

Creating Supportive EFL Classrooms for Diverse Students of Ecuador

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Abstract

Diversity affects the way the students learn, and in some circumstances, this diversity even disrupts the learning process. Thus, EFL teachers need to use diverse teaching strategies to provide their students a rigorous, relevant, complex, varied, and flexible instruction that benefits all types of learners. This paper seeks to understand five important sources of diversity found in EFL classrooms in Ecuador in order to determine which strategies are effective to address students' individual needs, and how these strategies can improve education as a whole in Ecuador.

Resumen

La diversidad afecta la forma en que los estudiantes aprenden, y en algunas circunstancias, esta diversidad incluso obstaculiza el proceso de aprendizaje. Por lo tanto, los profesores EFL necesitan utilizar diversas estrategias de enseñanza para proporcionar a sus estudiantes una instrucción rigurosa, relevante, compleja, variada y flexible que beneficie a todos los tipos de estudiantes. Por lo tanto, este trabajo busca entender cinco fuentes importantes de diversidad encontradas en las clases EFL en Ecuador para determinar qué estrategias son efectivas para atender las necesidades individuales de los estudiantes y cómo estas estrategias pueden mejorar la educación en su conjunto en Ecuador.

Introduction

Nowadays, teachers all around the world have to deal with diverse classrooms, and educators need to be very well prepared to instruct these diverse students. Every learner has unique personal and cultural experiences, types and amounts of schooling, interests, backgrounds, and preferred ways of learning (Fehr & Agnello, 2012). All these sources of diversity affect the way students learn. That is why responsible educators try to implement differentiated instruction in their classrooms in order to create an inclusive environment where all students are respected and valued. Actually, the clue for successful students is to adjust instruction and management practices to meet the needs of different groups in the class, and to provide a classroom environment that promotes positive behavior and enhances student learning (Burden, 2010; Heacox, 2012). Therefore, it is necessary to adjust the pace, level, and kind of instruction provided in response to individual learners' needs, styles, or interests. In doing so, educators will also promote the creation of more respectful societies; otherwise, schools will end up with a very "self-centered and ethnocentric society of youth" (Fehr & Agnello, 2012, p. 37). Consequently, this paper will analyze the importance and benefits of adapting instruction and teaching practices to the needs of diverse students in Ecuador.

Literature Review

There are abundant individual differences in every classroom; that is why it can be challenging to adapt instruction to each learner. However, it is not impossible. The first step is to recognize those differences. There are many sources of diversity: religion, race, socio-economic background, family structure, intellectual ability, social status, educational background, learning styles, learning abilities, and many others. Nevertheless, this paper will analyze five sources of diversity: cognitive ability, learning styles, cultural background, socioeconomic status, and gender. These are the

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common sources of diversity in most classrooms in Ecuador. It is important to examine existing literature and research concerning differentiated instruction in these specific areas of diversity.

Cognitive Ability

Each student has different cognitive abilities or skills, such as information processing, reasoning, and problem solving (Burden, 2010). According to Howard Gardner (1999), human beings have nine different kinds of intelligence: logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, existential, and naturalistic. Each person has an exclusive combination of intelligences, and each type of intelligence involves different ways of learning and communicating (Gardner, 1999). Differentiated instruction can increase students learning by accessing their individual learning styles. This is especially important when teachers have struggling learners or gifted-talented learners in class.

Struggling learners usually have limited attention spans and find it difficult to learn from instructional materials designed for the majority of students, such as texts and workbooks (Burden, 2010). Thus, teachers need to adapt their classrooms and teaching methods to the cognitive abilities and needs of these students. When teachers provide struggling learners different types of instructional materials and assessment tools, these students have the opportunity to show their real knowledge and skills. All we have to do is identify the appropriate tool to teach and evaluate each student. For example, when we vary instruction and use collaborative and cooperative groups, even low-level students contribute with their ideas. Thus, all the students can be engaged in class (Johns & Sipp, 2004).

