

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN MALAYSIAN PERSPECTIVE: INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

Malaysian multicultural society is typified by three major ethnic groups, namely Malays, Chinese and Indians. Education system is the best tool for these three major of ethnic groups will work together. Education is a deliberate attempt to construct human beings who will participate in society as productive citizens. The question whether our education system should be designed or not is quite irrelevant when education, schooling, training, indoctrination, and the spectrum of ways by which the child is "schooled" are all based on intentional design. Schooling is the most contested terrain in any society; it is a battlefield or a conveyor belt for the creation of human beings. In a multicultural society, who should be entrusted to design schooling? Are those designing our schooling system equipped with the varieties of philosophical perspectives in education?. School in Malaysia have rarely offered an enthusiastic welcome for student differences. However, a multicultural classroom must thrive on these differences and use them as a foundation for growth and development. Differences command work, resolution, openness, and understanding. The main aim of managing multiculturalism in Malaysia is to maintain national integration in which all these various cultural communities could live alongside each other while maintaining their own original identities. Aligned with the globalization era in education, Malaysia faces challenges in creating a new multi-channelled learning environment where international and local students study, connect and work with one another across classrooms, community and country borders in so many exciting ways .Since we have encourage foreign students and workers to come to Malaysia so that the Malaysian Ministry of Education should make a recent move to transform the landscape of Malaysian education to fit with the globalization era in education. There is, however, little discussion on outcomes related to diversity initiatives, multicultural programmes and global educational opportunities experienced by the students. This paper reports on a recent study about teachers 'awareness about multicultural education and instruction and assessment practice in multicultural classroom in Malaysian primary schools.

Key words: Multicultural education, awareness, instruction and assessment.

INTRODUCTION

The tremendous diversity of cultural, ethnic, religious and socioeconomic groups in school today calls for multicultural education programs that reflect understanding and respect for children's and adolescents' differences. The multicultural education movement has particular relevance for the 1990s and beyond because of the migration of people into all over the world and because of the enlightened and more humane perspective that diversity enriches, rather than weakens, a nation. Multicultural education is an approach to teaching and learning that is based on democratic values and beliefs and affirms cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies. To become an excellent classroom teacher in the twenty first century is extraordinarily hard work, especially given the intense national climate of educational standards, high stakes testing, increased diversity within the school age population, and the ever increasing expectations for schools to address special needs and community concerns.

Excellent teachers are those who can inspire the intellectual, social, and personal development of all their students to their highest potential. These students are increasingly diverse in terms of race, culture, and socioeconomic back ground, as well as personal knowledge and experience(Edward & Kuhlman,2007) Our main goal as teachers is to strive for the intellectual, social and personal development of our students to their highest potential. Teachers' wants to provide each student with an equal opportunity to learn. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of culture can help all students reach their potential.

Students bring to school, not only differing racial and ethnic heritages, but also a wide range of histories, perspectives, experiences, expectations, and approaches to learning. All of these factors will influence children's educational experience (Hixson, 1991). The increasingly diverse student population requires that teachers have a broader range of skills and knowledge to meet these diverse needs of the student body (Bynoe, 1998). It is unacceptable for teachers to have little respect for their students, or to blame poor school performance on the fact that the student did not come prepared to adapt to the school environment (Hixson, 1991). Teachers must recognize the impact that cultural differences can have on children and children's education. Teachers who are aware of the impacts of cultural differences are more likely to bring children's different cultures into the classroom (Gay, 1994).

What is multicultural education?

For the most part, educators agree on defining the general parameters of multicultural education, as follows

