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The Untold Story: Visualising Barriers to Inclusive Teaching Practices of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in Higher Education (HE)

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Abstract

This photo essay visualizes the barriers to inclusive teaching practices in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) within Higher Education (HE), as identified through a wide-scale research project funded by BALEAP - The Global Forum for EAP Practitioners. It highlights key obstacles such as inadequate training and awareness among educators, time constraints, and resource shortages. The essay also addresses the lack of diversity among teaching staff and the over-reliance on prescriptive teaching methods. By illustrating these challenges, the essay underscores the critical need for institutions to adopt comprehensive and ongoing support structures, diverse teaching strategies, and inclusive assessment methods to create a more equitable educational environment for all students.

Keywords: Inclusive teaching practices, English for academic purposes, higher education, barriers to inclusion

1. Introduction

Inclusive teaching practices in higher education are fundamental to creating an academic environment where all students, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, can thrive. These practices aim to eliminate barriers and foster equity, ensuring that students of all cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds have the opportunity to engage fully with curricula, participate actively in classrooms, and achieve their academic goals (García & Ortiz, 2020). This is especially critical in the context of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), a field that serves a highly diverse student body, including international students, non-native English speakers, and those transitioning from varied educational systems (Hyland, 2006). Students in EAP courses often grapple with challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, and unfamiliar academic expectations in English-speaking contexts (Evans & Morrison, 2011). Addressing these challenges through inclusive teaching practices is not just beneficial—it is essential to ensure equitable academic success.

The importance of inclusivity in EAP education extends beyond individual achievement to address broader institutional goals and societal equity. As a key component of higher education, EAP plays a pivotal role in equipping students with the academic language skills necessary to navigate and succeed in their programs. However, the traditional focus on prescriptive teaching and assessment can hinder inclusivity by failing to accommodate diverse student needs (Carroll & Ryan, 2005). Inclusive EAP practices, such as differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching, and integrating diverse perspectives into curricula, are vital in creating a more equitable educational landscape (Banks & Banks, 2019; Moore & Morton, 2017).

This photo essay contextualizes and visualizes findings from a comprehensive, BALEAP-funded research project that explored barriers to inclusive EAP education. The project employed an online qualitative survey with key stakeholders, including EAP tutors, program leads, and academic advisors, to identify barriers such as lack of awareness, prescriptive delivery, and financial constraints. It also highlighted approaches like differentiated instruction and reflective practice as effective strategies for promoting inclusivity. The findings align with a broader conceptual shift in inclusive education, where the focus moves from addressing deficiencies to scaling effective practices that promote equity and active participation for all students (Messiou, 2017; Schuelka & Johnstone, 2012).

The choice of a photo essay as the medium for this research dissemination is both intentional and strategic. As a genre, photo essays offer a powerful multimodal approach that complements qualitative findings by synthesizing textual and visual elements to create accessible, impactful narratives. This approach is particularly suited to

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visualizing barriers to inclusive EAP education, allowing for a nuanced portrayal that transcends the limitations of traditional academic formats. The images, created using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, were carefully designed to reflect identified themes, ensuring cultural readability and alignment with the findings. Textual elements accompany the visuals to bridge potential cultural variances in interpretation, broadening the accessibility of the study for diverse audiences.

Unlike conventional literature reviews or analytical papers, this photo essay represents a methodological innovation aimed at amplifying research findings through visual storytelling. The generative process involved identifying thematic barriers, translating them into visual concepts, and iteratively refining the images for clarity and cultural sensitivity. This approach not only enhances the dissemination of findings but also aligns with the goals of the wider research project to advocate for more inclusive EAP education practices. The multimodal presentation bridges academic and non-academic audiences, making the findings relatable, engaging, and actionable.

As part of a larger effort to understand and address barriers to inclusivity in EAP, this photo essay underscores the urgency of continued institutional and pedagogical reforms. By highlighting both challenges and actionable strategies, it contributes to a growing body of research advocating for systemic change to support diverse learners in higher education. Through this innovative visual representation, the essay aims to inspire educators, policymakers, and institutions to reflect on their practices and adopt more inclusive approaches.

2. Lack of Training and Awareness

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of inclusive teaching in higher education, the lack of adequate training and awareness among educators remains a significant barrier (see Figure 1). Many instructors, even those with the best intentions, are often not equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to support the diverse needs of their students (Gay, 2018). This deficiency can lead to the unintentional exclusion of marginalized groups, including students with disabilities, those from different cultural backgrounds, and first-generation college students (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Without the appropriate training, educators may default to traditional teaching practices that do not consider the varied learning styles and challenges faced by these students, resulting in their struggle to engage with the course material, participate in class activities, or achieve their full academic potential (Hockings, 2010).



