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Instrument to measure teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of English to pupils with learning difficulties

Instrumento para medir actitudes profesorales hacia la enseñanza del inglés a educandos con dificultades en el aprendizaje

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Abstract:

The English teacher's attitude is an important predictor of good educative practices. It consists of three essential components, cognitive, affective and behavioural. The article describes the procedures used to validate the instrument "A Scale to measure Foreign Language Teachers' Attitude Towards Inclusive English Language Education to Pupils with Learning Difficulties in Primary and Special Schools". A non-experimental descriptive research approach has been used, with a mixed paradigm based on the materialist dialectical method. The findings reveal indecisive attitudes of the teachers in its three components towards the inclusive teaching of English to students with learning difficulties in primary and special schools. The scale has evidenced to be useful to measure the attitude of both in - service English teachers and teachers - to - be.

Key words: attitude, teachers, English, learning difficulties

Resumen:

La actitud del profesor de inglés es un predictor importante de buenas prácticas educativas. Se integra por tres componentes esenciales, el cognitivo, el afectivo y el conductual. El artículo describe el procedimiento utilizado para validar el instrumento "Escala para medir las Actitudes de Profesores de Lenguas Extranjera hacia la enseñanza inclusiva a educandos con dificultades en el aprendizaje en escuelas primarias y especiales". Se utilizó un enfoque de investigación no experimental, de tipo descriptiva y paradigma mixto a partir del método dialéctico materialista como método general. Los resultados indican que los profesores presentan actitudes indecisas en sus tres componentes. La escala demuestra utilidad en la medición de las actitudes de profesores de inglés en formación y en ejercicio.

Palabras clave: actitudes, profesores, inglés; dificultades en el aprendizaje.

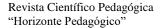
Introduction

The educational transformations advocated by the 3th process of curricular renewal of the National System of Education (NSE) in Cuba are focussed on the fulfilment of the goals and objectives of the 2030 Agenda. The renewal





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postulates the Institutional and Group Educational Project and the design of a flexible and contextualized curricular conception to satisfy the diversity and needs of all pupils and contexts, which gives great importance to collaboration in socio-educational networks. Therefore, the society demands the need to provide high-quality education for all learners, including those with learning difficulties, from now on (LD) and here comes the need to incorporate inclusive practices in the teaching learning process of all school subjects including English. Hence, identifying English language teachers' attitude towards inclusive English language education to pupils with learning difficulties in primary and special schools is a big challenge that would allow improving the training of these professionals and inclusive educational practices as well.

In this regard, attitudes have been studied for more than 100 years and its main precursor was Allport (1935). Rodríguez (1987), affirms that an attitude is "an enduring organization of beliefs and cognitions in general, endowed with an affective load in favour or against a defined social object, which predisposes to an action consistent with the cognitions and affects related to that object". (p.329). Attitudes are expressed in tree domains: cognitive, affective and behavioural. The cognitive refers to the beliefs, ideas, perceptions and thoughts about the object, the affective, indicates the feelings and emotions that induce in the person the object or phenomenon and the behavioural one alludes to predisposition or tendency towards an attitudinal objective.

The literature review on this theme confirms that to study attitudes, instruments such as Likert-type scales have demonstrated to be effective. (Rodríguez; Caurcel & Alaín, 2019). A variety of scales have been created by researchers in the educational context. Initially, they were implemented to describe how teachers or students with and without disabilities reacted to educational processes. (Rosero., Delgado., Ruano & Criollo, 2021). Other authors, focus their attention on the attitudes towards educational inclusion. (Granada, Pomés & Sanhueza, 2013; Forlin, Earle, Loreman, Sharma, 2011; Herrera, 2012; Adame & Becerra, 2015; Saloviita, 2020).

On the other hand, the scales to measure the English language teacher's attitudes towards inclusive practices in English language education to pupils with LD in primary and special schools are limited. Scientific evidence focuses on verifying their attitude but in regular and usual contexts. For example, studies by Kormos & Kontra (2008), first scholars of this area, applied a 36-item questionnaire. Out of them 23 items used Likert scale, 7 yes/no questions and 7 open-ended multiple-choice questions on biographical background to analyse the perceptions of language and special education teachers, and speech therapists in Hungary (Eastern Europe) about dyslexic pupils and their implications in the learning of a second language (L2). They found that teachers are aware of the dyslexia implications in language learning and they claimed they can identify dyslexia in language learning, but they do not know how many dyslexic children there are in their classroom.

