

Methodological Challenges faced by Foreign Language Teachers in addressing Students' Language Learning Difficulties

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Abstract

This study, conducted through a descriptive case study at Universidad Don Bosco (UDB), examined the methodological challenges faced by English and French teachers when supporting students with language learning difficulties. Twenty teachers participated between May and June 2025, through a Likert-scale questionnaire and open-ended responses, allowing the identification of quantitative patterns and complementary thematic insights. Results show a consistently adaptive teaching response: 95% reported using multisensory strategies, 90% provided more time-intensive individualized feedback, 85% adjusted classroom pacing, and 65% modified assessment procedures. Thematic analysis revealed four central dimensions: pedagogical differentiation, progressive scaffolding, collaborative learning, and technological support. Despite these adaptations, the study identified concrete tensions that hinder sustainable inclusion: limited instructional time to implement differentiated strategies, heterogeneity in students' learning pace that disrupts group work dynamics, and inconsistent institutional guidelines that leave teachers individually responsible for inclusive adjustments. These constraints reduce the systematic and scalable application of inclusive methodologies. The findings indicate that fostering equitable language learning requires institutional measures such as explicit adaptive assessment policies, protected pedagogical time for differentiated instruction, and sustained professional development aligned with Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The study underscores the need for coherent institutional frameworks to support long-term inclusive practices in foreign language education.

INTRODUCTION

The growing linguistic diversity in educational systems has intensified global discussions on inclusive foreign language teaching, particularly within frameworks such as UNESCO's call to promote multilingualism, equity, and sustainable learning environments (UNESCO, 2019). Internationally, inclusive language education has shifted toward evidence-based models such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), emphasizing differentiated instruction, multimodal input, and equitable assessment. These global trends highlight the need for language programs to move beyond general principles of inclusion toward systematic, measurable, and institutionally supported practices.

In Latin America, however, the implementation of inclusive pedagogies in foreign language teaching remains uneven. Although regional studies report positive teacher attitudes toward inclusion, they also identify structural constraints: limited institutional guidance, insufficient teacher training, and high classroom heterogeneity, that hinder the systematic adoption of differentiated methodologies. This gap between inclusive discourse and actual implementation is particularly salient in contexts where students present persistent linguistic learning difficulties, operationally defined in this study as recurrent challenges in phonological processing, vocabulary retrieval, grammatical sequencing, or written expression that require additional instructional support.

At Universidad Don Bosco (UDB), recent initiatives have attempted to integrate inclusive approaches into language programs, yet there is no coherent framework guiding how teachers should plan, scaffold, and assess learners with linguistic difficulties. Understanding the methodological challenges experienced by instructors is therefore essential both for improving institutional policy and for contributing to regional research on inclusive language education. Given this context, the present study examines how foreign language teachers adapt instruction, manage classroom time, and modify assessment practices when working with students exhibiting such persistent difficulties.

To guide this investigation, the research question is as follows: *What methodological challenges do UDB English and French instructors report when addressing students' linguistic learning difficulties, and how are these reflected in their instructional and assessment practices?* Based on existing theory and regional evidence, the study hypothesizes that teachers who report greater use of differentiated and multisensory strategies will also exhibit higher levels of adaptation in classroom pacing and assessment practices. This hypothesis connects individual teacher behaviors with broader institutional needs, aligning the study with international trends emphasizing sustainable, inclusive, and equity-oriented language education.

METHODS

Research design

This study employed a descriptive mixed-methods case study design integrating quantitative and qualitative components to examine the methodological challenges faced by English and French instructors when teaching students with linguistic learning difficulties. The design combined descriptive statistics from a Likert-scale questionnaire with thematic analysis of open-ended responses, allowing for convergence between numerical trends and interpretive insights.

Participants

Data were collected using a questionnaire composed of 18 Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) and 2 open-ended questions. The instrument assessed four domains: instructional adaptation, feedback practices, classroom time management, and assessment flexibility.

Representative items included: "I adapt my teaching strategies for students with linguistic learning difficulties" and "I adjust assessment procedures to accommodate these students."

Although the instrument was not previously validated, its content validity was strengthened through expert review by two specialists in foreign language pedagogy, who assessed item clarity and relevance. This limitation is acknowledged in the discussion.

Procedures

The questionnaire was administered electronically via institutional email and Google Forms. Participants received an invitation outlining the study's purpose, instructions, and confidentiality assurances. Responses were collected over a two-week period. No incentives were offered.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). Qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial coding, (3) theme generation, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition, and (6) report production. Coding was hybrid, combining inductive categories emerging from participant responses with deductive categories based on UDL and inclusive pedagogy literature. Two independent coders analyzed the data. Inter-coder reliability was established through iterative discussion until full consensus was achieved. Coding was managed manually without qualitative software. Saturation was reached when no new categories emerged during the final coding cycle.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed institutional research ethics guidelines. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and informed consent was obtained electronically prior to data collection. No identifying information was stored, and all responses were kept in secure, password-protected files.

