

## **Results of EN-ABILITIES questionnaire with English language teachers (Portugal, Romania, Serbia & Spain)**



The research was conducted within the project “Accessible Online environment for encouraging autonomous English language learning aimed at people with disabilities” (EN-ABILITIES 2017-1-ES01-KA204-038155) with partners from Burgos University (Spain), Sociedad Española de Asistencia Sociosanitaria (Spain), Dublin City University (Ireland), Aveiro University (Portugal), FASPER – University of Belgrade (Serbia) and University of Galati Dunarea de Jos (Romania). Co-funded by the European Union (Erasmus + KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education).

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### ***Sample***

The sample included 204 English Language Teachers aged between 22 and 62 years ( $M=42.37$ ;  $SD=8.72$ ). 25% are males and 75% females. 60 teachers were from Portugal (29.4%), 43 from Romania (21.1%), 47 from Serbia (23%) and 54 teachers were from Spain (26.5%).

Over half of the participants ( $n=116$ ; 56.9%) acquired formal education in English Language Teaching through undergraduate academic studies; sixty seven (32.9%) completed master academic studies; fifteen participants (7.4%) had a PhD, while five participants (2.5%) acquired formal education in a different way (not specified).

With regard to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, most participants (70.1%) considered that their English language knowledge was at a C2 level (143 participants); 20.6% believed to have a C1 level (42 teachers), while seventeen participants (8.3%) considered that their English language knowledge was at a B2 level.

Only two participants (1%) had less than one year of work experience. Twenty (9.8%) participants had between one and five years of work experience; twenty eight (13.7%) English language teachers had been working between six and ten years; forty two (20.6%) participants worked between eleven and fifteen years; while over half of the participants (54.9%) had more than fifteen years of work experience teaching English (112 teachers).

102 participants (50%) stated that they worked with adults over 18 years of age (86%), and 101 participants (49.5%) worked with students within the 7-17 age group.

A relevant number of participants (84) worked at a regular school (41.6%), University (54 participants; 26.7%) or a foreign language school (44 teachers; 21.8%).

### ***How often do they teach English to persons with some special educational needs?***

When asked how often they taught English to people with special educational needs (SEN), an important number of teachers stated that they never teach (from 34 to 59.5%). Depending on the type of disability autism was the disability with a higher percentage of teachers who have no experience teaching English in their classes, whilst

dyslexia was the least mentioned SEN. Results are shown in figure 1.

