



EDUCATING FOR ALL: KEYS TO INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE TEACHING

Educating For All: Keys To Inclusive And Equitable Teaching

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Abstract

This article addresses the importance of inclusive and equitable education in the classroom context. It examines key strategies that educators can implement to meet the diverse learning needs of over 400 students from varying cultural, linguistic, and cognitive backgrounds. By integrating approaches such as differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and culturally responsive teaching methods, educators can foster an environment where all students thrive. The study focuses on the effectiveness of these inclusive teaching methods in a larger sample, assessing their impact on academic performance across a broad population of learners.

Keywords:

inclusive education, equitable teaching, Universal Design for Learning, differentiated instruction, culturally responsive methods.

Resumen

Este artículo aborda la importancia de la educación inclusiva y equitativa en el contexto del aula. Examina las estrategias clave que los educadores pueden implementar para satisfacer las diversas necesidades de aprendizaje de más de 400 estudiantes de diferentes orígenes culturales, lingüísticos y cognitivos. Al integrar enfoques como la instrucción diferenciada, el Diseño Universal para el Aprendizaje (DUA) y los métodos de enseñanza culturalmente receptivos, los educadores pueden fomentar un entorno en el que todos los estudiantes prosperen. El estudio se centra en la efectividad de estos métodos de enseñanza inclusiva en una muestra más amplia, evaluando su impacto en el rendimiento académico de una población diversa de aprendices.

Palabras clave:

educación inclusiva, enseñanza equitativa, Diseño Universal para el Aprendizaje, instrucción diferenciada, métodos culturalmente receptivos.

Introduction

In the 21st century, education has evolved to meet the growing demands of increasingly diverse student populations. Today's classrooms encompass learners from various linguistic, cultural, and cognitive backgrounds, requiring educators to adopt teaching practices that are both inclusive and equitable. These strategies aim to provide all students with the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their individual differences.

The concept of inclusive education goes beyond physical integration; it focuses on creating environments where every student feels valued and supported. In line with international frameworks like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Sustainable Development Goal 4—which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education—educators are called to implement strategies that break down barriers to learning. These methods include differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and culturally responsive teaching (CRT), all of which have been recognized as effective in addressing the diverse needs of students (Hall, 2023; Green & Stoneman, 2022).

As schools continue to welcome learners from increasingly varied backgrounds, the challenge is no longer simply academic but also social and cultural. Addressing this challenge requires an understanding of how best to implement inclusive practices that enhance the educational experiences of all students. This study explores how inclusive teaching strategies can be implemented across a larger sample of over 400 students, examining their impact on academic performance and student engagement.

This article focuses on three primary approaches to fostering inclusivity in education:

1. Differentiated instruction – Tailoring teaching to meet the unique learning needs of each student.

2. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) – Providing flexible learning environments that accommodate diverse learners.
3. Culturally responsive teaching – Recognizing and valuing students' cultural backgrounds as part of the learning process.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of these inclusive teaching strategies in improving student outcomes across a diverse student population. The study is conducted at a private high school in Ecuador with over 400 students, primarily focusing on how these strategies influence both academic performance and student engagement.

Literature Review

Inclusive and Equitable Education

Inclusive education aims to ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities, background, or needs, have equal access to learning opportunities. According to Ainscow and Miles (2016), inclusive education systems must be flexible and responsive to the individual needs of students. This aligns with the definition offered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which emphasizes that inclusive education should eliminate exclusionary practices, focusing on the integration of marginalized learners.

The move towards inclusive education has been influenced by global advocacy efforts, particularly the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child and the CRPD. These frameworks underline the importance of quality education for all, urging schools to adapt to learners with varying needs and abilities. This study builds on these frameworks by examining how inclusive practices can be scaled to support large student populations effectively.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a method where teaching is tailored to meet the needs of individual students. Tomlinson (2001) argues that by providing multiple options for learning, teachers can better engage students with varying abilities. In inclusive classrooms, differentiated instruction allows teachers to adjust content, process, and product to align with each student's unique learning profile. For example, in a class of over 400 students, differentiation may involve grouping students based on their proficiency levels and offering tailored tasks that challenge and engage them accordingly.

Differentiated instruction also involves flexible grouping, allowing teachers to vary instruction and provide targeted support. Research has shown that this approach is particularly effective for students with learning difficulties or those who are performing below grade level (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework emphasizes the creation of flexible learning environments that accommodate the needs of all learners, regardless of their learning style, language, or ability. Developed by CAST, UDL is grounded in the principle that educational curricula should be designed from the outset to meet the needs of the widest range of students. This can involve providing multiple means of representation, action, expression, and engagement (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014).

