

Lived Experiences of Voluntary Pre-Service Foreign Language Teachers in an Inclusive Early Foreign Language Program

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Abstract: Previous studies provided evidence on the benefits of early foreign language education; however, U.S. schools typically offer foreign language classes after middle school or during high school. In addition, there are no teacher training programs specifically designed for early foreign language teaching, let alone for “inclusive early foreign language programs.” Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the classroom experiences of voluntary pre-service French teachers teaching French in an Early Foreign Language Exploratory (FLEX) Program at a charter school. This school provides education for students from pre-kindergarten through grade five and observes full inclusion of students with special needs in one of the Southern states of the United States. Findings from the lived experiences of voluntary French teachers may shed light in establishing foreign language teacher training programs that offer inclusive education or in offering courses on methods in teaching foreign languages to students with special needs.

Keywords: Students with special needs, French, foreign language education, inclusive education, FLEX

Introduction

Studies related to bilingual, second language, and foreign language education have indicated that learning a second language provides a lot of benefits to

students, including students' overall academic performance and literacy skills in the first language (Bialystok, 2001; Curtain, 1993; Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Despite these studies indicating the benefits, U. S. schools typically offer foreign language classes after middle school or during high school. For example, in 2009, only about 25% of all the U. S. elementary schools offered foreign language education (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011). On the other hand, there are no teacher training programs specifically designed for early foreign language teaching, let alone for "inclusive early foreign language programs." Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the classroom experiences of voluntary pre-service French teachers teaching French in an Early Foreign Language Exploratory (FLEX) Program (Lipton, 1992) at a charter school providing education for students from pre-kindergarten through grade five and observes full inclusion of students with special needs in one of the Southern states of the United States. The voluntary teachers teaching French as a foreign language in this program are not trained specifically for teaching foreign languages to young learners because of lack of such programs. Therefore, the current study is intended to understand the lived experiences of voluntary French teachers in teaching French as a foreign language in mainstreamed classrooms with special needs students.

Literature Review

Research has demonstrated the positive effects of early foreign language learning programs (Lambert & Tucker, 1972); however, in the U.S., middle or high school is the time for students to start learning a foreign language. Even though the positive perceptions on the benefits of learning foreign languages are common now, it was believed in 1970s that learning another language at an early age could potentially harm students' skills in their native language. Despite the contrary evidence, a lot of children start learning another language when they reach adolescence. According to research conducted by the Center for Applied

Linguistics, children who receive foreign language instruction cognitively benefit from learning another language and improve overall regarding the school performance and problem-solving skills (Curtain, 1993). However, there are very few programs intended for these benefits. Also, a longitudinal study compared the developments of K-8 and grade 5-8, and the study reported that learning foreign language helped children to attain optimum first language development more when they start their foreign language education at a very young age (Boyson, Semmer, Thompson, & Rosenbusch, 2013).

Furthermore, there are not a lot of programs for teaching foreign languages to students with special needs (Batista-Arias, 2011; Regalla & Peker, 2015, 2017). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) guarantees a free and appropriate public education to all students with special needs in the least restrictive environment. Thanks to this act, “educators must ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate and progress in the general curriculum” (Kleinert, Cloyd, Rego, & Gibson, 2007, p. 24); however, foreign language education is not provided to these students with special needs at most of the schools (Trawick, 2015). Even though studies conducted on the learning gains of these students proved that students with special needs can learn a foreign language at a slower pace than their typically developing peers (Regalla & Peker, 2015, 2017, 2018; Peker, Regalla, & Cox, 2018), such early foreign language programs have not been widespread so far and there is no teacher training specifically in this area. In addition, although legislative improvements have created a demand by school districts and state and federal departments of education for the programs that provide students with special needs both physical access to foreign language classes and programs in the general education curriculum, school districts in the U.S. have failed to provide foreign language teachers with appropriate training and support to teach students with special needs (Batista-Arias, 2011; Morrisette, 2009; Santoli, Sachs,

Romney, & McClurg, 2008). For these programs to be successful, districts should provide effective professional development series or programs for training pre-service teachers (Batista-Arias, 2011; Benton & Benton, 2008).

Since the research has focused mainly on the challenges encountered by special needs students and their teachers, the benefits of learning a foreign language remain largely unknown for these young children except a few studies conducted in earlier years. These students often have weak language processing skills, especially in phonology, and have difficulty with remembering vocabulary and using proper grammar rules while trying to understand the input in another language (Ciccarone, 2019; Leons, Herbert, & Gobbo, 2009; Tannock & Martinussen, 2001; Tolbert, Killu, & Lazarus, 2015; Trawick, 2015). Students who experience difficulties with working memory (e.g., ADHD, LD, traumatic brain injury) usually struggle with remembering and retaining information, which would make text production straightforward for them (Arries, 1999; Trawick, 2015). In addition, dyslexia and dysgraphia may add to the difficulties in constructing letters and writing a text in an orderly way (Gillespie & Graham, 2014). Because the emphasis of prior research has been on such challenges, students in special needs populations are immensely discouraged from having foreign language instruction. However, individual assessments of verbal working memory or phonology should be diagnostic criteria for deciding how (or if) a child with a disability should be introduced to a foreign language rather than blanket policies against it (Ciccarone, 2019; Regalla & Peker, 2015, 2017; Tolbert et al., 2015). This is especially true considering the potential benefits of doing so, and considering that the research on typically developing children has noted cognitive advantages to foreign language study (Boyson, Semmer, Thompson, & Rosenbusch, 2013; Curtain, 1993). Therefore, it is possible that foreign language learning can benefit special needs students as well (Peker,

