

THE VERSATILITY OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AND ITS CHALLENGES

Mohammed Mubashiru Olayiwola Babatunde, Ph.D

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education,
Lagos State University, Ojo, Nigeria
e-mail: myuniversity@yahoo.com

Rufai Musliu Dada

Department of Educational Management
Lagos State University, Ojo, Nigeria
musiliurufai@yahoo.com

&

Olufemi Josephine Eyo

Department of Arts and Social Sciences
Doregos Advanced College, Lagos, Nigeria
e-mail: oluphina@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Multiculturalism as a worldwide phenomenon is constantly evolving with complexities in world economies. Expanding world trade and globalization of industry, finance, and many professions are creating a world in which cross-cultural interactions occur more frequently than at any time in the past. As well, increasing specialization within many professions has led to a widely dispersed audience for targeted education and training. Professionals wishing to stay current or students wanting to develop specialized skills that match the needs of a rapidly changing world demand access to proper educational opportunities, even if this requires international travel or distance learning approaches, hence the need for multicultural education. Multicultural education poses a serious challenge to educators because of the different categories of students present in the classroom with diverse values and orientations. The diversity of ethnicities and cultures in a classroom makes the teaching process a herculean task for teachers and as such, teacher training programmes must be redirected to address these challenges. Equally, citizenship education must be transformed in the 21st century because of the deepening racial, ethnic, cultural, language and religious diversity in nation-states around the world so that students in a diverse democratic society will be able to maintain attachments to their cultural communities as well as participate effectively in the shared national culture. Some of the ways by which the challenges of multicultural education can be reduced is the need for teachers to create a bond with the students they are dealing with, stimulation of collaborative learning, development of reflective thinking and encouraging historical research among the students. Recommendations are also made for further research.

Keywords: multiculturalism, multicultural education, teachers/ educational instructors, students, diversity

INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism is a worldwide phenomenon with its peculiar challenges depending on the region. Migration of individuals from all parts of the earth, and with different values and perspective, to find jobs, study or be with their loved ones has caused an increase in the number of minority groups present in different countries of the world (UK Essay, 2015). The challenges posed by globalization, urbanization, occupational mobility and cross border movements as evident in Anglo-phone West Africa, a vast mass of candidates from different

ethnic groups leave their native communities and move to other communities in search of educational opportunities. This culminates in diverse anthropological, linguistic and sociological contexts among candidates. This point is affirmed by Friedman as noted in Parrish and Linder-VanBerschoot (2010) that numerous factors are converging that make teaching and learning in cross-cultural and multicultural contexts more commonplace. Expanding world trade and globalization of industry, finance, and many professions are creating a world in which cross-cultural interactions occur more frequently than at any time in the past. As well, increasing specialization within many professions has led to a widely dispersed audience for targeted education and training. Professionals wishing to stay current or students wanting to develop specialized skills that match the needs of a rapidly changing world demand access to proper educational opportunities, even if this requires international travel or distance learning approaches. This was the view of Berge, in Parrish et al (2010).

Multiculturalism according to Collins English dictionary (2012 digital edition) is the policy of maintaining a diversity of ethnic cultures within a community. It can also be viewed as the preservation of different cultures or cultural identities within a unified society, as a state or nation. The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy sees multiculturalism as the view that the various cultures in a society merit equal respect and scholarly interest. The Oxford English Dictionary offers a broader definition of multiculturalism as the characteristics of a multicultural society and the policy or process whereby the distinctive identities of the cultural groups within such a society are maintained or supported. Academics' definitions of multiculturalism according to BBC magazine (2011) refers to anything from people of different communities living alongside each other to ethnic or religious groups leading completely separate lives. The intent of multiculturalism in any given society is to produce a fine blend of people who are flexible in mind and character to various people and activities around them in order to raise a finer breed of people able to better manage complexities of various mix of culture so that a better society can emerge.

Tariq as quoted in BBC magazine (2011) said multiculturalism has many meanings, but the minimum is the need to politically identify groups, typically by ethnicity, and to work to remove stigmatization, exclusion and domination in relation to such groups. Sacks, also made his opinions known in BBC magazine (2011) that multiculturalism was intended to create a more tolerant society, one in which everyone, regardless of colour, creed or culture, felt at home. This view was affirmed by Bhikhu (BBC magazine, 2011) who opined that multiculturalism is a fusion in which a culture borrows bits of others and creatively transforms both itself and them. From the foregoing, multiculturalism insists on inclusion rather than exclusion and can build the path towards a reconciled society. It is a mainstream response by the society to the massive increase of racial diversity. Though multicultural discourses are divergent, the term implies efforts conveying recognition, respect, and tolerance to various ethnicities within a specific territory as stated by Schuster & Solomos in UK essays (2015).

