Teaching Presence for Inclusiveness in Blended Learning Classrooms: Perspectives from English Language Educators

Ivana Krsmanović*

University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Technical Sciences Čačak, Serbia

ivana.krsmanovic@ftn.kg.ac.rs

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4793-628X

* Corresponding Author

Dagmar Archan

CAMPUS 02 UAS, Graz, Austria

dagmar.archan@campus02.at

https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2017-4464

Lena Tica

University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Technical Sciences Čačak, Serbia

lena.tica@ftn.kg.ac.rs

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8754-7580

Abstract

The goal of this research study was to evaluate how Teaching presence, as a Community of Inquiry (CoI) construct, could help establish more inclusive blended learning classrooms in English language teaching (ELT) and whether educators need additional support to enhance inclusivity in their classrooms. An explanatory mixed-method study was conducted, investigating the relationship between teachers' teaching presence, their inclusive practices, and future training needs in blended learning environments. Data were collected from 68 ELT educators worldwide via a survey comprising the CoI questionnaire and an original inclusive practices scale. The study revealed that educators generally possess high confidence in facilitating and guiding blended learning, reflecting strong perceived capability in fostering inclusive environments. Positive correlations were found between Teaching presence and various measures of inclusive practice, indicating that stronger teaching presence enhances educators' readiness and confidence in inclusive practices. However, many educators reported

insufficient preparation and support for inclusive blended learning, highlighting the need for more comprehensive professional development and targeted resources. The findings emphasize the importance of integrating the CoI design principles and leveraging technology to enhance inclusivity. Overall, the study underscores the necessity of embedding the creation and maintenance of inclusive environments as fundamental components of educator training programs, aligning with the broader goals of inclusive digital education.

Keywords: Blended learning, Community of Inquiry (CoI), Computer-assisted language learning (CALL), Inclusiveness, Teaching presence

Introduction

"A Community of inquiry must be both inclusive and critical."
(Garrison, 2017, p. 37)

Although blended instruction originated in the early 1990s, it is only in the post-pandemic era that higher education institutions have adopted blended learning as the *new normal*. Blended learning, or the "thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences" (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 5), has become a focal point of numerous legislative initiatives in the period after the pandemic, as technology demonstrated a strong potential to "facilitate more accessible, flexible, personalized and learner-centered learning" (Council of the European Union, 2021, p. 4). Prior studies have confirmed that blended learning environments increase teaching effectiveness (Arifani et al., 2019), enable more individualized support for learners, and have the potential to improve learning outcomes (Archan, 2019), and are preferred by learners (Bukhari & Basaffar, 2019; Rahman, 2021). However, dissimilar to this, concerns have been raised that blended learning might diminish the quality of personal interaction between teachers and learners found in face-to-face educational settings (Amiruddin et al., 2022; Kohnke & Jarvis, 2021; Krsmanović, 2022; Naqvi & Zehra, 2020). There is also a risk that some learners might feel left out or excluded due to other various constraints that technology brings (Farmati et al., 2023; Hehir et al., 2021; Krsmanović et al., 2022). For those reasons, the focus must gradually shift from merely implementing CALL in ELT classrooms to adopting a more comprehensive perspective that prioritizes the *inclusion* of learners within blended learning environments, thereby further strengthening the capacities of CALL worldwide.

In this regard, inclusive digital education has called for a transformative approach that would encompass the digital skills and competencies of educators, as outlined in the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu) framework, with a specific emphasis on inclusiveness. The legislative "call for inclusion" extends to blended learning, with a particular focus on ensuring equal opportunities in e-environments. According to the Council of the European Union (2021, section 14), blended learning offers "an opportunity to improve the quality, relevance, and inclusiveness of education and training." Consequently, establishing and maintaining inclusive settings within blended learning environments has become imperative. To address this need, it is essential that the creation and sustenance of inclusive environments are embedded as fundamental components of educator training programs, aligning with the broader goals of inclusive digital education. This alignment is crucial to bridging the existing research gap and providing educators with practical tools to implement inclusive practices effectively.

Furthermore, there is a significant lack of scholarly discussion on what inclusion truly means in the context of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and how its various aspects can be operationalized. Thus, more rigorous and practical research is required to explore the implementation and outcomes of inclusive practices in CALL, ensuring that all learners can benefit equally from blended learning environments. The goal of this research study is to evaluate how Teaching presence, as a construct from the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, can contribute to the creation of more inclusive blended learning environments in English language teaching (ELT). Additionally, the study investigates whether educators require further support to effectively enhance inclusivity in their classrooms. By addressing this gap, the study aims to offer practical insights and contribute to a more equitable and effective educational landscape through the use of blended learning. In line with the existing gap, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: How does the level of teaching presence among English language educators correlate with their self-assessed effectiveness in implementing inclusive practices in blended learning environments?

RQ2: To what extent do ELT educators feel adequately prepared and confident to implement inclusive practices in blended learning environments?

RQ3: To what extent do ELT educators currently receive support from their institutions to implement inclusive practices in blended learning, and what specific areas would be most beneficial for them to receive additional training or support in?

RQ4: In what ways do ELT educators typically acquire information about the diverse learning needs of their students, and how the information on the specific needs of their students should be received?

Literature Review

Inclusion in Contemporary Education: Broadening the Scope

The concept of inclusion is based on the universal premise that all differences between individuals are natural and that what makes people different provides richness to their interactions and relationships. Discourses of inclusion reflect a humanist viewpoint, advocating for the right of any individual to participate in any group or activity that interests them (Papastephanou, 2019). However, various dimensions and levels of inclusion emerge when defined from different perspectives. Inclusion has been conceptualized as a principle (Weber et al., 2022, p. 19), as a process (UNESCO, 2020, p. 419), and as an act or a practice (Papastephanou, 2019). Inclusion is also viewed as a "system of education whereby every learner can access and engage with the curriculum alongside his-her age peers, regardless of ability" (Daloiso et al., 2021, p. 45) or as "a process consisting of actions and practices that embrace diversity and build a sense of belonging, rooted in the belief that every person has value and potential and should be respected" (UNESCO, 2020, p. 419). Importantly, however, the understanding of inclusion in education has transcended the assumption that inclusion is solely about students with special needs. Inclusion now encompasses all learners. Thus, while the term *inclusion* was primarily associated with disability, it now extends to wider groups as: "… a response to increasingly complex and diverse societies. It treats diversity as an asset which helps prepare individuals for life and active citizenship in increasingly complex, demanding, multi-cultural and integrated societies" (Soriano et al., 2017, p. 7).

Over the past decade, and especially after the pandemic brought a new appreciation for blended learning (Council of the European Union, 2021; DeMolder et al., 2023; Futch et al., 2016), inclusion has become a cornerstone of contemporary policy initiatives in education worldwide. A transformative educational agenda posts that "No education target should be considered met unless met by all" (World Education Forum, 2015, p. 2), whereas the 'Education 2030 Declaration and Framework for Action' (UNESCO, 2016) lists a priority to ensure *inclusive* and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Educational legislation advocates for learning settings that celebrate diversity, respect individual differences, and ensure equitable opportunities for all learners, as opposed to discriminatory practices or marginalization. Moreover, policymakers emphasize that

contemporary understanding of inclusion must extend to *digital* inclusion (e.g., The Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027, Council of Europe Recommendation on blended learning approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education, Inclusive Digital Education 2022). In other words, the progressive digitalization of social life, driven by the pervasiveness of technology in all aspects of our lives and the normalization of e-learning, has introduced new priorities and demands in education. Consequently, digital educational settings can potentially emerge as additional realms where threats of further exclusion and new vulnerabilities for groups and individuals may arise (Böttinger et al., 2023; Kotlyarova et al., 2021).

