

# Investigating Effective Instructional Practices for Inclusion and Diversity in Classroom

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## Abstract

Inclusion and diversity are always an area of interest among researchers and practitioners. It ensures learning opportunities for all learners irrespective of their background, intelligence, socio-economic status, learning disabilities, gender, and localities of the learners in one classroom. This study investigates the instructional practices that support the learning diversities of all student types of students. The researchers followed a quantitative survey research design and the population for this study covered primary school teachers at Government Primary schools of district Swat Tehsil Charbagh. Through simple sampling techniques, the researchers selected 163 Primary School Teachers (PSTs). The data were collected through a Likert scale questionnaire, the reliability was proved in the pilot testing and was validated through the content validity method. The data collected were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics, and the results revealed that teachers believed culturally responsive instructional techniques, differentiated instructional methods, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and collaborative learning techniques are the most effective instructional methods and practices that support the inclusion of diverse nature students in a class. Based on the findings, it was recommended that teachers be properly trained in these instructional practices and provide learning resources to schools to support the special needs of diverse students, and the policymakers were recommended to revise the curriculum and prospective teachers' education in light of sustainable developmental goals.

**Keywords:** Inclusion; Diversity; Collaboration; UDL, Culturally Responsive Teaching; Classroom Environment

## Introduction

Instructional practices refer to the methods and strategies used by teachers to deliver content and engage students in the learning process. Instructional practices for inclusion and diversity encompass a range of strategies and techniques designed to create an educational environment that supports all learners, regardless of their differences (Richardson & Blanc, 2016).

Studies highlight the importance of teachers' recognition of diverse student profiles in their different teaching strategies. To achieve this teachers can give importance to different cultural practices, create connections among subjects, and engage with the community to create inclusivity. In the context of primary education, effectively communicating and addressing diversity is crucial in instruction (Dion, 2020).

Despite progress in making education more inclusive, there is still a lot we do not know how to make it work well. We need to look closer at how to create classrooms where all students feel welcome and supported, no matter their learning style or needs. Right now, we do not have enough information about what works and what does not in making education more inclusive (Rogahang, Paramansyah, Rachmawati, Iqbal, & Judijanto, 2023).

Research on classroom teaching practices and strategies for promoting inclusion and diversity has identified that teachers need to use specific strategies and practices such as cooperative learning, cooperative teaching, problem-solving, heterogeneous grouping, and effective teaching as key to promoting an inclusive classroom environment (Makoelle, 2013).

Additionally, according to Makoelle, (2014), it is important to acknowledge the importance of using specific strategies that have been shown to promote inclusion. Teachers need to be creative and innovative to make their classrooms inclusive. He believes that most schools

already have the expertise to teach all students effectively, but it's crucial to use resources wisely. Teachers can either use existing strategies with technology or come up with their creative approaches to inclusive teaching. This idea has had a big impact on how people think about inclusive education worldwide.

Defining diversity can be a complex and challenging task. But generally, diversity means a variety of characteristics that make individuals unique, including race, ethnicity, culture, gender, and socioeconomic status. This term is frequently used to describe the diverse characteristics that make up a person's identity such as race, ethnicity, culture, and more (Convey & Richards, 2017).

Recognizing and valuing diversity in the classroom not only reflects the diversity of our society but also creates a more engaging and inclusive learning environment, leading to a richer and more comprehensive educational experience. Thus, rather than exploring diversity as a whole this study concentrates on how teachers approach cultural instruction, examining their thought processes, decision-making, and integration of diverse perspectives (Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey, 2016).

Inclusion in the classroom refers to the practice of educating all students together regardless of their background, learning abilities, or disabilities. Classroom inclusion means providing equal access to education for all students, irrespective of their background, identity, or varying learning styles, in a setting where everyone feels safe, valued, and respected (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004).

