

Multiculturalism in Modern Education and Pluralistic Societies

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Abstract: Multiculturalism in education is a multi-dimensional and dynamic field of research, reflecting the complex nature of pluralistic societies that are increasing in number throughout the modern world. Theoretical perspectives on multicultural education offer a critical insight into how education systems of these pluralistic societies can address the cultural diversity and promote social justice. This research delves into the theoretical fundamentals of multiculturalism in education, examining the key concepts, theories and frameworks. As we navigate the complexities of globalization and cultural interaction, the principles of multicultural education remain essential in shaping a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

Keywords: Multiculturalism; Migration; Society; Education; Culture

1. Introduction

Multicultural education refers to an educational approach that aims to create equity in educational settings for students with diverse racial, ethnic, social-economic and cultural backgrounds. It also aims to help all students to develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge needed to function as a productive member of an ethnically and racially diverse society and world. According to Banks (1993), multicultural education is made of various dimensions, including content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy and an empowering school culture

and social structure.

The origins of multicultural education can be traced back to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States during the 1960s, which highlighted the systemic inequalities faced by the African American community and other marginalized groups in the society. This movement laid the foundations for the educational reforms aimed at promoting equity and inclusion (Banks, 2004). Over time, the framework of multicultural education has evolved, addressing the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, influenced by globalization, migration and the changing demographics (Gay, 2018).



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2. Migration and Cultural Relations

Migration, an ever-increasing reality for the societies in the modern world, can be seen as the predominant reason of the multicultural environments. The increase in transportation opportunities, wars, educational and employment opportunities, and living conditions are leading people to leave their current locations and migrate to countries and cities with better opportunities. Yılmaz and Tağrikulu (2017) categorize these factors in three categories: as push, intermediary, and pull factors, all of which have a significant impact on migration. Push factors include difficulties in making a living, the need for additional income, and the inadequacy of services and job opportunities such as education and healthcare. On the other hand, pull factors consist of better education and healthcare opportunities, the hope of finding employment, a desire for a modern lifestyle, and the expectation of a better living standard. Intermediary factors are those that facilitate the migration process and make it easier. Examples of these include transportation, kinship and hometown ties, technological advancements, and the ease of communication. This makes the need for countries to plan and prepare for the effects of migration to become apparent. Throughout history, it is possible to observe that the impacts of migrations concentrate in specific areas. Among these, significant issues include the imbalance in population distribution due to the resettlement of migrants resulting from both internal and external migration. This imbalance can lead to inequalities in service sectors and investments. Migration is a process that directly affects the labor market and also signifies new unemployment and new housing policies. When considering internal migration, the imbalance in population distribution across the country will also lead to irregularities in the distribution of investments. Uncontrolled population growth will result in inadequacies in services such as infrastructure, health, and education in cities, leading not only to a decline in the quality of these services but also to new economic costs (Dağışan and Aydın, 2017).

On the other hand, the present day, marked by the highest level of intercultural interaction in history, is also poised to be known as the century characterized by political attitudes and behaviors against immigrants, barbed wire at borders, and migrants abandoned to death in hunger and misery (Gemici and Çatal,

2019). United Nations' International Organization for Migration (IOM) Missing Migrant Project reports show that at least 8,565 people died on migration routes worldwide in 2023, making it the deadliest year on record, according to data collected. The 2023 death toll represented a tragic increase of 20 per cent compared to 2022, highlighting the urgent need for action to prevent further loss of life. The Mediterranean crossing continued to be the deadliest route for migrants on record, with at least 3,129 deaths and disappearances. This was the highest death toll recorded in the Mediterranean since 2017. Regionally, unprecedented numbers of migrant deaths were recorded across Africa (1,866) and Asia (2,138). In Africa, most of these deaths occurred in the Sahara Desert and the sea route to the Canary Islands. In Asia, hundreds of deaths of Afghan and Rohingya refugees fleeing their countries of origin were recorded in the year of 2023 (IOM, 2024).

