



A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATION ACROSS CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the topic of education across cultural differences and explores the concept of multicultural education (ME) to address the challenges and benefits of cultural diversity in educational institutions. The paper begins by acknowledging the increasing diversity in societies due to factors such as globalization, immigration, and intermarriage, emphasizing the need for cooperation and understanding among nations, peoples, and education; in addition, to highlighting the understandings and contributions of multicultural education, including instilling cultural sensitivity, embracing diversity, and nurturing appreciation of diverse ethnocultural heritage among students. It discusses how multicultural education helps develop a positive mindset, cultural navigation skills, and a global mindset, reducing discrimination, racial abuse, and culture shock while increasing opportunities for employment, education, and settlement in other countries. However, the paper also acknowledges critiques of multicultural education. These include concerns about it being a barrier to quality education for students from minority groups, the potential loss of students' cultural identities, and the argument that it overly emphasizes culture at the expense of intellectual development. The paper discusses the role of critical multiculturalism, intersectionality, critical literacy, and critical race theory in addressing education inequality. These theories advocate for equal resource distribution, recognition of intersecting identities, cultural inclusion, and challenging structural racism. The paper concludes that while multicultural education has its advantages and critiques, these theories offer valuable perspectives for creating a more inclusive and equitable educational system. By incorporating a multicultural perspective, education can better cater to diverse students and foster a more just society.

Keywords: critical multiculturalism, critical literacy, educational institutions, multicultural education, diversity, individual differences, multiculturalism, cultural pluralism, cultural diversity, cultural overlap, immigration, race, religion, gender.

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INTRODUCTION

Humanity is characterized by tremendous diversity and great variation in individuals and groups. There is also a very wide range of individual differences between individuals in many physical and psychological characteristics, and these do not only exist in different human groups in values, customs, and traditions in prevailing cultures but can also be found among the same family. These differences created the need to invent the term "multiculturalism," which first came into public discourse between the late 1960s and early 1970s. It all started when Australia and Canada showed demand for it. The two countries needed to implement a "multicultural" identity to reflect their support for cultural pluralism. Later, cultural diversity became a more desirable aspect in itself and highly in demand for all nations in many ways for its benefits, especially for educational institutions and diverse students.

More recently, human diversity has been increasing in a continuous and expanding manner due to several factors. For example, the exchange and spread of information, education, and communication in an unprecedented way in any era of human history has contributed to cultural overlap between different societies and increasing rates of immigration and intermarriage between individuals of multiple cultures. Now it is more common to have multiple cultures in the same society and to have individuals come from many varied backgrounds consisting of race, religion, gender, age, economic level, social class, political orientation, and other variables.

Even though diversity has always naturally existed among human beings, it was and still is a huge challenge, especially in education. The solution is to find and create cooperation and understanding between nations, peoples, and education by offering Multicultural Education/ME that encompasses all issues in the educational approach.

There is a growing debate in the United States about the increase in injustice and inequity, and there are several theories aimed at ending this discrimination. In this paper, I offer an account of central issues and themes such as gender, race, inequity, and intersectionality in a philosophical engagement with literature that deals with ME and offers theories to address these issues, like critical race theory and critical multiculturalism. I address the way that everything aligns with the roles of teachers and students and multicultural educational curricula.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION UNDERSTANDINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

In a world where access to information and interaction among people have increasingly become valuable, multicultural education is becoming paramount to ensuring that the next generation becomes culturally sensitive. Awad (2011) defines multicultural education as any academic strategy geared toward instilling cultural sensitivity in the minds of young children. From this definition, it is understandable that multicultural education focuses on the diversity of the culture and thus instills in students the ability to embrace other cultures. On the other hand, Banks (1993) looks at multicultural education as simply the incorporation of the history of the diverse individual in the academic system. These include learning about the origin, culture, and perceptions people hold worldwide.