The complex nature of digital learning environments presents both opportunities and challenges for achieving greater inclusion in education. Some scholars argue that digital learning environments have dual character (Moore, 2014) as they can act as "both support for and barriers to greater inclusion in education in general and in digital education in particular" (Weber et al., 2022, p. 39). Recent research highlights that digital education "insufficiently support[s] valuable aspects of human interaction, e.g., informal conversations, direct eye contact, physical relationships and a physical assimilation of the world" (Weber et al., 2022, p.77). Additionally, numerous other factors, such as technical impediments (cost and access) (Paul, 2020; Tafazoli et al., 2018) and personal issues (digital literacy or lack of interaction) (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021) are listed as some of the constraints of CALL which may have led to an increased number of dropouts and exacerbated existing inequalities (Krsmanović, 2022). Furthermore, additional support is needed for teachers in selecting suitable inclusive teaching materials (Kasch, 2020; Weber et al., 2022) or those who are coming from underrepresented contexts themselves (Tafazoli & Picard, 2023). These barriers underscore the importance of addressing logistical (Lister et al., 2019), infrastructural (Sowell & Sugisaki, 2020; Yphantides, 2022), professional development (Ruddick et al., 2021; Young, 2024; Eragamreddy, 2024), and affective elements (Hale & Ono, 2019; Francisco et al., 2023) to create a more inclusive digital educational environment.

Community of Inquiry, Teaching Presence and Inclusion

English language teaching (ELT) coupled with blended learning instruction can pose significant challenges to students who face difficulties. One of the reasons comes from the fact that learners usually display a high degree of overlapping of different learning difficulties (Daloiso et al., 2021) and learning a foreign language in an e-environment makes it additionally difficult. Current literature on inclusion in ELT introduces the idea of implementing inclusive

practices through a two-level approach: at a general level, providing an accessible learning environment, and at an individual level, recognizing and embracing the individual differences that occur in any group (Daloiso et al., 2021), or as Sandra Stadler-Heer nicely puts it:

> [T]he notion of inclusion entails a transformed view of (language) teaching. It requires us to replace conventional conceptualizations of individual difference in the regular classroom with a broader, organizational, 'social' or 'interactive' perspective relating to all aspects of schooling including infrastructure of buildings, financial resources, constructing school communities, and training of personnel (Stadler-Heer, 2019, p. 219).

Compliant with the above-mentioned views, we argue that CoI, designed to assist educators and guide and facilitate online learning, can help establish and/or enhance inclusive practices in ELT blended learning environments. The CoI framework is a social (collaborative) constructivist model of a learning process in e-environments (Garrison, 2017) designed to assist educators in facilitating and guiding online learning. Aligning with social constructivist theory (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978), the concept was first introduced in 2000 by Garrison et al. It describes a learning community that emerges at the intersection of three core elements: cognitive presence, teaching presence, and social presence (Garrison et al., 2000). The CoI framework is widely accepted in the literature (Cleveland-Innes et al., 2024; Dietz et al., 2021; Ranjan, 2020), and the original CoI survey, which measures three presences, was developed (Arbaugh et al., 2008) and validated (Abbitt & Boone, 2021).

The CoI framework emerges as a valuable theoretical lens for addressing the challenges of inclusivity in blended learning environments (Garrison, 2017). Notably, the CoI framework emphasizes the importance of social and cognitive presence in online and blended learning settings, thereby highlighting the need for interactions and negotiations to create meaningful learning experiences (Garth-James & Hollis, 2014; Yang & Lay, 2024; Zhang, 2020). By focusing on creating social and learning processes through interactions, the CoI framework can effectively promote a sense of community and collaboration among learners, which is essential for fostering inclusivity in educational settings (ElSayad, 2023).

Moreover, the framework underscores the significance of strong Teaching presence by instructors to facilitate meaningful interactions and support students' learning needs in blended learning environments (Edginton & Holbrook, 2010; Garrison, 2017; Pei et al., 2024). Drawing

from the educator's role in educational experiences, Teaching presence is constructed within three components: a) Design and organization, b) Facilitating discourse, and c) Direct instruction (Garrison, 2024), which often overlap and are all vital for effective learning to occur (Garrison, 2017). Teaching presence presupposes a strong leadership role of the teacher which begins way before the course starts (Anderson et al., 2001). The teacher is responsible for creating, implementing, and monitoring learning/teaching activities that encourage communication and interaction between students, and facilitating the discourse and providing direct instruction when required by contributing academic knowledge and relevant experience throughout the process. When transitioning from rich-in-clues face-to-face teaching to online or blended learning, re-designing teaching practices is necessary so that they better meet the needs of learners who face different conditions in these environments as opposed to those found in a traditional classroom. Since blended learning includes online instruction at a certain level, it is essential that educators engage with even more intentionality and visibility than they would in traditional face-to-face teaching, as they need to make up for the lack of clues e-environments provides on a regular basis. Some of the common strategies to establish a strong teaching presence is to harness the available technology (video welcome announcements, outreach emails, voice messages) to establish the CoI as a safe space for the co-creation of learning experiences.

In our previous research, we showcased that there is a positive correlation between Teaching presence and course satisfaction in ELT and that students highly value the "teacher's conscious effort to establish and nurture Teaching presence through mindful instructional design in an e-environment" (Tica & Krsmanović, 2022, p. 405). This finding underscores the critical role of Teaching presence in enhancing student satisfaction and learning outcomes. Therefore, we argue that Teaching presence enhances inclusiveness in ELT blended learning. Common guidelines for establishing Teaching presence within the CoI framework (see Fiock, 2020; Goda, 2024) appear crucial for increasing and sustaining inclusive practices among teachers in blended learning environments. In other words, we believe that the CoI framework, particularly its focus on Teaching presence, contributes to capacity building by enhancing the pedagogical practices of educators, thereby enabling them to accommodate and support diverse student needs more effectively.

Method

Research Design

The goal of the research study was to evaluate how Teaching presence as a CoI construct could help establish more inclusive blended learning classrooms in ELT and whether educators need additional support to enhance inclusivity in their classrooms. For this purpose, an explanatory sequential mixed-method study was deployed, aimed at investigating the relationship between teachers' teaching presence, their inclusive practices, and future training needs in blended learning environments. This approach was chosen as it facilitates a structured analysis of the complex relationships between quantitative and qualitative data, ultimately leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), ensuring that the research is grounded in the realities of the participants' experiences (Galiot & Graham, 2016).

Participants

In this study, purposeful sampling was employed to identify and select a sample of 68 English language educators from diverse geographical locations worldwide, ensuring that the participants were particularly knowledgeable and experienced in the context of blended learning environments. This sampling technique allows researchers in mixed-method research to select individuals who can provide valuable insights into the phenomenon of interest, as emphasized by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011). Furthermore, the criteria for selection included not only knowledge and experience but also the participants' availability, willingness to engage, and ability to articulate their experiences and opinions effectively (Palinkas et al., 2016). The respondents were recruited through relevant ELT and EFL groups on social media, and they voluntarily completed a Google Forms survey.

The demographic profile of the surveyed population presents a comprehensive picture of gender distribution, age, educational attainment, employment status, and professional experience, reflecting a diverse and highly qualified group that teaches English across 18 countries across the globe (see Table 1).

