Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers to Teach Students with Disabilities in Arab-Speaking Countries: A framework for Action

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Across the globe, several countries face challenges in teaching foreign language (FL) to students in general and to students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in particular. In Arab-speaking countries, the challenges are doubled given the lack of a support system, the absence of adequate resources, the challenges associated with teaching FL in general, and the existence of several barriers that schools continue to grapple with (Emam, 2016; Fareh, 2010; Eno, 2018). English is perhaps the most rapidly growing language that is introduced as a foreign or second language in several countries due to its status as an international language of education and business. In Arab-speaking countries, English is introduced as a FL from early elementary grades, although a number of countries began to introduce it from grade 1 (Eno, 2018; Al-Abri, Emam, & Al-Seyabi, 2019; Mahmoud, 2015). In general, students with SEN include students with disability or other conditions that could affect their learning outcomes. The category of students with SEN may include children with health-related issues, disadvantaged students, students from marginalized families, and minority students. The current chapter aims to develop a framework of action to give a thrust to the preparation of FL teachers to teach students with SEN in Arab-speaking countries. Our endeavour is based on reviewing the existing literature on good practices on IE in across countries and building on the research that was conducted on Inclusive Education (IE) in the Arab contexts to date.

Inclusive education implies accommodating for the differences between all learners. Proponents of IE perceive differences among learners due to any type of disability or SEN as an advantage rather than an obstacle. IE welcomes diversity in schools and allows students with SEN or disability to receive their education with typically developing peers in public schools. Since the emergence of IE it was regarded as an advocacy for human rights of individuals with disabilities, and was thus connected to social justice (Shyman, 2015; Lingard & Mills, 2007). According to Dyson (1999), IE models all over the globe were informed by two types of discourse, namely justification discourse and implementation discourse. Research grounded in the justification discourse tends to focus on perceiving IE as a form of social justice (Lalvani, 2013). Researchers working within this paradigm study IE policies and mandates issued by governments to boost IE and grant individuals with disabilities their social, political and educational rights. Alternatively, research grounded in the implementation discourse prioritizes the investigation of hurdles that limit the participation of individuals with disabilities in social and educational settings. Researchers working within this research paradigm are interested in examining schools' efforts to respond to IE demands and requirements and how such efforts influence all learners' learning outcomes, teachers' attitudes towards IE, teachers' self-efficacy beliefs regarding the teaching of students with SEN, teachers' skills in

differentiating instruction, teacher education programs effectiveness in preparing general educators who are well prepared to cater for students with diverse needs (Forlin, 2013; Lemperou, Chostelidou, 2011; Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey 2011; Sharma, Forlin, Deppeler, & Yang. 2013). According to Emam, Al-Mahdy, (in press) research informed by the implementation discourse has recently increased in Arab-speaking countries.

Within the IE practice and implementation discourse, there has been a growing interest by researches to investigate the different opportunities that are offered to students with SEN in literacy, mathematics, and content subjects. More recently, however, there has been an interest in examining models of good practices in providing learners with SEN with numerous opportunities for high quality foreign language education (Nijakowska, 2019). Scholars argued that students with SEN need to receive enough support and evidence based instructional practices to be able to learn foreign languages. To fulfil this goal, researchers have highlighted the importance and crucial role of teacher education programs (Akcan, 2016; Lemperou, Chostelidou, 2011; Miranda, Wells, & Jenkins, 2019). Based on the recent trend of applying value added assessments in the area of teacher education, there has been evidence that effective teacher education programs have a positive impact on student learning outcomes including those with SEN (Lemperou, Chostelidou, 2011). Therefore, prospective teachers are likely to determine the quality of foreign language education for learners with SEN. Research on the quality and effectiveness of teacher education programs in preparing teachers to teach foreign language to students with SEN is very limited in Western countries in general and in Arab-speaking countries in particular.

In general, scholars argued that three important factors determine teachers' preparedness to teach FL to students with SEN in inclusive setting (Counts, Katsiyannis, & Whitford, 2018; Nijakowska, 2019; Ortiz, & Robertson, 2018; Verdon, McLeod, & Wong, 2015): (a) general knowledge of the needs of students with SEN and pedagogical knowledge and skills of how to cater for these needs, (b) possession of self-efficacy beliefs in implementing inclusive practices in and differentiated instruction for students with SEN (Ismail, 2019; Chen, 2020), (c) and finally having positive attitudes towards IE and the rights of students with SEN to be treated equally as their typically developing peers. The three factors received extensive investigation in different areas including literacy, mathematics, science and other content areas, both in in-service and preservice teacher education programs. Recently, however, these factors began to receive attention by scholars working in the area of foreign language teaching. The three factors were extensively examined in Western countries in relation to areas other than foreign language teaching where the research was very scarce. In Arab-speaking countries, however, the three factors were modestly investigated literacy and content areas, whereas they received limited attention in the area of foreign language teaching. Below we succinctly review the literature associated with the three factors.