Figure 1. Untrained and unaware: The critical need for inclusive education training in higher education

To address this issue, there is a critical need for comprehensive and continuous professional development in inclusive teaching practices (Schuck et al., 2018). Educators must be provided with ongoing opportunities to learn about and implement strategies that accommodate diverse learners (Gay, 2018). Training programs should cover a range of topics, including cultural competency, differentiated instruction, and the use of inclusive language (Nieto, 2017). Additionally, educators should be encouraged to engage in self-reflection and peer collaboration to continually improve their teaching practices (Brookfield, 2017). Empirical research has confirmed the impact of such training suggesting that faculty members who participated in inclusive pedagogy training were more likely to adopt teaching methods that enhanced the participation and success of underrepresented students (Dewsbury et al, 2022). This highlights the importance of institutional commitment to professional development in fostering an equitable and inclusive learning environment (Killpack & Melón, 2016).

3. Time Constraints

Another significant barrier to inclusive teaching in higher education is the time constraints faced by educators (see Figure 2). Instructors in academia are often required to balance a wide array of responsibilities, including teaching, conducting research, and fulfilling various administrative duties (Moss-Racusin et al., 2018). This heavy workload leaves limited time for faculty to focus on developing and implementing inclusive curricula (Neumann et al., 2002). The pressure to meet academic and administrative demands can lead educators to default to traditional teaching methods, which may not effectively address the diverse needs of their students (Hochschild, 2021).



Figure 2. Ticking time bomb: The invisible barrier to effective inclusive education

The issue of time constraints is further compounded by the lack of institutional support for professional development focused on inclusivity (Pallas, 2020). According to the American Council on Education (2021), the absence of allocated time for faculty to engage in training and development on inclusive teaching practices is a major obstacle to their widespread adoption (ACE, 2021). Universities must recognize this challenge and take proactive measures to address it, such as reallocating resources to ensure that faculty members have dedicated time to participate in professional development, collaborate with colleagues on inclusive teaching strategies, and revise their curricula to better serve all students (Aragón et al., 2017).

4. Resource Shortages

Resource shortages represent yet another significant obstacle to the effective implementation of inclusive teaching practices (see Figure 3). In many educational institutions, limited access to essential technologies, such as up-to-date computers and adaptive software, severely hampers educators' ability to accommodate the diverse needs of their students (UNESCO, 2020). For instance, students with disabilities often rely on specialized software to access and engage with course content, but when schools lack the necessary funding to provide these tools, these students are left at a disadvantage (Seale, 2013).



Figure 3. Outdated resources, outdated promises: the resource gap in inclusive teaching

Beyond technological and material limitations, the scarcity of support services, such as special education resources or mental health support, exacerbates the difficulties in creating an equitable learning environment (Krause, 2022). According to UNESCO (2020), the lack of investment in educational resources disproportionately affects students with disabilities and those from marginalized backgrounds, deepening existing educational disparities (UNESCO, 2020). For example, when schools lack adequate funding for special education professionals or mental health counsellors, students who need individualized support are often overlooked or underserved (Schwartz, 2019). Therefore, institutions must prioritize the allocation of resources to provide diverse teaching aids, accessible materials, and robust support services.

5. Lack of Diversity

The homogeneity of teaching staff also poses a considerable barrier to the promotion of inclusive teaching practices (see Figure 4). When educators predominantly come from similar cultural, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds, their perspectives may be limited, potentially failing to address or even acknowledge the diverse experiences and needs of the student body (Taylor & Ladson-Billings, 2017). This narrow perspective can inadvertently lead to a curriculum and teaching style that is not inclusive or representative of all students, particularly those from underrepresented groups (Howard, 2020).



Figure 4. Uniform classrooms: The challenge of achieving true diversity in higher education

Furthermore, the lack of diversity among teaching staff can impede the development of a truly inclusive educational environment (Gorski & Dalton, 2019). A diverse faculty brings a variety of perspectives, experiences, and teaching approaches that can enrich the learning environment for all students (NCES, 2022). When educators from diverse backgrounds are present, they are more likely to introduce inclusive teaching practices that reflect a broader range of cultural and social experiences. To address this barrier, institutions must adopt hiring practices that actively promote diversity among educators (Robinson et al., 2019). This could involve broadening recruitment efforts, implementing diversity training for hiring committees, and creating supportive environments that attract and retain faculty from diverse backgrounds.

