

MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

BY

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Abstract

This paper posits that culture and education are interwoven. Culture plays an increasing role at the various levels of education. Awareness of cultural diversity is crucial for attaining better teaching and learning in the classroom. Educational management is expected to play an increasing and important role in harmonizing cultural diversity in order to maintain an inclusive classroom. This paper therefore dealt with the relationship between cultural and education, aspects of cultural diversity, importance of the diversity in school, the influence on teaching/learning and how to manage cultural diversity in the classroom. Teaching with multicultural perspectives, goals and merits as well as examples of multicultural activities were highlighted. The paper concluded that culture is a background frame of mind on which new learning is made. Therefore, multicultural education in

schools must be ensured and encouraged so as to have a positive balance in classroom teaching and learning.

Keywords: Culture, diversity, multi-cultural education, management.

Introduction

What Is Culture?

Culture is a shared human pattern for living. It is day-to-day living models that pervade all aspect of human and social interaction. Culture is mankind's primary adaptive mechanism. It constitutes the food, language, dress, music, arts and literature of a society. Culture is a lot more than a list of the language someone speaks and food or dress preferences instead; it is a framework around which we build our identity with influences on how we engage with the world, including the perspectives we take and the expectations we have. According to Webster Dictionary, culture is the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs and all other products of human works and thoughts, typical of a population or community at a given time. Edward B. Tayer explains it as that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, law, morals, customs and any other habits acquired by man as a member of society. Deepa Kharta sees culture as something a person learns from his family and surrounding and not ingrained in him from birth. Thus, culture is a learned pattern of behaviour and ways in which a person lives his life. A child imbibes the cultures of the society where he grows up. Individuals from varied nationalities, tribes, ethnicities and races, all bring cultural traditions to their

interactions. Therefore, culture is an integral part of every society.

Culture and Education

Culture and Education are two inseparable parameters. It can be stated that education and culture are mutually interdependent, complementary and supplementary in all their aspects and activities. Education, through its specialized agencies, tries to inculcate the traditions, customs, values, arts, morals, etc, into the tender minds of pupils. The function of education is to transmit the social values and ideas to the young and capable members of society. Education has the privilege, authority and potentials to reshape the process of thinking of the society and culture across the globe. It helps in preserving the vital elements of our heritage.

Culture however, is regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or social group. It encompasses in addition; arts, literature, life styles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs. Culture shapes individual's world view and the way communities address the changes and challenges of their societies. For this reason, education serves as a cultural vehicle for transmitting these value systems as well as for learning from the humanity's diversity of world views and for inspiring future creativity and innovation. Social and cultural values are learnt through education. Education makes students ready to deal with these cultural ethics and norms. Individual's adoption of natural and social environment in a positive way takes place through cultural elements. This is why education is a foundation of transmission and

transformation of culture. It socializes an individual in one hand and it preserves, transmits and promotes the culture of a society on the other hand. However, culture has an impact on education, side by side with great impact of education on culture, hence proper management of cultural diversity in the classroom becomes necessary.

Cultural Diversity

Diversity focuses on the forms of differences among people. The culture of Nigeria is shaped with multiple ethnic groups. It is widely believed that Nigeria consists of a minimum of 250 ethnic groups with Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo as the three dominations. This makes Nigeria a multi-cultural nation where students come to school with different backgrounds, different cultural contexts, different world views and sets of experiences. Everyone has a culture and most of them have identities built from multiple culture. Increase in diversity does not only relate to race and ethnicity, rather, it includes students from different religion, language background, economic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc. Even in the western countries such as USA, UK and Asia, and other countries of the world, census predicted that over half of the nation's population will be people of colour, and the trend will continue. Therefore, diversity in and out of classrooms will continue to grow, and so, it is essential to prepare students to adapt to an evolving world and embrace these differences from themselves.

The issue of diversity plays a role in how students and teachers view the activities of the classroom; what should happen there in terms of teaching and learning, with regards

to their prior knowledge. The implication is that teachers should be aware of notions of differences among students in the class, identify and think through how this affects teaching and learning, and then make the classroom an inclusive place and healthy environment.

Aspects Of Cultural Diversity

Some Common Cultural-Diversities:

Different aspects of culture that can influence student's perceptions, attitudes and behaviours in the classroom include:

Race: This has to do with skin colour. Skin colour has an impact and can affect student's perception of each other and themselves too. This relates mostly with the Western culture.

Ethnicity: This is the culture derived from nationality. Ethnic differences appear in all groups and can persist for generation. Teachers should therefore understand ethnic and cultural differences and be attuned to their students' interests and outlook.

Religion: People do not worship the same way, while some do not worship at all. Teachers should familiarize themselves with the ways religious tradition and requirements impact their students' behaviours.

