

MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM: AN EMERGING TREND IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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❖ ABSTRACT

This research paper is aimed to explore the concept of multicultural classroom from the Indian context. Though being one country, India has a mixture of different cultures in it which have some resemblances and some differences. Due to technological advancements in the world and in India, students from different states and cultures come and sit in one classroom to pursue education. In a multicultural classroom, a teacher has to undertake a lot of responsibility. This paper states that teacher in a multicultural classroom should possess more skills and competencies than those who teach in homogeneous classrooms. As a result, a teacher in a multicultural classroom must be able to understand culturally diverse backgrounds, manage conflicts constructively, and comprehend different strategies to handle sensitive situations.

This research paper discusses some issues or challenges that a teacher faces in multicultural classroom and the strategies to overcome these issues and challenges.

Key Words: Multiculturalism, Multicultural Classroom, Culture, Language, Teacher, Homogeneous Classrooms

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❖ INTRODUCTION:-

Indian culture is a culture which is the strongest and has the inherent quality of flexibility, assimilation and preservation of the best practices prevailing in the contemporary society. That is reason why this culture is the thing of pride.

Education has always played a vital role in Indian culture. In earlier days gurukul system was followed in India which reflects the bonding between teacher and student, as students were used to stay at the teacher's place for ten to twelve years.

However by the passage of time, scenario has changed and in modern world the term 'India-Unity in Diversity' has actual become a practice in Indian education system. With wide spread of technical education, students move out of their hometown to different parts of the country for pursuing their higher education. It has made an Indian classroom the combination of various cultures as a multicultural classroom in the same nation.

❖ MULTICULTURALISM:-

Multiculturalism is defined as the co-existence of diverse cultures, where culture includes racial, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in customary behaviours, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking, and communicative styles. It is the cultural diversity of communities within a given society and the policies that promote this diversity. As a descriptive term, multiculturalism is the simple fact of cultural diversity and the demographic make-up of a specific place, sometimes at the organizational level, e.g., schools, business establishments, neighborhoods, cities. As a prescriptive term, multiculturalism encourages ideologies and policies that promote this diversity or its institutionalization. In this sense, multiculturalism is a society "at ease with the rich tapestry of human life and the desire amongst people to express their own identity in the manner they see fit."

❖ IMPORTANCE OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION :-

"Multicultural education means different things for different people. We can say that multicultural education means education that moves away from the principle of assimilation."

-Sleeter and Grant

Multicultural education describes a system of instruction that attempts to foster cultural pluralism and acknowledges the differences between races and cultures. It addresses the educational needs

of a society that contains more than one set of traditions, which is a mixture of many cultures. It provides students with knowledge about the histories, cultures, and contributions of diverse groups, and it assumes that the future of society is pluralistic. Therefore, multicultural classrooms promote decision-making and critical thinking while moving towards cultural pluralism.

Dr. James A. Banks developed a concept called “the five dimensions of multicultural education” where the five aspects include content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction and empowering school culture and social structure. In an interview with NEA Today’s Michelle Tucker, Dr. Banks says, “with content integration, language arts and social studies teachers can do more than the physics teacher.” In regard to knowledge construction, it is a “process moves to a different level because here teachers help students to understand, investigate, and determine the implicit cultural assumptions and frames of reference and perspectives of the discipline they’re teaching.” Equity pedagogy simply means that the faculty changes their methods to enable students from diverse racial groups and both genders to achieve. A research on racial prejudice indicates that adolescent prejudice is very real, and students come to school with prejudices toward other groups. The educators should use methods to help students develop more positive racial attitudes. Empowering school culture and social structure has to be applied not only at individual classrooms, but at the total academic culture to see how to make it more equitable.

MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM:-

Multicultural classroom blends students from various cultures to form a diverse learning environment. It is not just related with the student’s native but with gender, age and socioeconomic factors. India, being one large country incorporates a blend of various cultures within it. The cultures that exist in each state of India are different from each other, though it bears some similarities.

In India, people are constantly shifting from rural to urban areas and hence we can find multicultural classrooms in metropolitan cities. This classroom consist students from all parts of India, who have different mother tongue, different native culture, food habits etc.

