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Adult Migrants as SEND Learners: Reframing Inclusion in ESOL Classrooms

Ozlem Isik*

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ABSTRACT

Overlapping challenges related to language acquisition, cultural adaptation, and diverse learning needs are some of the issues adult migrant learners face in English as a Second Language (ESOL) classrooms, which also include Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). However, the area of inclusion in the adult ESOL provision is under theorised and understudied. The present paper explores the conceptualisation and practice of inclusion by ESOL professionals who teach adult migrants and provides a reformulated perspective to the conceptualisation and implementation of inclusion within the framework of Reframe-Redesign- Respond. Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations in adult learning centres in England through the qualitative research design. The results indicate that the concept of inclusion is a process and relational concept and not a policy construct. The concept of inclusion developed by practitioners is based on the idea of inclusion as an ethical promise grounded in empathy and recognition, aligning with the standards of Universal Design for Learning and trauma-informed pedagogy. Nonetheless, both institutional constraints (such as disjointed SEND policies, insufficient funding, and digital inequities) limit the ideal implementation of inclusive practices. The research arrives at the conclusion that not only the pedagogical innovation is necessary in inclusive ESOL provision but also structural reform and policy coherence. This study, by redefining inclusion as a relational, intersectional and transformative process, will help understand better how adult migrant education can be used to promote social justice and fair engagement in lifelong learning.

INTRODUCTION

Adult migrants have been found to be one of the most linguistically, cognitively and socially diverse populations in the education system of England. In addition to being the entry point into the language, English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) providing is also a critical component of social and economic inclusion (Morrice *et al.*, 2021). However, the learning profiles of the adult migrants are very complicated and are underestimated when the educational needs are presented only in terms of language acquisition or the lack of language. This would be a limited perspective in which cognitive, emotional, and socio-cultural variables, including unidentified Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), influence the trajectories of learning. Practically, most adult migrants exhibit the features of dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum conditions, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or mild impaired thinking (Flanagan, 2025). When they are combined with linguistic obstacles, disrupted education, and trauma, the threat of educational marginalisation becomes even higher.

The ESOL programmes in adult education have been mainly focused on linguistic achievement and on employability indicators, which is indicative of funding accountability systems instead of on the overall development of the learner (Long & Roberts, 2024). This instrumental orientation can unwillingly overrule those learners who may have obstacles beyond grammar and

vocabulary, include neurodiversity, emotional regulation, and well-being (Spada & Lightbown, 2022). Replacing the pathologically conceived adult migrants with the potential SEND learners does not humanise difference but humanises it. It acknowledges the idea that inclusive design, as based on universal accessibility, gains the good of all learners by lowering systemic barriers and creating engagement (Sewell *et al.*, 2022). Such reconceptualisation goes hand in hand with the principle of Universal Design to Learning (UDL), which proposes various ways of engagement, representation, and expression to support the needs of different learners (Roski *et al.*, 2024).

These educational disparities were revealed and increased by the COVID-19 pandemic. A study by Nash (2025) and Siegel *et al.* (2021) revealed that the disproportionate impact of the abrupt transition to remote learning was seen on learners with low digital literacy, lacked access to devices, and those with low socio-emotional support. Such disruptions used to lead to complete uninterrupted engagement in learning in adult migrants with undiagnosed SEND (Nash, 2025; Siegel *et al.*, 2021). Most of them were deprived of both language education and social and emotional support systems that ESOL classrooms tend to offer (Field, 2024). The pandemic therefore brought to the fore a basic fact that educational inclusion is not independent of digital inclusion (Treanor & Troncoso, 2023).

At the policy level, the inclusion is reestablished as both a statutory and moral duty by the SEND Code of Practice

¹ Department of Education, College of Business, Arts, and Social Sciences, Brunel University of London, UK

* Corresponding author's e-mail: ozlemisik11@outlook.com

(Fleming, 2021) and the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan (Lamb, 2025). However, the provision of adult ESOL is often not included in these structures and thus forming a grey area of unmet need as coined by policy analysts (Long & Roberts, 2024). Children and the youth are lucky to have well-established systems of SEND identification and support, but adults, especially migrants, still tend to be invisible in policy and practice. This disjunction exposes a systemic blind spot the belief that inclusion is either about childhood education or a remedial service but is not something that is an endless right.

