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Reflections on the Role of the Teacher in Promoting Multicultural pedagogy in Teaching and Learning at Secondary School.

Mandoga Edward

Educational Foundations Department, Bindura University of Science Education, Box 1020
Bindura, Zimbabwe.

Abstract

The research focuses on whether or not teachers are ready to adopt a social pedagogical approach to teaching and learning within the realm of multicultural education. It thus looks at pedagogical aspects, classroom practices and initiatives that influence the quality of education as practiced at three educational institutions in Zimbabwe. Inherent in the study, are strategies that can be employed to strengthen approaches to teaching students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds in line with the multicultural values in Zimbabwe. The discussion is based on an analysis of data collected through questionnaires and interviews from a sample of thirty five (35) out of one hundred and fifteen (115) teachers. The results indicated that most teachers lacked adequate training and skills to implement pedagogical approaches consistent with teaching of pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Key words: Multicultural education, Diverse learning needs, Pedagogical approaches, Cultural pluralism.

Introduction and Background to the Study.

Multicultural education is defined differently by different groups of scholars depending on their focus on this broad concept. Gorski (2010) opines that what counts as multiculturalism will, to a large extent, be determined by how the concept is defined. It is acknowledged that it is very difficult to define multicultural education as it is a complex and contested construct given different emphases by different authors in different contexts.

Hanley (2002) defines multicultural education as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education. In the Zimbabwean context, multicultural education involves the identification and reduction or elimination of barriers to students' participation in traditional settings (i.e. schools, homes, communities, and workplaces) and the maximisation of resources to support teaching and learning (Campbell, 2010). This research will be informed by Nieto's (1996) conception which characterises multicultural education as an educational practice based on the social premise of justice. It advocates equal access to educational opportunities for all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, religious or cultural backgrounds.

Within a multicultural school environment different types of learners learn together taking due diligence on differences in social backgrounds and individual needs. The model recognises the equality of all learners and advocates the need for the children to be taught under one platform despite their socio-cultural or religious persuasions. Based on the principle of fairness, it tries to bring the real society that is normal with all students from diverse cultural backgrounds and learning needs.

Ideally, this practice forms the cornerstone for quality and equity in education for all marginalised sub-cultural groups (Banks, 2006). Multicultural education is in line with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Education and Training whose thrust is to improve access to education and training and to reduce all forms of inequality in the education sector (The Sunday Mail In-depth 17 February 2013). Broadly speaking, multiculturalism enhances the greater involvement of students from diverse sub-cultural groups in the regular activities of the school thus contributing to the development of the school community (Ramsey, 2004).

The role of the teacher in ensuring that children get worthwhile educational experiences is very vital. Research has pointed to the inadequacy of the teacher training programmes in terms of equipping the teacher with the requisite skills to effectively teach a multicultural class (Ramsey, 2004). Currently, in Zimbabwe, limited numbers of teacher training institutions are sufficiently resourced to offer programmes and skills to student teachers so that they will be in a position to benefit pupils from diverse religious and social backgrounds. This research contends that multicultural education must not be offered superficially or as a public relations gimmick but as a transformative means of attaining parity in education and ushering in a just society. The challenge that Zimbabwe faces today, is ensuring that human resource development can support the multicultural education initiative. Merrell (2010) concurs that teachers have not received enough training to efficiently execute their duties in a multicultural set up.

The lagging factor in Zimbabwe is the training of the teachers so that they can offer pedagogical experiences that are consistent with the dictates of multiculturalism. Adequate training therefore remains the over arching missing jigsaw piece. Most teachers are never exposed to the multicultural model at college or undergraduate level. Without sufficient training, it is difficult to

meet the expectations of the model and those of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MPSE). The teacher manifests serious inadequacy in terms of meeting the unique individual needs of the students. The challenge of inadequate training on the part of the teachers is further compounded by unavailability of resource materials that are necessary for instruction. Lack of funding, administrative and policy level support also pose a threat to the proper implementation of the model in Zimbabwe (Aldridge, Calhoun, & Aman, 2000).