Regalla, & Cox, 2018; Regalla & Peker, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018; Regalla, Peker, Llyod, & O'Connor-Morin, 2017).

With the situation above in mind, it is hard to mention the existence of pre-service teachers for such an early foreign language instruction programs for special needs students in the U.S. In inclusive classrooms that have students with special needs and typically developing students, teachers are “responsible for providing materials and activities that accommodate the needs of the students with disabilities, working in conjunction with special educators” (Trawick, 2015, p. 11). This task can be daunting, and a lot of adjustments may be needed in teachers’ practices. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how the untrained voluntary French pre-service teachers experience language teaching while teaching both typically developing students and students with special needs. However, there are very few studies examining inclusive FLEX programs, and there is no study investigating the lived experiences of untrained and pre-service French teachers. Examining lived experiences of voluntary teachers teaching special needs students might help establish a FLEX teacher training program specifically designed for pre-service teachers teaching foreign languages to students with special needs.

However, to look at this unique context, several studies conducted with different populations might shed light for the current study. The studies done in the field of pre-service teacher training indicated novice teachers’ classroom management skills and self-efficacy improved significantly over time, which contributes to the foreign language education field to develop strategies and materials (Gutierrez-Almarza, 1996; Kleinert et al., 2007). At this stage in the research, the previous studies have mostly focused on teaching French as a Second Language (FSL) and the experiences of pre-service teachers teaching English as a foreign and second language. For instance, in one of the qualitative studies, by using focus group

technique, 26 pre-service French teachers that were categorized into three focus groups were interviewed, and the results indicated that pre-service French teachers doing their service learning at elementary schools felt that it was necessary to get some sort of support for teaching French as a Second Language especially with their second language (L2) teaching skills (Bayliss & Vignola, 2007). In this study, French pre-service teachers doing their service learning at elementary schools experienced an urgent methodological need during their practice teaching.

Next, Kosko and Wilkins (2009), in their study with inservice teachers teaching special needs students, found that teachers were able to adapt their materials and classes based on the needs of special needs students when they had more professional development series specifically designed for training teachers to teach special needs students. In addition, Eun and Heining-Boyton (2007) found that, institutional support at the school level increased teachers of special needs students' self-confidence and made their teaching skills and practices better when appropriate professional development was provided.

In another study describing the culturally responsive pedagogy for students with learning disabilities, a teacher was observed and interviewed for the purpose of finding out her experiences with teaching English as a foreign language to the students with learning disabilities in her reading classes (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014). Based on this study, the foreign language teacher used a culturally responsive pedagogy that focused on the cultural needs and interests of these special needs students. This might be another alternative perspective in establishing a teacher education program for the inclusive FLEX Programs.

Furthermore, another study investigating the vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension development of the 42 English learners with learning disabilities

was conducted as a small group experimental study (Bos, Anders, Filip, & Jaffe, 1989). The intervention was for three days, and the results indicated that when there was a student-teacher interaction, the gains for the students with learning disabilities were a lot more than the control group. This study emphasized the sociocultural model of teaching a foreign language by focusing on the student-teacher interaction during intervention. Therefore, it can be claimed that foreign language intervention studies might help the students with learning disabilities or special needs students as long as the teachers are trained accordingly. Teachers of inclusive FLEX Program would need such skills and might lack culturally responsive teaching skills. For instance, in a qualitative study describing the culturally responsive pedagogy for students with learning disabilities, a teacher was observed and interviewed for the purpose of finding out her experiences on what type of teaching might help her students with learning disabilities in an English-Spanish bilingual school (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014). She experienced success with students with learning disabilities in her reading classes because she “provided English language learners (ELLs) with clear, direct, and explicit differentiated instruction that intertwined with biographical, collaborative, and skills-based approaches to facilitate their use of reading content commensurate with their skills and language abilities” (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014, p. 526).

With regard to the experiences of these pre-service and in-service teachers, there is still a lot to search about the effect of foreign language teaching practices on the students with special needs at a pre-k level and their teachers. As there is not even one trained pre-service teacher for such inclusive foreign language teaching programs with students with special needs, this phenomenological study will serve as a pilot study to close the gap in the field through the experiences of untrained voluntary pre-service teachers in order to develop pre-service teacher

training programs specifically designed for inclusive schools that provide education to all students.