MULTICULTURALISM AND EDUCATIONAL DIVERSITY

The diversity of ethnicities and cultures in a classroom makes the teaching learning process a herculean task for teachers. Every day, teachers encounter complex issues in their classrooms. The blend of ethnicities and value systems often places teachers in a cultural minefield where they must navigate a careful path of trying to respect the sensibilities of many different groups. How teachers can best manage these conflicting expectations prevalent in today's increasingly diverse classrooms is difficult to tackle (John, 2001). Banks (2006) believes that Citizenship education must be transformed in the 21st Century because of the deepening racial, ethnic, cultural, language and religious diversity in nation-states around the world. Students in a diverse democratic society should be able to maintain attachments to their cultural communities as well as participate effectively in the shared national culture. A number of authors, including Gay and Lipman (2010) have identified characteristics of culturally relevant teaching. These characteristics are:

1. Validating and Affirming: Culturally relevant teaching is validating and affirming because it acknowledges the strengths of students' diverse heritages

2. Comprehensive: Culturally relevant teaching is comprehensive because it uses cultural resources to teach knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes.
3. Multidimensional: Culturally relevant teaching encompasses many areas and applies multicultural theory to the classroom environment, teaching methods, and evaluation.
4. Liberating: Culturally relevant teachers liberate students.
5. Empowering: Culturally relevant teaching empower students, giving them opportunities to excel in the classroom and beyond. Empowerment translates into academic competence, personal confidence, courage, and the will to act.
6. Transformative: Culturally relevant teaching is transformative because educators and their students must often defy educational traditions and the status quo.

The educational instructor must be vast in his skills to bring about the needed unity while still maintaining a high level of diversity. Unity without diversity results in cultural repression and hegemony. Diversity without unity leads to Balkanization and the fracturing of the nation-state. Diversity and unity should coexist in a delicate balance in democratic multicultural nation-states. Planning curriculum for schools in a multicultural democracy involves making some value choices in which Schools are not neutral. The schools were established and funded to promote democracy and citizenship, and as such teachers are to help schools promote diversity. Schools should plan and teach cooperation, mutual respect, the dignity of individuals and related democratic values. Schools, particularly integrated schools, provide a rich site where students can meet one another, learn to work together, and be deliberative about decision making. In addition to democratic values, deliberative strategies and teaching decision-making provide core procedures for multicultural education (Banks, 2006).

Multicultural education should therefore reflect the student body, as well as promote understanding of diversity to the dominant culture and be inclusive, visible, celebrated and tangible. According to Banks (2013), a major goal of multicultural education is to change teaching and learning approaches so that students of both genders and from diverse cultural, ethnic, and language groups will have equal opportunities to learn in educational institutions (p. 10). Citizens need multicultural education in order to enter into dialogue with fellow citizens and future citizens. Furthermore, multicultural education should include preparation for an active, participatory citizenship. Multicultural education is a way to promote the civic good of a nation. Levinson (2009) describes four ways to do so: From learning about other cultures comes tolerance, tolerance promotes respect, and respect leads to open mindedness which results in civic reasonableness and equality (p. 431-432). All students have different learning styles so incorporating multicultural education techniques into the classroom, may allow all students to be more successful. Multicultural education needs to enable students to succeed economically in a multicultural world by teaching them to be comfortable in a diverse workforce and skillful at integrating into a global economy (Levinson, 2009). All these promote integration and social interaction between and among citizens.

Some other gains of multicultural education are: Promote civic good, Right the historical record, Increase self-esteem of non-mainstream students, Increase diversified student exposure, Preserve minority group culture, Foster children's autonomy, Promote social justice and equity and Enable students to succeed economically in an integrated, multicultural world. Multicultural education should span beyond autonomy, by exposing students to global uniqueness, fostering deepened understanding, and providing access to varied practices, ideas, and ways of life; it is a process of societal transformation and reconstruction (Levinson, 2009).

CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY TO EDUCATORS

It is almost impossible for teachers to respond in culturally appropriate or sensitive ways to all the cultures they have in their classrooms (John, 2001). They don't know how to get a grip on all the information they need or how to learn more about the cultures in their classrooms. Across the national frontiers, government

protectionist policies and inter-governmental diplomatic exigencies are critical challenges confronting educational institutions operating in diverse cultural settings as well (Iyi and Adedokun, 2013). For example, in Lagos, Nigeria alone, there are at least 20 spoken languages, each representing a group of children who are being brought up with particular cultural and behavioral traits, teachers can really find that challenging. These differences, however, are not limited to race or linguistics. Religious differences must be considered as well as, gender-equity issues, children who have disabilities, children coming from single parent or same-sex households, and others.