Research studies show that such education aims to enhance openness and cultivate a culture of acceptance of other people's views and cultures. In the same way, multicultural education focuses on "nurturing admiration and appreciation of diverse ethnocultural heritage in young minds" (Sleeter & Grant, 1987, p. 23). The aim is to ensure that as children grow, they appreciate the diversity in culture and are ready to accept others despite their worldview. Multicultural education has contributed to developing a positive mindset among students where they appreciate others and thus are less racist and discriminative against others based on their cultures. First, it helps children learn the value of each other despite their backgrounds (Banks, 2014). That way, it reduces the chances of discrimination stemming from the children's ignorance of the other's culture and background (Welton, Owens, & Zamani-Gallaher, 2018). At the same time, multicultural education imbues students with the ability and skills to navigate diverse cultures. In the current world where people from diverse backgrounds meet and engage, students need to acquire skills to help them interact with others without stepping on their cultures (Vasquez, Janks, & Comber, 2019). They must develop a culture-sensitive mindset and skills to allow them to know the specific culture they face and how well they can respond to it without causing cultural conflict.

Lastly, multicultural education has created a global mindset for people, which has played a critical role in allowing more people to seek employment, education, and settlement in other countries. As interactions increase, people understand others' cultures (Banks, 2004; Comber, 2013; Gillborn, D. 2015). In that way, it has reduced cultural conflict and shock, which is always a barrier to interaction between people of different cultures. In that way, it has created global citizenship, where people feel comfortable in any place because they have background knowledge of the cultural expectations in such places (Ladson-Billings 1992). Thus, multicultural education has reduced discrimination, racial abuse, and culture shock and has increased chances and opportunities for working, learning, and living in other countries despite hailing from a different culture.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION CRITIQUES

Despite the evident contribution that multicultural education has brought, like creating global citizens where people can live, learn, and efficiently work in other countries, many critics view it as a barrier to better education. First, some studies show that multicultural education, despite its advantages, is a significant barrier to education for students from minority groups. For example, de Cuir & Dixson (2004) reveal that students who come from different countries and learn in a nation like the United States might find it difficult to integrate well with a multicultural education or syllabus. Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) further state that even though these students might speak the same language as the majority, some core cultural aspects are included in the syllabus, creating misunderstandings among these students. In that way, it establishes situations where students from minority groups cannot get a quality education.

Other than creating a barrier for students from minority groups, research studies also state that multicultural education makes some students lose their identity. Patel (2016) says that in most cases, the multicultural syllabus focuses on other cultures and ignores the original country's culture.

Mostly, these students learn more about what others think, how they behave, and their understanding of the world. In that way, Patel (2016) reveals that students might lose their identity and thus embrace other people's ways of life and worldview. Sleeter & Grant (1987) further reveal that when students are forced to learn more about others' cultures and ignore theirs, it might create conflict between the student, family, and society. Sánchez et al. (2021) add that a multicultural syllabus teaches students to value and respect others' perspectives and values. In that way, it might create a cultural conflict among the students as they are forced to assimilate and adopt other people's worldviews, not the ones that the community or their families teach them.

Lastly, the critiques argue that multicultural education is dogmatic and thus unsuitable for rigorous education that enhances intellectual development among students. Vavrus (2010) states that education should improve intellectual development. However, multicultural education overemphasizes one aspect of education: culture. In that way, it cannot fulfill its purpose of boosting the underachievement of minority individuals. Patel (2016) further reveals that multicultural education deviates from the primary purpose of education, which is achieving better grades among students. The authors state that, with a significant emphasis on culture and the creation of barriers among other students, multicultural education is not the best model that students should focus on during their studies. Green (2017) further reveals that this education only focuses on the minority and might not be concerned with the majority. Education should be equal for all, and when the emphasis is on limited areas like culture, other students might be disadvantaged.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND/OR THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCHOOLING

Inequality in education has emerged as a significant challenge in the United States and other countries worldwide. Many theorists have accused the education system in most Western countries, like the United States, of prioritizing the culture of the West in moves that discriminate the international students. For this reason, many theoretical models have strived to find an alternative way that the Western education system can be structured to reduce inequality. This discussion will focus on critical multiculturalism, intersectionality, critical literature, and critical race theory.

