

Adaptive Teaching: An Invaluable Pedagogic Practice in Social Studies Education

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Abstract

The paper delved into the issue of learner/teacher centredness in Social Studies and held that the choice of around whom Social Studies teaching would be centred should be determined by the individual differences of the learners. Adaptive teaching was explained as an approach aimed at achieving a common instructional goal with learners considering their individual differences. Differentiated teaching and individualized instruction were contrasted with adaptive teaching and illustrated with a diagram. The paper further discussed the application of, and obstacles to adaptive teaching. It was concluded that the dynamic nature of Social Studies as a discipline necessitated adoption of adaptive teaching to take care of the learners' individual differences via remediation and compensatory approaches.

Keywords: Adaptive teaching; differentiated instruction; individualized instruction.

INTRODUCTION

The learner occupies a central place in all matters concerning education, ranging from planning, development and implementation of a curriculum to pedagogic methods and strategies. His psychological disposition, socio-economic status as well as the level of his physiological wholesomeness and educational background influence and sometimes even determine what an educational practice is or should be. He is therefore an indispensable factor in the teaching-learning spectrum.

Social Studies being a problem-solving discipline focuses on the problems affecting the learners and the solutions to those problems with the ultimate aim of effecting an improvement or total change in man-environment interrelationship. Learner-centredness thus remains the pedagogical mode in Social Studies education, without however neglecting absolutely the merits of teacher-centredness, for according to D'Amico and Gallaway, (2008), while student-centred discussions improve the achievement of highly anxious students by providing a more informal climate; teacher-centred lectures increase the achievement of low-anxiety students by allowing for a faster pace. Learner factors could therefore be delineated into two broad conceptualizations, based on their inbuilt characteristics. First is that which possesses extraneous characteristics that impinge on the learner's educability status; the other possesses intrinsic and hereditary characteristics which imbue the learner with uniqueness and differentiation. These constitute the fabric of this discourse.

• Learner/teacher-centredness

Around whom the focus of teaching would be centred (the learner or the teacher) remains an unsettled issue in teaching-learning activities. It is a common practice to delineate pedagogic practice into either 'learner-centred' or 'teacher-centred', (Mkpa, 2009). While the former (that is, learner-centredness) is viewed as modern and widely accepted practice, the latter (that is, teacher-centeredness) is dubbed ancient or outdated practice. Unfortunately, the 'middle-path' between learner/teacher centredness has no protagonists.

Related to the centredness of Social Studies teaching and learning is the relegation of lecture method to an ignoble position. The method is easily associated with teacher-centredness and thus is clad in the garb of disregard. Paradoxically, all methods of teaching, whether aimed at the development of cognitive; affective or psychomotor aspect of the learner, employ lecture method in either its pristine or modified form.

The underlying consideration in taking a decision as regards choice of the most suitable method of teaching Social Studies is however the individual differences of the learners and the teacher's ability to identify and respect these differences and apply his instructional methods and materials appropriately. While some learners are inclined to learning with ease via particular method or set of methods, others learn with reduced anxiety when some other methods are applied. This makes adaptive teaching both necessary and important.

