

MULTICULTURALISM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Simona Serafimovska

Faculty of Philology, University “Goce Delcev”-Stip, Republic of North Macedonia,
simona.serafimovska@ugd.edu.mk

Abstract: Multiculturalism in English language teaching is a global trend, both in the developed and in the developing countries, especially those that are out of the English-speaking area. This paper presents certain contemporary trends on multiculturalism in the student environment. It is important for diverse English language learners (ELLs) to feel heard and understood in their classrooms. The findings indicate that schools that implement rich multicultural education in their classrooms positively benefit ELL students psychologically, socially, and academically. Multicultural education has one important message to give to all the students it serves, and it is that regardless of their differences in gender, social class, ethnicity, race, etc., they all deserve an equal opportunity to attain an equal education. Different approaches in the multicultural English teaching classes, the conditions in the multicultural study of the English language and the possible redesign of the multicultural curriculum in the study of the English language are basic for the correct interpretation and practice of multiculturalism in the study of the English language.

Keywords: education, multiculturalism, redesign of curricula, English language.

1. INTRODUCTION

Multicultural education refers to any form of education or teaching that include the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds. At the classroom level, for example, teachers may modify or include lessons to reflect the cultural diversity of the students in a particular class (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. Multiculturalism in a best view at a student classroom level

In many cases, “culture” is defined in the full possible sense, encompassing race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation.

In general, multicultural education is predicated on the principle of educational equity for all students, regardless of culture, and it strives to remove barriers to educational opportunities and success for students from different cultural backgrounds. In practice, educators may modify or eliminate educational policies, programs, materials, lessons, and instructional practices that are either discriminatory toward or insufficiently inclusive of diverse cultural perspectives. Multicultural education also assumes that the ways in which students learn and think are deeply influenced by their cultural identity and heritage, and that to teach culturally diverse students effectively requires educational approaches that value and recognize their cultural backgrounds (Jankova Alagjozovska, 2018)). In this way, multicultural education aims to improve the learning and success of all students, particularly students from cultural groups that have been historically underrepresented or that suffer from lower educational achievement and attainment.

However, I would like to emphasize that the multicultural education is not a task to be done or even an end goal to be accomplished. Instead, it is an approach to education that aims to include all students, promote learning of other cultures, and teach healthy social skills in a multicultural setting. We may refer to the multicultural education as the present and future of education due to findings of many researchers. Multicultural classrooms are a melting pot of learning. In multicultural teaching class-rooms rather than a passive, one-way learning from teacher to student, there is a brainstorming of ideas, stories, and experiences that enrich the educational experience in ways that are impossible in monocultural classes (Dias, 2019).

2. DIFFERENT APPROACHES IN THE MULTICULTURAL ELT LECTURES

Enlightening, multicultural education may entail the use of texts, materials, references, and historical examples that are understandable to students from different cultural backgrounds or that reflect their particular cultural experience—such as teaching students about historical figures who were female, disabled, or gay (a less common practice in past decades). Since schools in the United States have traditionally used texts, learning materials, and cultural examples that commonly—or even exclusively—reflect an American or Eurocentric point of view, other cultural perspectives are often absent. Hence, some students—such as recently arrived immigrants or students of color, for example—may be placed at an educational disadvantage due to cultural or linguistic obstacles that have been overlooked or ignored (Dang and Ruiter, 2005).

The following are a few typical ways in which multicultural education may occur in schools:

- Learning content: Texts and learning materials may include multiple cultural perspectives and references. For instance, a lesson on colonialism in North America might direct different cultural perspectives, such as those of the European settlers, indigenous Americans, and African slaves.
- Student cultures: Teachers and other educators may learn about the cultural backgrounds of students in a school, and then intentionally include learning experiences and content relevant to their personal cultural perspectives and heritage (Dirven and Radden, 2004)). Students may also be encouraged to learn about the cultural backgrounds of other students in a class, and students from different cultures may be given opportunities to discuss and share their cultural experiences.
- Critical analysis: Educators may intentionally scrutinize learning materials to identify potentially prejudicial or biased material. Both educators and students might analyze their own cultural assumptions, and then discuss how learning materials, teaching practices, or schools policies reflect cultural bias, and how they could be changed to eliminate bias.
- Resource allocation: Multicultural education is generally predicated on the principle of equity-i.e., that the allocation and distribution of educational resources, programs, and learning experiences should be based on need and fairness, rather than strict equality. For instance, students who are not proficient in the English language may learn in bilingual settings and read bilingual texts, and they may receive comparatively more instructional support than their English-speaking peers so that they do not fall behind academically or drop out of school due to language limitations.