The paradigm shifts to include ESOL must therefore be restructured to take the form of anticipatory design rather than reactive design. Educators and institutions should incorporate inclusive and trauma-informed practices at the first stage, instead of waiting until the learners reveal their diagnosis or show signs of deficits (Gibson, 2025). These practices involve the provision of multimodal materials, prediction routines, reduction of triggers and flexibility of assessment and participation. It is based on the five foundational principles of trauma-informed education, namely safety, trustworthiness, empowerment, collaboration, and cultural responsiveness (Watson & Astor, 2025), which will be utilized to provide adults with migrants with the emotional safety necessary to learn and recover concurrently.

Moreover, the concept of inclusion cannot be detached and issues of equity, intersectionality, and power. According to Collins *et al.* (2021), people tend to have various, intersecting types of disadvantage that cannot be perceived alone. In the case of a migrant who has poor English and is unable to be diagnosed with dyslexia, e.g., a woman, the exclusion might take both the linguistic and the cognitive route (Collins *et al.*, 2021). It is difficult to ignore this intersectionality and require inclusion policy and practice in ESOL to take into consideration the cumulative impacts of migration status, language proficiency, disability, gender, and socio-economic precarity. The threat of invisibility is especially great to learners with SEND features whose needs are masked by the language barrier or the cultural stigma of disability (Pöyhönen & Simpson, 2024).

Recent changes in the Adult Skills Fund (ASF) reforms (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2024-25) and devolution of funding to Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) allow new possibilities of integrating the inclusion in local ESOL provision. There is contextualised innovation, including the inclusion of bilingual support, co-located welfare services, and inclusive digital learning, but these reforms also have a tendency to be disruptive because of fragmentation and inconsistency (AoC, 2025). The lack of strong accountability and signs of inclusion can make learners with SEND-related needs still fall through the cracks of provision.

It is against this backdrop that the present article suggests that inclusion in ESOL has to be re-framed in three

inter-connected perspectives namely- Reframe, Redesign, and Respond. Reframing is an action that will cause a change of a deficit-focused perception of learners to a more normalising diversity approach, where difference is seen as a strength (Ainscow, 2025). Redesign involves the integration of the concepts of Universal Design of Learning (UDL) and digital accessibility into the curriculum, materials and assessment. The answer must involve trauma-informed and empathetic pedagogy which acknowledges the realities of the emotions and cognition of displacement, neurodiversity and adjustment (Barnes *et al.*, 2025).

Finally, the transformation of inclusion in English-speaking language classes is not only a teaching option, but also an ethical and social necessity. It is a demonstration of a belief that adult migrants are not intended to be passive members of the integration policy but active subjects in their own education and community creation. Through a SEND-informed and trauma-conscious approach, teachers and policy-makers will be able to shift to an inclusion model that allows fostering dignity, equity, and belonging. The following sections are based on this introduction as they describe the conceptual grounds, policy environment, and practice implementation of this redefined approach, and finally the Reframe-Redesign-Respond model as a framework of future practice and research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Migration, disability and adult education as an intersection point has become a central point of discussion of inclusive pedagogy within the discipline of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The fact that adult migrants have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is not only a moral requirement but also a pedagogical challenge. Other researchers Ainscow (2025) maintain that inclusion stretches further than the act of physical incorporation in the mainstream classrooms to include equal involvement and access to learning opportunities. In adult ESOL settings, however, there is the complexity of including migrant learners due to aspects specific to migrants, such as cultural diversity, language barriers, educational discontinuities, and traumatic or displacement experiences (Pöyhönen & Simpson, 2024). The presence of these overlapping factors explains why there is a need to adopt a subtler interpretation of inclusion that goes beyond the disability-centric focus of the field and places SEND into the context of the general social, linguistic, and migratory experience of learners.

Besides, the concept of inclusive education in the world discussion has long focused on children and mandatory schooling, and adult education remains a relatively understudied phenomenon (Amor *et al.*, 2019). Although the United Nations sustainable development goal 4 focuses on lifelong learning and making education equally accessible to everyone, there is still an unequal practical implementation among adults and more so adults in language education. Adult ESOL classrooms in many

cases work within unfavorable financial environments and stringent accountability systems that focus on the language acquisition results rather than personalized care (Sidaway, 2023). Therefore, there is under-identification or over-categorization of SEND-related needs, i.e. in the form of linguistic deficiency. This conflation does not only contribute to the obscurement of the existence of learning differences but also to a deficit perspective of learners who fail to achieve typical levels of linguistic advancement (Wang *et al.*, 2021). In this way, the literature is always marked with a contradiction between the principles of inclusive education and the structural realities of ESOL provision.