Language: Language is a structure of words and symbols used to communicate with other communities. No one hardly speak every language, instead one is expected to make

accommodations for those who speak different languages so that language barrier should not be education barrier.

Economic: This is economic status originating from cultural background. Economic pressures can lead to classroom stress. Economic situation of a student's family can greatly impact on her learning.

Value: It is a shared system used by members of a society to define and evaluate the standard of good or pleasant, right or wrong. Example, in the West, people are individualistic and belief on individual achievement while in the East, there is a strong belief on welcoming collaborations.

Importance of Diversity in School

It is important to encourage diversity in schools because;

It fosters acceptance among students with different background and makes them easily embrace differences from themselves and among others.

Diversity helps students learn about other languages and culture, thereby making them intercultural sensitive.

It prepares students to thrive in an exponentially growing society and enables them adapt to the evolving world.

Having diverse classroom helps develops tolerance and a greater sense of security when in the environment with other foreign cultures present.

Diversity necessitates culturally responsive approach to teaching which helps students, as it widens their scope of knowledge.

Benefits of Teaching Culture in Classroom

Cultural awareness is crucial in the classroom and the benefits it can have on the students now and in the long-term are enormous. Thus, Drexel University of Education (2001) highlights the benefits to include the following:

Teaching culture exposes students to various culture and social groups, channeling them to become better citizens in their communities.

Students become more empathic and are prevented from developing prejudice later in life. They learn to empathize with people different from themselves since they are more aware of the experiences someone of a different race or cultural group may face.

Students gain better understanding of the lesson. When students work and learn with people from variety of background and culture, they gain more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. They use their own point of view to contribute in a diverse work environment and attain greater comprehension on the topic by taking in different points of view.

Students become more open-minded; exposes students to a diverse range of opinion, thoughts and cultural background and this encourages them to be more open minded in life.

Students feel more confident: Students who learn about different cultures during their education feel more comfortable with differences in culture. This allows them to interact on a wide range of social groups with a feeling of confidence in themselves and others.

Students are better prepared for a diverse work place. The rise of globalization has facilitated working with people from different culture and social groups. Exposing students to cultural awareness in the classroom sets them up to flourish in the work place in future.

Influence of Culture/Diversity on Teaching and Learning

There are many ways culture affects learning both in and outside the classroom. Lenzerini (2014) writes that cultural influence on student's learning include:

Learning Attitude: Cultural upbringing has some tremendous influence on students' learning. It influences their perception, attitudes and behaviours in the classroom.

Student-Teacher Relationship: Student-teacher relationship differs across culture. Some cultures may have very formal structure for student-teacher relationship while others adopt informal relationship between teachers and students and amongst students themselves.

Classroom Engagement: Blamed of cultural factors influence how students engage in class activities. For example, students from poor economic and impoverished cultural background may be less likely to speak in class and may

struggle with focus and participation in school work and other activities.

Problem Solving: Giving the same set of information about a problem, students from different cultural background are likely to have wide range of solutions and approaches to it. The teacher's job is to validate the various approaches and help them understand that there are multiple ways to solve a problem.

Handling Conflict: Cultural responses to conflict vary significantly. Some cultures teach to avoid conflict at all cost whereas other cultures see conflict as a positive and constructive exercise. It is vital for the teachers to be aware of these differences so that they can mediate effectively between conflicting parties or individuals in the class.

Academic Performance: Socio-economic factors originating from cultural background can influence student's performance in the classroom. Studies have shown that malnourished children from poor economic background struggle to retain information, so they are more likely to fall behind in academics. Some may not afford adequate and proper school materials; causing them to struggle with assignments, class work and home works. This influences their academic performances in many ways. More so, studies have shown that there is a connection between poverty level a student grows up with, and academic achievement and language. Poverty often creates a developmental burden that manifests in a word gap.

Managing Diversity in the Classroom

There are several ways teachers can ensure that both the class environment and curriculum are responsive to the increasing cultural diversity. Those strategies will encourage students' cultural awareness, enhancing each student's sense of identity and foster inclusion in the classroom. This could be achieved through the following ways as outlined by Philips (1988).

Know Your Student: Promoting cultural awareness in the classroom starts with the teacher understanding individual student. Take time to learn about each student's cultural background and learning styles. Demonstrating a genuine interest in learning about each student and their culture will help establish trust and form a bond with them such that they feel valued. When students feel appreciated by and conformable with the teacher, there is better chance they will feel comfortable too with their peers, making an inclusive classroom.

Maintain Consistent Communication: Teacher should maintain on-going communication in the class all through, by scheduling meetings with students to check how accessible the classroom is to everyone. During meetings, students can express whether they feel included in the class culture. This will help identify issues and ways to improve experiences, discuss progresses and offer guidance on individual needs.