Currently, Nijakowska., Tsagari & Spanoudis (2018) have created and applied a validated instrument (Nijakowska, Tsagari, & Spanoudis, 2020) Scale Foreign Language teacher's preparedness to include dyslexic learners in regular classrooms (TEPID), to 546 teachers to- be and in-service in Greece, Cyprus and Poland, (155 Greek-Cypriot, 233 Greek and 158 Polish teachers). The scale consisted of 24 items measured on a six-point Likert scale. It comprises three parts: A, referring to demographic information; B, focussing on English as a second language teachers' beliefs about their preparation to include dyslexic learners in regular classrooms and C, addressing prior training on dyslexia, inclusive instructional practices and professional training needs. This alternative has more than one option to select. The scale measured the beliefs about the self-efficacy that in-service English language teachers and teachers-to- be have about their preparation to include dyslexic learners in regular classrooms and it also measured their professional training needs.





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The study found that demographic variables like country, level of training, type of school where teachers work and experience in teaching learners with dyslexia, have effects in TEPID. However, the special school modality is not included within the type of schools. This element is beyond the scope of its study; nonetheless, in the Cuban context its measurement would be a novelty since there are special schools in Cuba as resource and support centres. It was also found that primary teachers' beliefs is low regarding their knowledge on dyslexia, self-efficacy about inclusive practices and insufficient teacher training. The authors believe that these results are due to the differences between the educational systems of each country, the training models and study programs.

According to the authors, the TEPID concept has two components: (a) beliefs about acquired knowledge on dyslexia and self-efficacy in implementing inclusive instructional practices with dyslexic EFL learners (knowledge and skills) and (b) beliefs about general principles of inclusion towards dyslexic EFL learners (attitude/position toward inclusion). Component (b) refers to: the recognition of the individualization of the teaching approach, the introduction of adjustments and adaptations, the collaboration with parents and the educational professionals, as well as the relationship between teacher's behaviour in the classroom and student's self-esteem and self-determination. (Nijakowska, Tsagari & Spanoudis, 2019). In this case, the authors of this article do not agree with Nijakowska, Tsagari & Spanoudis (2019), they recognize the attitude in its cognitive component, which expresses the knowledge and beliefs about the attitudinal object. The attitude goes further and also expresses the relationship between affective and behavioural factors that can be modified.

In Cuba, there is an increasing number of pupils with LD in primary and special education (Mendoza, Enríquez & López, 2022), which requires the study of this diagnostic entity and their teaching. However, studies about the design of instruments to describe teachers' attitudes towards inclusive English language education to pupils with LD in primary and special schools are still insufficient. Hence, a question arises: what instrument would allow measuring the attitudes of in-service English teachers and trainees towards inclusive in English language education to pupils with LD in primary and special schools? The present research is aimed at proposing a valid instrument to measure Foreign Language teachers' attitude towards inclusive English Language education to pupils with learning difficulties in primary and special schools in the Cuban context.

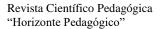
Materials and methods

This research is guided by the materialist dialectical method which allowed to analyse the object of study, its dynamic relationship and objectivity. A non-experimental descriptive research approach has been used, with a mixed paradigm. Scientific methods have helped in different ways. At theoretical level the documental study was used to review literature; the analytical-synthetic method to explore and analyse different studies and proposals as well as the Cuban context so as get to generalisations; modelling has allowed to determine the structure and contents of the scale items. At empirical level, the survey was used for measuring teachers' attitudes, by preparing a Likert-type scale questionnaire "Scale Attitudes of Foreign Language Teachers towards Inclusive English Language Education to Pupils with Learning Difficulties in Primary and Special Schools"; consulting specialists allowed to assess the proposal. In addition, Cronbach's alpha coefficient formula (Cortina, 1993) was applied to verify the internal consistency of the items. Descriptive statistics were implemented: frequency distribution (absolute and relative percentage) to process the results obtained in the applied instruments. The scale was validated in three essential stages:

Stage 1:









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Design, elaboration and evaluation rating by specialist criteria. A total of 11 specialists, all of them were PhD (5

psychologists, 3 foreign language professors and 3 especial educational professors). To do this, an analysis guide of

four indicators was created: correspondence with the attitude components; correspondence with the inclusion,

speciality and educative attention model to pupils with LD in Cuba; applicability to English teachers -to -be and in-

service; consistency and brevity of the items. The indicators were measured on a value scale of (VA) Very Adequate;

(A) Adequate; (LA) Little Adequate and (NA) Not Adequate.

