




# Bridging the Inclusion Gap in Colombian Language Classrooms: A Literature Review<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Inclusive classrooms are a priority for educators, as they bear the responsibility of 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 from an analysis of eight Colombian journals from 2000 to 2023 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. Findings suggest that 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.

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

## Resumen

### La inclusión en la enseñanza de lenguas en Colombia: una revisión de literatura

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 ocho revistas colombianas entre 2000 y 2023 sobre las cuestiones de inclusión y el uso de la enseñanza diferenciada en el aula de lenguas extranjeras. Este estudio tiene como objetivo identificar

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<sup>1</sup> Artículo de revisión.

los tipos de inclusión comúnmente abordados, las principales estrategias pedagógicas utilizadas, el posible uso de prácticas de instrucción diferenciada y las dificultades reportadas. Los hallazgos sugieren que crear conciencia, construir comunidad, cambiar actitudes y adaptar materiales son claves para los enfoques inclusivos, que deben considerarse al proponer e integrar estrategias inclusivas en el aula.

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

### **Résumé**

#### **Inclusion dans l'enseignement des langues en Colombie : une revue de la littérature**

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 huit revues colombiennes entre 2000 et 2023 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. Les résultats suggèrent que la sensibilisation, la construction d'une communauté, le changement d'attitude et l'adaptation du matériel sont essentiels aux approches inclusives, qui devraient être prises en compte lors de la proposition et de l'intégration de stratégies inclusives en classe.

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

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## INTRODUCTION

Current educational trends aim at inclusive pedagogies. A significant example of this 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" (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 strategies to achieve SDG-4 as a national public educational policy.

According to the Colombian National Ministry of Education (MEN, 2018), inclusive education is a permanent process that recognizes, values and responds properly to the diversity and expectations of the students. This concept is supported by the Colombian General Law of Education (1994), which establishes that education must be guaranteed to all Colombian citizens. While the legal framework and expectations are clearly defined, implementing them may pose considerable challenges since inclusion is constantly interrupted by the lack of knowledge, skills and methods (Sowell & Sugisaki, 2021) or attitudes (Lindner et al., 2023) that teachers, school directives and policymakers fail to achieve. On the grounds of this, finding ways to effectively materialize inclusion and equity in the classroom is paramount.

For inclusion to be a successful process, obstacles present within the school, educational system, and policies that might impede the involvement of every student should be addressed; recognizing difficulties, removing barriers that are created by those difficulties in the learning environment, and providing appropriate support are crucial. 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).

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 present differences regarding their language level in one or more skills, their background knowledge and their learning profile. Some of these differences influence more than others during the learning process, demanding 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 their curriculum, methods, resources, activities and student products as a way to maximize students' learning opportunities (Bearne, 1996-2006; Blaz, 2016; Tomlinson, 2003).

Most articles related to inclusion in Colombia report on empirical studies developed in particular contexts and aim at specific types of inclusion (e.g. just special needs or gender), others compile studies related to inclusion in Colombia; moreover, these articles review only one journal (Mosquera, Cárdenas, & Nieto, 2018; Robayo & Cárdenas, 2017), and a few are reflective articles about Colombian inclusion policies (Ochoa, 2016; Usma, 2009). As for the use of DI, no Colombian articles systematizing the use of DI in the English as a foreign language (EFL) field were found. A general compilation of what has been researched and published in journals is missing. Such compilation could be useful for teachers looking for inclusion strategies, researchers seeking gaps in the field and policymakers willing to transform current schemes. To explore the state of Inclusion in the foreign language classroom in Colombia, the purpose of this work is to analyze articles published in Colombian journals that address this topic and most particularly, to focus on the use of DI for this end. This article seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What types of inclusion have been addressed in the foreign and second language classroom in Colombia?
2. What are the main pedagogical strategies and suggestions to address inclusion in the second and foreign language classroom? Is differentiated instruction 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 is a descriptive review since its goal is to find patterns and trends in the collection of articles selected (Paré & Kitsiou, 2017). To explore the state of inclusion in the foreign classroom in Colombia, articles from eight peer-reviewed foreign language teaching and learning Colombian journals were analyzed. All the available volumes from 2000 to 2023 from 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 of will be used onwards).

