

Opinion Article

ECLECTIC TEACHING METHOD: A PARADIGM SHIFT IN CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGY FOR AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

Abstract

One of the major challenges of teachers in modern times is the continuous search for pedagogy and approaches to meet diversities among learners in an inclusive school. Since being aware of student's personal characteristics are some of the key components in managing learners in an inclusive classroom. The eclectic method employs a variety of teaching resources in order to respond to the various ways of learning inherent among learners. It is important that teaching and learning materials are interesting and motivating for the learners. This means that the teacher should carefully select teaching materials according to the teaching point, learner needs and characteristics and the cultural context of the learning and teaching context should be taken into consideration. Ideas of inclusion assume that every learner has equitable access to education and schools organize learning. Due to different approaches, the eclectic method allows individuals to study objects from different angles. This paper examines the issues of elective methods in an inclusive classroom. It highlights some recommendations to teachers in an inclusive classroom. This is followed with a conclusion.

Keywords: elective teaching method, inclusive classroom and pedagogy.

Introduction

In recent decades, the impact of technical, social and cultural change has added new challenges to education throughout the world. This is reflected in our classroom which has prompted most educational stakeholders to think of methods and strategies in teaching and learning that can accommodate all these differences. Being aware of student's personal characteristics is the key to classroom management. since students are from diverse background. One of the major challenges for teachers in modern times is the continuous search for pedagogy and approaches to meet this diversity in inclusive schools. Ideas of inclusion assume that every pupil has equitable access to education and that schools organize learning. Since the early 90s, educators have been developing the philosophical theory of the eclectic approach. Due to different approaches, the eclectic method allows individuals to study objects from different angles. This technique allows the teacher to explain the material to the students using various techniques. Eclecticism allows teachers to find unity in various pedagogical methods and makes the learning more dynamic. This method also helps to implement an individual approach to learning and solving social problems. Most importantly, it is based on the study of the interests and needs of the child. To

answer all students' needs and solve all of the issues students face, teachers must know and apply more than one methodology. These are positive outcomes of the method on day-to-day education. Educators who eclectically mix different teaching methods can always present the material following the students' preferences. This led to the emergence of the eclectic teaching approach which is claimed to be the suitable approach for teaching Brown (2002) argues that eclectic approach allows teachers to select the materials that work well in their classrooms within their dynamic contexts. Gilliland et al. (1994) pointed out that the reason for adopting eclecticism is because it does not rely on a single teaching method or approach. The eclectic approach has a broad theoretical basis and has a flexible set of activities. Therefore, the place of eclectic teaching method during teaching and learning especially in handling learners in an inclusive classroom cannot be over emphasized.

The Eclectic Method: Definitions, Meaning and Implications

The eclectic approach was born out of the realization that each of the individual methods of teaching had strengths and weaknesses and that no one method was responsive to the dynamic classroom context. Thus, based on the shortcomings of the methods, Brown (2002) argued that eclecticism provides the solution because the approach allows the teacher to select what works within their own dynamic contexts. Gilliland et al. (1994) stated that the justification for the eclectic approach lies in the weaknesses of the single approach because a single method has a narrow theoretical basis and has a delimited set of activities and is therefore inflexible. Since eclecticism is context sensitive, learning is fun and innovative and the approach works for every type of learner regardless of their social economic background and preferences.

According to Gao (2011), the principles of eclectic approach would challenge instructors to ensure that decisions about classroom instruction and activities are based on a holistic and comprehensive understanding of all teaching theories and pedagogies, in terms of the goal and situation of teaching and learning, learners' needs and the available materials. Gao (2011) viewed eclecticism as a teaching method that combines all language skills (e.g. listening, speaking, reading and writing) and encompasses some practice in the classroom. He also advises teachers to integrate and take advantage of all other teaching methods and to avoid their disadvantages. Wali (2009) stated that principled eclecticism should not serve methods but learners. Thus, it is up to the teachers' discretion to choose procedures and techniques inside the classroom. Given that all teaching teaching methods has its own advantages and disadvantages, and there is no concrete or ideal approach in teaching. The eclectic teaching approach is characterized by keen flexibility since teachers can choose whatever works to achieve learning objectives (Wali,2009).It is extremely important to note that the eclectic approach is not rigorous, and its features are combined with other teaching methods. Ali (1981) attempted to explain the major characteristics and principles of eclecticism as follows:

- Teachers are free to select various types of teaching techniques in the classroom with reference to the lesson objectives.
- Teachers could choose any method or aspect that suits teaching inside the classroom.