Stage 2:

Verification of the effectiveness of the scale with its practical application. It was applied in the printed variant to a

study group of 50 English teachers at the primary level in Havana, through visits to educational institutions and

participation in methodological preparations. Out of them, 52% (26) were women and 48% (24) men between 19 and

50 years of age. 31 were elementary school English Teachers of upper middle level graduated from the Pedagogical

Schools, between 19 to 25 years of age and 19 Bachelor in Education. Foreign Language teachers graduated from the

"Enrique José Varona" University of Pedagogical Sciences, between 36 to 45 years old.

The analysis of the data obtained with the scale was processed following García & Alonso's methodology (1985).

This allowed assigning a value to each component of the attitude by calculating averages. The total score was divided

by the number of items evaluated. The minimum range determined was from 29 points to a maximum of 145, from the most negative to the most positive attitude, where the variable was included. The total result was located for each

component of the attitude as follows: Negative or unfavourable attitudes: total value of 0-48; Indecisive or neutral

attitudes: total value of 49-96 and Positive or favourable attitudes: total value of 97-145.

This methodology made possible to measure and determine the score range from the total value per component. This

is translated into the fact that it allows to determine, per component, how the attitude is characterized and verify that

part of the total of the group studied had negative, indecisive or positive attitudes in each component. (Muñoz,

Velásquez and Asprilla, 2018). For example: Cognitive component: negative attitude 0-19, indecisive 32-63 and positive 64-95; Emotional component: negative attitude 0-6, indecisive 7-13 and positive 14-20 and Behavioural

component: negative attitude 0-10, indecisive 11-19 and positive 20-30.

Stage 3: checking the internal consistency of the items on the scale. For this, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient formula

was applied, the reliability indicator of psychometric scales most used in social sciences. It was obtained by

calculating the covariance between the total items, the total variance and the number of items that make up the scale.

(Curtain, 1993)

Results and discussion

Attitudes are psychological configurations that cannot be observed until they are manifested as a human being's

reaction to the attitudinal object. In the educational context, and in particular the teaching of English to primary

students with LD, teachers' attitude plays a determining role, since depending on its positive or negative connotation,

the implementation of inclusive educational practices in any educational context can be predicted. The literature

review carried out and the application of the scale designed in a prior study allowed the authors Mendoza, Enríquez &

López (2022) to operationally define that the attitudes of foreign language teachers towards inclusive English

language education to students with LD in primary and special schools is:

"a lasting organization of beliefs of foreign language teachers about inclusive didactic activity aimed at the

acquisition of English language skills by pupils with learning difficulties in any educational context, which





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induce these feelings in favour or against and that predispose to take actions accordingly, as an expression of the cognitive, affective and behavioural components". (p.4)

Taking into consideration the conceptual content described in the definition tree dimension of the attitudes were determined: cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions, that allowed to create the scale and its measurement.

The linguistic analyses carried out in the authors' previous study (Mendoza, Enríquez & López, 2022) and specialised literature reviewed suggested changing the terms used to name the scale. The elaborated questionnaire to measure teacher's attitude was a Likert-type scale questionnaire "Scale Attitudes of Foreign Language Teachers towards Inclusive English Language Education to Pupils with Learning Difficulties in Primary and Special Schools". It was based on the (TEPID) scale proposed by (Nijakowska, et al, 2020). It was adapted to the Cuban context and to the definition of attitude assumed, in fact it addresses the three components of attitude. Demographic variables were readjusted, such as: the country where they teach or study to become teachers, because a comparative study with other countries was not carried out. The "special school" modality was incorporated as a type of school because, in Cuba, it is maintained as part of the educational provision to these pupils where the English subject is part of the curriculum. At present, they are conceived as resource and support centres, which offer guidance, as requested, to the entire educational community on effective inclusive educational practices. The indicators of component B and C that explore the cognitive component were reorganized, grouped, and adjusted. A linguistic validity analysis suggested eliminating items B1.3, B1.5, B1.11, B1.13 and B1.16. The scale was composed of 2 sections:

Section A: Composed of nine questions on general demographic information regarding age, gender, title, academic level, educational level in which they work, type of school, years of general work experience, work experience with pupils with LD in primary schools and experience in specials schools. They are shown below:

Figure 1. Scale. Section A.