Theoretical Framework

In light of previous research suggesting that pre-service foreign language teachers' lived experiences need to be considered in teacher training, the current study adopts an approach that includes observation and interview techniques to be able to understand in-depth meanings of what took place in an inclusive classroom and what the teacher experienced. In doing this, the researcher both observed and interviewed the untrained voluntary pre-service teachers and found out that these teachers constructed a community of practices (Wenger, 1998). Therefore, framed by the understanding that learning and teaching occur within a community and this community consists of students with special needs, typically developing students, and voluntary pre-service teachers, this study adopted Wenger's (1998) Community of Practices (CoP) as its theoretical framework.

The concept of community of practices consists of mutual engagement, joint projects and activities, and shared supplies, and these components are necessary parts of being a community (Wenger, 1998). In terms of teaching, it could be stated that teaching practice itself is a part of an action in a community, and in order for the members to be mutually engaged, each member need to embrace their own capabilities, as well as that of others. In the current context, teachers help each learner embrace their own and each other's capabilities. With the help of teachers, students learn together as members of an inclusive community.

Purpose and Research Questions

As mentioned earlier, there are no teacher training programs specifically for early foreign language teaching, let alone for "inclusive early foreign language

programs.” Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the classroom experiences of voluntary pre-service French teachers teaching French in an Early FLEX Program (Lipton, 1992) at a charter school that provides education for students from pre-kindergarten through grade five and observes full inclusion of students with special needs in one of the Southern states of the United States. For this purpose, the study investigated the following research questions:

1. Main question: What are the lived experiences of voluntary pre-service French teachers teaching French in an Early FLEX Program at a charter school that observes full inclusion of students with special needs in the United States?
 - a) What do voluntary pre-service French teachers do in class?
 - b) What don't voluntary pre-service French teachers do in class?
 - c) What is difficult or easy about being an untrained pre-service French teacher in this inclusive FLEX program?
 - f) What do pre-service French teachers think about effective classroom interaction during French classes?

Methodology

Research Site

The setting for this study is a charter school that serves students from pre-kindergarten to fifth grade. This school practices full inclusion of students with special needs. This means that the school population includes approximately 50% typically developing students and 50% students with special needs including language impairments, developmental delays, autism, hearing impairments, and orthopedic impairments.

Teaching Materials and Lessons

Because of the full inclusion model followed by the school site, an effort was made to employ a foreign language program in which all students could experience success regardless of impairments or disabilities with the integration of multimodal techniques to teach French. These techniques may include technological resources such as visuals, graphic organizers, videos, and animations (Moreno & Mayer, 2007). Students with special needs generally need more time to handle linguistic input, and also they may need repetition to transfer new knowledge to both short and long-term memory (Ciccarone, 2019; Regalla & Peker, 2016; Tolbert et al., 2015). Skinner and Smith (2011) suggested using multimodal or multiple sensory techniques to design language lessons for students with special needs because these learners may need repetition and multimodal techniques to enable this. According to Ciccarone (2019), repetition and using both multisensory and non-multisensory techniques help students with special needs to retain vocabulary gains.

Due to the nature of the context in this research study, Little Pim video series (Pimsleur-Levine & Benaisch, 2015) was chosen as the main materials because of its multimodality and appropriateness for young learners of all ability levels from birth through age six. In these video series, there is a cartoon panda bear displaying French vocabulary and some phrases to create context without using students' native language (i.e., English). One theme was taught by volunteer teachers each week and this theme would match with one of the Little Pim episodes. However, teachers were free to support Little Pim videos with YouTube videos or songs, age-appropriate teacher-created activities, and realia that the teachers would bring to classroom.

Data Collection and Sample

Convenience sampling was used to select the three untrained voluntary pre-service French teachers as participants. The participants neither had previous teaching experience nor graduated from a teacher training program. Also, they had been teaching French for one semester only. Therefore, maximum variation was ensured to a certain extent (Creswell, 2007). Considering these, the voluntary pre-service French teachers from the French Honor Society (two females and one male) were interviewed. These participants (ages 23-29) provided references to show that they were in good academic standing (see Table 1). They taught two classes of 30 minutes per week.

Pseudonyms were used here to protect their identities. Jessica is a 24-year old Haitian woman who majors in Psychology with a minor in Health Science and volunteers to teach French at this inclusive program. French is her native language and she likes working with kids. Audrey is a 23-year old Hispanic woman majoring in Psychology and minoring in French Language Program, not French Education. Lastly, Aidan is a 29-year-old man who majored in Psychology and minored in French. He holds a Certificate of Foreign Language Accomplishment and Proficiency. He has been learning French since 6th grade.

After obtaining Institutional Review Board's permission and parental permissions, students were randomly assigned to each teacher's classroom when the semester began. A total of 30 students participated in this study. Among these, 19 were typically developing students and 11 were students with special needs. Both typically developing students and students with special needs were equally distributed across the three teachers' classes (see Table 1 for the number of students in each class during each interview day).