6. Prescriptive Delivery

Another key barrier to creating an inclusive educational environment is the reliance on one-size-fits-all teaching methods (see Figure 5). These traditional approaches often marginalize students with diverse learning needs, including those with disabilities, different cultural backgrounds, or varying levels of academic preparedness (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009). A one-size-fits-all methodology assumes that all students learn in the same way, ignoring the fact that students have unique cognitive styles, abilities, and preferences.

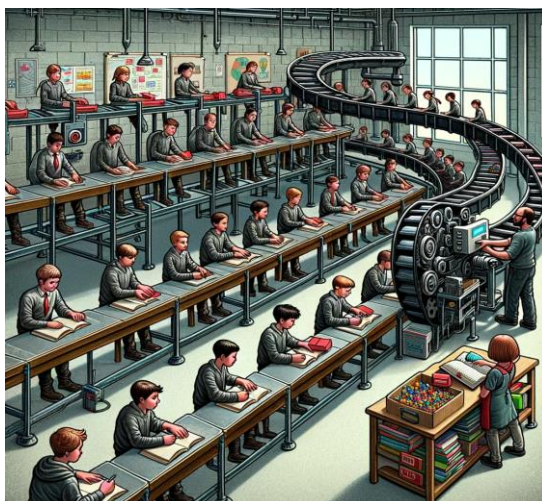


Figure 5. One-Size-Fits-All: The limitation of prescriptive teaching methods

Educators must be trained in flexible, student-centered teaching strategies that recognize and cater to these diverse learning needs (Rose & Meyer, 2002). This can include adopting Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, which provide multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression, allowing students to access and engage with content in ways that best suit their individual needs (Meyer et al., 2014). Research shows that when teachers employ diverse instructional strategies, such as project-based learning, flipped classrooms, or adaptive technologies, students are more likely to succeed academically and feel included in the learning process (Blaschke, 2012).

7. Lack of Embedded Support

The lack of ongoing institutional support for inclusive teaching practices is also a significant barrier to fostering an inclusive learning environment (see Figure 6). While individual educators can make efforts to adopt more inclusive teaching methods, without institutional backing, these efforts may be unsustainable and inconsistent (Hockings, 2010). Many universities still lack comprehensive academic support programs, such as tutoring, counselling, or mentoring services, that are crucial for supporting students from diverse backgrounds (Museus et al., 2017).

Institutions must prioritize embedding comprehensive support structures to create an inclusive learning environment (Salazar, 2020). This includes providing professional development opportunities for educators to learn about inclusive teaching practices, ensuring that academic support services are accessible to all students, and developing policies that promote inclusivity at all levels of the institution (Hart et al., 2017). Research has shown that when universities invest in these areas, there is a marked improvement in student retention and success rates, particularly among traditionally marginalized groups (Museus & Chang, 2009).



Figure 6. Alone in the crowd: The impact of missing support systems in education

8. Lack of Multimodal Assessments

Another critical barrier to inclusive teaching practices is the lack of multimodal assessments (see Figure 7). Traditional exams and written assignments are the most common forms of assessment in many educational institutions; however, these methods often fail to accommodate the diverse learning styles and abilities of students

(Shepard, 2000). For instance, students with learning disabilities, language barriers, or different cognitive processing speeds may struggle to demonstrate their understanding through conventional written exams (Black & William, 1998; Brookhart, 2013).

To address this barrier, institutions must implement a variety of assessment methods, such as projects, presentations, and practical evaluations (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). These alternative forms of assessment can cater to different strengths and learning preferences, allowing students to demonstrate their skills, and understanding in ways that align with their capabilities (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). By diversifying assessment methods, educators can create a more inclusive environment that acknowledges and values the varied ways in which students learn and express their knowledge (Gardner, 2011).



Figure 7. One test fits none: The need for varied assessment methods

9. Financial Constraints

Financial constraints present another critical challenge to promoting inclusive education (see Figure 8). Adequate funding is essential to provide the necessary resources, training, and support services that enable inclusive teaching practices (Doyle & Gough, 2018). Schools and universities require funds to develop and maintain assistive technologies, hire specialized staff, and offer professional development programs for educators (Daly & Regan, 2019). Without sufficient financial resources, institutions may struggle to implement these essential components, thereby limiting their ability to support all students effectively (Hancock & Scherff, 2010).