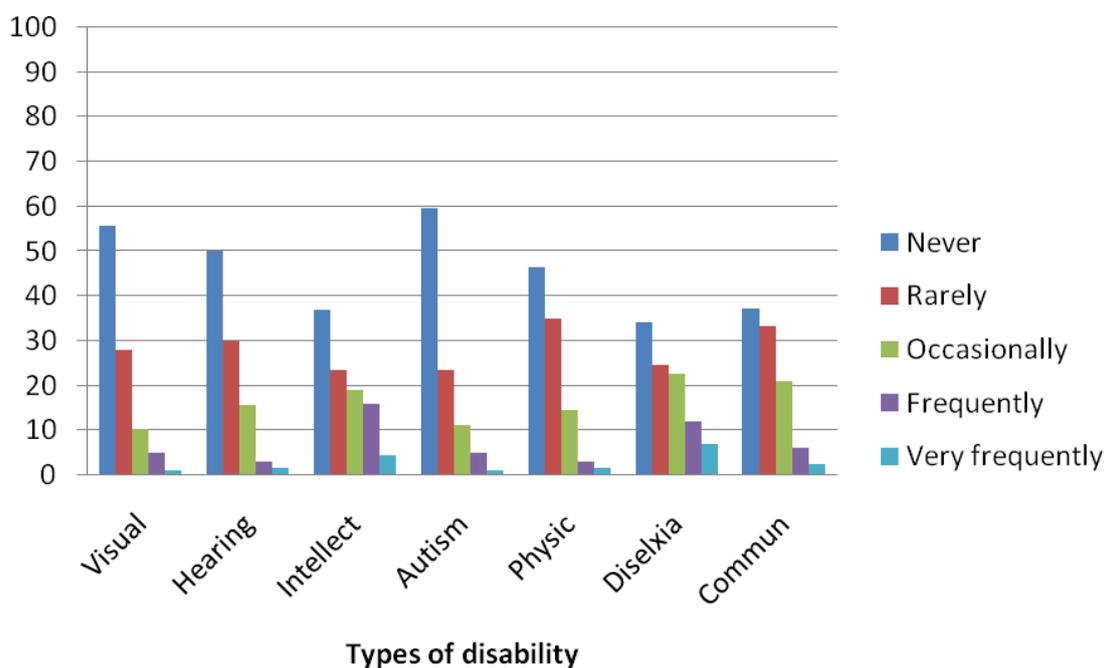


Figure1. How often do you teach English to persons with disabilities?

Results show that the situation in which more teachers state that they have taught English to students with SEN frequently or very frequently was to people with intellectual disability (20.5%) followed by dyslexia (19%).

### ***How do they adapt their teaching methods to students with special needs?***

Among numerous strategies, these teachers most frequently mentioned adapting and simplifying the program, teaching methods and tasks. For example, they divided tasks into smaller, simpler steps (step by step learning), they required students with disabilities to only engage in tasks they found interesting or which were related to tasks they had recently done. Also they thought that it was very important to offer extra material or different activities (for instance, cards to develop vocabulary, physical response games, manipulative activities or materials beforehand of each lesson). Teachers also used accommodations such as giving more time for completing a task,

extended response time, or additional lessons and consultations. Some teachers made accommodations by giving special attention to students with SEN (e.g. they approached these students more frequently), while some emphasized adapting teaching materials and the learning environment (e.g. a privileged seat for a student with SEN). They also recognized the significance of adapting the way content was presented, and thus emphasized using visual support (pictures and drawings) and a multimodal teaching approach (presenting the content in a visual, auditory and tactile-kinaesthetic way). Moreover, students could take advantage of more frequent tutorials with the teacher.

These teachers also paid great attention to understanding the content. English language teachers more frequently checked whether individuals with disabilities understood instructions, repeated significant information, and introduced in their assignments up to three new words per unit. Teachers also used drill-repetition-practice, detailed oral presentation, direct questions and answers, and encouraged self-correction before a more general and public correction of results. They also used learning through play (memory games, guessing games, drawing...), listening to songs in English, and watching appropriate TV programmes in English.

These results indicate that teachers involved in the survey were aware of the need to adapt teaching methods for learners with SEN, and that they recognized that there were many different available strategies. However, this positive image resulted from the fact that some teachers listed up to eight strategies, while some listed none (less than three strategies on average), which pointed out to important individual differences. Some teachers stated that they were not able to adapt teaching methods due to having a large number of students (e.g. groups of 70-110 students) although they were very willing to meet the needs of students requiring additional support in education. These answers in general provide a basis for the assumption that teachers'

knowledge on educational needs of students with SEN is greater than what is generally thought, but that it needs to be awakened and structured (i.e. many participants would benefit from training in this aspect of teaching).

***Do participants think that people with special education needs should learn English?***

Teachers' attitudes were tested on a five-point Likert scale where 1 indicated complete disagreement and 5 complete agreement with the given assumption. Participants believe that all people must learn English, but there are differences when dealing with each specific disability.

Table 1 shows the mean and the standard deviation of the attitudes towards the different types of disabilities.