A major challenge for educators is to prepare reflective practitioners who can connect with diverse students. Teacher preparation programs generally don't address these except in very tangential or sporadic ways. Because of this insufficient training, many teachers are unprepared for what they face in their classrooms (John, 2001). Most teachers who go out there are not ready to face these students; most of them simply do the best that they can. Complicating this picture even further, is the fact that within the various groups that teachers encounter, there are often additional subgroups with even more distinct traits and differences. Some people think an African American teacher should be able to reach African American students because their background is the same. John (2001), points out that it is not necessarily true. There may be a gap between the teachers and the community where they're teaching. They may not live in the same area, and by going through the experience of becoming educated, they have acquired a certain way of looking at issues. So there can be a gap there as well. Given these various complexities, many educators wonder how they can find the time to manage diversity issues on top of the other challenges they are expected to handle every day.

Equally, the growing need for educational access leads students rightly to demand culturally adaptive learning experiences that allow full development of the individual as viewed by Visser in Parrish et.al (2010). Students entering into professional education in a multicultural context who are not aligned with their own culture can experience significant conflict. This conflict arises not only in regards to incompatible teaching and learning styles, but also because the growing professional self struggles to maintain both a connection to the local culture in which the student eventually intends to work and a connection to the learning environment. Accordingly, Gunawardena & LaPointe in Parrish et.al (2010) believed that instructional providers, including instructors and instructional designers, should develop skills to deliver culturally sensitive and culturally adaptive instruction. For instruction to do the most good for students, instructional providers must be cognizant of the cultures of their learners and how those cultures manifest themselves in learning preferences. This was the view of Nisbett in Parrish et.al (2010). The challenges of multicultural education, restated more succinctly, are these (Banks, ND):

1. Understanding and appreciating the cultural differences of students in order to make the appropriate instructional decisions that will enhance their learning;
2. Becoming aware of one's own cultural preferences for what they are and not assuming they represent the "right" way to think;
3. Determining which student behaviors represent cultural values and are therefore less prone to modification to accommodate the instructional situation;
4. Accepting the dual responsibility of educators to acculturate and respect individual student cultural backgrounds; and
5. Accepting that research-based instructional strategies are also culture-based and therefore may be at times inappropriate or in need of adaptation.

TOWARDS A MORE DIVERSIFIED MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

A major step to fostering multicultural education is the need for a total overhaul of teacher training programmes to reflect a more dynamic content in order to produce competent educators who are able to adapt their skills to their ever changing multicultural environment. It is assumed that in addition to the need for teachers who are well informed about their content areas and cultural diversity, the nation needs teachers who

are fair minded, critical thinkers, who care about the welfare of their students and humanity in general, and who act in ways that encourage all students to learn and develop to their highest potential. This was the view of Sleeter in Basanti (2010). Scholars (Banks, 1989; Bennett, 1995; Derman-Sparks & the A.B.C. Task Force, 1991; Haberman & Post, 1998) in the field of multicultural education have emphasized the need for culturally responsive teachers in the schools.

Culturally responsive teacher education programs as stated by Irvine in Basanti (2010) must include opportunities for pre-service teachers to work in schools where all students learn and develop to their highest potentiality; where students and teachers understand and begin to develop multiple ways of perceiving, behaving, and evaluating; and where students conform to those aspects of school culture necessary for harmonious social interaction while retaining their own ethnic identity. Haberman and Post (1998) in their article "Teachers for multicultural schools: The Power of Selection," emphasized on the following qualities of teachers: Self-knowledge, Self-acceptance, Relationship skills, Community knowledge, Empathy, Cultural human development, Cultural conflict, Relevant curriculum, Generating sustained effort, Coping with violence, Self-analysis, and Functioning in chaos. To fulfill these qualities as responsive teachers in 21st century schools, the pre-service teachers must become aware of the diversity among young children and their families, develop understanding and respect for diverse cultures and build partnerships with families in educating young children. Through early exposure to the concept of multiculturalism prior to entering into a teacher preparation program, pre-service teachers can learn to develop the right kind of attitude and skills to address the issues negatively affecting the education of young children. Preparation of pre-service teachers involves three major phases: liberal arts education, specialized subject-field education, and professional education (Haberman et al, 1998). During these phases the students get exposures and opportunities to learn about the world around them, strengthen their personal knowledge on specific content, and develop critical thinking ability in making decisions and solving problems for themselves and others. Liberal arts education develops and refines the thinking process of individuals to accept rational explanation of phenomenon happening around them and to be able to accept and recognize diverse viewpoints with patience, respect and decency (Basanti, 2010). This kind of refinement of the thought process facilitates students' ability to make rational decisions and solve problems scientifically. Pre-service teachers in early childhood education courses are exposed to knowledge, skills and professional dispositions on diversity issues, teacher expectations of all students, professional and ethical qualities to become an empathetic teacher through clinical experiences, classroom activities, discussions and dialogs.

