

Inclusive Online Learning for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education: A Needs Assessment

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online education, highlighting its essential role in learning continuity. However, insufficient integration of information and communication technology (ICT) skills into pre-service and in-service teacher training programs left many educators underprepared for the transition to online teaching. This lack of readiness, coupled with insufficient attention to inclusive education, created a snowball effect during the pandemic, affecting overburdened teachers and students with disabilities. To this end, this study aims to better understand the unique needs of preparatory school instructors and inform the development of targeted training programs that will prepare instructors to address the challenges of online instruction with a focus on students with disabilities. Using a qualitative descriptive research design, we conducted individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with two key informants and six academics who were instructors at the Foreign Language School of two foundation universities in Ankara. Based on the data collected, we explored the instructors' perceptions and needs utilizing thematic analysis across three main themes: conceptions of inclusive education, identifying students' disability status and needs, and adjustments in teaching and learning. Finally, implications and suggestions regarding higher education policies and professional development of instructors and future research are discussed.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a significant shift in education by accelerating the adoption of online education and emphasizing its critical role in maintaining learning continuity on a large scale. While this transition highlighted the advantages of technology, it also exposed ongoing challenges in online learning environments such as the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. Inclusion is a key outcome of the broader human rights movement, which seeks equality for all, regardless of color, gender, socioeconomic status, or disability (Paseka & Schwab, 2020).

As at other educational levels, higher education worldwide has seen an increase in the number of university students with various disabilities, prompting significant changes to support inclusive educational practices (Moriña & Perera, 2020; UNESCO & Right to Education Initiative, 2022). For example, in the United Kingdom, the number of students with disabilities enrolled in higher education increased by 47% between 2014-2019, while in the United States, the estimated proportion of college students reporting a disability increased from 11% in 2004 to 21% in 2020 (UNESCO & Right to Education Initiative, 2022; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2024). Access to higher education is essential for students with disabilities to develop their talents, socio-emotional skills, and educational opportunities (Fuller et al., 2004; Hurst, 1996). Accordingly, universities are gradually adopting inclusive practices to make higher education more accessible (Barnes, 2007; Riddell & Weedon, 2014). Besides, online education has expanded access by removing time and location barriers, though challenges such as limited access to tools persist (Altunoğlu, 2020).

Individuals' right to education is perceived as sacred and universal, and it is protected by both national and international legislations including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which Türkiye also ratified. These agreements emphasize non-discrimination and obligate signatory countries to secure the right to education and equal access to education. Moreover, they highlight the necessity of educational programs that raise awareness of disability rights (Kurt et al., 2016; Sart et al., 2016). Türkiye's legislative framework, the 2005 *Engelliler Hakkında Kanun* (Disability Act, Law No. 5378), aligns with these international standards to support inclusive education (Sart et al., 2016).

Although these legal frameworks recognize education as a fundamental right, they do not adequately address the practical emergence of barriers to participation in higher education. In this regard, the social model of disability provides a framework for analyzing the influence of institutional structures and learning environments on access and inclusion. This study is informed by Oliver's (1990) social model of disability, which states that disability primarily arises from environmental, institutional, and social barriers rather than from individual limitations. We use this model as a lens for identifying and reducing barriers embedded in institutional arrangements and learning design, rather than as a claim that impairment effects or differences in students' opportunities to participate are irrelevant as mentioned by Oliver (2013) and Terzi (2004). In accordance with Shakespeare (2013), we recognize that participation in online learning is shaped by the interaction between individual support needs and environmental conditions, while still foregrounding the removal of socially produced barriers. In online higher education, barriers commonly arise through the accessibility of e-learning materials and resources and the practices of multiple stakeholders, including lecturers, learning technologists, and support services, with

implications for teaching and assessment arrangements (Seale, 2013). Consistent with this framing, we consider inclusion as participation in regular learning settings with adequate support (Saloviita, 2020), and we view curriculum and instruction as requiring proactive attention to learner diversity and awareness-building among educators and peers (Morgan & Houghton, 2011; Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2022). This perspective supports our needs assessment focus on identifying the conditions that hinder or support participation, and on translating these into professional learning and institutional support needs (see Bunbury, 2020).

Disability and Inclusion Practices in Türkiye

As in the rest of the world, disability in Türkiye emerges as a significant social issue that impacts individuals' lives in various ways. In Türkiye's education system, the promotion of inclusive education and the enhancement of awareness regarding the needs of individuals with disabilities are becoming increasingly important (Yazıcıoğlu, 2020). Despite the current endeavors, significant challenges persist for students with disabilities. These include insufficient vocational guidance, inadequate support during university admissions, and limited physical and digital accessibility on campuses (Mutanga & Walker, 2015; Piştav-Akmeşe, 2018; Sart et al., 2016). These challenges are not unique to Türkiye, but they reflect a broader global pattern that has encouraged international stakeholders to intervene at a systemic level. In this regard, the United Nations' digital inclusion strategy of 2020 provides a critical framework by emphasizing equitable access to digital technologies as a fundamental component of full and meaningful participation in education and broader society for individuals with disabilities (United Nations, 2020).

Although digital accessibility has gained importance, as highlighted in the United Nations' (2020) Disability Inclusion Strategy and UNESCO's (2021) Global Education Monitoring Report, online education may present challenges for students with disabilities, including inaccessible course materials, difficulties with navigation, and a lack of personalized support (Kent, 2015). Thus, limitations of accessibility tools like sign language interpretation and subtitles, as well as the inadequacy in modifying assessment procedures hinder online learning progress and prevent equal access to education (Council of Higher Education [CoHE], 2020a, 2020b; Dumitru, 2023), particularly for students who are already marginalized within traditional education systems. Nevertheless, Altunoğlu (2020) points out that the growth of online learning has created new opportunities to enhance accessibility without restrictions.

The pandemic underscored the critical role of internet accessibility in education. CoHE released recommendations on online accessibility in response to the World Bank's 2021 Report on Disability-Inclusive Education Post-COVID-19, which urged academic institutions to modify their digital platforms to accommodate students with disabilities (CoHE, 2020a, 2020b; World Bank, 2021). Furthermore, institutions are encouraged to give priority to digital, instructional, and physical accessibility through the CoHE's Barrier-Free University Awards (CoHE, 2025). While Türkiye has established legal frameworks aligned with international standards for accessible education, struggles continue to exist. Key obstacles (e.g., limited availability of assistive technologies and the absence of proactive, inclusive policies) still prevent students with disabilities from having fair access to higher education, especially in the areas of inclusive practices and digital education.

Studies reveal such persistent challenges (Bindhani & Gopinath, 2024) as inadequate resources, systemic barriers, and societal attitudes in addressing inclusivity issues in social and

academic contexts, as emphasis tends to be on physical rather than educational or socio-cultural aspects, attributed to insufficient consideration in program design (e.g., Koçak Tufan, 2021). The Association for the Visually Impaired in Education (Eğitimde Görme Engelliler Derneği, [EGED])¹ (2020) identifies challenges such as limited access to synchronous courses, course materials, and online exams, recommending accessible online platforms, instructional materials, and assessment procedures, as well as surveys to monitor the experiences of students with disabilities and inform academics.

Moreover, the CoHE's Students with Disabilities Commission² surveyed 195 universities, representing 48,159 students with disabilities. This survey aimed to assess support measures during the pandemic. Findings revealed limited adjustments in teaching and assessment, but over half of the universities implemented measures such as additional online meetings, accessibility training for lecturers, and psychosocial support through workshops and interviews (Koçak Tufan, 2021).