Besides this, research into the interface of disability and language learning demonstrates that there are systemic barriers to participation. As Migrants (2023) point out, adult migrants who have undiagnosed learning problems, including dyslexia or auditory processing disorders, are at risk of being misunderstood about their problems as failure to work or lack of motivation (Migrants *et al.*, 2023). Such assumptions may put learners off and lower the self-efficacy that is essential to the success of adult learning (Graham, 2022). In addition, disability has vast cultural perceptions that are different in every society and affect the way migrant learners self-identify and seek assistance (Duda-Mikulin & Glowacka, 2024). As an example, disability can be stigmatized or even conceptualized in religious or moral terms in some cultures, and thus needs can be unwilling to be disclosed. Thus, teachers should not just have a learning disability perspective that is enacted institutionally in the West, but be sensitive to the cultural constructs that define the identity and learning habits of learners.

Changing the cultural focus, one can see that the inclusive ESOL pedagogy needs the teachers to introduce the principles of universal design of learning (UDL), which accommodates the diversity in cognitive, linguistic and sensory processing (Chamo & Yarom-Cohen, 2025). According to research, adaptive teaching methods including multimodal instruction, visual aids, differentiated assessment, and collaborative learning can be used not only with SEND students, but with all students in bilingual classrooms (Rajak & Dey, 2025). However, the teachers are not always trained or supported by the institutions to use such methods. Research by Mathai (2025) indicates that the training of ESOL teachers often does not include much information about SEND, and the practitioners must resort to informal experimentation related to the inclusive approach instead of the systematic development (Mathai, 2025). Such policy/practice discrepancy supports a piecemeal conception of inclusion, in which good intentions are compromised by lack of pedagogic models.

The other aspect that underpins in the literature is the emotional and psychological aspect of learning among adult SEND migrants. Most of the adult learners have complex histories in their lives, such as forced migration, socio-economic crisis, and loss of professional identity.

The expression of these experiences can include anxiety, lack of confidence or post-traumatic stress, which affects the process of language acquisition (Schiess-Jokanovic *et al.*, 2021). Inclusive pedagogy should thus not be limited to the cognitive adaptation, but should also cover the emotional and relational aspects. In this respect, the ethos of care and empathy will be a part of inclusive teaching (Makweya & Sepadi, 2025). The ability of teachers to create non-judgmental, supportive classroom conditions helps learners to take linguistic risks and regain confidence in their learning abilities. This kind of affective inclusion is also close to the theme of dialogical education, defined by Freire (1970), with a teacher learner relationship based on respect, reciprocity and empowerment (Fields *et al.*, 2022).

In addition, studies show that institutional and systemic frameworks are also important in influencing the results of inclusion. Adult ESOL education funding policies, curriculum design, and testing systems tend to focus on employability and functional literacy with limited opportunities of differentiated or therapeutic pedagogies (Tavares, 2022). Consequently, accommodation to SEND learners might not be provided adequately, and their development might be measured using the wrong standardized measures. This structural rigidity highlights why it is necessary to have an inclusive policy change that allows adaptation to the realities of adult migrant. These systemic gaps can be bridged by integrating a systemic approach to disabilities service provision and community organizations and including more holistically through interagency cooperation between ESOL providers and disability services (Kuneva & Hough, 2023).

Altogether, the literature describes inclusion in the adult ESOL as a multidimensional construct that involves pedagogical, cultural, emotional and structural factors. It is agreed that inclusion should not be regarded as an external problem or an extra burden but as one of the primary postulates of adult education practice. Reframing inclusion entails the recognition of intersectionality between migration and disability, providing educators with competencies related to inclusion, and making institutional structures truly facilitating accessibility and equity. Inclusive education does not flourish in a homogenous environment but in a responsive one, as Brown (2025) both stress that difference is an asset, a source of learning, but not a hindrance to it (Brown, 2025).