Critical Multiculturalism

Discrimination based on origin, race, or ethnicity is a significant educational challenge. Due to such discrimination, international students cannot get a better education because of the unequal redistribution of resources and power in schooling (Abd Elkader, 2016). The critical multiculturalism theory confronts this idea of creating an inclusive environment that allows proper schooling for all students, despite their origins. The essential theory of multiculturalism focuses on reducing discrimination based on race, economic disparity, gender, and class (Bennett, 2001). In that way, there are different ways in which this theory is key to addressing inequality in schools.

First, the theory focuses on the equal distribution of resources in education. It focuses on how well the government can develop policies that realign the education sector and create opportunities for students despite their family background. In a country like the United States, minority individuals, primarily African Americans, face extreme school discrimination (Blum, 1997). Most schools where these students learn lack resources due to their economic disadvantages. Compared to white students, not white students get limited opportunities in education, which leads to high school dropout rates. The challenge, thus, is due to their class and race (Taylor et al., 2019). That way, multiculturalism advocates for an inclusive education where the cultural background does not dictate the level of education and the resource-specific school should gate. At the same time, the theory also advocates for less gender discrimination. It supports the situation where girls and boys are given equal opportunities. Multiculturalism further advocates for better education for immigrants, the poor, and other minorities by focusing on equal resource distribution to ensure that everyone gets better schooling despite their background. Another critical theory that puts effort into reducing inequity in the schooling system is the intersectionality theory.

Intersectionality

Another critical theory that has improved equality in education is the epistemology of intersectionality. It "aims to shed light on how multiple dimensions and systems of inequality interact with one another and create distinct experiences and outcomes" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 323). The theory holds that multiple systems interact to cause oppression and victimization for some students. For instance, gender and race might intersect to create a situation where female students from minority groups such as immigrants, African Americans, or Asian Americans are discriminated against. It is defined as a "simultaneous experience of social categories such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation and how these categories interact to create systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 43). The intersectionality theory thus reduces inequality by sensitizing the education sector to the need to understand how these oppressive systems interact, which later leads to satiation where some students are discriminated against and oppressed in the education system. In that way, it helps create an understanding of how these interacting systems can be addressed to reduce systematic and institutional oppression in the education sector.

Intersectionality reduces inequality in schooling by acknowledging the students' intersecting identities in the classroom and school. It is essential to allow the staff and other policymakers to create policies and strategies in place that address these intersecting identities to reduce oppression and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). Secondly, it promotes the inclusion of cultural identity in all aspects of the student's learning and syllabus. At the same time, it promotes equity, where the policies and reforms that target education sectors are designed with identity and multiculturalism in mind (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Finally, through intersectionality, education sectors become aware of the "outgroup" who are vulnerable to intersectionality oppression and discrimination. In addition to intersectionality, a critical theory also focuses on means of reducing the Western cultural dominance in the education system, which is linked to inequality.

Critical Literacy

The critical literacy theory focuses on the need for society to enhance equal literacy levels despite people's backgrounds. The theory advocates for an increase in education levels among people. In an organization like the United States, the literacy level varies with race, class, and economic capabilities. For example, most white people are highly educated because they can access better education and resources. This reduces the rate at which they can drop out of school. However, minority groups such as African Americans, Muslims, immigrants, and those who follow social and economic classes have low literacy (Awad 2011). Critical In that way, the theory advocates for equal literacy where race, class, and gender do not define the level of literacy of the students and the citizens. The theory thus reduces inequality in school and class.

