



MULTICULTURALISM AND EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge and education learnt in a multicultural setting is the driving force behind global co-existence, collaboration and successful leadership. With this in mind, educators should continue to cultivate individuals and inculcate in them skills and abilities with which they can be prepared for the future. Through this, the knowledge they gain becomes a tool of power and expansion of peaceful co-existence, irrespective of ethnic or racial differences originating from the classroom to the global community. Multicultural education has the potentials to reduce instructional practices that are either discriminatory or insufficiently inclusive of diverse cultural perspectives. This paper examined multicultural education in the 21st century. It highlights some of its goals and objectives. It goes further to discuss the importance as well as the problems facing multicultural education.

KEYWORDS: Multiculturalism, education, multicultural education

INTRODUCTION

All over the globe, multiculturalism and education are seen as an interwoven system of instructions, either a formal or non-formal attempt to foster cultural pluralism which acknowledges the differences between races and cultures. The goal is to help students understand and appreciate cultural differences and similarities and to recognize the accomplishments of diverse ethnic, racial and socio-economic groups.

Thus, various cultures in a society merit equal respect, status, scholarly interest and reservation. Different cultures or cultural identities can co-exist peacefully and equitably in a unified society. Wong & Wong (2006) therefore asserted that multiculturalism is the co-existence of many cultures in a society without any one of the units dominating the others. Multiculturalism in this context plays down any form of discrimination.

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Akporehe and Osiobe (2017) opined that multiculturalism and education promote healthy individuals and foster good harmonious relationship with one another. Good and Sound intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships are fostered. To this end, multiculturalism and education is simply an attempt to bring educational processes and practices closely in line with basic characteristics of the human conditions and the society at large. The incorporation of culture, tribe, ethnicity, diversification, oneness, in teaching and learning is influential in shaping political, social, intellectual and other behaviours. Therefore, this paper looks at multiculturalism and education as a functional instrument which can be used for sustainable global peace and unity.

CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is the phenomenon of multiple groups of cultures existing within one society (Rationedwiki, 2017). It also refers to a situation or state in which all the different cultural or racial groups in a society have equal rights and opportunities and none is ignored or regarded as unimportant. According to International Federation of Library Association and Institution (IFLA, 2016) multiculturalism is the coexistence of diverse cultures, where culture includes racial, religious, or cultural group and is manifested in customary behaviours, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking and communicative styles. Multiculturalism has been used in a variety of ways. Some see it descriptively and others normatively. Heywood (2011), holds that while multiculturalism in descriptive term is seen as cultural diversity in a normative term, it is an ideological project that positively endorses communal diversity based either on the right of different groups to respect and recognition or to the alleged benefits to the larger society of moral and cultural diversity. The implication of the above definitions is that the diversity of ethnic cultures in the society must be maintained and without anyone dominating the others.

Education

Education is the art of imparting ideas, skills and knowledge into an individual which will define or shape his course of action in life. It is a means of perpetuating the culture and belief of a people from generation to generation. Hence, Chou (2007) maintained that education is a societal

instrument for its survival, growth and development. He further posited that the central purpose of education is to transmit those values that will enable the society to live in peace and happiness, feed and protect itself from inside and outside forces of disintegration, grow and develop numerically, physically, economically and socially. Education can take place in formal and informal settings and any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational.

Multicultural education

Multicultural education is dependent on the principles of educational equity for the students, regardless of culture and it strives to remove barrier to educational opportunities and success for students from different cultural backgrounds. In practice, educators may modify or eliminate educational policies, programmes, materials, lessons and instructional practices that are either discriminatory towards or insufficiently inclusive of diverse cultural perspective.

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 background. In this way multicultural education aims at improving the learning and success of all students. Nieto (2004) defined multicultural education within a socio-political content as;

"a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. Its challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender among others) that students, their communities and teachers reflect". Multicultural education in the 21st century is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school (Banks & Banks, 2004).

Multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics should have an equal opportunity to learn in school.

It is therefore vital to view the school as a social system so as to successfully implement multicultural education. Each major variable in the school, such as its culture, its power, relationships, the curriculum and materials, and the attitudes and beliefs of the staff, must be changed in ways that will allow the school to promote educational equality for students from diverse groups. The schools need to teach about social justice in addition to teaching skills. An education that is narrowly defined as an academic achievement and testing will not prepare students to become effective citizens who are committed to social justice. We should educate students to be reflective, moral, caring and active citizens in a troubled world (Bank, 2004). Multicultural education must therefore be viewed as an ongoing process that prepares individual be aware that the world's greatest problems do not result from people being unable to read and write, but they emanate from people in the world from different cultures, races, religions, and nations being unable to get along and work together to solve world's problems.