Considering these views, the literature has jointly expressed the need of a paradigm shift by ensuring that a new approach to inclusive practices in ESOL classrooms is grounded on transformative inclusion. This change implies the abandonment of minimal accommodations in favor of a culture that acknowledges diversity as the key to effective pedagogy. Such reframing is a prerequisite of education and a re-establishment of the rights to meaningful participation and lifelong learning to adult migrant SEND learners.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This research will use a qualitative interpretivist approach to research design to address how inclusive education is conceptualised, practiced, and experienced when providing adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in England during the period between 2010 and 2025. Interpretivist paradigm has been selected since inclusion, language learning, and equity are socially constructed phenomena, and only through the meanings that people give to their experiences can be comprehended. The research does not test hypotheses; instead, it attempts to shed light on the ways in which inclusion is understood by the practitioners, policymakers, and learners in practice.

The study design combines two complementary approaches to research: document review and a semi-structured interview. The analysis of documents makes it possible to study the progress of inclusive education in the official policy frameworks, whereas the interviews will help to understand the process of inclusion operationalisation and experience in every-day ESOL classrooms. This multi-level structure allows the maintenance of balance between the macro-level interpretation of the policy and the micro-level classroom realities, and the adult ESOL landscape is observed in a holistic manner. It is an exploratory study that indicates the scanty amount of literature on the connection between SEND, migration and adult ESOL learning in England.

Data Collection

Two primary sources, namely documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews with ESOL practitioners, programme managers and adult learners, were utilized to collect data. The policy documents and statutory documents, such as the SEND Code of Practice, SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, and the

Equality Act (2010), are analyzed in the documentary. Also, the frameworks of funding like Adult Skills Fund (ESFA, 2024-25) and the Multiply Programme (Education, 2022) were evaluated to understand the influence of funding priorities on inclusiveness of adult learning. The reports of Ofsted (2023), British Council (2025), and Association of Colleges (2025) were also analyzed in order to find out trends in the provision of inclusive ESOL services (AoC, 2025; Council, 2025; Ofsted, 2023). The selection of the documents was done purposely to include balance based on policy, institutional, and practitioner views.

Regarding the interviews, a goal of purposive sampling was to achieve a variety of voices in varying ESOL situations. The twelve ESOL practitioners, four programme managers and ten adult learners were all participants registered in publicly funded ESOL programmes in Greater London, West Midlands and Yorkshire. Practitioners were sampled based on their experience in adult literacy and SEND-inclusive teaching whereas learners were sampled to exercise diverse educational and linguistic experiences, including those with unidentified differences in learning or other stressors such as trauma or technological disadvantage.

The interviews were conducted either online with the use of Microsoft Teams or in person depending on the preference of the participants. The semi-structured format provided flexibility in undergoing personal experience, but kept the focus group on the same subject matter including policy interpretation, classroom inclusion strategies, and barriers to accessibility. Central to the questions that were addressed through learner interviews included perceptions of belonging, engagement, and support mechanisms, and practitioners talked about the challenges that organizations encounter and how they should perceive inclusive pedagogy. Table 1 shows the profiles of participants and their experiences.

Table 1: Participants and Institutional Profiles

Participant ID	Role	Institution Type	Teaching Experience (Years)	Noted SEND Experience	Class Size	Mode of Delivery
P1	ESOL Lecturer	Adult Community Centre	7	Dyslexia, ADHD	15	In-person
P2	ESOL Tutor	FE College	10	Autism Spectrum	18	Hybrid
P3	Learning Support Assistant	Community NGO	4	Language Delay	12	In-person
P4	ESOL Coordinator	Local Authority Centre	12	Multiple SEND Profiles	20	Online
P5	Volunteer Tutor	Refugee Learning Hub	2	No formal training	10	In-person

Data Analysis

The data were analysed through the six-phase thematic analysis method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) who give a systematic and flexible way of identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns among qualitative

data. The process has started by reading the transcripts and policy texts multiple times to develop familiarity. These early concepts would slowly be classed into larger understanding of groups of fundamental problems that included; hidden learning needs, policy-practice

disconnect and pedagogical adaptations to inclusion. After identifying the key themes, they are analysed within the framework of the concept of the study- Reframe, Redesign, Respond (as seen in Figure 1) inclusion was put in the context of an ongoing process of identifying various needs, redesigning pedagogical frameworks, and responding to them through equitable and flexible strategies.