These recommendations are supported by a study conducted by Finnegan (2012). Her research was conducted with fifty-two participants, ages 5-12, from five schools in the New York metropolitan area and all were considered to have a significant cognitive disability that affected the development of their reading skills. Before the intervention, the researcher realized that those children were not exposed to alternative or differentiated instruction and assessment. This study wanted to explore how differentiated and personalized instruction would affect them. For that reason, students were divided in two groups, the intervention group which experienced differentiated and personalized instruction and assessment, and the control group which continued with their regular reading program with no additional instruction. At the end of the intervention, the findings suggested that differentiation strategies were beneficial for many students with cognitive disabilities. For example, the researcher found that participants maintained their interest in the learning activities during the intervention. It was also beneficial for them to have class sessions that were shorter in length and that provided them many opportunities to interact with and respond to the learning materials. The study also revealed that students worked better and learned more with materials that were designed for them because they were easy to read, easy to manipulate, and appealing to look at (Finnegan, 2012). Consequently, the study concluded that differentiated instruction affects many students with learning disabilities in a positive way. However, the literature suggests that differentiated instruction is important not only for struggling learners, but also for advanced, talented, and gifted learners.

According to Burden (2010), gifted-talented learners are "students who perform at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age" (p. 154). If these learners are not challenged or motivated, they may develop

negative attitudes toward school and learning as they feel bored at school. Nevertheless, if teachers modify the traditional curriculum and include interesting activities in the class to develop their creativity and their critical thinking skills, the students will be engaged in the class (Freeman, Freeman & Ramirez, 2008). As these students have to make real choices based on what they are learning, they perceive the content as relevant and feel motivated to keep learning. Additionally, when these students are involved in problem-solving activities, they learn to work cooperatively and value the knowledge and skills of other classmates (Johns & Sipp, 2004).

These ideas are supported by research conducted by Kanevsky (2011). The research was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and its purpose was to determine which differentiation strategies were preferred by gifted students. The participants were 646 students in grades three through eight from two suburban school districts, one Canadian (315 students) and one American (331 students). The participants were recognized as intellectually, spatially, creatively, or academically gifted students. During the study, the students had to answer a questionnaire and choose their preferences for certain differentiation strategies used in class. The author used a five-point Likert-type scale from *strongly agree* (SA) to *strongly disagree* (SD), with 110 items related to different aspects of differentiated instruction, such as pace, collaborative learning, curriculum content, evaluation, open-ended activities, and teacher/student relationship. At the end of the study, the results showed that gifted learners preferred self-pacing, choice of topic, and choice of workmates. They also wanted to learn about complex, extracurricular topics and authentic, sophisticated knowledge, to work with others some of the time and to choose the format of the products of their learning (Kanevsky, 2011). The results showed that gifted students prefer and work better when instruction is adapted to their needs. Teachers should adapt the curriculum, activities, materials, assessments, and time frame for these types of students. Actually, most advanced learners and talented students want to have a voice in what and how they learn.

Learning Styles

This is another important source of diversity. According to Woolfolk (2007), a learning style refers to the "individual preference for the conditions of the learning process" (p. 202). Thus, learning styles include working alone, with a partner or in groups, in a quiet place or with noise, while sitting still or moving around (Dunn, 1993). Brain hemisphericity also affects the student preference for learning environment. For instance, left-brain dominant people are more logical and analytical; as a result, they prefer concrete and sequential instruction. On the other hand, right-brain dominant people have a more holistic way of thinking; as a consequence, they prefer to learn through visual tools and hands-on activities (Burden, 2010).