The 21st century teachers must begin to use multiculturalism and education as a set of strategies and materials when responding to several issues surrounding the rapidly changing demographics of their learners hence giving them the knowledge about histories, cultures and contributions of diverse groups and project the society as a pluralistic one.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

The goals and objectives of multicultural education tend to vary among educational philosophers and liberal political theorists. Educational philosophers might argue for preservation of the minority group culture, by fostering children's development of autonomy and introducing them to new and different ideas. This form of exposure would assist children in thinking more critically, as well as encouraging them to have a more open mindset. On the other hand, a political theorist might advocate for a model of multicultural education, which Warrants social action. Hence students are equipped with knowledge, values and skills necessary to evoke and participate in societal changes. However, the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME, 1990) advanced the following goals of multicultural education;

- i. To respect and appreciate cultural diversity
- ii. To promote the understanding of unique cultural and ethnic heritage
- iii. To promote the development of cultural responsive curricula.
- iv. To facilitate acquisition of the attitudes, skills and knowledge to function in various cultures.
- v. To eliminate racism and discrimination in society.
- vi. To achieve social, political, economic and educational equity.

In line with the above goals, the objectives of multicultural education posited by Levinsons, (2009) include:

- Promote civic good
- Right the historical record
- Increase self-esteem of non-mainstream students
- Preserve minority group culture
- Foster children's autonomy
- Promote social justice and equity
- Enable students to succeed economically in an integrated multicultural world.

IMPORTANCE OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

The importance of multicultural education to school diversity and national peace and unity cannot be over emphasized as it brings about acculturation, tolerance, religious cohesion and dissolves the impact of ethnocentric tendencies. According to National Association for Multicultural Education (1990) in Unimna and Mboto (2018) the following are importance of multicultural educations in the 21st century:

- helps students develop positive self-image
- offers students an equitable educational opportunity.
- allows multiple perspectives and ways of thinking
- combats stereotypes and prejudicial behaviour
- teaches students to critique society in the interest of social justice.

In line with the above importance, multicultural education helps to eradicate prejudice and racism, it also brings different races together in harmony, builds interaction between diverse cultures,

creates tolerance between two groups, and it eradicates cultural barriers (Daniel, 2011).

religious beliefs and practices; ethnic rituals may cause a rift between two or more groups.

v. Education: Children from other ethnic groups would take time in getting accustomed to a

The knowledge of multicultural education stimulates the people to understand different races and cultures thus reducing anxiety and cultural misunderstandings. It further helps individuals to have better and critical understanding of global strengths and weaknesses.

What this means is that an individual grows up with better perspectives on many issues. Rather than confining themselves to their respective cultures, they become open to the interchangeable nature of the society. Children are able to identify with other cultures regardless of their differences and are presented with these differences in a healthy and educated environment. This helps develop strong leaders who can flourish in different settings. The universality of education allows different people from different places to benefit and through that create unity despite differences (Mohammed, 2014). At the same time, giving individuals a change to delve into their own culture gives them a heightened sense of self- respect and value.

PROBLEMS FACING MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

The major problem facing multicultural education or education of culturally diverse groups is reconciling or accommodating differing cultural orientation (Dumlao, 2016). Other obstacles in multicultural education include:

- i. Teachers not being knowledgeable about all of the beliefs, traditions and cultures in the classroom. This could cause the teachers to make decisions, lesson plans and activities that might not be acceptable by all the cultures represented in the classroom.
- ii. Lack of communication due to language barriers between teachers and students could cause a problem with understanding what is being said.
- iii. Fear of influence: Living in a multicultural society may inculcate fear among individuals of minority groups that they would lose their identities or lifestyle. Being influenced by other cultures or foreign belief systems, at time creates a protections tendency among citizens.
- iv. Risk of social conflict: The possibility of social conflict occurs due to differences in

new environment. This may get reflected in their academic performance when compared with that of the local children (Varun, 2016).

COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

Counselling is a popular tool to help remove roadblocks to intergroup harmony, assess difficulties within a group, and assist individuals who must cope with the stresses of everyday life. Counsellors must strive to create both a trusting relationship and comfortable environment with all their clients so that the difficult task of healing process can begin (Unimna and Mbotu, 2018). Counsellors must be aware that as our educational system in the 21st century has gained cultural complex components, traditional counselling has fallen short of these goals. Therefore, counsellors must be aware that students seeking counselling come from diversity backgrounds, requiring them to understand the various ways culture influence the teaching and learning as well as counselling relationship. A lack of sensitivity to student's unique cultural background and experiences can result in miscommunication and students refusal to participate in educational activities (Neace, 2012). Today's counsellors and indeed counselling profession have to purposefully diligently, appropriately and realistically plan for and respond to the realities, benefits and problems of multiculturalism and education in the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

Multicultural education should be seen as a way of teaching, promoting principles such as inclusion, diversity, critical thoughts, democracy, skill acquisition, inquiry, value of perspectives and self-reflection. Evidence increasingly indicates that multicultural education makes schooling more relevant and effective. Students perform more successfully when there is greater congruence between their cultural backgrounds and school experiences. As the challenge to better educate the under-achieving students intensified and diversity among students' population expands: the need for multicultural education grows exponentially. Multicultural education may be a solution to some educational and societal problems that currently appear insoluble, closing

the achievement gap, genuinely not leaving any individual behind academically and otherwise.

RECOMMENDATION

Moving forward, there is need to revolutionize educational system by infusing into it Curricular content on multicultural education. Teachers should use multicultural content perspective and experience to teach. Any form of segregation and discrimination that undermined our peaceful coexistence and unity should be discouraged. Also, the counsellors must develop multicultural skills so as to be able to counsel the clients from their own cultural perspectives.

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