Although the pandemic has been declared over and educational institutions have returned to face-to-face learning, online education has solidified its place in the educational landscape, offering flexibility and diverse learning tools that continue to shape higher education. However, the challenges remain relevant, particularly for instructors and students with disabilities. In Türkiye, the lack of emphasis on ICT skills and the integration of technology teacher training programs left many teachers unprepared for a full transition to online teaching (OECD, 2020). This unpreparedness, as well as inadequate focus on inclusive education, triggered a snowball effect during the pandemic, placing a disproportionate burden on overworked instructors and students with disabilities who had already been marginalized by the system prior to entry to higher education.

In this context, instructors significantly influence how online education meets the needs of students with disabilities, and they are key to addressing the challenges of online education so that students with disabilities or learning difficulties are not excluded from the learning process and are effectively supported. This role becomes even more critical at the preparatory school level in Turkish universities, where instructors typically teach foundational English courses and are often among the first to engage with students upon their admission. To this end, they can identify learning needs early and implement inclusive practices at the very outset. Therefore, equipping these instructors with the necessary pedagogical and technological competencies is essential for fostering inclusive and accessible online education (Koçdar et al., 2018).

In spite of the recent emphasis on inclusive education and digital transformation in Türkiye, some important gaps still remain in the literature. First, while national and international studies have explored the general challenges of online education with foci on instruction (e.g., Akyol & Garrison, 2011), few have examined how preparatory school instructors in Turkish higher education institutions perceive and address the needs of students with disabilities (e.g., Moran, 2022). Second, existing research often focuses on either student experiences or institutional policies (EGED, 2020; Şahin İpek et al., 2020) leaving a critical gap in understanding instructors' preparedness, training needs, and perceptions, especially in the context of foreign language

¹The Association for the Visually Impaired in Education is officially abbreviated as EGED in Turkish which is the abbreviation used in the whole body of the document. Although this association focuses on one particular impairment group, their work and reports include university students from different disability groups, addressing the problems they experience in the distance education process and the solutions to these problems.

² The Commission has been called by different names throughout the years in Türkiye. This more globally used name is translated by the researchers thereof is used in the whole body of the document.

education. Moreover, although there have been recent efforts to promote accessible education through national initiatives, there is very limited empirical evidence to inform targeted professional development in this regard for preparatory school instructors. Finally, the intersection of online education, disability inclusion, and language teaching remains significantly under-researched in Türkiye.

With these gaps in mind, we conducted this study as part of a broader curriculum development. The study aimed to identify the specific needs of English preparatory school instructors working in online environments. More specifically, we sought to inform the design of targeted training programs that might support instructors in creating more inclusive, equitable, and effective learning experiences for all students, especially those with disabilities.

In this regard, we aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What knowledge do English preparatory school instructors have of existing institutional policies and procedures related to supporting students with disabilities in online learning environments?
2. What do English preparatory school instructors need to enhance the online teaching, learning and evaluation procedures for students with disabilities?

Method

Needs assessments play a crucial role in curriculum design for identifying gaps and informing targeted interventions (Demirel, 2017; Peterson, 2003). This process requires instructional designers to determine the needs to be addressed through systematic and comprehensive information gathering (Peterson, 2003). As aforementioned, the primary aim of this study was to conduct a needs assessment to identify the specific needs of the preparatory school instructors.

Within this scope, the study was expected to inform the design of an online in-service training module for university-level instructors to optimize their online learning environments for students with disabilities. To achieve this aim, we employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the professional development needs of preparatory school instructors in supporting students with disabilities. The design was preferred because it enables a comprehensive description of participants' perspectives and experiences without imposing excessive interpretation (Cohen et al., 2018; Sandelowski, 2010). Individual, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore instructors' awareness, knowledge, and practices related to supporting students with disabilities, as well as their perceived training needs.

Context of the Study

In Türkiye, students with disabilities form a visible part of the higher education student population. Yurdakul and Şahin-Demir (2024) report that in the 2023-2024 academic year, 57,921 students with disabilities are reported to be enrolled in higher education programs in Türkiye, including Associate, Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate levels. Given the increasing number of students with disabilities enrolled in Turkish higher education and the continuing need for more inclusive practices, this study focuses on preparatory school instructors, who are often among the first academic staff to work with these students.

Preparatory schools in Türkiye are standardized in curriculum and assessment. This standardization offers a unique opportunity to systematically identify and address the needs of

students with disabilities. The findings from this study aimed to inform the development of an online modular training program tailored to higher education-level English instructors, equipping them to create inclusive and effective online learning environments.

To situate this emphasis within the national framework of disability and inclusion, it is crucial to delineate the formal definitions of disability and accessibility within Türkiye's legislative context. In Türkiye, the term "person with disability" is defined in the Turkish Disability Act (Law No. 5378, 2005). This legislation outlines that an individual with a disability is one who encounters attitudes and environmental conditions limiting their active participation in social life, unlike those without disabilities. This condition is characterized by the loss of physical, mental, spiritual, and sensory abilities at varying levels (Law No. 5378, 2005). The same Act further defines "accessibility" as the condition whereby buildings, open spaces, transport, information services and information and communication technologies are designed so that persons with disabilities can use them safely and independently.

Participants

The needs assessment was carried out through interviews. Since in-depth interviews help identify the participants' perspectives on a phenomenon of interest (Patton, 1990), interviews were conducted with the potential audience of this program, namely, preparatory school instructors and key informants who have administrative roles in their institutions, to assess whether there is a need for such a training program. Therefore, a purposive sampling strategy was used to choose participants who could provide rich and pertinent information aligned with the aims of the needs assessment (Cohen et al., 2018).

This approach was regarded appropriate given the study's focus on exploring instructors' knowledge, practices, and training needs related to supporting students with disabilities. Participants were selected based on their professional roles as preparatory school instructors or as key informants with administrative responsibilities related to academic or student support services. This sampling strategy ensured alignment with the research questions, which aimed to identify both instructional practices and institutional perspectives relevant to the design of an in-service training program.

The participants of the study were recruited through direct contact by researchers via institutional email based on their roles. The potential participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and 8 returned a positive response to the emails sent. Thus, the sample consisted of two key informants who are supposed to provide information regarding the inclusive education policies and their application in departments of foreign languages in universities, namely academics with administrative duties and six academics who are preparatory school instructors at the Foreign Language School of two foundation universities in Ankara, Türkiye.

They have had between 4 and 16 years of experience in teaching. Among the participants, five held master's degree in English Language Teaching, Curriculum and Instruction, English Language and Literature, Human Resource Development in Education, and European Studies and International Relations. Three participants were still studying for their degrees in English Language Teaching or English Language and Literature at the time of the study.

Data Collection

As part of the needs assessment, a thorough literature review was conducted, and two separate semi-structured interview protocols were designed in an attempt to identify participants' knowledge and awareness of disability, regulations for students with disabilities, how to identify and report the needs of the students with disabilities, how to arrange/alter teaching-learning processes, and determine their further needs regarding these issues. The interview protocols were informed by the social model of disability, which foregrounds barriers embedded in institutional arrangements and learning design rather than locating difficulties solely within individuals. Accordingly, questions also prompted participants to describe conditions that hindered or supported students' participation in online learning and to reflect on institutional procedures and support for identifying needs and implementing adjustments.

The participants were informed via informed consent form addressing the purpose of the study and voluntary participation in the study. The interviews were carried out in June 2021 by two researchers using an online conference program (i.e., *Zoom*), and they were video recorded upon participants' consent. The interviews lasted between 20 and 38 minutes.