Migrations affect not only the societies receiving migrants but also the migrating communities themselves. The adaptation process to this newly formed multicultural environment varies for each individual and society. In this context, the attitudes, behaviors, and approaches of the pre-existing society towards migration and the incoming community are as influential as the characteristics of the migrating society. For this process to be as easy as possible, it is important for receiving societies to have a plan and policy regarding migration, as well as for migrating communities to maintain a positive attitude towards the resulting multicultural environment (Başar, 2022). Migrations may also result in forming ghettos in the outskirts of the cities. It has been observed that when a segment or segments of the larger societal structure of a city or other settlements isolate themselves from this larger structure and live in a closed community, it leads to various problems for the larger societal structure that constitutes the city or other settlements. These outcomes can be described as organizational issues, xenophobia, hate crimes, and other forms of discrimination, polarization, and security threats. Additionally, these outcomes also result in certain consequences concerning the impact of cultural differences within the city's societal segments on urban life. The multicultural structure of large urban areas and the numerical and qualitative strength of this cultural

diversity leads to inferences about the demographics of the social segments living within the city, as well as insights into the dominance of these cultural structures based on their numerical presence. These social segments are shaped by various factors such as internal migration, external migration, political polarization, religious division, ethnic and linguistic discrimination, and the assertion of cultural superiority. Additionally, another segment that can be considered in this context includes the large number of individuals who are not citizens of the country and who reside or live in the country illegally without any official migration or residency permits, often forming an illegal labor force through individual or group migration.

One of the most prominent concepts formed by the demand for better living conditions and job and settlement opportunities within the urban fabric is "local patriotism" (fellow townsmanship). Initially, it represents a pure form of communication and integration, but eventually, it can evolve into an opportunistic and utilitarian area of discrimination. Despite the solidarity, cooperation, and benevolent thinking inherent in the concept of local patriotism, it also harbours certain elements of cultural nationalism due to the tendency to form social segments based on fellow townsmanship. This type of structuring is known to exist in many areas of global life. Shubik (1999) articulated this reality as follows: "Cultural nationalism remains a significant issue in many countries within the globalizing world." Another reality of multicultural societies is the intolerance, marginalization, and discrimination against the "other" that occurs among different social segments within the society. These phenomena are frequently encountered in societies where efforts and preparations for multiculturalism are inadequate. Various findings regarding these phenomena are present in the literature (Başar, 2022).

Barett (2013) stated that there are three main forms of multiculturalism: symbolic, structural, and communicative. In *symbolic multiculturalism*, communities within a country are allowed to maintain defining characteristics such as celebrations, clothing, food, and music. These elements are taught through schools and promoted through cultural centers, aiming to help preserve cultural diversity. *Structural multiculturalism* focuses on overcoming political, economic, and social inequalities. This

includes taking measures against discrimination, providing socioeconomic assistance, and offering systematic education. It involves establishing state-controlled structures and processes that ensure fair and equal treatment of members of minority groups. *Communicative multiculturalism*, distinct from the other forms, emphasizes the necessity of fostering intercultural communication within a multicultural framework. Its characteristic feature is its unifying role in society, aiming to create and uphold a sense of common commitment.

In sensitive subjects, such as culture, the terminology used and having a common understanding of the said terminology is very important in order to avoid causing any misunderstandings and offense. Therefore, it is important to differentiate multiculturalism from any commonly jointly used terminology. Interculturalism is a term commonly used with the term multiculturalism, and usually mistakenly used as interchangeably. Nayir and Sarıdaş (2020) state that the concept of multiculturalism emerged as a way of granting social rights and allowing minority cultures to live within an egalitarian framework. In this context, the concept of multiculturalism describes a cultural environment where the interaction of minority cultures with the majority culture is ignored and left to the will of the minority culture. Whereas interculturalism is characterized by openness, communication, and interaction. While multiculturalism is based on respect, interculturalism is based on communication and interaction (James, 2008). The concept of interculturalism, which aims for all cultures to embrace the society and feel a sense of belonging, differs in that it strives to eliminate the concept of the "other" that emerged with multiculturalism, but is still incomplete (Keval, 2014; Antonsich, 2015; Levey, 2012). The concept of interculturalism aims to both protect the structure of minority cultures and foster change through interaction with different cultures, developing empathy and sharing within society on common ground and mutual understanding (Meer and Modood, 2011).