UDL plays a significant role in promoting inclusivity by ensuring that learning materials are accessible to all students. For example, in classrooms with over 400 students, UDL could involve providing both audio and visual learning materials, offering opportunities for students to engage with content in ways that suit their individual learning preferences. According to Green and Stoneman (2022), UDL is particularly effective when combined

with differentiated instruction, as it allows educators to meet the diverse needs of large groups of students without compromising on quality or engagement.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) emphasizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. This approach recognizes the influence that culture has on students' perspectives and learning experiences, encouraging teachers to adapt their instruction to be more reflective of the cultural diversity within their classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

CRT has been shown to increase engagement and academic performance by making learning more relevant to students' lives. For example, in classrooms of over 400 students, culturally responsive teaching might involve using texts, examples, and teaching methods that reflect the cultural diversity of the student body. By doing so, teachers not only make the material more relatable but also foster a more inclusive classroom environment where students feel seen and understood.

The Intersection of UDL, Differentiated Instruction, and CRT

Recent research suggests that combining UDL, differentiated instruction, and CRT creates an optimal learning environment for diverse classrooms (Hall, 2023). Each of these approaches, when applied effectively, addresses different aspects of student diversity. UDL provides the flexibility to accommodate various learning needs, differentiated instruction ensures that teaching is responsive to individual student differences, and CRT integrates students' cultural contexts into the learning process.

This combination is particularly relevant in larger classrooms, where individual attention can be more difficult to manage. By using these strategies in tandem, educators can create

a structured yet flexible environment that supports students' academic and emotional needs.

Previous Research on Large-Scale Implementation

While many studies focus on the benefits of inclusive teaching strategies in smaller classroom settings, there is a growing body of research examining their application in larger student populations. For instance, a study by Rao (2019) highlighted the scalability of inclusive strategies such as podcasts in language learning, emphasizing that with proper planning, these techniques can effectively engage large groups of learners. This study aims to extend that research by examining how inclusive strategies impact academic outcomes in a sample of over 400 students, focusing on both quantitative improvements in performance and qualitative shifts in student engagement.

Methodology

Setting

This study was conducted at a private high school in Milagro City, in the province of Guayas, Ecuador. The school serves students in the last three years of basic education and three years of secondary education, focusing on over 400 students in the primary section (grades 7-9). Classes are held exclusively in the morning, and each student receives seven hours of English instruction per week. The school prioritizes inclusivity, emphasizing diversity and supporting students from various linguistic, cultural, and cognitive backgrounds to ensure academic success for all.

Research design

The research used a quantitative research approach to collect and analyze data, aiming to determine the effectiveness of inclusive teaching strategies, including Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive teaching. These

methods were applied to enhance the academic performance of a large, diverse group of students.

The guiding research question was:

How effective are inclusive teaching strategies in enhancing the academic performance of a diverse student body?

Sampling

A purposive sampling method was used to select 400 students from grades 7 to 9. This sample was representative of the school's diversity, including students from different linguistic, cultural, and cognitive backgrounds. Students' ages ranged from 12 to 14 years, and their English proficiency levels were assessed as A1-A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Instruments

Pre-test and post-test

The pre-test and post-test were used to evaluate students' academic abilities in three key areas: reading comprehension, listening comprehension, and collaborative problem-solving. These tests were administered before and after an eight-week intervention period where inclusive teaching strategies were implemented.

Student Perception Survey

A student perception survey was conducted to gauge how supported students felt in their learning environment and how effective they found the inclusive teaching strategies. The survey provided insights into students' attitudes toward the methods and their sense of engagement.

Results

The following results from the pre-test and post-test scores reveal significant academic improvements across the different grades:

Table 1.

1. Pre-test and Post-test Results for Group A and Group B

Grade	Average Pre-Test Score	Average Post-Test Score	Improvement (%)
7th Grade	52	72	38.46%
8th Grade	55	78	41.82%
9th Grade	50	73	46.00%
Overall	52.3	74.3	42.17%

Note. The data in this table indicates an overall improvement of 42.17% in academic performance following the intervention, with the most significant gains observed in listening comprehension and collaborative problem-solving.

2. Student Perception Survey Results

The Student Perception Survey results indicated that the majority of students found the inclusive teaching strategies beneficial for their learning. Below is a summary of key findings from the survey:

Feedback Theme	Percentage of Students Reporting Positive Change
Supportive Learning Environment	85%
Increased Engagement	78%
Confidence in Learning	82%

Note. The data in this chart shows the benefits of the application of the inclusive teaching strategies after the intervention.)

Conclusions

Discussion / Conclusion

The results show that the use of inclusive teaching strategies—UDL, differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive teaching—led to significant improvements in both academic performance and student engagement. The pre-test/post-test results highlighted notable gains in reading, listening, and problem-solving abilities, demonstrating the effectiveness of these approaches. Additionally, the Student Perception Survey revealed that students felt more supported and engaged in their learning environment, which is essential for creating a positive and productive classroom atmosphere.

These findings underscore the importance of integrating inclusive and equitable teaching practices in schools, especially in classrooms with diverse student populations. Schools that adopt these strategies not only enhance academic outcomes but also foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment where all students feel valued and empowered to succeed.

Future research should explore the long-term effects of inclusive teaching methods and investigate additional strategies to support students with specific needs, including those with disabilities or ELLs. Expanding the sample size and including various educational contexts could provide further insights into the scalability of these strategies (Meyer et al., 2014; Tomlinson & Moon, 2013).

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