

Classroom Pedagogy and the Accommodation of Students' Cultural Diversity: An Analysis of Teachers' Views from Selected Primary Schools in Chegutu District, Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

The study explored teachers' views on classroom pedagogy and the accommodation of cultural diversity in primary schools in Zimbabwe. The study was carried out in five selected primary schools in Chegutu district. Qualitative research was selected as the research method with phenomenology as the research design. The sample comprised twenty teachers (10 male and 10 female) selected through purposive sampling technique. Data gathering instruments consisted of unstructured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The study found out that teachers accommodate cultural diversity in a number of ways. Teaching methods employed in the classroom accommodate all learners in terms of varying ability levels. In the teaching of the languages particularly Shona cultural diversity is catered for through providing pupils with equivalent terms in different dialects as well as examples. The teaching of religious and moral education was seen as an area where cultural diversity is addressed through the adoption of a multifaith approach. Teachers were also found to be sensitive to pupils' diverse cultural backgrounds through utilisation of conducive teacher pupil classroom interaction. The study recommends that accommodation of cultural diversity should transcend all subjects in the primary school curriculum. Teachers need to be sensitised on the ideals of multicultural education through the hosting of seminars and workshops. Book publishers should make an effort to accommodate cultural diversity through provision of examples from a variety of cultures. There is need for teachers to carry out adequate research on pupils backgrounds so as to accommodate all pupils.

Key words: culture; diversity; multicultural education; culturally responsive teaching; sub culture

Introduction

The cultural diversity found in the student body in all countries worldwide demands that classroom pedagogy should accommodate student diversity. The increasing diversity found in most educational institutions globally means that educationist teach and manage learners with different cultures, languages

and backgrounds that are unknown to them (Meier & Hartell, 2009:180). Zimbabwe is a multiracial, multicultural and multiethnic nation. Zimbabwe's multicultural character is recognised and acknowledged (Report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training, 1999:357; Ministry of Education, Arts, Sports and Culture, 2004: 4). The demographic composition of Zimbabwe demands that classroom pedagogy accommodates the cultural diversity found in the nation. The accommodation of cultural diversity in terms of pedagogy needs to be discussed in the context of multicultural education. Multicultural education attempts to cater for students' cultural diversity and to give students with different characteristics an opportunity to learn (Banks, 2009: 4).

Zimbabwe is a signatory to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 29 of this convention states that children's education should develop each child's personality, talents and ability to the fullest and should encourage children to respect others human rights and their own and others' cultures. Article 30 states that minority or indigenous children have the right to learn about and practise their own culture, language and religion (UNICEF, 1990). These provisions can be realised through a system of education that acknowledges the plural character of society. Educators have the responsibility to ensure that students appreciate and tolerate those who are culturally different. This ideal situation can be realised through inclusive classroom pedagogy.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by postmodernism. Postmodernism celebrates difference in society. According to Bakhtin in Agger (2006:34) postmodernism is characterised by polyvocality, which suggests that everything can be said differently, indeed in multiple ways that are not inherently superior or inferior to one another. This observation confirms the need for the accommodation of students' cultural diversity in terms of classroom pedagogy. From the perspective of postmodernism, the world is viewed as pluralistic, split into a multitude of sovereign units of authority, it emphasises indeterminacy, ephemerality, fragmentation and reinvention along with diversity, the celebration of difference, a tolerance of ambiguity and mixing of styles (Punch 2004:144). From the point of view of postmodernism all knowledge is relative; all is good as any other (Lyotard in Kirby et al, 1997: 719). Therefore classroom pedagogy should make an effort to include different forms of knowledge in terms of pedagogy. By so doing the achievement prospects of diverse learners are enhanced.

Definition of Multicultural Education

The concept of multicultural education has been defined in a number of ways. Baptiste cited in Lemmer & Squelch (1993:3) defines multicultural education as:

The transference of the recognition of our culturally pluralistic society into our education system. Furthermore, multicultural education is the operationalising of the education system in such a fashion that it appropriately and in a rightful manner includes all racial and cultural groups. Therefore multicultural education has been regarded as a process which guides the total education enterprise (Lemmer, Meier & Van Wyk, and 2007:4).