These multicultural classrooms are need of the day as world has become a small village and we need to learn surviving recipes in this global village. Students from these classrooms have differences among themselves and this environment teaches them to respect each other’s culture

and to learn new things about other cultures. But for faculty members, handling these classrooms effectively is a big challenge as each student in the class is different from the other.

❖ **DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM AND UNIFORM CLASSROOM:**

Sr. No.	Homogeneous Classroom	Multicultural Classroom
1.	In this classroom, students are from same culture and have same pattern of values and behavior.	In this classroom, students are from different cultures and have different pattern of values and behavior.
2.	All the students from the class have same mother tongue.	All the students from the class have different mother tongue.
3.	As both the teacher and the students belong to the same culture, students can easily relate themselves to class proceedings.	As both the teacher and the students belong to the different cultures, it becomes difficult for students to relate themselves to class proceedings.
4.	As students have same mother tongue they are friendly with each other and are comfortable which eventually reduces communication gap.	As students have different mother tongue they may not be friendly and comfortable with each other which causes a wide communication gap.
5.	For faculty members, teaching, explaining and controlling is comparatively easy in this class.	For faculty members teaching, explaining and controlling is a big challenge in this class
6.	These students have almost same reception capacity to a foreign language.	These students have different reception capacity to a foreign language as they have different educational background.

❖ **PRESENT SCENARIO IN INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM:-**

If we consider the current situation in India we find both **homogeneous** classrooms as well as multicultural classrooms. In small cities and in rural areas significantly we find uniform classrooms where as in universities, metropolitan cities and in reputed educational organizations

we find multicultural classrooms. These multicultural classrooms can be further divided into two:

1. **Multicultural classrooms with students from different parts of India** The quality of education provided by various Indian universities differ. If a University is not available in a particular state of India with proficient faculty members or high quality facilities, students of that region naturally moves out of the state in search of a good educational organization. Cities like Pune and Delhi are educational hubs and students from other states of India come here for higher education and research. ,

2. **Multicultural classrooms with students from different parts of India as well as from foreign countries:**

Most of the universities in India have student exchange programmes. Research scholars and students from a country can learn from abroad and is acquainted with the culture and language of that country. This type of class room include students from different regions of India as well as students from other countries as Delhi, Punjab, Thailand, Iran, Afghanistan, Kerala etc.

Medium of instruction in Indian education is mainly regional language and at universities, reputed educational organizations and in professional institutes it is English. Though Hindi is a national language in India, many states in India do not accept Hindi as a medium for communication. Due to this language barrier, communicating and handling these classrooms is a difficult task.

❖ **TEACHING IN A MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM: A CHALLENGE**

Teaching in a multicultural class is a big challenge for faculty member as each individual in the class has different cultural background that ultimately shapes the thinking ability and behavior, which is exactly, slightly or entirely different from other students in the class. We can explain this fact with the help of examples:-

1. Students asking questions in the class and even arguing with the teacher till they get a satisfying answer is very common in Australia whereas for Thai students, it is sheer arrogance as they don't find the tradition of questioning in Thai culture.

2. If a question is asked to a teacher in the class and in reply teacher asks other students what do you think, for a Thai student, it means either teacher is lazy or less competent but for an Indian student, it is very common as it is used in India as a tool for motivating other students to find out or think about probable answers of the questions.

If we take an example of Indian multicultural classroom -----

1. Tone, language and body language of students from Maharashtra seems to be arrogant at some instances though they don't intend to mean or convey the same. If two students from Maharashtra are talking with each other, at a point, a student from Kerala may feel that they are fighting with each other.

2. In India, the language of instruction in most of the higher educational organizations is English. Proficiency of English is different for students from different parts of India. In Nagaland, English is the official language. Therefore, students from Nagaland find it easy to understand and speak in English than students from any other part of India.

3. Hugging/ Public display of affections

When a student who is born and brought up in a rural setting comes to a city like Delhi to pursue higher education, he realizes that the culture of students is entirely different. Students in a metropolitan city display their affection to students of opposite gender in a free manner. Holding hands together and hugging between students of opposite gender are very common in an urban setting and a student from rural area initially finds it difficult to digest these gestures.