Acknowledge and Respect Every Student: Teachers should keep open dialogue among students. Learning how to talk about others culture in a respectful way is essential for success in and outside classroom. Encourage students to learn about their diverse background, how to research and also learn about their own ethnic and cultural background. This will allow

them to better understand their peers. They can make presentations about their family traditions and culture. This will allow them understand their own culture as well as the differences with those of their peers.

Practice Cultural Sensitivity: Teachers should be sensitive to every student's culture, belief and language. Remain sensitive to differences, consider what cultural differences might be influencing their study habits; from learning styles to language; using them to adjust teaching methods or to provide accommodation. This will give every student the space to learn in their own way and feel included.

Incorporate Diversity in the Lesson Plan: Express interest in diversity. Teacher should ensure that diversity is represented in the actual lesson plan. Reflect culturally inclusive dimensions by broadening the lesson, so as to capture world in its whole. Ask students to make stories and relate experiences to the lesson you are teaching. It is easier to promote cultural awareness within the lesson when there is a real example for students to relate to. This will ensure that students don't feel as if their culture is unimportant or that their contributions are not wanted.

Give Students Freedom and Flexibility: Most valuable lessons are often learned through students' own experiences. Giving the students some freedom in the course encourages them. They should be allowed to read and present their own materials that relate to the fundamental lesson; so that they can approach the topic from their perspective. In this, the teacher can act as a facilitator and encourages conversation and healthy debate between diverse opinions. Group

assignments are also another way to expose students to diverse perspective, allowing them to work together to explore and solve problems.

Maintain High Expectation for all Students: For all students to excel, teacher should maintain the same expectation for all of them, though he can make special accommodation for those who may need special attention, treating them at their own pace.

Multicultural Education

Nigeria has always been a multicultural country. As a result, its education system is made up of students from a variety of background, bringing varieties of culture; language and perspectives to the classroom. Since our world is multicultural, children need to experience the diversities outside their immediate environment. It is important for people of different cultures to value education and for education system to value all cultures. Femi (2018) writes that children from different cultures need to make some behavioural adjustments to meet the expectations of the school. Thus early childhood education include the development of positive attitudes in young children by teaching them to learn about and promoting the various cultures represented among the children in the class. If children are to know about minority group, they must be taught about them in the same way they are taught about majority group; otherwise, they can grow to adulthood unaware of and insensitive to the experiences of other cultural groups, Gomez (1991). Hence, teachers should know that a multicultural programme that focuses on the presentation of

other cultures but at the same time, allow children to be aware of the nature and uniqueness of their own culture is necessary.

Children who are taught to appreciate and understand their own culture should learn to understand others' culture in the process, in order to promote recognition, understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity and individual uniqueness. Children's cultural diversity has to be considered so as to be aware of their biases. It requires learning about the diversities, devoting much effort to changing oppressive ways where culturally and racially differences exist in the society at large. Multicultural education emphasizes how other cultures can be similar and yet different. Therefore, our diversity has to be nurtured. Nurturing diversity means making multicultural education a process of action through which we can achieve clarity in our society. Multicultural programme focuses on the presentation of other cultures but at the same time, allow children to be aware of the nature and uniqueness of their own culture. In other words, multicultural education does not focus on other cultures to the exclusion of the cultures represented in the class. Therefore, Nigeria as a multicultural nation with more than 250 languages and several ethnic groups must ensure and encourage a positive balance through multicultural education.

What is Multicultural Education?

Multicultural education is a concept built on the ideas of freedom, justice, equality, equity and human dignity. It affirms on need to prepare students for their responsibilities in an interdependent world. It recognizes the role schools can play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a

democratic and multicultural society. Multicultural education values cultural differences and challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of democratic principles of social justices. It is implemented to establish equitable educational opportunities for the students; an ongoing process of helping students succeeds in their academic and personal lives.

Goals of Multicultural Education

According to Banks (1997) goals of multicultural education include:

teach children about other groups; help children become accustomed to the idea that there are many life styles, languages, cultures and points of views; that there are other cultures that exist in distinct ways that reflect differences from the dominant culture.

attach positive feelings to multicultural experiences so that each child will feel included and valued; and will be friendly and respectful towards people from other ethnic and cultural groups.

promote everyone's culture in the children development of a multicultural perspective.

promote positive characteristics to enable a child accept the uniqueness of others.

Merits of Multicultural Education

It helps students develops a positive self-concept by providing knowledge about the histories and contributions of the diverse groups. Children discover that all groups have made significant contributions to civilization.

It prepares students to work actively towards developing structural tolerance in religion, racism, sexism and other issues.

It places students at the centre of the teaching and learning process.

It offers all students equality and equity; equitable educational opportunities.

It encourages students to critique the society in the interest of social justice.