All students have different learning preferences; that is why teachers need to adapt classes according to the needs of each learner in order to engage and motivate students to learn. It will make it easier for students to acquire the content taught in class. This was demonstrated in a study conducted by Howard and Tracey Ernst (2005). The purpose of their investigation was to determine if differentiating instruction based on the students' learning styles would be considered effective and practical by teachers and learners. The authors conducted this research with 35 undergraduate students in a Public Policy class at the University of Virginia during the spring of 2000. During the study, the students were divided in two groups: 1) the treatment group, which experienced differentiated instruction, and 2) the non-treatment group, which had regular instruction. The findings revealed that students

responded favorably to the differentiated approach, reporting higher levels of intellectual growth, interest in the subject, and satisfaction with the course than students in the non-treatment group. The instructor's evaluation of the approach was also positive. Although the teacher was concerned about the considerable amount of time needed to teach a differentiated class, in the end he considered that this approach was practical and improved the class (Ernst & Ernst, 2005). Thus, this study, as several others (Haager & Klingner, 2005; Hall, 2004; Laboard, 2003; Lovelace, 2005) support the idea that differentiating instruction, according to students' learning styles, has positive effects on learners.

Cultural Background

Learning preferences are usually molded by the culture and context in which each individual lives (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Each culture has its own values, beliefs, attitudes, rules, ways of thinking, and perceptions of the world. Evidently, all these factors influence the way students learn. That is why teachers need to make sure that each student from every cultural group succeeds in school. Consequently, teachers who are culturally responsible acknowledge and take into account the students' cultural diversity during instruction (Gay, 2005).

When teachers are responsive to the students' cultural diversity in class, all the students benefit. For example, when teachers use books which address issues of diversity in class, the students' identity and cultural values are affirmed. They see themselves and their families represented in those stories and books. As a result, they feel important and valued in the class, and that encourages them to work harder to succeed (Johns & Sipp, 2004). When inclusion and diversity are promoted in education, there are positive results throughout the school system. For example, Tienda (2013) explained that after inclusion and diversity were promoted in several universities in 2003, many graduate programs observed remarkable increases in Black and Hispanic enrollment. In general, the development of more culturally responsive education systems over the years has had a positive effect on minorities. For example, "the number of advanced degree seekers who were Black and Hispanic rose 73% between 1980 and 2010" (Tienda, 2013, p. 469).

It is true that cultural inclusion in schools is important; however, this is just the first step. It is also necessary to differentiate instruction in order to address the needs of culturally diverse students. This is evidenced in a study conducted by Wang (2007) at San Diego State University. Her research is focused on cultural differences in online learning. Since online courses often involve students of diverse cultural backgrounds, the researcher wanted to determine if different learners would exhibit varying levels of engagement depending on the format of the assignments, the type of assessments, the online relationships between participants, and the communication tools used in this online class. The study was conducted with graduate students enrolled in online classes of three universities in the United States, South Korea, and China. During the research, the students had to identify their preferences regarding the use of communication tools (same-time/synchronous tools, such as chat and instant messaging vs. delayed-time/asynchronous tools, such as emails, discussion board and bulletin board system); the format of the assignments (individual or teamwork, exams, essays, reports or projects); the type of assessment (solely by the instructor, peer review and self-evaluation); and the course conduct (teacher-centered one-way presentation/lecture or two-way interaction between teacher-student and student-student. For that purpose, the researcher used surveys and interviews to collect students' perceptions of the course design and their level of

engagement. The results showed that students from different cultural backgrounds preferred and were more engaged with different types of instruction. For example, regarding power distance, the American group felt comfortable in approaching their instructors for help, while the Korean and Chinese groups felt uncomfortable in doing so (Wang, 2007). This suggests that, even though not all students who belong to a certain cultural group or country have equal needs or preferences, instructors still need to be aware of these cultural and personal preferences in order to adapt the instruction to the needs of students and motivate them to actively participate in learning.

Finally, if teachers create a class environment which gives attention to individual differences, students will be prepared to succeed in this globalized world where it is necessary to coexist, work, and study with diverse people (Gurung & Prieto, 2009). According to Page (2009), when people from different backgrounds work together to solve a problem, they do it better and faster because they all contribute with their diverse and non-redundant skills and experiences.