3. Multicultural Education

Up to this point, the theory of multiculturalism and related concepts, the causes and effects of migration, and relevant theories have been explained. The phenomenon of multiculturalism indicates three

structural periods. The first period is the pre-formation period in terms of the compulsory and/or natural foundations of multiculturalism. The second period involves the displacement and new settlements leading to the emergence of multiple cultural structures and environments, marking the period of definition and understanding of these cultural environments. The third period focuses on measures, adaptation, and implementation in response to the effects and needs identified in multicultural settings. These periods are intrinsically and contextually interconnected but involve different approaches and processes in terms of formation, structuring, and adoption. The phenomenon of immigration, which is the most significant reasons for multiculturalism, serve as the driving force behind these periods. In this context, it is known that the new social structures formed by both internal and external migration necessitate a life composed of various social segments. The existence of communities with multiple cultural structures in this living space profoundly affects the larger societal structure in every aspect. One of the areas impacted by these effects of multiculturalism is undoubtedly the field of education. Political developments create changes across all aspects of society, including significant impacts on education. It can be said that education is the pathway to achieving the desired model of an individual. Alongside the concept of multiculturalism, terms such as multicultural education, multicultural society, multicultural school, and multicultural teacher have emerged (Polat and Kılıç, 2013).

The concept of multicultural education is important as a comprehensive term that encompasses the overall impact of multiculturalism on education. Multicultural education serves as an umbrella concept that includes all secondary sub-elements associated with multiculturalism as its sub-domains. It is at the center of all theories and practices in the related field. Tuncel and Balcı (2016) describe that multicultural education, in essence, should be organized in a way that enables all its components to communicate under equal conditions and a common framework, rather than conflicting, excluding, or marginalizing differences. This emphasizes the need for education's language and content to be cleansed of discrimination and marginalization through a perspective of education for peace. Multicultural education aims to ensure

equal opportunities in education for everyone. In this regard, multicultural education stands against all forms of discrimination and also aims to create cultural awareness among students, break down prejudices towards different cultures, and enhance students' abilities to empathize and critically think by "putting themselves in others' shoes".

Besides multicultural education, another prominent concept is culturally responsive education. "Culturally responsive education practices are a process that nourishes individuals' cultural identities, enhances cultural competence, and emphasizes the necessity of social justice in the educational environment (Mayfield and Garrison-Wade, 2015)". Another definition involves integrating students' cultures, emotional and social backgrounds, cognitive schemas, experiences, and different cultural values such as language and ethnicity into educational systems and learning processes to educate all students to high-level skills (Kotluk and Kocakaya, 2018). According to Gay (2002), culturally responsive education aims to integrate students' cultures, socio-emotional and cognitive foundations, schema, experiences, thoughts, and cultural values into the educational system and teaching-learning process to ensure that all students have equal rights to high-level skills. In this context, culturally responsive education can be defined as an effective educational system created to meet the social and academic needs of students with different cultural values. Culturally responsive education emphasizes not only students' academic achievements but also their social development. Therefore, students should feel comfortable expressing their cultural values in the educational environment and should be able to learn about the values of new cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

4. Key Theoretical Perspectives in Multicultural Education

4.1. Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that examines the ways in which race and racism intersect with other forms of social stratification, including class, gender, and sexuality. CRT presumes that racism is not just an individual prejudice but a systemic and institutionalized phenomenon. In the context of education, CRT highlights how educational

policies and practices can maintain racial inequalities and marginalize minority students. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), CRT in education challenges the dominant narratives that support the status quo and advocates for the inclusion of diverse perspectives and voices in the curriculum.

4.2. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is an approach developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings that emphasizes the importance of incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into the teaching and learning process. CRP aims to make education more meaningful and engaging for students by validating their cultural identities and experiences. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant teaching involves three key components: academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Teachers who adopt CRP aim to create a learning environment where all students can improve academically while maintaining their cultural integrity.

