



SJMS 2024

FOSTERING INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES THROUGH MULTILINGUAL-ORIENTED PEDAGOGY

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Received: 3.4.2024; Accepted: 24.4.2024; Available online: 25.4.2024 ©2024 The Author(s). Published by Sankalp Publishing-A Unit of SEDF

Abstract: In today's rapidly globalizing world, classrooms are increasingly becoming microcosms of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In an effort to promote inclusive education, educators are increasingly turning towards multilingual-oriented pedagogy as a means of creating an environment that supports the learning needs of diverse learners. This paper aims to explore the potential of understanding and implementing multilingual-oriented pedagogy to enhance inclusive educational practices. This study draws on theoretical framework of Gibson's Affordance theory. The paper recommends training and retraining of teachers to equip them with requisite knowledge and skills to open up to the flexible use of multilingual-oriented pedagogy, for teachers and education stakeholders to create and sustain inclusive learning spaces that respect learners' linguistic backgrounds, and empowering learners to embrace their multilingual identities, through the use of their multilingual skills in various academic and social contexts to enhance learning and cherish their identities. The paper concludes that multilingual-oriented pedagogy will help create learning environment that embraces linguistic diversity that is not only crucial for promoting inclusion, but also prepares learners for success in an increasingly interconnected world. It is through this inclusive approach that classrooms can truly become spaces where learners thrive and flourish.

Keywords— Diversity, Education, Equity, Inclusion, Multilingualism

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the topic of linguistically diverse classrooms and inclusive educational practices has garnered significant attention in the field of education. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected and globalized, diversity in education is becoming more prevalent. This diversity encompasses linguistic diversity, as more and more learners with varying linguistic backgrounds are in the class. In light of this, it is crucial for educational practices to become more inclusive towards linguistic diversity. A British Council publication on using multilingual approaches in the class shows that preventing learners from using their home languages in the classroom not only impedes learning and denies their linguistic human rights, but also loses valuable opportunities for teachers to draw on their students' knowledge and experience as resources for teaching. (UNESCO, 2019) Inclusive education goes beyond the physical presence of students with diverse needs in the same classroom. It encompasses a mindset and a set of practices that prioritize the full participation and success of every learner through multilingual-oriented pedagogy. Multilingual-oriented pedagogy is a teaching approach that aims to facilitate the learning and use of multiple languages in education. It is a learner-centered approach that recognizes and respects the linguistic diversity of learners in the classroom. It has been argued that teaching processes should focus more extensively on general knowledge about multilingualism and language acquisition, cross-linguistic and meta-linguistic awareness, sensitivity to learner differences. (Haukas, 2016)

This approach recognizes that diversity enriches the learning experience for all students and prepares them for life in a diverse and interconnected world. It aims to provide multilingual learners with equal access to education and to optimize their learning potential. (Christison, Krulatz, & Sevinc, 2021)

This does not only foster a culture of acceptance, empathy, and understanding among students, promoting a sense of belonging and community within the learning environment. It emphasizes the celebration of differences and the development of social and emotional skills that are essential for success in the society.

This paper argues that this can be achieved through multilingual-oriented pedagogy. This approach fosters an environment where students learn to appreciate and value cultural diversity, leading to a more inclusive and harmonious society. This, in turn, contributes to the promotion of equality and justice as learners grow to become advocates for these principles. Ultimately, by promoting this style of pedagogy,

stereotypes are broken down, inclusivity is achieved, and learners feel valued, respected, and supported in their learning journey.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Inclusive education: Slee, (2011) notes that there no single, universally agreed-upon definition for the concept of inclusive education. However, this work will state some definitions that capture the core elements of inclusive education.

According to UNICEF (2023) inclusive education is an approach to education that allows students of all backgrounds to learn and grow side by side, to the benefit of all. The purpose is essentially to close the education and any kind of marginalization gap for learners with of different background and need. Inclusive education means all children in the same classrooms, in the same schools. It means real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded, not only children with disabilities, but speakers of *minority languages* too.

Inclusive education is an approach to schooling that aims to provide equal opportunities for all learners, regardless of their background, abilities, or special needs. It involves the integration of learners rights and needs into mainstream classrooms activities. This approach goes beyond simply placing learners from different backgrounds, with different needs in the same classroom, but rather focuses on creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that embraces all the learners.