It fosters equality, justices and equity.

It establishes the reality of philosophical ideals in classroom environment.

Therefore, there is need to integrate and develops a multicultural perspective by focusing on activities that highlight the similarities and differences of all children's lives. Teachers, administrators and school leader should play important role in ensuring incorporation of multicultural education by selecting and managing policies, curriculum and teaching style that will support students to develop positive perspective of cultures of other peers through incorporation of culturally responsive practices.

Teaching with Multicultural Perspective

Since we have a multitude of culture in our country, it is impractical, perhaps impossible to teach about all of them. The challenge of the teacher is to adopt an effective multicultural perspective strategy by means of which all learners can learn to accept others and their views. In our increasing diverse and multicultural society, it is very important for teachers to explore culturally responsive strategies in the classroom, whether in primary, secondary or institutions of higher learning. Teaching with multicultural perspective means teachers promoting equal learning opportunities for students of all races, ethnicities and other different background as strategies to achieve multicultural classroom.

Guidelines on How to Cultivate Multicultural Perspective

Amal (2021) writes on ways to bring equality to work, as a guide to cultivating multi-cultural perspectives.

Creating an Inclusive Classroom: Individual students bring different cultural traditions into class interactions. Teachers should create inclusive classroom where students of all background will feel represented and welcomed. In the class, students should be taught to understand and process ideas based on their cultural upbringing.

Adaption of Lesson Plan: It means that teachers will need to adapt lesson plans for multicultural classrooms by presenting materials and activities that enable students learn the similarities of all individuals.

Such activities provide students with feeling of group identity and introduces them to varieties of cultures represented in the class. Lesson plans could be geared towards addressing social and school-based inequalities that create experiences of marginalized people. Students can be taught to recognize and discuss real problems from others. Although instructions often rely on the content of specific curriculum, yet teachers can still infuse multicultural elements into every instruction; from project assignments to lessons they teach in the class.

Selection of Teaching Styles: Teachers can use different teaching methods to promote multicultural classroom. They should ensure incorporation of multicultural activities by selecting teaching styles that will support students to develop positive perspectives of culture of other peers through culturally responsive practices. An example is using games to encourage students to share. Another is the use of drama method in teaching and using multicultural greetings most of the times to benefit diverse student's population.

Promotion of Positive Self Concept: Teachers should accept the real fact that they, like other members of the society, are inevitably influenced by some negative stereotypes and one-sided view that exist among various groups, therefore change the attitude by accepting all children as they received them.

Be Aware of Biases: Teachers should understand that they are dealing with students from many

backgrounds that may have biases against one another for cultural, racial, ethnic or religious reasons. Teachers must consider children's cultural identities and be aware of their biases. This is because teachers may be open minded and want to deliver equitable instruction, while students may have underlying biases that teachers may not be aware of. Teachers need to discover the potential biases and cultivate safe and productive learning environment. They should work hard towards dissipating such biases. These are the ways teachers can promote multiculturalism in the classroom.

Multicultural Classroom Activities

A multicultural classroom refers to any classroom where teachers incorporate the histories, texts, values, beliefs and perspectives of people from different cultural background. The notion is that one teaching modality fits all is longer effective. In order to welcome and embrace diversities in classrooms, the multicultural activities are introduced so as to avoid discrimination and maintain social justices. Because our classrooms are filled with a diverse student population, teachers can no longer educate their students with a "one-size-fit-all model". Therefore, in today's society, teaching for change is emphasized through incorporation of various cultural activities in the classroom. When introducing and implementing multicultural classroom activities, be sure to increase awareness of global issues, promote inclusiveness and eliminate prejudicial behaviours. Activities must be chosen on the basis of relatedness and appropriateness. All

activities should be accompanied by commentaries that explain their cultural contexts.

Examples of Multicultural Classroom Activities Include:

Cultural Festival: Celebrate cultural diversities through cultural dresses, meals, and various shows.

Cultural Arts: Allow students to create cultural diverse art activities; various artistic symbols, investigate their meanings and origins. They should design, illustrate and display their creations throughout the classroom.

Culture Corner: Create a library area in your classroom with books from your students' cultures and backgrounds.

Multicultural Day: Bring in guest speakers. Students set up areas to discuss all they have learned and share amongst themselves and school community.

Excursions & Field-Trips: Travel around diverse communities to learn about their culture, customs and tradition. Students can report about their observations.

Playful Participation: Children love to play no matter their age. The language of the play should transcend cultural boundaries, regardless of one's native tongue. While students play, they are also learning about how children from other countries enjoy their play time.

Holidays: Another way to educate students on multiculturalism is to go on holidays, to observe the different traditional holidays from diverse communities. With thus, each student can create a

presentation that includes their experiences on how their own tribe celebrates a particular holiday.

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