First, teachers' general knowledge of the needs of students with SEN was highlighted as one crucial determinant of prospective teachers' and in-service teachers' success in supporting students' with SEN (Nijakowska, 2019; Yazan, 2017). Lack of general knowledge of what disability is and how the characteristics of students with disabilities may affect the way they should be taught may cause failure of school inclusive practices. Effective teaching was associated with teachers' good knowledge of the specific characteristics of each category of students with SEN (Tran, Patton, & Brohammer, 2018). Therefore, one would expect that teaching students with learning disability (LD) may require specific practices that could differ from teaching foreign language to students with ASD. Research shows that the general knowledge should be acquired primarily during teacher education program. In addition, preservice teachers have been shown to be dissatisfied with the professional knowledge and

skills in relation to preparing them for inclusive classrooms (Nijakowska, 2019; Ortiz & Robertson, 2018).

Second, teacher self-efficacy was recently conceptualized more specifically with inclusive practices on the ground that teacher's efficacy for inclusive practices (TEIP) is different from the general construct of self-efficacy (Loreman et al., 2011; Emam & Al-Madhy, 2020). This implies that a teacher could feel efficacious in teaching students in general but less efficacious in teaching students with SEN. TEIP refers to teachers' perceived competence and ability to cater for the needs of students with SEN, provide differentiated and remedial quality instruction, and manage behaviour to improve their learning outcomes (Forlin, Sharma, & Loreman, 2014) Tran, Patton, & Brohammer, 2018). It is argued that TEIP is shaped up during teacher training. Therefore, foreign language teaching to students with SEN is likely to be ideally implemented only when student teachers have developed their sense of efficacy for inclusive practices in their teacher training programs. It is also argued that the knowledge and skills that student teachers acquire contribute to their sense of efficacy for inclusive practices.

The third determinant of teachers' preparedness for teaching foreign language teaching to students with SEN is their attitudes towards IE (Rezai, Jabbari, & Ahmadi, 2018). Attitude is defined as an emotional state affecting the way a person behaves. Although the affective component of attitude is evident, it also has cognitive and behavioural aspects. Attitudes towards IE is probably the most extensively researched construct in relation to inclusive practices in schools. In the most cited review of attitudes towards inclusion, Avramidis and Norwich (2002) indicated that teacher's attitude toward IE is affected by the type and severity of a disability as well as by the teacher's gender age, years of teaching experience, grade level, and personality characteristics. Recently Emam and Al-Mahdy (in press) argued that one important environment related factor that affects attitudes towards IE is the inclusive school climate in which teachers and students with SEN Research also indicated that the relationship between efficacy for inclusive practices and attitudes towards IE is reciprocal rather than a one direction cause and effect relationship. Research findings on attitudes of preservice teachers towards IE varied across different contexts (Emam & Mohamed, 2011). Additionally, the research findings showed that there is an association between the attitudes of preservice teachers and self-efficacy of preservice teachers (Alghazo, Dodeen, & Algaryouti, 2003).

Nijakowska (2019) argued that a conceptual framework for teaching foreign language to students with dyslexia includes teacher knowledge on dyslexia, their self-efficacy in catering for their needs, and their positive attitudes towards their inclusion in public schools. In her study Nijakowska reports on another study which aimed at developing and validating the Teacher Preparedness to Include Dyslexics (TPID) scale on 546 pre and in service EFL teachers from three countries, namely, Cyprus, Greece, and Poland. The 22-item scale includes two factors: (1) teachers' self-efficacy beliefs about the extent to which they trust their possessed knowledge of dyslexia to teach and manage the behaviour of students with dyslexia (2) general attitudes about inclusion of students with dyslexia.