Some issues faced by faculty members in a multicultural classroom are discussed below:

1. Cultural Difference:

It is almost impossible for teachers to respond in culturally appropriate or sensitive ways to all the cultures they have in their classrooms. The differences are not limited to culture, race or linguistics. The faculty members have to consider religious differences, gender issues, differently abled children or children coming from single parent. The teacher training programs generally do not address these issues. Because of this insufficient training, most of the teachers are unprepared for what they face in their classrooms.

Teachers find it difficult to explain the concepts that are alien to their culture. For a teacher from Kerala, it is difficult to explain the purdah system of Rajasthan to the students from Delhi or Kolkata. It is the same with explaining the importance of festivals. A teacher from Maharashtra finds it difficult to explain to students from Nagaland the reason behind the celebration of Diwali as Nagaland follows Christian culture and most of the Maharashtrians follow Hindu culture.

2. Language and Communication:

The very basic fact that we have discussed earlier is that the students in multicultural classroom have different mother tongue. Due to difference in the language, tone and pronunciation is also

different in the class and it is slightly difficult to understand. In such classroom, selection of intermediate language is also a problem for teacher as teacher is also having different tone and accent. Another problem in this classroom is that as students find no common language to communicate with each other they try to avoid communicating with each other or students who have same mother tongue form their own group. By this way class is divided into few groups and it becomes difficult for a teacher to control and teach the class. In many regional Indian languages same words are there but they have totally different meanings, such situations create confusion in the classroom and convincing students the new meaning of the same word in other language is a challenge for teacher.

3. Regional Stereotyping:

Stereotype means 'a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.' As a human tendency different regions in India have a few stereotypes which limit our view of looking and communicating with the person. In a multicultural classroom where there are students from different regions they have prejudices about each other which prevent them from communicating and developing relationships with each other.

e.g. 1. South Indian people are stereotyped as very studious, and if a south Indian student is there in a class, due to this stereotyping other students will try to avoid this fellow as he is very studious and a genius. In reality it can be different but these prejudices force us to believe the same.

4. Educational Background:

In India there is no uniform education system and region wise it differs as every state has its own State board. All the government schools and a few private schools follow the syllabus prescribed by the State Board, a few private schools follow CBSE curriculum, which is central and common for all the states and a few schools follow ICSE and ISC curriculum. Medium of instruction in these schools is also different. Some schools go with regional language and some with English. When these students sit in a classroom for higher education, the teacher finds it difficult to manage as each student has different educational background.

5. Comprehension and Perception Capacity:

As each student comes from different educational background, they have different comprehension and perception capacity. As English is the language of instruction in a multicultural classroom, students who have learned in English medium school find it easy to

understand and respond whereas students from regional medium school finds it difficult to understand and to relate with the things in the classroom. If teacher repeats the things in the classroom for regional medium students, those who have understood it will feel it boring and will lose their interest vice versa if teacher won't repeat student who did not understand will lose their interest. So teacher have to take care of both the factors while explaining and have to balance in such a way that both will feel it interesting. For teacher it is a challenge as he/she has to fluctuate between these two extremes.

6. Lack of Competent Faculty:

In India faculty members are not trained for handling multicultural classrooms. Most of our teachers are not competent in English. Since the link language in multicultural classroom is English, they find it very difficult to communicate with students, which leads to weak relationship between teacher and students.

❖ STRATEGIES TO FACE THE CHALLENGES IN MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM:

1. Receptive mind of teacher:

Teachers in multicultural classrooms must be openminded to their students and they have to put forth the effort needed to know their students inside and outside theclass. If a teacher is hesitant about being open, the class will reciprocate and the students will become estranged from one another and the teacher. In order to be open, teachers must be interested in their students, they have to be fearless, willing to try new and different things, avoid taking things personally, and non-judgmental of his or her students

Intercultural relations in the classroom may be a source of knowledge and mutual enrichment between culturally diverse learners if managed proactively by teachers. Frustration, misapprehensions and intercultural conflict are a more likely outcome if teachers do not deal with diversity in a sensitive manner.

2. Faculty Training Programmes:

Faculty training is a best and ultimate solution to reduce problems in a multicultural classroom. If a faculty member is competent and trained to handle multicultural classroom he/ she can comfortably adjust in the class and can understand students problems and needs. Faculty training can include language training especially English, understanding student's psychology and an overall knowledge of other culture.