Socio-Economic Status

The socioeconomic status refers to the position of the family within the society, determined by the parents' income, occupation, or level of education (Burden, 2010). According to Books (2004), Lee and Bowen (2006), and Ormrod (2008), students' school performance, test scores, and grades are correlated to their socioeconomic status. For example, Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) found that "low achievement levels and low college attendance is very common in low-income students" (p.10). These students usually have low self-confidence and believe that education is not important in their lives. Therefore, those students who belong to a low socioeconomic status tend to be at greater risk for dropping out of school (Woolfolk, 2007). The limited financial support for the education of working-class students "forces upon the teachers and school administrators in the working-class schools a type of social relations which fairly closely mirrors that of the factory" (Bowles, 1972, p. 3). It means that learners who belong to middle-class or working-class families usually go to public schools, characterized by large classes, absence of individualized attention to students, few elective courses, unqualified teachers, and few opportunities for independent or creative work (Bowles, 1972). In general, those students are trained to end up in jobs similar to those of their parents.

Despite the challenges, sensitive teachers try to understand the circumstances of these students and adapt the curriculum and instruction to their needs in order to help them to succeed (Johns & Sipp, 2004). The importance of using differentiated instruction in these cases is clearly evidenced in a study conducted by Flaherty and Hackler (2010). The research was conducted with a group of 50 students who were in the 4th and 6th grades of school. The purpose of their study was to determine if differentiated instruction would improve students' motivation and achievement. The participants belonged to a low socioeconomic status and did not have much parental support. At the beginning of the research, the students considered that academics were not as fulfilling as other interests or activities. Classroom teachers noted high incidence of incomplete homework, low classroom participation, low motivation, poor study habits, disorganization and low academic achievement. During the study, differentiated instruction was utilized daily in the classroom, and the lessons emphasized student choice and diverse groupings for class activities. At the end of the intervention, data showed increased student involvement and improvement in class participation, homework completion, and on-task behaviors during group, full

class, and independent classroom activities which led to enhanced student motivation. Increased levels of academic achievement were also noted. Consequently, differentiated instruction was recommended as an effective teaching strategy to increase student motivation and improve academic achievement.

Gender

Gender is another source of diversity in the classroom (Heacox, 2012). Brain research shows that gender may influence the way students learn. For example, male students prefer action and exploration to passive learning. Also, they benefit from regular physical activity and do best with hands-on learning. On the other hand, female students learn more with verbal-linguistic activities. They also want to have opportunities to ask questions and discuss ideas and concepts. Besides, female learners prefer real-life applications and examples, and a balance between independent and collaborative work (Gurian & Stevens, 2010). That is why educators need to use different teaching strategies in order to meet the needs and preferences of diverse students.

These gender differences are supported by research conducted by Honigsfeld and Dunn (2003). The authors investigated gender differences among the learning styles of 1,637 adolescents in grades 7-12 from five countries: Bermuda, Brunei, Hungary, New Zealand, and Sweden. The purpose of the study was to determine if female and male students had different learning styles and preferences, and if they needed different types of instruction according to their gender. At the end of the study, the researchers reported statistically significant differences between the learning styles of male and female students. The findings indicated that boys were more kinesthetic and peer oriented than girls. Also, they observed that it is beneficial to take into account all learning styles and vary instruction accordingly in order to maximize the instructional outcomes, capitalize on strengths, cope with instructional approaches that are incongruent with needs, and help develop positive study habits and learning strategies. It is not possible to generalize because some male and female students are different and have their own unique preferences. However, it is necessary to take into account these differences in order to adapt the class to the needs of both male and female students.

These studies present the positive effects that differentiated instruction has on diverse students including ideas that teachers can use to differentiate instruction in their classrooms and support learners.

Application

As mentioned before, understanding the sources of diversity is the first step to creating supportive and inclusive classrooms. Then, with this information, educators will be able to make responsible decisions about the curriculum, instruction, and environment they will provide to their diverse students. Accordingly, this section will explain specific strategies that teachers can use to create inclusive and supportive classrooms for their diverse learners.