Teaching EFL to students with SEN in Arab Contexts: A succinct review

Currently, a lack of special education teacher preparation to effectively meet the needs of English language learners (ELLs) with disabilities is reported (Cheatham & Barnett, 2016). Therefore, a purposeful and coherent teacher education programme is necessary to adequately prepare teachers to effectively teach ELLs (Hamann & Reeves, 2013). Preparing and training EFL teachers to deal with students with learning disabilities involve developing some competencies and professional skills. EFL competencies in special education contexts suggest a shared knowledge base that all teachers of English must have to provide linguistically and culturally responsive instruction and intervention that is differentiated to meet students'

language-, literacy-, and/or disability-related needs (Ortiz & Robertson, 2018). In this regard, Patton et al. (2003) and Tran, Patton and Brohammer (2018) argue that regardless of the vehicle chosen to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to be a special education teacher today, it is essential that teachers are culturally and linguistically competent and diverse in both instruction and assessment.

In general, Arabic research, as Hussain (2010) reported, is limited when it comes to the preparation and training of special education teachers in general. Most special education and disabilities research in the Arab world focusses mainly on inclusion and inclusive schools (e.g. Ali, 2018; Awad, 2016; Ghoneim, 2014). According to Hadidi and Al Khateeb (2015). Shortcomings are still common in most aspects of special education teacher training in Arab countries at both the pre-service and in-service levels. Training programmes should include more emphasis on practical experience and need to be based on professional standards for practice.

In Egypt, motivated by the training needs imposed by the new 'special education' courses, which were included in the university bylaws and internal regulations of Egyptian colleges of education in 2010, and the subsequent challenges that emerged in relation to course design and content selection, Abdallah (2017) conducted an action research study that aimed at negotiating and improving the structure and delivery of a new special-education language-learning course entitled, 'TESOL/TEFL for Special Needs Students' taught to English majors (EFL student teachers) at Assiut University College of Education (AUCOE), and reaching a final framework of how the new course content should be like, and the evidence based paractices to be used in delivering it. Therefore, an action research methodology of two cycles was employed with two different groups of English majors throughout two successive semesters during the academic year 2012/13: the first group included 106 junior general-section EFL student teachers (1st semester, 2012); and the second group consisted of 51 senior primary-stage EFL student teachers (2nd semester, 2013). Data collection tools were used for both formative and summative evaluation purposes, and thus varied both at the initial stage and during the two iterations. They included: (1) questionnaires; (2) online diaries; (3) semi-structured interviews; (4) final feedback reports; (5) following-up logs online (on a Facebook page). The two AR cycles resulted in a final framework of the course structure and content along with some suggestions and guidelines into how to deliver it to the target learners, which include:

1. Introducing the field of special education;

2. The different teaching methods, strategies and techniques used for teaching English to students with special educational needs (e.g. Learner-centred approaches: self-paced learning and individualised instruction; technology-assisted approaches: computer-assisted language learning 'CALL', Web-mediated language learning, online learning, e-learning; Collaborative approaches: cooperative learning, peer teaching, group learning, community-based learning; Task-based approaches: task-based learning, problem-based learning, learning projects);

3. The different strategies and techniques used for assessing and evaluating language learning for students with special educational needs (e.g. alternative assessment strategies: performance-based assessment, portfolio, checklists, discussions, extended essays, diaries and journals, self-assessment, oral presentations, questionnaires, rubrics, interviews, logs, observations, research products, re-telling, etc.);

4. How to teach different language aspects, mainly vocabulary and grammar, and the main four language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing) to students with special educational needs;

5. How to employ new technologies to enable a supportive and optimum language learning environment for students with special educational needs;

6. How to conduct a successful classroom management for those students.

Some studies investigated the needs of teachers in inclusive settings in Egypt, showing lack of sufficient knowledge, skills and support to teach SEN students (Ali, 2018; Alkahteen et al., 2016; Awad, 2016; Ghoneim, 2014). This called for the need for dealing with SEN students in both pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes. In this regard, Ali (2018) conducted a mixed methods study that aimed to identify the needs and preferences of Egyptian in-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers regarding working with special-need students in inclusive schools. Interviewed participants (EFL teachers) reported lack of training in inclusive education, large class size, negative attitudes, shortage of time, heavy workload, and unfamiliarity with necessary strategies as barriers to inclusion. In addition, participants prioritized their needs for identification of language disorders, teaching methods, individualized instruction through curriculum adaptation and individualized educational plans, and controlling behavioural problems. Teachers preferred face-to-face workshops, mentor-supported learning and project-based learning besides morning sessions in weekdays.

El-Koumy (2016) noticed that that students with language learning disabilities are completely ignored in the Egyptian school system and there are no special programmes that cater to these students. They are placed in normal schools that are not prepared to deal with their unique difficulties. His book, therefore, attempted to provide teachers with multiple-strategies models for teaching English language skills to these students at the intermediate level and beyond. More specifically, it was intended to help pre-and in-service teachers in Egypt and in the Arab region to: (1) identify effective strategies for learning and using language skills, (2) use multiple-strategies models for teaching language skills, (3) interweave strategies for language learning and language use into regular language activities, and (4) improve both the processes and products of language learning of students with learning disabilities.