Table 1

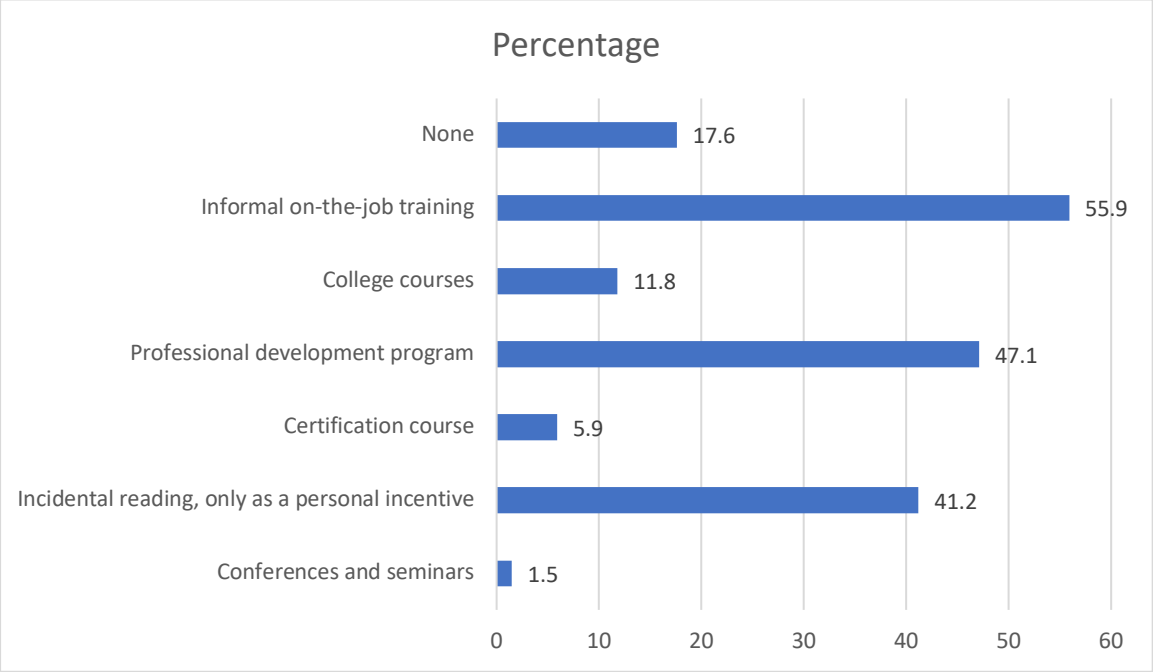
Participants' Demographic Information

Category	Subcategory	Percentage
Gender	Female	77.9
	Male	22.1
Age	20-30 years old	1.5
	31-40 years old	26.5
	41-50 years old	45.6
	51-60 years old	26.5
	61 and older	0
Education	PhD	51.5
	MA	33
	BA	15.5
Employment status	Employed full-time	89.7
	Employed part-time	4.41
	Adjunct/retired/freelance	5.89
Professional experience	More than 20 years	44.1
	11-20 years	45.6
	5-10 years	7.4
	Less than 5 years	2.9

The educators were asked 'What does your previous preparation to teach in a blended learning environment include?' The results (Figure 1) reveal that informal on-the-job training is the predominant method of preparation, with 55.9% of respondents indicating reliance on experiential learning and adaptation within the actual teaching context. Professional development programs also play a significant role, with 47.2% of respondents engaging in these structured training opportunities.

Figure 1

Previous Preparation to Teach Blended Learning



Regarding the certification question (Do you hold any certification for teaching in blended learning environment), the overwhelming majority of the sample, 88.2%, indicated that they do not possess any certification for teaching blended or online courses, while only 11.8% reported having such a certification.

Data Collection

The data were collected through a survey instrument which comprised four sections: 1) Demographic questions and questions about the teaching practice, 2) The CoI questionnaire developed by Arbaugh et al. (2008) (teaching presence scale with 13 statements), 3) An original set of statements on inclusive practices – inclusive practices scale, designed by the researchers, and 4) Seven questions regarding future teaching development. The structure and the number of items per section are given in Table 2. The wording of the teaching presence scale was modified and adapted. The reliability of the scale for the instrument was determined by Cronbach's Alpha's Coefficient, with the result of 0.95, which indicates significant consistency (Table 3). The inclusive practices scale was developed based on the three pillars of Teaching presence: Facilitation, Direct instruction, and Instructional design.

Table 2

Research Instrument Structure

Questionnaire section	No of questions	Type of question
Demography	8	7 multiple choices & 1 open-ended
Overall perceived teaching presence	13	Likert (1 to 5 range)
Current inclusive practices	13	Likert (1 to 5 range)
Future teaching development	7	6 Likert (1 to 5 range) & 1 open-ended

Participants were asked to reflect on their teaching activities within blended learning courses. The use of a 1-5 Likert scale (1 meaning 'strongly disagree,' and 5 meaning 'strongly agree') in this research design is justified due to its ability to quantitatively measure attitudes with clarity and simplicity, facilitate flexible data analysis, and provide rich insights into educators' perceptions, aligning with Garrison et al.'s emphasis on structured measurement tools in educational research (2010).

Table 3

Reliability of the Instrument

Scale	No if items	N	Cronbah's Alpha
CoI scale	13	68	.98
Inclusive practices Scale	13	68	.84
Overall questionnaire	26	68	.95

Data Analysis

The analysis of the collected data involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. The data analysis process consisted of the following steps. In the first step, the descriptive statistics were calculated for all the study variables. The means and standard deviation were calculated to analyze the obtained data from the questionnaire. Also, the Cronbach alpha method was adopted to ensure the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire items. Secondly, correlations between teaching presence in blended learning and inclusive practices were examined, along with the future professional development needs of ELT lecturers. The collected data underwent analysis using SPSS software (version 29) for statistical and inferential analysis, with a Pearson coefficient analysis and regression analysis utilized for obtaining results. The results are interpreted with means categorized as follows: 1.00-1.79 (very

low); 1.80-2.59 (low); 2.60-3.39 (moderate); 3.40-4.19 (high); 4.20-5.00 (very high), compliant with Pimentel (2019).

Additionally, a thematic analysis was performed on the responses to the open-ended question (Braun & Clark, 2006). The thematic analysis was conducted beginning with familiarization, where the responses to the open-ended question were thoroughly read and re-read to identify patterns. Next, initial codes were generated by systematically categorizing meaningful data segments, which were then organized into potential themes through iterative refinement. Finally, the themes were reviewed, defined, and named to ensure they accurately represented the underlying patterns in the data and were relevant to the research question.