RESULTS

Quantitative findings indicate a strong pattern of instructional adaptation among participating teachers. A total of 95% reported adjusting their teaching strategies in response to students with linguistic learning difficulties, with 70% agreeing and 25% strongly agreeing that they routinely modify instructional approaches. Only 5% expressed a neutral stance, and none disagreed. These results suggest that adaptive pedagogy is a widespread and systematic component of classroom practice.

The results also show extensive use of multisensory strategies as part of teachers' efforts to scaffold linguistic comprehension. A combined 90% of participants reported employing visual, auditory, or kinesthetic supports to facilitate learning, with 55% agreeing and 35% strongly agreeing. Only 10% expressed a neutral position, and none disagreed. These patterns indicate that differentiated, multimodal input is a central component of instructional practice when addressing linguistic learning difficulties.

Assessment-related practices exhibited greater variability compared to instructional adaptations. While 65% of teachers reported modifying their assessment procedures to accommodate students with linguistic learning difficulties (45% agreeing and 20% strongly agreeing), 20% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 15% expressed disagreement. This distribution suggests that, although assessment adaptation is present, it is not yet a consolidated or systematic dimension of inclusive practice.

Findings also reveal notable social-interaction challenges associated with linguistic learning difficulties. A combined 55% of teachers reported that these difficulties interfere with pair or group work, with 40% agreeing and 15% strongly agreeing. An additional 25% neither agreed nor disagreed,

while 20% disagreed. This distribution indicates that collaborative learning is often hindered when students struggle to keep pace with peers, affecting participation, task balance, and group dynamics.

Table 1 summarizes teachers' responses to the 18 Likert-scale items and reveals a consistent pattern of adaptive pedagogical behavior when addressing linguistic learning difficulties.

Table 1. Summary of Likert-Scale Items on Linguistic Learning Difficulties (N = 20)

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Linguistic learning difficulties affect the overall pace of my classes.	5%	5%	30%	35%	25%
2. I have had to adapt my teaching strategies due to students with language-learning difficulties.	0%	0%	5%	70%	25%
3. Linguistic difficulties limit the development of certain oral or written activities.	0%	0%	5%	60%	35%
4. I adjust my teaching materials to facilitate comprehension for students with linguistic difficulties.	0%	0%	5%	55%	40%
5. Difficulties in understanding grammar require me to repeat or reinforce content frequently.	0%	5%	0%	35%	60%
6. I modify my assessment methods to address diverse linguistic abilities.	0%	20%	15%	45%	20%
7. Students' linguistic difficulties hinder pair or group work.	5%	5%	35%	30%	25%
8. I design differentiated activities for students with low linguistic performance.	0%	10%	25%	45%	20%
9. Linguistic difficulties influence my weekly class planning.	5%	20%	25%	40%	10%
10. I feel methodologically limited when students do not progress in language acquisition.	15%	25%	30%	25%	5%
11. Feedback for students with linguistic difficulties requires more time and care.	0%	0%	10%	35%	55%
12. I use visual, auditory, or kinesthetic strategies to support language learning.	0%	0%	5%	20%	75%
13. Linguistic difficulties force me to be more flexible with time use in class.	0%	0%	15%	55%	30%
14. Communicative methodologies require adjustments when students have linguistic difficulties.	0%	5%	5%	55%	35%
15. Difficulties in written production affect expected learning outcomes.	0%	0%	25%	45%	30%
16. Recurrent pronunciation or comprehension errors influence my choice of activities.	5%	20%	30%	40%	5%
17. I plan individual or group reinforcement for students with linguistic difficulties.	5%	15%	35%	40%	5%
18. I have sought additional training to address methodological challenges related to linguistic difficulties.	10%	5%	35%	30%	20%

Note. Adapted from the original dataset.

Across the dataset, most items show strong agreement levels, particularly those related to instructional modification, multisensory strategy use, and reinforcement of grammatical content, where combined agreement frequently exceeds 80%. Conversely, items related to assessment adaptation,

methodological limitation, and collaborative work display greater dispersion, with higher proportions of neutral or disagree responses, indicating domains where inclusive practices are less consolidated. The distribution also suggests that while teachers actively adjust instruction and feedback, they encounter structural or procedural barriers that limit their ability to implement inclusive assessment or maintain equitable group dynamics. Overall, the table illustrates a teaching context characterized by high individual effort but uneven institutional support, reinforcing the need for systemic frameworks aligned with inclusive language education.