Madhesh (2023) defines inclusive education by summarizing the following factors:

1. All children can enroll at the closest school to their home.
2. All schools have a “zero-rejection policy” when it comes to enrolling and educating children at the school closest to their homes. All students are welcome and appreciated.
3. All children learn in regular and heterogeneous classrooms with peers of the same age.
4. All children follow substantially similar study programmes, with curricula that can be adapted and modified if necessary and teaching methods varied to respond to all needs without discrimination.

5. All children participate fully in regular educational activities and events in schools and classrooms with a celebration and appreciation of diversity in these classrooms.
6. All children are supported to make friends and achieve social success with their peers.
7. Adequate resources and training shall be provided to all specialists and stakeholders within the school, classroom, and educational district to support the proper implementation of inclusive education.

Inclusive education is also defined as a teaching model whereby all students, regardless of their ability, learn together in one environment. The aim is to ensure that all students are treated fairly and get equal opportunities. Within an inclusive education environment, student diversity and uniqueness should be celebrated without discrimination. (FutureLearn, 2021)

Inclusive education is defined as the reduction of barriers to learning, the full participation of all students, and an increase in the school's ability to accommodate all students regardless of their differences. This is an effort to treat them in ways that reflect that they are of equal value and status. (Ainscow et al. 2006)

Linguistic diversity: Toke (2023) defines linguistic diversity as the many different ways that people can speak and communicate with each other. Just like there are many different colors, shapes, and sizes of toys, there are also many different languages and ways of speaking. Some people speak Spanish, some people speak Chinese, some people speak English, and many other languages too. When we learn about linguistic diversity, we can learn to appreciate and respect all the different ways that people can speak and communicate.

*Multilingual pedagogy :*It is an approach to teaching and learning process that recognizes diversity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds of learners and aims to use this diversity to support knowledge acquisition and understanding. (Harshita, 2023)

Donley, (2022) defined it as the process through which teachers employ to engage linguistic diversity additively and equitably in the classroom in a way that empowers multilingual learners and the knowledge they bring, to critically and creatively disrupt the language borders of their classrooms.

Crisfield, (2022) states that multilingual pedagogy is the intentional use of languages, combining two or more systematic, purposeful, and meaningful way as part of instruction in the classroom, which allows students to develop new knowledge and skills.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

This study draws on the theoretical framework of James Gibson Affordance theory.

James Gibson's Affordance Theory

James Gibson, a prominent American psychologist, found the theory. Popularized in his book “The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception” published in 1979. It has gained popularity in various fields, including multilingual pedagogy, as an approach to understanding and analyzing complex systems.

This theory posits that the environment offers possibilities for action based on the interaction between an organism (in this case, the learner) and its surroundings. It focuses on the individual, the environment and the emergent character of learning opportunities, (Kordt, 2018) and it is particularly well-suited for addressing the diversity of present day learning environment and the need for multilingual-oriented pedagogy.

This theory offers a valuable lens through which to examine and improve multilingual pedagogy. In the context of multilingual pedagogy, this theory highlights the importance of understanding the language ecology/diversity of the classroom. It emphasizes the need to consider all the linguistic differences that are present in the classroom, rather than just the dominant language. This approach provides a more holistic understanding of the linguistic diversity in the classroom.

The Learner's Environment and Teacher as Affordance Designers

According to this theory, the classroom or learning environment should be designed to offer rich and varied affordances for learners from different linguistic background. This includes providing exposure to languages other than the standard language of instruction in different contexts (written, spoken, and visual), that cater to different learners needs. For this to be effectively implemented there is need for effective teachers to be knowledgeable and skilled enough to consider individual learner needs and backgrounds to ensure they can inclusively be carried along in the learning process.

Teachers act as designers of the learning environment, actively creating an inclusive environment for learners, providing more explicit instruction and support. This involves encourage learners to express and interact with their languages in meaningful ways that aids learning. When learners see the

affordances of multilingualism in their learning environment, it can boost intrinsic motivation and engagement in learning.

Since this theory caters to learner diversity, it is tailored to accommodate not only the individual learner linguistic backgrounds, but other needs such as learning styles. There is focus on learner agency, the focus shifts from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered exploration, empowering learners to take ownership of their learning process. Also the emphasis is on expression and interaction between learners using their languages in the learning process leads to a more dynamic and contextualized learning experience.

