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Exploring Participatory Pedagogy for Cultivating Inclusivity in Classroom

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Abstract

The effectiveness of the teaching-learning process and the classroom environment is dependent on the pedagogical strategies employed by the teachers. Further factors influencing the efficacy of pedagogical approaches include a teacher's expertise, subject-matter knowledge, and teaching abilities (bridging the gap between theory and practice) and also the skill to identify the diverse needs of her students. More comprehensive results are obtained when a teacher utilizes a more engaging teaching approach. One such pedagogical approach is participatory pedagogy where students are involved using active learning styles and these styles are designed according to students' learning preferences. This pedagogical approach helps in nurturing inclusivity by catering to the needs of diverse learners, encouraging every student to learn and making them develop a sense of responsibility for their learning. This research paper focuses on the theoretical aspect, features, and various strategies to enhance outcomes of participatory pedagogy and significance of participatory pedagogy.

Keywords: participatory pedagogy, inclusivity, universal design of learning, collaboration, experiential learning

Introduction

The effectiveness of the teaching learning process and the classroom environment is dependent on the pedagogical strategies employed by the teachers. Further factors influencing the efficacy of pedagogical approaches include a teacher's expertise, subject-matter knowledge, and teaching abilities (bridging the gap between theory and practice) and also the skill to identify the diverse needs of her students. More comprehensive results are obtained when a teacher utilizes a more engaging teaching approach. One such pedagogical approach is participatory pedagogy where students are involved using active learning styles and these styles are designed according to students' learning preferences. This pedagogical approach helps in nurturing inclusivity by catering to the needs of diverse learners, encouraging every student to learn and making them develop a sense of responsibility for their learning.

In the traditional method of teaching and learning the focus was only on the learning part, that is it was subject centered. This subject-centered strategy is not worthwhile since our attention should be directed on objectives that address both the individual's and everyone's well-being. Curriculum, subject matter, and teaching practices must be carefully planned and arranged in order to make the transition from a subject-centered to a learner-centered approach which provides equal chance and maximizes participation of all in the teaching learning process. A substantial shift from the standards of today's education is also necessary when educators strive for a larger vision and better results. Given the current circumstances, educators should be focusing on the deeds rather than the ideal. Actions lead to outcomes and assist us in achieving our goals. In the same way, rather than focusing too much on the goals of education like

inclusivity, we should question how to get to the point where no one is marginalized and everyone receives a high-quality education. Students are at the heart of the learning process when it comes to participatory pedagogy, also known as active teaching or student-centered learning. It transforms the classroom environment into a participatory and dynamic one as opposed to traditional lecture-style teaching, in which knowledge is transferred unilaterally from the teacher to the pupils (Singh, 2023). According to Trauth-Nare and Buck (2011) participatory approach is practical and collaborative, reflective process, and purposeful in bridging the gap between theory and practice in a classroom. This pedagogy is a collection of several intricate sets of tactics or strategies rather than a single teaching approach. It fundamentally means a process where teachers and students actively participate to construct and work collaboratively in the classroom (Trauth-Nare & Buck 2011). Participatory pedagogy lays its foundation on the principles of constructivism that is knowledge is actively constructed rather than passive transmission. Participation is a road to inclusion. Participation and inclusion are connected. Maxwell et al. (2018) suggested that defining inclusion as participation should be a way to operationalise inclusion. Participative pedagogical approaches are informative and help encourage students to become actively involved in the learning process, increase their knowledge of and sense of accountability about their educational experience (Joshi, 2022). Participatory pedagogy aims to promote the ideals of equity, equality and co-agency with the aim of modeling this effectively within our classrooms so that it reflects and spreads across the school community and wider society (Simpson, 2018).

Features of Participatory Pedagogy

- **Equal Responsibility**-Both teachers and students have a shared responsibility for their learning experience. Teachers have faith in students' ability to participate to derive meaning from what they experience, whilst students have faith in teachers' respect for their independence and learning potential.
- **Initiative by Students**- Students direct and shape their learning experiences and full opportunities and support is provided by the teachers.
- **Diverse Perspectives**- Teachers act as agents who value students' needs and choices thereby providing different learning experiences based on their learning styles.
- **Open dialogue**- It offers a kind, welcoming atmosphere where students' opinions are valued and heard, which helps them feel included and inspires them to speak out.
- **Co-producers**- Learners are not only actively involved in learning by doing they are also involved in determining objectives, teaching-learning methods

Participatory Pedagogy and Inclusivity

Su et al. (2010) stated that the participatory approach to learning considers learning by doing which is typical for active practice, experience and direction to the learning. Participatory approach is a significant part of inclusive education as it promotes diverse ways of interaction to reach all students -- including historically underrepresented groups (Eddy & Hogan, 2014; Freeman et al., 2007; Freeman et al., 2014; Hake, 1998).