Gorski & Covert (2010) define multicultural education as a progressive approach for transforming education that holistically critiques and responds to discriminatory policies and practices in education; it is grounded in ideals of social justice, educational equity, critical pedagogy and a dedication to providing educational experiences in which all students reach their full potential.

A common theme that runs across these definitions is the idea that multicultural education is an approach that seeks to accommodate learner diversity in its entirety in the practise of education. Banks (2005) in Runhare & Mulaudzi (2012:194) states that multicultural education guides the young generation to immerse themselves in other cultures, engage with difference and acquire diverse cultural competence. Therefore the aim of multicultural education is to provide a conducive climate for all students so that they can thrive academically and reach their full potential. Classroom pedagogy that is informed by the ideals of multicultural education has a significant role to play in this regard.

Dimensions of Multicultural Education

Banks (2009:20-22; 1993:4) has identified five dimensions of multicultural education as follows; content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy and empowering school culture and social structure. Content integration refers to the use of examples and topics from different cultures. It deals with the infusion of various cultures, ethnicities and other identities to be represented in the curriculum (Bode, 2010). Prejudice reduction seeks to help students examine their preconceptions about other people, especially people in the minority group and develop positive attitudes towards all human beings (Banks, 1993: 4; Banks, 2009:21). Equitable pedagogy is achieved when the teacher is able to match teaching strategies with students' learning styles. Knowledge construction focuses on the way knowledge is created in various subject areas and how one cultural assumptions, experiences and perspectives influences the knowledge constructed (Banks, 2009:20). These dimensions can be addressed through classroom pedagogy that accommodates the cultural diversity of all learners. It can be argued that content integration engenders equitable pedagogy, prejudice reduction and knowledge construction. Content integration should therefore be a prominent feature of classroom pedagogy designed to cater for students' cultural diversity.

Multicultural education requires culturally responsive teaching or culturally responsive pedagogy. Gay (2000) in Maatta (2008:22) defines culturally responsive teaching as making learning relevant and effective for ethnically diverse pupils by using the cultural knowledge, previous experience and performance styles. The essence of culturally responsive teaching is the accommodation of student diversity which should be viewed as strength by teachers. Montgomery in Maatta (2008:23) suggests that culturally responsive classrooms acknowledge the presence of culturally diverse children and their need to relate to each other and the subject matter and tasks they are asked to perform.

Statement of the Problem

Zimbabwe is a multicultural, multiracial and multiethnic nation where the need for multicultural education is of paramount importance. The successful implementation of multicultural education requires classroom pedagogy that caters for the cultural diversity of all learners. Educators at times fail to design classroom pedagogy that is inclusive of all learners. Hence this study seeks to explore teachers' views on inclusive classroom pedagogy.

Research Questions

The research study sought to address the following research questions:

- 6.1 How does classroom pedagogy reflect and accommodate cultural diversity found in the classroom?
- 6.2 What are teachers' views on sensitivity to diverse pupils' cultural backgrounds?

Research Methodology

The research method adopted for this study was the qualitative research paradigm. According to Denzin & Ryan (2008:580) qualitative research is multi method in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Therefore qualitative research observes people in their natural setting (Minichello & Kottler 2010: 12). Phenomenology was adopted as the research design. Phenomenology describes the meaning of several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or phenomenon. Data were obtained through the use of in depth- unstructured interviews and focus group discussions.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of all the teachers in the selected five schools. From this population a sample of twenty teachers (10 male and 10 female) was selected using purposive sampling techniques. Purposive sampling is based on the characteristics that the participants hold, and which are deemed by the researcher to be crucial to understanding the phenomenon being studied (Singleton & Straits, 2010: 173; Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2008:78; Barbour, 2008: 52). All teachers selected into the sample had a minimum of five years post qualifying experience.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data were analysed through thematic analysis. According to Struss and Corbin (1987) in Marshall & Rossman (2006:154), qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements and underlying themes. In the presentation of the data the responses of the participants were quoted verbatim in line with transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994 cited in Creswell 2007: 58).The participants and their schools were assigned pseudonyms to enhance anonymity and confidentiality/

Findings

Classroom Pedagogy and the Accommodation of Students' Cultural Diversity

All the participants were of the view that teachers accommodate classroom diversity in their teaching methods. This is done when designing appropriate classroom pedagogy through the examples that are given to pupils when teaching. This should be seen as a form of content integration according to Banks's (2009:20) dimensions of multicultural education. The views of the participants show that the different examples used in teaching are drawn from the sub cultural experiences of the pupils.