**Table1. Participants' attitudes toward learning English in the population of learners with different types of disability**

<b>Type of disability</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
1. Delayed speech and language development	3.94	1.08
2. Specific learning disabilities	3.98	1.06
3. Mild intellectual disability	4.12	0.92
4. Severe forms of intellectual disability	3.19	1.31
5. ADHD	4.18	1.00
6. Visual impairment	4.51	0.77
7. Hearing impairment	4.12	1.10
8. Physical disabilities	4.74	0.58
9. Mental disorders	3.57	1.26
10. Behavioural disorders	4.12	1.00
11. Brain injury/neurological disorders	3.45	1.30
12. Autism spectrum disorder	3.95	1.11

Participants obtain high scores in positive attitudes toward learning English in all the disabilities. However, there are more positive attitudes towards the group of learners with physical and visual disabilities and more negative attitudes towards the group of people with severe intellectual disability and brain injury or neurological disorders. In

general, the participating teachers do not doubt that all students (regardless of their disability) must learn English as a foreign language, but they stress this idea more clearly when it is related to a physical or sensory disability and do not agree as much when it refers to an intellectual disability with serious repercussions in the learner's daily life.

The workplace (university vs. foreign language school vs. regular school) had a significant influence on participants' attitudes only towards the idea that students with severe intellectual disability should learn English. An ANOVA was carried out with attitudes regarding different disabilities as a dependent variable, and the place where they work as factor. As mentioned, only severe intellectual disabilities yielded significant differences [ $F(2,180)=5.17$ ;  $p=.007$ ;  $\eta^2=.055$ ]. The post-hoc Bonferroni test showed that the significant differences were between university ( $M= 3.59$ ;  $sd=1.09$ ) and foreign language school teachers ( $M=2.80$ ,  $sd=1.23$ ) [mean differences=  $.797$ ; standard error =  $2.56$ ;  $p=.006$ ].

Teachers who work in the university have more positive attitudes regarding the opportunities of the students. This could be due to various reasons, having more knowledge of these problems, because those students who are enrolled in the university have already developed more competences for studying; because there are more accommodations for people with disabilities, or because of the lower level of interaction with these participants in comparison with foreign language school teachers who may have a stronger interaction with the students and less accommodations to support students with disabilities and so have a more negative attitude.

An ANOVA showed that there were differences in attitudes between men and women in having taught students with intellectual disability [men:  $M= 1.86$ ;  $sd=1.00$ ; women:  $M= 2.42$ ;  $sd=1.28$ ;  $F(1,199)=7.83$ ;  $p=.006$ ;  $\eta^2=.038$ ]; autism [men:  $M= 1.33$ ;

sd=.62; women: M= 1.75; sd=1.00;  $F(1,199)=7.88$ ;  $p=.006$ ;  $\eta^2=.038$ ]; and dyslexia [men: M= 2.00; sd=.87; women: M= 2.45; sd=1.34;  $F(1,199)=4.99$ ;  $p=.027$ ;  $\eta^2=.025$ ]. In all cases women stress that they have taught these participants more times than men. Nevertheless, there are no significant gender differences in agreeing that people with different disabilities should learn and be taught English.

As for possible differences based on the time these teachers have been teaching English, the only significant differences was found in teaching English to people with hearing impairment [ $F(4,199)=2.57$ ;  $p=.039$ ;  $\eta^2=.050$ ]. The Bonferroni post hoc test shows that the difference is between those who mention that they have taught English for 1-5 years (M= 1.25; sd= .55) and those with over 15 years' experience (M= 1.88; sd= .93) (mean differences = -.631; se = .222;  $p=.049$ ).

Once again there were no differences based on teaching experience in the appreciation of if students with disabilities should learn English or not.

### **Participants' habits in using ICT**

42.2% of participants used ICT between one and three hours a day, 38.7% used these technologies between four and six hours a day and 11.8% used them between seven and nine hours every day. Meanwhile, only three participants used ICT less than one hour and twelve teachers spent more than nine hours a day using these technologies (See Figure 2).

