

Multicultural Education Integration in Teacher Training Programs: Towards Affirming Diversity in Morocco

El Mustapha Imouri¹
University of Mohamed V, Rabat, Morocco

ABSTRACT

In a diverse Moroccan environment where groups, ethnicities, languages, religions, people of color, migrants, refugees, and different identities like LGBTQs coexist, multicultural education as a framework and as a pedagogical approach to diversity has become mandatory. The present study reports about an experience at Mohammed V University in Rabat where a multicultural education course was introduced into the curriculum of the teacher training MA Program. The study investigates the feedback of three cohorts of teachers who benefited from the program. Their responses focus on the influence of multicultural education on their teaching practices in diverse contexts. Three research questions have been used, namely (i) what are the teachers' attitudes towards the course of multicultural education? (ii) to what extent has the course content influenced their teaching practices in dealing with students from different groups? And (iii) what are their opinions about their pedagogics after taking the course? The study adopts a qualitative approach making use of semi-structured interviews with 18 respondents. The content analysis and data coding process have also classified the themes in relation to the research questions. The findings have disclosed that the course content has to a large extent impacted the teachers' attitudes and practices towards the different identities of their students. They have also yielded very positive views about multicultural education course. The results have stressed the fact that the program should engage students more in diverse experiences and multicultural activities.

KEYWORDS: Diversity, Multicultural Education, Morocco, Teacher Training.

The history of multiculturalism in Morocco has noticed fundamental changes ever since the 19th century to the present time. The multicultural views of Moroccans can be seen from two different phases. The first one is the period before colonization and the second phase is after independence. These two phases have really displayed discrepant understandings of multicultural issues and dimensions in Morocco. Though Moroccan diversity dates back to long times ago, the colonial invasion of Morocco could be considered an intercultural contact between foreign and local cultures- a contact in which one is imposing his culture, and the other is resisting it. The encounter between the imperial powers and Moroccans during the 19th century is described by Moroccan scholars, namely Sabila (2005), Himer (2005), and Chikh (2003) as 'a shock of modernity' since it pushed the state at that time to take certain measures to modernize different sectors, including education and trade. During the 19th century, the religious scholars of Morocco were against exchanging ideas, education, trade, etc. with people from the West. In this connection, Bensaid (2006) cited that "the appearance of a small group of traders who theorized for values and traditions alien to the Moroccan society. . . led to a large

¹ Corresponding Author E-mail: e.imouri@um5s.net.ma / imourimustapha@gmail.com

criticism and condemnation from Muslim scholars” (p, 52). This rejection of the Western traditions and values accentuated the misunderstanding and created more clashes between the Moroccans and the Europeans.

However, the coming of the European colonizer to Morocco managed to hybridize the Moroccan views towards people from other cultures. After independence, many Moroccans had access to modern education/ schooling, which has led to a change in the paradigm of Moroccan view of the ‘Other’ in general. Due to such mode of life, some traditional social norms no longer prevail in Morocco, in Chikh’s (2003) words, “for they are lost in the society of modernity” (p. 33). Consequently, lots of changes have taken place within the Moroccan society, and people should be educated accordingly to know how to react in contexts that are characterized by difference, diversity and multiculturalism. This article argues that despite the advancement and reform in the Moroccan educational system, teaching multicultural education is still a big issue and challenge that requires a daring elite to integrate it into the curriculum. Many issues are taking place in Moroccan schools and colleges because of the absence of trainings in multicultural education either at the level of content or pedagogy.