Data Analysis

All recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researchers, and the interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Patton, 1990). The social model of disability was used as a sensitizing lens during analysis to interpret patterns in terms of barriers and enabling conditions embedded in institutional arrangements and instructional design, particularly in relation to online teaching, learning, and assessment. The interviews were coded by the researchers. It consisted of several steps, namely the identification and reporting of patterns in a data set using codes and themes that aim to provide a systematic and justified interpretation of these observed patterns (Creswell, 2012).

At the initial stage of data analysis, three of the researchers got familiarized by reviewing the literature and reading the transcripts. The researchers generated initial codes with their operational definitions through peer discussions on potential codes and themes. They worked independently and coded all the transcripts. Then, they reviewed the coded transcripts section by section. In places where one researcher felt that the code could be revised or a new code could be introduced, the researchers discussed whether a new code was necessary or if an excerpt could be described by using the existing codes. Accordingly, some codes were added, redefined, and reworded through the process. Two researchers have examined all of the codes, the operational definitions and the notes taken by researchers during the coding process for later consideration, categorized them meaningfully and gathered the codes under the themes. After a peer debriefing on the final coding scheme, all researchers reached consensus on themes. Because all the discordant coding was resolved during the intercoder agreement process, no metrics were generated.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, strategies addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were employed (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). To ensure credibility, the researchers received expert opinions regarding the data collection instruments. Both instruments were sent to three experts, i.e., a research assistant working in the disability support office at a public university, a measurement and assessment specialist, and an academic specializing in the field of curriculum and instruction. The experts commented on the

clarity and content of the interview questions, and revisions were made by considering their suggestions and comments. Besides, peer debriefing was used during the data analysis process to enhance credibility by engaging in regular discussions to refine codes and themes and to reach consensus. Dependability was ensured through a systematic and transparent data analysis process. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and multiple researchers independently took part in the coding process. Consensus was used to discuss and resolve discrepancies collaboratively (Guest et al., 2012). Confirmability was supported by maintaining detailed records of coding decisions, code definitions, and analytic memos throughout data analysis process. This allowed for an audit trail of methodological decisions. Finally, transferability was addressed by using a purposive sampling strategy and a thick description regarding the sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures so that the applicability of the findings might be considered in similar contexts (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

Ethical Issues and Limitations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Human Subjects Ethics Committee prior to data collection, under protocol number 266-ODTU-2021, dated 23.06.2021. Participants were informed about the details of the study including the purpose and the methodology, voluntary participation, and right to leave the interview without consequence through a written consent form. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing participants' identities. Any data obtained from participants were securely saved and accessed only by the researchers.

This study has several limitations that should be taken into consideration. Due to institutional constraints, limited sample representativeness, and time constraints, the generalizability of the findings is restricted to preparatory school instructors at the foreign language schools of two foundation universities in a single province. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within the specific institutional and contextual boundaries of the study.

Second, the data were collected solely based on instructors' opinions and perceptions. As with most qualitative research, the findings may be influenced by individual biases, which may change over time and may be affected by subjective interpretations or social desirability bias. The absence of multiple data sources, such as student perspectives or observational data, may limit the transferability of the findings. Nevertheless, methodological rigor was ensured through systematic data analysis procedures, careful interpretation of the data, and transparent reporting of the research process. In line with the nature of qualitative research, these methodological constraints should be considered when interpreting the findings, as the study prioritizes depth of understanding and contextual insight over statistical generalization.

Third, the long-term applicability of the findings may be influenced by the rapidly evolving nature of online learning environments. Continuous changes in digital tools, instructional platforms, and institutional policies and practices may alter how inclusive online learning is implemented and experienced over time.

Results

The analysis of the semi-structured interviews with preparatory school instructors revealed that their perceptions and needs in meeting the needs of students with disabilities in their classes were categorized into three themes: *conceptions of inclusive education*, *identifying students' disability status and needs*, and *adjustments in teaching and learning* (see Figure 1).

Figure 1*Hierarchical Representation of Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes*

Theme 1 Conceptions of inclusive education		Theme 2 Identifying students' disability status and needs		Theme 3 Adjustments in teaching and learning		
<i>Inclusion</i>	<i>Disability</i>	<i>Policies and Practices</i>	<i>Support Services</i>	<i>Instructional considerations</i>	<i>Teacher attitudes</i>	<i>Assessment procedures</i>
Accessibility	Mental vs. physical limitation	Regulations	Psychological support	Instructional method	Positive attitudes	Individual assessment
Equal opportunity	Inborn vs. acquired	Institutional practices	Social support	Additional materials	Flexible attitudes	Enabling tool usage
Inclusive curriculum	Normal vs. abnormal	Needs assessment	Financial support	Technological aids/supports	Inflexible attitude	Adjusting the assessment materials
				Training students with disabilities for ICT		Providing additional time

Together, these themes capture both preparatory school instructors' understandings of disability and inclusion and the practical conditions that shaped their capacity to support students in online learning environments, including institutional procedures for identifying needs and course-level adjustments in teaching and assessment.

Conceptions of Inclusive Education

To begin with, conceptions of inclusive education, which were shaped by preparatory school instructors' knowledge background and preparedness of teaching students with disabilities, was one of the key themes. It consisted of two sub-themes, namely, inclusion and disability (see Table 1).

Table 1*Conceptions of Inclusive Education*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Sub-theme</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Conceptions of inclusive education	Inclusion	Accessibility Equal opportunity Inclusive curriculum
	Disability	Mental vs. physical limitation Inborn vs. acquired Normal vs. abnormal

Regarding inclusion, the participants underlined the importance of providing equal opportunities for all students. However, some of the participants stated that inclusive education can only be appropriate for the students with disabilities who do not have mental disabilities. An excerpt from one of these participants is given below:

If the individual has a mental disability, it is a necessity that they have a different kind of education since they cannot have the same education and go through the same processes as others that we call normal individuals. However, people who have physical disabilities, such as visual and hearing impairments, can be in the same environment as those who do not have any disabilities. (P2)

On the other hand, it was evident that some participants felt some tension with the idea of an inclusive curriculum that addressed individual needs. This tension also reflects structural constraints that can limit the extent to which inclusive practices are feasible. As one participant put it: *"I think the program needs to be developed with the consideration of individual differences in mind. However, this seems to be rather utopian when we think of the classrooms of 25 to 30 students."* (P5)

One of the participants stated that he has difficulty in identifying the nature of disabilities and whether a situation can be characterized as a disability. In this regard, it was noted that mental or physical limitations, inborn or acquired, normal or abnormal were the terms that were highlighted in the attempts to define disability. To illustrate this, the interviewee expressed that: *"Disability is having a disability through inborn or acquired... is something a normal individual does but a disabled person cannot do."* (P1). On the other hand, another participant focused only on the physical disabilities or limitations, stating that: *"I see disability in a more physical sense, I can describe the state of being physically unable to perform certain activities within the integrity of the body."* (P4). In these accounts, disability was often described in individual terms, which left less attention to how teaching arrangements and institutional procedures might enable or restrict participation.

Identifying Students' Disability Status and Needs

Another theme that emerged was *identifying students' disability status and needs*, derived from instructors' responses about the challenges and advantages they encountered in their practices. This theme comprises two sub-themes: *policies and practices* and *support services* (see Table 2).

Table 2

Views on Identifying Students' Disability Status and Needs

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Sub-theme</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Identifying students' disability status and needs	Policies and Practices	Regulations Institutional practices Needs assessment
	Support Services	Psychological support Social support Financial support

The *policies and practices* sub-theme consists of three codes: regulations, institutional practices, and needs assessment. Regulations here refer to CoHE regulations, institutional regulations, and decisions regarding students with disabilities. It was found that some of the participants were not even aware of the presence of regulations, while others were aware of them but lacked knowledge of their content. While some of the participants expressed low self-efficacy regarding their knowledge of the regulations for students with disabilities, only one participant stated that they read the relevant CoHE regulations but had difficulty remembering the content (P1). In light of these findings, it appears that there is a need for instructors to receive information on all dimensions of the regulations.

