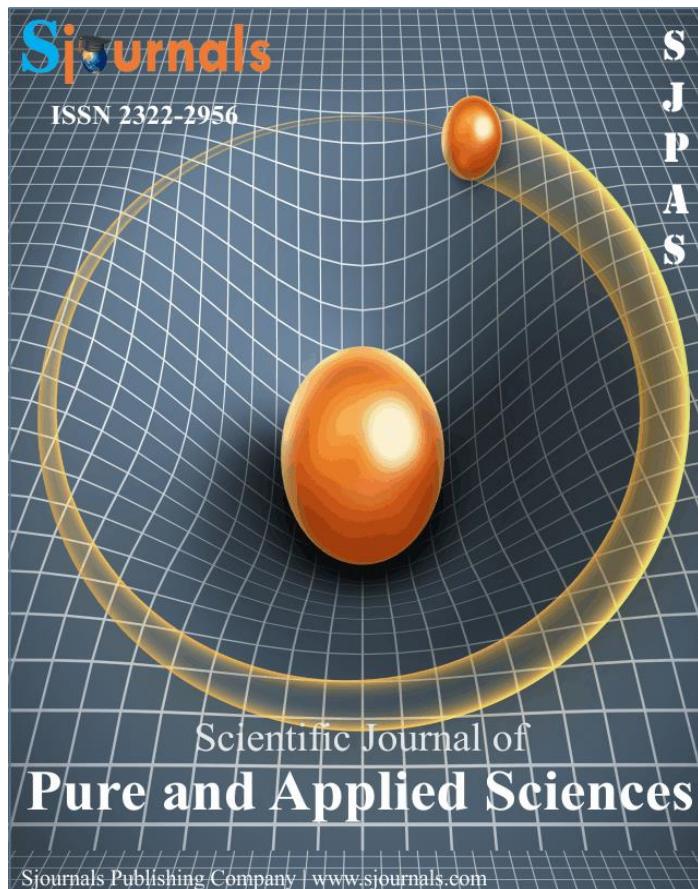


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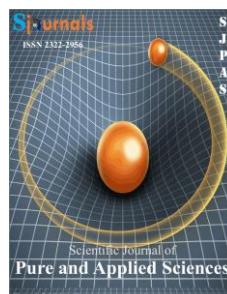
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Review article

A synopsis of individualisation of teaching and learning in inclusive settings

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history,

Received 30 August 2022

Accepted 09 October 2022

Available online 16 October 2022

iThenticate screening 02 September 2022

English editing 07 October 2022

Quality control 15 October 2022

Keywords,

Individualisation

Inclusive education

Adaptation

Modification

Differentiation

Individualised education plan

Universal design

ABSTRACT

Successful inclusive education is premised on the realization that learners have different abilities, potentialities, interests, aspirations, needs and experiences. It acknowledges and responds to the diversity that characterise learners. At the core of these is the realization that, in inclusive classrooms, learners are not taught as a group but as individuals. Individualisation of instruction can be achieved through adaptations/ modifications, differentiation, and individualised education programmes (IEPs). This synopsis concludes that there could be no inclusive education to talk about without individualisation of instruction. The author therefore recommends rigorous training in various strategies for individualisation of instruction among both trainee and practicing teachers if the implementation of inclusive education is to be effective.

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1. Introduction

In inclusive education, we acknowledge diversity of needs and abilities. As such, learners are not taught as a group but as individuals. This is referred to as individualization of instruction. By definition, individualization of instruction entails the realisation that students learn differently and therefore accommodating differences by personalizing, matching or adapting instruction to the needs, interests, experiences and aptitudes of individual learners (Linder and Schwab, 2020). Thus, in inclusive education, learners are taught as individuals because they

are different. They have different abilities, potentialities, interests, aspirations, needs and experiences. Individualisation therefore draws from Howard Gardner's theory. According to Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, "There is no one best way to educate all children. Indeed, the biggest mistake of past centuries has been to treat all children as if they were variants of the same individual and thus to feel justified in teaching them the same subjects in the same ways." Appropriately individualised instruction enables teachers to provide meaningful learning experiences to all learners including those with special needs (McWilliam et al., 2001; Boat et al., 2010). In this section we cover general and specific strategies for individualizing instruction. The specific strategies entail accommodations which will be of great help during your teaching practice (TP) experiences and these include adaptations/ modifications, differentiation, and individualised education programmes (IEPs).

2. General Strategies for Individualisation of Instruction

In order to achieve individualised instruction, the inclusive education teacher should;

- Know the child's interests, needs and abilities.
- Create opportunities for learning based on the child's interests, needs and abilities.
- Scaffold children's learning through supportive interactions. There are two scaffolding strategies namely response-prompting and peer-mediated strategies. Response-prompting strategies entail providing help to a learner in order to elicit a desired response e.g. when the teacher uses verbal prompts to remind the child or physical prompts such as hand over hand technique to prompt the child do a particular physical skill. When using peer-mediated strategies the teacher pairs a more accomplished peer with one who needs help.
 - Provide supports as per the individuals' needs. Supports include increasing time allocation for completion of tasks, use of gestures, use of verbal and physical prompts, modelling and step by step demonstrations, provision of concrete media or electronic gadgets such as calculators and computers, use of sign language, Braille etc.
 - Monitor individual learners' progress.