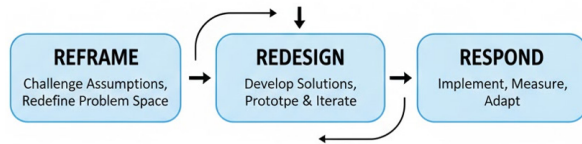


Figure 1: Dendrogram of keywords evolution

Similarly, it was applied in the analysis of the documents and included the language of the policy, funding mechanisms and institutional directives. Inter-weaving of interview and policy information made the study to relate the personal experiences to the systemic structures and this brought out the interaction between national policy discourse and classroom realities

Triangulation, Reliability and validity

The focus of the research design was to guarantee the credibility and the trustworthiness of the findings. To determine a validity, the study used a combination of several types of triangulation that utilized documents, practitioners, and learners data. This triangulation methodology enabled the confirmation of the results of various approaches that enhanced the internal coherence of meanings. Member checking was done on the chosen participants to confirm the correctness of transcripts of interviews and the initial thematic take. This involvement validation made sure that the interpretations made by the researcher were accurate representation of the intended meanings of the participants. Also the application of thick description contributed to transferability by giving comprehensive contextual data of participants, institutions and policy environments.

Reliability was also strengthened by a systematic audit trail that was used to record important methodological decisions, coding iterations and reflective memos. The journal of self-reflection kept by the researcher acted as a way of self-criticism and noted down assumptions, emotions and biases that may affect interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results that came out of the analysis of documents and semi-structured interviews with the ESOL practitioners, programme managers and adult learners. The data are structured and analysed based on the Reframe-Redesign-Respond framework that was built in this paper and that covers 3 intertwined dimensions of inclusion: (1) the conceptualisation and perception of inclusion (Reframe), (2) the way the inclusive pedagogical and institutional

practices are designed and operated (Redesign), and (3) the way educators and institutions respond and adapt to the changing needs of learners (Respond). The results reveal both the systemic and experience-based approach, and inclusive education of adult migrants with SEND is practiced in the English ESOL environment.

Reframe: Adult ESOL Inclusion Perceptions

The first analytical dimension, which is Reframe, examines the definition and meaning of inclusion to practitioners and learners in ESOL environments. Inclusion is formally formulated in the policy documents that include SEND Code of Practice (Education, 2022) and Equality Act (2010) as inclusive access and participation of all learners (Gov, 2010). Yet, the interpretations of the participants showed a more complicated and situated meaning, influenced by their professional life and the various experiences of the learners in life.

A number of practitioners were linking inclusion with differentiation and flexibility as opposed to official diagnosis. They stated that inclusive practice in ESOL is not about labelling; it is about identifying obstacles, linguistic, emotional or cognitive and managing them. This opinion is consistent with the claim of Norwich (2023) that inclusion should be responsive to the profiles of learners instead of being restricted to categorical definitions of disability. The practitioners had often observed that the learning difficulties of numerous adult learners were so hidden or undiagnosed, particularly in migrants with disrupted education history or trauma (Norwich, 2023). As one tutor reflected: “One of my learners has never been tested to identify his/her learning requirements in the past; instead, s/he just believes that he/she is a bad English student, but frequently, there is more to it, such as dyslexia or anxiety.”

This implication suggests the general redefinition of inclusion as ethos of recognition as opposed to an issue of procedures compliance. Nevertheless, the analysis of the documents showed tension between such a practitioner-based interpretation and the official policy wording that tends to assume some school-centered model of SEND identification and support. Such adult education policies as the Adult Skills Fund (ESFA, 2024-25) often omit any stated mechanisms of SEND assessment in ESOL provision, and it is left to institutional choice. This means that the inclusion of adults in ESOL is mostly constrained by the level of practitioner consciousness and institutional ability and not by systemic consistency. Interviews with learners also revealed that inclusion can be experienced with relations. Multiple learners explained that they felt seen and or supported when tutors were patient, employed various teaching methods, or were able to recognize their emotional feelings. One of the learners said that his or her teacher knows when one of them needed more time... she assists without making them feel different. These reactions emphasize the significance of empathy and relational pedagogy as the inclusion practices (Amor *et al.*, 2019). However, others

have also claimed that they have felt ignored or sidelined in the process of learning because of the inaccessibility of learning resources or the unfriendly nature of digital learning platforms. Such results indicate that inclusion in the ESOL setting is a construction that is both

emotional and pedagogical in nature based on the human relationship but limited by the barriers of institutional and technological structures. Table 2 summarises the perspectives of practitioners and learners.