- Learners will see different teaching aids that make lessons more stimulating and interesting.
- Teachers and learners would be in a better situation to overcome difficulties that may arise from the textbook materials.

The eclectic approach saves much time and effort in the presentation of learning activities. The eclectic approach is subjective since it is constructed by teachers according to the learning context. The teacher should carefully select the materials to suit the learning context and make the teaching process more motivating and interesting. Widemann (2001) affirmed that good teachers spend much time in collecting attractive and interesting teaching materials to gladden their teaching. Teachers should not spare a thought in developing materials for the learners. In eclectic approach, teachers can use computers, pictures, maps, music, film, radio, newspapers, magazines, textbooks, research articles, chats and realia in their teaching (Ledema, 2003). Like any other teaching method, the eclectic teaching approach has advantages and disadvantages. The eclectic approach is live, motivating, participatory, context-sensitive, and learner-centered and includes using a variety of classroom tasks and activities. In addition, the eclectic approach is flexible to the needs of the classroom during the lesson, it is correlative and objective since it addresses the learners' needs of diverse backgrounds (Kumar, 2013). The eclectic approach is said to have disadvantages that include (1) discouraging teachers to reflect upon their teaching; (2) The adoption of the eclectic approach could be unsafe due to the methodological baggage that comes with it. Nonetheless, the eclectic approach is more advantageous than disadvantageous; most of the limitations of this approach are justifiable when teachers are poorly prepared for the classroom (Widemann, 2001).

Inclusive education

Inclusion is an on-going process, a never-ending quest, aiming for increased participation in education for everyone involved. Some define it as representing the participation and education of disabled pupils and special needs pupils in mainstream or general education (Salend, 2010). This view focuses on special needs, as the prerequisite for inclusion, meaning that it is a part of special needs education. Those who adhere to this definition hold the worldview that the difficulties pupils experience in school are a consequence of their impairments or shortages. Thereby they exclude the possibility that pupils' difficulties can be attributed to failure in relationships, to the fact that curricula and approaches to teaching and learning are not responsive to diversity, or that difficulties can arise from the social pressures homes and communities bring into schools (Slee, 2011).

For others, the development in defining inclusion comes from the notion of diversity, rather than disability and how schools respond to and value a diverse group of pupils. Diversity is a natural characteristic of a school community, mirroring the wider community, and it can be explained as the range of characteristics that result in a perception of difference among people. This perception of difference can elicit responses in others that can either be favourable or unfavourable to the individual in question (Lumby & Coleman, 2007). Inclusion is aimed at diverting attention towards inequalities presented in exclusion and discrimination against

diversities such as social and ethnic circumstances, religion, gender and ability of pupils and their families. Thus, we state that inclusive education is a movement against exclusion of any kind and a reaction to political segregation and social inequality (Petrou, Angelides, & Leigh, 2009).

