Review of Literature on Multicultural Education

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Abstract

Diversity within societies and an increasing percentage of people who speak a second language has made multicultural education crucial at all levels of education. This paper describes multicultural education through cultural and pedagogical perspectives. Misconceptions about multicultural education were discussed. Many teachers hold false beliefs and stereotypes about diverse student populations. In the paper, it is explained that educators should integrate multicultural education into their classroom in order to celebrate diversity. Two principles of multicultural second language curricula are discussed. The paper also includes researchers’ perceptions on the benefits of multicultural education courses to help educators effectively interact with diverse students and improve their academic achievement.

*Keywords:* multicultural education, celebrate diversity, academic achievement
Multicultural Education

Aldridge and Goldman (2007) defined multicultural education as a reform movement that is designed to restructure educational institutions in order to develop students’ skills and attitudes and be able to function effectively in a diverse world. Bennett (2003) explained multicultural education as “an approach to teaching and learning that is based upon democratic values and beliefs and that affirms cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies in an interdependent world” (p. 14). Gay (1994) elucidated that multicultural education is an educational reform movement, and a process intended to change the structure of educational organizations; this process helps all students to have an equal chance to achieve their academic success.

Banks (1993) proposed that multicultural education is an education of freedom in which its main goal is to help students to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to actively participate in a democratic society. Further, Gay (1994) suggested that cultural diversity provides the direction for multicultural instruction and for selected policy reforms. Multicultural education calls for all aspects of education to always be examined, critiqued, and transformed in order to improve all students’ learning, regardless of their cultural background (Gorski, 2002). On the other hand, Nieto (1992) defined multicultural education as a process of comprehensive and basic education for all students. Multicultural instruction challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society (Nieto, 1992).

The Census Bureau reported that there is an increase in the minority population every year which resulted in the changes of the demographics of the United States (Okoye-Johnson, 2011). According to Pallas, Natriello, and McDill (1989), by the year of 2020, culturally and linguistically diverse student populations will include approximately half of the public school population in the U.S. Thus, the existence of various cultures requires the need to assure democracy among all ethnic groups (Okoye-Johnson, 2011). Gabelko and Michaelis (1981) and
Lynch (1987) stated that “the reduction-of-prejudice dimension of ME is geared toward helping students acquire more democratic values, behaviors, and attitudes” (as cited in Okoye-Johnson, 2011, p. 1252).

**Cultural Perspective**

Gordon (2007) defined cultures by saying that they are complex entities which includes people’s food preferences, customs, and holiday celebrations and also covers their beliefs. Moreover, she added that cultures include modes of students’ interaction with adults and their peers. It has been demonstrated that immigrants who adapt and adjust to life in the United States, they experience “profound transformations” that had a negative impact on abandoning their old cultural traditions and adapting new ones (Gordon, 2007, p. 150).

In the past, multicultural education was a term that considered differences (Bennett, 2003). The term “melting pot” represented as an American culture by combining the strengths of many cultures into something new and unique (Bennett, 2003). Nowadays, “cultural pluralism” has emerged as an alternative to the melting pot (Bennett, 2003). Maxim (2006) described cultural pluralism as how each individual in society contributes to an American whole. It is important to understand and accept the differences among all people. Banks (2001) profoundly explained that students’ ability to communicate and negotiate among diverse cultures enable them to become successful in a diverse world. Thus, the challenge for educators is to present an effective multicultural education in which all students can learn how to respect and accept diverse cultures (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007).

**Misconceptions about multicultural education.** The focus on the value of multicultural education is essential because many pre-service teachers hold false beliefs, stereotypes and erroneous attitudes about diverse student populations (Vaughn, 2005). Raskoff (2012) stated that
stereotyping are overgeneralizations which makes people generalize things, and most likely they are false assumptions. Studies found that Arab Muslim students claim to feel left out and secluded by their school peers mainly because of misconceptions and discrimination regarding their culture and religion (Ayish, 2003). Aldridge and Goldman (2007) identified some current misconceptions about multicultural education. For example, it is explained that multicultural education is the study of cultures that are not American. Moreover, it is explained that people from the same nation or geographic region share the same culture. It is a false conception because there are Spanish-speaking citizens from Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Chile and their dialects are completely different. Furthermore, people thought that families from the same culture share the same values and traditions.