Thematic analysis (Qualitative findings)

The thematic analysis revealed two major domains emerging from teachers' open-ended responses: instructional strategies implemented to address linguistic learning difficulties and the perceived impact of such difficulties on foreign-language teaching. Across the first domain, teachers consistently described a strong reliance on differentiated instruction, scaffolding, multisensory resources, personalized support, and collaborative learning structures. Strategies such as adapting materials, offering extra practice, using visual and auditory aids, integrating role-plays, and providing individualized feedback were frequently cited, illustrating a pedagogical model grounded in responsive instruction and UDL-aligned flexibility. These themes, extracted from more than 20 coded responses, suggest that teachers' practices are highly individualized and effort-intensive, requiring continuous monitoring, adjustment, and emotional labor.

Table 2. Thematic Coding Summary of Open-Ended Responses

Theme	Code Labels	Representative data fragments
Instructional adaptation	Adapting materials; modifying tasks; differentiating content	"I modify activities or contents depending on difficulty" (PA1ED4); "Adapted materials to facilitate understanding" (PA1ED17)
Personalized support	Individual tutoring; targeted feedback; monitoring	"I provide personalized feedback to those with more difficulties" (PA1ED3); "Personalized support during each stage of the class" (PA1ED12)
Multisensory and technological supports	Visual aids; auditory reinforcement; digital tools	"Use of visual and auditory resources to reinforce pronunciation" (PA1ED2); "Online tools for listening and pronunciation practice" (PA1ED6)
Collaborative learning	Pair/group work; peer support; scaffolded grouping	"Students work in pairs to support each other" (PA1ED7); "Group support among students" (PA1ED17)
Reinforcement and extra practice	Additional exercises; optional practice; at-home reinforcement	"Provide extra practice when structures are difficult" (PA1ED4); "Optional complementary activities for reinforcement" (PA1ED7)
Pronunciation and literacy support	Targeted phonological practice; structured writing support	"Pronunciation sessions and sound identification exercises" (PA1ED20); "Individual revision of texts and sentence formation" (PA1ED9)
Impact on pacing and planning	Slower pacing; extended activities; time constraints	"Need to advance more slowly depending on content difficulty" (PA2ED1); "Activities require more time than planned" (PA2ED6)
Challenges in group work	Peer resistance; interaction difficulty	"Some students complain about working with peers who struggle" (PA2ED1)
Need for institutional support	Need for training; need for guidelines; structural limitations	"I have sought additional training to face methodological challenges" (PA1ED18)

Note. Adapted from the original dataset.

The second thematic domain highlighted how linguistic learning difficulties reshape the pacing, structure, and expectations of classroom instruction. Teachers reported that students with such difficulties often require slower instructional pacing, extended practice time, and additional reinforcement, which in turn affects the completion of planned activities and alters peer dynamics. Several responses referenced tensions in group work, such as classmates' reluctance to collaborate with struggling peers, alongside increased teacher workload and the need for more reflective planning. These pressures reflect structural challenges that exceed individual teacher control and align with prior literature emphasizing the gap between inclusive aspirations and institutional conditions.

Taken together, these themes illustrate a coherent pattern: although teachers demonstrate high levels of pedagogical commitment and deploy a diverse set of compensatory strategies, these efforts remain largely dependent on individual initiative rather than systemic support. Thematic evidence reveals that instructional adaptation is constant yet uneven, emotionally demanding, and time intensive. This aligns with prior research on inclusive language teaching, where teachers' agency is high but institutional scaffolding is insufficient. Thus, the findings underscore an urgent need to formalize institutional guidelines, expand professional development, and ensure equitable access to resources so that inclusive linguistic instruction moves from isolated teacher-led efforts to a sustainable, program-wide framework.

DISCUSSION

The results demonstrate a strong and consistent pattern of instructional adaptation, which aligns closely with principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Vygotskian scaffolding. The fact that 95% of teachers reported modifying their instructional strategies indicates that adaptive teaching has become an essential mechanism for addressing linguistic learning difficulties in foreign language classrooms. These adaptations, ranging from adjusted pacing to differentiated materials, reflect UDL's emphasis on providing multiple means of representation, engagement, and action. Similarly, the frequent use of scaffolding strategies corresponds with Vygotsky's notion of supporting learners within their Zone of Proximal Development, particularly when linguistic complexity becomes a barrier. However, while these instructional adjustments demonstrate strong teacher agency, they also expose a systemic reliance on individualized effort rather than coordinated institutional frameworks, suggesting that adaptive pedagogy is functioning more as a compensatory measure than as part of an integrated inclusive design.