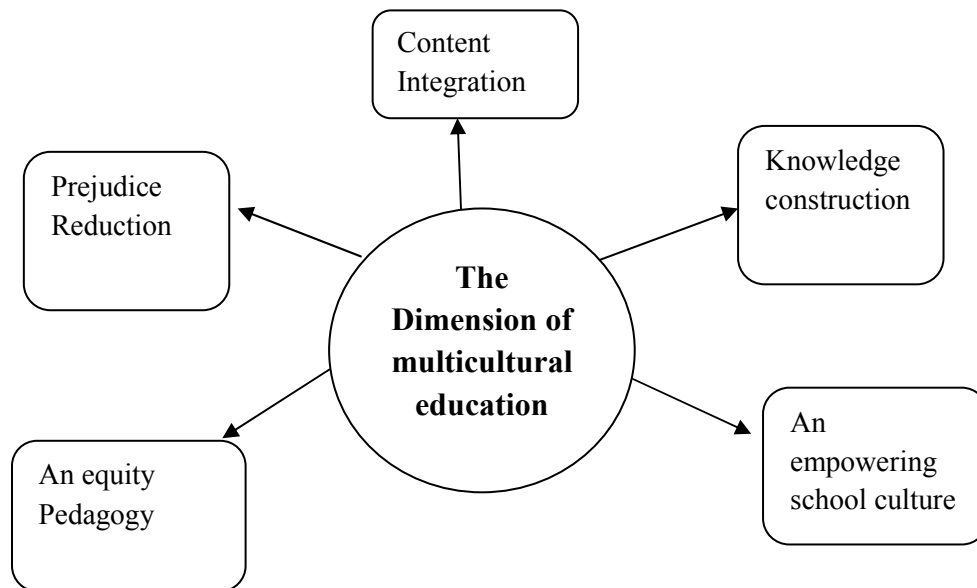
An education that is multicultural is comprehensive and fundamental to all educational endeavours. Given an understanding of the nature of human differences and the realization that individuals approach concepts from their own perspectives, advocates of education that is multicultural are consistent in their belief that respect for diversity and individual differences is the concept's central ingredient.(Tiedt.P.L. and Tiedt I.M)

Multicultural education is both a concept and deliberate process designed to teach learners to recognize, accept and appreciate differences in culture, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation,

religion, special needs and gender (Baruth, L.G & Manning, M.L 2008). Marshal(2002) defines multicultural education as “a vision of schooling based on the democratic ideas of justice and equality”. In the United states , scholars studying multicultural education agree that traditional schooling is a thing of the past, advocating restructuring within the areas of teaching styles, techniques, curriculum, and interpersonal interaction. Referred to the definitions, we can summarized that multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics should have an equal opportunity to learn in school.

The dimensions of multicultural education

James A. Banks's *Dimensions of Multicultural Education* is used widely by school districts to conceptualize and develop courses, programs, and projects in multicultural education. The five dimensions are show in figure 1.



Source: Adapted from An introduction to multicultural education James A. Banks Pearson education ,INC 2002 USA

According to Banks (2002), schools with a rich multicultural focus share five characteristics. First, content integration which is referring to expanding the curriculum acknowledge the experiences and contributions of diverse groups. Second, knowledge construction is about helping students understand how people create beliefs based on their own cultural biographies. Third, pedagogy is referring to use strategies that lead to higher achievement for students of all races. Forth, prejudice reduction is helping students develop more positive attitudes about people of different races and ethnicities. Finally, an empowering school culture is about examining the impact of school policies, such as academic tracking and discipline referrals on students from different backgrounds.

Principles of Multicultural Education

According to Gorski (2010) principles of multicultural education describes as below:

- (i) Every student must have an equal opportunity to achieve to her or his full potential.
- (ii) Every student must be prepared to competently participate in an increasingly intercultural society.
- (iii) Teachers must be prepared to effectively facilitate learning for every individual student, no matter how culturally similar or different from her or himself.
- (iv) Schools must be active participants in ending oppression within their own walls, then by producing socially and critically active and aware students.
- (v) Education must become more fully student-centred and inclusive of the voices and experiences of the students.
- (vi) Educators, activists and others must take a more active role in re examining all educational practices and how they affect the learning of all students: assessment methods, pedagogies, school psychology and counselling practices, educational materials and textbooks.