Most 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). All of them are still active and publish from two to three issues a year (refer to Table 1). Most of these journals belong to Colombian universities, except for How Journal, a publication from the Colombian Association of English Teachers. These journals focus on results from

research in the field of applied linguistics, literature, translation, and language teaching and learning.

Journal	Indexation to date	Years active	Volumes to date	University /Association
Profile	A1	2000-2023	25	Universidad Nacional
Ikala	A2	1996-2023	28	Universidad de Antioquia
CALJ	B	1998-2023	25	Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas
Folios	B	1990-2023	58	Universidad Pedagógica Nacional
How	B	1996-2023	30	Asociación Colombiana de Profesores de Inglés
Lenguaje	C	1972-2023	51	Universidad del Valle
Enletawa	-	2008-2023	16	Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia
Gist	-	2007-2022	25	Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana

**Table 1.** General Information About the Journals

### **Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

Data-based, theory-based, and pedagogical experiences were taken into account, but only Colombian<sup>2</sup> articles from 2000 to 2023 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

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

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, LGBTQ+ community, race) where the main focus was identity instead of inclusion were not taken into account.

### **Article selection**

To select the articles, a three-step procedure described by Álvarez-Valencia (2014) was followed. First, the tables of contents of 196 issues (from eight different journals) were reviewed to discover possible articles. Then, the abstracts and keywords were taken into account to confirm the selection criteria. Last, 32 articles were selected and read for the study. To organize the information, a matrix in Google Sheets 2023 was used to visualize characteristics from the papers. After reading the articles, four categories were evident according to their main aim or topic:

- A. General inclusion in the classroom:** Papers in this category belong to educational policy monitoring (Ochoa 2017; Robayo & Cárdenas, 2017; Usma, 2009), personal characteristics that may influence students' learning (Vera, 2000), pre-service teachers' views about inclusion (Vélez, 2013), and proposals of reforming the educational system in order to address inclusion (Ocampo-González, 2023; Soler, Martínez & Peña, 2018).
- B. Inclusion in the language classroom related to special needs:** Articles in this category deal directly with special education. The topics are related to students who are deaf or hard of hearing (HHs) (Ávila, 2011; Castillo & Flores-Martello, 2020A, 2020B), visually impaired or blind (Arenas, 2012; Medina & Huertas, 2008; Perdomo & Vergara, 2009), students with Autism and Down Syndrome (Giraldo & Ramos, 2021), and functional diversity or special needs in general (Montaño & Vera, 2012; Villareal & Méndez, 2021).
- C. Challenges a group of people (with a specific characteristic) face when learning a language:** Studies in this category are about gender and ethnicity. They portray topics such as indigenous students and their experiences with EFL (Arismendi & Ramírez, 2019; Arismendi, Ramírez & Arias, 2016; Cuasilpud, 2010; Escobar & Gómez, 2010; Usma, Ortiz, Gutiérrez, 2018) and Spanish as a second language (Amaya, Fonseca & Pineda, 2019), and gender and sexual orientation regarding conflicts and barriers the participants had to overcome in the language classroom (Durán, 2006; Peña, 2008; Rondón, 2012).

**D. Some uses of differentiated instruction in foreign language learning:** Even though the words “differentiated instruction” were not always included in the texts, they were categorized in this section due to the strategies described or proposed to address inclusion in the classroom (Barfield, 2003; Dueñas, 2013; Moreno, 2001; Niño, 2014; Ramírez, 2021; Serna & Ruíz, 2014; Vargas, Rodríguez & Mosquera, 2018).