Managing dyslexia and reading comprehension difficulties in EFL teacher training was also researched in Egypt. For example, Al-Hadidy (2006) attempted to identify the main common difficulties encountered by dyslexic children in Egypt and examine EFL primary education pre-service teachers' knowledge of literacy instruction so as to design a literacy instruction-based programme with proper reading strategies to manage dyslexia of the target learners. The study recommends conducting a survey study to identify the exact numbers of learning disabilities at Egyptian Primary Schools to provide them with quick remedial interventions. In addition, major efforts are required to ensure that colleges of education in Egypt develop preparation programmes to foster the necessary content and pedagogical expertise for pre-service teachers to scaffold poor readers throughout school years.

In Saudi Arabia, AL-Hudaib et al. (2017) aimed to identify training needs of transitional services for teachers of secondary learning-disabled girls in Saudi Arabia, and determine the differences in training needs of transition services for teachers pursuant to the variables: educational level, years of experience, and training courses. Also, Hussain (2010) attempted to provide an evaluation of the undergraduate special education teacher preparation programme at King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. A final sample of 160 LD teachers provided the data used for analysis. Data for the study were collected by a survey consisting of five subscales: coursework, internship quality, classroom applications, professors teaching skills, and personal learning experience. LD teachers also discussed a number of areas where they felt there were needs. They wanted to have English textbooks and English classes, better translations into Arabic, and additional information on other disabilities, since many students

are identified with more than one disability. They wanted lessons to be more creative, include case studies, as well as being able to do more practical applied projects or presentations and fewer exams. LD teachers needed more information on developing an IEP, working with middle school students, making lesson plans, and better classroom materials. LD teachers did want to have access to additional education through advanced degrees and access to workshops and training before and after graduation. Learning Disabilities teachers felt a weakness of the program due to the lack of practicing in classrooms, especially in courses about teaching methods. Methods courses will be more beneficial if they let students practice what they learn in university in their classrooms. Collaboration between special education departments and districts should be established to allow students to visit schools and practice what they learned in university. LD teachers believed that training time spent (internship and training) in actual classroom situations are the most important part of a special education teacher' preparation program. All special education teachers' preparation programs need to continue to emphasize these types of experiences. Such experiences should begin early in the program and continue through to the internship and practicum. The length of internship has to be for one year. Finally, students have to receive feedback regularly from their professors to improve their teaching skills.

In Kuwait, Aladwani and Al Shaye (2012) investigated Kuwaiti primary language school teachers' knowledge and awareness of early signs of dyslexia among Kuwaiti students. To achieve this purpose, a survey was developed to collect data randomly from more than 700 participants across Kuwait's six educational districts. The results showed that the majority of teachers lack the training, knowledge, and skills to diagnose the dyslexic students in their classroom. The results take us a few steps forward in asking about practical implications for practitioners, course designers, and ministry of education policymakers, where dyslexia and other learning disabilities are pressing and urgent issues for students, teachers, and specialists.

Teaching EFL to students with SEN in Arab contexts: Implications for building a framework of action

Given the aforementioned overview of teaching English to SEN learners as depicted in the literature and more particularly in the Arab world, a framework for action could be situated within three premises. First a vision for promoting effective English Language Teacher Education Program (ELTEP) via deliberate incorporation of general and pedagogical teaching skills, reinforcement of self-efficacy beliefs in implementing IE for SEN learners, and promotion of positive attitudes towards IE and SEN. Many ELTEPs in the Arab world do not pay sufficient focus on SEN learners within their program not only through the inclusion of relevant SEN courses but also with the conspicuous shortage of IE field experiences. The assumption that ELTEPs indirectly incorporate these three aspects in some form within existing courses is dramatically undermining the importance of SEN within the educational systems and require drastic philosophical, strategic, conceptual, dispositional, and practical reconsideration. Language teaching methods relevant to SENs such as Sheltered Instruction approach (Lopez-Reyna, 2002) should be advocated in pre-service and in-service training programs as they equip the student teachers with the required knowledge, skills, and dispositions to go beyond prescribed discourse (i.e. textbooks and rigid top-down processes) to flexibly cater for the variability of SENs of learners. Arries (1994) reported in order to cater for the variability of learning disabilities in language classrooms, language teachers should not exclusively rely on textbooks but rather on the incorporation of their learners' interests and motivation to learn as well as the teachers' pedagogical skills and strategies. Language teachers in many Arab contexts heavily abide by the textbook (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2010, 2011) in mainstream teaching and it is not very different in teaching SEN learners. Mayer (2009) argued