Please, honestly answer a few simple questions. This information SECTION A: GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION.			
(A1) My gender is: (A1.1) Male (A1.2) Female (A3) I am a graduate of: (Title)	(A2) My age is: (A2.1) 19 to 25 years (A2.3) 36 to 45 years (A2.2) 26 to 35 years (A2.4) 46 years or more (A4) My academic level is:		
(A3.1) Primary English Teacher (Pedagogical Schools) (A3.2) Bachelor of Education Foreign Languages (University) (A3.3) Other, please specify:	(A4.1) Upper secondary level (Intermediate technician) (A4.2) Higher Level (Graduate) (A4.3) Master's degree (A4.4) Doctor in Educational Sciences (A4.5) Other, please specify:		
(A5) Work at the educational level: (A5.1) Primary Education (A5.2) Special Education (A5.3) Other, please specify:	(A6) I work in a school: (A6.1) Primary School (A6.2) Special School (A6.3) Other, please specify:		
(A7.1) less than 5 years (A7.2) 6 to 12 years (A7.3) 13 to 19 years old (A7.4) 20 to 26 years old (A7.5) 27 to 31 years old	(A8) Work experience with students with LD in primary schools: (A8.1) less than 5 years (A8.2) 6 to 12 years (A8.3) 13 to 19 years old		

Source:

Elaborated by the authors, adapted from Nijakowska, et al (2018)

Section B: Composed of 29 items, 26 positives with 5 points (5=strongly agree and 1=strongly disagree) and 3 negatives with inverse scoring (1-5). The cognitive component contains 19 items, from B1.1 to B1.19 it refers to





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knowledge and beliefs about LD; LD and L2 learning; inclusive practices with students with LD in primary and special schools.

The affective component contains 4 items, from B1.20 to B1.23, indicating the feelings and emotions that the inclusive teaching of English to students with LD in primary and special schools induces in teachers. The items from B1. 20 to B1. 22, were analysed and adapted from those proposed by Forlin, Earle, Loreman, Sharma (2011) as they are consistent with the affective states that it implies and that are expressed through human behaviour. Finally, the behavioural component made up of 6 items, from B1.24 to B1. 29 imply the concrete actions of inclusive practices carried out by teachers. They are shown below:

Figure 2. Scale. Section B.

SECTION B: ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION TO PUPILS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN PRIMARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS. Note that learners with Learning Difficulties (LD) also include those known in Cuba as having Mental Developmental Delay. Please select the answer that best matches your criteria. (SA) Strongly agree (A) Agree (U) Undecided (D) Disagree (S) Strongly disagree ÍTEMS **STATEMENT** B1.1 I know what LD are. B1.2 I am familiarized with the cause of the LD. I know the difficulties experimented by pupils with LD in the learning of a L2 **B1.3 B1.4** I know the Cuban educational polices regarding the educational attention modalities to pupils with LD. B1.5 I know what educational inclusion is and its application in the English language education to pupils with LA. B1.6 I am informed about the construction of the Institutional and Group Educational Projects for the inclusive English language education to pupils with LD in primary and special schools. B1.7 I know the necessary methods, resources and supports for the inclusive English language education to pupils with LD in primary schools. B1.8 I know the necessary methods, resources and supports for the inclusive English language education to pupils with LD in special schools. B1.9 I know how special schools work with pupils with LD as a resource and support centre. B1.10 I know the support teachers' functions B1.11 I believe LDs are a disability. I believe pupils with LD can learn English as a L2. B1.12 B1.13 I believe that students with LD can receive more profits in primary schools. **B1.14** I believe that students with LD can receive more profits in special schools B1.15 I believe pupils with LD need special methods, resources and support in the teaching and learning of English in any educational context. B1.16 I believe English language teachers should differentiate his teaching approach to teach english to pupils with LD in whatever educational context. B1.17 I believe that collaborative work with the support teacher is useful for English teachers who teach learners with LD in any educational context. B1.18 I think that foreign language teachers should also work in the special school for learners with LD B1.19 I think I would serve LD learners better if I worked in special schools. B1.20 I avoid teaching English to students with LD. B1.21 I am afraid of teaching English to LD learners in primary schools. B1.22 I am afraid of teaching English to LD in special schools. I feel safe and happy knowing that I can teach English to students with LD in primary and special schools. B1.23 **B1.24** I attend to the individual differences of students with LD to satisfy their SEN in primary schools B1.25 I adapt the English teaching approach to teach learners with LD in any educational context B1.26 I adapt and implement diverse methods, resources and supports in the classes to cater for the special needs of my students with LD in primary schools. B1.27 I adapt and implement diverse methods, resources and supports in the classes to cater to cater for the special needs of my students with LD in special schools B1.28 I remove barriers and create learning activities involving all my students with and without LD in primary schools. B1.29 I remove barriers and create learning activities involving all my students with LD in special schools.