**Figure 1.** Articles According to Four Categories

**Articles according to categories**

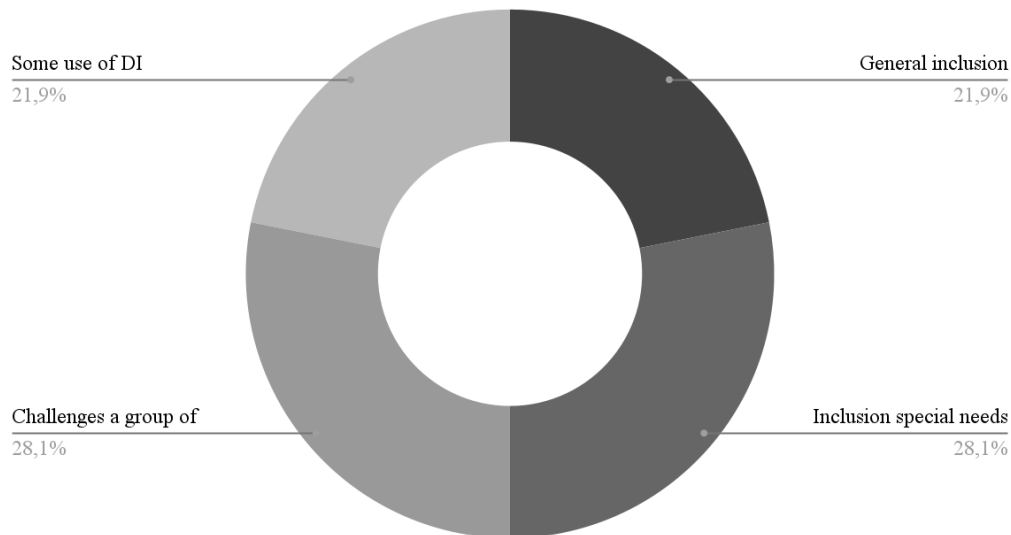


Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of articles belonging to each category. Inclusion related to special needs and Challenges a group of people (with a specific characteristic) face when learning a language are the categories with the majority of articles, each comprising nine articles (29%), which may be related to the general idea of inclusion being mostly for students who need special accommodations in the classroom. The other two categories have seven articles each (22,6%), indicating a balanced representation of topics. However, special needs are present in all of them, just not as the main topic.



## FINDINGS

As shown in Table 2, the journal with the largest number of articles related to inclusion was Profile (seven chosen articles), followed by Folios (six articles), whereas Ikala, and GiST only provided two each. In the case of Ikala this may be due to the journal focus, since it is mostly specialized on translation studies. Nevertheless, taking into account the number of articles published, CALJ and Enletawa are the journals with the highest percentage of articles related to inclusion (1,6%). This percentage indicates a considerably low count of articles associated with inclusion in the foreign or second language classroom in Colombia.

Journal	Period analyzed (in years)	Volumes analyzed	Total articles	Articles chosen	Percentage of articles related to inclusion
Profile	23	25	507	7	1,4
Ikala	23	23	513	2	0,4
CALJ	20	20	321	5	1,6
Folios	23	46	537	6	1,1
How	23	23	330	4	1,2
Revista Lenguaje	19	19	330	3	0,9
Enletawa	15	15	192	3	1,6
GiST	15	25	225	2	0,9
<b>Total</b>		<b>196</b>	<b>2.955</b>	<b>32</b>	

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

### Types of articles

From the 32 articles chosen, 10 (31,3%) were pedagogical experiences, 11 (34,4% ) were theory-based, and 11 (34,4% ) 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 different participants share their teaching and learning experiences through the years. Except for one article (Vélez, 2013) all the articles were qualitative studies.

### **Context and participants**

Regarding the geographical areas, some articles were from Bogota (28%), others from different places in Colombia (25%), and the rest did not report the exact place of the study (46%). Considering that Bogota is the capital of the country, it is not surprising that the majority of the studies that mention the context 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 the 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 took place is concerning because it impedes a deep analysis of possible geographical gaps.

At a more specific level, some studies mention the type of institutions. The number of public ones (38%) is considerably big compared to private ones (13%). Regarding the educational level, the studies took place at schools (34%), universities (31%) and English schools for special needs (3%); a considerable number of articles (31%) do not mention the micro context, mostly because they focused on reflections on the subject rather than on an experience or a data-based study. It is rare to come across a majority of school studies when compared to university studies; in this case, this difference can be attributed to the varying access of the participants. For instance, according to the National Enquiry of Life Quality (ECV - DANE, 2020), statistics show that 17% of students with disabilities have access to higher education, compared to 24% of students without disabilities who have similar access.

To finish, in terms of study participants, the majority (53%) of studies focused only on students (9% out of them on pre-service teachers), a portion of them (25%) addressed students, teachers and other members of the community, and few focused only on teachers' views (6%). Since inclusion in the classroom is a student-centered topic, highlighting the participation of the students was expected.