The results also revealed that participants had limited information about institutional disability practices and were unsure where to access guidance. Some of the participants noted

that their main source of information was an email from the relevant unit, while others relied on what they had observed on campus. Overall, they described the process for identifying students with disabilities as unclear due to inconsistent communication regarding the roles and responsibilities across administrators, instructors, and support units. Therefore, several participants emphasized the need for training on disability types and on how to identify and respond to students' needs. One described the situation in their institution as follows: *"There is no specific training [on disability]. We do not have many things to identify their needs. We have found our way by trial and error and we move very slowly. We only take action on suspicions."* (P6)

In addition, participants reported that documentation of a student's disability status was largely handled through self-disclosure and, at times, teacher reporting. They described several barriers to identifying disability status and related needs such as unclear or inconsistently implemented institutional procedures, uncertainty about roles and responsibilities, and limited coordination between the institution and families. Participants also noted that stigma and shame surrounding disability could discourage disclosure and complicate communication with parents. Illustrating this point, one participant stated:

Rather than the students, the parents' attitude that has been developed over the years against this situation [documentation of disability status] is more important. Because parents have great concerns about this documentation, labeling and categorization can come back to haunt their children in their future professional lives after university. (P8, Key informant)

With regard to roles and responsibilities, it was observed that participants cannot provide clear definitions of their roles in the process of identifying students' disability status and needs. Therefore, they sometimes define their roles and responsibilities in smaller areas, such as mostly mentioning providing some tools and materials, or do not feel they have sufficient knowledge about the extent of their roles and responsibilities. However, all participants emphasized the importance of being informed about the students with disabilities and being in communication with administrators or other related units. Accordingly, some of the participants suggested some actions that need to be taken in order to improve institutional policies and practices, such as establishing a common understanding of disability practices, informing/guiding teachers about the needs of the students with disabilities and instructional procedures, and informing students to raise awareness about providing equal opportunities for students with disabilities.

Findings uncovered that needs assessment emerged as a recurring code in relation to identifying students' disability status through both administrative and teacher-led processes. Although participants highlighted needs assessment as an important step in addressing issues such as adjusting the teaching-learning environment and materials, limited examples of needs assessment methods were mentioned, such as questionnaires, surveys, and interviews.

Furthermore, under the theme of *identifying students' disability status and needs*, support services emerged as a sub-theme consisting of mentions for psychological support, social support, and financial support. It was found that the participants strongly emphasized the needs of the students with disabilities for additional support and individualized services considering the different types of disabilities. Even though the participants were able to give the general framework of the support, such as financial or social support, it was found that they

had difficulties, especially in the online learning process, to give specific examples of these kinds of support services that would be provided by institutions. For instance, one participant found it difficult to provide an example of social support for students with disabilities within the online teaching-learning process, explaining it with the following statements:

I mean, because it [the learning] is online, I do not know exactly what to do now in terms of the social aspect. If it were not online education, I would say orientation could be done to show the school. For now [during online learning], a special video can be presented related to the content of the course, but I do not know what to say. (P1)

Adjustments in Teaching and Learning

Adjustments in teaching and learning stood out as another major theme, consisting of three sub-themes: *instructional considerations*, *teacher attitudes*, and *assessment procedures* (see Table 3).

Table 3

Views on Adjustments in Teaching and Learning

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
Adjustments in teaching and learning	Instructional considerations	Instructional method Additional materials Technological aids/supports Training students with disabilities for ICT
	Teacher attitudes	Positive attitudes Flexible attitudes Inflexible attitude
	Assessment procedures	Individual assessment Enabling tool usage Adjusting the assessment materials Providing additional time

In relation to the instructional considerations, it was seen that some of the participants were knowledgeable about how to address diverse needs in their practices (i.e., adjusting instructional methods, giving additional materials, providing technological aids/supports, and training students with disabilities for ICT), but in general, they expressed their low self-efficacy in terms of incorporating potential inclusive practices.

Most participants highlighted the need for providing additional materials and/or adjusting the materials used in teaching-learning processes and mentioned about their usage of some methods to make these changes depending on the type of disability. However, their mention of adjusting materials was limited to some common practices, such as using subtitles in videos for students with hearing impairments and using larger fonts for students with visual impairments. An excerpt from the interviews follows:

When I find out that there is a student with a disability in the classroom, I think the simplest and easiest thing to do is to organize the materials we use according to them. If it is a deaf student, it could be something like preparing a presentation and adding a subtitle or text to the same presentation. Or, if it is a visually impaired student, it may

be something like describing and explaining everything we reflect visually. This again depends on the type of disability. (P2)

One such participant also spelled out the importance of conducting needs analysis in order to identify these students' needs and to make adjustments accordingly: *"At the very beginning of the teaching-learning process, a needs analysis should be done in relation to the needs of all students."* (P3)

The findings also revealed that some of the participants were aware of some tools used by students with disabilities (e.g., screencast-o-matic and earphones) and believed that such students need technological aid/support. However, it was found that most of them could not name any specific tools that can be used in online teaching-learning processes. Moreover, there were incidents in which the participants were not even aware of the existence of such tools.

In addition to providing technological aids/support to the students with disabilities, one of the participants emphasized the importance and necessity of training the students with disabilities for ICT, stating that:

It may be necessary for universities to provide these programs for free, etc., but the most basic thing is their [students'] access and technical information on how to use them (...) Therefore, tutorials can be provided. Technical knowledge, maybe with applied lectures, small workshops, and so on, could be provided to increase their [students'] competence in this aspect and improve their self-confidence while using it. (P5)

In relation to the teacher attitudes sub-theme, it was accentuated that the responses were grouped under three codes, namely *positive attitudes*, *flexible attitudes*, and *inflexible attitudes*. The analysis revealed that some participants highlighted the significance of possessing positive attitudes towards students with disabilities. Similarly, some of the participants emphasized the need to have flexible attitudes towards students with disabilities so as to provide them with equal opportunities and ensure equal access. This mainly indicates providing some flexibility and space for their practices to satisfy the needs of students with disabilities. On the other hand, it was seen that some participants had inflexible attitudes towards students with disabilities, which indicates treating them in the same way as any other student. One of the participants explained the difficulty of meeting the needs of the students with disabilities in their teaching as follows:

In one of my classes, a student of mine was mentally disabled. Since there was no separate environment for the mentally handicapped in universities, I had to teach them together with other students without disabilities. (...) We had problems with participation in the class, we had problems with following the class rules (...). I wanted to apply the same rules to them, but neither they nor their family could make it possible. I couldn't create the environment that I wanted. (P2)

Moreover, the sub-theme of assessment procedures was grouped under four codes: individual assessment, allowing students to use tools, adjusting assessment materials, and providing extra time. In the interviews, the participants repeatedly expressed the significance of adjusting the assessment process. For instance, one participant emphasized the need for training on how to address different needs in assessment procedures, as seen in the following excerpt:

It seems to me that the type of disability actually shapes the learning methods and materials (...) Instead of entrusting the disabled to one of the instructors by saying you have 15 minutes of extra time, I think it is necessary to inform the instructor about the disability and what the students can and cannot do. (P7, Key informant)

In relation to the adjustments made in the assessment process, some participants indicated that they provide individual assessment opportunities, adjust the assessment materials, and give additional time. Some participants also emphasized that to equalize students with disabilities with other students, they may allow them to use certain assistive tools during exams. Additionally, technological tools emerged as a way to provide students with feedback. Although participants mentioned why and how to make adjustments to assessment procedures, they generally had incidental or limited knowledge of these adjustments, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

In these speaking exams and writing exams, things like giving extra time are already used. But what can be done other than that is something that I can realize through the training I said I really need. Frankly, I can't find very creative solutions. (P6)

In conclusion, findings revealed the needs of preparatory school instructors who teach students with disabilities in higher education. Notably, these needs include improvements in the areas of the conceptions of inclusive education, the identification of students' disability status and needs, and adjustments in the teaching and learning processes. These needs were reflected in the instructors' responses, which primarily highlighted the challenges and limitations they face in both individual and institutional preparation and practice with respect to ensuring inclusion of students with disabilities in online environments.