The participatory pedagogy can ensure inclusive environment in classrooms in following ways-

Universal Design of learning- According to Rose et al. (2014) Universal Design of Learning is based on three principles 1) Multiple ways of engagement 2) Multiple ways of presentation and 3) Multiple ways of actions and expressions. Considering the participatory pedagogy, it is quite clear that this approach provides opportunities for engagement, expression and representation. The principle of engagement supports the notion of providing a range of opportunities for students to participate in education. The identification of students' needs and customization of education to the diverse range of interests, skills, learning styles, etc., that are necessary for the promotion of numerous modes of interaction. The idea is centered on communication, and it is important for educators and students to think about the best ways to reach out to groups of people who have varying linguistic preferences and levels of responsiveness. The third principle supports the idea of facilitating learning that is a goal directed by using teaching strategies promoting effective learning.

Participatory Pedagogy aligns with the principles of the UDL(Universal Design of Learning) model offered by Rose et al. (2014) that enables educators to satisfy demands of all students present in the classroom. It is beneficial for every pupil, not merely for those with impairments, but also caters to those who may still be growing and who are equally gifted in that particular area.

Cooperative and Collaborative Learning- Participatory approach provides opportunities for collaborative and cooperative learning which builds upon the principles of heterogeneity and argue that diversity ought to be embraced rather than being shunned. It is evident that when students participate actively in a supportive setting, their educational experience becomes richer. They establish and foster peer assistance and connections while

drawing upon heterogeneity encompassing students labeled as at risk, normal, gifted, especially abled etc., where they feel safe to raise their voice and take risks. The conventional or even individualized approach to teaching is no longer relevant given the recent developments in inclusive settings and student diversity as previously highlighted. The conventional or even individualized approach to teaching is no longer relevant due to the recent developments in inclusive settings and student diversity. Because cooperative and collaborative learning occurs in a range of cultural and social situations, such techniques are becoming increasingly important for inclusive education (Rogoff, 1990).

Collaborative learning can enhance inclusivity by using the following six attributes highlighted by Makinen and Makinen (2011)-

- **Activation-** This supports that educators should cultivate collaborative skills among their students as these skills enhance confidence that they are capable of achieving something through teamwork (Shindler,2010).
- **Presence of the teacher-** To cultivate a conducive environment full of positivity and a directed flow of energy the teacher must be aware of the group dynamics as being aware of what is happening in the classroom will help them see how students' habits can be altered.
- **Sensitivity-** The teacher must recognise the social, emotional needs and the nonverbal cues of the students. Inclusivity is possible if teachers establish a learning environment that satisfies every child's demands. Students ought to be able to engage in a classroom environment that is defined by compassion and a sense of belonging.

- **Assistance-** Assistance and encouragement when given to students motivates them to contribute to the activities and experience the satisfaction of achievement. Many students initially hesitate to participate and this hesitation is removed when the teacher motivates, assists and guides the students into the right direction when they are confused and stuck in cognitive chaos of sense making.
- **Trust-** Trust is the building block of any relationship. Similarly in teacher student relationship it is a necessary step that every teacher should take before initiating any activity in the classroom. The trust enables students to feel safe which is the first necessary component of the classroom environment. In inclusive education every child should be free from the fear of bullying, put downs as every child has diverse needs and perspectives.
- **Autonomy-** It supports that teachers must cultivate in students a sense of accountability for their learning. It is crucial that educators state their expectations and goals clearly so that students may understand them on a personal and collaborative basis and then contribute to the utmost of their capacities.

Experiential Learning- Dialogue plays a significant role in the teaching learning process as highlighted by Paulo Friere. Students can freely discuss their experiences and ideas based on these encounters when they participate in experiential learning. It is a source of learning that helps create a safe environment for educating about human uniqueness, individual differences and promotes self-awareness. It facilitates a conducive environment for inclusive education by offering a comprehensive learning framework for diagnosing learning needs and helps exploring inclusive teaching approaches and provides a means of fostering emotional and mental security

in the classroom through dialogue.

