

Celebrating Multiculturalism in School Education: Parents' Perspectives

Geeta Chetty

Graduate School of Education, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal

Email: changugeeta@gmail.com

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Abstract

Inclusion is progressively becoming a fundamental aspect of societal norms. Multicultural education is an educational approach that aims to integrate diversity into the learning process. The objective of this educational approach is to mitigate biases and stereotypes associated with other cultures and ethnicities. Nepal is a diverse nation, including several cultures, languages, and ethnic groups within a compact geographical region. In an increasingly globalized society, the implementation of multicultural education is imperative, but it presents some difficulties. This study examines the role of parents in implementing multicultural education in a school context by exploring their viewpoints and understanding of the topic.

Keywords: Multicultural education, diversity, ethnic identity, student-centered activities inclusion

Introduction

Progress may be achieved by embracing diversity and promoting inclusiveness. Nepal is characterized by a pervasive presence of diversity. Nepal is a diverse country, including a wide range of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and geographical variations. It is inhabited by more than 125 distinct ethnic groups and boasts over 123 different languages. In this small nation, achieving inclusion has been both a difficult task and an objective pursued by everybody. Inclusion in education for minority and underprivileged groups is an essential tool for the advancement of Nepal. Education is the fundamental basis for development. It has a profound impact on shaping the future. Promoting diversity in education is a fundamental obligation for Nepal. Empowering those who have been oppressed by social stereotypes is a significant

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endeavor that is essential for achieving development. According to Jesse Jackson, "Inclusion is not merely a matter of adhering to political correctness." "It is the essential factor for growth and development.

Though Nepal is a multicultural, multilingual and multiethnic country, educational opportunity has not been equal to all. Disadvantaged groups as Dalit, women and ethnic group's participation in education are very poor. The diversity present in the country is not reflected in schools of Nepal. The education system of Nepal has great responsibility to these different forms of diversity through education. Multicultural education has now emerged as an umbrella concept to address diversity in the educational world.

Aydin (2013) has described multicultural education as "a reform movement designed to bring about some fundamental changes in the education system". Multicultural education has a significant role in improving all students' attitudes and values that a democratic society requires and enables the adoption of different cultural values and pluralism. The national association for multicultural education states that under multicultural education, schools must promote the development of social justice while prohibits discrimination and implement policies and activities that have a positive effect on the knowledge and skill level of all students. Multicultural education is a process that encourages teachers and students to critically analyze the world of today where power and domination prevail (National Association for Multicultural Education [NAME], 2014). The major aim of multicultural education is to provide equality and justice for all students through a comprehensive, sustainable, more transformative attitude that educators can understand and fulfil (Gorski, 2006). Despite the various definitions of multicultural education by different scientists, there is a consensus on the fact that teaching-learning environment must be shaped by considering cultural differences in terms of multicultural education.

In the context of Nepal, multicultural education is not a completely recognized subject but number of policies and attitudes encouraging participation of girls, disabled children and children from other marginalized groups. There were some of the efforts after Rana period in the field of multicultural education. The National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) was formed in 1956. This Commission endeavored to highlights the life of rural Nepal through pictures of multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual situation of Nepal. The commission promoted the use of one language policy as the medium for teaching and thereby diminishing educational opportunities for communities that did not speak it, mainly indigenous and ethnic minority communities. Overly, the NNEPC report disadvantaged the indigenous and ethnic minority children. The All Round National Education Committee (ARNEC) was formed in 1960. The Committee suggested implementing free and compulsory primary education which is the positive aspect for development of multicultural education in the country but it did not suggest any change in the NNEPC suggested language policy. Curriculum development and teacher training also did not address the needs of children in regards to a language barrier. These policies brought children from many backgrounds to the schools however the needs of these children in terms of inclusion and diversity were not met.