Assumptions in Multicultural education

Baruth & Manning (2008) stated several assumptions underlie multicultural education:

- (i) Cultural diversity is positive, enriching element in a society because it provides individuals increased opportunities to experience other cultures and thus to fulfilled as human beings. Educators should view cultural diversity as a strength with the potential for helping individuals better understand their own cultures.
- (ii) Multicultural education is for all students. Some peoples believe that multicultural education is only for minority children .This policies is based on the odd notion that only minority youngsters need multicultural education. This notion completely fails to recognize that majority cultures can get benefit from a better understanding of cultural differences.
- (iii) Teaching is a cross-cultural encounter. All teachers and students have their own cultural backgrounds, values, customs, perceptions, and perhaps, prejudice. These cultural aspects play a significant role in teaching and learning situations and can have a substantial effect on behaviour and learning.

(iv) Multicultural education should permeate the total school curriculum rather than be doled out in “one course” or a teaching unit approach. The school must be genuinely multicultural. Multiculturalism must embrace the curriculum.

(v) The education system has not served all students equally well. Members of minority groups, students from low-income families, and students who are culturally different or speak a language other than English have not fared well in U.S. school systems. (U.S. case)

(vi) Schools will continue to experience and reflect increasing cultural diversity because of influxes of immigrants and refugees and the high birth-rates of some cultural groups. The arrival will increase the numbers of people from culturally different backgrounds.

Instruction and Assessment

Planning instruction and creating good assessment are at the heart of teaching. Today, teaching requires educators to examine the curriculum to ensure that the instruction, learning experiences, and assessment activities are aligned with the standards. Two important instructional tasks are identifying the content to teach and determining the performances expected from students. What is taught in the classroom plays a primary role in determining student achievement. In developing assessment strategy, the first step teachers need to identify and examine the standard statement for content and skills. Second step is determining the level of cognitive processing and the last step is choosing the assessment strategy. To ensure suitability and fairness for all students, teachers need to check the assessment strategy for its appropriateness and if there are racial and gender biases (Bennet, C.I, 2007) All students should have an opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do. Assessment should be culturally and linguistically appropriate, fair and bias-free.

What is multicultural Education in Malaysia?

Most people agree that the population of Malaysia will continue to grow more and more diverse. Schools will be challenged to address the needs of students from many back grounds. Educators must have a new mindsets to accommodate the needs of a diverse population. Today, Malaysian multicultural society is typified by three major ethnic groups, namely Malays, Chinese and Indians. The variety of ethnic groups, with their own distinctive lifestyles and value systems will be living together. Razak Report in 1956 stated that, good education must reflect diversity, encourage understanding of various cultures and lifestyles (Abdul Razak, 2005). The Razak Report advocated that education system should encourage a commitment to share values and should enable pupils to respond positively to these. Therefore, the main goals are to change attitudes among the multiethnic pupils and to develop a pattern of education that enables all pupils to give their best. Education system in Malaysia should think several recommendations that might improve the educational experience, such as making the instruction and assessment more culturally relevant and responsive. Education play important role in multicultural communities. Vision 2020 encourages the three major ethnic groups to share destiny.

Are current education system in Malaysia need for change?

Malaysia as a new industrial country is increasing the numbers of immigrant. Recently, there are many immigrants came to work in Malaysia from all over the world. Besides that, as an education hub, Malaysia also encourages students from overseas to further studies in Malaysia. Some of them came with their family. These situations had changed the ethnic communities in Malaysia. In primary school, we can see few overseas students learnt together with local students in the same classroom. This is a new phenomenon in Malaysia's school. According to the new school environment, Malaysian education and schooling practice need to enhance social integration among these various ethnic groups beyond mere physical integration, and intends to eliminate social prejudice and discrimination. Multicultural education in Malaysia will successful if the education system can provide an opportunity for students of different ethnics groups to interact with each other. The education system should bring all ethnic groups together will lead to cross-racial contact, lead to better understanding of other races and promote greater social tolerance and interaction.

METHODOLOGY

The Purpose Of Study

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine teachers' awareness toward multicultural education in primary school. In addition, this study also to determine instruction and assessment practice in multicultural classroom in primary school. This is a preliminary study . It is hoped that the findings will provide initial information for further in-depth research in the future.

Research Questions

- (i) Are teachers awareness of multicultural issues in education?
- (ii) Are teachers practices multicultural instruction in classroom?
- (iii) Are teachers practices multicultural assessment in classroom?