Table 1. Participant Descriptions

| Pseudonym | Gender | Ethnicity | Major Degree | Minor | Data | SN | TD |
|-----------|--------|-----------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----|----|
| Audrey | Female | Latina | Psychology | French | Unstructured Observation, Semi-structured Interview | 4 | 6 |
| Jessica | Female | Haitian | Psychology | Health Sciences | Unstructured Observation, Semi-structured Interview | 4 | 6 |
| Aidan | Male | American | Psychology | French | Semi-structured Interview | 3 | 7 |

- SN stands for the number of students with special needs in class.
- TD stands for the number of typically developing students in class.

Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

Moustakas (1994) stated that phenomenology is an inspirational system for the researchers for the purpose of discovering knowledge and applying theories into human science as it has subjective openness that enables researchers creativity by using their reflections and help them to find out the important beliefs and values in participants' lives. Therefore, phenomenology values require the element of experience. For this purpose, the researcher needs to have the substantial description of reflective data analysis that is structured comprehensively. Considering these features of phenomenological studies, it is important to emphasize that phenomenological study was appropriate for this study because this study looked for the essential, innate meaning of an experience (Creswell, 2007). This goes beyond the quantitative studies and frameworks created until now. Therefore, to be able to understand the essence of the experiences of untrained voluntary pre-service French teachers, data needed to be collected from participants who experienced the phenomenon and the study offered an interpretation of the essence of the common experience (Creswell, 2007).

In this study, unstructured observations and semi-structured interviews were used. Unstructured observations were recorded as in "descriptive notes" and "reflective notes" to record enough information to cue the memory for transcription. Semi-structured interviews were recorded because they allow the participants to describe their experiences in a more open way than the structured interviews. After these observations and interviews were done, interpretive analyses were conducted.

In order to obtain rich data and create thick descriptions, the questions needed to be open ended as much as possible. Therefore, the interview questions used to obtain the data were as follows:

- a) Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, your educational and professional history?
- b) Can you tell me how long you have been teaching in general? And teaching French? How did you end up with teaching French?
- c) What do you usually do in class when teaching French?
- d) What do you avoid doing in class when teaching French?
- e) If you were asked to volunteer to teach French in all the pre-K classrooms at this school, what would you do/think?
- f) Can you tell me what is difficult and easy about being a French teacher at a pre-kindergarten in general?
- g) Can you tell me what is difficult and easy about being a French teacher at a pre-kindergarten with special needs students?

Data Analysis

In order to code the data, the researcher used the simplified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method that was discussed by Moustakas (1994). This method is mostly interpretive, and as a result of rich data obtained from

unstructured observation and semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to describe what was going on with the participants, what the untrained voluntary pre-service French teachers were doing, what they meant, etc. In other words, interpretations were formulated as in the form of explanations of the interactions during the interviews observed in the data. This was an attempt to set aside the researcher's personal experiences (i.e., bracketing). Therefore, the interpretations were done carefully and the salient ones were chosen. Then, the list of significant statements was created from the observation data and interview data (i.e., horizontalization, Creswell, 2007).