The Constitution of Nepal article 35 (10) states that the State shall pursue a policy, which will help to promote the interest of the marginalized communities and the peasants and laborers living below poverty line, including economically and socially backward indigenous tribes, Madhesis and Dalits by making reservation for a certain period of time with regard to education, health, housing, food sovereignty and employment. Similarly, it further mentions in article 35 (14) that the State shall pursue a policy of making special provision based on positive discrimination to the minorities, landless, squatters, bonded laborers, disabled, backward communities and sections, and the victims of conflict, including women, Dalits, indigenous tribes, Madhesis and Muslims (MOLJ, 2007). More recently, realizing the importance of the mother tongue the 'Education for All National Plan of Action Nepal (2001-2015)' has added one more goal to the six major goals set by Dakar Forum. The goal is to ensure the rights of indigenous people and linguistic minorities to quality basic and primary education through their mother tongue (EFA/NPA, 2002). School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) was prepared in (2007) and it is working now. In it, cultural diversity was considered as one of national treasures. Similarly, it mentioned that Nepal is one of the most diverse countries on earth and thus has a responsibility to conserve a rich cultural heritage. It further realized that minority groups, ethnic communities and disadvantaged groups (such as women, Dalits and ethnic minorities) have low levels of participation in education. Finally, it accepts raising the participation of such groups is a key challenge for the government. In the history of Nepal's education SSRP is the most multicultural education friendly document. From the above discussion, it is obvious that Constitutional provision, recommendations of education commissions and other study reports have accepted the, multilingual, multicultural and multiethnic situation of the country. Furthermore, these documents also ensured to stop all types of discriminations related to caste, gender, culture etc. Despite the acknowledgement for the need for multicultural education in Nepal, in application, efforts have not reached the real field i.e. the classroom. Parents perception on the practice of multicultural education in classrooms of primary level and what parents think about the role of learning multiculturalism in regards to globalization plays a important roles as deciding factor on the implementation of multiculturalism. The policies placed push the cause of inclusion forward but the classrooms that deal with the students do not reflect this.

The actual aims and objectives of multicultural education is preserving the minority cultural groups and fostering the children's development of autonomy and exposing them to new and progressive environment. The other aims and goals of multicultural education as stated by Levinson (2009) are: promote civic good, right the historical record, increase self-esteem of non-mainstream students, increase diversified student exposure, preserve minority group culture, foster children's autonomy, promote social justice and equity and enable students to succeed economically in an integrated, multicultural world. A classroom is a miniature of the society due to this reason a teacher must be familiar about various dimensions (Banks, 2013, p. 19). The dimensions of the multicultural education are as follow: Equity pedagogy is essential to address the need of the students in a classroom who are from diverse social-class

groups. Teachers have very important role for modifying their teaching strategies and techniques inside the classroom teaching incorporating all. Leaving the traditional one size fit approach of teaching for all and specially focused on the dominant groups, now the teacher needs to facilitate according to their adaptation ways so that there may seem the positive changes in their academic achievement. Parents' comprehension of the importance of multicultural education is crucial to the goal of inclusion.

Content Integration

Teachers are given leeway in deciding what content will be integrated into the material. According to time and context and moreover by considering the students of the classroom, teachers must decide and make plan for integrating various contents in their teaching. It is important for the parents to understand the change or addition in syllabus.

Knowledge Construction

Different cultural groups in our society are directed by partially or totally by various types of knowledge as stated by Habermas (1972) and their orientations are set accordingly. Through the multicultural education, diverse cultural group students come in the single platform and share their beliefs and practices among others which will help the other cultural groups to gain knowledge about their distinct practices.

Prejudice Reduction

Multicultural education brings the outcaste and oppressed groups of the society in the mainstream. Due to which the prejudices regarding ethnicity, race, sex and others will be reduced. Such type of activities obviously helps children to have clear and good concept about accepting own diverse culture not as weakness but a matter of strength.

Research Questions

This research will examine the following questions to assess the level of comprehension among parents.

1. How do parents think about the effect it has on children when celebrating multiculturalism?
2. What is the parental perspective on the significance of teaching multiculturalism in relation to globalization?

Methodology

This research has used case study research method which is considered as one of the qualitative research designs. Tikac (2015, p. 360) defines qualitative research as "a scientific study based on the discovery, understanding and interpretation of a variety of events and phenomena in a context where they are thoroughly examined. Johnson and Christensen (2012) note that case study is a form of a qualitative study through which the detailed examination of one or more cases is provided. This research has a case study research method as the views of the parents with children accustomed in a multicultural environment were examined and the case was tried to be examined in depth by using multiple data sources. The unit of analysis is multicultural education in the current research.

The participants of this study consist of 4 parents of a school whose children study in secondary level in Kathmandu. The participants were selected purposefully on the basis of ease and convenience. The present study has attached great significance to the variety of the participants' gender, educational status and seniority. In this way, the diversity of their perceptions regarding multicultural education has been tried to be reflected. This research has used a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are data collection tools used in case study researches (Sart, 2015). The tool includes three questions to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants and four open-ended questions to identify their views on multicultural education. This study has also used participant observations. DeWalt and DeWalt (2010) identified participant observation as a data collection tool in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people for learning the aspects of their life routines and culture. Participant observation is used to make additions to the data obtained from other methods such as structured and semi-structured interviews, pure observation, analysis of text and other secondary sources (Bernard, 2006). In this study, the researcher has also observed the multicultural education activities in the school and how the respective parents perceive on this practice. In this study, the multicultural education-based activities that teachers have used, the problems they have encountered, and the solution proposals they have developed as well as parental perspectives, their agreement or disagreement, their happiness or sadness were observed.