First, critical literacy theory demonstrates the need to improve the education level of every individual in society. The theory does not only look at education for the dominant groups but holds that improving literacy levels in the community must consider every person despite their status and country (Ahmed, 2000). At the same time, the theory improves equality by advocating for policies that enhance literacy levels in the community. Implementing such reforms is crucial to ensuring a high level of education among people, despite their economic, social, and racial backgrounds. Lastly, the critical literacy theory believes in the need for awareness among schools to ensure that every person gets the right to education and improves their educational level. That way, it ensures that schools are accommodating diverse cultures and put strategies to ensure that the environment where these students learn is less discriminatory to international students and those from minority groups. In the same way as critical literacy theory, the CRT also advocates for change in structure to favor international students.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The theory underscores the need for structural changes as it establishes that the education sector in the United States is laced with systematic racism. From this perspective, the education system in the United States only benefits native students while ignoring international students from different cultures (Vasquez et al., 2019). As a result, the syllabus in the country is cemented to the country's affairs. In that way, it misses some of the pertinent issues that international students face and is thus unfair to these students who come to study in the country. In that way, the critical race theory focuses on restructuring the education system to incorporate a multiculturalism perspective that favors international students and creates an environment where these students can achieve their academic dreams irrespective of their cultural background.

Critical race theory focuses on the need to restructure Western education to focus on the multicultural aspect. From the CRT perspective, Western education is exclusive to international students. They are disappointed with the syllabus that focuses on the values and interests of Western culture and excludes other cultures worldwide (Ladson-Billings et al., 1992).

Critical race theorists believe that focusing on Western culture, as in most of the syllabus, is a form of inequality where international students are forced to learn only one culture and must thus change their identity to try to align with what they are taught in these schools. As a result, it creates cultural dominance, with international students forced to quit their identity and embrace Western culture. Critical race theorists now believe that restructuring the syllabus and the education system to incorporate a more sensitive cultural syllabus is the solution to ending the discrimination and racial injustice that come with the Western education system and creating equality in education.

CONCLUSION

It is not enough for educators to say that we are not racists or that we are against racism. We are now active fighters against social inequality, and our weapons are our education and our desire to change the world into a better place for each other and the coming generations. Much of the existing literature and theories address only limited learning issues regarding multicultural education. Studies and research go hand in hand with teachers, students, and educational institutions. The work so far has focused on identifying the issues and solving them. This has been going on for decades: theories, studies, analyses, and solutions have been developed, seminars have been given, and workshops have been held, but nothing has changed, and these issues still exist. Education is a human right, and everyone deserves access to quality equity education that includes cultural contributions and a sense of community from the students and their families because they all exist in a society.

This paper offers a literature review of some scholarly works and critiques regarding the issues of inequity in schooling in addition to defining four of these theories: critical multiculturalism, intersectionality, critical literacy, and critical race theory. In addition, the paper offers some solutions to be conceded to improve the education system to eliminate any discrimination practices, especially those based on the marginalization and/or persecution of individuals and/or groups for reasons including gender, race, color, culture, or religion. These practices, once enabled by authority or power, may be fatal with the use of violence. For instance, on September 16, 2019, at Landmark Middle School, a 13-year-old special needs Diego was a victim of a hate crime that led to his losing his life after being hit by two students. The incident happened for no reason except that he was special and different in his way, but two students did not accept that, and they started bullying, pushing, and hitting him. Educational institutions should fulfill the responsibilities of achieving full justice among all students and all members of society through practice. Due to the absence of education that supports diversity and serious punishment, the two students did not care and were moved by racism and the power they had to end another student's life without caring for any consequences.

Even after all these efforts to change reality, some people still abuse individuals' social customs and dignity, and that is because the abusers feel safe and secure in the absence of punishment for their actions. As the Arabic saying goes, whoever is saved from punishment is ill-mannered and will not stop. Therefore, enough with theories; it is time to be practical and take serious actions like penalties to restrict these violations.

Let us stop talking about people's rights and enact legislation to secure their rights, no matter what they look like or where they come from.

The right to education went through many stages before it was considered one of the universally recognized human rights. As a scholar, I believe it is important to focus on issues such as how diverse scholars see themselves, evaluate their ways of learning, and ensure they receive the education that resonates with them. Many crucial factors help to motivate and succeed diverse students, such as teachers, schools, and curricula. Educational institutions play an important role in education in building a democratic society that respects diversity and cultural specificity through the practice of multicultural education.

The goal of ME is to improve relationships among individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds and help all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for participation in cultural interactions personally or in groups. Another goal is to empower students, teachers, and parents to build a society that respects diversity and expands the knowledge base of different cultural groups.

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