In an environment where diverse ethnicities, languages, religions, people of colour and different identities like LGBTQs coexist, multicultural education becomes mandatory (Gunay, 2014; Kadioglu, 2014). Schools should no longer marginalize the minorities. Within pluralistic contexts, teaching has been a very challenging enterprise because of the diversity that characterizes students, schools and teachers. We no longer live in a monocultural environment; media, globalization, emigration, study abroad programs and tourism have made our world so small like a mall that is culturally diverse. Thus, we no more talk about monocultural contexts, but rather about multicultural ones. That’s why, education has become more challenging and demanding and sometimes frustrating not only for teachers but for students and curriculum developers as well. Banks (2006) asserted that “ethnic content is needed by all students to help them to understand themselves and the social world in which they live. It can help students to broaden their understanding and concept of what it means to be human and enable them to better understand their own cultures and lifestyles” (p. 63). Teachers’ ethnicities are not representative of students’ identities. This leads to the fact that the teachers’ lessons do not usually reflect the students’ diversity unless they integrate it within the content.

Amongst the reasons that make education more challenging is the emergence and the appearance of culturally diverse districts and hence culturally diverse schools and classrooms. This fact brings about new changes concerning the teachers’ roles as well as the educational practices. That is to say, in the midst of a culturally diverse setting, cases of discrimination, injustice, harassment, racism and unequal educational opportunities may emerge and disrupt the teaching/ learning process. Therefore, our educational practices have to take into consideration these changes and cope with these new situations so as to avoid such cases of racism and injustice in our education.

Classrooms are likely to have students with challenges², individual differences, different races, sexual identities, faiths, etc. Students also bring with them diverse historical, cultural and economic backgrounds that shape the way they behave at school. Being aware and knowledgeable about the students’ background will affect the learning outcomes of the students positively. Integrating a multicultural education course into the curriculum will serve the community to absorb major challenges of cultural diversity. Gollnick and Chinn (2017) defined multicultural education as “an educational construct in which students’ cultures are integrated into the curriculum, instruction, classroom and school environment. It supports and extends the concepts of culture, diversity, equality, social justice, and democracy into the school setting . . . that is multicultural” (p. 4). The need for multicultural content in our colleges grows faster. Both teachers and students are in need of multicultural education more than ever before.

² Considering the philosophy of multicultural education, the term ‘challenges’ is used to substitute other expressions used to address people with ‘special needs.’

Nwachukwu (2010) argued that

the need for multicultural education arises from the stress of cross-cultural encounters. Humans do not exist in isolated culturally homogeneous units any more. We live in a global age, where barriers of race, ethnicity, distance, and civilization are continuously crumbling. How we relate to one another in this global age, however, is often determined by the beliefs and ideas that we hold about the groups or individuals who are different from us. (p. 43)

The reality of our world stipulates that the integration of a multicultural course into the curriculum will enable students to learn, communicate, travel, work, etc. in a context that is multicultural. Multicultural education courses remain important solutions for Moroccan schools and colleges to promote mutual understanding and fighting the impact of the nineteenth century's rejection of everything coming from abroad. As a matter of fact, going over the literature tackling the issue of multiculturalism in Morocco during the 19th century, one can only encourage research in this field.

Recently, Morocco has taken a caring decision that shows its multicultural pluralism after welcoming the integration of refugees and immigrants within its educational system. Morocco has even started rectifying some books that contain certain issues, which do not reflect the multicultural dimensions of the curriculum. Though Morocco has taken some procedures to integrate different minorities, identities and cultures in the educational programs and the integration of cultural diversity into school curriculum, it is believed that multicultural integration should be at the heart of teacher training programs within universities in Morocco. Research on this domain is still very rare if not absent as far as the integration of the multicultural education course in the Moroccan university is concerned.

Statement of the Problem

In Morocco, teachers in higher education have more freedom now to integrate new contents into the curriculum thanks to the flexibility of the modular system. Cultural studies theorists have been calling for creating the modular system ever since its inception in the 50s of the 20th century so as to give more chances to students to learn new and diverse courses that could not be offered by the mainstream curriculum. Since some school programs could not overcome smoothly the impact of the cultural clash of the 19th century, it is wise enough to think of integrating multicultural education within higher education in Morocco.