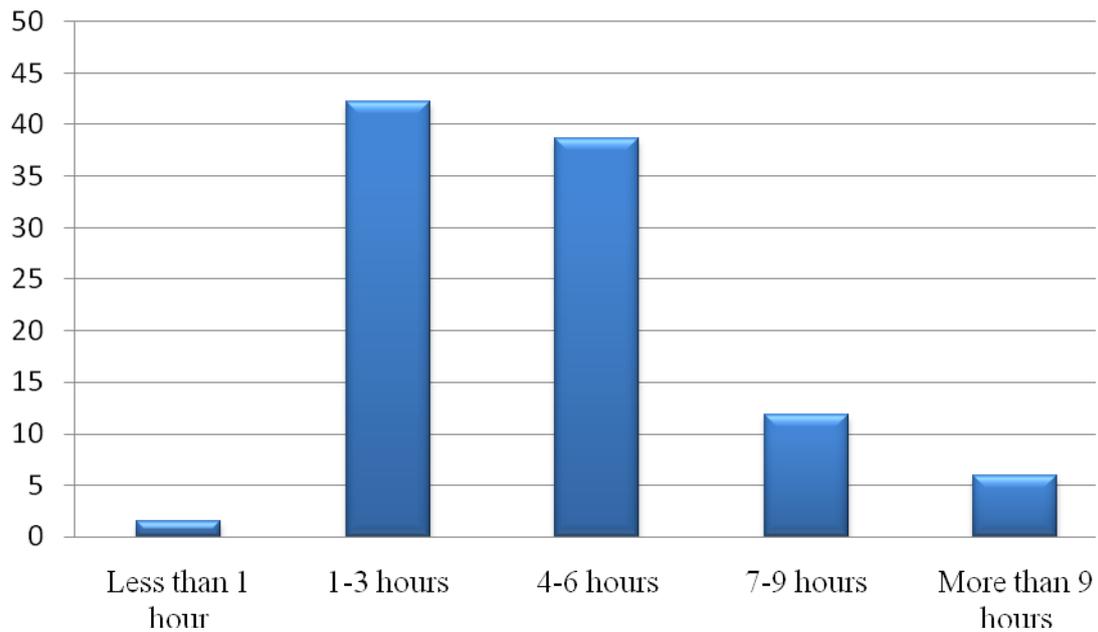


Figure2. How many hours a day do you use technology (%)?

As we can see over 50% of the teachers stress that they use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) over 4 hours a day, although the largest percentage states a usage of between 1 and 3 hours per day.

On a scale from 1 to 5, intended to measure participants' self-assessment of skills in using ICT, their average rate was intermediate ( $M=3.77$ ;  $sd=.72$ ). Results of participants' self-assessment are shown in Figure 3. Almost all participants state that their level of knowledge is intermediate-high, while nobody recognized that they did not know how to use this technology.

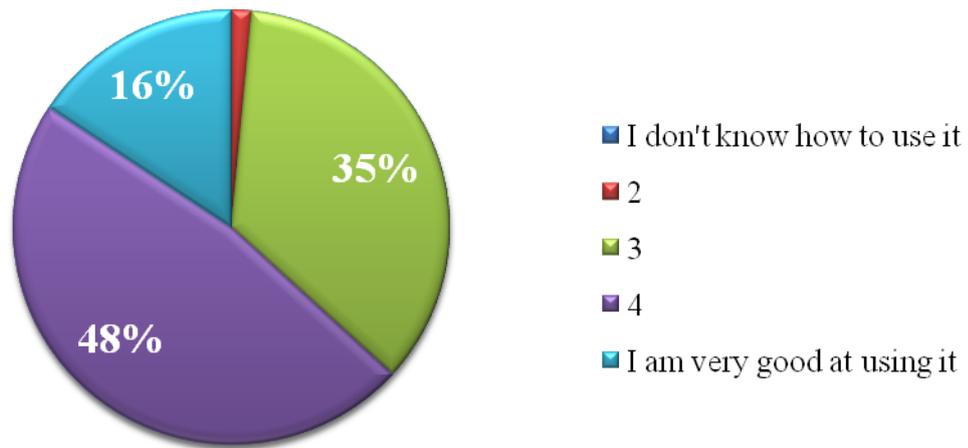


Figure3. How tech-savvy would you describe yourself on a rating scale from 1 (I don't know how to use it) to 5 (I am very good at using it) (%)?