Although the concept of inclusion is globally understood as educating all learners without discrimination, different countries interpret inclusive education in varying ways. In some nations, inclusive education means providing equal access to education for all students, regardless of their abilities, cultures, genders, or other characteristics, without exception. This approach values diversity over assimilation and seeks to avoid marginalizing minority groups. Inclusive education aims to create a sense of belonging for all students in mainstream classrooms, allowing them to access the curriculum and participate fully in their education, free from discrimination and colonization by dominant cultural norms (Lee & Picanco, 2013).

Inclusive pedagogy plays a critical role in faculty development and its significance in teaching must be thoroughly examined and addressed. This method holds the assumption that all students possess the ability to learn and emphasizes the teachers' role in facilitating students' success. Inclusive pedagogy can empower students to critically evaluate their impact and engagement in personal local and global contexts (Thomas, 2014).

Furthermore, according to Loreman, Deppeler, and Harvey, (2016), teachers can promote inclusivity through their pedagogical choices, as multidimensional and cross-cultural perspectives are essential to instruction and cultural exploration. Some other instructional practices for inclusion and diversity include:

- Differentiated Instruction: this requires adopting instructional approaches and material to accommodate the diverse needs and abilities of students.
- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: This approach promotes the academic success of students while also nurturing their cultural identity. This includes: using culturally relevant materials and examples and encouraging students to share their cultural perspectives.
- Collaborative Learning: It is an effective instructional practice that fosters inclusion. Cooperative learning enhances student interaction and students can share their unique perspectives and experiences.

Makoelle, (2014) argues that our teacher training programs often do not equip us with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively manage the challenges of teaching in the classroom. Despite the growing diversity of the student population, many educational institutions continue to struggle with creating an inclusive learning environment that values and supports the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of all students.

Traditional instructional practices often perpetuate systematic inequalities, resulting in marginalized students' feelings excluded, disconnected, and underserved. The lack of inclusive instructional practices hinders academic achievement, social-emotional well-being, and overall

success for diverse student populations. Hence, rather than labeling learners as deficient, our education system must take a proactive approach by modifying pedagogy and learning conditions to accommodate the varied abilities, needs, and experiences of students.

Therefore, there is a pressing need to investigate and develop effective instructional practices that prioritize inclusion and diversity, empowering teachers to create welcoming and inclusive learning environments that foster equity, belonging, and academic excellence for all students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The study attempts to cover the need of efficient instructional practices for inclusion and diversity within primary classrooms. Their unique population requires determination of measures that would guarantee equal opportunities to learn for all students. The research is based on the practices of primary school teachers in District Swat, Pakistan, who are expected to implement culturally responsive teaching, differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and collaborative learning. The primary education phase is very crucial, yet it does seem to lack adequate evidence concerning the implementation of ideal policies at the primary level, especially as such policies are central for school integration. The study also aims to provide insight about the dilemmas experienced by teachers regarding lack of professional development and adequate resources needed to effectively create inclusive educational settings.

### **Research Questions**

1. What instructional practices do teachers use to promote inclusion and diversity in their classrooms?
2. Which instructional practices are known to be effective in promoting inclusion?

### **Research Hypothesis**

1. There is no significant relationship between the use of culturally responsive teaching, differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and collaborative learning practices in primary school classrooms and the promotion of inclusion and diversity.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

The researcher delimited the study to the Government Primary school Charbagh. According to DEMIS, (2023), there are a total of (56) Government primary schools in tehsil Charbagh District Swat. Furthermore, there were (280) primary school teachers who were part of the study population. The researchers determined the sample size keeping in view the population of the study through the Raosoft sample size calculator which is (163) PSTs (Primary School Teachers) who were selected through simple random sampling technique for the collection of data.

### **Research Design**

As this study intended to investigate effective instructional practices for inclusion and diversity in the classroom, therefore, this study was conducted with quantitative research design because the data collection of the study was statistical also the researcher found out the result statistically, using the quantitative design research. That's why the Quantitative design is suitable for this study. The methodology for this study was survey-descriptive.