Discussion

The efforts to promote inclusion of students with disabilities have increased, as reflected in initiatives led by the Students with Disabilities Commission under CoHE (e.g., Barrier-Free University Awards). Yet, significant challenges persist and students with disabilities continue to face difficulties in higher education. The pandemic has intensified these challenges as teaching and learning shifted rapidly to online environments. This transition has been particularly challenging for preparatory schools, which serve as the gateway for students entering their departments. Learning a foreign language online requires diverse cognitive and interactive processes. Therefore, the challenge for English instructors at preparatory schools becomes two-fold: adapting their lessons to online pedagogies without losing the communicative nature of language learning and keeping it accessible to students with disabilities. In this study, instructors' accounts highlighted two interconnected areas shaping inclusion: institutional arrangements, including regulations, role clarity, and pathways for identifying needs and coordinating support, and course-level practices, including accessible materials, assessment adjustments, and the use of assistive technologies in online teaching.

Several reports and literature (Koçak Tufan, 2021; Kunz et al., 2021; Sart et al., 2016) highlight the areas that need to be improved and significant steps to be taken regarding rising awareness of differences (Dignath et al., 2022), enabling support mechanisms to work effectively (Dignath et al., 2022), providing equal opportunities and access for students with disabilities (Alanazi & Gadelmawla, 2021) and adjusting teaching and learning processes (Papadopoulos et al., 2024). As foreign language instruction is a complex process with all these bodies embedded in it

relying heavily on interaction and sensory input, adopting an inclusive approach requires attention at every stage. Specifically, in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), inclusion is mostly about active participation in communicative activities. As a result, this adaptation includes training instructors, encouraging collaboration among stakeholders, establishing and maintaining support units, and ensuring that inclusivity is all reflected in the teaching and assessment processes.

CoHE and institutional regulations constitute the basis for all efforts held in universities. However, according to the findings of the current study, most of the participants were unaware of these regulations, suggesting a communication and implementation gap in institutional arrangements. This lack of awareness underscores the need for systematic training to familiarize instructors with the content of these regulations and prepare pre-service teachers for such gaps. It appears that English instructors often focus on linguistic competence and CEFR standards, potentially overlooking the institutional regulations regarding disability. Moreover, it was seen that the participants were not informed or trained in a systematic way by their institutions, as they mostly stated that they have incidental familiarity with the institutional policies and practices about students with disabilities. These findings align with prior research (EGED, 2019, 2020; Toutain, 2019), which highlights the importance of structured systems to inform instructors about their roles, responsibilities, and available resources.

Many studies referred not only to instructors' lack of awareness but also that of students with disabilities about the availability of resources or the disability resources office (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005; Finn, 1999; Lyman et al., 2016; Salzer et al., 2008; Toutain, 2019). Similarly, the absence of a disability resources office in universities, or the lack of awareness among instructors even when such offices exist, was one of the issues highlighted in this study as well. There is not a reported structured effort to guide instructors on how to use these offices even in rare cases where they exist, nor institutional policies aimed at raising awareness on a practical level. As preparatory school instructors are often first academic stakeholders to interact with the students and facilitate their transition to university life, their lack of knowledge about support offices creates a "broken link" at the very beginning of the students' academic journey. If an English instructor cannot refer a student to the correct office during the preparatory year, the student may struggle silently throughout their entire undergraduate education, meaning this lack has its reflections on the rest of the academic experience for the students.

The results indicated that participants were aware of how significant it is to provide equal opportunities for all students in relation to inclusivity, broadly defined in the most general sense as celebrating and valuing diversity including disability (see Hornby, 2014). However, their understanding of inclusive education seemed to exclude students with mental disabilities, which is against the fundamental principles of inclusiveness. Furthermore, it was evident that participants' accounts often relied on impairment-focused language and binary distinctions (e.g., "normal" versus "abnormal"), indicating that disability was frequently understood in individual terms rather than in relation to barriers created by teaching arrangements and institutional processes. In this regard, participants mostly defined disability within the frame of the medical model, which Oliver (1990) critiques as being rooted in an understanding of disability as an individual problem to be fixed. Such views focusing on barriers within individuals rather than addressing the systemic challenges perpetuate exclusion (Bunbury, 2020; Sart et al., 2016). Thus, the findings highlight a limited understanding of what disability entails and a need for a training program covering a conceptual framework for inclusive

education, inclusive curriculum, and disability, moving beyond a perspective focused on individual impairment.

The report by the EGED (2019) emphasized the need for adaptations in online teaching and learning processes to eliminate the difficulties experienced by students in relation to accessing and following the lessons. Some examples of common academic accommodations include letting students work with note-taking assistants, providing them extra time during evaluations, enabling them to tape-record classes, and/or assign interpreters for students with disabilities in higher education (Leuchovius, 2004). However, in the context of online language learning, accommodations must go beyond these basics. For an English instructor, this means ensuring that Learning Management Systems (LMS) are screen-reader friendly, live sessions have captioning for listening comprehension, and speaking exams are modified to reduce anxiety for students with specific impairments (e.g., stuttering, speech impairments, anxiety). Considering the importance of providing all students with equal opportunities and access to quality education, such adaptations are highly essential. To achieve this, instructional methods must be adjusted in such a way that no one, especially the students with disabilities, feels left out. The findings of this needs assessment revealed that most participants were not fully knowledgeable about the need to adjust instructional methods based on students' disability status and lacked sufficient information about how to implement these digital modifications effectively in an online language class. Similarly, while participants acknowledged the necessity of adapting materials and assessment procedures to provide equal opportunities for the students with disabilities, they mainly referred to a narrow set of commonly used adjustments (e.g., subtitles, larger fonts, extra time) and reported limited access to practical guidance on how to implement a wider range of accessibility measures effectively in online teaching and assessment. Supporting this observation, previous research highlights that staff working with students with disabilities often face significant challenges, exacerbated by evidence suggesting that faculty members may not fully comprehend the importance of providing necessary accommodations or the methods for doing so, leading to hesitancy or resistance in making required adjustments to courses and assessments (Cook et al., 2009; Hong, 2015). So, instructors should be equipped with the skills to develop and adjust materials and assessment procedures based on the type of disabilities their students have or might have. EGED (2019; 2020) suggests specific strategies, such as adding subtitles to videos, using contrast colors in the texts, and including written descriptions to visual materials. Similarly, assessment procedures should ensure accessibility to students with disabilities, including the use of simple language and verbal expressions in questions, additional time for exams, and supportive environments. These adjustments should be carried out through the cooperation of support units, students, and academics to make sure their effective implementation.