3. Use of Audio-Visual Aids:

Images speak more effectively than words. In a multicultural classroom, to make teaching-learning process easy and effective teacher can make use of audio visual aids. Students can witness the fact and will try to understand it because they can relate more with images. It makes learning easy for students. Use of audio visual aids will be helpful for teachers also as it makes explanation easy and effective.

4. Motivate Teamwork:

To reduce cultural barriers in a multicultural classroom teacher can assign students small group activities or small projects in teams. This will help to reduce communication gap between the students. They will try to adjust with each other and will try to learn new things about each other's culture; with frequent contact they will be free of all the prejudices about each other. Students will share their views, experiences and ultimately it will help teacher for teaching.

5. Provide Knowledge of other Culture:

By providing knowledge about the cultures, histories, and contributions of different groups, multicultural education helps students to develop a positive outlook about their life. It prepares the students to work actively toward structural equality in organizations and institutions. Multicultural education demands faculty members who are culturally competent and linguistically diverse.

6. Integration of Faculty and Students:

Integration of Faculty and Students is also very important for effective teaching –learning process in a multicultural classroom. Association of teacher and student will help to build relationship between them which will help to reduce cultural conflicts in the classroom and will help to attract students towards class. Students will get the feel that teacher considers them and it will motivate them to take part in the class actively.

❖ ADVANTAGES OF MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM**1. To Conquer Bias:**

One of the main advantages of a racially and culturally diverse classroom is that it helps students to overcome their own personal and cultural biases. This is especially true of schools in rural or isolated areas, where different ethnicities and belief systems may not be represented as evenly as

they are in urban areas. Having a diverse student body helps everyone challenge their own assumptions and come together to learn more about each other.

2. Provides Cultural Awareness:

Students who interact with peers who come from other areas of the country become aware of places that would otherwise remain unknown to them, learning about various cultural practices, foods, and religious beliefs. Education is benefited from a curriculum that teaches students about holidays and celebrations from other countries, states. This may often have a life-changing effect on young people. The students may decide to choose a certain career path or even live in another country based on experiences getting to know peers in college who reflect the diversity of our country.

3. To learn new languages:

Insisting on cultural diversity challenges students to think outside themselves. This includes being stimulated to learn other regional languages as well as foreign languages. A diverse classroom environment provides an impetus for students to explore other cultures, including new languages.

4. Humility:

Being confronted with diversity forces students to be humble by pushing them beyond their comfort zone. If they want to be able to get along with people who are different, they must be aware of and sensitive to cultural assumptions that differ from their own. This, in turn, causes them to become aware of their own biases and assumptions, which would otherwise remain unconscious and taken for granted.

5. Improved Self-Knowledge:

When students learn to recognize and appreciate the differences they see in others, they learn more about themselves. "Early Years: Journal of International Research and Development" reported that students' self-perceptions are often based upon how they are similar to and different from others. The classroom can be an ideal space for understanding these differences in a respectful, sensible way.

6. Real-World Preparation:

Increased classroom diversity provides a more genuine real world experience for students. In 2006, the "European Journal of Teacher Education" discovered that diverse classrooms promote

acceptance and celebrate diversity, resembling the cultural and political practices occurring with the European Union (EU). In the same way that members of the multicultural classroom are unified by their diversity, members of a diverse classroom report feeling a sense of unity and solidarity with their diverse classmates.

7. Enhanced Group Work:

The diversity in the classroom lent itself to more successful group work among students. When students from diverse backgrounds and experiences work together, the differences among them enrich the group discussion and overall experience for the group. Students can draw upon and learn from each other's varying viewpoints.

❖ CONCLUSION:

In multicultural classroom teacher shares a lot of responsibility. Teacher is the one who controls, motivates and involve students in the classroom activities. Multicultural classroom helps to increase personal and professional competence of students. To work in a global front students have to interact with their colleagues who are from different cultural backgrounds. The exposure from the multicultural classroom enables students to adopt and assimilate new cultures in their professional life. From personal point of view students will be mature enough to respect other cultures through their wide experience and knowledge. If teacher takes this challenge of this multicultural classroom positively, it is the best way to prepare students to face real professional world. Multicultural classroom is the best tool to relive students from all the restrictions of state and culture and will bring them together as Indians that will help them to get rid of their prejudices.

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