Source: Elaborated by the authors, adapted from Nijakowska, et al (2020)

By stages, the results showed that: Stage I, 100% of the specialists valued the scale as very appropriate and effective to use it with teachers- to- be and in- service teachers. In Stage 2, the scale was applied to all the teachers. Stage 3, the application of Cronbach's alpha coefficient showed high reliability of the internal consistency type, with values of 0.81 points.





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The results obtained with the application of the scale to the totality of the study group confirmed that demographic variables such as the academic level of teachers, age, teaching experience with students with LD and the type of school where they work, impact the in-service teachers' attitude towards teaching English to pupils with LD in primary schools. The teachers who showed a positive attitude in the cognitive component (31) were graduated as English Teacher of Primary Education at the upper middle level in the Pedagogical Schools, between 19 and 25 years of age; besides, they had less than 5 years of experience teaching general classes and in particular teaching students with LD. The reason for this is that the teachers graduated from these institutions have received training to work with students with special needs, as it is specified in a subject of the study plan.

However, its elements are insufficient to address the LD students' individual differences in the English teaching-learning process. The rest, (4) have Bachelor's degrees in Education, between 36-45 years of age who work in primary schools. They declared having learned to work with these students due to their constant interaction with the students and special education teachers and self-learning.

It was revealed that in general 9 (18%) teachers show positive attitudes, 41 (82%) showed indecisive attitudes and none (0%) negative attitudes. When determining the range of scores by component, it was found that, in the cognitive component, 35 (70%) teachers show positive attitudes, 15 (30%) indecisive attitudes and (0%) negative attitudes. Regarding the affective component, the results were consistent with the cognitive component, it was found that only 8 (16%) teachers showed a positive attitude and 42 (84%) teachers an indecisive attitude. In the behavioural component, no teacher showed negative attitudes, however 37 teachers (74%) revealed hesitant attitudes and 13 (26%) showed positive attitudes.

The study allowed us to affirm that currently in our country, foreign language teachers, specially the English language teachers, graduated from the Enrique José Varona University of Pedagogical Sciences, have indecisive, negative and unfavourable attitudes towards teaching in special schools in its three components. However, graduates from pedagogical schools show more positive results. There was a predominance of feelings of dislike towards inclusive teaching for students with LD, anxiety and rejection in Bachelors in education, due to insufficient knowledge about LD and L2 learning, as well as the necessary resources and support. Similar studies have also been verified by Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, (2008); Forlin & Chambers (2011); Forlin et al., (2014) and Kormos & Nijakowska (2017). This situation generates that the actions of inclusive teaching practices are insufficient with emphasis on the adaptation of the teaching approach and implementation of methods, resources and diverse supports in the classes, elimination of barriers and creation of participatory learning activities in primary and special schools. This is due to lack of undergraduate training and experience teaching students with LD.

On the other hand, insufficient understanding was also found about the creation of the Institutional and Group Educational Project towards inclusive teaching of English. This unprecedented finding in our context demands urgent research in view of the generalization of these new forms of work in all schools in the country. It is suggested to initiate research on how to eradicate these insufficiencies, reduce teachers' concerns and increase their self-confidence towards the inclusive teaching of English in primary schools, with an emphasis on special schools. (Mendoza, Enriquez & López, 2022).