The findings of the study indicated the importance of conducting a needs analysis to explore the needs of students with disabilities and adjust teaching-learning processes accordingly. In a similar manner, EGED (2020) suggested that surveys should be conducted to follow the experiences of the students with disabilities and academics should be informed about their students. Considering its significance, all academics should be informed about the necessity of needs assessments so that they can get to know the students and their needs and make suitable adjustments accordingly. These findings further support the need to train faculty in inclusive pedagogy, in parallel to the findings of Collins et al. (2019), Shine and Stefanou (2022),

and Sniatecki et al. (2015), which show the faculty members' desire for professional development regarding the creation of inclusive environments.

EGED (2019) also mentioned the importance of informing academics about the support technologies used by students in their academic life. Although some of the participants of the present study were knowledgeable about some technological tools used by the students with disabilities, it was seen that most of them were not knowledgeable about the specific tools that can be used in online teaching-learning processes. For instance, awareness of tools specifically useful for language acquisition, such as text-to-speech for pronunciation practice or accessible digital dictionaries, was notably absent. The finding that most academics need systematic training and lack sufficient knowledge of assistive technology, especially in online learning environments, is supported by a number of studies (Choi et al., 2021; Christodoulidou & Sidiropoulou, 2024). Choi et al. (2021) emphasize the necessity of comprehending how teaching and learning are evolving in a digital learning environment and make recommendations for a potential restructuring of the educational and training programs offered to educators in order to enhance their professional competency in the digital era. Christodoulidou and Sidiropoulou (2024) also emphasize the need for systemic support and teacher training to enhance inclusivity in online education because the teachers' lack of preparation for creating inclusive, student-centered digital activities and delivering online lessons may have had a detrimental impact on students' learning experiences. Similarly, Papadopoulos and colleagues (2024) stated that faculty members' limited knowledge and experience with assistive technology typically leave students with disabilities without sufficient support. For instance, many teachers were unfamiliar with essential tools such as screen readers, text-to-speech devices, and image magnification software. The findings of the present study align with these observations, emphasizing the importance of professional development for educators to effectively integrate modern technologies into their teaching practices, especially in online learning environments where students with disabilities might be even more disadvantaged. Effective use of technology can provide students with more accessible and flexible ways to engage with the curriculum and complete assignments (Cao, 2022). Therefore, instructors need training about these technologies to ensure all students can fully participate in educational activities.

According to the research conducted by CoHE, only 39% of the participating universities prioritized improving the digital literacy of students with disabilities during online learning (Koçak Tufan, 2021). Similarly, the present study highlights the importance and necessity of providing ICT training for students with disabilities. Given the growing emphasis on leveraging technology to ensure equal opportunities, there is a need to enhance such students' digital literacy while simultaneously raising instructors/academics' awareness of this particular need.

Finally, teacher attitudes are highly essential in terms of providing equal opportunities and access to students. Studies emphasize that faculty members' views and beliefs about inclusion have a big impact on how they interact with students with disabilities and how they teach (Dignath et al., 2022; Kunz et al., 2021; Lane & Nagchoudhuri, 2015). Similarly, teachers who have good attitudes about inclusion are more likely to use instructional practices that meet the requirements of different learners, improving every student's educational experience (Alanazi & Gadelmawla, 2021; Dignath et al., 2022). On the other hand, it is seen that not all participants of the present study were aware of the importance of positive attitudes, and some of them had inflexible attitudes towards students with disabilities. In this regard, there is also a need to train

individuals about how to approach students with disabilities during teaching-learning processes. Research in teacher education indicates that rigid or negative attitudes frequently stem from apprehension and a perceived lack of efficacy (Muhammad & Liu, 2025; Shi et al., 2025). As a result, providing preparatory school instructors with professional training in inclusive online pedagogy may help them view inclusion as an inseparable part of their profession rather than an additional responsibility. With time, this may support a more natural integration of inclusive practices into everyday teaching practices.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of the study revealed the needs of preparatory school instructors in creating inclusive online learning environments for students with disabilities in higher education. Although instructors acknowledged the importance of equal access, teacher attitudes, and instructional adaptations, the study suggests that they need further support through institutional guidance, pedagogical knowledge, and practical strategies for promoting inclusion in online learning environments. The findings also point to the need for educational institutions to take greater responsibility for implementing systematic and practice-oriented professional development initiatives which equip instructors with necessary skills, knowledge, resources and support to address diverse learners' needs. Such initiatives should focus on inclusive instructional strategies, accessible digital resources, and pedagogical guidance that can be used in instructional practice. Professional development in this area needs to be more applied, enabling instructors work with concrete examples and context-sensitive strategies which can be easily utilized in their own teaching practices. In this regard, such approaches as flexible assessment practices, multimodal course design, clearer instructional support, and asynchronous learning opportunities may help reduce obstacles for students with disabilities in online courses. However, improving inclusivity for students with disability does not only depend on individual instructors' efforts or teaching practices; it also requires institutional awareness and a supportive academic culture in which inclusive practices are encouraged and positive faculty attitudes are supported.

As a result of study findings, the development of an online modular training program that is tailored by taking into consideration the needs of preparatory school instructors in promoting equal learning opportunities for all students in higher education. This study also provides valuable insights that can shape future research and practice. Thus, the findings emphasize the importance of embedding accessibility and inclusivity principles to ensure that online courses offer multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression, thereby addressing the diverse needs of learners.

The study aligns with the relevant literature pointing to the need for more structured professional training program on disability awareness and inclusive teaching in higher education and designing and implementing inclusive online learning environments. Many instructors still report feeling uncertain about how to support students with disabilities in online settings effectively. For this reason, professional development initiatives should be embedded within institutional professional development structures and closely connected to both curriculum and instructional practices. The data obtained from the needs analysis conducted here can serve as critical reference point for defining realistic learning outcomes and content that reflect instructors' actual classroom experiences.

The implementations of such future training programs should be piloted and systematically evaluated before broader dissemination or implementation. Moreover, institutions should revise their own professional development programs, carry out similar needs analyses within their own contexts, since the experiences of both instructors and students with disabilities may vary across settings. Instructors should be educated so that they can adapt materials, vary assessment methods, and improve online learning activities in online learning environment in higher education that are more inclusive, accessible, responsive and equitable.

While the study has some limitations, it still contributes to the existing literature on inclusive online learning by providing in-depth insights into preparatory school instructors' experiences and perspectives on supporting students with disabilities in online learning environments. Further research studies employing larger and more diverse samples, including multiple stakeholders perspective such as students with disabilities experiences, as well as adopting mixed-method research designs, could offer a more comprehensive understanding of effective inclusive practices in online learning environments. In addition, longitudinal research may also be useful in providing valuable insights into how inclusive practices evolve alongside pedagogical and technological developments.

Declarations

Author Contributions

Elif Tuğçe Gezer: Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, data collection, data analysis, writing and editing original draft, validation, interpretation, coordination and cooperation among the co-authors.

Hasan Şerif Baltacı: Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, data collection, data analysis, writing and editing original draft, validation and interpretation.

Funda Kelahmetoğlu Tunçer: Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, data collection, data analysis, writing and editing original draft, validation and interpretation.

Derya Şahin İpek: Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, data collection, data analysis, writing and editing original draft, validation and interpretation.

Dr. Begüm Erçakır Kozan: Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, data transcription, writing and editing original draft, validation and interpretation.

Prof. Dr. Cennet Engin: Validation, critical review of manuscript drafts, instruments, and overall content and structure.

Conflict of Interest

There is no personal or financial conflict of interest among the authors or participants of this study.

Disclosure of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use

We used OpenAI's ChatGPT only for grammar and language editing.