Despite strong evidence of instructional adaptation, assessment practices emerged as a significantly weaker dimension of inclusive pedagogy. Only 65% of teachers reported modifying their evaluation procedures, indicating that assessment remains the least developed area of adaptation. This aligns with regional findings (Calucho, 2018; Chiqui et al., 2019), which consistently identify evaluation as a structural bottleneck in inclusive language education. Teachers' reported barriers—such as limited time to redesign tests, uncertainty about maintaining academic rigor, and the absence of institutional guidelines—suggest that assessment reform cannot depend solely on individual initiative. Instead, these challenges point to the need for institutional assessment policies that are explicitly aligned with inclusive frameworks and that support teachers in developing valid, differentiated, and equitable evaluation mechanisms. The discrepancy between instructional flexibility and limited assessment adaptation underscores a systemic disconnect that restricts the full realization of inclusive and sustainable language learning environments.

The findings also highlight the social-emotional dimension as a critical yet often underexamined component of inclusive language teaching. With 55% of teachers reporting that linguistic learning difficulties hinder pair or group work, it becomes evident that these challenges extend beyond individual cognitive processing and influence broader classroom dynamics. Qualitative comments describing students who “withdraw during collaborative tasks” or peers who “express frustration when progress slows” illustrate how linguistic disparities can disrupt equitable participation and reduce the effectiveness of communicative methodologies. These patterns reinforce prior research (e.g., Barahona et al., 2023) showing that student engagement and peer interactions are deeply affected when linguistic demands exceed individual capacities. The implications are significant: inclusive pedagogy must integrate structured collaborative routines, socio-emotional supports, and explicit norms for equitable group participation to prevent linguistic gaps from becoming social barriers. Without such measures, collaborative activities risk perpetuating rather than mitigating inequality within the language classroom.

Interpretation of these findings must acknowledge several potential confounding variables that were not controlled within the study design. Factors such as class size, teachers’ years of experience, and the proficiency levels of the student groups may influence the degree to which instructors adapt instruction, materials, and assessment. Larger classes, for example, may limit the feasibility of individualized scaffolding and feedback, while more experienced teachers may feel better equipped to implement differentiated strategies. Additionally, because the study relied exclusively on self-report data, there is a risk of social desirability bias, particularly in items related to inclusive practices. No inferential statistical analyses were conducted; therefore, the results reflect descriptive tendencies rather than causal relationships. This distinction is essential for maintaining analytic rigor, ensuring that conclusions drawn from the data remain firmly within the scope of what the methodology allows.

Taken together, the findings provide partial but meaningful support for the study’s hypothesis: teachers who report extensive use of differentiated and multisensory strategies also tend to adjust lesson pacing, provide more individualized feedback, and, to a lesser extent, modify assessment practices. However, the uneven development of these adaptations, particularly the limited adjustments to evaluation and the social challenges documented in collaborative work, indicates that inclusive pedagogy cannot be sustained through individual teacher agency alone. Instead, the results point to the necessity of institutional structures that formalize inclusive practices, such as guidelines aligned with UDL principles, coordinated professional development in differentiated assessment, and protected time for instructional planning. Without systemic support, adaptations remain fragmented, dependent on personal commitment rather than embedded pedagogical policy. The hypothesis is thus validated within the constraints of the current institutional environment, highlighting both the strengths of teacher-led efforts and the urgent need for organizational frameworks that ensure equity, coherence, and sustainability in foreign language education.

CONCLUSION

This study provides evidence that foreign language teachers demonstrate substantial adaptive capacity when supporting students with linguistic learning difficulties, particularly through differentiated instruction, multisensory scaffolding, and individualized feedback. These practices align with UDL principles and sociocultural theories of mediated learning. However, the uneven development of assessment adaptation, the fragility of collaborative learning structures, and the increased cognitive and temporal demands placed on teachers indicate that individual effort alone cannot sustain inclusive language education. Rather, the findings highlight a structural imbalance in

which teacher agency compensates for the absence of institutional frameworks, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent practice.

The implications extend beyond the immediate context. Institutions seeking to build equitable and sustainable language programs must adopt system-level policies that formalize inclusive assessment, ensure protected pedagogical time, and provide ongoing professional development grounded in evidence-based approaches. Strengthening institutional scaffolding is essential not only for enabling teachers to respond effectively to linguistic diversity but also for promoting long-term educational equity in multilingual learning environments.

While the study is limited by its single-site design and reliance on self-report data, it offers a foundation for future research examining how institutional policies, workload structures, and program frameworks moderate teachers' ability to implement inclusive methodologies. Multi-site, mixed-method studies, integrating classroom observations, learner performance outcomes, and institutional analyses, are warranted to advance understanding of inclusive foreign language teaching across diverse educational systems.

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