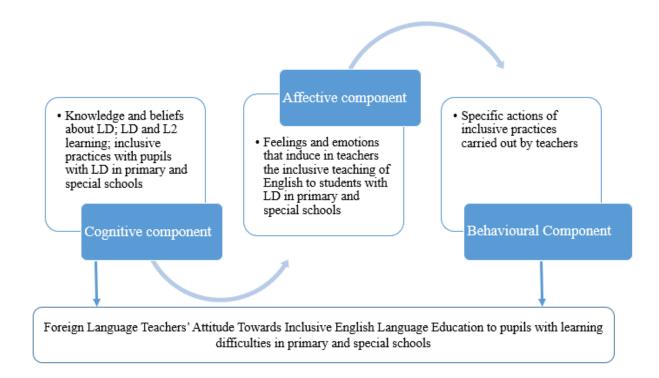
The components of attitudes are characterized by their dynamic relationship and system character, it is logical to deduce that if teachers have limited knowledge about LD, its characteristics, limitations, its impact on the learning of a language such as English and the adequate resources and support to teach them, will generate teachers' insecurities and negative feelings towards this activity, represented in the chart below:

Figure 3. Representation of the dynamic relationship and attitude system character and its components.





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Source: self-made

As a result, there will be few inclusive English teaching practices carried out in any educational context where these learners' study. If the teachers-to.be have limited experiences during their teaching practicum with these children either in the regular schools or in special education institutions, then they would not be able to develop the necessary professional skills in keeping with the current demands of education to undertake inclusive education for all as it is required. In this regard, a limitation of the study was that the influence of teaching experience in special schools on the attitudes of English teachers could not be directly verified as they had not worked in these centres, nor were they placed in them during their initial training. (Mendoza, Enriquez & López, 2022). However, teachers believe that they should also work in special schools, indicating that they are likely to develop favourable attitudes towards inclusive English teaching in these institutions.

When carrying out an analysis of the training of these professionals, a problem that explains the results of the study conducted has been identified. The program for the major in Foreign Language Education trains teachers with two graduating profiles: Foreign language education specialized in English and the other in English with a second language, generally French. The curriculum is aimed at helping trainees to develop the skills that will enable them to teach in different educational levels- primary, secondary, upper secondary, technical and vocational, adult and higher educations. It is interesting to highlight that special education is not included; however, these institutions, as the rest, have the social need to provide English language learning opportunities to their students, so as to help them face successfully the current scientific, technological and human development demands; nevertheless, this is outside the scope of the training process of these professionals.

If teachers have insufficient knowledge and skills for teaching pupils with LD and little experience with them in primary and special schools, it is most likely that they will reject or avoid teaching them, that they will not make an effort to find the necessary resources and/or support, and therefore, will not develop inclusive teaching practices. Adequate initial training and sufficient direct experiences teaching pupils with LD in any educational context is necessary. For a deeper review, you can consult the original study (Mendoza, Enríquez & López, 2022).

Conclusions







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A series of studies have been analysed that have made it possible to prepare and propose the "Attitudes Scale of Foreign Language Teachers towards Inclusive English Language Education to Students with Learning Difficulties in Primary and Special Schools" for both teacher trainees in undergraduate courses and in-service teachers already working in schools. It has a valid structure similar to the studies by Nijakowska, et al (2020) the Scale of Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers to Include Dyslexic Children (TEPID) but adapted to the Cuban context, with a total of 29 items, 26 positive and 3 negatives with reverse punctuation.

The application of three stages for its validation with emphasis on its application in a group of English teachers allowed to verify its validity and identify the attitudes of these teachers towards teaching English to students with LD in the Cuban context. The findings of the study allowed us to conclude that training and educating an English teacher capable of teaching students with LD from a corrective-compensatory and developmental approach in any educational context is a current challenge for teacher education in Cuba. The results of the study will allow the initiation of research focused on the training of this professional to equip them with the necessary tools to cater for the special needs of the students, increase their positive attitudes towards inclusive practices in English language education to these students in primary and special schools, reduce their concerns and increase their self-confidence in developing inclusive practices.

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No.	Contribution Roles	Author 1	Author 2	Author 3
1.	Conceptualization:	100 %		
2.	Research:	100 %		
3.	Methodology:	50 %	25 %	25 %
4.	Validation:	50 %	25 %	25 %
5.	Writing – original draft:	100 %		
6.	Writing – review and editing:	50 %	25 %	25 %

Declaration of originality and conflicts of interest

The author(s) declare(s) that the article:

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