4.3. Funds of Knowledge

The Funds of Knowledge framework, developed by Luis Moll and colleagues, emphasizes the rich cultural and intellectual resources that students bring to the classroom from their homes and communities. This perspective challenges the deficit view of minority students and their families, instead recognizing them as valuable sources of knowledge and expertise. By tapping into these funds of knowledge, educators can create more inclusive and relevant learning experiences. Moll et al. (1992) argue that teachers should build strong relationships with students and their families to better understand and integrate their cultural resources into the curriculum.

4.4. Social Justice Education

Social justice education is an approach that seeks to address and dismantle systemic inequalities in education and society. It emphasizes the importance of teaching students about social justice issues, such as racism, sexism, classism, and ableism, and empowering them to become active agents of change. According to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017), social justice education involves both the content of the curriculum and the pedagogical practices used in the classroom. It requires educators to critically examine their own biases and assumptions and to create a learning environment that

promotes equity and inclusion.

5. Multicultural Teacher Competencies

In a multicultural education framework, two foundational pillars stand out: the teacher and the curriculum. As students themselves embody the essence of multiculturalism, teachers and the curriculum serve as the primary agents driving educational processes centered around multiculturalism and administrative staff and other personnel play crucial supporting roles. In today's globalizing world, the impacts of globalization trends are increasingly felt within education systems. In modern societies, individuals are expected to interact with and develop positive attitudes towards different cultural groups. Therefore, developed countries include multicultural education efforts when addressing their educational challenges (Cirik, 2008).

In this context, there is a necessity for teachers to be equipped with competencies suitable for multicultural education. Competencies for multicultural education have been defined in various ways over time, but a comprehensive framework can be found in the report published by the European Union's (EU) Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) in 2017, focusing on the impact of teacher education on preparing teachers for cultural diversity environments under four main headings. These four main headings include teachers' personal qualities, formal qualifications and experience, methodological competencies, and pedagogical content knowledge.

Teachers must be effectively prepared to embrace the benefits of diversity for schools and all students. The quality of an education system is directly linked to the quality of its teachers, which influences students' educational outcomes (Barber and Mourshed, 2007). Teacher quality can be characterized by the following variables (PPMI, 2017):

- *Personal Qualities*: values, attitudes, personality, level of flexibility/rigidity, extroversion/introversion, locus of control, self-efficacy, general and verbal intelligence
- *Formal Qualification and Experience*: formal qualifications, teachers' continuous work experience
- *Methodological Competencies*: e.g., capacity to implement different learning strategies
- *Pedagogical Content Knowledge*: knowledge related to adapting and delivering pedagogical methods

tailored to the subject

6. Examples of Multiculturalism in Education around the World

It is evident that in developed countries, initiatives and measures related to multicultural education have been initiated. At the core of these initiatives lies the necessity for teachers to be prepared for multiculturalism through various studies. For example:

In some countries, multicultural education has become a recommended concept to be taught as a course in universities and colleges. For instance, the National Council on Teacher Quality in the United States emphasizes the inclusion of multicultural education in teacher preparation programs. Therefore, some universities require their students to take at least one course related to multicultural education (Diaz, 1994).

Similarly, the APA's accreditation program also requires mention of cultural diversity for graduate education in psychology. Massachusetts was the first state to mandate that anyone applying for certification as a psychologist must undergo multicultural education. Since 1996, doctoral students in Massachusetts have been required to take at least four credits related to multicultural contexts, and since 1999, at least one course focusing on race and ethnic characteristics has been mandatory (Schultz, 2002).

Multicultural education programs are implemented from preschool classes onwards in multinational and multicultural countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, and the United Kingdom (Güven, 2005).

Additionally, the National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE) in the United States considers 'Experiences Working with Diverse Students' as one of the six core standards in teacher education (Başbay and Bektaş, 2009).

In Sweden, teacher candidates are expected to respect and promote the personalities of individuals shaped by their ethnic backgrounds, genders, gender identities, and occasionally physical characteristics (Rabo, 2011).