The course of multicultural education has been ignored in Moroccan universities though its contents can serve students to face the 21st century issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, LGBTQ and other challenges. The concerns of the students who identify themselves with the aforementioned identities are still overlooked by the content courses taught in Moroccan higher education. Students with different identities find it hard in fact to identify themselves with the mainstream academic discourse. Moreover, they are not engaged in decision making of what they have to study at the university. Therefore, this study aims at giving chance to Moroccan MA students at Mohamed V University to express their views about integrating multicultural education course in the Master Program of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language. The paramount objective of this study is to get the feedback of Moroccan students' views about integrating multicultural education course within universities in Morocco. The second objective is to provide university professors with a background research on Morocco if they intend to implement the course within their colleges.

Research Questions

This study has addressed the following questions:

RQ 1: What are the teachers' attitudes towards the course of multicultural education?

RQ 2: To what extent has the course content influenced their teaching practices in dealing with students from different groups?

RQ 3: What are their opinions about their pedagogics after taking the course?

Method

The Sampling Process

Participants in the present study were 18 Moroccan students from the English Department at the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences of Mohamed V University in Rabat. They were all enrolled in the Master Program of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language. The sample included 12 males and 6 females from three cohorts who attended the course of multicultural education for the whole semester at Mohamed V University.

This study has used "purposeful sampling" in the selection of the sample. The sampling is purposeful to target the issue of integrating multicultural contents into the curriculum. According to Creswell (2012), purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest.

The Instrument

To collect qualitative data from the participants, the study has used the semi-structured interview, which is considered one of the best instruments to get information and feedback from the informants on topics like the one under study. Since this study investigates the early stages of integrating multicultural education into the curriculum, this method is used during both the early and late stages of exploring the research domain. Rubin and Rubin (2005) argued that this method offers a balance between the flexibility of an open-ended interview and the focus of a structured survey. They say that the semi-structured interview is a more flexible version of the structured interview as "it allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 88). It is thus an endeavor to balance the organization and framework of the structured approach with the spontaneity and flexibility of the unstructured interview. (Salmons, 2016, p. 133).

The interview procedure was carried out through two main phases. The first one intended to thank the participants for their consent to collaborate and contribute to the aims of the research. To help participants feel comfortable, the interview started with warm-up questions like identifying and introducing each other. In the second phase, questions were more focused so as to address the main concern of the study. For instance, participants responded to questions such as: "what are your perceptions towards integrating multicultural education as an MA course in Med V University?", "to what extent are you satisfied with the course contents?", "what are your views of the professor's pedagogics (student/teacher centered, rapport & activities)?", "To what extent has the course met your expectations?", etc. The interviews were very flexible and allowed enough time to respond to each question.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, qualitative content analysis has been used to summarize and examine the participants' responses. The responses were coded and classified in a thematic manner.

Result

This section presents the findings for each research question.

Research Question 1: What are the teachers' attitudes towards the course of multicultural education?

The majority of this study's respondents voiced clearly that before the beginning of the multicultural education course, they have different conceptions of the course that were open to vagueness. Most of them have never even heard of such a content course. This response remains a typical sample of many respondents: "at the beginning, I had no idea about the concept, I thought it will be about culture: a lot of booklets full of events, dates and names to be memorized! Then, I discovered a wonderful subject course" (interviewee 8). Concerning the integration of multicultural education course, all the 18 respondents agree unanimously that it is a fruitful experience. "Integrating the course of multicultural education was one of the best courses in our MA course and it should have been integrated in undergraduate studies too" (interviewee 2). "I find it very necessary to integrate such course in Med V University and why not all the universities" (interviewee 3). "All these reasons and others make the integration of the multicultural education a must, not only as an MA course in Med V University, but in every Moroccan university and at all levels as well" (interviewee 9). In fact, students expressed the urgent need of integrating the course of multicultural education into the universities' curriculum. According to interviewee 10, "the course is much needed in MA programs so that students are exposed to new perspectives on education, which is certainly lacking in the undergraduate levels. The need is even urgent with regards to the MA programs that tackle global issues and prepare the candidates to engage in multicultural situations."