This theory emphasizes creating flexible learning environments that cater to a wide range of learners, presenting information in different formats (visual, auditory, text) to cater to different learning styles and language proficiency levels. (using images, diagrams, audio recordings alongside text). It also promotes engagement through diverse activities, materials, and assessment methods to cater to different learners and their language abilities. (such as: offering group work, individual assignments, with varying language demands). This provides options for learners to demonstrate their understanding in ways that suit their linguistic abilities, allowing presentations, written reports, or artistic expressions.

This theory emphasizes the importance of scaffolding instruction based on individual needs in multilingual classrooms, offering helpful means for educators working with linguistically diverse learners to create inclusive learning environments.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Many researchers have indicated that inclusive educational practices that embrace diversity and promote a positive attitude towards multilingualism can lead to positive outcomes for both learners and the society. However, learners, frequently encounter the unfortunate circumstance where their languages are ignored or viewed as an impediment to mastering the *main* language used in academic space or environment.

Sumariadhi, Risadi, and Premananda, (2022) reveal that issues arise about whether minority languages should be used, and if so, how they should be incorporated into the instruction. Bayyurt, (2013) believes that incorporating the culture of foreign language in the classroom is a waste of time since the students

will never need such knowledge, while others claim the multilingualism and multiculturalism are qualities students need to understand and integrate newly met concepts.

Mendelowitz, Ferreira and Dixon (2022) challenge the monoglossic ideologies (the belief that there is one dominant language), traditional language pedagogies and dominant forms of knowledge construction and alternatively foregrounding multilingual and multicultural students' language narratives, repertoires, and identities. Understandably, the dominant ideologies and pedagogies surrounding education have traditionally been monolingual and mono-cultural in nature, privileging the dominant language and culture while marginalizing others. This monoglossic pedagogy fails to recognize the linguistic and cultural heritage of learners but also perpetuates a sense of alienation among those who do not belong to the dominant language used in the classroom or teaching environment.

If language plays a crucial role in education and in shaping individual and collective identities, it follows that teachers must effectively engage with the diversity in the classroom. This is essential to foreground the voices, experiences, and identities of learners from different linguistic background. Adopting a multilingual-oriented pedagogy to education helps recognize and value the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of learners.

Portoles & Marti (2020) observed that educational pedagogies have often ignored the new multilingual paradigm and, consequently, educators may hold some misconceptions about how additional languages are learnt and should be taught in multilingual contexts.

Teacher training have traditionally been focused on teaching with the official language, for example in Nigeria, English, as a first language, disregarding the multilingual nature of the country. The curriculum and textbooks used in schools are predominantly written in English, and teachers are expected to teach using only this language. Although the new national language policy strives to address this, the result is slow. This stereotyped pedagogical approach to teaching has resulted in a lack of understanding and appreciation for the diverse languages and cultures that exist within the country. It has also created a barrier for students who come from different linguistic backgrounds, hindering their learning and academic progress.

This study argues that adopting the multilingual-oriented pedagogy is essential to navigate diverse multilingual teaching environment. This paradigm shift requires teacher training programmes to recognize the importance of all languages and cultures in the learning process. It also emphasizes the

need for teachers to be proficient in several languages, including their students' mother tongue, and to use these languages as a medium of instruction alongside English. This approach fosters a more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment, promoting equity and academic success for all students.

Underpinning the need for multilingual-oriented pedagogy, in order to engage with learners from different linguistic backgrounds that are present in classrooms, Heikkila and Lillvist (2023) stresses that schools should place emphasis on stimulating children's language development with their mother tongue other than the dominant language. Similarly, Agoke, (2023) notes that to bridge the gap between classroom expectations and learners' experiences, there is need for an alternative pedagogy that privileges language users' multilingual realities in the classroom context.

Rapp & Corral-Granados (2021) argue that the main goal of the educational system is to function as an integrational institution in society, and inclusive education is often seen as the way to reach this goal. That is, within the societal framework, the educational system is fundamentally designed to serve as an institution that fosters integration. In this context, inclusive education is widely regarded as the most effective approach to achieving this objective.

Multilingual-oriented Pedagogy

Imagine a classroom where students from diverse linguistic backgrounds such as Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Ibibio, Urhobo, Kalabari, Tiv, and making them feel valued and empowered. This is the promise of multilingual-oriented pedagogy, an approach that embraces multiple languages in the learning environment. The pedagogy approach that the study recommends goes beyond simply allowing students to use their native languages. It is about actively incorporating them into the learning process to foster inclusivity.