According to the given results, 37.3% of participants would describe themselves as early adopter (visionaries, that will adopt technology earlier than majority) and another 35.8% would describe themselves as early majority (pragmatists who will adopt technology as soon as the majority of teachers do so). 25% considered themselves as innovators and only four teachers (2%) chose to be a late majority. There were no participants who considered themselves as not ready to accept modern technology as a pedagogical tool. Results of participants' self-descriptions are shown in Figure 4.

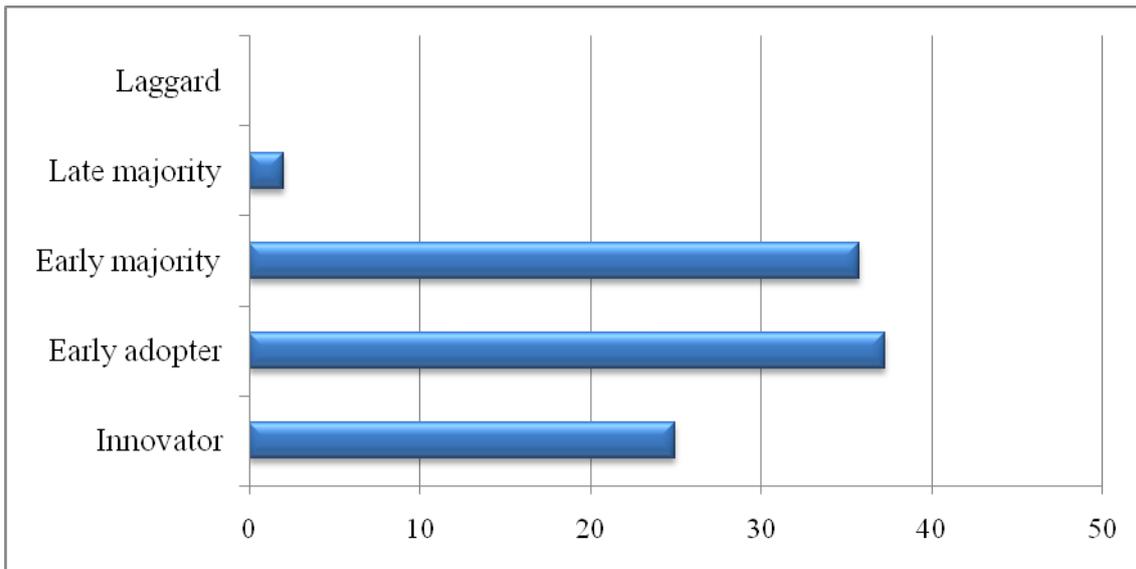


Figure 4. How would you describe yourself in terms of using technology for learning and instruction?

However, regarding the use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) for teaching English, 27 participants (13.2%) stated that they never used it. 26 participants (12.7%) stated that they rarely used it. Moreover, 72 participants (35.3%) placed themselves in a neutral interval. Nevertheless, 28.4% (58 participants) defined themselves as experienced in the use of VLE, and 10.3% (21 participants) used it very frequently.

As expected there was a positive correlation between knowledge in the use of ICT and a positive self-description in the use of ICT ( $r=.411$ ;  $p=.0001$ ) and experience using VLE ( $r=.250$ ;  $p=.0001$ ). Moreover, there was also a positive correlation between one's self-description and the experience using VLE ( $r=.327$ ;  $p=.0001$ ). In sum, the more a teacher uses ICT the more s/he believes in being tech savvy and has experience using VLE.