The success of the multiculturalism model tightly hinges on passably empowering the teacher, school heads and other stakeholders so that they are well prepared to sustain the model. Training of the teachers must go along with a serious conviction on their part that the model is just and beneficial to all pupils. Training in handling multicultural classes is indispensable; this is because the nature of the modern class calls upon the teacher to be innovative and sensitive. The teacher must be able to rise to the challenge by exploring pedagogical approaches in accordance with the multiplicity of learning needs. Peters (2005) stresses that teachers who are trained in multicultural education are dynamic, flexible, and reflective and have the ability to change and adapt according to the demands of the situation. This research contents that the challenge that exists in the schools is the development of inertia among the teachers due to institutionalization of the traditional ways of teaching and lack of buy-in of the new model. Zimbabwe is a multicultural society embracing pupils from diverse physical, socio-economic and religious backgrounds. The need to adopt and promote an all embracing pedagogical approach is imperative. There is a strong justification therefore to adopt 21st century teaching methodologies engrained with contemporary approaches to teaching and learning.

Literature Review.

Multicultural Education Policy Framework.

The government of Zimbabwe made commendable strides in terms of redressing discriminatory educational practices of the colonial government by democratizing the learning space. The educational arena was widened by creating equal educational opportunities for all. The Bill of Rights enshrined fundamental human rights and freedoms designed to guarantee equality of opportunity for all regardless of race, colour, gender, creed, place of origin, or any other considerations. Public policy thus compels the state to ensure that there is equal educational opportunity for all (Grant, 2005). Through this principle of equality the government has continued to shape and pronounce its policies.

Within this broad framework that informs educational practice, Zimbabwe became a signatory to several multicultural education related international charters. Currently however, Zimbabwe does not have specific legislation for multicultural education. A number of government policy issues consistent with the spirit of multicultural education have been adopted. For example, the Zimbabwe Education Act (Education Act, 1996), the Disabled Persons Act (Disabled Persons

Act, 1996) and various Ministry of Education circulars (Education Secretary's Policy Circular No. P36, 1990) require that all students, regardless of race, religion, gender, creed, and disability, have access to basic or primary education (up to Grade 7). The Zimbabwean Education Act introduced free and compulsory education for all students regardless of any demographic differences implying support for multicultural education (Chireshe, 2011).

There were a lot of good intentions behind the acts but the role that stakeholders in the education sector were supposed to play was to ensure that the acts informed the national curriculum through the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (MHTE). This would have seen the tertiary institutions rebranding their curricular with a view to positioning their products to operate effectively within multicultural set ups. The Secretary for Education's directive requires schools to provide equal access to education for all learners with diverse learning skills from different social backgrounds. Any school that refuses to enrol a child on grounds of diverse learning needs is in violation of existing educational Acts and faces disciplinary action from the District Education Office

The Sociology of Multicultural Education.

Multicultural education is a sociological principle that edifies a number of facets in the lives of students. The benefits of multicultural education are numerous for the student (Banks, 2006). Based on the principle of justice, multicultural education promotes friendship among pupils and increases social initiations, relationships and networks and promotes group interaction and dynamics. It offers a platform for social and behavioral skills to be improved through peer role modeling as there is greater interaction among the students (Bode 2005). This widens the opportunity for the pupils to appreciate individual differences and diversity. Pupils are thus better prepared for adult life in a society that is culturally plural.

By its very nature, multicultural education requires a holistic approach to promote togetherness. The concept discourages the spirit of segregation and isolation of learners considered to be from marginalized groups (Phillion, 2005). It aims at welding all parties together thus creating a sense of working together.

Multicultural Education Beyond Zimbabwe.

At independence in 1980, the government of Zimbabwe prioritised education as an indispensable obligation to be fulfilled for all through Education For All (EFA). Unlike Zimbabwe, South Africa signed every international statement about multiculturalism, and this has promoted deep transformations in its education system. Vietnam developed several systems and mechanisms that demonstrate the success of children with disabilities in schools as well as offering effective multicultural lessons in different parts of the country. Increasing awareness about multicultural education improves the confidence of teachers in their ability to teach students with diverse learning needs.