Availability of Data and Materials

The dataset used during this study is not publicly available due to ethical and confidentiality restrictions related to participant privacy but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Ethics Committee Approval

The authors declare compliance with the Personal Data Protection Law and copyright regulations concerning intellectual and artistic works. All personal data used in this study have been processed in accordance with legal and ethical guidelines, with the written consent of its participants. This study was approved by the Human Subjects Ethics Committee at the Middle East Technical University with the 266-ODTU-2021 protocol number on 23.06.2021.

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TÜRKÇE GENİŞ ÖZET

Yükseköğretimde Engelli Öğrenciler için Kapsayıcı Çevrim İçi Öğrenme: Bir İhtiyaç Değerlendirmesi

Giriş

Dünya genelinde, diğer eğitim seviyelerinde olduğu gibi üniversitelerde de farklı engellere sahip öğrencilerin sayısı artmakta ve bu durum, kapsayıcı eğitim uygulamalarının yaygınlaşmasına önemli ölçüde katkı sağlamaktadır (Moriña ve Perera, 2020). Engelli öğrencilerin yüksek öğrenime erişimleri, eğitime yönelik beklentilerini, yeteneklerini ve sosyo-duygusal becerilerini geliştirmek için kritik önem taşımaktadır (Fuller ve ark., 2004; Hurst, 1996). Bu nedenle, üniversiteler yüksek öğretimde erişilebilirliği artırmak amacıyla kapsayıcı stratejiler uygulamaya başlamıştır (Barnes, 2007; Riddell ve Weedon, 2014). Ancak çevrim içi öğrenme, zaman ve mekân sınırlamalarını ortadan kaldırarak erişimi kolaylaştırır da erişilebilir kaynak eksikliği gibi sorunlar devam etmektedir (Altunoğlu, 2020).

COVID-19 pandemisi bu zorlukları daha da belirgin hale getirerek çevrim içi eğitime hızlı bir geçişi zorunlu kılmıştır. Bu dönüşüm, dijital öğrenmenin eğitimin sürekliliğini sağlamadaki kritik rolünü ortaya koyduğu gibi, aynı zamanda engelli öğrenciler için mevcut engelleri de gözler önüne sermiştir. Teknolojinin sağladığı avantajlara rağmen, ders materyallerine erişimde zorluk ve kişiye özel destek eksikliği çevrim içi öğrenme ortamlarındaki temel sorunlar arasında yer almaya devam etmektedir.

Türkiye'de engellilik, eğitim alanında önemli toplumsal etkileri olan ciddi bir sorun olmaya devam etmektedir. Kapsayıcı eğitim ve farkındalık çalışmaları giderek artsa da (Yazıcıoğlu, 2020), engelli öğrenciler mesleki rehberlik eksikliği, sınırlı üniversiteye giriş desteği ve yetersiz fiziksel koşullar ve dijital kampüs erişilebilirliği gibi sorunlarla karşı karşıya kalmaktadır (Mutanga ve Walker, 2015; Piştav-Akmeşe, 2018; Sart ve ark., 2016). Birleşmiş Milletler Engellilik Kapsayıcılık Stratejisi (2020) ve UNESCO Küresel Eğitim İzleme Raporu (2021) gibi uluslararası çerçeveler dijital erişimi vurgulasa da çevrim içi eğitimde engeller devam etmektedir. Erişilemez ders materyalleri ve yetersiz destek bu sorunlardan bazılarıdır. Ayrıca, işitme engelliler için işaret dili tercümesi ve altyazı desteğinin eksikliği ile ölçme ve değerlendirme süreçlerinde yeterli düzenlemelerin yapılmaması bu sorunları daha da derinleştirmektedir (Dumitru, 2023; Kent, 2015; Koçak Tufan, 2021).

Eğitmciler, bu sorunları ele alarak engelli öğrencilerin çevrim içi eğitime etkili bir şekilde entegre edilmesini sağlama konusunda yadsınamaz bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu durum, özellikle hazırlık okullarında İngilizce dersleri veren öğretim elemanları için çok önemlidir, çünkü bu öğretim elemanlarının, öğrencilerin ihtiyaçlarını erken safhada belirleyerek bunlara yanıt verme imkânları vardır. Ancak, Türkiye'deki öğretmen yetiştirme programlarında bilişim teknolojileri becerilerine ve teknoloji entegrasyonuna yeterince önem verilmemesi, çoğu öğretmenin çevrim

içi öğretime tam anlamıyla hazırlıklı olmamasına neden olmuştur (OECD, 2020). Bu durum, kapsayıcı eğitime yönelik ilgisizliğin de eklenmesiyle pandemi süresince hem öğretim elemanlarını hem de engelli öğrencileri olumsuz etkilemiştir.

Daha geniş çaplı bir çevrim içi hizmet içi eğitim programı geliştirme projesinin parçası olarak, hazırlık okullarında görev yapan öğretim elemanlarının karşılaştığı zorlukları daha iyi anlamak amacıyla gerçekleştirilen bu çalışma, engelliliği büyük ölçüde çevresel, kurumsal ve toplumsal engellerin ürettiğini vurgulayan sosyal modelden (Oliver, 1990) yararlanmaktadır. Çalışma, çevrim içi katılımın bireysel destek gereksinimleri ile öğrenme ortamının koşullarının etkileşimiyle şekillendiğini kabul etmektedir. Öte yandan, kapsayıcı eğitim, engelli öğrenciler de dahil olmak üzere tüm öğrencilerin uygun desteklerle normal sınıflarda eğitim almalarını sağlar (Saloviita, 2020). Kapsayıcı bir eğitim programı, öğrenci çeşitliliğini tanır ve hem öğretmenler hem de öğrenciler arasında farkındalık oluşturulmasını gerektirir (Morgan ve Houghton, 2011; Stentiford ve Koutsouris, 2022).

Bu bağlamda, mevcut çalışma aşağıdaki araştırma sorularına cevap aramıştır:

1. Hazırlık okullarında görev yapan öğretim elemanlarının, çevrim içi eğitimde engelli öğrencileri desteklemeye yönelik mevcut düzenlemeler ve uygulamalar hakkında sahip olduğu bilgiler nelerdir?
2. Hazırlık okullarında görev yapan öğretim elemanları engelli öğrenciler için çevrim içi öğretim, öğrenme ve öğretme durumları ve ölçme ve değerlendirme süreçlerini iyileştirmek için nelere ihtiyaç duymaktadır?

Yöntem

Bu çalışma, hazırlık okullarında görev yapan öğretim elemanlarının ihtiyaçlarını daha iyi anlamak ve engelli öğrenciler için çevrim içi öğretimin zorluklarıyla başa çıkmalarını sağlayacak hizmet içi eğitim programları oluşturmak amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışmada, nitel bir yaklaşım benimsenmiş ve birincil yöntem olarak yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme protokolü kullanılmıştır. Yarı yapılandırılmış birebir görüşmeler, katılımcıların belirli bir olguya ilişkin bakış açılarını belirlemeye yardımcı olduğu için (Patton, 1990), bu programın potansiyel hedef kitlesi olan hazırlık okulu öğretim elemanları ve kurumlarında idari roller üstlenen anahtar kişilerle görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Bu görüşmeler, böyle bir eğitim programına ihtiyaç olup olmadığını değerlendirmek için gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Bu bağlamda, kapsamlı bir literatür taraması yapılmış ve hazırlık okulunda görev yapan öğretim elemanlarının engelli öğrencilere destek olma konusundaki farkındalığını, bilgisini ve uygulamalarını keşfetmek ve eğitim ihtiyaçlarını belirlemek için iki yarı yapılandırılmış mülakat protokolü hazırlanmıştır. Çalışmanın onayı, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi İnsan Araştırma Etik Kurulu'ndan 23.06.2021 tarih ve 266-ODTU-2021 protokol numarası ile alınmıştır.