Multilingual classrooms have become increasingly prevalent worldwide due to the rapid rise in global mobility and migration. These diverse classrooms consist of students from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, who may speak one language at home and another at school or be learning the language of instruction as an additional language. International organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and the European Commission argue that multilingual education can effectively engage diverse learners while also promoting positive identities associated with their respective cultures. This is reinforced by Richard Ruiz's concept of "language as a resource" (Ruiz, 1984), which advocates for utilizing students' native languages as tools for teaching and learning. In practice, this approach requires teachers to

incorporate students' home languages into lesson planning to facilitate communication while simultaneously developing proficiency in the language of instruction.

It is about celebrating cultural identity, for example, using Igbo in the classroom acknowledges and respects learners' cultural heritage. This fosters a sense of belonging and self-worth, crucial for creating an inclusive learning environment. This will improve engagement and understanding, because learners often grasp concepts better when explained in their native language. Integrating learner's languages in the teaching process allows educators to bridge language gaps and ensure all students can actively participate.

Key concepts can be introduced in both in the standard language and learners languages, with visuals and activities to support understanding. Furthermore, this can be incorporated their learning materials to provide rich learning experience. By embracing linguistic diversity, fostering a sense of belonging for all learners, and empowering them to thrive in multilingual learning space, this approach leads to a richer and more inclusive learning environment.

Despite research indicating that incorporating multilingual pedagogies into classroom practices yields significant benefits, many classrooms across the globe still overwhelmingly prioritize English-only lessons where students read, write, listen, and speak solely in English. Unfortunately, there are few resources available to educators detailing how they can deliberately integrate multilingualism into their lesson plans while maintaining systematic delivery methods. This implies that teachers need training and resources to effectively implement multilingual pedagogy. Since, many languages exist within the classroom, teachers need to be sensitive to these variations and create a welcoming space for all forms of language. Also, standardized testing systems around the world that often prioritize English proficiency, must shift to assessments that value multilingual skills.

RECOMMENDATION

To be able to implement inclusive and multilingually-oriented pedagogies, the study recommends:

- Teachers play an important role in this process, their stock of knowledge on linguistic diversity is important because it will enable them to view multilingualism as asset to the student, (Haukas, 2016) and this can enhance transfer of knowledge to the learners. Teachers possess the capability to utilize a variety of teaching methods in order to champion multicultural education and nurture

learning environments that are conducive to the diverse student populace. Kirsch, Aleksic, Mortini, and Andersen, (2023) submit that teachers need to open-up to flexible language use. Professional development has been hailed as the key method to help practitioners develop knowledge, skills, and practices (Peleman et al., 2018) and may, therefore, also contribute to the development of multilingual approaches. Teachers should infuse every aspect of their instruction with multicultural education, spanning from class interactions, to assignments. It is essential for teachers to demonstrate the willingness to delve into the concept of multicultural education and ascertain effective means of its integration.

- Creating and sustaining inclusive learning spaces that respect learners' linguistic backgrounds, by incorporating multicultural literature, music, art, and other resources into the curriculum to showcase the richness of different languages and cultures, allowing learners to see themselves reflected positively in their learning materials and how they express themselves.
- Empowering learners to embrace their multilingual identities, through the use of their multilingual skills in various academic and social contexts, such as classroom discussions, presentations, and cultural events, to enhance learning, validate and celebrate their linguistic diversity. By cultivating these positive attitudes towards multilingualism among educators, policymakers, and students alike, educational institutions can better equip learners for success in today's increasingly interconnected and diverse global society.

CONCLUSION

Multilingual-oriented pedagogy will help create learning environment that embraces linguistic diversity that is not only crucial for promoting inclusion, but also prepares learners for success in an increasingly interconnected world. However, this study reveals that the specific needs of various learners may require tailored strategies. Further research is thus needed to explore the most effective methods for implementing multilingual-oriented pedagogy within different educational contexts that can create high-quality, multi-learning space responsive materials that support multilingual pedagogy. It is important for educators and policymakers to recognize the value of this pedagogy and provide the necessary resources to support its implementation. The transformative potential of multilingual-oriented pedagogy, underscores the importance of collaboration between educators and policymakers to ensure that classrooms become vibrant spaces where linguistic diversity is not just tolerated, but celebrated. It is through this inclusive approach that classrooms can truly become spaces where learners thrive and flourish.

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