## **RESULTS**

The articles were analyzed through a Google Sheets matrix with filter options to answer the initial interrogations. Categories such as main topic, objectives or research questions, type of institution where the study was carried out, type of inclusion addressed,

pedagogical strategies or recommendations given by the authors and use of DI, and difficulties encountered during the studies, were used to analyze the 32 selected papers. The responses to the specified questions are presented below.

### **What types of inclusion have been addressed in the foreign and second language classroom in Colombia?**

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

#### *Students who are disadvantaged due to personal or contextual characteristics*

Articles in this category addressed different types of groups of students.

- *Gender and sexual orientation*: Concerning gender, Durán (2006) and Peña (2008) explored 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.

As for sexual orientation, Rondón (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. The author explained how anxiety regarding fear of rejection or disclosure of their identity can influence the performance of the students, and invited teachers to be careful, assertive and tolerant with all students.

- *Indigenous students*: One article was about Spanish as a second language teaching/learning experience (Amaya, Fonseca, & Pineda, 2019) in which the teacher-researcher shared the strategies used to improve writing in the classroom. 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 & Gómez, 2010; Usma et al., 2018). These articles mentioned the challenges indigenous university students have to face due mostly to background knowledge differences compared to university students who went to non-indigenous 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, 2011; Castillo & Flores-Martello, 2020A, 2020B), blind or visually impaired (Arenas, 2012; Medina & Huertas, 2008; Perdomo & Vergara, 2009), have Autism or Down Syndrome (Giraldo & Ramos, 2021) take English classes. There were also studies with general reflections about SEN students in the EFL classroom (Montaño & Vera, 2012; Villareal & Méndez, 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 from vulnerable groups:* Niño (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 needed a strategy in order to be included in the classroom and achieve the class objectives.

### *Students' general differences and interests*

Some authors (Barfield, 2003; Dueñas, 2013; Moreno, 2001; Ramírez, 2021; Vera, 2000) addressed the differences in the classroom related to students' levels, interests, learning preferences and some personality traits. The aspects taken into account 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 aspects and differ in others.

Vera (2000) addressed the question of whether certain characteristics influence students' attitudes and willingness to learn. The author mentioned that aspects such as age, self-esteem, and internal and external factors impact language learning. In addition, Moreno (2001) and Ramírez (2021) suggested that paying attention to students' characteristics is a good way to enhance motivation. Ramírez (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 (2013) shared the experience with "learning centers", which are

corners in the classroom with multiple activities for students to choose from and develop. These three 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 to address inclusion in the second and foreign language classroom? Is differentiated instruction one of them and if so, in what specific contexts has it been utilized in language classrooms?**

A variety of strategies to help students develop skills or achieve objectives related to English as a foreign language or Spanish as a second language was reported. The use of interculturality, task-based learning/teaching (TBLT), universal design for learning (UDL), and the implementation of technology or differentiated instruction (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.

Giraldo and Ramos (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, 2012; Medina & Huertas, 2008; Montaña & Vera, 2012; Perdomo & Vergara, 2009). 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.

Supplementary, 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 & Flores-Martelo, 2020; Medina & Huertas, 2008). Additionally, autonomy and self-confidence are vital for the process (Arenas, 2012; Perdomo & Vergara, 2009), and teachers should help students develop them if they want their learners to be high achievers.

Regarding suggestions, Soler, et al. (2018) and Ocampo-González (2023) 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 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 Colombian educational system should evolve to leave aside mainstream inclusion practices and to

promote 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 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.

Focusing on differentiated instruction (DI), its purpose is to modify various aspects of the class to reach the necessities of all the learners ( Gregory, 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 (2014) and Vargas et al. (2018) are the only authors who use the term "differentiated instruction" (DI) in their work. Niño 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 et al. (2018), adopted DI through a virtual learning environment (VLE) in their tenth-grade classes, 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 clearly perceived include differentiation of the *content* (Arenas, 2012; Medina & Huertas, 2008; Montaña & Vera, 2012), of the *process* (Ramírez, 2021), using interest centers (Dueñas, 2013), of the *product* (Montaña & Vera, 2012), and differentiation based on *students' profiles* (Barfield, 2003; Moreno, 2001; Serna & Ruiz, 2014; Vera, 2000). For this last aspect (students' profiles), the authors placed a major emphasis on students' differences and preferences, but it is not 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, 2012; Giraldo & Ramos, 2021; Medina & Huertas, 2008) and with regular students, 25% (Barfield, 2003; Dueñas, 2013; Moreno, 2001; Niño, 2014; Ramírez, 2021; Serna & Ruiz, 2014; Vargas, Rodríguez, & Mosquera, 2018; Vera, 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, 2014; Vargas et al., 2018) and at the university level, 3% (Serna & Ruíz, 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?**