Table 2: Summary of Practitioner and Learner Perspectives on Inclusion (Reframe Dimension)

Theme	Practitioner Perspective	Learner Experience	Illustrative Quote
Definition of Inclusion	Flexibility, differentiation, empathy	Feeling supported, recognised	“She helps without making us feel different.”
Barriers to Inclusion	Hidden/undiagnosed SEND, limited funding	Inaccessible materials, digital exclusion	“I can’t use the online class—it’s too hard to log in.”
Policy-Implementation Gap	School-focused frameworks, unclear SEND procedures	Uneven support across centres	“Support depends on the teacher, not the system.”

Redesign

Inclusive Pedagogy and Institutional Adaptation

The Redesign dimension focuses on how schools and teachers redesign their curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in the light of the needs of different students. Included in the studied institutions was evidence of increased awareness on inclusive practice, but a great difference in practice.

Practitioners explained how they adjusted materials in ways that enhanced learning to be more visual, multimodal and contextualised. Some of the strategies involved pictorial aids, simplified language scaffold, peer learning, and task-based activities that encouraged collaboration and confidence. Tutors also emphasized the principles of Universal Design of Learning (UDL) such as the provision of multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression as more applicable in adult ESOL settings (Tavares, 2022). However, they too acknowledged that the concept of UDL was not often institutionalised in institutional training: I am doing inclusion intuitively rather systematically, as one programme manager remarked.

The researchers discovered that trauma-informed pedagogy also was becoming an essential part of inclusive ESOL practice. Practitioners stated that a lot of migrant learners had suffered some sort of displacement, loss, or instability, which impacted concentration and emotional toughness. As one tutor explained: “Some students close down easily or when they perceive failure they become

nervous. Inclusion to them is not only about making language easier but also about making them have a safe space.”

This method aligns with the idea of Schiess-Jokanovic *et al.* (2021), who believes that trauma-informed education is based on emotional safety and confidence in one another as the conditions of learning. The educators who incorporated well-being practices, reflective journaling, or mindfulness stated that they had better learner engagement and fewer dropouts.

Redesigning institutions was, however, constrained by structural factors including funding, time and policy ambiguity. The analysis of documents proved that even though the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan include the focus on early identification and personalized support, its use in adult learning is insufficiently funded. SEND coordinators are not present in many institutions, with general ESOL staff engaging in identification and support of learners.

Technology also came out as a two-sided sword of inclusion. Although interactive whiteboards and learning apps helped ease visual learning and provided a good time management system, digital exclusion was a significant challenge to numerous adult migrants. Students who could not use a device or had unstable network connectivity could not engage in the course, pointing to the conclusion that inclusion has to be pedagogical and digital equity. Table 3 summarises the inclusive pedagogical redesign in ESOL.

Table 3: Inclusive Pedagogical Redesign in ESOL

Strategy	Purpose	Reported Impact	Related Framework
Visual and multimodal materials	Support comprehension for learners with low literacy or dyslexia	Improved engagement and retention	UDL – Multiple Means of Representation
Peer learning & group tasks	Build confidence and collaboration	Greater learner participation	Social Constructivism
Trauma-informed routines	Provide emotional safety and predictability	Reduced anxiety, higher attendance	Trauma-Informed Pedagogy
Simplified digital platforms	Enhance accessibility	Mixed results due to connectivity gaps	Digital Inclusion Framework

Response: Adaptation, Reflexivity and Learner Empowerment

The last dimension, Respond, reflects the idea that educators and institutions keep changing their strategies based on the needs and feedbacks of learners, which evolve constantly. The practitioners also reported a concept of inclusion as a living practice, which involves a continuous reflection and adaptability instead of following some predetermined models. This process of adaptation frequently depended on unofficial cooperation and professional communication between the employees. Frequent case discussion meetings, peer observation, and reflective meetings allowed teachers to exchange their strategies and discuss issues together. A number of practitioners highlighted the fact that an institutional responsiveness was best when leadership approaches promoted a culture of inclusion and a sense of psychological safety. According to the remarks of one manager, inclusion is not a supplementary measure, but it must be incorporated in how we make our plans, schedules, and tests. In the institutions where inclusion was integrated in the staff development and curriculum review, students claimed to have felt more appreciated and encouraged. On the other hand, learning environments were usually perceived to be disjointed or detached where inclusion was viewed as a compliance matter.