The goal of inclusion is to work against inequality and nurture people's sense of belonging in school and society. Inclusive schools aim to find ways to educate all their pupils successfully,

Recommended activities to support teachers

1. *Formulating and implementing policies to meet the needs of trained teachers:* Considering the importance of professional training for teachers, it would be necessary for the Ministries of Higher, Secondary and Basic Education to come up with a policy on this issues that ensures that our trained teachers at the level of primary, secondary and even in Higher Education can competently handled learners with special needs given the growing need of diverse learners in the classroom
2. *Organization of pre-service and post service training programmes:* The centralized and the decentralized services of the ministries of Higher, Basic and Secondary education and with the help of experts in these areas should organized seminars, works to enhance professional development of teachers given the nature of today learners. Lay private and confessional school should be part of this programme.
3. *The organization of learning station:* One way to create an instructionally responsive classroom is to set up learning stations (Good & Brophy, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999). Learning stations can be used with pupils at different ages within different subjects and are organized at different spots around the classroom. The time frame, tasks, content and learning processes are differentiated to accommodate for pupil resources. In addition, teachers plan assignments by pupil readiness and employ flexible grouping. The assignments at each station can vary and pupils can be allowed to suggest topics and tasks. Setting up such learning stations in our regular schools will enable teachers to organize and plan individualized tasks for each student and have them working independently or towards independence
4. *Use of cooperative learning:* Cooperative learning is a form of teaching and learning in which the teacher organizes pupils to work collaboratively in small groups. For pupils to gain individual accountability or positive interdependence, the teacher structures the group work, gives pupils different roles to be accountable for, designs groups that are small enough for everyone to contribute, and clearly defines the tasks. By using cooperative learning, an opportunity is created for pupils to work with others and listen to a variety of responses and different points of view. Furthermore, the teacher enables pupils to add their perspectives to the discussion and get acquainted with different cultures (Gillies, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 2003). Thus, it should be noted that this form of teaching and learning works well in diverse inclusive classrooms.

5. *Use of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Understanding by Design (UbD)*: These are two strategies that work well together and can be used to cater for pupils' abilities, strengths and interests. Understanding by Design (UbD) is a strategy to use for curriculum planning. It has also been termed 'backward design' as it entails beginning by identifying the desired learning outcomes and deciding how learners show evidence of learning, similarly to UDL (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Thus, the instruction and learning experiences are planned based on clear learning goals specifying what pupils should be able to do. Differentiated instruction is however aimed at the way content or aims are organized with diverse pupils in mind. Thus, in planning instruction there is variation and inherent flexibility in content (what is to be learned), processes (how it is learned) and products of learning (how learning is evidenced) (Tomlinson, 2003). This means that pupils can choose their learning approach and product rather than the teacher making the choice for them based on some pre-set profile of the pupils (Ferguson, 2008; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). These two approaches together, backward design and differentiation, present a holistic method of organizing curriculum, assessment and instruction based on ideas of effective teaching and learning for diverse learners in our classroom.
6. *Collaboration and parental involvement in school*: Collaboration here refers to how practitioners and others interact and work cooperatively to accomplish a task or series of tasks in and for various situations (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). This will enable teachers and others with different skills and expertise to work together and to problem-solve in order to respond more effectively to pupils (Ferguson, 2008; Meijer, 2003). Research on effective inclusive schools has shown that the disposition and aptitude of staff towards working together was seen as critical for accommodating diverse groups of pupils (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). Furthermore it is suggested that collaboration is most likely to be beneficial when collaborators each have something to contribute, share mutual goals, work together voluntarily, contribute equally, and share responsibility for making decisions and achieving pupil outcomes (Friend et al., 2010; Guðjónsdóttir, 2010). The active involvement of parents in the education of their children can facilitate the work of the classroom teachers in many ways. Mbipom (1997) emphasizes the need to sustain the partnership between the school and parents of children with handicapping condition. This communication between the teacher and parents can help the classroom teacher to understand the children, home and cultural backgrounds influencing the children's learning and behaviour. Thus reaching out to parents, establishing and maintaining effective communication are key in handling learners with diversities in an inclusive classroom.

Conclusion

This review study sheds light on the research on the use of the eclectic method in an inclusive classroom in recent times in the domain of teaching and learning. Considering the complexity and diversity of learners in the regular classroom. It is important for teachers to use the eclectic teaching method since it will enable them to choose whatever works to achieve learning objectives. Therefore, classroom teachers play an important role in the effective realization and implementation of inclusive education in our society.

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