Enhancing English Language Teaching Pedagogy in a Multimedia Course for Pre-Service Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the integration of differentiated instruction (DI) and universal design for learning (UDL) principles in a preservice EFL teacher training programme. The author discusses strategies for designing course content, materials, activities, and assessments that accommodate diverse learning styles, preferences, and abilities. These strategies are illustrated through a case study example that outlines the practical implementation of DI and UDL principles in a multimedia course for preservice EFL teachers in Argentina. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of integrating these pedagogical approaches to promote inclusive teaching practices and optimize learning outcomes in English language teaching contexts.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, differentiated instruction, multimedia, preservice teachers, universal design

INTRODUCTION

While evidence shows that multimedia tools and applications can promote and enhance learning, this is dependent on how technology is used. For example, a review by Lillejord et al. (2018), evaluating technology in higher

education for Norway, concluded that higher education was still very teacher centered and that digital technologies were not being exploited to promote more learner centered and inclusive learning environments.

Any learning environment must offer quality and effective learning. This is aligned with UN Sustainable Development Goal No. 4 for inclusive and equitable quality education and "inclusive and effective learning environments for all" (www.social.desa.un.org). Ensuring quality education inherently involves fostering inclusivity within the learning environment. This means creating a space where every individual, regardless of background or circumstance, feels valued, supported, and empowered to learn and grow. Quality learning is therefore tied to inclusion in the learning environment.

However, preservice English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Argentina do not often receive formal training that integrates contemporary pedagogical approaches with innovative technology to design learning experiences that benefit all learners. In this practitioner article, we explore the integration of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles into a multimedia course designed for preservice EFL teachers at a local university in Buenos Aires. By leveraging multimedia tools and incorporating DI and UDL principles, future teachers can effectively meet the diverse needs of English language learners.

UNDERSTANDING INCLUSION, DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION AND UDL PRINCIPLES

Inclusive education is conceptualized as "actions that embrace diversity and build a sense of belonging, rooted in the belief that every person has value and potential and should be respected, regardless of their background, ability or identity" (Antoninis et al, 2020, p. 104). Antoninis et al. (2020) present inclusive education as a system where all learners are together in the same classroom, arguing that this can result in improved academic achievement and contribute to the "social and emotional development, self-esteem, and peer acceptance" (p.106) of diverse learners and the more efficient use of resources by having one inclusive system.

To create inclusive environments that recognize and accommodate diversity in all its forms, instructors can combine differentiated instruction (DI) and universal design for learning (UDL) principles. As stated by Hall, Strangman, and Meyer (2003), DI is an approach to teaching that

acknowledges and accommodates the diverse learning needs, interests, and abilities of students. It involves tailoring instruction to address individual student readiness, learning styles, and interests, thereby maximizing learning outcomes for all learners.

Universal design for learning (UDL) is a framework for designing educational environments and materials that are accessible and effective for all learners (Grant, 2018). Thus, UDL principles emphasize providing multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression to address the variability among learners, ensuring equitable access to learning opportunities. According to Hall, Strangman, and Meyer (2003), instructors can create lessons, curricula, and learning systems that are engaging, maximize flexibility, and optimize learning by following three UDL principles of design: 1) providing multiple means of engagement, 2) providing multiple means of representation, and 3) providing multiple means of action and expression (Rose, Meyer & Gordon, 2014).

Each UDL principle is elaborated upon through UDL guidelines and checkpoints. These detailed guidelines offer educators valuable direction for infusing flexibility throughout every aspect of the curriculum, including objectives, teaching approaches, resources, and evaluation methods (Novak & Rose, 2016). This ensures that every student receives the necessary support to access, engage with, and continually assess their progress across all dimensions of learning.

INTEGRATING DI AND UDL PRINCIPLES INTO A MULTIMEDIA APPLIED TO ELT COURSE

Multimedia courses specifically designed for preservice EFL teachers are ideal for integrating DI and UDL principles. For example, DI principles can be integrated into the design of course content by providing various learning pathways and resources to accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences. Among other options, instructors can include multimedia presentations, readings, interactive simulations, and hands-on activities to cater to visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile learners.

Moreover, instructors can ask preservice teachers to engage in a variety of activities, such as creating digital lesson plans, designing interactive language games, recording podcasts or video tutorials, and collaborating on virtual language immersion experiences. By offering

choice and flexibility, instructors empower preservice teachers to personalize their learning experiences according to their needs and interests.