Although these practices are organized in different categories according to the source of diversity, most of them can be used to address different areas of diversity at the same time.

Diversity of Cognitive Abilities

A practical strategy is to implement multiple intelligences across the curriculum in order to let students demonstrate their knowledge and skills in diverse ways

(Finnegan, 2012; Freeman, Freeman & Ramirez, 2008). Additionally, it is important to vary the instructional strategies, develop lessons around students' interests and needs, use individualized instruction and materials, teach content in small sequential steps, and provide study aids and peer tutors for those learners who need extra support (Burden, 2010; Finnegan, 2012). When teachers deal with struggling learners, they should guide these students to establish their own goals and timelines to achieve those goals. Teachers can also differentiate assignments by modifying the length, difficulty, and time span of tasks (Burden, 2010; Finnegan, 2012; Johns & Sipp, 2004).

On the other hand, if teachers have gifted or talented learners in the classroom, it is vital to challenge them with interesting activities that promote their creativity and critical thinking skills to solve problems (Freeman, Freeman & Ramirez, 2008; Kanevsky, 2011). Even though they are talented, they do not have all the intelligences. That is why educators have to challenge students' strong areas and help them to develop their weaker areas. With these students, it is imperative to use a fair and relevant curriculum, and to consider differentiated assignments. It is important to select appropriate instructional content which is significant and challenging for the learner. Moreover, educators need to remove unneeded assignments and avoid repetitive activities if students have already mastered certain content or skills. Finally, it is important to provide motivating materials and curricula to engage the students in the class (Burden, 2010; Kanevsky, 2011). In this way, teachers will address the students' strengths and interests, and motivate them to keep learning.

Diversity of Learning Styles

The first step is to use "Interest Inventories" (originally developed by the psychologist Edward Kellogg Strong in 1927) to learn about the students' preferred learning styles. Interest inventories are questionnaires that collect information about students' interests and learning profiles (Heacox, 2012). Then, instructors can give them the opportunity to try different types of activities and materials that they consider interesting and motivating. Curriculum materials must reflect the diversity of learners in the classroom (Burden, 2010). For example, it is possible to use not only textbooks, but also visuals and other activities such as collages, posters, sculptures, role-plays, real life objects, pictures, and games. Regarding the class activities, teachers should combine lectures with learning centers, projects, and cooperative-group activities (Ernst & Ernst, 2005; Rogers, Mosley & Kramer, 2009; Stanford, 2003).

In general, the key is to adapt instruction and assessment to how students learn and to how students show what they have learned. For left-brain dominant students, it is necessary to sequence the learning process and develop information processing skills in class. Right-brain dominant learners need to develop their intuitive thinking and use visual-spatial materials and manipulatives (Burden, 2010). Finally, teachers can use independent reading, partner reading, texts with images, online research, group demonstration, small group instruction, and individual work to adapt the class to the needs of students (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010).

Diversity of Cultural Backgrounds

To create differentiated classrooms, educators need to get to know their students in-depth. In this regard, home visits and parent interviews can be very useful tools that teachers can use to know the students and their families better (Gurung & Prieto,

2009). Also, they can use bio-data questionnaires to gather information about the students' first language and family background (Johns & Sipp, 2004; Wang, 2007).

All the information gathered through home visits, parent interviews and bio-data questionnaires can guide teachers to use culturally relevant teaching strategies and to incorporate learning experiences that go across cultures (Holmes, Rutledge & Gauthier, 2009; Wang, 2007). This means that teachers incorporate students' cultures into the curriculum. For instance, teachers can use visuals and artifacts that represent the students' cultures. They can also use culturally relevant books or articles that affirm cultural identities (Freeman, Freeman & Ramirez, 2008; Johns & Sipp, 2004), as well as films that give students the opportunity to explore their own cultures, geographical regions, and history (Holmes, Rutledge & Gauthier, 2009). Educators can even introduce global education content and materials into lessons, include the analysis of other cultures in the curriculum, and select class routines that do not affect any cultural value. In general, teachers need to create learning experiences that are relevant and meaningful across cultures (Wang, 2007).