Results

Overall Perceived Teaching Presence

The self-assessed teaching presence scores demonstrate a generally high level of confidence among educators in their ability to facilitate and guide learning activities effectively (Table 4). The highest mean score was for "Overall, I clearly communicate important due dates/time frames for learning activities" (Mean = 4.36, SD = 1.09), indicating strong confidence in this area. Conversely, the lowest mean score was for "Overall, I am helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics that help students to learn" (Mean = 3.94, SD = .983). The high scores across most items suggest that educators feel adept at organizing and managing course logistics, which is crucial for maintaining a structured learning environment.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Teaching Presence Scale

Q9	Teaching Presence Scale	N	min	max	M	SD
1.	Overall, I clearly communicate important course topics.	68	1	5	4.28	.98
2.	Overall, I clearly communicate course goals.	68	1	5	4.21	1.09
3.	Overall, I provide clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.	68	1	5	4.22	1.05
4.	Overall, I clearly communicate important due dates/time frames for learning activities.	68	1	5	4.36	1.09
5.	Overall, I am helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics that help students to learn.	68	1	5	3.94	.98
6.	Overall, I am helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helps students clarify their thinking.	68	1	5	4.09	.98

7.	Overall, I help to keep course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.	68	1	5	4.13	.99
8.	Overall, I help keep the course participants on task in a way that helps students learn.	68	1	5	4.09	1.01
9.	Overall, I encourage course participants to explore new concepts in courses.	68	1	5	4.06	1.02
10.	Overall, my actions reinforce the development of a sense of community among course participants.	68	1	5	3.97	1.04
11.	Overall, I help to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helps students to learn.	68	1	5	4.15	1.09
12.	Overall, I provide feedback that helps students understand their strengths and weaknesses relative to the course's goals and objectives.	68	1	5	4.12	1.00
13.	Overall, I provide feedback in a timely fashion.	68	1	5	4.21	1.00

Inclusive Practices Scale

The inclusive practices scale findings reveal varied levels of self-assessed effectiveness among educators in fostering inclusive environments within blended learning courses, but still ranging from high to very high (Table 5). The highest mean score was for "I cultivate an environment where all students feel empowered to express their opinions and share their ideas, regardless of their background or identity" (Mean = 4.57, SD = 0.67), indicating strong confidence in creating supportive and inclusive communities. On the other hand, the lowest mean score was for the statement, "I consider accessibility and inclusivity when selecting multimedia resources and technology tools for my blended learning materials, ensuring they are suitable for all learners" (Mean = 3.57, SD = 1.11). The overall self-assessment of inclusive practices among educators in blended learning environments reveals a commendable commitment to fostering inclusivity and support for diverse student populations.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Inclusive Practices Scale

Q10		Inclusive practices scale	M	SD
1	FACILITATION	I prioritize creating opportunities for diverse student interaction and (e.g., group projects with students from different cultural backgrounds, online discussions where all voices are encouraged).	4.01	0.83
2		I employ strategies to ensure the active engagement of all students, including those from underrepresented groups (e.g., using inclusive language, and providing diverse examples that resonate with all students).	4.04	.69

3		I cultivate an environment where all students feel empowered to express their opinions and share their ideas, regardless of their background or identity (e.g., creating a supportive online community where respectful dialogue is encouraged, acknowledging and valuing diverse perspectives).	4.57	0.67
4		I provide additional support or enrichment opportunities for students who require personalized instruction or challenges, regardless of their background or abilities. (e.g., extension activities for advanced learners, scaffolding for struggling students).	3.98	0.81
5		I address potential challenges or conflicts related to diversity and inclusion that may arise among group members during collaborative activities. (e.g., facilitating open discussions about group dynamics, offering mediation and conflict resolution strategies)	3.79	1.06
6		I promote equity and fairness in group work, ensuring that all students have equitable opportunities to contribute and succeed, regardless of their background. (e.g., rotating leadership roles, providing structured feedback on individual and group performance)	4.42	0.73
7	DIRECT INSTRUCTION	I provide individualized support and feedback to students from diverse backgrounds who may require additional assistance or accommodations in their learning (additional office hours for those who fall behind, phone calls, direct emails, chats…)	4.11	0.88
8		I establish a strong classroom policy and build relationships with students to ensure they feel supported and valued, particularly those who may face barriers to learning (e.g. personalized welcome messages, regular check-ins to discuss progress and concerns)	4.25	0.92
9		I address the unique learning needs and preferences of students from diverse backgrounds during one-on-one consultations or office hours (e.g., providing alternative explanations, and offering supplementary resources tailored to individual learning styles).	4.05	0.93
10	INSTRUCTIONAL	I intentionally design learning activities and assignments that embrace and celebrate the diversity of my students' backgrounds and experiences (e.g., incorporating culturally relevant content, allowing for multiple modes of expression)	3.65	1.00
11		I consider accessibility and inclusivity when selecting multimedia resources and technology tools for my blended learning materials, ensuring they are suitable for all learners. (e.g., providing transcripts for	3.57	1.11

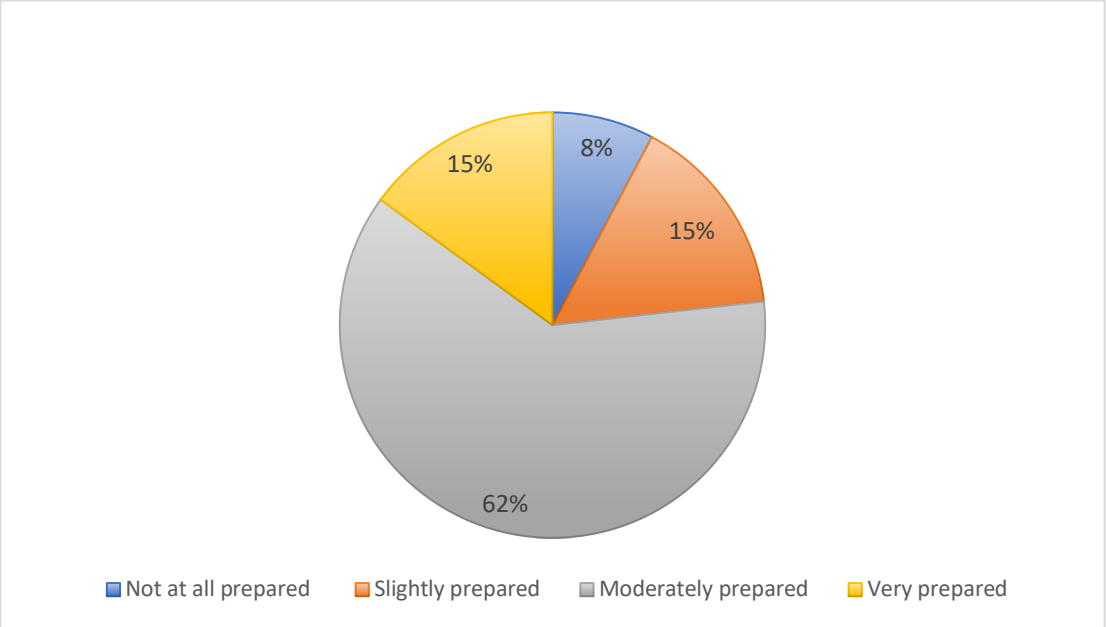
	audio/video content, choosing platforms with built-in accessibility features)		
12	I integrate universal design principles into my course content and assessments to ensure they are accessible to students from diverse backgrounds and abilities. (e.g., offering multiple means of representation, action, and expression, providing clear instructions and rubrics)	3.76	1.07
13	I adapt my teaching strategies and materials to meet the diverse learning needs and preferences of my students, ensuring that all learners can engage meaningfully with the content. (e.g., providing alternative readings, offering choice in assignments).	3.91	1.46

Future Teaching Development

To investigate to what extent ELT lecturers currently feel adequately prepared to implement inclusive practices in blended learning environments we asked them to rate the level of preparedness ranging from 1 to 5. The results (Figure 2) indicate that a significant majority, 47.1%, report being "moderately prepared," which suggests a prevailing sense of competence tempered with the recognition of ongoing challenges. This group seems to navigate the complexities of inclusive practices with a degree of confidence but acknowledges room for growth. In contrast, only 2.9% of respondents feel "extremely prepared," and 32.4% of respondents feel "very prepared," suggesting that a substantial portion of educators possess a high degree of readiness. On the opposite end of the spectrum, 5.9% of educators feel "not at all prepared." This stark figure underscores a critical area of concern and highlights an urgent need for targeted professional development and resources to support those struggling with inclusivity in blended settings. These findings demonstrate that a big majority of the respondents feel they are moderately prepared to implement inclusive practices in blended learning.