3. SIGNIFICANCES IN MULTICULTURAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Identifying students' learning problems means a necessary step before embracing strategies for their specific needs. The fact that the group of participants proved to have pronunciation problems, most of them caused by language interferences, requires instructors to pay attention to the improvement of their pronunciation skills. Thus, their focus should be on the practice of the English sound system, the word and sentence stress, the intonation and rhythm of the language. In the case of the speakers of non-Latin script languages, personalized instruction can be of a great help, too. In addition, phonetics and phonology practice exercises should be supplemented by activities based on listening to authentic materials because they expose learners to various native speakers (Kustati et al., 2020).

Furthermore, students' difficulties with English grammar and vocabulary, revealed by the language errors they made during the group discussion, need special attention. For example with engineering students, it would be more effective for their teachers to consolidate their basic knowledge about vocabulary and grammar (the forms and uses of tenses, subject – verb agreement, word order etc.) before dealing with technical and other specialized texts which imply a higher degree of linguistic competence (McAllister and Irvine, 2008). Apart from textbooks, students should be encouraged to read different books and online sources on a variety of subjects (magazines, newspapers, blogs, essays etc.). Developing dictionary skills, playing word games (crossword puzzles, anagrams, Scrabble etc.), writing a journal and performing other attractive reading activities may also prove to be useful strategies for building students' vocabulary. It is also through reading that students can learn complex grammatical structures and develop a good writing style.

On the other hand, students' positive perceptions of the instructional process can indicate good teaching and learning practices that must be continued in the classroom. Instructors may satisfy learners' preference for motivating classroom experiences by focusing their English classes on the communicative teaching approach and its advantages (students' interaction with one another, learners' engagement in the learning process, development of all language skills in various situations etc.). What is also important is that such classes help international learners to overcome the language barrier and improve their communication skills (Auqilar, 2001). Obviously students' satisfaction with collaborative learning based on group and teamwork activities represents a good opportunity to encourage interpersonal relationships.

An English class designed to meet culturally diverse students' needs and interests should also include discussions about the customs and traditions of their countries of origin. Topics such as famous national personalities, contributions of a certain country to the world culture, national holidays and cultural differences etc. have the potential to develop students' intercultural sensitivity, which is a prerequisite for genuine interaction within a multiethnic group. Moreover, extracurricular activities organized systematically and efficiently can complete the efforts of the instructor who is willing to develop positive attitudes and values in globalized classrooms. In this way, educators may enable international students to evolve from an ethnocentric consciousness to an ethnorelative one which involves openness towards the other and appreciation of cultural differences (Presadă and Badea, 2018).

4. POSSIBLE REDESIGNS OF THE MULTICULTURAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

Modern trends of intensive migration of different populations from different parts around the world require quality reform of multicultural education of the English language at different levels..

English language multicultural education evolved out of the Civil Rights Movement in the World. Although it began with the African-American community, the movement soon expanded to include other cultural groups who were subject to discrimination. In the recent years, as student populations have grown more diverse, multicultural approaches to education are increasingly being used in public schools (Figure 2).

The following are few main ways in which multicultural education may intersect with efforts to improve schools:

Curriculum design: In teaching materials and learning experiences, the backgrounds and perspectives of previously excluded subcultures are increasingly being represented in school curriculum (Mastruserio, 2015). In addition, there are now educational programs, such as ethnic and gender studies, that focus on specific cultural groups, and school learning experiences and social-justice programs may also encourage students to investigate and address cultural bias

in their school or community.

Student instruction: The way that educators teach is also changing to accommodate increasing diversity in public schools (Jankova Alagjozovska, 2018)). For instance, students who are not proficient in English are increasingly being moved into regular classes (rather than being taught in separate classes), where they may receive specialized assistance, but where they learn the same material as their peers.

Learning assessment: Proponents of multicultural education tend to argue that “one-size-fits-all” approaches to assessing student learning could disadvantage students from different cultural backgrounds—e.g., when students are not fluent in the language used on a test, when assessment questions are phrased in a way that could be misinterpreted by students (because the students are unfamiliar with English slang, customs, or cultural references), or when a testing situation does not make sufficient accommodations for students with disabilities. One alternative to standardized tests, for example, is to measure student learning progress using a wider variety of assessment options, such as teacher-created tests, oral presentations, and various demonstrations of learning that give students more opportunities to show what they have learned.