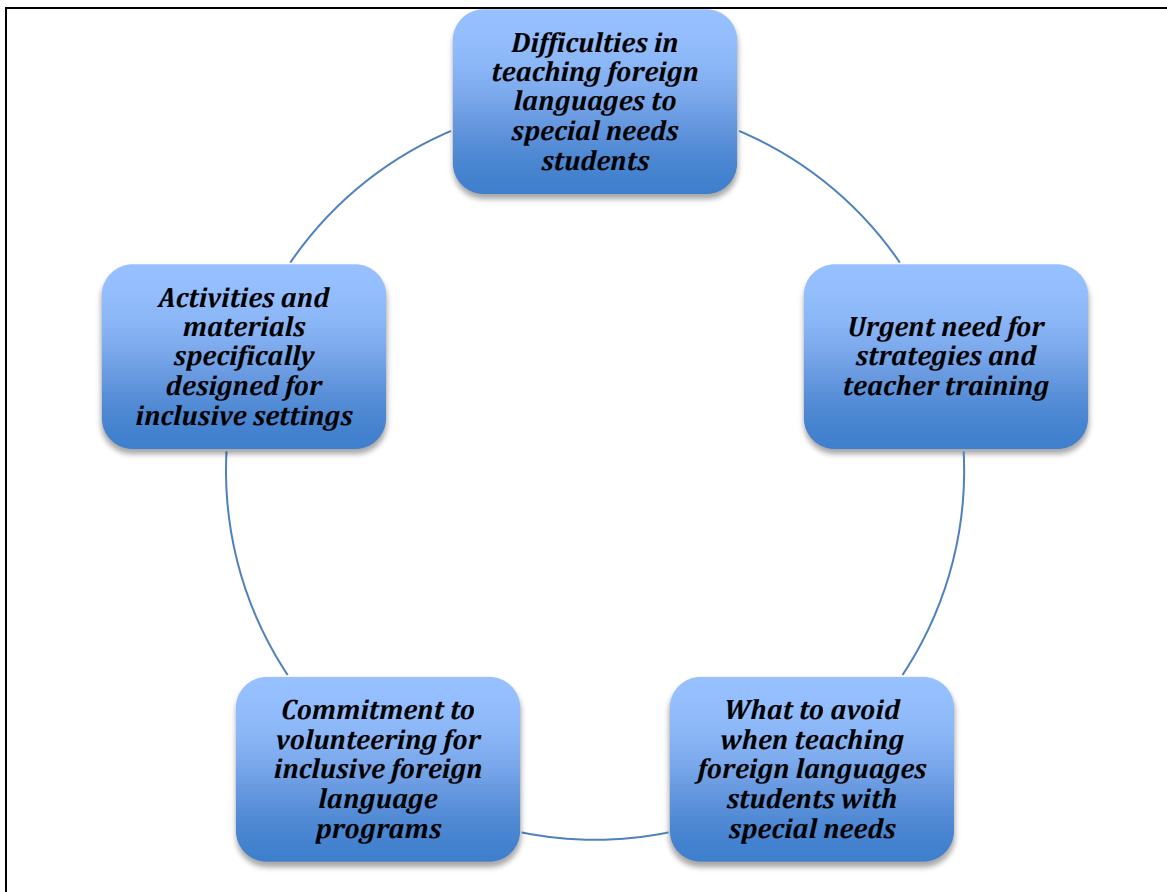


Figure 1. Lived experiences of pre-service French teachers in inclusive contexts

Then, the researcher extracted non-overlapping statements from this list by treating each statement equally. Most importantly, for this study, emergent

coding was conducted because coding emerged from the data without prejudices, presuppositions and previous knowledge of the subject area, and new ideas emerged from the data. Then, these statements were grouped into larger units such as themes, and for each theme, the researcher wrote about the descriptions of the experiences of the French teachers. These included specifically very informative ones considering the research questions. From all these, five themes emerged (see Figure 1), and these include: *difficulties in teaching foreign languages to special needs students, urgent need for strategies and teacher training, activities and materials specifically designed for inclusive settings, what to avoid when teaching foreign languages students with special needs, and commitment to volunteering for inclusive foreign language programs.*

In order to ensure the trustworthiness throughout the data collection, member checking was implemented just after each observation and interview. In addition, as the researcher was in touch with the participants every day, she did member-checking on other days after refining the interpretive recording and analysis. Furthermore, to get richer data and provide thick descriptions, the researcher did not only focus on the semi-structured interviews but also applied unstructured observations. In addition, since this study was based on the experiences of untrained voluntary pre-service French teachers, the researcher used bracketing which is an "attempt to suspend or put in abeyance [her] preconceptions and presuppositions (i.e., one's biases)" (Valle, King, & Hailing, 1989, p. 10). However, even though bracketing was applied in this study, it should be noted that there is always a raising issue regarding transparency of phenomenological research, which the researcher acknowledges as the nature of this type of a study. The researcher tried to reflect and interpret as objectively as possible. After the first analysis, one of the researcher's colleagues who majored in foreign language teaching also checked the analysis and external audit was obtained to make sure that everything was as objective as possible.

Findings

Based on the interpretive coding, five themes emerged from the data. Each theme is explained through excerpts from the participants to clarify their lived experiences.

Theme 1. Difficulties in teaching foreign languages to special needs students

The participants described their experiences, mostly difficulties, regarding having special needs students such as the students with learning disabilities, autism or ADHD. They were challenged by the diversity of the types of disabilities. They felt that they did not have enough skills to cope with the difficulties that they encountered. They thought they needed skills to deal with the noise or cries of these students.

Mostly, they talked about their lack of classroom management skills with pre-k students in general, and specifically with the students with special needs. For instance, Audrey stated, "If you don't spend a lot of time with them, you don't know how much they can do, or you don't know if you should keep pushing them to do it. You don't wanna make them feel bad!"

More positively, Jessica asserted,

At the end of the day, children are children regardless of their disabilities. It is all about the environment that we create for them; it is all about how we teach them. As far as the students with special needs, hmmm, for example, with students with down syndrome, they can't answer you or they can't articulate or you cannot hear them. But they have their own way to understand and tell you that they understand. So, I feel like each day it gets easier for me once I get to know each kid everyday. It doesn't come easy at all but you need to know each kid!

Furthermore, Aidan mentioned some of the kids in different classes were having some issues such as attention difficulties, ADHD, aggressive behavior, and those were the kids that he had been having difficulty when he was teaching French. Also, in general, he contended that getting the children's (both students with special needs and typically developing students) attention to focus on something is really hard for him. He mentioned that he needed to get better on it.