that if deaf ESL learners lack access to the primary form of their L1, typical designs of ESL programs with their conventional language focus might not cater for their needs. Uzum (2013) argued that foreign language teachers [and we add teacher educator thereof], as representative of L2 culture, should explore ways to attract students to professional practices encouraging positive dispositions towards IE. ELTEPs, therefore, need to train student teachers on the various types of SEN of their learners not only through the courses but practical exposure and interaction in various pedagogical IE settings.

The second premise of the framework is sustaining an effective national educational policies for supporting the effective inclusion and proper training of SEN in pre-service and in-service teacher education. Lowe (2016) proposed a framework for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) regarding SEN in ELT due to a similar lack of training opportunities and support available in mainstream education regarding SEN. The 4-step sequential framework includes students' consultation about their learning issues, teachers coach and mentor SEN learners, teachers receiving CPD opportunities, and eventually cascade training to recycle knowledge. Although many countries developed such policies and put them into effect, Arab countries have not manage to materialize their policies in developing SEN's status at their educational environments. Alnahdi, Saloviita, and Elhadi (2019) compared the attitudes of pre-service teachers in Saudi Arabia and Finland towards IE and found that the Finnish sample attitudes were near the neutral midpoint whereas their Saudi counterparts was below the midpoint. They concluded that it is vital for teacher preparation programs to understand the capitalize on creating positive attituded towards inclusive education.

National or regional policies that teacher education programs in relevant contexts can draw on such as the European Commission Report about the position of the teaching of foreign languages among SENs (cited in: Stevens & Marsh, 2005) could inform ELTEPs to develop their programs and equip their candidates with the required IE knowledge, skills, and dispositions to train pre-service language student teachers. When such policies tackle the most crucial elements that could facilitate the development of IE (e.g. roles of stakeholders, teacher preparation programs, community service institutions, ICT, support agencies), it become easier to align ELTEPs with such policies and dedicate efforts to follow up alignments between the two.

The third aspect of the framework focuses on the effective incorporation of relevant ICT tools within the teacher preparation program in supporting student teachers acquisition of knowledge and skills to teach SEN learners. Increasing number of ICT tools are developed to cater for the various educational needs of normal and SEN language learners which teacher educators are expected to keep abreast with and infuse in their courses. Any consideration of higher levels of inclusion, with classrooms comprising a more diverse learning group, can probably only be managed by harnessing technological support (Stevens & Marsh, 2005). Attempting to investigate whether language teachers' self-confidence, self-efficacy and attitudes to IE with dyslexic students defer prior to or after taking part in a MOOC, Kormos and Nijakowska (2017) found that their attitudes were more positive, their self-efficacy beliefs higher and their concerns lower than at the outset.

Initial teacher training, in-service teachers, and CPD organizers should not only focus on the language pedagogy component in their programs but should pay equal attention to SEN in planning, implementation and evaluation in order to deliver success effectively to all learners (Stevens & Marsh, 2005). Although the lack of resources especially ICT support is a common predicament facing Arab educational systems in mainstream education and IE, teacher education programs and more particularly ELTEPs should train their candidates on using

effective ICT tools to diagnose, plan, deliver, and assess SEN learners in various education contexts. Pre- and in-service teachers are usually worried about the lack of time to plan and teach lessons in inclusive classrooms especially when behavioral issues arise in heterogeneous classes and the availability of resources (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Forlin & Cooper, 2013; Horne & Timmons, 2009). For this reason, teacher education program as well teacher employers should invest in creating the educational infrastructure that SEN learners must have in order to thrive pedagogically alongside their peers.

In a nutshell, this triadic framework for ELT to SEN learners in the Arab world incorporating skills and dispositions, effective educational policies and relevant ICT tools, if implemented in collaboration with all stakeholders in questions, would provide promising opportunities for language teachers and SEN learners to develop their linguistic and social abilities. As noted before, such a framework without the relevant educational infrastructure and two-way support (i.e. top-down and bottom-up) would find it difficult to materialize. Therefore, creating a continuous open dialogue between ELTEP and national policy makers to plan, implement, and evaluate the given educational content, methodology, and support is paramount for the success of pre-sentence and in-service language teachers.

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