In line with the change in teacher education, Multicultural education encompasses many important dimensions. Practicing educators can use the dimensions as a way to incorporate culture in their classrooms (Banks 2013). The five dimensions listed below are:

1. **Content Integration:** Content integration deals with the extent to which teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures in their teaching.
2. **Knowledge construction:** Teachers need to help students understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed.
3. **Prejudice Reduction:** This dimension focuses on the characteristics of students' racial attitudes and how they can be modified by teaching methods and materials.
4. **Empowering School Culture:** Grouping and labeling practices, sports participation, disproportionality in achievement, and the interaction of the staff and the students across ethnic and racial lines must be examined to create a school culture that empowers students from diverse racial, ethnic, and gender groups.
5. **Equity Pedagogy:** An equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, gender, and social-class groups.

Affirming the five dimensions to improved multicultural education is Coffey (2015), who opined that teachers / educational instructors maintained relationships with their students and should often; attend community events in order to demonstrate support for their students. In maintaining relationships with their students, they create bonds with students and developing a community of learners, which means that all students will work collaboratively to become responsible for each others' learning. Ladson-Billings (1994) maintains that in order for teachers to use culturally relevant pedagogy successfully, they must also show respect for students and understand the need for the students to operate or adapt their distinctive identities to the community in which they have found themselves.

Cooperative learning: Similarly, many educators recommend cooperative learning methods as effective teaching strategies to promote culturally relevant learning (Diller & Moule 2005). Rather than fostering competitiveness among students, group learning strategies encourage collaboration in the completion of assignments. These way students learn to work together towards common goals. Students learn important skills such as team work, and embracing other learning styles (Mayer, 2008).

Games and cross-cultural activities: these allow students personal interaction with different cultures. Students can participate in one of two very different cultures and must learn the languages and customs of that cultural group. Similar to this activity, is the program Tribes implemented into many elementary classrooms, to help students understand their school and classroom as unique and diverse communities (Kea, C., Campbell-Whatley, G., & Richards, H., 2006).

Other suggested strategies include family history research where students interview family members and learn about familial cultural influences on their own lives, and reflective writing where students write about and share their beliefs and cultural assumptions. Meta-reflection through these activities is very important to student learning, about themselves and their peers (Kea, et. Al, 2006). Students may choose to write about their cultural identity and its connection with their educational experiences, or they may choose to look at a different culture altogether, which they have learned about from a peer. Learning about new cultures through this activity can be very engaging for students.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational diversity is a national asset to any country. From the discussions in this paper, it must be noted that schools must rely on teachers' personal beliefs or a willingness to allow for their personal beliefs to be altered in order for multicultural education to truly be effective within classrooms. Second it requires for schools and teachers to knowledge that there is a blatant curriculum as well as a latent curriculum that operates within each school; with latent curriculum being the norms of the school that are not necessarily articulated but are understood and expected by all. Third schools must rely on teachers to teach towards students becoming global citizen which again, relies on teachers' willing to embrace other cultures in order to be able to convey open-mindedness to their students (Bennett, 1995). There is also the challenge of whether or not teachers believe in the effectiveness of a multicultural education especially in this region of the world. More specifically, teachers may fear bringing up matter within multicultural education that could truly be effective because said matters could be equally effective and potentially harmful. For example, discussing history between races and ethnic groups could help students to view different perspectives and foster understanding amongst groups or such a lesson could cause further division within the classroom and create a hostile environment for students.

It is very important that teachers advocate for students sharing their own personal experiences with their classmates. This allows students to learn more about one another and new cultures in general. As a teacher prepares to implement culturally relevant teaching into the classroom, it is most effective for the teacher to recognize the student's diversity and incorporate their backgrounds into the lesson and classroom environment. The 21st century classroom, and learner are always evolving, and it is important that our students are global thinkers. Understanding and embracing the variety of cultural backgrounds which make up a classroom is pivotal to life-long learning, and developing transformative skills for life beyond the education system. As such, the government of various countries must be proactive enough to invest heavily in teacher education because a nation may not develop beyond its educational level. The teachers

/educational instructors are at the center of ensuring the implementations of a more diversified education; therefore, great attention must be paid to their professional development as well as an encouraging remuneration system.

