways to tailor their classes when they encounter students who need accommodation it is still necessary to raise awareness regarding the difficulties certain students face in a classroom when such arrangements are not made. It is paramount that teachers and school stakeholders become aware of the implications of neglecting inclusion needs.

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¹ Literature review

² Research studies carried out in Colombia, with Colombian participants and related to Colombian policies, even if the author is not Colombian.