Cultural Pluralism in Zimbabwean: Education Training Programmes.

The future of multicultural education in Zimbabwe lies in enhancing teachers understanding of the concept by training them at pre-service and in-service level. Pre-service training refers to training individuals before they become qualified teachers. This takes place at teacher training colleges and universities. In-service training relates to training the teachers who are already in the teaching field. There are various ways in which in-service can be implemented. The following are examples of activities and strategies that have been used successfully in some countries in the region. Zimbabwe can benefit significantly from such experiences. This includes:

- Organising training workshops and staff development exercises.
- Integrating knowledge about the benefits of multicultural education into initial training programs for student teachers in colleges and universities.

Holding of workshops and staff development exercises at cluster or district level can ideally increase the teachers' knowledge, appreciation and understanding of cultural relativism in education. In terms of integration, multicultural education should be a compulsory subject for all student teachers and must become an integral part of teacher training curricula. Lancaster (2007) opines that for many pre-service teacher education students, their exposure to the field of multicultural education should be participation in mandatory courses included in their regular education programmes. Lancaster further attests that one of the major reasons for high levels of teacher attrition in schools is the perceived mismatch between pre-service preparation and the actual working conditions in schools. Dolby, (2000) acknowledges that knowledge and skills of pedagogical approaches, which involve appreciation of the needs and abilities of children with diverse learning needs, should be provided widely to student teachers.

When creating teacher training programs, it is very critical to find out about existing national educational guidelines and policies. This allows for the creation of modules and promotion of pedagogical approaches that complement and integrate into the pre-service curriculum. This can be done by understanding the local context. There is also a greater need for creating partnership among all key stakeholders to avail resources and funding for multicultural education.

Main Research Question.

How can the role of the teacher in promoting pedagogical approaches consistent with multicultural education be assessed?

Sub- Questions.

1. What is the level of awareness of the concept of multicultural education among the teachers?

2. What strategies have been employed to educate teachers on approaches used in handling a multicultural class?
3. What are the teachers' attitudes towards multicultural education?
4. What are the educationists' views of their role in promoting multicultural education?
5. What strategies have educationists adopted to promote training of teachers for multicultural education?
6. In what ways can awareness of multicultural education be improved among educationists at different levels?

Justification of the Study.

Despite the existence of policies and legislation guaranteeing the right to Education For All (EFA) in Zimbabwe, the country does not have a robust pre-service and in-service training programme designed to sustain the values of multicultural education. Multicultural education is one of the several ways in which the Zimbabwean education system can eliminate all forms of discrimination to students who may be potentially marginalized due to disability, gender family background, ethnicity and other socio- economic factors. Shortage of resources has often been cited as the major stumbling block to the proper implementation of multicultural education in the schools.

It is however important to note that multicultural education does not require expensive resources for its implementation. Change of attitudes on the part of serving teachers is one of the very critical elements that need to be addressed if the dream of offering vibrant multicultural education in the schools is to be achieved. Change of attitude and behaviour is not a quick or easy process. It requires willingness and self motivation on the part of the practitioners. If the issue of attitudes and training is not satisfactorily addressed, the vibrancy of multicultural education might remain a silhouette. There is therefore a need to assess the role of the teacher in enforcing and implementing the demands of cultural diversity in the schools. This study therefore seeks to find out the perceptions and attitudes of the key personnel in the education sector regarding their contributions in initiating and strengthening multicultural education.

Limitations of the Study.

One of the major limitations of this study is that cultural diversity is a social concept that is non examinable in the schools. Attributing poor or good performance of students in an exam to use or non use of multicultural pedagogical approaches would need a relatively longer period of study. This study was therefore not exhaustive in terms of juxtaposing use of multicultural pedagogical approaches vis-a-vis academic results in the schools.