In addition, one of the other difficulties Aidan experienced was about having students pronounce French words. He mentioned that he did not want the students to be stressed out about pronouncing but he was also aware of the fact correct pronunciation was crucial. He stated,

When I am pronouncing the words, I pronounce it as if ...hmmmm...you know I learn them as the proper way to do it and then I see sometimes hmm trying to get the children to pronounce it that same way, and then I have to kind of avoid doing that kind of saying it. They are saying it but it is not the French way. I mean I see that they are having a lot of struggle trying to pronounce it, I don't mind saying how it is supposed to be pronounced but pronouncing it in French hmm I just don't want to make them to pronounce it that way. Most of the time, I am confused and indecisive about asking them to pronounce words correctly or not. Is it too much to ask for, you know, especially for the students with special needs?

Based on their explanations and the excerpts above, it could be stated that they experienced certain difficulties related to teaching this specific population, students with special needs. They all mentioned that there were certain responsibilities that they needed to do for these students but there were also certain tasks that they felt they needed to avoid because of a wide variety of special needs existing in the current context.

Theme 2. Urgent need for strategies and teacher training

The participants emphasized that they needed specific strategies and ideas to accomplish teaching French as a foreign language to this unique population. The students were very young (i.e., four-five year-olds) and they had different types of disabilities. They saw teaching French as a trial-and-error method because they had never had a foreign language teaching training before. They emphasized their concern especially on classroom management skills. For instance, Jessica asserted:

I have a kid, for instance, like 'I want it and I want it now!' if we are doing circle-time and he wants to read a book. He says, 'I wanna read the book, this is what I want now'. He starts crying and hitting everyone. So I think it is about the rules. You need to tell him that it is NOT reading time. It is about have him follow the rules!

She believed that teaching is about teaching knowledge as well as teaching discipline and rules for kids; however, she contended that she definitely need foreign language teaching program specifically for teaching language to kids with autism and ADHD. These were the two types of disabilities in which she found herself helpless.

Aidan mentioned that the most difficult part of teaching French at an inclusive pre-kindergarten was getting the students to focus on what he was teaching. He mentioned some of the students had attention difficulties, ADHD, aggressive behavior, and Aidan felt helpless in teaching French in class even with the help of several assistants who were helping the special needs students. Also, in general, he contended that getting the children's (both students with special needs and typically developing students) attention to focus on something was really hard for him. He mentioned that he needed to get better on it.

Furthermore, Audrey mentioned that she wanted the students move around and stay active in class; however, when she let them do this, she could not control any of the students. She realized she needed expert opinion on how to manage an inclusive foreign language class, how to keep students active but manageable at the same time. She stated that she had this dilemma every single day.

Theme 3. Activities and materials specifically designed for inclusive settings

The participants experienced the benefit of using hands-on and realia during the activity time and circle times. They contended that both typically developing students and special needs students would benefit from dancing, videos, and songs as well as pictures. For instance, Jessica said, “you are making a cake for your friend, what would you need?” “what type of cake do you like Brian, Josh, Mike,…” Then they started answering by inserting some French words in their sentences. Some examples from their sentences would be “I like fraise gateau [strawberry cake],” “beurre [butter],” “banan cake [banana cake],” and “pomme gateau [apple cake].” She stated that doing these types of activities would urge the students to respond more, and she had been having success with her methods on the days when she used realia, pictures or multimedia.

In addition, Audrey mentioned the importance of repetition. She asked the students to repeat the same words over and over again and students liked this approach. She said reviewing and repeating what she taught the students was one of the most important activities that she preferred doing in each class. She asked them about their daily activities. For instance, she asked them about what they brought for lunch because she taught the children such words as apple, strawberry, yogurt, milk, and water. She stated that associating French words with the students’ daily lives had a great impact on the students’ learning French. In addition, she said that she watched Little Pim videos together with the

students, and she did activities related to Little Pim flashcards about the episode they watched.

Considering the activities that both Jessica and Audrey mentioned, they seemed like good candidates to take training on teaching French to young learners, especially students with special needs. They both mentioned similar activities. For example, they were teaching the most basic words by using songs and games that were associated with what the students had been learning each week. They also used realia to teach words. The participants emphasized that they did not know which types of activities would work with the inclusive population but they realized that multimodal activities helped the most.

On the other hand, Aidan, as an untrained pre-service teacher, believed that motivating the students and teaching them the cultural aspects of language was important. He thought that culture is a part of language that we cannot avoid. He stated, "I try to engage the children and get them passionate about French. I want my kind of passion, and my love of the language and the culture to rub off on them too." In addition, he gave some information about how he taught culture to the inclusive population. However, he did not mention what type of activities or games he applied in teaching culture. He stated,

Sometimes we get up and sing songs. We dance around and watch Little Pim. I also like to bring in the tiny aspects of the culture as well. Maybe, hmmm talking a little bit about the Eifel Tower, or talking about Paris in general. So even trying to incorporate not in every lesson but in a lot of my lessons, I like to incorporate a lot of aspects of culture as well.

He mentioned that he had been teaching the most basic French words by using songs that are associated with what they had been learning that week. He

thought that teaching a language through culture was really important. However, he did not mention specifically which cultural activities worked better.