Aldridge and Goldman (2007) added that multicultural education doesn’t only include ethnic and racial issues; gender and socioeconomic diversity are also two important issues that should be included in multicultural education. Dalghres (2011) emphasized that racism and discrimination are existed throughout human history. Tarman and Tarman (2011) explained that people from different cultural background have different kinds of interaction styles, languages, customs, and traditions. Maxim (2006) stated that many people tend to discriminate against other groups from different cultures, leading to misconceptions about members of groups, unfair treatment of people in those groups, and closed attitudes toward those differences.

Additionally, students should learn about multicultural education, not young ones; this misconception is false. Lynch and Hanson (1998) found that young children develop cultural understanding by the age of five and more easily adjust and learn from new cultural patterns than adults. Pattnaik (2003) stated that the use of multicultural children’s literature is a key ingredient in the early childhood programs. Pattnaik (2003) explained that many people do not understand
the real meaning of multicultural education. It was also mentioned that schools are the mirrors that reflect the diversity of society. Pattnaik (2003) further explained that children’s behavior change in school because they often observe ethnic conflict among people from different cultural background in their neighborhoods.

A study by Tarman and Tarman (2011) examined a preschool teacher’s understandings and practices regarding multicultural education. Their study investigates the value of multicultural education in early childhood programs. It is a qualitative case study which explores an experienced preschool teacher’s understandings and best practices of multicultural education. The ethnic background of the day care center was: 44% Caucasian American, 27% Asian, 8% African American, 4% Hispanic, 6% Indian, 2% Turkish, 2% Egyptian, 5% Russian, and 2% German.

Qualitative data is collected through observations, interviews, classroom observations and artifact collection in a daycare center in the US (Tarman & Tarman, 2011). Findings of the study provided an understanding about multicultural education for young children. Derman-Sparks (1989) highlighted methods that early childhood educators can develop an anti-bias curriculum by stressing on the visual aspects of the classroom environment, toys and materials, and classroom practices. Based on the researchers’ observation, preschool teachers used activities that promote understanding and acceptance of diversity. The following activities were used in the classrooms: cooking activities from different cultures; celebrating holidays of different cultures; varied cultural art activities; dance and folk music of different countries (Tarman & Tarman, 2011).

Tarman and Tarman (2011) further explained that teachers used different strategies to celebrate diversity as part of routines and play; for instance, greetings in different languages are
used in the classroom. Teachers used some words and games in different languages. In order to show cultural diversity, educators used books, puzzles, small toy people, posters from different cultures; maps, and dress up clothing. Therefore, educators play important roles in integrating multicultural education into their classroom, and have influence over the curriculum with their values, perspectives, and teaching strategies (Banks, 1993).

**Pedagogical Perspective**

Proponents of multicultural education (Banks, 1994; Bennett, 1990; Coelho, 1994; Davidman & Davidman, 1994; Gay, 1988; Grant, 1977; Nieto, 1992) explicitly explained the importance of incorporating multicultural education in the curriculum of schools in order to improve students’ academic achievement and enhance their racial attitudes as well (as cited in Okoye-Johnson, 2011). Brown and Marchant (2002) suggested that the implementation of multicultural education enables educators to examine their own values, knowledge, and teaching practices about different minority groups to avoid biased multicultural education. Banks (1994) threw light on five important dimensions of multicultural education which are: content integration, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social structure. Gay (1988) focused on the importance of modifying the values of education in order to reflect the cultural, ethnic, linguistic, social, and racial pluralism in the United States.

**Benefits of multicultural education courses.** Based on studies, many of new teachers have a lack of knowledge of the experiences, needs and resources of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations (Cho & Decastro, 2005). As a result, it is suggested that pre-service teachers complete a multicultural education course in order to be able to effectively work with culturally diverse students (Cho & Decastro, 2005). In 2005, Cho and Decastro’s qualitative
study examined the effect of a multicultural education course on the pre-service teachers’ attitudes towards working with diverse student populations. Twenty-five participants were selected from secondary education pre-service teachers who enrolled in a multicultural education course prior to their first student teaching assignment.

The qualitative findings formed by the majority of the pre-service teachers indicated that their completion of a multicultural education class had a positive impact on changing their attitudes towards teaching diverse student populations (Cho & Decastro, 2005). Furthermore, the findings showed that the participants’ completion of the course enabled them to increase their cultural knowledge, and appreciation of other cultures. The majority of the participants highlighted the fact that the multicultural education class positively changed their perceptions towards teaching minority students. The pre-service teachers reported that the multicultural education course helped them to gain a better vision about multicultural setting in the classroom. After completing the course, few teachers still felt “ill equipped” for teaching diverse students because of “their limited cultural knowledge, teaching experience and exposure to issues of diversity” (p. 27). Keengwe (2010) noted that many teacher education programs incorporate multicultural education courses in their programs in order to compensate for the lack of cultural diversity knowledge, skills, and experiences. Keengwe (2010) proposed that multicultural education helps in promoting the freedom, abilities, and skills to cross ethnic and cultural boundaries among people from different cultural background.