This is done in an attempt to ensure that all pupils have an equal opportunity to achieve. One participant had this to say about teaching methods:

Teaching methods accommodate the children because eh, these children are different. Their way of grasping, their way of accepting, their way of understanding is different. So the moment we use the different methods of teaching one child will be able to grasp, while one will grasp faster when using another different method. (Mrs. Tichienda School 4)

In the teaching of languages for example Shona, diversity can be accommodated through the use of different dialects to enhance pupils' understanding of terminology used for example in a story. The task of the teacher in accommodating the different dialects was emphasised by another participant who suggested that; The methods of teaching must include all the pupils. For example if you are teaching a story, the other time I gave you stories that I teach my Shona pupils. For example the terms and the terminology in that story may come from a different dialect. Then you can explain to the children what the other terms in that story mean, by so doing you are including everyone. I explain these terms in their own dialect. Students' diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences can be included through drama, role play. For example I can stage a drama on the payment of lobola by the Shonas. I can explain how the Ndebeles do it and how the Korekores do it. By so doing I am including everyone, those pupils from the Korekore subculture will now participate when you talk about the Korekore subculture and the Ndebeles will participate when you talk about how they do it in their culture. (Mrs. Mupfuti School 1)

Diversity can be accommodated in the classroom by giving pupils equivalent terms in different dialects for the same item or concept. According to a third participant;

When giving examples in the classroom we include pupils' cultural backgrounds. We use their experiences for the benefit of the rest of the class. For example in Shona, eh, *dikita* (sweat) is what we know it in Zezuru, but in Chipinge (Manicaland), if you go to Chipinge it is called *chifundi*. So in that case we use the experience of the children, we use their language, their knowledge of the language to help the whole class. Because when questions are asked in examinations, they don't only ask in Shona, I mean Zezuru questions, they also ask words pertaining to Karanga, Nda, Manyika and Korekore. So the children in our class, I really am happy if I have different pupils from different cultures, because it makes my teaching easier. (Mr. Marara School 3)

Teaching methods can be tailor made to suit the setting of the school and thus accommodate pupils' cultural diversity. This enables pupils to learn in a familiar environment as another participant stated; I think the

methods which are used by the teacher become important. Let's say you are talking about the site of the school, you talk about whether it is a rural, peri urban, a farm school or otherwise. Now the methods which are going to be used by the teacher are going to accommodate everyone. So the methods which are going to be used by the teacher are going to help the children. Let's say for here it is a farm school, you will look at the background of the children. In a farm situation you will talk about the compound where they live. Most of the pupils here live in compounds so the methods which you are going to use should be drawn from a compound setting. (Mrs. Khumalo School 2).

Similar views were expressed during focus group discussions. The importance of knowing each pupil as an individual was emphasised. The need for child study was emphasised by a participant who propounded that; Um, like I have already said we do child study. We have a social record where we look at the background of the child, religion and culture. That is meant to ensure that when we deal with our pupils we accommodate their sub cultural experience. (Mr.Penyai School 3)

The importance of accommodating all cultures in the teaching approach was emphasised as a way of accommodating all pupils in terms of pedagogy. Another participant observed that; they also accommodate multicultures whereby if it is the teaching of RME or whichever subject, whichever topic, the teacher is supposed to accommodate all those pupils knowing that I have pupils of this culture, pupils of this race. His/her methods of teaching should also accommodate that. This happens in all subjects just because there is no other subject to say eh, I should not apply this special method of teaching. All subjects are taken as if they are just the same. (Mr. Mwenga School 5)

