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CALLA MODEL FOR INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION

By

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Abstract

Inclusive and equitable quality education is a central priority in global educational reform and is clearly articulated in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasises ensuring quality education for all learners. Achieving this goal requires pedagogical approaches that address the linguistic, cultural, and academic diversity present in contemporary classrooms. The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA), developed by Anna Uhl Chamot and J. Michael O'Malley, is a research-based instructional model designed to support academic success among diverse learners. CALLA integrates content instruction, academic language development, and explicit instruction in learning strategies to enhance students' cognitive and metacognitive abilities. The model is grounded in cognitive theory, metacognitive regulation, and sociocultural perspectives of learning. Through its five instructional phases Preparation, Presentation, Practice, Evaluation, and Expansion CALLA promotes scaffolded learning and encourages learner autonomy. This paper explores how the CALLA model contributes to inclusive and equitable quality education by supporting diverse learners and strengthening academic language learning in inclusive classrooms.

Keywords: *cognitive academic language learning approach (CALLA), inclusive education, equitable quality education, metacognitive strategies, and academic language development.*

Introduction

Across the world, education systems are redesigning their structures and pedagogies to create classrooms that foster inclusion, equity, and meaningful participation. The global commitment expressed in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) highlights the urgent need to ensure quality education for all learners, irrespective of language, gender, socio-economic status, or ability (United Nations, 2015). Although policy frameworks

emphasise inclusivity, schools increasingly face linguistic diversity, cultural plurality, and varied learning needs. These realities require moving beyond traditional, uniform methods of instruction toward approaches that guarantee equitable access and academic achievement. The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) provides a strong instructional response to these challenges (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). Originally designed to support English language learners in mainstream classrooms, CALLA has evolved into a comprehensive framework for inclusive education. By explicitly teaching cognitive and metacognitive strategies, CALLA enables learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning processes (Chamot, 2005). Through its integrated focus on content learning, academic language development, and strategic competence, CALLA promotes learner autonomy and advances genuine educational equity.

Theoretical Foundations

Understanding CALLA's relevance to inclusive and equitable education requires a review of its theoretical foundations: cognitive, metacognitive, and sociocultural theories.

Cognitive Theory

Cognitive learning theory explains how information is processed, stored, and retrieved in the learner's mind. According to information-processing theorists, effective learners use strategies such as summarising, organising, elaborating, and inferring to make sense of content (Anderson, 1985; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). CALLA explicitly incorporates these strategies to help learners process academic content more effectively. (Chamot & O'Malley, 1996, pp. 259-273)

Metacognitive Theory

Metacognition refers to learners' ability to reflect upon and regulate their thinking processes (Flavell, 1979). CALLA's instructional design places a strong emphasis on metacognitive strategy instruction, teaching students to plan for a task, monitor their comprehension, and evaluate their performance (Chamot, 2005). Such self-regulated learning practices are essential for equitable education, as they foster learner independence and resilience.

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory, particularly the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978), posits

that learning is fundamentally social and mediated through interaction with experts and peers. CALLA incorporates social-affective strategies and collaborative learning structures, aligning with Vygotsky's views on the Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding.

Core Components of CALLA

CALLA is characterised by three interrelated components:

Academic Content Instruction

Learners interact with grade-level academic content rather than simplified materials. Teachers design instruction that makes complex concepts accessible through strategic support (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). This approach counters deficit-oriented pedagogy and aligns with inclusive education principles.

Academic Language Development

Academic language encompasses the vocabulary, grammar, discourse structures, and cognitive linguistic functions needed to participate in schooling (Cummins, 2000). CALLA explicitly integrates language development into content instruction, ensuring that learners build linguistic competence alongside conceptual understanding.

Learning Strategy Instruction

CALLA teaches cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective strategies systematically (Chamot, 2005). Students learn to plan their approach to tasks, monitor their comprehension, apply problem-solving techniques, and use social resources, such as peer support.

CALLA and Inclusive Classrooms

Inclusive education seeks not merely to place learners in the same classroom but to ensure access, participation, and achievement for all (Ainscow, 2005; UNESCO, 2020). CALLA supports inclusion in several ways:

Differentiated Instruction and Scaffolding

CALLA encourages teachers to adjust instruction based on learner readiness, interests, and language backgrounds (Tomlinson, 2014). Scaffolding, temporary support that is gradually removed, helps learners engage with rigorous tasks without being overwhelmed.