As to their attitudes towards the course, the respondents have expressed positive views. As said by a respondent, "multicultural education course functions more potentially as an immersive element which, too often, makes student's views grow critical and broadened" (interviewee 1). Another one said that "from multicultural education course, I learned unconsciously that marks do not matter, what matters is being able to self-transform into a global citizen" (interviewee 2). Almost the same view articulated by another respondent, saying that "the course has helped me think outside the box (interviewee 7).

Research Question 2: To what extent has the course content influenced their teaching practices in dealing with students from different groups?

All respondents have plainly demonstrated their total satisfaction with the contents of the multicultural education course. For example, interviewee 1 has cited that "all the topics that were addressed in this course were very important to me because it made me aware of the world I live in. I am very satisfied that we addressed such issues." The responses show that all students were very happy with the contents as the course helped them develop critical views towards the addressed issues. For interviewee 4, "the references used to teach this course were very up to date, targeting most multicultural issues confronted within or outside classrooms and those persistent in the curriculum. These references illustrated these issues with real life examples and presented very critical questions for reflection." Many examples form students' feedback

confirm that the course has met their expectations to the extent that multicultural education has impacted their careers positively. Amongst the respondents, one of them has asserted that,

the course contents were extremely helpful especially the reading material that we were assigned. For me, the course was oriented towards making sure that we were developing as individuals rather than focusing on the process of learning new terminology for a test and later dropping them. This is something that made me really satisfied because I feel that the outcome of this course will be everlasting in my teaching career. (Interviewee 6)

Research Question 3: What are their views about their pedagogics after taking the course?

Their perceptions of their pedagogy after taking the course have presented a discrepancy between two groups. The first group includes the opinions of 4 interviewees. The second group is composed of the views of 14 interviewees. Concerning the issue of being student or teacher centered, the first group of 4 interviewees expressed their lack of satisfaction with the way they approached the delivery of the course. They mentioned that the act of lecturing is important to explain more for the students. They say that though they adopt the student-centered learning, they would like to explain things in details. An interviewee from the first group argues that “I wish I could talk more while delivering my lessons as I enjoy teaching” (interview 8). Another one voiced that “the teacher has so much to say, but little has been uttered along the course periods. The motifs of learning lie in interactivity, as a matter of fact, students still need much to listen to teacher’s discourse” (interviewee 2).

As to the second group of 14 respondents, they found that the student centered learning an amazing pedagogy as it gave them more time and chance to help their students construct their knowledge and share their cogitations about the different issues. This second group appeared to enjoy multicultural education methodology. One of the participants says that

through my entire teaching and learning path, [the course] is leading the top five courses that I have taken. I honestly find that MCE teaching style is a model to follow. The class is 100% student-centered, very communicative, interactive, a free-anxiety atmosphere where mutual respect reigns. In fact, the professor’s interventions were not meant to impose his opinion but to trigger discussion and increase students’ curiosity. [the professor] has indirectly taught me to make my class 100% student-centered and meaningful. (Interviewee 7)

When it comes to freedom of expression, the interviewee 1 pointed that “what I liked about MCE is that enough space is given for students to discuss their thoughts freely and being in a student- centered class made students very relaxed to express their opinions without any pressures.” Interviewee 6 also said that “the instructor’s is to make sure that everything is being monitored so that the discussion will sustain its relevance to the topic addressed.”

As far as the professor’s rapport with his students is concerned, all respondents agreed that the professor should be “caring”, “flexible”, “supportive”, etc. A respondent expressed that “there were should be no limits in communication channels between students and teachers; what matters more is the trust they should share while keeping sense of professionalism” (interviewee 1). Another one asserted that “...this made me work harder effortlessly and effectively since I was working with passion. What led to this feeling is the good rapport the professor had with his students” (interviewee 5).