In accommodating classroom diversity there are some issues that need to be considered. The need for teachers to be familiar with the backgrounds of their pupils was emphasised. A strategy to ensure the accommodation of cultural diversity was summarised by a participant who said; I think the best way of accommodating children in the classroom is to actually have an adequate research on the backgrounds of the children so that examples given are relevant to children in the community instead of the teacher giving his/her own examples from his/her own background, from other backgrounds which are alien to the local children. So I think the best method, they are OK ,but now the way they are executed will tell a story whether or not the children's cultures are integrated in the method the teacher uses.(Mr. Mabasa School 2)

The teacher's personality was seen as an issue that presents challenges in terms of accommodating pupils from diverse backgrounds in the classroom. This has implications for pedagogy as one participant believed that; At times it is a challenge. Because you might have your teacher who is a personality. He/she has his/her own culture. For example myself I am a Christian I try by all means to mix the cultures. But at times you find that some of the things I don't believe in it is very difficult for me to teach those. S (Mrs. Ndari School 2)

Views on Teacher Sensitivity to Pupils Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Most of the participants felt that teachers are sensitive to pupils' diverse cultural backgrounds. This is shown in the nature of teacher pupil interaction the accommodation of pupils' cultural beliefs as well as pedagogy that is employed in the classroom.

One participant was of the view that she exercises sensitivity in terms of pupils' social class background. This guides the nature and course of teacher pupil interaction. She remarked;

Sometimes, I think they are sensitive to other children. Like if I have a child who is poor, if he sometimes, if I notice that the child is dirty in the classroom I cannot shout at him in front of the class. Even if I have to say something nasty to the child, I have to talk to him and make sure others don't hear it. Or I will try to make others accommodate him especially if there is that person who is poor. I will try to make the pupils accommodate him. If the pupil is dull, I will try to make others accommodate him instead of telling him that you are dull. (Mrs. Chumi School 4)

With regards to teacher sensitivity to pupils' cultural backgrounds the teacher's cultural upbringing was seen to have an impact on his/her sensitivity to pupils' cultural diversity. Another participant had this to say about the influence of the teachers' background on sensitivity; Yah, I think they are, but there is need for continuation in terms of making teachers aware of the need to be sensitive. Because one may also be affected by the pressures of his/her own culture, but as a teacher remember you are teaching all the cultures. So you should have no culture yourself, but you should have the culture of the class as your culture. So one must be knowledgeable in those cultures and appreciate them so that maybe when you are teaching you can use for example the Ndaou culture, the Karanga sub culture, the Ndebele culture. (Mr. Bvumayi School 2)

The teacher has a role to play in ensuring sensitivity to diverse sub cultures in the classroom. This promotes positive pupil to pupil interaction in the classroom as a participant remarked; Like in my class, last year I used to have kids from the Islamic community, kids from the Islamic culture. Their culture is a bit different from ours, that was about maybe not just last year but about three years ago, I had some again. And nowadays for example circumcision is prevalent but those days it was not, it was usually people from that culture who used to be circumcised. So you find some kids want to mock them and do whatever. I would actually sit down with them and explain that it is their culture, just like you have your own culture. So they try to accommodate them. (Mrs. Bango School 3)

Although teachers make an attempt to be sensitive to pupils' cultural backgrounds they also encounter some challenges. These challenges impact negatively on their efforts to be sensitive to diverse cultural backgrounds. Lack of knowledge on handling diverse sub cultures appears to hinder efforts directed at accommodating pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds. One participant felt that; Teachers are sensitive but also we teachers are not equipped enough, equipped in terms of materials, in terms of knowledge of how to do it, or maybe from how we were trained. (Mrs. Gotor School 3)

Similar views were expressed during focus group discussions. The need to learn from other sub cultures was emphasised. One participant had this to say about teacher sensitivity; Yah, at this moment teachers are becoming sensitive because like I have given you an example in Shona, they are sensitive because they know that if one comes from a certain ethnic group it doesn't necessarily mean that he knows what is happening in another group. So they become sensitive, they accept the existence of these pupils in their classes and they make use of that. (Mr. Marara School 3)