There was learner voice that emphasized the importance of empowerment as an indicator of inclusion. The sense of inclusion was attributed by many participants to the ability to make a valuable contribution to classroom dialogues and decision-making. A learner explained: “I feel as though I am a part of the class, not just a student learning English, when the teacher asks my opinion or allows me to assist other students.”

These experiences demonstrate how inclusion as accommodation has changed to inclusion as participation, which is one of the major differences highlighted in the modern inclusion theory (Rajak & Dey, 2025). It was also found that culturally responsive teaching was critical in maintaining the engagement of the learners. Those tutors who worked with backgrounds, languages, and experiences of learners explained that they had a better rapport and motivation amongst students. However, there were still systemic obstacles. The practitioners reported the high workloads, lack of access to specialist training, and inadequate institutional support as common challenges. Funding systems where the language performance preferred over the overall learner performance were regarded as having the opposite effect. Some of the respondents suggested that reform of policy was necessary to acknowledge inclusion as one of the performance indices in ESOL provision. Table 4 summarises the respond dimension.

Table 4: Institutional and Pedagogical Responses to Learner Needs (Respond Dimension)

Area of Response	Institutional Example	Outcome	Limitation
Reflective practice & peer observation	Staff meetings and peer mentoring	Shared strategies, better communication	Time constraints
Learner voice in planning	Consultation, feedback forms	Increased motivation and agency	Inconsistent implementation
Culturally responsive teaching	Integration of learner backgrounds	Enhanced engagement	Requires cultural competence training
Inclusion integrated in quality metrics	Pilot inclusion index	Greater accountability	Limited policy uptake

Discussion

The results of this research help to understand that the concept of inclusion in adult ESOL classrooms is a challenging and dynamic phenomenon, and the inclusive practice is not a final destination but a continuous process of negotiation, adjustment and reflection. The conceptual framework of loading inclusion is a multi-layered dynamic which can be viewed through the Reframe-Redesign-Respond framework used in the study. In the broader perspective of educational policy, social justice and the language learning theory, the findings highlight both the successes as well as the inescapable constraints of inclusion in education of adult migrants.

The lesson that can be gained in this study at the first point is the reframing of inclusion as an ethos and not as an obligation of the policy. Practitioners always defined inclusion as a strategy of identification and understanding-commonly defining obstacles to inclusion

instead of classifying learners based on diagnostic principles. This interpretation is in line with the argument by Norwich (2023) who argues that inclusion cannot only be achieved through procedural conformity but also through a values-based approach to equity and belonging. This is of great importance in the adult ESOL setting (Norwich, 2023). Migrant students tend to be in-between in the education system, neither properly integrated in the general educational system nor sufficiently catered to by specialised schemes of SEND. Their learning experiences are informed by overlapping social factors, such as language proficiency, migration history, trauma, and socioeconomic insecurity (Mathai, 2025).

By framing inclusion as a behavioral and thoughtful practice, practitioners in this article attack the traditional and standard deficit model within the framework of which SEND learners are viewed as an issue that can be accommodated. Rather, inclusion is made a dialogue

process in which the learning environment is informed and sensitive by the educator. This relational knowledge is familiar to the intersectionality theory by Benkirane and Doucerain (2022) who points out the interactions of the many identities disability, ethnicity and migratory status to form distinct forms of marginalization (Benkirane & Doucerain, 2022). Having to learn to access services and resources is not only a factor that leads to exclusion in many adult migrants but also a combination of the cultural displacement, language factors, and invisibility of the institutions. An integrative concept of inclusion should thus consider such overlapping vulnerabilities.

Simultaneously, the results show that practitioner and formal interpretations of inclusion are not in touch. Although these universal principles of equal access are expressed in policies, including the SEND Code of Practice and the Equality Act (2010), they are largely school-age education-based in their design. Adult ESOL is a policy grey area formally part of the same education system as inclusive education, but often not a direct subject of specific funding and attention. This gap can be traced back to the issues raised by the Learning and Work Institute (2025), which discovered that the policy of adult education in England is more focused on employment outcomes and language acquisition, rather than on the well-being or inclusion of the learner (Institute, 2025). As a result, institutional frameworks do not guarantee implementation of inclusive practice but are dependent on the efforts of individual practitioners by many ESOL providers to implement inclusive practice.