Similarly, a pioneer in multiculturalism, the European Union (EU), includes topic-specific studies in teacher training programs: "In EU education policies, teacher training programs aim to train prospective teachers professionally to prepare every student for the future,

regardless of cultural background, ethnic makeup, or gender (Karşlı & Güven, 2011)."

Conclusion: Challenges and Future Directions for Multiculturalism in Education

One of the significant challenges in implementing multicultural education is addressing the systemic inequities that exist within educational systems and society at large. According to Gillborn (2005), racism and other forms of discrimination are deeply embedded in the structures and practices of education, and efforts to promote multicultural education must involve challenging and changing these structures. This requires a commitment to social justice and equity at all levels of the education system, from policy and leadership to classroom practice. Another challenge is the resistance and backlash that can arise when implementing multicultural education. According to Sleeter (1995), there can be significant resistance from various stakeholders, including educators, parents, and policymakers, who may perceive multicultural education as a threat to the status quo or as promoting a particular political agenda. Overcoming this resistance requires effective communication, education, and advocacy, highlighting the benefits of multicultural education for all students and society as a whole.

Ensuring that multicultural education is implemented authentically and with depth is another challenge. According to Banks (2010), there is a risk of superficial or tokenistic approaches to multicultural education that fail to address the deeper issues of power, privilege, and inequality. Authentic multicultural education requires a comprehensive and sustained commitment to equity and inclusion, involving ongoing reflection, dialogue, and action. The emergence of social justice activism and the discourse on cultural appropriation present another significant challenge to multiculturalism in education. Social justice activism, which advocates for the marginalized and promotes social justice, often emphasizes the need for systemic change and heightened awareness of inequalities. This can sometimes lead to heightened sensitivities and polarizations within educational settings, potentially stifling open dialogue and the exchange of diverse perspectives that are crucial to multicultural education. Simultaneously, the concept of cultural appropriation, which critiques the adoption of elements from one

culture by members of another culture, can complicate the integration and appreciation of diverse cultural practices in educational curricula (Young, 2008). Educators may find it challenging to navigate the fine line between celebrating cultural diversity and respecting the boundaries of cultural ownership, leading to potential conflicts and misunderstandings among students from different cultural backgrounds (Matthes, 2016). These dynamics necessitate a more nuanced and empathetic approach to multicultural education, where the principles of respect, inclusion, and mutual understanding are actively promoted to ensure a cohesive and supportive learning environment (Banks, 2007).

Multicultural education is a vital and dynamic field that seeks to create equitable and inclusive educational environments for all students. Theoretical perspectives such as Critical Race Theory, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Funds of Knowledge, and Social Justice Education provide critical insights into how educational systems can address cultural diversity and promote social justice. The impacts of migration, as highlighted, necessitate proactive planning and policy-making to mitigate challenges such as demographic shifts and socio-economic inequalities. While multicultural education promotes cultural awareness and empathy among students, it also confronts resistance and challenges, including systemic inequities and the complexities of social justice activism. Addressing these challenges requires a steadfast commitment to equitable educational practices, inclusive curricula, and supportive learning environments that empower all students. Implementing multicultural education requires a comprehensive approach to curriculum and instruction, teacher education and professional development, school culture and climate, and community engagement and partnerships. Understanding the predominant type of multiculturalism in the society at the time and using the correct terminology is very important in this sensitive subject to avoid any misunderstandings and causing any unintended offenses. On the other hand, being hyper-sensitive in others' stead and refusing to share and celebrate cultural diversity, hinders the process of creating a cohesive and coherent society, even if done with good-intentions. Therefore, the challenges faced by the modern societies to embrace multiculturalism

can be caused by both ends of the spectrum in terms of being either too apathetic or hyper-sensitive on the subject. Despite the challenges, the ongoing commitment to multicultural education is essential for creating a more just and equitable society. Looking forward, the future of multiculturalism in education demands ongoing dialogue, reflection, and adaptation to meet the evolving needs of diverse student populations. By embracing cultural diversity as a strength rather than a challenge, educational institutions can foster environments where every student feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute positively to society. As we navigate the complexities of globalization and cultural interaction, the principles of multicultural education remain essential in shaping a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

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