The need to accept diverse pupils' cultural beliefs was seen as a way of showing sensitivity to pupils' diverse cultural backgrounds. One participant made the following observation with regard to cultural beliefs; Teachers are very much sensitive to pupils' cultural backgrounds. Because you find that a child comes to school with charms tied to his body or some body parts. I think it is for protection. You as a teacher cannot do anything about that and you cannot dissociate yourself from that child. Because you also want to help that child to prosper in education. (Mrs. Ndari School 4)

However some participants felt that teachers are not sensitive to pupils' diverse cultural backgrounds. In their view this is due to lack of knowledge about other cultures as well as the ideals of multicultural education. Teachers cultural backgrounds were seen as presenting an obstacle in efforts directed towards sensitivity to diverse cultural backgrounds in the classroom. One participant contradicted the preceding views about teacher sensitivity to pupils' cultural backgrounds. He said; I think, it is half- half. Because sometimes, teachers are expected to tolerate children's backgrounds in spite of their own. Sometimes, teachers put an effort to do that, but you realise that sometimes teachers are overwhelmed by their backgrounds such that they won't be able to accommodate different children. For example, we have children from Christian denominations, we also have an Islamic centre, but you realise that children from the Islamic centre I don't really think they are accommodated to the maximum state in respect of their culture, their way of worship and so on (Mr. Mabasa School 2)

Lack of adequate knowledge of the diverse pupils' cultures present in the classroom tends to present challenges in the design of equity classroom pedagogy. Commenting on teachers' lack of knowledge on pupils cultures a participant expressed the following concerns; We are not sensitive. Teachers are not sensitive because it appears that they are also not aware, or they are not well versed in those different cultures. A teacher sometimes sticks to his own culture; this is also what he delivers to the pupils that he will be working with. So there is really no teaching of other cultures. The teacher follows the line which he comes from; his culture is what he is delivering to the children. (Mr. Mabara School 4)

Teacher sensitisation on multicultural education was seen as a way of enhancing teacher sensitivity to diverse pupils' cultural backgrounds. A participant in support of the above concerns said; Teachers need to be more sensitised on multicultural education. Because long back in teaching, teachers were not aware of the need to be sensitive. They just knew that one was a teacher who had to teach what he knew because one could teach in his own home area. Now because Zimbabwe is a multicultural nation it means teachers have

to be trained so that they should be able to teach children from diverse backgrounds. (Mrs. Mupfuti School1)

Discussion

The responses of the participants show that classroom pedagogy tends to accommodate classroom diversity. This is seen in terms of teacher pupil interaction as well as some of the examples given in teaching. In the effective implementation of multicultural education pedagogy has to accommodate and acknowledge students cultural diversity as a form of content integration. Bakhtin cited in Agger (2006:34) advises that postmodernism is characterised by polyvocality which suggests that everything can be said differently indeed in multiple ways that are not inherently superior or inferior to one another. This enables the voice of the student to be heard in the classroom. From the responses of the participants content integration is being practised in the design of pedagogy. It appears that content integration features prominently in the languages particularly in the teaching of Shona where reference is made to different dialects as well as cultural practises. The teaching of religious and moral education was also cited as an area where content integration is also practised. Although some subjects were cited as enabling content integration the desirable situation is one where content integration cuts across all the ten primary school subjects. Accommodation of pupils' cultural diversity is an affirmation of the principles of postmodernism. With reference to Zimbabwe it appears that teachers are aware of the need to accommodate pupils' cultural diversity as shown by the different responses of the participants. It is a form of content integration that should also enhance equity pedagogy which is another dimension of multicultural education (Banks, 2009:20).

Multicultural education attempts to cater for students' cultural diversity and give students with different characteristics an opportunity to learn (Banks, 2009:25). This can be achieved in part through the design of classroom pedagogy that accommodates students' cultural diversity in the classroom. In this regard the school must not create the 'Other' by making borders around group differences (Ghosh, 2002:6). All pupils must feel included in terms of content integration. Moll *et al* (1992) and Gonzalez, (2004) cited in de Souza (2010:3) state that when teachers get to know their students and find ways to incorporate their home based expertise or 'funds of knowledge' in the classroom, students are better able to make connections between topics and across languages thus maximising learning. Postmodernism has been particularly important in acknowledging the multiple forms of otherness as they emerge in differences in subjectivity, gender and sexuality, race and class, temporary configurations of sensibility and spatial geographic locations and dislocations (Huysenns (1984) in Harvey, 2001:176). Accommodation of students' cultural diversity through content integration is part of the knowledge construction process where the focus is to emphasise to pupils that knowledge is socially constructed. Knowledge construction focuses on the way knowledge is created in various subject areas and how one cultural assumptions, experiences and perspectives influences the knowledge constructed (Banks, 1993:4).