In addition, all the participants stated that they greeted students by saying “Bonjour!” to each student to make each student be a part of the community they constructed in class. They wanted them to personalize the language learning. Their experiences were helpful for them to ensure the discipline and focus on the material when they tried to teach something about the students’ daily lives. For instance, when they were teaching vegetables and bread they wanted the kids to make a sandwich through role-play technique. Therefore, they all contended that using hands-on activities was the best idea for them.

Theme 4. What to avoid when teaching foreign languages students with special needs

Participants placed a greater importance on avoiding singling out certain students and letting the same students talk too much. All the participants mentioned that they tried their best to avoid picking the same students to get an answer when they asked questions in French. From the observations, it was also obvious that they did not let the same students speak. A student would raise their hand all the time but they would pick somebody else sometimes. They emphasized avoiding singling out students. For instance, Audrey mentioned,

I avoid singling out certain kids, and just like picking out certain kids to do things because I know that they all want to get involved. So I try... hhhmmmm... I try to get them each repeat what the other person did.

In addition, Jessica mentioned that she would avoid doing the same thing over and over again! She stated,

With kids on that specific age range that I have, they get bored easily and you can lose them in a matter of minutes! So, I would try to be more

engaging and do more activities because that is one of the things that I have learned with my particular lessons. Sometimes, by doing the same thing over and over again, I lose track of them!"

Jessica also avoided using the same method on every child because she thought that they all learn differently. Under these conditions that she avoided, she always had a back-up plan to gain children's control again. She thought that the children in her classroom liked to participate and liked being a part of the French lessons and community while some other children in other classrooms liked singing songs or different activities. Therefore, she believed that having a back up plan for students that certain strategies would not work for would help her because she thought that one size would not fit all and she avoided using the same strategy or technique for all the students.

Theme 5. Commitment to volunteering for inclusive foreign language programs

As the last theme, the researcher found out that they would wait and think about volunteering for being foreign language teachers for such an inclusive program because they mostly stated some concerns such as not being able to cope with the requirements, time sacrifice, and the difficulty of lesson planning or having a curriculum. They stated that they would not easily accept the idea of volunteering to teach French again. They experienced difficulties specifically with special needs students and stated that they would think about over and over again. They became aware of the commitments as they taught especially the students with special needs.

For instance, Jessica thought that teaching French was something natural for her as French is her native language. She said that she was comfortable with talking in French and teaching French. However, she thought that the hardest part was not having a teaching background. She thought that she would think about

volunteering again by considering all aspects because it was hard for her to take certain responsibilities even though she knew some of the techniques, approaches, and rules through her part time job as a daycare-person. She recalls that she spent more time in learning classroom management through her experiences whereas she never spent time in teaching a language. So she believed that she would need a teacher training or education in French teaching to special needs students.

Overall, thoroughly considering the themes emerged from the data, it can be tentatively stated that there was a great need for a foreign language teacher training program specifically designed for teaching students with special needs at young ages. Teaching young learners, especially the ones with special needs, require more classroom management skills, more skills in managing students with certain disabilities, knowing how to handle situations that may arise during a language class, and having more knowledge about teaching languages with multimodal techniques. If there was a teacher training program for such unique populations, these pre-service teacher would be able to meet the language needs of these students and fully integrate them into the curriculum.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the current study indicated several important conclusions: certain difficulties that voluntary teachers have been experiencing in teaching foreign language to young students with special needs, the need for teacher training programs framed for teaching this unique population, the awareness of the type of activities that would work with young students with special needs, what to avoid in teaching these students, and the requirement of long term commitment as part of being a foreign language teacher for this context.

First, having students with different varieties of disabilities created certain difficulties for volunteer pre-service teachers. Especially, they could not know how they need to approach to students with autism or ADHD. They felt that they did not have enough skills to cope with the difficulties that they encountered. They mentioned their lack of classroom management skills with pre-kindergarten students in general, and specifically with the students with special needs. Students' attention difficulties and aggressive behaviors put teachers under stress; they had to deal with certain difficult situations rather than figuring out how to teach a foreign language to these students. This finding aligns with the findings from previous studies in that students with special needs may experience difficulty in language processing skills that results in extra difficulties in decoding texts and pronouncing certain words, which also means extra effort on teachers' end (Leons et al., 2009). In addition, these students may experience difficulty in remembering vocabulary and using grammar rules while talking to a teacher or listening to a conversation in a foreign language (Tannock & Martinussen, 2001). However, even though these students may experience such difficulties that challenge teachers, these difficulties may be overcome with teachers' expertise and correct strategies such as meaningful repetition, and certain accommodations (Kleinert et al., 2007; Peker, Regalla, & Cox, 2018). Students with special needs may be learning a foreign language at a slower rate compared to their typically developing peers; however, the previous studies show the learning gains of students with special needs through correct techniques and materials (Friend & Bursuck, 2001; Duvall, 2006; Kleinert et al., 2007; Peker, Regalla, & Cox, 2018; Regalla & Peker, 2018; Regalla, Peker, Llyod, & O'Connor-Morin, 2017). These findings also support the current participants' need in searching for training or correct techniques. The participants in the present study emphasized that they needed specific strategies and teaching methodology to teach in this context. For instance, for teachers with special

needs students in their classrooms, Friend and Bursuck (2001) suggested 7-step strategies called INCLUDE:

Step 1: Identify classroom environmental, curricular, and instructional demands

Step 2: Note student learning strengths and needs.