Diversity of Socioeconomic Status

When there are low-income minority students in the classroom, it is important to remember that they need empowerment, not just sympathy (Fehr & Agnello, 2012; Flaherty & Hackler, 2010). These students should have access to an open and flexible educational environment, independent and creative work, and individualized attention from teachers. They should have the opportunity to develop skills to become independent workers and decision makers, which are important qualities needed to easily move into high working positions (Bowles, 1972). This is connected to the idea that education should not be a teacher-to-student deposit experience (Flaherty & Hackler, 2010; Freeman, Freeman & Ramirez, 2008; Rogers, Mosley & Kramer, 2009). Instead, it is an experience where learners have the opportunity to develop their own knowledge and abilities. This kind of differentiated instruction will help them to succeed in society.

Gender Diversity

Literature and research show that if teachers want to make the classroom more gender friendly for all students, it is important to make learning visual, incorporate movement during instruction, give students choices in the class activities, provide opportunities for social interaction, find ways to make learning real, include art and music into the curriculum, and encourage equal participation (Gurian & Stevens, 2010; Honigsfeld & Dunn, 2003). However, it is also necessary to encourage students to see that academic achievement is more a product of effort than of natural ability. This will help the students and their parents to realize that differences and preferences due to gender are not applicable for every single student, and also that despite the preferences, all students, no matter the gender, can succeed in any area if they strive to achieve their goals (Burden, 2010).

Implications of Diversity on the Education System of Ecuador

Many people believe that Ecuador does not have a very diverse population compared to the United States because there are not many immigrants or people coming from foreign countries. However, Ecuador is considered a multicultural and multiethnic country because of its diverse population. Even though most people are Mestizos, we can also find Afro-Ecuadorians, Quichuas, Awas, Tsatchilas, Chachis, Huancavilcas, Mantas, Epera, Cofan, Secoyas, Sionas, Huaorani, Zaparo, Achuar, and Shuar (Granda, 2003). Nevertheless, this is not the only source of diversity in

Ecuador. Socioeconomic status is also an important source of diversity in the classrooms.

According to the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos* (INEC, National Institute of Statistics and Census) (2013), the population in Ecuador is classified in five socioeconomic categories based on income, education, and occupation (see Figure 1). The first category (A) represents those who have a higher income, and the final category (D) represents those who live in poverty. Based on the national census, 1.9% of the population is in level A, 11.2% in level B, 22.8% in level C+, 49.3% in level C-, and 14.9% in level D (INEC, 2013). Most students who are in level A go to private schools, and that is why in public schools, you usually find students who come from upper middle-income, middle-income, lower middle-income, and lower-income families (corresponding levels: B, C+ and C-, and D).

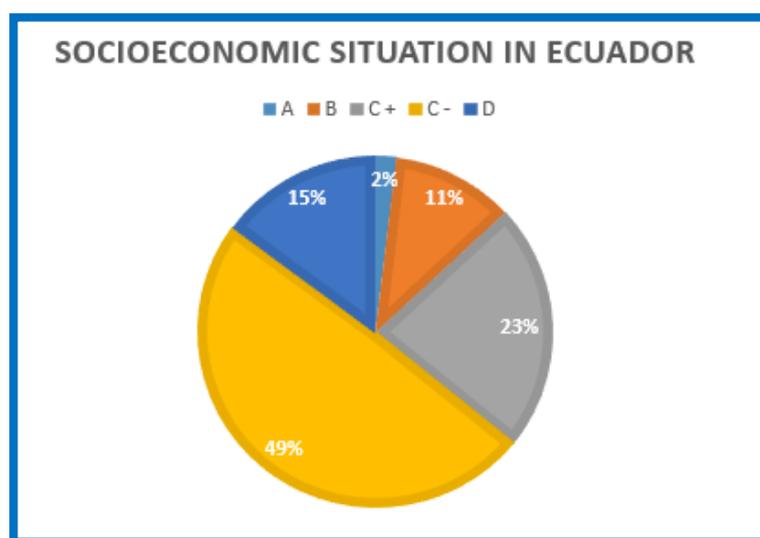


Figure 1. Socio-economic situation in Ecuador (INEC, 2013).