Teacher education: Multicultural education has also affected teachers' preparation. At the beginning of the 1980s, accrediting organizations and state departments of education started requiring teacher-education programs to include multicultural coursework and training. For instance particular education organizations (schools and Universities) undertook ambitious efforts to train teachers in multicultural education and English as a second language (Grant and Chapman, 2008).



Fig. 3. Multicultural group of students studying parts of learning material in a library

School staff: Districts and schools are also being more intentional or proactive about hiring educators of color from diverse cultural backgrounds. While proponents of multicultural education would not claim that teachers of color are more skilled than other teachers, they are likely to argue that staffing decisions reflect a school's fundamental values and that students will benefit from having educators and role models from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds.

Legislative and legal issues: The rise of multicultural education has also coincided with a number of legislative and court actions. Such actions among many others, increased the visibility of multicultural education and led to the widespread adoption of more multicultural approaches to education and have also had a major effect on multicultural education in schools (Bialik et al., 2018).

5. CONCLUSIONS

First of all, multiculturalism is an advanced process in ELT at university conditions because there we really meet students from different nationalities, social categories, cultural traditions, ethnological and different habits. Their common goal is collegiality, multiethnicity and to master the English language in their professional work.

When students enter in an intercultural classroom, the teachers must guide their students and describe the environment, and when this happens then the learning is learner-centered, engaging, interactive, participative and collaborative. If teachers become aware that language skills and knowledge need to be connected to the multicultural competence, students will feel that energy also and will show much better results. That is the reason why multicultural competence is essential to achieve goals on international level by implementing intercultural competence in the educational process a big cultural awareness can be acquired. A multicultural classroom consists of students from different cultures which are supposed to form a diverse learning environment. In order to achieve a relaxing environment the teacher should have skills, creativity and knowledge. However, teachers should not be blamed if they have lack knowledge in this field because it is not known whether they have access to training programs of intercultural communication and multiculturalism.

REFERENCES

- Aguilar, M. J. C. (2001). Do we like them? Empathy and Multicultural Aspects in Second Language Learning. In Teaching English in a Spanish Setting. Valencia: Universitat de Valencia.
- Bialik, K., Scheller, A. and Walker, K. (2018). 6 facts about English language learners in U.S. public schools. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/25/6-facts-about-englishlanguage-learners-in-u-s-public-schools/>
- Dang, P. and Ruiter, R. (2005). Highway to E.S.L.: A User-Friendly Guide to Teaching English as a Second Language. Lincoln, NE: iUniverse Inc.
- Dias, D., (2019). Effects of Multicultural Education on English Language Learners. Capstone Projects and Master's Theses Capstone Projects and Master's Theses, California State University, Monterey Bay, 32 p.
- Dirven, R., and Radden, G. (2004). The Cognitive Basis of Language. U R. Dirven, M. Verspoor Cognitive Exploration of Language and Linguistics (1- 23), Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company

- Grant, C. A., & Chapman, T. K. (2008). *History of Multicultural Education: Vol. 6. Teachers and Teacher Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Jankova Alagjozovska, N. (2018). Teaching English in a multicultural classroom. *Knowledge International Journal*, 26(2), pp. 609-613.
- Kustati, M., Qismullah Yusuf , Y., Hallen, Al-Azmi, H., and Sermal., (2020). EFL Teachers' Attitudes towards Language Learners: A Case of Multicultural Classrooms. *International Journal of Instruction*, Vol.13, No.1, pp 353.-370.
- Mastruserio, R. K. (2015). *Approaches to Inclusive English Classes. A Teacher's Handbook for Content – Based Instruction*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- McAllister, G., & Irvine, J. J. (2008). Cross-Cultural Competency and Multicultural Teacher Education. In *History of Multicultural Education: Vol. 6. Teachers and Teacher Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Presadă, D. and Badea, M., (2018). Teaching English in Culturally Diverse Classrooms: A Case Study - Chapter 2. In: *Promoting Ethnic Diversity and Multiculturalism in Higher Education*, IGI Global Publisher, Pennsylvania, USA. pp. 25-39.