Participants

A sample of 30 teachers from 1 primary school was selected to answer the questionnaire. Only 1 primary school was selected because this school have many students from different ethnics. This school consist of local and overseas students. Most of the teachers have taught at least 8 years. The sample included 15 malay, 6 Chinese and 9 indians; 15 females and 15 males. This study was conduct in the middle of the year, after the students sat for their midterm assessment.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire was adapted from Barry and Lechner(1995) who have done the study on the subject matter . The questions were then amended and reworked to suit the context of this study. This questionnaire consists of 36 questions. The questionnaire used was validated by two content experts and the Alpha cronbach reliability test result was 0.86 which is above the benchmark 0.75 (Perry et.al 2007) and is reliable for further analysis. Self administered technique was employed in administering the questionnaire, where researcher will be on site, to distribute and to collect the completed forms. According to Best and Kahn (1986). Self administer of questionnaire will have the opportunity to establish rapport, explain the purpose of the study and the meaning of the test item that may not be clear. This will help to increase the usable rate and respond rate of the questionnaire.

Interview

The purpose of the semi-structured interview was adopted in this research is to elicit the information from the teachers about their instruction and assessment practices in multicultural classroom. The interview questions were adopted from Sharma et al (2008) and item were selected according to the appropriate of this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

(i) Teachers awareness of multicultural issues in education

After analyzing the Teachers' awareness questionnaire, the following findings were obtained:

- 73% of the teachers agreed that students who live in poverty are more difficult to teach
- 90% of the teachers agreed that Culture views of a diverse community should be included in the school's yearly program planning
- 85% of the teachers agreed that Foreign students have more behaviour problems than other students
- 80% of the teachers agreed that teachers must culturally responsive in their teaching behaviours
- Only 7% of the teachers prefer to work with students and parents whose cultures are similar to them
- Only 5% of the teachers agreed students from certain ethnic groups appear lazy when it comes to academic engagement

Based on the analysis of data, there was a significant evidence to support teachers' cultural awareness in daily instruction in multicultural classroom. It is important for teachers to become more aware to students from different cultures to make the classroom environment more conducive for teaching and learning.

(ii) Teachers practices multicultural instruction in classroom

After analyzing the Teachers' instruction and assessment practices, the following findings were obtained:

- 96% of the teachers always group students from different cultures during groups activities
- 90 % of the teachers always encourage students to take an active part in the classroom discussion
- 75% of the teachers often equip student with appropriate communications skills to intervene for themselves in a safe manner
- 72% of the teachers often promote a wide cross-section of student interaction
- Only 64% of the teachers always used text books and other curricular materials recognize the value of cultural diversity
- Only 60% of the teachers often implement new instructional methods, ones that address students diverse
- Only 54% of the teachers often use vary methods of instruction to ensure that all students are address
- Only 45% of the teachers often create and preserve environment in which every student feel comfortable
- Only 45% of the teachers often perceive events and situations from other cultural perspectives
- 90% of the teachers often assessed students in their academic, social and presentation skills.
- 86% of the teachers always developed group and art project assessment
- Only 60% of the teachers often developed assessment that will assure equal educational access and opportunity to all students
- Only 56% of the teachers often developed assessments of good communication skills and enriched environment through play, storytelling, discussion, and role playing.
- Only 50% of the teachers often develop assessment can brainstorm multicultural issues and construct a confident and knowledgeable self-identity.

Based on the analysis of data, the teachers still not really implemented multicultural aspects during instructions and classroom assessment. The research concluded that most teachers do not fully realize or accept their responsibilities as educators. Because many teachers do not know or understand what multicultural education is, and they do not know how to use effective practices, teachers are not providing the best education opportunities that they can for their students regardless of the students' backgrounds and learning needs, the curricular content area, and the quality of instruction. Teachers need to learn how to infuse culturally responsible and responsive pedagogy across the curriculum and throughout the school environment to assure equitable learning opportunities for all students. Teachers also lack of skills for incorporating alternative and authentic assessments to match and expand culturally diverse student learning styles. Most teachers are unclear on how to design meaningful assessment procedures that genuinely empower students and demonstrate student achievement in various ways.

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