Assessment can also be an integral part of the learning process in a multimedia ELT course for preservice teachers. They can be asked to demonstrate their understanding and skills through diverse assessment methods, including written reflections, multimedia presentations, teaching demonstrations, and digital portfolios. By allowing for flexibility in assessment formats, instructors can assess preservice teachers' mastery of course objectives while honoring their individual strengths and preferences.

Furthermore, UDL principles can guide the design of multimedia courses to ensure accessibility, flexibility, and inclusivity for all learners. Among other options, instructors can apply UDL guidelines by offering content in various formats, such as text, audio, video, and interactive media, to accommodate diverse learning preferences and abilities. Additionally, preservice teachers can be asked to use digital storytelling tools to create multimedia language lessons tailored to specific learner needs or collaborate on virtual language exchanges to enhance cultural understanding and language proficiency.

CASE STUDY: IMPLEMENTATION IN A PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM

To illustrate the practical implementation of DI and UDL principles in a multimedia course for preservice EFL teachers, let us consider a case study:

Case Study: Multimedia Methods in ELT Pedagogy

In this third-year course, which was designed for preservice EFL teachers in Argentina, the instructor integrates DI and UDL principles through the following strategies:

1) Preservice teachers are provided with diverse resources such as interactive simulations demonstrating language acquisition theories, video tutorials showcasing effective teaching techniques, and digital readings exploring innovative trends in foreign language teaching. This approach caters to different learning styles by offering visual, auditory, and textual materials, aligning with UDL's principle of multiple means of representation.

2) There is choice and flexibility in learning activities to give preservice teachers the freedom to select from a range of tasks tailored to their interests and preferences. For example, they can opt to create digital lesson plans using multimedia tools, design interactive lessons using language learning augmented reality (AR) apps tailored to specific learner needs, or participate in collaborative online international learning (COIL) activities to enhance cultural understanding. This approach supports DI by acknowledging and accommodating individual differences in learning preferences and strengths.

3) Multiple assessment options are offered to allow preservice teachers to demonstrate their understanding and skills in various ways. They may choose to showcase their learning through multimedia presentations, conduct teaching demonstrations using digital resources, or compile an electronic portfolio highlighting their achievements and reflections. Thus, the instructor supports DI by recognizing and valuing diverse talents and abilities among preservice teachers.

4) Course materials and activities are designed with UDL principles to ensure accessibility, flexibility, and inclusivity for all learners. For instance, digital materials are provided in multiple formats to accommodate different learning preferences, and learning activities are scaffolded to support learners with special needs and varying proficiency levels. This approach aligns with UDL's goal of removing barriers to learning and providing equitable opportunities for all learners to succeed.

5) The instructor incorporates a variety of multimedia tools, such as learning management systems for asynchronous learning, virtual reality (VR) rooms for synchronous discussions, and digital storytelling apps for creating interactive learning experiences. These tools facilitate differentiated instruction by allowing the instructor to personalize learning experiences based on individual needs and preferences. For example, preservice teachers receive personalized feedback on their assignments through audio recordings, enabling them to better understand and apply course concepts. By leveraging multimedia tools, the instructor also promotes UDL principles of flexibility and customization in course delivery, catering to the diverse needs of preservice teachers.

As shown, the integration of Diversity and Inclusion (DI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in the Multimedia Methods in ELT Pedagogy course exemplifies a commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment for preservice EFL teachers in Argentina. By offering a diverse array of multimedia resources, providing choice and flexibility in learning activities, offering multiple assessment options, designing course materials with UDL principles in mind, and using a variety of multimedia tools to differentiate instruction, the course aims to cater to the diverse needs, preferences, and strengths of all learners. Through these intentional strategies, the course not only equips preservice teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively incorporate multimedia in their future classrooms but also cultivates a culture of respect, diversity, and accessibility in the field of English language teaching.

CONCLUSIONS

Integrating Differentiated Instruction and Universal Design for Learning Principles into a multimedia course for preservice EFL teachers is essential for preparing educators to meet the diverse needs of English language learners effectively. Through the utilization of various multimedia tools and the provision of tailored learning opportunities, instructors can empower preservice teachers to develop inclusive teaching practices that promote equity, accessibility, and engagement in ELT classrooms. Through thoughtful course design and implementation, educators can foster a new generation of EFL teachers who are equipped with the required knowledge, skills, and mindset to support the success of all learners in a variety of English language learning contexts.

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