

ADAPTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR DIVERSE LEARNERS

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Abstract. This research study is intended to investigate specific adaptive teaching strategy techniques and their ability to meet the wide range of learning needs of students in the modern classroom. The reason for needing alternative teaching strategies is due to the fact that there is a significant heterogeneity in classrooms today based on individual differences, such as cognitive ability, cultural background, learning style, and prior knowledge. Educators have been forced to find and implement alternative teaching strategies to create equal opportunities for all students to learn. Adaptive teaching strategies (also known as differentiated instruction) are characterized by a flexible approach to teaching and learning in which the content delivered, the style of teaching, and the style of assessment are based on the unique needs of each learner.

This research study focuses on the effectiveness of adaptive teaching strategies including differentiated instruction, formative assessment, technology-assisted learning and cooperative learning. The challenges faced by teachers in implementing adaptive teaching strategies are examined and evaluated, as are the benefits of utilizing adaptive teaching strategies in the classroom to create successful learning experiences for students. The findings of the research suggest that by providing students with personalized, equitable and caring learning environments, adaptive teaching strategies will enhance the success levels of students. Ultimately, in order to ensure equity and effectiveness of instruction in the classroom, adaptive teaching strategies should be employed in all heterogeneous and multicultural classrooms.

Introduction

There is an obvious change over the last few years with the increasing diversity of learning environments. Students have varying cognitive abilities, cultures, learning styles, experience/knowledge, motivation levels, and socio-emotional needs. Therefore, the traditional method of teaching will not be appropriate to meet the needs of learners. If the needs of learners are not appropriately met, it will lead to learner dis-engagement, learning gaps, and differential learning outcomes.

Adaptive teaching, or differentiated instruction, is a method of teaching that adjusts the methods of teaching, type of content as well as the assessments used to determine student understanding to meet the individual needs of every student. Research indicates that adaptive teaching has a positive impact on both student achievement and student engagement and in addition supports inclusive education (Tomlinson, 2014; Hattie, 2012). This document identifies and discusses key adaptive teaching strategies, explores and examines the challenges teachers face when implementing adaptive teaching and provides some examples that illustrate best practices in adaptive teaching through real-life classroom examples.

Understanding Learner Diversity

The learner diversity aspect represents an enormous range of differences in learning capabilities, preferences and styles, prior knowledge/ability and culture. A strong understanding of these different types of learners and their individual differences is essential

for teachers who wish to teach successfully in an adaptive manner. Each student comes to the classroom understanding themselves in a way specific to their individual strengths and weaknesses in learning and in their social development.

1. **Cognitive Diversity:** While working through a cognitively similar process of developing cognition, students can be very differently influenced by varying amounts of time for processing and ways of processing (e.g. some students may be highly analytical/logical, while others may be more creatively or visually). Some students may benefit from developing their knowledge through hands on experiences, while others will develop better through reading/listening. Therefore, it is very important for teachers to incorporate a variety of instructional strategies in order to understand and support all students.
2. **Diversity in Culture and Language:** Not all students are alike. All students entering into a class come from diverse backgrounds and will communicate differently; therefore teachers that understand and respect their students' diversity will create an inclusive classroom environment where they can work collaboratively with their peers while decreasing the number of misunderstandings that could occur between classmates.
3. **Emotional and Social Needs:** Every student has a different level of motivation, self-esteem and ability to relate well with his/her peers. By understanding and respecting the emotional and social needs of every student, teachers can provide each student with the opportunity to participate in large group activities; thus creating a classroom environment that supports the participation and cooperation of all the students.

A teacher who previously taught in a multicultural classroom in NYC understood that some students had difficulty leveraging lecture-style instruction due to their adoption of a new first language compared to their native language. By using a combination of lecture and groupwork-based instruction, the teacher was able to facilitate each student's comprehension of the material being taught.

Key Adaptive Teaching Strategies

1. Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is defined as the modification of teaching techniques according to the different requirements, skills, and learning styles of students.

Content adaptation: Using different types of teaching materials for students, like visual aids like charts, diagrams, etc., for visual learners, or lectures, discussions, etc., for auditory learners.

Process adaptation: Modifying the teaching process according to the skills of students, like preparing different types of tasks according to their skills.

Assessment adaptation: Allowing students to demonstrate their skills through different means like presentations, essays, projects, etc.

Research evidence: Heacox (2017) stated that students who were taught by teachers who used the technique of differentiated instruction showed better performance than those who were taught by teachers who did not use this technique.

2. Formative Assessment and Feedback

Through continuous use of formative assessments, the teacher engages in ongoing evaluation of student learning and adjusts his/her instructional delivery and student learning practices as needed.

Examples of tools used by teachers for formative assessments include Exit Slips, Reflection Journals, Quizzes, and Class Discussion.

The teacher provides students with timely, clearly articulated, and helpful feedback so that they can learn effectively.

3. Technology-Enhanced Learning

Technology-assisted education provides students the opportunity to individualise their learning experiences by giving them the flexibility to learn at their own speed.

Adaptive programmes adjust their level of complexity based on how well the student does on previous performance. Multimedia learning alternatives allow students to learn according to their own styles.

Online learning platforms keep students involved (particularly those who feel shy or nervous in a group setting).

Example: Khan Academy and Edmodo are examples of online platforms that help students learn independently, receive immediate feedback on their learning, gain gradual improvement in their skill set, and grow at their own pace.

4. Collaborative and Cooperative Learning

Collaborative learning promotes the growth of social development and critical thinking skills along with the development of interaction skills among students.

Teachers can create groups of students with different levels of ability to help each other by allowing students the opportunity to work together using their various abilities.

In addition, student learning is reinforced through peer tutoring, which provides opportunities for peer students to support their own understanding of subject matter with peer students.

Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (2014) have provided research evidence supporting the class academic achievement, social improvement, and better self-confidence through cooperative learning methods.

Challenges in Implementing Adaptive Teaching

However, there are challenges associated with this highly effective method of adaptive teaching:

1. Time and Planning: More preparation is involved in adaptive teaching.
2. Class Size: Large class sizes make it difficult to be adaptive.
3. Teacher Training: Teachers have to be trained for this method.
4. Equity: There have to be considerations for equity in this method.

Best Practices for Adaptive Teaching

- Use data about how students learn and what their interests are in order to plan for your lessons.
- Change groups often to provide students with the chance to work with a variety of people and learn from each other.
- Implement technology into the classroom through using adaptive software or other digital tools as a way in addition to traditional teaching methods.
- Encourage students to take control of their own learning by establishing goals for themselves and using student-led methods for reaching those goals.
- Evaluate your own teaching methods regularly and collaborate with colleagues to share successful strategies.

Conclusion

Adaptive teaching strategies are important in today's classrooms. This is because, through the realization of the diversity of learners, teaching strategies like differentiated instruction, assessment, technology, and collaborative learning can be used to improve teaching and learning. Despite the challenges faced by adaptive teaching strategies, through effective planning and creative problem-solving skills, the teacher can effectively implement the teaching strategies. Research in the future is important in understanding the impact of adaptive teaching strategies and creative ways of teaching the diverse learners.

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