### **Research population**

The population of this study included all Government, Boys, and Primary schools in tehsil Charbagh tehsil District Swat due to cultural constraints girls' teachers were not selected in the population. Fifty-six (56) Government primary schools in tehsil Charbagh District Swat. Furthermore, there were (280) primary school teachers who were part of the study population.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

The population of the study was delimited to the (163) PSTs (Primary School Teachers) who were selected through a simple random sampling technique for the collection of data. Sample size keeping in view the population of the study through the Raosoft sample size calculator.

### Data Collection Tool

To collect data, from the study respondents, the researchers developed a questionnaire for teachers which was validated through expert opinions and a pilot test for establishing reliability.

### Reliability and Validity

The overall reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was  $\alpha = .811$ . After the finalization of the questionnaires, the data were gathered with self-administered questionnaires to teachers and students. After completion of the data collection process, the data were analyzed with mean frequencies, percentages, standard deviations, and chi-square values.

### Data Analysis

A self-created questionnaire was used to gather the data, and SPSS version 26 was used to assist in the analysis. After analyzing the demographic data, descriptive and inferential statistics were performed. Results and analysis are presented.

**Table 1 Teachers' Qualification, Teaching Experiences, and Training**

Level	Percentages	Experiences	Percentages	Training	Percentages
FA/Fsc	05%	1 to 5 Years	59%	Less than a weeks	16%
BA/BSc	24%	5 to 10 Years	24%	1 to 2 Weeks	29%
MA/MSc	69%	11 to 15 Years	10%	3 to 5 weeks	55%
MS/MPhil/PhD	02%	16 and above	07%	6 or above weeks	00%

Teachers' qualifications, teaching experiences, and in-service training are significant demographic information revealed that most (69%) teachers have master-level academic qualifications, and a significant number of teachers are fresh with 1 to 5 years of teaching experience. It is also worth mentioning that 55% of them have three to five weeks of training related to different natures and skills including their induction program training.

**Table 2 Teachers' Perceptions Related to Instructional Practice (Culturally Responsive, and Collaborative Practices)**

S#	Teaching Practices	Mean	S.D	X <sup>2</sup>	Sig
1	Using real-life experiences, establishing relationships	3.92	.944	2.98	.041
2	Ensuring students' engagement, and authentic assessment practices	4.08	.877	8.19	.000
3	Students' Identity Development, and Cultural Awareness	4.55	.889	11.3	.000
4	Group work and self-accountability among students	4.44	.871	6.27	.001
5	Group activities and a supportive environment	3.60	.991	3.81	.032
6	Think-pair-share for individual and pair instruction	4.51	.983	12.8	.000

The results showed that teachers at primary schools strongly agreed (mean score 4.55, 4.51 and standard deviation of .889, .983) that student identity development, cultural awareness, and think-pair-share for individual and pair instruction are the most significant elements of successful teaching methods for ensuring the inclusivity and diversity at the classroom level. The chi-square value (11.3 which was highly significant at .000 confirmed that teachers believe in culturally responsive instructional methods in classroom teaching. Similarly, the results 4.44, 4.08, 3.92, and 3.60 with a standard deviation of .871, .877, .944, and .991 explain that teachers agreed to group work, self-accountability, ensuring student engagement, authentic assessment, using real-life examples, establishing academic relationships, and supportive learning environment are those activities that support students' inclusivity and celebration of their diversity, all these results are supported by the chi-square values where significant at  $>.05$ .

These results in the light of the study of Thomas (2014) are reflective as Thomas concluded that real learning occurs when students are actively engaged in the learning process which was further supported by the study of Convey, and Richards (2017). Likewise, Lee, and Picanco (2013) concluded that multiple methods and techniques encourage students' participation with

their diverse needs including real-life examples and authentic assessment, individual accountability, and pair instruction.