Figure 2

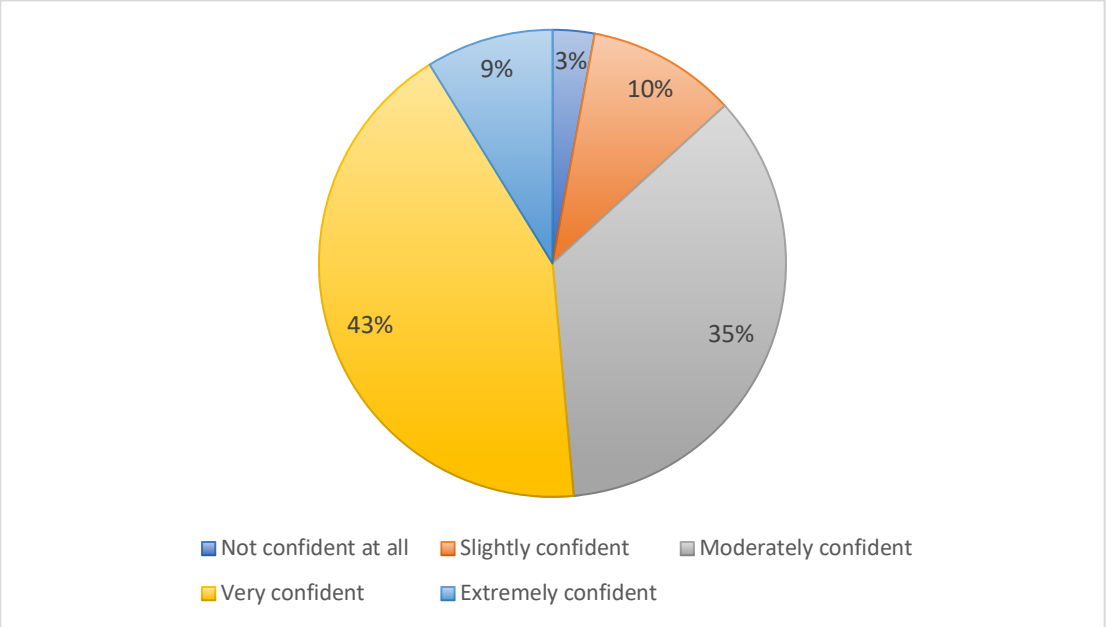
Preparedness to Implement Inclusive Practices in Blended Teaching



Regardless of their prior level of preparedness, we aimed to explore how confident the respondents are in their ability to address the diverse learning needs and preferences of students in a blended learning setting. A notable 42.6% of educators report being "very confident" in their ability to address diverse learning needs (Figure 3). Altogether with 8.8% of respondents who express "extreme confidence," the sample makes more than 50% of highly confident educators to address the diverse learning needs and preferences of students in a blended learning setting. On the other end of the spectrum, 2.9% of respondents express being "not at all confident," mirroring the 5.9% from the earlier question who felt "not at all prepared." This overlap suggests that a lack of confidence in addressing diverse needs is closely related to feeling inadequately prepared, highlighting a critical area for intervention. The "moderately confident" category, at 35.7%, aligns closely with the 47.1% of respondents who felt "moderately prepared" earlier. This consistency implies that a moderate level of preparedness correlates with a moderate level of confidence. However, the sizable proportion in this category indicates that while many educators feel reasonably equipped, they still face challenges in fully addressing diverse needs.

Figure 3

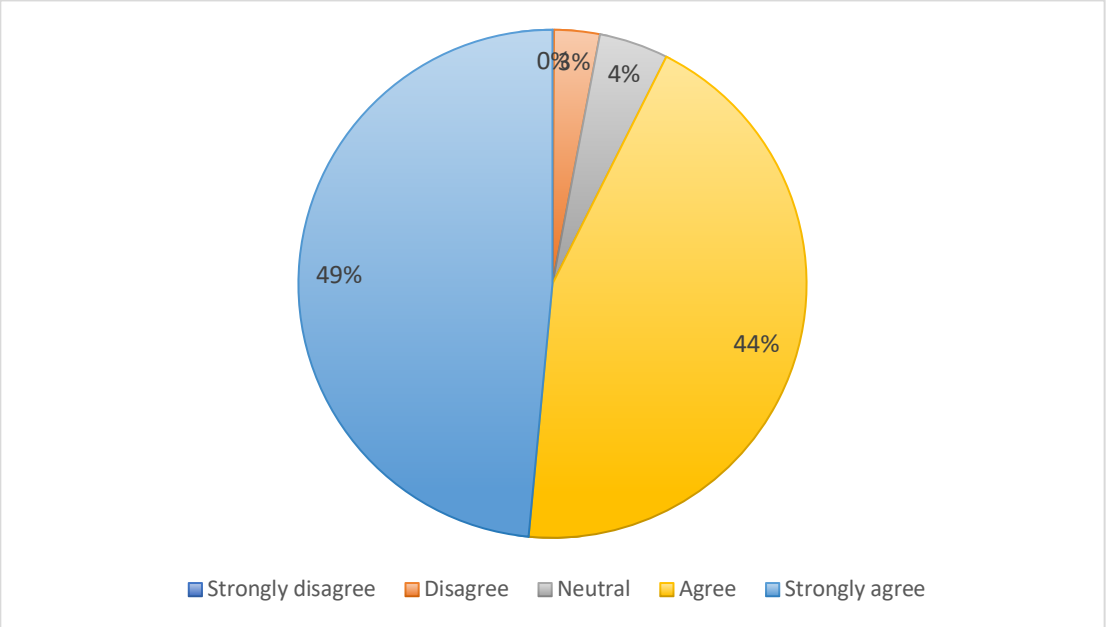
Level of Confidence to Meet the Learners' Needs



The responses to the third question in this part "Do you believe that additional training or professional development opportunities focused on inclusive practices in blended learning would benefit you as an educator?" reveal a strong consensus among educators regarding the value of further professional development in this area. The results show overwhelming 48.5% of respondents "strongly agree" that additional training would be beneficial, and 44.1% "agree" with this sentiment (Figure 4). Together, these figures represent a substantial majority of 92.6% of educators who recognize the need for further support in enhancing their skills related to inclusive practices in blended learning environments.