The research data was analyzed through content analysis. Content analysis is an analytical method that attempts to define data with a broad context and to derive meaning from it (Given, 2008). Berg (2001) defines content analysis as attentive, detailed and systematic examination and interpretation of a specific material in order to identify patterns, themes, prejudices and meanings. In the interviews, the responses of the parents have been examined and coded one by one, and these codes have been corresponded to one another and gathered under themes. The views of the parents have been presented in findings coding them with number and letters (P:1, M=Parents 1, Male; P:2, F=Parents 2, Female).

Findings

Theme 1: Multicultural Education: Ethnic Identity

The parents have different perceptions towards the concept of multicultural education. They perceive multicultural education as the education which is mostly received by different ethnic identities. Besides, the concepts of religion, language and gender have been found to be frequently used. The views of the participating parents are presented as follows:

"It is the education given to the individuals who have different beliefs, who speak different languages and who have different ethnic identities." (P:4, F)

"It is the training through which tolerance is ensured for different cultural characteristics and that these differences must be respected." (P:1, F)

"It is education that entails respect and tolerance towards cultural differences. People with different cultural characteristics live together in society; therefore, education includes these cultural differences" (P:2, M)

"It is a kind of education that include the characteristics of individuals with different cultural characteristics such as religion, race and language in a teaching environment (P:3, M)

Theme 2: Student-Centered Activities

Parents' views on the activities based on multicultural education are presented under this theme. The multicultural based activities that have been implemented by teachers are divided into student-centered and teacher-centered themes. The classroom teachers mostly use student-centered activities concerning multicultural education. The student-centered activities that teachers mostly use has been identified as drama method, case study method, discussion, watch a movie, playing games, listening to music, group study, using visuals, integrating it into the lessons, making individuals gain the values of tolerance and respect to the differences, brainstorming technique and conducting research. In this regard, some of the parents expressed their views as follows:

"I have seen student-centered activities like making a drama about cultural differences, brainstorming, discussion, etc. The teachers frequently use case study. I like the way to teach students how differences are natural through using these methods. When encountering something of their own cultural characteristics, their sense of belonging to the school improves." (P:4, F).

"The school does various activities taking into account the different cultural characteristics of our children. To illustrate, my son says that he has watched films of different beliefs, and we discuss them. We listen to foreign music. Teachers try to develop their empathy skills through drama activities. Sometimes, I debate over the problems caused by the differences. For example, we recently had a debate about violence against women." (P:2, M).

The observations made by the researcher have indicated that teachers commonly use student-centered activities based on multicultural education in the lessons. It has also been observed that teachers use case study, drama and discussion methods along with films about the disabilities and socio-economic status and activities related to values education including cooperation solidarity, tolerance and respect the differences. Teachers have also been identified to prefer traditional teaching methods such as instruction and question-answer.

Theme 3: The Problem of Bias

The problems mostly encountered by the teachers when using multicultural education activities derive from family, social life, student, school administration, teaching programs. Under the theme of student-related problems, the parents complain that the teachers have been found to encounter with problems due to various reasons such as students' bias, their negative attitudes towards the individuals with different cultural characteristics, their disrespect for the differences.

"Families have an effect on the emergence of the students' biases. We, as parents sometimes react as we also have these biases. The problems may also arise as textbooks do not include activities about the individuals with different cultural characteristics. I cannot do so many activities because of my own prejudice."(P:3, M)

As for the family-related problems theme, the participants have indicated that they have problems due to the fact that the family is usually biased. In this respect, the view of P:1 is as follows:

"The biggest problem is that students have biases against each other and the families, too. In addition, different cultural characteristics are not included in the acquisitions." (P:1, F)

"I do not face too many problems at my home; I see that my children welcome those who have different cultural characteristics. I think the most important reason for this is that we parents are in good economic condition and we are well educated."(P:4, F)

Observations made by the researcher have shown that the teachers mostly face with problems due to prejudices of the students against multicultural education in the lessons. Indeed, it was observed that some of the students used prejudiced expressions in an activity based on different beliefs. In addition, observations made by the researcher have suggested that teachers cannot conduct lessons effectively and efficiently due to the lack of textbooks, and they have difficulty in preparing activities and making students gain the acquisitions since the teaching program is not prepared in harmony with multicultural education. The other problems encountered by teachers have been observed to arise from the fact that students lack knowledge regarding the different cultural characteristics and they ostracize and mock those with different cultural traits.