It is therefore important that the teacher considers;

- What the child enjoys and values.
- What the child is capable of doing.
- The child's present skills.
- Appropriate content standards.
- Collaborating with parents.

3. Adaptations/Modifications

The terms adaptation and modification are different but are often used interchangeably in individualisation discourses. Curriculum adaptation/modification involves modifying the content, instructional strategies, and the different ways of assessing what the learner has learned. 'Adapting the curriculum involves differentiating instruction to provide all learners with a variety of ways to process information and demonstrate what they have learned, in order to "match" the way in which each individual learns most effectively and efficiently.' (Kaur, 2013:26). There are different ways in which adaptations/modifications can be undertaken. These include content, instructional, material, process and assessment adaptations/modifications.

• **Content modification** entails simplification of the concept without compromising the quality of the content. It is thus not simplification of the content but the concept e.g. breaking down the concept into concrete components or giving less work. In other words, the goal is not to reduce content for students with special learning needs, but to provide tools for them to effectively access content. The teacher has to give certain amounts of tasks according to competences and abilities of the learners. In effect, simplification of content-related characteristics is at the forefront of content modifications in inclusive education (Linder and Schwab, 2020). Thus content modification might for example involve:

- Reducing the number of vocabulary words assigned to an individual learner.
- Having a learner complete only the odd-numbered problems on a mathematics exercise.
- Assigning a learner to learn three facts about one animal, instead of two facts about each of five different animals like the average class.

- Giving learners the choice of taking a spelling pre-test or to opt out of spelling for a particular week.
- **In instructional modification**, the teacher adapts instructional explanations and content preparation in the form of diversifying teaching methods such as speaking slowly, using sign language or total communication for the deaf, Braille for the blind, ICT for those with intellectual disabilities, concrete media and outdoor activities for those lagging behind etc.
 - **Material modification** entails adjusting materials to meet the needs of individual learners e.g. Braille books, talking books, larger font size, tree dictionaries, rewriting instructional materials in a simplified format, providing summaries, graphic organizers, or outlines of instructional materials, developing study guides to provide support before, during, and after reading etc. The process of adapting materials provides additional, or simply different, materials, in a variety of modalities that the learners might use during the course of instruction.
 - **Process modification** consists of creation of a variety of activities from which learners can choose or to which the teacher can allocate learners according to their abilities, interests and needs. E.g. some learners could draw a map showing major cities, others identify the major cities yet others could paste names of the major cities on an already existing map. In Physical Education, activities are adapted e.g. throwing can be done while sitting in the wheel chair. We call this Adapted Physical Education and Sport.
 - **Assessment modification** involves various concessions to ensure a level playing field for all learners when measuring their performances especially in academic learning areas. Examples of modified assessment include:
 - Giving additional time.
 - Ignoring specific errors e.g. wrong word order for learners who are deaf.
 - Giving oral instead of written tests or examinations.
 - Allowing signed examinations for learners with hearing impairment and Braille transcription for learners who are blind.
 - Varying lengths of exercises and tests i.e. shortening or extending the length of a test or an assignment.
 - Providing additional support materials for some learners e.g. dictionaries, word processor open book examinations, calculators etc.
 - Allowing for frequent rest times or breaks.
 - Adding pictures/visuals to a test.
 - Reading a test to student.
 - Previewing language of test questions.
 - Giving applications in real life settings.
 - Having a test administered by a resource person.
 - Giving short answer instead of essay questions.
 - Modifying the response format (multiple choice, essay, true/false etc.)
 - Allowing un-timed testing.
 - Modifying the grading system.
 - Allowing answers to be dictated.
 - Allowing open book or open note tests/examinations.
 - Providing study guides prior to test.
 - Highlighting key directions.
 - Giving a test at an alternative site.
 - Adjusting the pacing of assignments to allow for re-readings.
 - Color-coding textbooks to highlight key concepts and new vocabulary.
 - Audio taping textbook content.

4. Environmental Adaptations/Modifications

While specialist and inclusive education teachers may not personally undertake environmental adaptations/modifications, it is their responsibility to advise school authorities accordingly. Environmental adaptations/modifications are changes to the school environment to make it more accessible to learners with disabilities. There can be no inclusive education to talk about when schools have physical barriers to access as learners with disabilities will automatically be excluded from fully and freely experiencing education. These

environmental adaptations/modifications are achieved through universal designs. Universal design entails the design of all new products, environments, programmes and services such that they are usable by all people (including those with disabilities) to the greatest extent possible without the need for further adaptation or specialised design (Ostroff, 2011). According to UNCRPD (2006) Article 2 Paragraph 4, these reasonable accommodations entail necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments in order not to impose a disproportionate or undue burden, but to ensure persons with disabilities experience the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Examples of environmental adaptations/modifications include:

- Ramps for wheelchair users
- Rails for persons with blindness
- Wide doors for wheelchair users
- Lower door handles for wheelchair users
- Lower toilet seats
- Carpeted and sound-proof classrooms for those with hearing impairment
- Lifts with Braille floor numbers for those who are blind etc.