Smith, Constantine, Dunn, Dinehart, and Montoya (2006) stated that multicultural education has a positive effect in developing cultural awareness of self and others and increasing understanding related to culturally competent practice. Kimani and Laster (1999) stated that educators should be prepared to teach all students from diverse backgrounds. Garibaldi (1992)
explained that the discussion over the content of a multicultural teacher education curriculum is active and diverse within the profession. Gordon (2007) suggested that teachers should learn about their students’ cultures. Moreover, Aldridge and Goldman (2007) recommended that teachers need to familiarize themselves with each child’s culture in their classrooms. Lynch and Hanson (1998) emphasized the importance of having all educators use different teaching strategies that effectively reach all students from different cultures. Banks (1994) and Bennett (1990) focused on developing antiracist and prejudice-reduction themes in multicultural education in order to become knowledgeable about other cultures, reduce bias, develop respect skills, and become accepting of others. Thus, multicultural education courses should be embedded in teacher education programs in order to help pre-service teachers effectively interact with diverse students and improve their academic achievement (Keengwe, 2010).

Garibaldi (1992) outlined a series of general skills that effective educators should focus on during their preparation. For example, prospective teachers should plan and organize effective instructional situations in their culturally diverse classroom settings. Educators should learn how to encourage the cooperation of their students, families and communities (Garibaldi, 1992). It is explained that multicultural curricula are very broad programs of study which help minority students “maintain harmonious relationships with their families and ethnic communities” (Gordon, 2007, p.150). Moreover, Gordon (2007) suggested that teachers should implement activities that help in providing parent involvement in their children’s education. Such activities help to facilitate learning about different cultures. Reaching out to immigrant communities is an important principle of multicultural education. For example, a child can work closely with family members on recording family history; this activity helps to promote children’s ethnic awareness (Gordon, 2007). The NCCREST (2006) recommended that teachers
play important roles in fostering a positive relationship between students, their families, the community, and school. For instance, effective teachers can do so by inviting parents and community members into the classroom to participate in the teaching-learning process.

Tarman and Tarman (2011) mentioned that “Language is the basic language of culture” (p. 594). Pattnaik, (2003) stated that teachers should provide opportunities for children to experience other languages. Derman-Sparks (1989) stated that displaying and labeling materials in different languages enable children to develop their cultural awareness; for instance, teaching children basic words such as numbers, colors, days of the week, and objects in different languages help students to develop their cultural awareness.

Gordon (2007) stressed on validating and celebrating students’ home cultures in order to foster minority students’ sense of personal worth and improve their pedagogical learning. Aldridge and Goldman (2007) explained that curriculum in multicultural education should focus on the culture of different groups. It is essential to learn about ethnic holidays inside the classroom, such as decorating the classroom or tasting ethnic food (Gordon, 2007). Furthermore, multicultural games from other cultures are beneficial for all students. For example, The Multicultural Game Book and International Playtime are two volumes that described the games played by children all over the world (Gordon, 2007). Inevitably, Gordon (2007) reported that the more the students explore other cultures, the more they’ll get new insight about the world.

It has been demonstrated that hearing a song or reading multicultural books are two effective sources that help students to learn about other cultures (Gordon, 2007). For instance, it is suggested that reading books about children’s experiences in Ramadan inside the classroom will enable children to be familiar with different cultural experiences (Gordon, 2007). Effective educators can use entering the text activity which is an important part of the multicultural
curriculum; it helps students to practice imaginary interaction with other diverse cultures. Consequently, Gordon (2007) further acknowledged that educators can prepare all students to become more culturally competent citizens in a diverse society. Not only enhancing teaching and working with diverse students is important, but also multicultural competence improves the ability of faculty and higher education professionals to help students to be effective global citizens and workers (Goodman, 2013). Smith (2006) added that social and cultural interaction between minority groups and established residents builds cross-cultural understanding that helps all community members to comfortably interact with each other and broadens their appreciation for all different cultures.

