

Best Practices in Inclusive Education: Inclusiveness in the English Teaching Classroom

Charlie Egas Orbe

Universidad Politécnica Nacional del Ecuador

Email for correspondence: charliegar.be@gmail.com

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Director. PhD. Haydeé Ramírez Lozada. Phone: 2721459. Extension: 123/126

Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, Sede Esmeraldas. Calle Espejo, Subida a Santa Cruz, Esmeraldas. CP 08 01 00 65

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Abstract

Inclusive education is an important concept for the twenty first century teacher as the number of students with special needs continues to increase nowadays and require integration into the broader classroom. Who are these students with “special needs”? Why is it so important for the teacher to identify them? How can this concept contribute to better classroom management that also complies with the core curriculum learning environment in which equal opportunities are guaranteed to all? A critical element for language teachers relates to general strategies for classroom management. According to Smith, (1990), the number one reason why teachers leave the profession is students’ abusive behavior. Other research carried out by Elan and Gallup, in 1996, demonstrated that about 15% of the participants in a survey believe behavioral problems in public schools is a key problem, only after drugs. Therefore, it is critical to implement appropriate and effective strategies that would contribute to a positive teaching/learning environment, be inclusive and still comply with the curriculum objectives.

Key words: Inclusive education; rights; language teaching; language learning difficulties; competences.

Introduction

Education, as mandated by Ecuador and most countries around the world, is an obligation and a right. It must be of sufficient quality and reach universally every person from age five to approximately eighteen years old, where they complete what we call secondary education.

Education is a universal right, as deemed by UNESCO in its World Declaration on Education for All (1990). Education must be guaranteed for all citizens without distinction, including people belonging to minority groups, immigrants or those with special abilities. This declaration emphasizes the need for integration of all people in the classroom, in which teachers must create an inclusive teaching/learning environment through appropriate methodologies, dynamics, activities, tasks, etc. This is called “inclusive education”.

It is legislated in Ecuador that every citizen, without distinction, attends primary and secondary school. Likewise, all parents should send their children to the educational institution. In cases where parents cannot or wish to opt out due to health issues or ideological convictions, they must take the necessary actions to ensure their children receive an education. Thus, these parents need to demonstrate that their children are receiving home instruction

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in accordance with the contents or programs corresponding to the necessary levels, as established by the Ministry of Education in 2013.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008) point out that education is a universal right that extends to children, young people and adults who may have special needs or disabilities. Module 1 on Inclusive and Special Education, published by the Vice-Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador in 2011, also states that one of its objectives is to reduce all forms of discrimination and exclusion. In Chapter 1.3, on diversity, it states that “*all students have their own individual and specific educational needs for accessing the necessary learning experiences, whose satisfaction requires an individualized pedagogical attention*” (p. 18), which means that all students have their own educational needs as a result of their social and cultural origin as well as their own characteristics, because every person has different abilities, motivations, interests, styles and learning rhythms.

In order to achieve this objectives, it is necessary for education professionals to develop their abilities and aptitudes, in a world that presents challenges and accelerated changes due to globalization and technological digitization. It is necessary to develop the skills not only to enhance the abilities inherent to work, but also to adapt to such changes by understanding in depth the opportunities, challenges and ethical issues related to inclusive education.

Development

Understanding the concept of inclusive/special education holistically is essential in order to clarify myths and fears that teachers, parents and students might have regarding special needs. According to Smith (2015), inclusive education refers to the education and specialized service provided to students who are at special or *risky conditions*. Therefore when identifying students with special needs, it is important to consider those who have an identified disability or possess a special talent, but also those who are at risk of developing other problems as a result of their current condition.

Research suggests that the percentage of students with special needs is 20% to 30%. Just the same, there are students who are not disabled but have special needs, e.g. students who go through extreme economic difficulties, show difficulties with the local language and/or present other "risk factors". Risk factors refer to drug and alcohol use, belonging to minority cultures, pregnancy, and problems of legal order. All of these risk factors may lead to other sets of problems, for which the teacher should manage his/her instruction, methodologies and practices tactfully and appropriately.

It is important to note that special needs should not be seen as disabilities that hinder people's daily lives, but as a different form of learning. The theory of *Multiple Intelligences* addresses the issue of those learning distinctions. Gardner (1993), its author, identifies them according to the distinct skills individuals develop along their lives since they are born, which implies that it is necessary to adjust the teaching processes, assist and develop efficient strategies that allow everyone to be included in the learning/teaching environment. It is necessary to provide the necessary tools to students with special needs, so that they can overcome these difficulties. Often, these adjustments consist of giving more time for the fulfillment of exercises, adapting a less rapid pace during instruction, being more flexible regarding the curriculum objectives, and looking carefully at the signs and symptoms of the problems students present in the classroom. Thus, the daily lesson planning, class organization, and strategies used by the teacher must go in accordance with the needs of all the participants in the classroom.

Challenges for Teachers in Foreign Language Teaching and Inclusiveness

According to Crombie (1999) in her article about Foreign Language Learning and Learning Difficulties, the challenge for teachers is to find the most effective methods of teaching a foreign language to students with learning difficulties. This tells us that the teacher will need to carry out careful observations regarding the students' learning styles, e.g. small group, individual work, motivational factors, identifying the areas of difficulties, etc., and often use a combination of methods which prove to be best. In any case the methods and strategies that the teacher may use include considering paying close attention to the physical appearance of the classroom, and appropriate atmosphere in the lessons (classroom). In order to set an appropriate atmosphere, the following are important factor to adopt:

- a positive teacher's attitude (approach) towards students
- activities that involve all the students
- enthusiasm
- showing appreciation and praising students

Regarding accommodation, the following factors are essential for the teacher to consider when he is imparting the class content:

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- clarifying and simplifying written directions
- giving more opportunities for practice and revision
- giving instructions very clearly and explicitly, step by step.
- placing the student close to the teacher.
- a positive teacher's attitude (approach) towards students
- provide additional practice.

All these factors and others that the teacher might consider important, should be included in order to facilitate the inclusion and positive atmosphere that would lead to achieve the teaching/learning objectives. Besides all of the above, a key factor that teachers should look attentively is emotional support. As students may also need help with emotional issues, mental health specialists should be considered to be hired as members of the school staff, as they would provide with appropriate sensitive orientation and guidance.

Conclusions

The competences of the twenty first century teachers include understanding the insights of inclusiveness which, along with the implementation of pedagogic methodologies, appropriate planning, assessment, motivation, classroom management, communicative approaches, and cooperation/collaboration activities, will guarantee a positive learning/teaching environment. Just the same, arrangements/adjustments and/or modifications should be carried out by teachers periodically. Thus, including all of these important teaching resources are necessary in order to comply with the alignment of inclusive education, which are essential for the success of all students and are the foundations of their lifetime development.

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