*Attitudes toward using virtual environment in teaching English to students with special education needs.*

These attitudes were tested on a five-point Likert scale in which 1 indicated complete disagreement and 5 complete agreement with the given item. Participants had mainly positive attitudes toward using VLE. The existence of low average rates for the assumption that VLE distracted students from the content of the lesson also indicated a positive attitude. Participants were least optimistic with regard to the idea that VLE provided more social inclusion and job opportunities. Table 2 shows the main results with means and standard deviations for each statement.

Table2. Participants' attitudes toward using virtual environment in teaching English to students with special education needs.

Statements	M	SD
Using VLE enhances their learning and educational goals.	4.12	0.87
VLE enables a teacher to meet the needs of individual students.	4.01	0.93
VLE distracts students from the content of the lesson.	2.25	1.17
VLE encourages autonomous language learning.	4.18	0.87
VLE provides more job opportunities.	3.71	1.06
VLE encourages social inclusion.	3.61	1.08

Teachers who considered themselves to have more ICT skills and knowledge believed that using VLE would enhance learning and the educational goals of students with disabilities ( $r=0.17$ ,  $p=.016$ ) and that VLE enables a teacher to know the individual needs of participants ( $r=0.20$ ,  $p=.004$ ). Also there was a correlation between the belief that using VLE enhances their learning and educational goals with the other statements posed in the question: that VLE enables a teacher to know the needs of individuals students ( $r=0.69$ ,  $p=.0001$ ), VLE distracts students from the content of the lesson ( $r=-0.19$ ,  $p=.005$ ), VLE encourages autonomous language learning ( $r=0.63$ ,  $p=.001$ ), VLE provides more job opportunities ( $r=0.43$ ,  $p=.0001$ ) or VLE encourages social inclusion ( $r=0.37$ ,  $p=.0001$ ).

### *The needs of English language teachers for additional support*

English language teachers stated that they needed additional training in the field of special educational needs as much as in ICT and VLE. Figure 5 shows the percentages for the different needs.

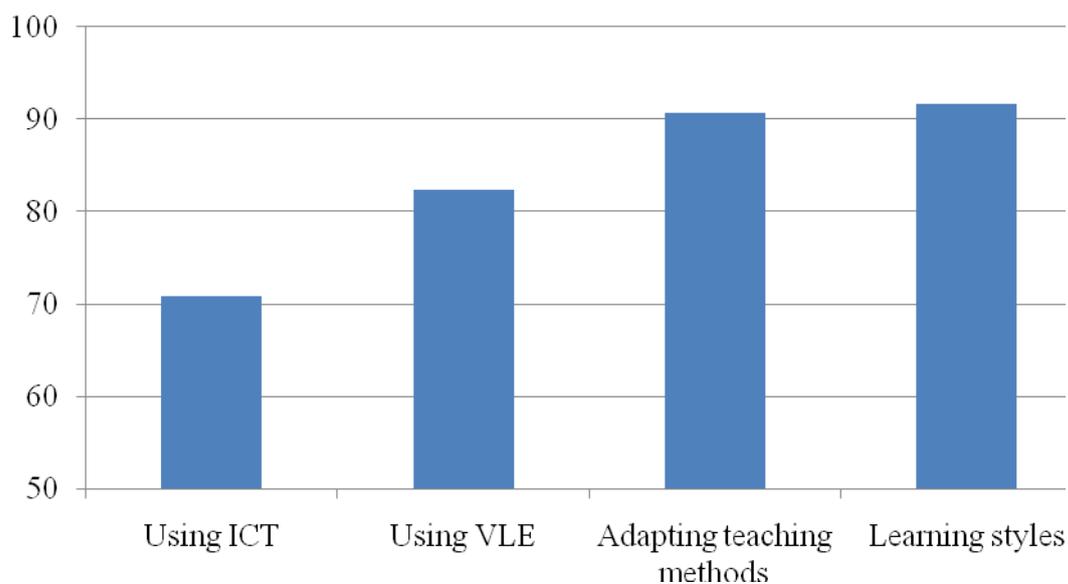


Figure5. Questionnaire of support needs for teachers

As we can see there is a large consensus regarding the need for teachers to receive training in using ICT and VLE, the two most technical aspects of the process involved in language teaching with new tools and technologies. Nevertheless, there is even more of a need to train these teachers in how to adapt the existing educational material and learning styles to working with participants with SEN. In sum, teachers are well aware of the need to learn new ways to teach, create new non-traditional materials, and adapt their learning processes to new contexts and situations in which people with different educational needs are involved.