Discussion and Conclusions

This research is conducted on how the current situation related to multicultural education in secondary schools and how parents think about practicing and celebrating multicultural practices in schools. The first aim of the research is to determine how multicultural education is perceived by the parents. The results have revealed that the parents have somewhat satisfactory concepts of ethnic identity, religion, language and gender in relation to multicultural education. Parents may be said to perceive multicultural education as the education given to the individuals with different ethnic identity, language, religion and gender. Besides, parents have also been identified to possess similar perceptions towards multicultural education in terms of gender, seniority and educational status.

Banks (2013a) notes that the regulation of the teaching-learning environment based on the students' differences such as language, religion, ethnic identity, age, gender, economic level, social class, and disability is considered as multicultural education. As seen in this definition, differences such as gender, language, religion and ethnic identity are indispensable concepts of multicultural education. However, multicultural education also holds dimensions such as sexual orientation, age, social class, and disability. These dimensions are not used or rarely emerged in small numbers within the present study. This has been considered as a shortcoming

by the researcher. The multicultural based activities that have been implemented by teachers are experienced quite satisfactory by the parents. The majority of the teachers used mostly student-centered activities that brings a state of contentment to the parents and the parental perspectives is quite satisfactory. Teachers have been observed to mostly use case study method, discussion, playing games, listening to music, group study, using visuals, integrating it into the lessons, making individuals gain the values of tolerance and respect the differences, brainstorming technique and conducting research. It has also been observed that teachers use case study, drama and discussion methods along with films about the disabilities and socio-economic status and student-centered activities related to values education including cooperation, solidarity, tolerance and respect to the differences.

The results of these observations also are in line with the parents' interviews on the use of more student-centered activities in their lessons which their children share at home and reflect on their behavior. Teachers' use of more student-centered activities in multicultural education activities is considered as positive by the researcher. Thus, the activities related to multicultural education are expected to be influential on the students and to support the development of democratic individuals, one of the aims of multicultural education. The researches have revealed that students with different backgrounds have higher academic achievement when they are educated in accordance with their own culture and experience (Gay, 2010), whereas, students whose differences are ignored during the teaching-learning process have lower academic achievement (Irvine & Armento, 2001). In this respect, student-centered activities based on multicultural education in the teaching-learning environment may also enhance the academic achievement of the students.

The research has also examined that the problems mostly encountered by the teachers when using multicultural education activities derive from family, social life, student, school administration, teaching programs. Observations made by the researcher have shown that the teachers mostly face with problems due to prejudices of the students against multicultural education in the lessons. One of the aims of multicultural education is to overcome the biases of the individuals against one another (Banks, 2013b). In fact, Yildirim (2016) concludes that the activities about the cultural differences improve respect for cultural, racial and religious diversity and decrease students' biases. As for the family-related problems, it was indicated that they have problems due to the families' biases.

As stated above, most of the problems related to multicultural education encountered are caused by students. So, to control and educate small minds, parents should be educated in parallel. Their perception should be studied well and they should be involved in celebrating multicultural activities in the school. This helps to improve and elaborate the thinking level of their children. Based on this result, the schools are likely to think that parents should be educated about multicultural education in order to overcome students' biases against the individuals with different cultural characteristics. In addition, family plays a significant role in education. Students' biases against individuals with different cultural characteristics may result from their families. Thus, educating parents about multicultural education may eliminate these

biases. In addition, observations made by the researcher have indicated that teachers share the problems with the families when student-related problems emerge, and the problems are tried to be solved.

Further, numerous recommendations regarding multicultural education are developed like cooperation should be ensured with parents, it should be contacted with the guidance service, students' biases should be overcome, the teaching program should be arranged taking multicultural education into consideration, programs should include acquisitions based on multicultural education, education attainments should be organized on the basis of multicultural education, textbooks should be prepared considering multicultural education, student-centered activities should be implemented, school management should be provided in-service training on multicultural education, schools should be designed based on multicultural education, students should be urged to gain empathy skills, students should be endowed with values education, individuals with different cultural characteristics should be thrown together, equipment should be supplied. This creates a healthy joyful teaching learning environment in the school that makes each agency student, school and parents contended.

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