Çalışmanın örneklemini, Ankara, Türkiye'de bulunan iki vakıf üniversitesinin Yabancı Diller Bölümlerinde yönetici pozisyonunda görev yapan iki akademisyen ile bu üniversitelerin hazırlık okullarında görevli altı öğretim elemanı oluşturmaktadır. Katılımcılar, öğretim alanında 4 ila 16 yıl arasında deneyime sahiptir. Beş katılımcı sırasıyla İngilizce Öğretmenliği, Eğitim Programları ve Öğretim, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı, Eğitimde İnsan Kaynakları Gelişimi ve Avrupa Çalışmaları ve Uluslararası İlişkiler alanlarında yüksek lisans derecesine sahiptir ve üç katılımcı ise çalışmanın

yapıldığı sırada İngilizce Öğretmenliği veya İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı alanında yüksek lisans yapmaktaydı.

Bulgular

Verilerin analizi sonucunda üç tema ortaya çıkmıştır: kapsayıcı eğitim kavramları, öğrencilerin engellilik durumunu ve ihtiyaçlarını belirleme ve öğretim-öğrenme süreçlerinde uyarlamalar.

Kapsayıcı eğitim kavramları iki alt temadan oluşmaktadır: kapsayıcılık ve engellilik. Katılımcılar, tüm öğrencilere eşit fırsatlar sağlanmasının önemini vurgulamışlardır. Ancak bazıları, kapsayıcı eğitimin yalnızca zihinsel engeli olmayan öğrenciler için uygun olabileceğini belirtmiştir.

Ortaya çıkan bir diğer tema, öğrencilerin engellilik durumunu ve ihtiyaçlarını belirlemedir ve iki alt temadan oluşmaktadır: politikalar ve uygulamalar ile destek hizmetleri. Bulgular, katılımcıların kurumsal uygulamalara ilişkin bilgi ve aşinalıklarının yetersiz olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, yöneticilerin, öğretmenlerin ve destek birimlerinin rollerinin ve sorumluluklarının net bir şekilde tanımlanmadığı düzensiz bir sistemin var olduğu ifade edilmiştir. Katılımcılar, genel destek çerçevesini belirleyebilmiş ancak özellikle çevrim içi öğrenme sürecinde kurumsal destek hizmetlerine ilişkin örnekler vermekte zorlanmışlardır.

Son olarak, öğretim ve öğrenme süreçlerinde yapılan uyarlamalar üç alt temadan oluşmaktadır: öğretim ile ilgili hususlar, öğretmen tutumları ve değerlendirme prosedürleri. Bazı katılımcılar, farklı öğrenci ihtiyaçlarına yönelik uygulamalarda nasıl hareket edileceği konusunda bilgi sahibi olsalar da kapsayıcı uygulamaları dahil etme konusunda düşük öz-yeterlik hissettiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Bazıları, engelli öğrencilerin eşit erişim ve fırsatlara sahip olmalarını sağlamak için esnekliğin gerekliliğini vurgulamış, değerlendirme uygulamalarına dair örnekler vermiştir. Fakat, bu uyarlamalar hakkındaki bilgilerinin sınırlı veya tesadüfi olduğu görülmüştür.

Tartışma

YÖK'ün Engelli Öğrenciler Komisyonu ve Engelsiz Üniversite Ödülleri gibi girişimleri, engelli öğrencilerin yükseköğretime dâhil edilmesine yönelik çabaların arttığını göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, çevrim içi öğretime geçişle birlikte bu konudaki zorluklar daha da belirginleşmiştir. İyileştirme gereken temel alanlar arasında farkındalığın artırılması, destek mekanizmalarının güçlendirilmesi, eşit erişim ve öğretim uygulamalarının uyarlanması yer almaktadır (örn. Koçak Tufan, 2021; Sart ve ark., 2016; Dignath ve ark., 2022; Papadopoulos ve ark., 2024).

Mevcut düzenlemeler bir zemin sunsa da katılımcıların destek hizmetleri ve kurumsal düzenlemelere ilişkin farkındalığı sınırlı kalmıştır. Yöneticiler, öğretmenler ve destek birimleri arasındaki rol belirsizlikleri ile kurumsal desteğe ilişkin somut örneklerin sınırlı olması, ihtiyaçların belirlenmesi, yönlendirme ve destek koordinasyonu için daha açık ve yapılandırılmış mekanizmalara ihtiyaç olduğunu göstermektedir (EGED, 2019, 2020; Toutain, 2019). Bunun yanında, katılımcılar fırsat eşitliğinin önemini kabul etseler de kapsayıcılığı sınırlı biçimde yorumlamış, zaman zaman zihinsel engelli öğrencileri dışarıda bırakmış ve engelliliği daha çok bireysel yetersizlikler üzerinden ele almışlardır. Bu durum, engelliliği bireysel bir sorun olarak

gören tıbbi modelle örtüşmekte (Bunbury, 2020; Oliver, 1990) ve kapsayıcı eğitime ilişkin kavramsal çerçevenin daha güçlü biçimde ele alınmasına ihtiyaç olduğunu göstermektedir.

Ayrıca, katılımcıların çevrim içi öğretime ilişkin bilgi ve öz-yeterliklerinin de sınırlı kaldığı görülmüştür; düzenlemeler çoğunlukla altyazı, büyük punto ve ek süre gibi temel önlemlerle sınırlı kalmıştır. Bu bulgu, sınırlı bilginin uygulamadaki tereddütlerle ilişkili olduğunu gösteren araştırmalarla örtüşmektedir (Cook ve ark., 2009; Hong, 2015; Choi ve ark., 2021; Christodoulidou ve Sidiropoulou, 2024; Papadopoulos ve ark., 2024). Bulgular ayrıca, öğretim uyarlamalarına yön vermede ihtiyaç analizinin önemini ve kapsayıcı pedagoji konusunda öğretim elemanlarının mesleki eğitim ihtiyacını ortaya koymaktadır (örn. EGED, 2020; Shine ve Stefanou, 2022). Özellikle çevrimiçi yabancı dil öğretiminde materyal, ölçme-değerlendirme ve dijital araçların erişilebilir biçimde düzenlenmesi önemlidir.

Son olarak, öğretmen tutumları kritik öneme sahiptir. Olumlu tutumlar daha etkili kapsayıcı uygulamalarla ilişkilendirilirken, olumsuz ya da esnek olmayan bakış açıları kapsayıcılığı engelleyebilmektedir (örn. Dignath ve ark., 2022; Alanazi ve Gadelmawla, 2021; Muhammad ve Liu, 2025). Bu çalışmada da daha kapsayıcı yaklaşımlarla daha katı tutumlar bir arada görülmüştür. Bu nedenle, eşitlikçi öğrenme ortamlarını desteklemek için kapsayıcı çevrim içi pedagojiye yönelik hedefli eğitim temel bir gereklilik olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

Sonuç ve Öneriler

Bu çalışma, hazırlık okullarında görev yapan öğretim elemanlarının engelli öğrenciler için kapsayıcı öğrenme ortamları oluşturma konusundaki ihtiyaçlarını ortaya koymaktadır. Adil erişim, öğretmen tutumları ve uyarlama stratejileri önemli olarak kabul edilse de öğretim elemanlarının bilgi düzeyindeki eksiklikler, belgelendirme süreçlerindeki aksaklıklar ve öğretmen farkındalığındaki yetersizlikler devam etmektedir. Bu durum, kurumların kapsamlı mesleki gelişim programları oluşturmalarının aciliyetini vurgulamaktadır.