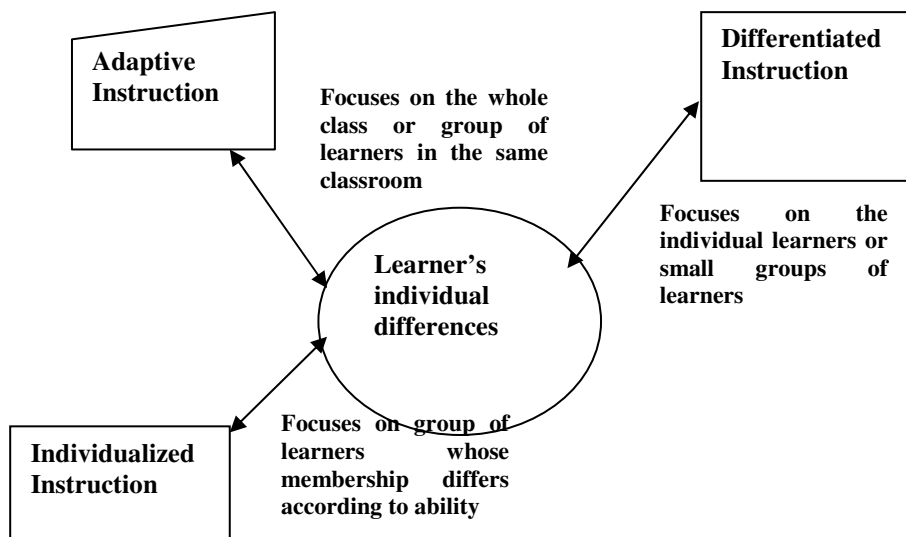
Concept of Adaptive Teaching

Adaptive teaching is an approach aimed at achieving a common instructional goal with learners whose individual differences, such as prior achievement, aptitude, or learning styles differ. Adaptive teaching according to Borich (2011:41) “apply different instructional strategies to different groups of learners so that natural diversity prevailing in the classroom does not prevent any learner from achieving success”. Two major approaches are adopted in adaptive teaching, namely, remediation approach and compensatory approach. While remediation approach is proactive in nature, compensatory approach is reactive in the sense that in the former the learner is provided with the basic or prerequisite knowledge or skill necessary for him to benefit from the planned instruction, such as student-centred discussion and question-and-answer session; in the compensatory approach choice of an instructional method is based on its efficacy in compensating for lack of basic knowledge or skill among the learners. This may involve presentation of the content with more learning resources and activities.

It is important at this point, to obliterate the dilemma and confusion immanent in the conceptualization and application of such terms as differentiated teaching and individualized instruction which, superficially, have similar meaning with adaptive teaching. Adaptive teaching as has been explained above is an approach to achieving a common instructional goal with learners whose individual differences, such as aptitude or learning styles differ. It focuses on the whole class or groups of learners in the same classroom who may differ.

Differentiated teaching is concerned with the academic achievement of individual learners or small groups of learners. In differentiated teaching, the task before the teacher includes good knowledge of individual student’s educational and historical background, his interests and learning ability. The teacher then chooses instructional strategies or techniques that are most suited to the individual learner. In individualized instruction, much of the instruction takes place in group settings but membership to learning groups does not take form of a permanent placement. Learners are moved from one group to another as is needed to help them learn in their best way. Uniform assignment and uniform requirements for the entire class are avoided (Ikwumelu, 2012).

A common factor in the three instructional strategies is that they are all approaches to responding to learner’s individual differences. This is diagrammatically represented below:



Approaches to Responding to Learner's Individual Differences

Application of Adaptive Teaching in Social Studies Education

Social Studies discipline focuses on man's problems in relation to his environments. This implies that the discipline has a quadruple task of recognizing man as a determinant of his environment, identifying man as a product of his environment, studying the resultant problems from man-environment interrelationship, and setting action in motion to solve the problems. The outcome of this relationship gives rise to differences in individual's physiological, psychological and emotional make-up. In response to this situation, Social Studies teaching is organized in such a way that the differences in individuals are taken care of through adaptive teaching.

In applying adaptive teaching in Social Studies the elements of the Social Studies curriculum such as the content, the process and product are taken into consideration. The content, for example, could vary in terms of structure and presentation; the process takes cognizance of the group affiliations and individual interests; and in relation to the products, assessment methods are made flexible in response to the learner's level of understanding.

Some of the instructional strategies in adaptive teaching that are relevant to Social Studies Education include: cooperative grouping; inquiry, student-centred presentation, and self-directed learning. Each of these strategies could yield good result depending on learning strength and experience of the learners and proper judgment on the part of the Social Studies teacher concerning when and how to apply remediation or compensatory approach.

In cooperative grouping, for example, learners are made to interact with others. This enables them to acquire cooperative attitudes and values that would help them to think independently in the real-life world. It provides a situation where different viewpoints can be orchestrated from which an individual student forms attitudes and values of his own. Adaptive learning is encouraged in cooperative grouping especially as each learner strives to facilitate the task performance of fellow group members. In other words, actions of individuals are influenced by other members and behaviour of individual members affects the group.

In inquiry instructional strategy the learner is the active agent in discovering concepts, generalizations and ideas. He thinks critically about ideas, problems or issues, finds answers to them and draws his own conclusions, (Ikwumelu, 2012). This is an essential ingredient in adaptive learning.

Student-centeredness implies that content is based on students' problems and interests, and that students are actively involved in the selection of the form and substance of what is to be learnt; individually tailored feedback mechanism is also provided. Adaptive teaching consequently thrives effortlessly when teaching is student-centred.