Step 3: Check for potential areas of student success.

Step 4: Look for potential problem areas.

Step 5: Use information gathered to brainstorm instructional adaptations.

Step 6: Decide which adaptations to implement.

Step 7: Evaluate student progress (p. 43).

These strategies could be applied in situations where teachers do not feel confident and competent enough to teach foreign languages to special needs students, especially in terms of classroom management. In Regalla and Peker's (2016) study, it was proved that students with special needs improved their French scores when correct techniques, multimodal tasks and management styles were used in teaching French as a foreign language. This brings up the next point that needs to be discussed in this study: the kinds of materials in inclusive programs.

One of the most important findings of this study was about the kinds of materials and activities that helped these untrained teachers to do a better job. They reported that multimodal materials such as songs, videos, games, realia, and flashcards helped students learn French as a foreign language within the community of practices they created in class. When the teachers used multimodal activities, they were able to teach French to more students easily. Also, repeating words in different modalities helped students retain their learning. These findings align with Regalla and Peker's (2015) findings. They claimed that the multimodal approach acted as a tool for prekindergarten

teachers to incorporate French into their daily routine. In addition, since students with special needs may need more time to process linguistic input and more repetition to transfer new knowledge to both short and long-term memory, Skinner and Smith (2011) recommend multimodal teaching techniques when designing foreign language activities for students with special needs because of their multiple ways in exposing students to the language. Multimodal instruction is also recommended in the literature by other studies (Brady, Storkel, Bushnell, Barker, Saunders, Daniels, & Fleming, 2015; Leons et al., 2009).

Another point that needs attention was that the teachers realized that they needed to avoid using certain strategies with these students with special needs. For instance, singling out or picking the same student was not helping. In addition, as mentioned earlier, using different techniques for each student was helpful because they experienced the fact that one size does not fit all. This study made the readers be aware of the question of exemptions from foreign language education. Decisions about the exemptions from foreign language education should be made by considering each individual and their special needs separately (Duvall, 2006; Regalla, Peker, Llyod, & O'Connor-Morin, 2017; Trawick, 2015). Using certain techniques and avoiding some others should be on individual basis. Lastly, since teaching in this context required a lot of effort and commitment, these teachers became aware of the requirements, time sacrifice, and the difficulty of lesson planning or having a curriculum throughout this inclusive program.

Implications and Limitations

This study provided a different lens towards teaching foreign languages to young learners. In this study, the context consisted of pre-kindergarten students with special needs and typically developing students as well as untrained pre-service teachers. However, the most important part was about making the reader

be aware of the fact that there are no teacher training programs specifically designed for language teaching to special needs students (Batista-Arias, 2011). Trawick (2015) stated, “without understanding how to differentiate instruction and include students of all ability levels, teachers are unlikely to take on the time-consuming challenge of changing their lessons on their own” (p. 30). Since the needs of these students are completely different than the other populations that have been studied in foreign language teaching field, this study has a very important place in the literature in terms of showing that the foreign language education field needs teacher training programs for inclusive classrooms.

In addition, identifying what kind of materials would be helpful in teaching language to special need students, this study could be referred by material designers in designing multimodal materials. However, there is definitely a need for more research on such inclusive foreign language programs. Further research could examine strategies and accommodations that support successful inclusive foreign language teaching and the possible benefits of learning a foreign language for special needs students (Duvall, 2006; Tolbert et al., 2015). To be able to realize these, a proper foreign language teacher training in inclusive settings is necessary.

However, there are also some limitations of this research study. For instance, the researcher would need more participants and this would provide more maximum variation for the study. Results cannot be generalized because of the small sample size. There were only three teachers that were observed and interviewed. One of the reasons was that this program was in the process of piloting and only volunteer teachers were able to teach in this program. In addition, there was no funding involved that would support the program. Therefore, the sample size was pretty small.

Another point that needs consideration is that the data collection was done only five times. In addition, even though the researcher reminded the participants that none of their answers would affect their position in teaching French, some of them might have hesitated about stating what they thought. They might have acted as if they have more skills than they actually had. This is because of the existence of the researcher. Therefore, positionality might have affected the participants' answers or their perceived beliefs about their teaching.

However, overall, despite several limitations, this study contributes to the readers' awareness of the lack of teacher training programs for inclusive schools that fully integrates special needs students. Even if it may be too early to design specific teacher training programs for such purposes with the results of only one study, foreign language education programs may provide courses that are intended for teaching pre-service teachers about what they may encounter while teaching foreign languages to special needs students. The challenges and strategies could be taught.

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