Figure 4

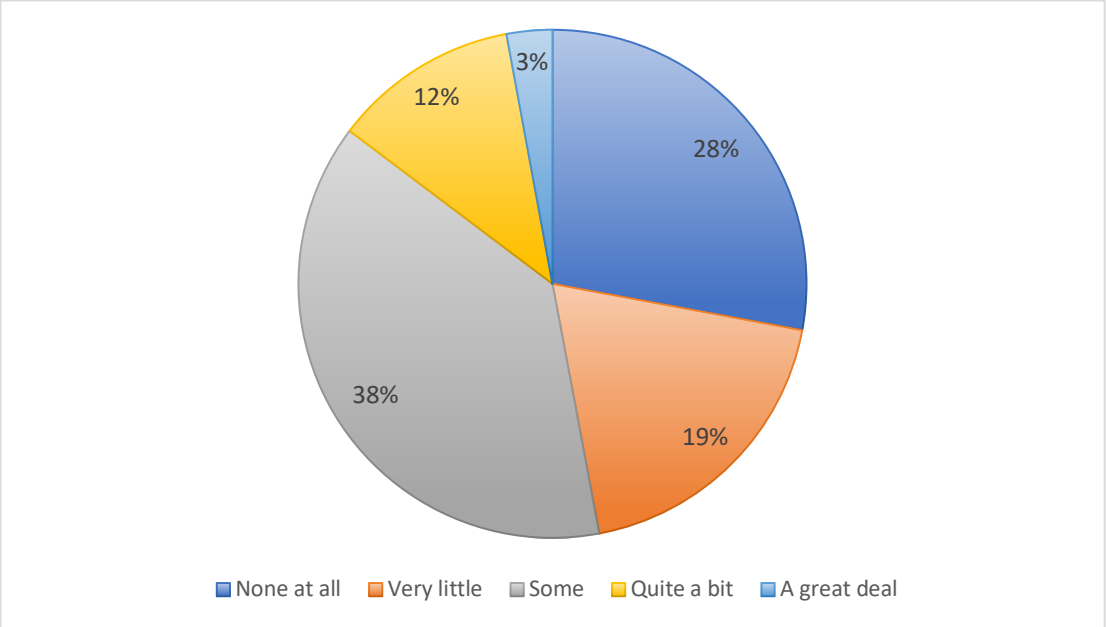
Need for Additional Training on Inclusive Practices



The responses to the fourth question "To what extent do you currently receive support or resources from your institution or professional networks to enhance your understanding and implementation of inclusive practices in blended learning?" offer critical insights into the level of institutional and network support available to educators. A minority of educators, just 2.9%, report receiving "a great deal" of support, while 11.8% receive "quite a bit" of support. Cumulative, this relatively small percentage (less than 20%) indicates that only a small fraction of educators receive adequate support from their institutions or professional networks to enhance their understanding and implementation of inclusive practices in blended learning environments. In contrast, 27.9% receive no support at all, indicating that over a quarter of educators lack the necessary assistance or resources for inclusive practices. Additionally, 38.2% receive "some" support, reflecting a moderate but likely insufficient level, and 19.1% report receiving "very little" support. These figures highlight that nearly 90% of educators face challenges in feeling prepared and confident due to inadequate support for implementing inclusive practices, echoing issues identified in previous responses.

Figure 5

Level of Current Institutional Support



The following question was an open-ended one: "What specific areas or topics related to inclusive blended learning do you feel would be most beneficial for you to receive additional training or support in?" Out of 48 responses given, eight themes were identified. The thematic analysis reveals several key areas where educators feel additional training or support would be most beneficial for inclusive blended learning (Table 6). The most significant need, highlighted by 21.28% of respondents, is in 'inclusivity and diversity,' reflecting a strong desire to create environments that celebrate diverse backgrounds and address various disabilities. Technology and tools and student engagement and management each received substantial attention (14.89% each), indicating a need for enhanced digital skills and strategies to effectively engage and manage students. There is also a notable demand for professional development and collaboration and improvements in curriculum and instructional design (12.77% each), pointing to the need for targeted training and innovative approaches in instructional design.

Table 6

Identified Areas for Additional Training and Support in Inclusive Blended Learning

Theme	Number of Mentions	Percentage of mentions in total responses (%)	Example Responses
Inclusivity and Diversity	10	21.28%	"Dealing with the needs of students with various conditions such as autism." "Developing cultural competence and strategies to create inclusive learning experiences that respect and value diverse cultural backgrounds."
Technology and Tools	7	14.89%	"Utilizing technology tools and platforms that facilitate inclusive practices and enhance student engagement." "Mastering technology integration to support all learners, including those with disabilities."
Student Engagement and Management	7	14.89%	"How to engage shy students." "Various techniques of teaching specific student groups in blended learning setting."
Professional Development and Collaboration	6	12.77%	"Teachers professional development courses from the educators who have been studying as well as teaching in foreign universities, who may have ample ideas to share with."
Curriculum and Instructional Design	6	12.77%	"Inverted classroom, asynchronous phases." "Alternatives to traditional learning tools."
Learning Disabilities and Special Needs	5	10.64%	"Students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia" "Autism, vision impairment"

Assessment and Feedback	3	6.38%	"Formative assessment" "Providing growth feedback"
General/All Areas	3	6.38%	"All areas would be beneficial."

The sixth and seventh questions in this part were designed to investigate in what ways lecturers typically acquire information about the diverse learning needs of their students (Q6), and how the information on the specific needs of their students should be received (Q7).

The findings (Figure 6) reveal that lecturers typically obtain information mainly through informal observations and interactions (79.4%) as the primary method for understanding students' diverse learning needs. This is complemented by individual student interviews and surveys (39.7%), showing a commitment to directly soliciting feedback from students. However, parent/guardian communication is notably less utilized (1.5%). When it comes to how educators believe they should receive information about inclusive needs, ongoing feedback and observation (60.3%) and collaboration with colleagues and specialists (55.9%) are the most preferred methods, indicating a desire for continuous, collaborative, and dynamic approaches (Figure 7). Professional development and training sessions (44.1%) and direct communication with students and families (45.6%) are also valued, though to a slightly lesser extent, suggesting that educators recognize the importance of structured training and family involvement.