**Multicultural second language curricula.** Gordon (2007) threw light on transformational multicultural curriculum as the first important principle of multicultural TESOL curricula; it is meant to help students to “transform the participants of the educational process” (p.159). Gordon (2007) stated that transformational multicultural curricula don’t only focus on teaching students about countries’ holidays or important people; however, students should be exposed thoroughly to a discussion of the themes and ideas that shape different cultures. Theorists of multicultural education have demonstrated that cultural explorations help second language learners to develop new cultural perspectives. The more the students explore other cultures, the more they’ll get new insight about the world.

Gordon (2007) added that multicultural literature is one of the important elements of transformational curricula. For instance, *A Caribbean Cinderella* is a Mexican fable that can be used with elementary-level students; this fable is a good example that helps students to discover other diverse cultures (Gordon, 2007). Gordon (2007) referred to social action curriculum as a second innovative principle of multicultural TESOL curricula. It is argued that second language
educators play important roles in helping their students to “become active and informed citizens” (Gordon, 2007, p. 161). Moreover, second language learners should be able to understand the meaning of democracy. Students also should be able to know their own roles in society in order to improve their own lives and also work on improving others’ lives (Gordon, 2007). Effective educators should guide their students to identify the problems in their school environment. For example, educators should direct students to write letters to the school administration, addressing an issue and requesting that a problem be resolved. Accordingly, administrators should give attention to the problem and make suggested improvements. Furthermore, the NCCREST (2006) suggested that effective teachers are responsible for giving their students the opportunity to learn about people from different cultural backgrounds in order to relate positively with one another. This allows students to be culturally knowledgeable and able to interact with people from different cultural groups and backgrounds. Thus, students should be aware of diverse political and social ideas in their world (Gordon, 2007).

Nieto (2002) stated that there are correlations between bilingual and multicultural education as both address the need for linguistic and cultural pluralism (as cited in Kleyn, 2007). Kleyn (2007), the researcher focused on understanding how four bilingual educators from different ethnolinguistic groups interpret multicultural education. Kleyn (2007) stated that all the participants were immigrants and ELLs who agreed that they liked to create a classroom free from bias and prejudice.

One of the participants attributed his interest to bilingual education and based on his experiences he reported that, “it appears children of bilingual parents opens up a new world of bilingual education that simultaneously offers alternative career opportunities for native Spanish speakers” (p. 109). The participant added that he had a negative stereotype that “Dominican and
Puerto Ricans are not as good as us Argentines” (p. 109). The participant further explained that his parents hold some stereotypes and bias against other racially and ethnically diverse populations. Interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds and completing diverse coursework in a teacher education program helped him to gain cross-cultural understanding. The participant clearly explained that during his graduate studies in bilingual education, “he felt an infusion of multicultural education across his coursework as well as constant focus on issues related to bilingualism and ELLs” (p. 110).

Asante (1991) threw light on teachers’ different perceptions about multicultural education; educators felt that the students’ cultures should be part of a curriculum in order to celebrate diversity. In the study, the majority of the participants reported that the dual language program helped them to increase their ability to implement multicultural education. For example, one respondent mentioned that having the opportunity to teach in a self-contained dual language classroom enabled him to work with Latino students and “cultivate pride in their own backgrounds while developing their English and Spanish simultaneously” (p. 110). Another participant noted that “it’s also the teacher’s experiences, sensitivities to cultural differences, and careful planning for those differences that work to unite bilingual education with multicultural education” (p. 116).

Findings of the study showed that all of the four groups of bilingual education teachers value bilingualism and multiculturalism (Kleyn, 2007). The majority of the participants complained about the shortage of materials in their schools, such as Language other than English (LOTE) books. Kleyn (2007) explained that teachers needs “to provide students with literature that spans languages, levels, topics and cultural frames of reference, teachers need a greater voice in the selection of materials” (p. 241). Kleyn found that additive bilingual or dual
language programs in colleges enables the bilingual teachers “a solid foundation from which to bring in different languages and cultures, while subtractive programs limit such possibilities” (p. 256). All participants agreed that incorporating multicultural education in their instruction allows students to have access to a curriculum that connects to their realities and broadens their knowledge.

Based on this study, Kleyn focused on making efforts to teach through bilingual and multicultural framework more feasible and acceptable to all students from diverse backgrounds. The researcher further explained that bilingual and multicultural education are two overlapping fields that work together to support one another; bilingual education stresses on linguistic and dialectical variety which should be tackled in multicultural education. Correspondingly, multicultural education which is associated with diversity, race, gender, ethnicity, religion and class must also be addressed within bilingual education. Thus, this study revealed how educators should incorporate bilingual and multicultural education in their instruction in order to meet the needs of minority populations (Kleyn, 2007).
References