Research Design.

The research was a case study carried out in Manicaland province of Zimbabwe. Rule & John (2011) define a case study as a detailed examination of an event that the analyst believes exhibits the operation of some identified general theoretical principles. Case studies attempt to explain holistically the dynamics of a certain historical period of a particular social unit. Qualitative methodologies were used because we can only gain a deeper understanding of people's perceptions, attitudes and actions through qualitative studies. Patton (1990) defines qualitative research methodologies as methods that focus on the meaning that participants in the research give to social phenomena, while Leedy (1997) sees them as all research approaches that are interactive in nature. Qualitative research aims at discovering the underlying motives, attitudes, opinions, behaviour and desires and as such in-depth interviews and focus group discussions are considered appropriate for collecting data.

Population and Sampling.

The study was carried out in one of the ten districts of Manicaland province in Zimbabwe. The district was purposively chosen as it has all the different types of schools in the province. This district also has fairly developed infrastructure in terms of school buildings, accommodation for teachers, roads and communication network. As such staff turnover rate is minimal. This is important in that the participants in the study were most likely not to transfer to other districts during the course of the study.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the schools to participate in the study. A list of all primary and secondary schools in the district was obtained from the District Education Office (DEO) and it was used as the sampling frame. Schools were divided into strata based on the type of school, that is, urban government day, rural government day, mission boarding schools and mission day school. The exact number of schools in the sample was determined from the list obtained from the District Education Office. The purposive stratified sampling strategy guarantees that each type of school in the district is represented in the sample. All school heads of the schools taking part in the study were included. Community leaders and officers in relevant United Nations Agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF and relevant NGOs operating in the district were also included in the study.

Maximum variation was also used as another sampling strategy. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) posit that many different variations of the data in a given case should be explored and must be carried out to ensure that the researcher will select those cases which will provide rich sources of information to have a better understanding of a phenomenon. Silverman (2000) asserts that the goal of maximum variation is to add rigour and an in depth understanding derived from data arising from the fullest range of participants and settings. The total sample size was determined by the number of the selected sources which provided rich information on the role of the teacher in providing a holistic approach to teaching students within a multicultural set up.

Results and Discussion.

Management plans can be forestalled by failure to accept change as reflected in table 1. There was inadequate buy-in of the model from the majority of the teachers and heads who form the core of the stakeholders. The apathy could have developed from the deep rooted nature of traditional model of teaching in some schools. Besides the issue paucity of resources in schools operating with meagre resources, some schools did not have any implementation plan to embrace the multicultural approaches. The stake holders find little or no incentive in embracing the concept.

Level of Awareness of the Concept Multicultural Education.

Thirty four (34) percent of the respondents indicated that they were comfortable operating in a multicultural class even without training, and were aware of expectations of how to operate in such a class. Fifty percent (50%) found it difficult operating in a multicultural class principally because of the attendant factors such as language and cultural barriers. They indicated that whilst their curricular at college and university level had aspects of theory of education which came closer to addressing issues of multiculturalism there was need to broaden the scope of the curriculum. Sixteen percent (16%) of the teachers pointed out that they were not aware of what multicultural education entailed. These were mostly teachers with academic degrees without professional qualification. At college the teachers pursued their academic studies without being exposed to the fundamentals of teaching which would equip them with skills to handle multicultural classes.

Strategies Employed to Educate Teachers on Approaches used in Handling a Multicultural Class.

Forty six percent (46 %) of the respondents indicated that workshops were of vital importance in equipping practising teachers with skills that are compatible with 21st century teaching methodologies. This would involve resource persons being deployed to workshop teachers on the model. Thirty seven percent (37 %) suggested that in-servicing teachers through cluster model approach where teachers from the same cluster gather at designated points sharing professional information was the most ideal thing to do. They indicated that the approach was cost effective and less time consuming. Ten percent (17%) asserted that multiculturalism would be best achieved when the college curricula fully embrace modules on how to handle multicultural classes. During training at college the students are exposed to the theoretical aspects of catering for students with diverse learning needs and in teaching practice they are mentored by their tutors. Thus, as students leave college they are fully equipped to operate in multicultural settings.