Montaño 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 could follow regarding special needs. Additionally, data analyzed by the authors revealed that specialized support and teacher training (Castillo & Florez-Martelo, 2020) is 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 & Gómez, 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 programs, 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 great 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), which causes isolation and lack of motivation in students who need support. The attitude problem can come from administrators, teachers, parents, classmates and the students who are facing the barriers:

1. From some administrators unwilling to share or make clear parameters for the rest to follow (Montaño & Vera, 2012);
2. from teachers promoting exemption rather than adaptation (Castillo & Florez-Martelo, 2020) or not adapting their materials (Medina & Huertas, 2008);

3. from parents having poor participation in students' processes (Montaño & Vera, 2012);
4. from classmates failing to build rapport or support classmates who struggle in the class (Castillo & Florez-Martelo, 2020), and
5. from 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, 2012; Montaño & Vera, 2012).

Together, these results provide important insights into inclusive education in second and foreign language teaching in Colombia, a field that needs to continue growing and being researched.

## DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to analyze inclusion in language education in Colombia in the past 23 years to identify the types of inclusion, pedagogical strategies, and difficulties in second and foreign-language classrooms in Colombia.

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 (ONCA- COALICO, 2024). This phenomenon generates interrupted schooling, which in turn may create barriers in the classroom leading to students with low achievement. This means that there are groups that are not being fully addressed, for this reason, it is necessary to focus and increase research on other needs presented in the language classroom, such as readiness level and low achievement.

Additionally, regarding research focus, studies related to special needs were present, 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 are rare, a gap that could be addressed by researchers. 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 has slowly but steadily increased since the number of published articles per year related to inclusion has varied between 0 to 3 over the past 23 years. Despite being a hot topic at the international level, 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; Villareal & Méndez, 2021).

Related to the types 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 3,1% of the articles is not qualitative research), so as 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 & Cárdenas, 2017) focused exclusively on one journal (Profile), this current study was able to show a larger picture of inclusion-related articles by expanding the search to eight journals. The objective of these previous studies, however, differed from the current one. In one of the studies, the authors focused on Colombian policies and their representation in the selected papers (Robayo & Cárdenas, 2017), whereas in the other 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 task-based learning, as well as 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, universal design for learning (UDL) and differentiated instruction (DI) was. Based on these results, it is necessary to work on 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 lies in the fact that there was just one researcher in the study. When selecting, classifying and labeling the articles there was not a discussion held for those articles that partially met some of the selecting criteria, thus the final selection of all the articles came from a single point of view. 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 went under a process of peer review before being published, which increases the trustworthiness of each study.

The biggest limitation is the relatively small number of journals used for the study. Due to time constraints, only eight journals were selected. These are among the most common journals for the field of EF, and ELT in Colombia; despite that, many other journals from different universities may contain important articles related to inclusion in Colombia. Based on this, generalizations must be made with caution. Future projects could take into account the journals that were not included in this study in order to broaden the information.

## CONCLUSION

After analyzing 32 published articles related to inclusion in the foreign or second language classroom in Colombia from 2000 to 2023, multiple conclusions can be made. Categorically, a range between 0.4% and 1.6% 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 differentiated instruction 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. Strategies used by second and foreign language teachers include working with the community in order to increase their awareness and cooperation, self-confidence and autonomy development, and the use of technology and specific methodologies, together with material adaptation for effective instruction. Differentiated instruction was included (implicitly and explicitly) in some of the papers to face a wide variety of contexts and participants. Inclusion in the classroom comes with many difficulties, authors mentioned negative attitudes and lack of communication or resources 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 accommodations, it is still needed 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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