**Table 3**  
**Teachers' perceptions related to instructional practice (Differentiated instruction & UDL)**

S#	Teaching Practices	Mean	S.D	X <sup>2</sup>	Sig
1	Ensures students' interests, needs and necessities	4.78	.789	17.2	.000
2	Peers' feedback, formative assessment, and group activities	4.01	.879	12.1	.000
3	Providing students the opportunities to practical work	3.45	.912	3.29	.04
4	Providing multiple sources of learning to students	3.03	.935	2.91	.031
5	Providing numerous sources of engagement to students	2.54	1.18	3.18	.041
6	Technology integration, and continuous professional development	2.49	1.32	2.53	.027

Teachers' responses on differentiated instruction and UDL revealed that teachers strongly agreed (mean score 4.78 and standard deviation .789) that teachers take care of students' academic interests, needs, and necessities during their instruction, they also agreed (Mean score 4.01 and standard deviation .879) that peers' feedback, formative assessments, and groups activities are those instructional techniques which can facilitate the inclusion of diversified background students in one class. The chi-square values were significant as the p-value was  $>.05$ .

The results also explain that teachers were not clear and neither satisfied that teachers can provide more practical (hands-on), orient primary school students towards multiple sources of learning and more opportunities for active classroom learning as reflected by the mean scores (3.45, 3.03, and 2.54), their results were also significant as the sig value is  $>.05$ . However, the mean score 2.49 with standard deviation 1.32 reflected that teachers have no or very few opportunities of technological integration and professional development opportunities at primary school level, the results were confirmed by the chi-square value which was significant at .027.

Most of the results follow the results of the study of Makoelle (2014) as they also concluded that most teachers in developing countries are not integrating technology into teaching teaching-learning process at the primary school level technological integration. Similarly, the results were also supported by the study of Loreman, Deppeler, and Harvey (2016).

### Research Findings

1. Teachers were in strong agreement that inclusion is best accomplished with the help of real-life teaching practices, building relationships, and forming students' cultures. They also noted that group work, personal responsibility, and real-life learning evaluations were essential for teaching a wide range of students. These practices account for the considerable amount of diversity in the classroom, as evidenced by high mean scores for index items like, cultural practices 4 meaning 4.55 and 4.51 for think-pair-share class activities and cultural awareness.
2. In reporting their experiences, teachers said that interdisciplinary instruction that meets the interests and academic levels of the students works best in inclusive education. However, there were noted problems in the application of Universal Design for learning principles, especially in the use of multiple resources for learning and the provision of active learning experiences. These challenges, along with integrating technology and providing ongoing teacher support, were shown in the overall low mean scores for these factors (e.g. 2.49 for technology integration).
3. There were gaps and missing information in order to effectively implement the more advanced inclusive strategies observed in the study that created serious gaps. Variable means suggest that teachers had access to some resources but not enough opportunities for professional training in inclusive strategies that teachers needed to adopt which ultimately hindered their ability to utilize these resources.

4. Moreover, the results suggested that more qualified teachers (for instance, those who possess Master's degrees) and those who had from 1 to 5 years of work experience were more likely to practice inclusion in instruction. Nonetheless, the study stressed the importance of having more comprehensive training interventions that teach how to instruct in an inclusive and diverse manner.

### Conclusions

Based on the study results and discussions it was revealed that culturally responsive teaching methods promote identity development and cultural awareness among students and teachers which positively contribute to the inclusivity in classroom teaching. It was further concluded that the collaborative model of teaching provides more interactional opportunities which also support inclusive classroom practices. Low technological integration and lower active learning opportunities negatively affect inclusive practices in the classroom teaching-learning process.

### Recommendations

Therefore, it was recommended that teachers should be properly trained in these instructional practices, and provide learning resources to schools to support the special needs of diverse students, and the policymakers were recommended to revise the curriculum and prospective teachers' education in the light of sustainable developmental goals.

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