

## **Multiculturalism in Education**

### **Abstract**

*Today, nation-states face with the challenges of globalization engendered by multiculturalism diverging from the culturally homogeneous model as we know it. A large number of different nations, ethnic groups and minorities live in the world resulting in various linguistic, religious and ethnic characteristics of different cultural identities. This, in turn, requires that cultural diversity of life styles, ethnic groups, sects increasingly focus on their demands for recognition and representation. Since education has a role to shape and affect culture, it is important to define educational policies in multicultural societies to preserve one's values. In democratically unstable societies, the risk of defining and imposing one culture on others is always inevitable. In such cases the members of "dominant culture" have the privilege to limit or define the way of living, representation or participation of other cultures in the society. In this article, we try to re- evaluate the concept of multiculturalism in education in terms of cultural freedom, individual rights and effectiveness of teaching environments for multi-religious and multi ethnic societies.*

**Keywords:** *Multiculturalism; Education; Globalization; Identity; Ethnicity; Gender; Diversity*

## 1-Introduction

Today, nation-states face with the challenges of globalization engendered by multiculturalism diverging from the culturally homogeneous model as we know it. As Fullinwider (2001) underlines that a large number of different nations, ethnic groups and minorities live in the world resulting in various linguistic, religious and ethnic characteristics of different cultural identities. This, in turn, requires that cultural diversity of life styles, ethnic groups, sects increasingly focus on their demands for recognition and representation.

For some, such as Albert, R. D. Harry C. Triandis (1985) multiculturalism is praised uncritically in an indisputable manner. Those who categorically disagree with this concept regard it either “a new trap of global capitalism” or against “the spirit of national unity and solidarity”.

It may be possible to use the expression “cultural pluralism or multiculturalism” as against to the term “mono-culturalism”. The debates in multiculturalism brought not only the sovereign “nation-state”, but also the rights of “citizen” in the agenda. Since education has a role to shape and affect culture, (Ecirli A., 2009) it is important to define educational policies in multicultural societies to preserve one’s values. In democratically unstable societies, the risk of defining and imposing one culture on others is always inevitable. In such cases the members of “dominant culture” have the privilege to limit or define the way of living, representation or participation of other cultures in the society.

In this article, we try to re-evaluate the concept of multiculturalism in education in terms of cultural freedom, individual rights and effectiveness of teaching environments for multi-religious and multi ethnic societies. A free society and broadminded inter-personal relations can be considered as the source of respect, peace and mutual love for human life. Efficient, respected and comfortable living can be achieved by means of equality and fraternity.

The identity policies play important role in multicultural education. In a society, there is an implicit structure and hierarchical positioning of cultural identities. Emphasizing the diversity of cultures, religions and ethnics in a society may break such a structure and may result in “cultural polarization”. Discussions in multiculturalism in education, concentrates on the topic as to whether respect for individual rights will be in contradiction to that of the collective rights.

This is possible; the latter would not have to be in conflict with former. The realization of equal rights in a democratic process would be possible by means of assuring the co-existence of different cultural life styles and ethnics providing them equal rights (Ismaili, M., et al, 2010). In this sense, the assurance of multicultural life depends on the existence of various cultural groups in society as well as on achieving a “common culture”.

Although the expressions “tolerance” and “acceptance” still imply the differences in religion or ethnicity reflecting a hierarchical view to “others”, they are

widely used as they clearly show the efforts being exerted to achieve a common basis to live together with those “others”. This is important especially to initiate dialog among members of different cultures who must live together or come together in an educational settings. The debates for multiculturalism in education focus on two main views. The nationalistic dominant view suggests that educational system should be built to serve and protect the nation- state and its cultural values. The representatives of the second view regard themselves as the victims of such an educational system.

For the latter, the main purpose of the system must be to teach students their ethnic, religious and cultural values (Jaupaj, A., 2011). An ideal multicultural society can be defined as an environment where each of its members can perform required commitments to their families, communities, religions, nations, countries and cultural values. Otherwise, dominance in education of one culture, religion, customs, manners and language will result in acculturation or assimilation. As Schoorman, D.and Bogotch (2010) explain, societies where different cultures are not allowed to flourish side by side; other belongings and affiliations are rejected or discredited can be considered as colonial, dictatorial or totalitarian. Diboll (2011) underlines the fact that multicultural education policy is the one which respects “other” as the subject of recognition which requires the importance given to “identity”. Such a policy avoids imposing any identity to the “other”; penalizing diversity; or describing the different as “abnormal”, “deviant” or “traitor”.

## 2- Cultural Identities in Education

Various groups live in society in a variety of sexual, ethnic, religious identities, each with differences compared to others. Some of these identities may experience discrimination in social life. One of the areas exposed to identity discrimination is education. Education should be a right from which all individuals in the community can benefit (Sleeter, E., 1989). The principle is defined to provide education for all, gender, color, race, language, religion, origin, age, excluding any possible distinction. No matter what one’s gender, ethnicity, and religious identity, anyone has the right to self- development. Multiculturalism plays a vital role in preventing the discrimination in education policies and practices (Gorski, P.C., 2009).