Teachers' Attitudes Towards Multicultural Education.

Seventy percent (70%) of the teachers showed a negative attitude towards exploring pedagogical methods that cater for students of diverse learning backgrounds. Their negative attitude was

prompted by the failure to receive such training during their college life. The teachers reiterated that their class sizes were too large with an average of 45 to 60 students which made it difficult to attend to each student's individual learning needs. The teachers also posited that the current school based teacher incentive programme where high performing teachers were rewarded financially after students passed public examinations forced them to focus only on high fliers. Thirty percent (30%) indicated a willingness to work with students with diverse learning needs but however, they were also quick to mention the challenge of lack of material resources, time and also unmanageable class sizes that deterred them from employing pedagogical methods that best suited students with diverse learning needs.

Educationists' Perceptions of their Role in Promoting Multicultural Education.

Of the different responses given by the participants in the study, the majority of the teachers fifty nine (59%) indicated that advocacy towards curriculum rebranding offered the immediate solution to the promotion of multicultural education. This had to start at teachers college level. Twenty three (23%) of the respondents noted that training was cardinal in promoting an all inclusive education model. Only nine (9%) felt that the status quo was justified. Some of the teachers had this to say:

“Teaching a multicultural class is a daunting task because it requires that one has the resources that appeal to pupils from different cultural persuasions”.

“It is difficult to tell how many people from different cultural groups you will be dealing, with so we just teach without much focus on cultural differences”

“The current approaches are good the important thing is that students should pass their exams”

Lack of Adequate Resources.

Most respondents who included community leaders and members from Non-Governmental Organisations who work in the area expressed the need for greater community involvement in shaping multicultural education in the schools. They reiterated the compulsion on the part of the ministry to avail teaching resources like books and other materials that reflect diverse cultural persuasions as a critical starting point to the success of the multicultural education model. Without the requisite teaching and learning materials to suite diverse learning needs within a multicultural set up, teaching can be very challenging.

In order for the dream of multicultural education to fully materialise, there is need to consider a number of factors. Most respondents Forty nine percent (49%) proposed a more intense focus on multicultural education issues at college level during Theory of Education lessons. Six percent (6%) indicated that lecturers at teachers colleges should also make intensive follow ups on their students on Attachment Teaching Practice (ATP) to assess whether or not their students were implementing the concept. Thirty two percent (32%) felt that there was need for more stake

holder involvement. The remaining twelve percent (12%) felt that college and university lecturers needed to be given enough resources to enable them to execute their duties fully.

Conclusion and Recommendations.

The findings indicated that there is a general inertia in as far as using multicultural pedagogical approaches in teaching and learning is concerned. The main reasons were basically lack of training on the part of the teachers as well as shortage of resources to implement the model. Some of the causes of failure to implement the model were purely attitudinal. In view of the research finding above, to achieve success, it behoves all teacher training institutions to embrace components of multicultural education in their curricular. It is also essential for the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (MHTE) to mount in-service programmes to educate practising teachers on the multiculturalism model. This will ensure that all teachers are well grounded in the knowledge of multicultural education. Reduction of teacher-pupil ratio to at least one (1) teacher to twenty (20) students, against the current situation of one (1) teacher to forty five

(45) or sixty (60) students is of significant importance. This would enable the teachers to have ample time to cater for students with diverse learning needs. Non-discriminatory payment of teacher incentives to all teachers would be an essential motivator. Teachers generally complain of low remuneration, school based incentives would build their motivation to explore pedagogical approaches that stand to benefit all the pupils. Teachers have the ability to develop the intellectual and moral capacity to operate in a multicultural school if their morale is boosted. The revitalisation of the education sector with the aim of building teachers who appreciate the multiculturalism approach should remain on top of the development agenda within the education sector.

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