Figure 6

Methods of Acquiring Information about the Learning Needs of Students

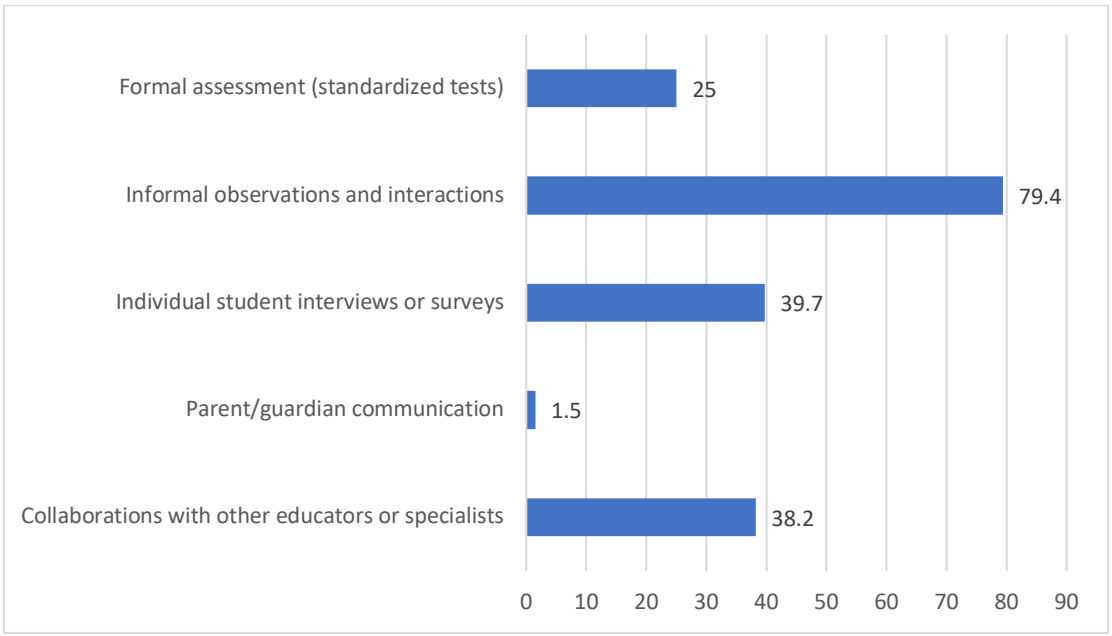
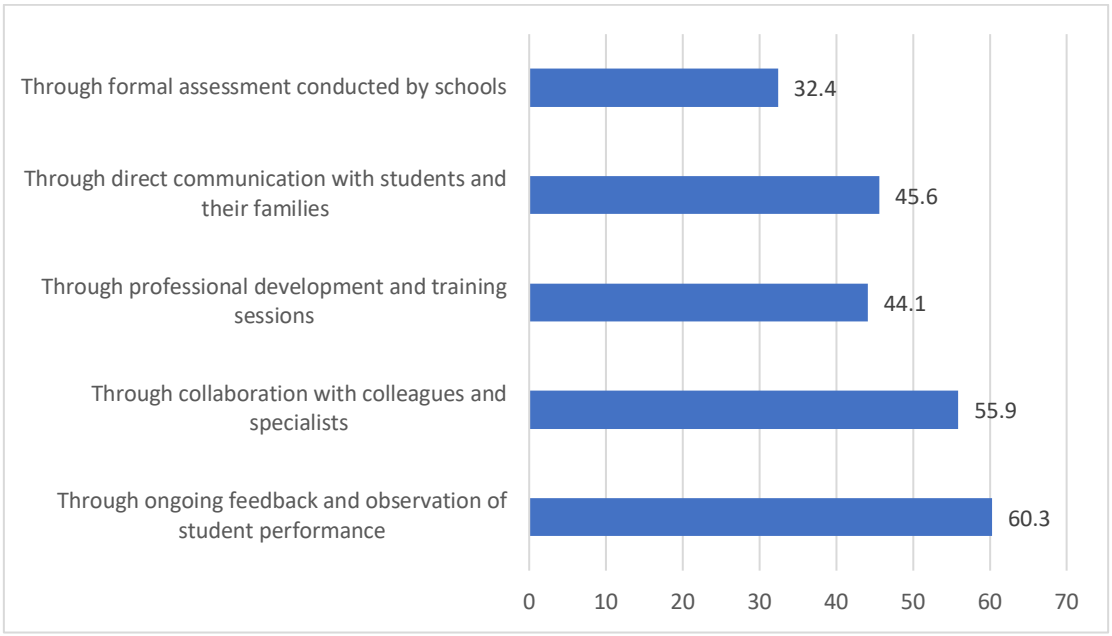


Figure 7

Preferred Methods of Acquiring Information about the Learning Needs of Students



The correlation data presented in Table 7 provides insights into the relationships between various instructional and inclusive practice variables.

Table 7

Correlation Analysis

	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Instructional design	.670**	.487**	.405**	.864**	.534**	.572**	.136
2. Facilitation	1	.636**	.367**	.913**	.438**	.576**	.367**
3. Direct instruction		1	.316**	.782**	.415**	.500**	.457**
4. COI (TP scale)			1	.427**	.147	.278*	.279*
5. Inclusive practices total				1	.542**	.644**	.354**
6. Preparation to implement inclusive practices					1	.682**	.078
7. Confidence to address the diverse learning needs in a blended learning setting						1	.205
8. Benefits of additional training in inclusive practices							1

The key correlations observed are as follows:

Community of Inquiry (COI) and Other Variables: COI is positively correlated with Inclusive Practice Total ($r = 0.542$, $p < 0.01$), the extent of preparedness ($r = 0.682$, $p < 0.01$), and confidence in addressing diverse needs ($r = 0.427$, $p < 0.01$). The correlation with preparedness and confidence indicates that educators who demonstrate a stronger Teaching presence in blended learning are more likely to perceive themselves as better prepared and more confident in inclusive practices. All sub-scales (instructional design, facilitation, direct instruction) of the inclusive practices scale show positive correlations, ranging from 0.49 to

0.67. These correlations represent moderate to strong positive relationships between evaluations across these sub-scales.

The strong positive correlations of Instructional Design with Facilitation ($r = 0.670$, $p < 0.01$), Direct Instruction ($r = 0.487$, $p < 0.01$), and Community of Inquiry (COI) ($r = 0.405$, $p < 0.01$) indicate that higher scores in Instructional Design are associated with higher scores in these areas. The exceptionally high correlation of Instructional Design with COI ($r = 0.864$, $p < 0.01$) suggests that effective instructional design is strongly related to the Teaching presence of a supportive learning community. This high correlation underscores the integral role of well-designed instruction in fostering a collaborative and engaging learning environment.

Facilitation shows significant positive correlations with Direct Instruction ($r = 0.636$, $p < 0.01$), COI ($r = 0.913$, $p < 0.01$), and Inclusive Practice Total ($r = 0.438$, $p < 0.01$). The strongest correlation is with COI, indicating that effective facilitation is closely linked to the presence of a robust learning community. Direct Instruction is positively correlated with COI ($r = 0.782$, $p < 0.01$) and Inclusive Practice Total ($r = 0.500$, $p < 0.01$). The strong correlation with COI highlights that direct instructional approaches are closely associated with the effectiveness of community-based learning. The positive correlation with Inclusive Practice Total suggests that effective direct instruction contributes to overall inclusive practices. Inclusive Practice Total correlates positively with preparedness ($r = 0.682$, $p < 0.01$) and confidence ($r = 0.354$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that educators who feel more prepared and confident in implementing inclusive practices tend to rate their overall inclusive practices more highly.

Finally, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between teachers' estimates of inclusive practice in a blended learning mode and their self-confidence about preparation for inclusive practice in a blended learning mode. The analysis revealed the following key findings: a significant regression was found ($F(1,65) = 46.11$, $p < 0.001$. The R^2 was 0.42, indicating that teachers' estimates of inclusive practice in blended learning mode explained approximately 42% of the variance in their estimates of self-confidence about preparation for inclusive practice in blended learning mode. The regression equation was: *estimates of self-confidence about preparation for inclusive practice in blended learning mode* = -0.38 + 0.94 (*teachers' estimates of inclusive practice in blended learning mode*). That is, for each one unit increase in teachers' estimates of inclusive practice in blended learning mode, the predicted estimates of self-confidence about preparation for inclusive practice in blended learning mode increased by approximately 0.94 units.

Confidence intervals indicated that we can be 95% certain that the slope to predict teachers' estimates of self-confidence about preparation for inclusive practice in blended learning mode from their estimates of inclusive practice in blended learning mode is between [0.67] and [1.22]. In summary, the better teachers feel about their inclusive practices in blended learning, the more confident they are likely to be in preparing for these practices, and this relationship is quite strong.

Discussion

The research study indicates that English language educators generally possess a high level of confidence in their ability to facilitate and guide learning within blended learning environments, as evidenced by their self-assessed teaching presence scores. The inclusive practices scale findings reveal high or very high self-assessed effectiveness in fostering inclusive environments with blended learning courses, which implies that English language educators demonstrate a high level of commitment to fostering inclusivity and support for diverse student populations. Part of the reason for this result might be found in the fact that the sample comprised an experienced cohort of highly educated EL lecturers in their mid-career with more than 20 years of professional service. This reflects a strong perceived capability in managing and directing student learning activities in blended learning environments and further indicates that teaching presence is a crucial factor in fostering inclusivity in such settings (Futch et al., 2016; Lister et al., 2019).