The Redesign stage of the framework brings out the way practitioners are creatively addressing this policy vacuum. The teachers also noted the modification of pedagogy by visual scaffolding, simplified materials, and multimodal engagement techniques - the methodologies that fit the principles of Universal Design of Learning (UDL). UDL offers a conceptually sound approach to inclusive teaching of ESOL, where multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression are promoted in order to meet the profile of the various learners. Nevertheless, the research study made it clear that although teachers tend to use UDL-based approaches intuitively, there is a not so much formal understanding and education in UDL principles in adult learning organizations. This reflects the disjunction of new practices of inclusion and their theoretical expression, which Moreover, the rise of the concept of the trauma-informed pedagogy as part and parcel of inclusive redesign. Practitioners were aware that post-migration stress, displacement trauma, or interrupted education is common among adult migrants. This consciousness can be compared to the fact that Norwich (2023) focuses on the emotional aspect of learning and the necessity to establish the psychologically safe settings. In ESOL classrooms, trauma-informed practices, including building predictability, trust and emotional regulation, have a pivotal role in facilitating participation and perseverance (Norwich, 2023). However, the adoption of these practices is not yet evenly spread, as it mostly relies

on an individual teacher, and not on the institutional policy. Integration of the principles of trauma-informed training into ESOL training programmes and inspection frameworks (e.g. Ofsted 2021 criteria) may also improve the quality of teaching and student retention.

The results also reveal structural and systemic challenges that discourage the inclusive redesign. Absence of committed SEND coordinators in the adult ESOL service, unequal assessment procedures, and limited funding frameworks is a deterrent in the provision of equity. The Adult Skills Fund (English for Adults, 2024-25) is a resource that is distributed according to progression and attainment criteria, with rather narrow references to accessibility or learner diversity. The culture of outcome-driven funding does not encourage any experimentation with flexible pedagogies or assessment based on the learner. As Tett (2023) opine, the policy settings that favor efficiency as opposed to equity contribute to the likelihood of recreating exclusion because institutions that comply with quantifiable performance are rewarded, or those that encourage inclusion are omitted. Thus, the significant change is necessary not only in classroom practice but also in systemic redesign with the inclusion embedded in the accountability systems and performance models.

The Respond phase demonstrates that it is not only personal pedagogical competence, but also institutional reflexivity that is essential to successful inclusion in the sense of the ability to listen, modify, and evolve based on learner feedback. The more responsive and innovative levels were shown in the case of practitioners who were involved in a reflective dialogue, peer learning, and collaborative problem-solving. The institutions with the cultures of support (mentoring, staff development and mutual reflections) had better chances to maintain inclusive practices. On the other hand, where inclusion was viewed in terms of compliance or inspection, innovation was suppressed and teachers were also reported to be feeling isolated and burned out.

Agency and participation were closely linked with inclusion as seen by the learner. The students appreciated being addressed, heard and called upon to take part in the process. They describe their experiences in an inclusive manner that may be similar to the participatory vision of inclusion as described by Florian (2023) whose approach to teaching is that teaching ought to be participatory so that all learners can be taught instead of differentiating the few. In cases where the learners had a chance to exercise agency, as in the form of peer support, co-creation of materials or flexible assessment, they noted increased motivation and self-efficacy (Florian, 2022). Such results support the argument that inclusion cannot be seen merely as an inclusion strategy when dealing with marginalised learners but as a universal state of successful adult learning.

CONCLUSION

This research has shown that adult ESOL classroom

inclusion is a complicated, dynamic, and relationship process that is informed by pedagogical, institutional, as well as policy forces. The study also shows how educators can shift their relationship with SEND learners away from deficit-based perceptions in favor of more holistic, compassionate and responsive approaches by reframing inclusion using the Reframe-Redesign-Respond framework. The results indicate that inclusive ESOL delivery is successful in scenarios where educators are reflexive, engage in the application of trauma-informed and Universal Design of Learning, and develop learner agency. Nonetheless, structural obstacles (poor funding, weak policy alignment, and digital inequality) persist in preventing even-handed participation. In order to promote inclusion, policy integration of adult education and SEND models, ongoing professional learning of ESOL practitioners and institutional cultures that value equity and belonging all require greater emphasis. Finally, inclusion in adult migrant education should not be regarded as a marginal requirement but the key to the quality of education, social justice and human dignity.

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