For the activities carried inside and outside class, majority of participants felt happy about the activities including reading materials, presentations, movie analysis, critiques of articles, critical incidents, discussions, etc. Interviewee 3 found that “assignments were very beneficial too especially the critical analysis for the articles as it encouraged us to search more and more and also it was an opportunity for us to know the methodology of critiquing an article, which personally I didn’t experience before.” Interviewee 2 said that “they are greatly integrative, pushing students to do their best, thinking of the best that could be done.” Interviewee 8 summarized the course thus: “the whole course was interactive in its nature. In my opinion, the pedagogy used was communicational because we were always connected to each other through tasks and assignments. The interaction in class was also highly present with students’ discussions taking place each session.”

On the whole, the interviewees responded positively to the integration of multicultural education contents into their pedagogics. However, few respondents thought of different ways to present the reading materials. They suggested discussion instead of presentations. Interviewee 5, for instance, said “I think it would be better if the articles were dealt with as debates and discussions not in presentations.” Because of the nature of discussion that sometimes takes students away from the main issue, one student favoured lecturing. Interviewee 4 proposed that “having said that, these discussions, sometimes, drifted away from the topics of concern and went into unnecessary debates between classmates, each of them defending subjective points of views. These debates necessitated the interventions of the professor to get the discussion back to its course.”

Discussion

This section is devoted to the discussion of the research questions in light of the results obtained.

The first research question examined the views of students towards the integration of the multicultural education course into the curriculum at the university. Participants were found to have a different conception of the course before the first session. This fact shows that students have never been introduced to such course during their undergraduate studies. It should be noted here that the blame is on the university’s responsible staff of the academic affairs. Though all students have expressed positive views about the course, they still wish if they had learnt something about the course before. One potential explanation for this is that teachers are still occupied by the mainstream curriculum that could not think of students as a priority. Courses that target all identities at the university like multicultural education is still neglected. Normalizing the curriculum to integrate courses about students with challenges, LGBTQs and other issues of diversity needs another reform at the university.

Regarding the second research question related to the students’ satisfaction with course contents, all the interviewees have agreed that the course met their expectations. The results have yielded that all the issues and topics covered in the course description have been beneficial and satisfactory for the students. Concerning the activities and the professor’s rapport with students, all participants reported good experience. The results displayed that the course was organized and the activities were meaningful.

The third research question explored the participants’ views about their pedagogics. The findings have demonstrated that the issue of student-centered learning have divided the participants into two uneven groups. The first group of 4 articulated that the instructor should use lecturing much as other roles. This group noted that lecturing could generate better results than discussion. It is important to mention that participants of this group equate lecturing with competence of the teacher. They still believe in the traditional way of delivering the contents via lecturing, which destroys the critical thinking skills and autonomous learning. The second group of 14 respondents, on the other hand, remarked that student-centered learning has helped

students develop their critical thinking and knowledge. The participants of this group expressed their satisfaction with the positive impact of the course on their pedagogy.

Conclusion

This study has examined the integration of multicultural education into the Moroccan higher education. It is an early-stage research that is still unexplored. The findings have shown that participants' knowledge of the multicultural education was very limited and even absent due to the dominance of the mainstream curriculum at the university. The findings revealed also that all students developed a positive attitude towards the course. This study has found that the majority of students were satisfied with the students centered learning save for a very small number of students who were in favor of lecturing.

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Notes on Contributor

EL Mustapha Imouri, Ph.D. in cultural and media studies, is a professor at Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco. He is a Fulbright Alumni in International Leaders in Education Program- Kent State University, USA, where he led a research project on teacher training on the integration of technology in education. He won the Leadership Award from the International & Intercultural Education Center, Ohio. He received the Global Teacher Grants (GTG) to work with a team of Fulbrighters on training young teachers for schools and communities. His research focuses on teacher training, multicultural education, study abroad, media and diversity studies.

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