The findings further indicate that educators who demonstrate stronger teaching presence in blended learning are more likely to perceive themselves as better prepared and more confident in inclusive practices. This is due to a positive correlation found between the CoI and other variables (inclusive practice, the extent of preparedness, and confidence in addressing diverse needs). All subscales of the inclusive practices scale, including instructional design, facilitation, and direct instruction, exhibit positive correlations ranging from 0.49 to 0.67. This implies that educators who perceive their inclusive practices positively in blended learning environments are likely to have higher confidence in preparing for these practices, and this relationship is quite strong. The positive relationship between Teaching presence and inclusive practices underscores the potential of strong Teaching presence to enhance educators' perceived readiness and self-assurance in implementing inclusive practices. Finally, the simple linear regression analysis confirmed that teachers' estimates of inclusive practice significantly predict their self-confidence in preparing for inclusive practice.

In terms of ELT lecturers' current inclusive practices, the findings highlight certain disparities. When asked to assess their instructional design for the blended learning courses they teach, the respondents revealed that they integrate universal design principles into their course content and assessments to ensure they are accessible to students from diverse backgrounds and abilities (e.g., offering multiple means of representation, action, and expression, providing clear instructions and rubrics). However, the results also indicate that there is not much awareness of the intentional integration of multimedia and other technological resources for wider inclusivity and easier access. In other words, while there is a commendable effort to incorporate universal design principles into course design, there remains a gap in leveraging technology to its full potential for enhancing inclusivity and accessibility. This highlights the need for English language lecturers to further explore and implement innovative strategies that harness the benefits of multimedia and technology to create truly inclusive learning environments (as compliant with Tica & Krsmanović, 2022).

However, when it comes to the educators' prior preparation to deliver blended learning courses, they feel they have not been adequately trained. 47.1% of the respondents feel they are only moderately prepared to implement inclusive practices in blended learning. This is in line with the findings of Francisco et al., 2023, Hale and Ono, 2019, and Sowell and Sugisaki, 2020. Secondly, the most common method of teacher training to teach blended or online courses is informal on-the-job training (55.9 %), whereas 41.2% of lecturers confess to having had some incidental reading on the matter (only as a personal incentive). As much as 17.6% of lecturers have never had any prior training on blended instruction. It does not surprise then that only 1% of the respondents have completed a certification course on teaching blended learning courses.

In terms of future teacher development, the findings suggest a high level of awareness for additional support. Namely, 92.6% of the respondents agree that additional training or professional development opportunities focused on inclusive practices in blended learning would be highly beneficial. What is more, 27.9% of the respondents confessed that they receive no support at all, indicating that over a quarter of educators lack the necessary assistance or resources for inclusive practices. In examining the question and results about specific areas of inclusive blended learning that English language lecturers may require additional training or support in, several key themes emerge. Firstly, there is a clear need for training in the area of inclusivity and diversity, highlighted by 21.28% of respondents, which reflects a strong desire to create environments that celebrate diverse backgrounds and address various disabilities. Technology and Tools and Student Engagement and Management each received substantial

attention (14.89% each), indicating a need for enhanced digital skills and strategies to effectively engage and manage students. Finally, the results suggest a need for training and support in addressing the specific needs of traumatized and autistic students within the context of blended learning.

In examining the question regarding how English language lecturers typically acquire information about the diverse learning needs of their students, 79.4% of English language lecturers primarily rely on their own informal observations and interactions, and 55.9% believe that information on the inclusive needs of their students should come from a formal assessment of specialists and professionals in the field coupled with the teachers' ongoing feedback and observation (60.3%) of students. This indicates that more formalized collaboration with professionals who specialize in inclusion is needed, corroborating the findings of Yphantides (2022) and Ruddick et al. (2021). Overall, these findings suggest a scarcity of teacher training in this area and highlight the need for continuous, targeted support—potentially with certification—from educational institutions. Such support would equip ELT educators with innovative strategies to enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of blended learning environments. This conclusion aligns with the research of Eragamreddy (2024), Krsmanović et al. (2022), Pei et al. (2024), and Young (2024) and. Finally, it is essential that the creation and sustenance of inclusive environments are embedded as fundamental components of educator training programs, aligning with the broader goals of inclusive digital education (in line with Pei et al., 2024).

The findings of this study hold significant pedagogical implications for several stakeholders. Firstly, by systematically and intentionally integrating inclusive practices, especially through enhancing their Teaching presence, educators can better support diverse student populations and create more equitable learning experiences. However, this should not be left as an individual choice. This must be achieved through targeted professional development initiatives coming from educational institutions, which should prioritize the development of comprehensive professional development programs that emphasize inclusivity, diversity, and technology integration. These programs should be designed not only to introduce educators to best practices in inclusivity but also to provide ongoing support through advanced training modules. Finally, to formalize these competencies, educational institutions could offer certification courses for ELT educators, focusing on the creation and integration of technological solutions that cater to a wide range of student needs.

A crucial implication of the study is the need for a collaborative approach between ELT educators and inclusion specialists that could be best understood as a two-way street. This

collaboration should not be left to informal arrangements but should be supported through formal institutional frameworks. Inclusion specialists can play a pivotal role in enhancing the competencies of ELT educators, especially in areas such as inclusive pedagogy, cultural competency, and the strategic use of technology. Meanwhile, ELT educators can contribute to this partnership by providing feedback mechanisms that foster a continuous cycle of reflection and improvement. Lastly, to prepare educators effectively for inclusivity in blended learning environments, institutions must commit to sustained partnerships with inclusion specialists. Such partnerships should be institutionalized to ensure that educators have consistent access to expertise and support in adapting curricula and teaching strategies. Collaborative curriculum development, incorporating feedback loops and professional reflection, will lead to more dynamic and responsive educational practices. By institutionalizing these practices and creating structures for ongoing feedback, educational institutions can build a culture of continuous improvement and inclusivity.

Regarding the limitation of this research study, it must be taken into consideration that the sample comprised ELT educators from various regions, but there was a notable disparity in certification for blended learning, with very few educators holding such certifications. This regional dependency may affect the generalizability of the findings, as experiences and practices could differ significantly between areas like the EU and the USA, where certification is more common, and regions like the Balkans or Asia, where it is less prevalent. Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data could introduce bias, as educators may overestimate their competencies or the inclusivity of their practices.

Conclusion

Teaching presence plays a pivotal role in fostering inclusive environments within blended learning contexts. During blended learning processes, instructors' active engagement and facilitation significantly enhance the inclusion of students in the learning community in the broadest sense of the word. By aligning course design with the principles of the CoI framework, educators can create inclusive learning environments that effectively address the specific needs of learners. This alignment ensures that diverse learning preferences and requirements are met, thereby promoting a more equitable and supportive educational experience for all students.

To enhance this confidence and capability, it is essential for educational institutions to focus on areas such as inclusivity, technology integration, and student engagement. By leveraging the principles of the CoI to strengthen teaching presence, institutions can better support educators in creating equitable and inclusive learning experiences. Adopting guidelines

that enhance the Community of Inquiry framework in blended learning, particularly those focused on Teaching presence and promoting inclusiveness, can significantly contribute to the continuous improvement of teaching practices in ELT.

In the wake of Artificial Intelligence's (AI) pervasive influence across all aspects of human life and the increasing prominence of technology in education due to its potential to meet the learners' needs, CALL has transcended its former role as a mere supplementary tool in the post-pandemic era of ELT. Its impact is profound and far-reaching. Given the critical importance of "going digital", CALL's potential to meet diverse learners' needs, especially those at risk of educational exclusion, cannot be overstated. Looking ahead, it is imperative that future research focuses on making CALL more inclusive, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals to ensure equitable access to quality education for all learners.

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