Finally, the cognitive abilities and learning styles are also very common sources of diversity in many countries around the world, and Ecuador is no exception. As a result, teachers must be prepared to deal with many types of diversity in the classroom. Nevertheless, it is important to note that every student is a different world. Even though some groups share similar characteristics based on their socioeconomic status, cultural background, and even gender, not all students in these groups are the same. Teachers need to know the characteristics and needs of each particular student and adapt the class accordingly for greater learning success. That is why differentiated instruction is a basic need in many classrooms.

Students' differences profoundly impact the way they learn. Hence, if educators modify instruction, it will help every single student in class to succeed. Besides, according to Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010), "positive affect opens the door of learning" (p. 16). That is why it is necessary to motivate students and promote a positive self-concept of themselves. Research has shown that the teacher has a far greater impact on student learning than any other specific method or approach to teaching (Cheung & Slavin, 2005). When teachers recognize the students' interests and strengths, students can make connections between their life experiences and the curriculum (Levine, 2007). The National Standards for Professional Teaching in the United States establishes that "students' differences matter and effective teachers

attend to those differences thoughtfully and proactively” (Tomlinson & Imbau, 2010, p. 4).

Tomlinson and Imbau (2010) mention several reports and studies developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Middle School Association, and National Association of Secondary School Principals that show that personalized instruction increases academic performance (pp. 5-7). That is why it is important to adapt instruction to the students’ skills, abilities, learning styles, and needs. If teachers do not do this, students may feel like outsiders in the classroom, so they may not participate in discussions or group work, and in general, may not learn.

Nowadays, many families of Ecuador are discouraged from sending their children to school since they believe that the education system cannot provide much practical benefit to their families. Therefore, if teachers create more supportive and caring classrooms and use more relevant curricula, those families will be motivated to send their children to school because they know their kids will feel welcomed and supported in the classroom. Also, if teachers implement home visits and parent interviews, they will be able to create strong relationships with parents. In consequence, it will be easier to help struggling learners or students at risk such as those who live in poverty and have to work to help their families.

Conclusion

Currently, teachers must be prepared to deal with all kinds of diversity in the classroom. In Ecuador, every learner has unique personal and cultural experiences, types and amounts of schooling, interests, backgrounds, and preferred ways of learning (Fehr & Agnello, 2012). We cannot teach all students the same way; instead, we need to provide personalized and differentiated instruction. It is necessary to adapt the pace, level, content, type of instruction, and learning environment to the individual learners’ needs, styles, and interests. We have to know who our students are, what they need, and how to design learning activities that capitalize on their strengths.

Classroom instruction should reflect teachers’ thoughtful diagnosis of students’ learning needs and purposeful planning of activities that address those needs. In today’s diverse classroom, one size does not fit all (Heacox, 2012). Education is not just about filling the minds of students with knowledge; it involves helping students to become independent thinkers and decision makers who can manage their own lives and lead t society. All those changes and improvements in education are possible if teachers differentiate instruction and create supportive and caring classrooms for diverse students.

Now the question is: how can we share these ideas with other teachers in Ecuador in order to improve education as a whole? There are several options; one possibility is to implement workshops and conferences for English teachers in every district to guide them on how to implement differentiated instruction in their own classrooms. In the meantime, our responsibility is to care about our students and to increase their chances for becoming successful learners by differentiating our instruction according to their needs.

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