However there are also some challenges that have been observed in content integration that were highlighted by some of the participants. Lack of knowledge of pupils' cultures is an issue that was cited.

The need for adequate research into the pupils' cultures in the school cannot be overemphasised so as to enable teachers to get more knowledge of pupils' diverse cultures. It is a necessary prerequisite in effective content integration. Murrell (2001) in de Souza (2010:9) argues that teachers must become 'community teachers' by acquiring knowledge of the culture of the students they serve so they can draw on this knowledge to create core teaching practices necessary for effectiveness in their diverse settings. Therefore the effectiveness of content integration is also determined by the teacher's understanding of the different cultures in the classroom.

The responses of the participants show that teachers are sensitive to their pupils' cultural backgrounds although there are some challenges that have to be addressed. Their views are in agreement with Campbell (1996:26) who argues that from a multicultural perspective the task of the teacher is to respect the culture the child brings from home, to guide the students' learning of the basic skills and attitudes of the dominant culture, and to nourish the students' self esteem. Thus Montgomery (1997) cited in Stoicovy, Fee & Fee, (2012:4) advises that teachers should gain knowledge of the culture represented in the classroom and to translate these into instructional practice. Sensitivity to pupils' diverse cultural backgrounds should be seen as a form of culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is a prerequisite for effective content integration. Within research culturally relevant teaching has emerged as a good strategy to improve student achievement (Schemechel, 2012:211). Culturally responsive teaching acknowledges students diverse cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2000 in Maatta, 2008:22; Rose & Potts, 2011:3; Montgomery, 2001 in Maatta, 2008:23 Herrera, Holmes & Kavimandan 2012:2). The views of the participants show that culturally responsive teaching is practised in the different schools to some extent although there are some challenges that have been observed.

These findings tend to contradict the findings of Vandeyar (2010:348) who found that in South Africa there seemed a general apathy and non committal among the majority of teachers in terms of creating a warm and welcoming environment for all students. Cultural sensitivity on the part of the teacher is very important in the implementation of multicultural education (Nkomo, Vandeyar, Malada, Phatlane, Thabane & Phurutse, and 2009:43). Accepting every child as a valuable individual is a foundation for multicultural education and a significant goal for teachers (Jokikoko, 2005; Koppinen, 1999 cited by Maatta, 2008:14). This sensitivity enables the teacher to accommodate all pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds without 'othering' (Mustafa, 2006:86). It can be argued that in the practise of multicultural education in Zimbabwean schools cultural sensitivity is observed.

Conclusion

The responses of the participants show that classroom pedagogy accommodates students' cultural diversity. This is shown through the examples that are drawn in teaching as well as the teaching approach adopted. Classroom pedagogy that is utilised can be seen as a part of content integration as well as culturally responsive teaching. However the range of subjects cited in which pedagogy accommodates students' cultural diversity appears to be narrow as Shona and religious and moral educations were

frequently cited. An ideal situation is where all the primary school subjects can be utilised in content integration. Teachers were also found to be sensitive to pupils' cultural backgrounds. Positive teacher pupil interaction was seen as one area in which sensitivity is displayed. Lack of adequate knowledge was seen as a challenge in enhancing sensitivity to pupils' diverse cultural backgrounds.

Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations:

- Teachers need sensitisation on the ideals of multicultural education through workshops hosted by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education;
- The accommodation of cultural diversity in terms of pedagogy should transcend all the primary school subjects;
- Teachers need to carry out adequate research on the cultures and sub cultures of their pupils;
- Book publishers working in close liaison with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should make an effort to accommodate cultural diversity in the content of textbooks
- Multicultural education should be part of the curriculum in initial teacher training.

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