Self-directed learning is an approach to both teaching and learning that actively engages students in the learning process to acquire higher-order thinking skills. It helps learners construct their own understanding and meaning and to reason and think critically about the content, (Burke, 2006). In self directed learning, learners go beyond the information given by the teacher by employing their own ways of thinking and prior understanding in restructuring it. The teacher uses practice exercises, discussions and question-and-answer techniques to shift the responsibility of learning to the learners (Borich, 2011). This aspect of adaptive teaching is relevant to Social Studies education for it enables learners to identify a problem in the real- life situation, hypothesize solutions thereto, and actually embark on solving it.

Obstacles to Adaption Teaching

Adaptive teaching faces such obstacles as:

(i) Government Interference

Government interferes in educational practices through her educational policies which are often more political than educational. Political coloration in form of government sponsored policies hold sway in the formulation, development and implementation of education curricula, giving only tangential attention to the present and projected educational needs of the society. Omonijo and Owolabi (2013:168), thus observe that "educational system has been subjected to power play by the leadership and the various administrators over the years".

Monitoring of the teachers by government officials is another way of bureaucratization of education industry, it encourages rigidity and conservatism on the part of the teachers since any deviation from the 'standardized' norms could lead to loss of job or stagnation of advancement in rank. Williams in Kis (2005: 16) argues that "over-elaborate bureaucratic systems of external monitoring may lead to internal processes becoming determined by external requirements, but at the expense of what is good for the institution thus innovation, may suffer for fear that it will not be understood".

(ii) Population Explosion of Learners

Effective application of adaptive teaching requires that students' population should be of a manageable size to enable the teacher give adequate attention to individual learners in the classroom interactive sessions. Agreeing with this view Osam (2013) observes that the population in our classrooms has escalated, making

imparting of instruction to be cumbersome for large class size as effective control of the students may not be possible.

(iii) Content overload

Contemporary global issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender disparity, drug/human trafficking, child labour, child abuse, hunger, etc have necessitated the infusion of many subjects into the school curriculum in order to educate the learners on their debilitating effects and to mobilize them (the learners) into finding solutions to the problem. This infusion though relevant to the society has caused content overload in education system. Consequently, as noted by Maduwesi (2005:2), “teachers are not coping well with the influx of new materials into the already crowded school time-able”. This constitutes a constraint to effective application of adaptive teaching as an instructional strategy in Social Studies, since it forces schools and teachers to rush through subjects and drill students to pass not minding whether or not real learning has taken place (Borisade, 2013).

(iv) Inflexible and Inadequate Infrastructure

Infrastructure as used here refers to the classroom, furniture and teaching | learning equipment. These facilities are often put in place in a permanent form that does not allow any rearrangement. This situation makes adaptive teaching virtually impossible since individual differences in the learners necessitate constant rearrangement of school infrastructure in response to the varying educational needs and competencies of the learners. Furthermore, adaptive teaching requires that teaching | learning facilities should be in abundance to allow learners access to them as and when needed. Unfortunately, these facilities are inadequate in most schools.

(v) Uniform Evaluation Mode

Adaptive teaching abhors uniformity in evaluation mode and predetermined assessment methodology; rather it thrives effectively on varying assessment techniques and tools which would allow each learner’s assessment to be based on his or her level of understanding and at the same time present him or her with an opportunity to choose from a number of evaluation/assessment methods.

(vi) Insufficient Teacher Training and Retraining Programmes

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004:39) aptly observes that “no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers; concurring, Bozimo and Ikwumelu (2013) maintain that teachers are undoubtedly the translators, transmitters and implementers of educational policies and programmes. They are therefore capable of making or marring the entire education system if they are poorly prepared and ill-equipped for their role in the teaching-learning continuum. Adaptive teaching requires highly motivated conscientious and efficient classroom teachers that must be constantly and appropriately trained and re-training via seminars, workshops and in-service course in the contemporary global trends in pedagogic practices.

Conclusion

Social Studies as a curricular offering possesses some attributes that render its conceptualization and pedagogy amenable to constant change. For example, its major focii which include, man, his environment, his interrelationship with his environment as well as the problems emanating from such interrelationship, are all prone to constant changes. As a result of this, all the elements of Social Studies curriculum and teaching are expected to change in consonance with the fluidity of the discipline’s focii.

Furthermore, Social Studies has the ‘feeling’ or ‘emotional’ dimension which includes teaching of societally accepted attitudes, values, beliefs, and ideals. These affective issues are subjective, and so their assimilation and the success of inculcating them are intricately dependent upon learners’ individual differences. This makes adaptive teaching method indispensable in Social Studies pedagogy.

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