According to Uka (2011) multicultural education can be regarded as an inspiring tool which improves students’ intellectual curiosity for other cultures if proper arrangements are made in terms of curriculum and learning environments design. Education should lead students to different views, belief systems and experiences of different forms of conceptualization as well. Here, the importance should be given to provide a setting where student can view the different cultures in equal status but differently. To clarify the term of multicultural education, it is necessary to analyze identity of students in terms of ethnic, religious, gender and etc.

*Figure 1: Cultural Identities in Education*

Religious Identities	Sexual Identity	Ethnic Identity	Minorities
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## 2.1- Religious Identities

Genc (2011) made a comparison of Turkish German religious education and he concluded that educational systems aiming the emancipation of individual should focus on the factors protecting them from domination of the elements which has the potential to establish values on his- her religious identity especially in the public sphere where various religions and cultures meet.

However, what is meant here is not to support the religious identity of individuals who value out others, rather it is a public area where cultural identities are preserved without any negative discrimination. In this sense the system does not discriminate the believers or unbelievers, and any faith groups keeping an equal distance to all.

## 2.2- Sexual Identity

One of the main axes of the debate on multiculturalism is the demands of the feminist movements. The gender inequality in some societies is reflected in schools towards students as well. In such schools the pressure on girl students is a result of gender-based discrimination.

Today, there are still some schools where school administrators try to educate girls saying “you’re a girl,” “girls must or must not do such things”. In such societies school is an environment, where male power is given priority in terms of gender relations. For this reason, the school is seen as an area of gender struggle for female students. The demands of feminism on gender and sexuality, life experiences and the status of certain differences between male and female groups, justifying the dots, political platforms, especially in accordance with the requirements of social platforms to clarify interpretations that can be earned are given in the fighting.

This is the struggle of women in society as second-class citizens, or citizens seen as a reaction to continue. Because women for hundreds of years have been addressed to sexist traditions explained approaches as victims of a system. Extending from the depths of history crush, exploitation and pressure led to the perception of women’s human identity as not sexual beings. Today, it is re- shaping itself to the living conditions of capitalism (Phillips, J., et al. 2012).

Male dominated culture, with control over consciousness and practical classes, people, and inequality between the genders deepen with each and every day. This was a training which was carried out in one of the most effective ways. Male and female gender roles, especially in textbooks reinforce their traditional gender roles. We can see it in different books, texts, where the majority of the characters are men. In addition, women are mostly represented in a way to be expected as being engaged in housework and child- caring.

In general gender-based discrimination can be seen in person in schools for students as in many national educational systems. Schoolwork duties are distributed among the girls and boys according to their gender. Girls are introduced different handworks in comparison to boys in primary schools. School environment effect the gender relations in governing the male power. For this reason, the school, not

only as a medium to reproduce the dominant values, like all other social areas has to create a wider space for girls.

### **2.3- Ethnic Identity**

The coexistence of ethnic identities is important to provide a multicultural school and any dominance over different ethnic, religious or gender groups in such an educational setting means prevention of multiculturalism. Ethnic, religious and gender identities within the framework of the dominant ideology are in line with this understanding. Being dominated by other cultural and ethnic identities, the hierarchy between the protection, creation and reproduction of forms of social domination and inequality, stands as an obstacle to freedom (Jashari, H. 2012).

### **2.4- Minorities**

One of the main issues regarding multiculturalism is the issue of minorities. A barrier to minority rights is the nation-state-based structural protection of the dominant group, which brings the concerns of contending separatism. Demands for the realization of the rights of minorities on the way to win the independence of the nation-state have to be well established and understood.

Ethnic and cultural differences in the representation and recognition of legal regulations safeguards will be brought outside the relations of equality between ethnic communities. However, one of the greatest demands for ethnic communities is known as “education in mother tongue”.

### **3- Conclusion**

In multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-denominational open societies people live together with different worldviews. Majority of the differences, in terms of relationships between groups and individuals, inevitably constitute a potential problem. Even some common elements of the individuals and groups which are closer to each other have repellent potential differences.

Teaching who teaches children is the key for multicultural education as the future teachers should have the readiness for it. Rego in the year 2000 and Bennett in 1900 studied the predictors of such readiness for multicultural education in terms of teacher education.

Cultural diversity and its ecological balance seem to continue evolving. An approach favoring unitary identity seems to be resistant to change. Another approach claiming one culture- one identity is artificial and contrary to the nature of man. Societies where the power of the majority or dominant culture is in the position of structuring the unitary state and other different cultures are known as assimilating. This manifests itself in various forms of imposing in relatively innocent ways. Diversity of different cultures in a society cannot ignore the demands. By definition, diversity is an inevitable part of public life. The secular state should be in an equal distance to all beliefs. It should not exert pressure on any group of religion favoring another one. Citizens should not be subjected to a negative discrimination just because of their beliefs. First of all there is a need for a multicultural society, a representation of all cultures in order to make reliable society where all the identities are in close relation with each other

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