REFERENCES

- Abdul J. & Glenn H., (ND). *The Role of Culturally Responsive Teaching for supporting Ethnic Diversity in British University Business Schools*. Retrieved from http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/15029/3/CRT-HE_Final.pdf
- Banks, J.A., (2013). *Multicultural Education, Ite Education: Characteristics and Goals, Culture, Teaching and Ite Learning*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Banks, J. A. and Tucker M., (ND). *Multiculturalism's Five Dimensions*. Retrieved from <http://www.learner.org/workshops/socialstudies/pdf/session3/3.Multiculturalism>
- Banks, J. A. (2006). *Race, Culture and Education*. London, England: Routledge, Taylor & Francis
- Banks, J. A. (1989) Approaches to Multi-Cultural Curriculum. In Banks, J.A. & Gee-Banks, C. A (Eds.), *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*. Allyn & Bacon, Boston
- B.B.C. (2011). Multiculturalism: what does it mean? Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-12381027>. June, 2015.
- Bennett, C. I., (1995). Preparing Teachers for Cultural Diversity and National Standards Of Academic Excellence. *Journal of Teacher Education*. (46)(4) September-October PP 259-265.
- Coffey, H., (ND). *Culturally Relevant Teaching*. Learnnc.org. UNC. Retrieved 4 March 2015.
- Derman-Sparks, L., & A.B.C. Task Force (1991). *The Anti-Bias Curriculum*. NAEYC, Washington DC.
- Dictionary .com, LLC (2015).
- Diller, J., & Moule, J. (2005). *Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators*, Thomson Wadsworth, Belmont, California.
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally Responsive Teaching* 2nd Ed., New York: Teachers College Press. New York PP 31-36
- Haberman, M & Post, L., (1998). Teachers for Multicultural Schools: The Power of Selection. Preparing Teachers for Cultural Diversity. *Theory into Practice* (37) (2) PP 96 - 104. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00405849809543792?journalCode=htip20>
- Howard, Tyrone C. (2001). Telling their side of the Story: African American Students' Perceptions of Culturally Relevant Teaching. Retrieved from <http://curriculumstudies.pbworks.com/w/file/attach/51210877/Howard2001TellingTheirSide.pdf> <http://www.education.com/reference/article/culturally-relevant-pedagogy/>
- Iyi W. & Adedokun A.A. (ND). *The Challenges of Ensuring Quality Assurance in Assessment In Multicultural Contexts: The Case of West African Examination Council*. Retrieved from http://www.iaea.info/documents/paper_30e44070.pdf
- John F., (2001). The Diverse Challenges of Multiculturalism. *Journal of curriculum and Supervision*. (43)(2) PP 6 -10.
- Scherff, L. & Spector, K. (2011). *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, Rowman & Littlefield Education: Jossey-Bass Publishing; Lanham, Maryland.
- Kea, C., Campbell-Whatley, G., & Richards, H. (2006). *Becoming Culturally Responsive Educators: Rethinking Teacher Education Pedagogy*. National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems. Retrieved from [http://www.niusileadscape.org/docs/LawrenceA.\(2004\).What caused multiculturalism](http://www.niusileadscape.org/docs/LawrenceA.(2004).What%20caused%20multiculturalism). Retrieved from <http://www.amnation.com/vfr/archives/002874.html>
- Levinson, M. (2009). *Mapping Multicultural Education in Harvey Seigel, ed., the Oxford*

Handbook of Philosophy of Education (Oxford University Press)

- Mayer, R. (2008). Teaching By Creating Cognitive Apprenticeship In Classrooms and Beyond. in Learning and Instruction, 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, pp. 458-489.
- Parrish P. & Linder- VanBerschoot J.A. (2010). Cultural Dimension of Learning: Addressing The Challenges of Multicultural Instruction. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*. (11) (2). Retrieved <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/809/1497>.
- Ladson-Billings, G., (1994). *The Dream Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. Pearson Education; Jossey-Bass Publishing.
- Roschelle, J., Pea, D., Hoadley, C., Gordin, D. & Means, B. (2000). *Changing How and What Children Learn In School With Computer-Based Technologies*. Children and Computer Technology. 10 (2) PP 76 - 101
- U.K. Essay (2015). *Analyzing the Causes of Multiculturalism and Diversity Cultural Studies Essay*. Retrieved from <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/cultural-studies/analysis-of-the-multiculturalism-and-diversity-cultural-studies-essay.php#more-from-uk-essays>