Here are some ways to nurture inclusivity with Experiential Learning given by Sims and Sims (1995)-

- **Considering Inclusive Education as a Comprehensive Strategy-** The experiential approach of participatory pedagogy must be steered by a comprehensive strategy which should encompass and should include a variety of activities such as role plays, presentations, debates, and hands-on exercises.
- **Clear Specification of Teachers' Role-** The role of teachers has evolved with student centric education. When one talks about participatory pedagogy, that requires activity and interaction on part of students it also necessitates educators to assume a role that is distinct from what is typically anticipated of them. It is essential for one to define that role, his role is not just knowledge transformation it's about switching roles of being a facilitator, guide, role model at any time as per situation.
- **Clear Specification of Students' Role-** Learning as part of the experience can be tailored and autonomous. It could be challenging for students who are not used to this method to take ownership of accomplishing their learning goals. Educators must work together with students in order to assist them in applying emerging knowledge, abilities, and opinions to actual-life circumstances and appreciate the value in their own experiences.
- **Facilitate Dialogue-** Create exercises that facilitate experience processing and conversation. The dialogue itself starts with the speaker using first-person pronouns such as "I," "my," "me," and "mine," speaking from personal experience and owning

experience. It facilitates "straight talk," or the use of organized, straightforward, communication that strengthens bonds between people of similar standing (Jamison, 1987).

- **Determine the Faculty and Students' Learning Styles-** By understanding students' preferred methods of learning, instructors may create more effective teaching strategies and learning resources. It is anticipated that describing how a student starts to focus on, processes, absorbs, and recalls new and challenging educational situations or problems would help the student build efficient study techniques.
- **Ensure Utilization of Different Group Structures-** Combine groups according to the diversity constituted in the educational environment, which may include gender, race, approach to learning, and kind of organization; also, use a range of grouping arrangements such as pairs, trios, small groups, and the entire community.

Experiential and interactive learning exercises that ask students to put themselves in other people's shoes are common aspects of participatory teaching which cultivate a sense of respect, dignity and empathy among students and ultimately a healthy and inclusive environment.

Flexible Assessment Methods- Assessment is a critical component of any classroom process. Assessment must be meticulously designed to assess the learning outcomes of the students as well as to assess the teaching learning process that takes place. An evaluation or assessment exam that is well-designed offers an in-depth analysis of the entire instruction and learning process. In order to make well-informed judgments about learning, it entails the methodical collection of data on students' knowledge, skills, capacities, and comprehension. The vast majority of the needs of inclusive assessment may be satisfied by an assessment strategy

that is adaptable and varied. Here are some ways to create inclusive assessment methods

- Provide a variety of evaluation activities or offer an option such as presentations, written assignments, or hands-on projects, oral assessment, discussions, debate.
- Indicate prerequisites in the course description as it will be easier for students to assess their readiness for the course if they are aware of the expectations
- Before using assignments for summative grades, give students a chance to experience the kinds of assessment tasks you will provide.
- When creating assessment tasks, encourage learners to make use of insights gathered from their own experiences.
- Providing timely, adequate and unbiased feedback.
- Modifications should be made in order to guarantee that students who struggle with communication may participate fully in group discussions while they are being evaluated.
- Constructing tests by considering various student learning disabilities so that they do not act as barriers to them.

The assessment techniques employed in participatory approach showcase inclusivity.

Different learning styles and capabilities can be addressed in the construction of assessments.

Inclusive Language and Communication- Words are powerful and they can either unite or divide people. Teachers must carefully choose her/his words. The language used in classrooms should be impartial, truthful, and humane. When implementing participatory teaching techniques, educators must be aware of students' language and communication preferences. They should speak in a way that is inclusive and appreciates the variety of the students in the classroom. Diverse communication styles and skill levels can be accommodated by giving pupils

the chance to express themselves through written, spoken, and non verbal means.

Significance of Participatory Pedagogy- participatory pedagogy is an invaluable asset in inclusive education as it places a strong focus on student empowerment, teamwork, and active involvement.

- It offers improved utilization of knowledge, and development of skills like creativity, critical thinking and innovation.
- This pedagogy includes a range of pedagogic tactics that attempt to foster more engagement of students in the learning process and enhance their ability to evaluate data, draw connections, and apply their knowledge to practical situations.
- Also, it contributes to the development of cultural sensitivity and multicultural atmosphere for learning.
- Students who learn through a participatory approach feel more empowered because they have a greater feeling of autonomy and self-assurance.
- They develop a positive self-image, confidence, and a belief in their capacity to succeed academically.
- students have the opportunity to contribute their ideas, collaborate with peers, and actively participate in class which further acts as a tool or compensation for less teacher-student interaction in large classrooms.

Conclusion

To sum up, the importance of participatory pedagogy in education cannot be overstated, as it fosters student ownership, critical thinking, teamwork, and active involvement by learners

beyond the boundaries of conventional instructional approaches. Shen et al. (2004) concluded their work by saying the student-centered nature of the participatory approach enables students to appreciate and develop interest (Gal et al., 2018) in topical issues in class. It helps pupils develop the abilities and mindsets necessary for success in a changing and globally interconnected environment, therefore preparing them for the challenges of the twenty-first century. It embraces diversity, takes it as an opportunity rather than a barrier and fosters a sense of belonging for each and everyone in the classroom.

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