An important question referring to the needs which teachers perceive they have regarding helping and supporting people with SEN learn English would be to establish if there are differences based on their use of ICT tools. A chi square analysis shows that there were significant differences in the need for more ICT training [ $\chi^2(3,203)=16.07$ ;  $p=.001$ ] and the need for more training in the use of VLE [ $\chi^2(3,203)=11.36$ ;  $p=.010$ ]. The analysis of adjusted residuals shows that those teachers who state that they have some knowledge of ICT (midpoint in the scale) are those who state that they need more training, whilst, coherently, those who define themselves as very good at using ICT are who believe that they need less training. The same pattern emerges for VLE training. These results show that those who have some knowledge, but who do not define themselves as experts, may be more insecure about their real ability to address English language teaching to participants with SEN and so request more technical help and assistance in the use of these technologies. No significant differences were found with regard to the more educational aspects of adapting contents or learning styles for teaching English to students with SEN.

Regarding the relationship between these needs and the level of experience teaching English, the chi square showed that the only significant difference was found in the need for more training in the use of ICT [ $\chi^2(4,203)=10.34$ ;  $p=.035$ ]. In this case those teachers with 1-5 years' experience (who are also younger age teachers) state that they do not need this training, possibly because they already believe they have acquired it.

## **Conclusions**

Generally, this group of teachers has never taught English to students with disabilities, especially regarding autism and intellectual disabilities. However, they have occasionally taught English to students with hearing impairment and dyslexia.

When asked how they adapt their teaching methods to students with special needs, they most frequently mentioned they did so by adapting and simplifying the program, teaching methods and tasks. For example, enhancing step by step learning, extra material or different activities, giving more time to complete a task, extending the response time, or including additional lessons and consultations, special attention, visual support, multimodal teaching approach, frequent tutorials with the teacher, drill-repetition-practice, detailed oral presentation, direct questions and answers, encouraging self-correction before correction, including games and songs in the content units, etc. In conclusion, they use many different strategies, adapting the need to the situation. However, a significant percentage of teachers have used some curricular accommodations thinking only of people with visual or hearing impairments. In addition, 16% of teachers admitted that they never used any type of adaptation or accommodations either in content or exercises.

Participants mostly believe that all people must learn English, but there are certain differences when dealing with specific disabilities. They do not doubt students with visual and physical impairment should learn English as a foreign language. But some teachers have doubts regarding students with severe intellectual disability, mental disorders or brain injury.

The workplace had significant influence on participants' attitudes. Teachers who work at the university have more positive attitudes towards the opportunities of students with intellectual disability, mental disorders, behavioural disorders and autism, but they also probably have less experience with these learners because they are less present in tertiary education.

In general, these teachers have doubts regarding the use of virtual learning environments. Almost 50% of teachers believe that VLE promotes self-directed

learning, but in reality they have doubts, and maybe fears, about how to use these VLE. They need more training in using VLE, adapting teaching methods and learning styles and less in using ICT. It seems necessary to encourage VLE knowledge among English as a foreign language teacher.

In conclusion, although this group of teachers do not have previous experience with various types of disabilities and some of them think that learning English as a foreign language is not important for students with certain disabilities; they themselves suggest that they need more training in styles learning and learning adaptation methods. Therefore, it is possible that the situation may improve in terms of sharing more positive attitudes if both a pedagogical training and training about the use of VLE is offered.