Figure 8. Pennies for progress: The financial barrier to inclusive teaching

Advocacy for increased funding is crucial to overcoming this barrier (Bray et al., 2017). Policymakers, educational leaders, and stakeholders must prioritize budget allocations that support inclusive education initiatives (Fullan, 2015). For instance, securing grants, lobbying for government funding, and fostering partnerships with private organizations can help generate the financial resources needed to sustain these programs (Cahill & Freeman, 2007). By addressing the financial challenges associated with inclusive education, institutions can ensure that all students have access to the tools and support they need to succeed.

9. Addressing Stereotypes and Biases

Finally, stereotypes and biases in higher education represent a pervasive barrier that can undermine the effectiveness of inclusive teaching practices (see Figure 9). Educators, often unconsciously, may hold biases or

adhere to stereotypes that affect their expectations of students' abilities, leading to unequal treatment in the classroom (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). For instance, implicit biases might cause teachers to underestimate the capabilities of students from certain ethnic backgrounds or to favour students who share similar cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds to their own (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016).

To address this issue, educators need ongoing training to recognize and counteract their biases (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Professional development programs that focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion can equip teachers with the tools and strategies necessary to create a more equitable learning environment (Howard, 2019). Additionally, institutions should implement policies that actively promote inclusivity, such as diverse hiring practices and inclusive curriculum development (Banks & Banks, 2019). By proactively addressing stereotypes and biases, educators can contribute to a more inclusive educational environment where every student has the potential to succeed.

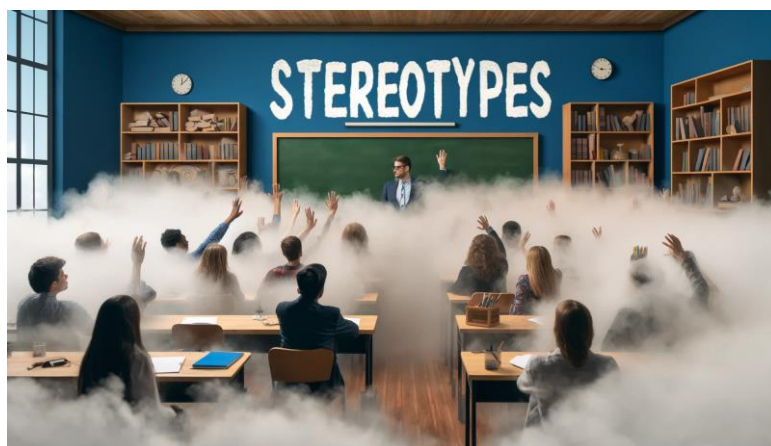


Figure 9. Breaking the mold: The essential fight against classroom stereotypes

10. Conclusion

hinder inclusive practices in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classrooms in higher education. Using AI-generated images to vividly depict these barriers, the essay communicates the need for inclusivity more effectively to a broader audience. Visualising these issues underscores the urgency of addressing them and can be used in awareness campaigns and professional development programs. By illustrating these barriers, the essay seeks to inspire actionable recommendations and institutional changes that improve student engagement and learning outcomes. Ultimately, it aims to spark conversations, inspire empathy, and mobilize support for policy reforms and more inclusive educational environments.

The exploration of barriers to inclusive teaching practices in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) within higher education reveals several critical challenges that hinder the creation of equitable learning environments. Key issues, such as the lack of training and awareness among educators, time constraints, resource shortages, the homogeneity of teaching staff, and reliance on traditional one-size-fits-all teaching methods, significantly impact the ability of institutions to fully support a diverse student body (Ginsberg & Włodkowski, 2009; Kendall & Tannenbaum, 2021; Wilkerson & Elkins, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017). These barriers not only perpetuate inequities but also contribute to a learning environment where students from underrepresented backgrounds may feel marginalized and unsupported (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Howard, 2020).

Moving forward, it is imperative that higher education institutions commit to systematic changes that promote inclusivity at all levels (Hockings, 2010). This includes providing comprehensive professional development for educators, ensuring adequate funding for inclusive resources and support services, and adopting hiring practices that increase faculty diversity (Meyer et al., 2014; Bray et al., 2017). Additionally, institutions must embrace innovative teaching methods that cater to diverse learning styles and actively work to dismantle stereotypes and biases within the classroom (Blaschke, 2012; Sensoy & Di Angelo, 2017). By prioritizing these efforts, universities can create a more inclusive, supportive, and effective educational environment, empowering all students to achieve their full academic potential.

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