5. Differentiation

Differentiation refers to a varied preparation (e.g. scheming, lesson planning, IEP and media construction etc.) and design of teaching which is reactive to learners' individual needs. It is the process of modifying or adapting the curriculum according to the different ability levels of the learners in the classroom. Differentiation is also about tailor making teaching environments and practices so as to create appropriately different learning experiences for different students. In effect, a differentiated curriculum is one that is individualised to meet the diverse needs of all of the students in one class. It is achieved through giving everyone equal opportunities to learn, not teaching everyone in exactly the same way. When properly implemented, differentiation does not have to mean more work for the teacher. In fact, it will allow a teacher to spend his or her time more efficiently with a greater number of students (Abodey and Ansah, 2017; Ronksley-Pavia, 2010). In the words of Tomlinson (1999), curriculum differentiation for all students entails "ensuring that what a student learns, how he/she learns, and how the student demonstrates what he/she has learned is a match for that student's readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning." Thus, a differentiated instructional approach is that which accommodates the diversity of learners by:

- Coping with learner diversity.
- Adopting teaching strategies that respond to learners' individual needs.
- Invoking a variety of learning activities to suit individual interests.
- Monitoring individual learners' needs.
- Pursuing optimal learning outcomes.

Curriculum differentiation is often considered to accommodate gifted and talented learners and therefore for such learners, differentiation could include:

- Deleting already mastered material from existing curriculum.
- Adding new content, process, or product expectations to existing curriculum.
- Extending existing curriculum to provide enrichment activities.
- Providing course work for able students at an earlier age than usual.
- Writing new units or courses that meet the needs of gifted students.
- Assigning periodic individual researches and projects.
- Allocating topics for research online.
- Giving opportunities for creation of devices.
- Providing extended fieldwork activities.

6. Individualised Education Plan (IEP)

An IEP can be conceptualised as a plan to ensure the child with special needs receives specialized instruction or as an annual programme for responding to the individual learner needs. It is a basic tool used in inclusive settings to address special needs in order to respond to the learners' diverse needs. By definition, an IEP is a set of annual goals and objectives or benchmarks which are target skills and competences for the learner to reach but it does not constitute the overall curriculum for the child. The IEP annual goals provide outcomes and directions that help individual learners with special needs, particularly those with disabilities, access the general curriculum as well as typical environments (Boat et al., 2010). Therefore, an IEP acts as a road map for achieving individual learner objectives.

- **Components of the IEP**

- Current Performance and Skills' Level
- Annual Measurable Academic and Functional Goals
- Short Term Objectives
- Progress Tracking
- Specialised Educational Services
- Duration of Services
- Participation in Mainstream Classrooms
- Testing Adaptations/Accommodations
- Statement of Transition
- Intervention Plan

- **Members of the IEP Team**

- School Head
- Specialist or Inclusive Education Teacher
- Class Teacher
- Remedial Tutor
- Psychologist
- Local Medical Staff
- Speech Therapist
- Language Therapist
- School Guidance and Counselling Teacher
- SDC Chairperson
- Local Leadership
- Parent
- The learner

NB: In rural setups in particular, some of the listed members may not be available but that should not stop the specialist or inclusive teacher from drawing up the IEPs. In this digital world, all members do need to be physically present. For some you may consider online interactions such as WhatsApp conferencing or groups, Microsoft Teams etc.

7. Conclusion

Clearly, the implementation of inclusive education is impracticable without individualisation. Inclusive and specialist educators can only be effective in implementing inclusivity if they possess adequate individualisation skills which include adaptations/ modifications, differentiation, and construction of the IEP. Above all, these educators should be able to appreciate and cater for the diversity of needs of the learners in a class and within the school. Despite the large class sizes which often characterise many of the schools in Zimbabwe, teachers should endeavour to meet the learners' individual needs by responding to the learners' personal interests, abilities and potentials. In essence, learners in inclusive settings should be taught as individuals to ensure that all of them, including those with special educational needs, experience maximal success. It is therefore recommended that

massive and rigorous training in various strategies for individualisation of instruction for both trainee and practicing teachers be undertaken if the implementation of inclusive education is to be effective.

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How to cite this article: Sibanda, P., 2022. A synopsis of individualisation of teaching and learning in inclusive settings. *Scientific Journal of Pure and Applied Sciences*, 10(1), 984-989.

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