Collaborative Learning

CALLA's incorporation of social strategies fosters collaboration, peer interaction, and shared meaning-

making. Cooperative learning not only enhances comprehension but also builds social capital (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

Strategic Autonomy

By teaching metacognitive strategies, CALLA empowers students to self-regulate their learning. This autonomy is particularly important for learners who have historically been marginalised in traditional teacher-centred classrooms (Zimmerman, 2002).

CALLA and Educational Equity

Educational equity involves the fair distribution of opportunities and supports so that all students can achieve their potential (OECD, 2012). CALLA fosters equity by:

Access to Rigorous Content

CALLA ensures that marginalised learners are not excluded from grade-level academic discourse. Through strategic support, students with varied linguistic abilities can access rigorous curricula.

Bridging Language and Content

CALLA's integration of language and content prevents the common mismatch in which language learners are taught vocabulary without context (Gibbons, 2002). This alignment supports deeper comprehension and participation.

Reducing Achievement Gaps

Research shows that strategic learning instruction can improve academic outcomes across diverse learner groups (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). CALLA's emphasis on metacognitive awareness helps reduce disparities, particularly for learners removed from academic English environments.

Implementation Strategies

Successful implementation of the CALLA requires systematic planning, institutional support, and sustained professional commitment. To ensure that CALLA effectively promotes inclusive and equitable learning, three key dimensions must be addressed: professional development, curriculum integration, and formative assessment.

Professional Development

Teachers play a central role in the successful application of CALLA. They require specialised training in explicit instruction in learning strategies, academic language scaffolding, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Research emphasises that educators

must understand how to model cognitive and metacognitive strategies clearly and consistently in classroom practice (Chamot, 2005). Additionally, culturally and linguistically responsive teaching enhances student engagement and affirms learner identity, particularly in multilingual settings (García & Wei, 2014). Continuous professional development ensures that teachers can adapt CALLA strategies to diverse learner needs while maintaining academic rigour.

Curriculum Integration

Effective CALLA implementation demands the deliberate integration of content and language objectives. Academic language goals should be explicitly embedded within subject-area instruction rather than treated as separate components (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Clear alignment with curriculum standards ensures that strategy instruction supports disciplinary knowledge while maintaining high expectations for all learners.

Formative Assessment

Ongoing formative assessment is essential for monitoring student progress and guiding instructional decisions. Regular feedback, reflective activities, and self-evaluation practices help learners refine their strategies and deepen understanding (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Through continuous assessment, teachers can differentiate instruction and support equitable learning pathways for diverse students.

Challenges and Considerations

The cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach offers a structured, research-based framework for inclusive and equitable education; however, its implementation is not without challenges. Practical constraints, such as limited instructional time, often restrict teachers' ability to provide explicit strategy instruction alongside content instruction. In many educational settings, pressure to complete prescribed syllabi may reduce opportunities for reflective learning and guided practice. Additionally, insufficient teaching resources and large class sizes can make it difficult to implement individualised scaffolding effectively. Another significant concern is inadequate teacher preparation. Without proper training in strategy instruction and academic language integration, educators may struggle to apply CALLA principles consistently and systematically (Graham & Herbert,

2010). To address these challenges, sustained institutional and systemic support is essential. Ongoing professional development, collaborative planning opportunities, and administrative encouragement can strengthen implementation. When schools invest in teacher capacity building and resource allocation, CALLA can function more effectively as a transformative model for inclusive and equitable quality education.

Conclusion

The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) represents a theoretically grounded and pedagogically robust framework for advancing inclusive and equitable quality education. By systematically integrating academic content, language development, and explicit instruction in learning strategies, CALLA ensures that learners are not only exposed to a rigorous curriculum but also equipped with the tools necessary to succeed within it. CALLA empowers students to take ownership of their learning through planning, monitoring, and evaluating their academic progress (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). Such strategic autonomy is particularly significant in diverse classrooms, where learners vary in linguistic proficiency, cultural background, and prior knowledge. In contemporary educational contexts marked by diversity, globalisation, and accountability demands, CALLA offers educators a comprehensive and practical instructional model. By fostering academic competence, language proficiency, and self-regulated learning, CALLA supports the creation of equitable learning environments in which all learners are provided meaningful opportunities to achieve academic success.

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