


Chapter 2

Integrating Multicultural Education Into English Language Teaching: Practical Examples for Language Teachers

Kadriye Dimici

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7368-3218>

İzmir Katip Çelebi University, Turkey

Alper Başbay

Ege University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Multicultural education is an educational approach that focuses on accepting diversity in society, offers equal opportunities for students, and requires a transformation in the process of teaching. Foreign language teaching seems to be an appropriate field to utilize multiculturalism in the curriculum due to its relationship with culture and the flexibility of the content. Despite the existence of different approaches for the integration of multicultural content into the curriculum, there is little research explaining how to realize it in practice, especially in the field of foreign language teaching. Dealing with this problem, this chapter introduces the five dimensions of multicultural education and four levels of the content integration model, both designed by James A. Banks, to show how the English language curriculum could be restructured through the infusion of multicultural themes. This chapter appeals to the English teachers desiring to practice multicultural education in their teaching, and curriculum experts and decision-makers aiming to prepare a multicultural curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Improvements in technology and transportation have caused many changes around the world and one of the most important effects has been on the structure of society, causing the emergence of multicultural

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societies as a result of migrations. Therefore, multiculturalism has emerged as an important concept that emphasizes the peaceful coexistence of different cultural groups and requires the acceptance of diversity by people and governments (Banks, 2010a). This concept includes cultural diversities of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, social class, religion, and age (American Psychological Association [APA], 2002).

In this context, multicultural education has arisen to create equal opportunities for students from different cultural groups and develop dialogue between them (Cırık, 2008). Banks (2010a) define multicultural education as the educational approach focusing on the recognition and acceptance of diversity and the provision of respect and tolerance. Students feel a sense of belonging when their cultural background is taken into consideration in educational settings and this affects their academic achievement positively, so multicultural education offers an approach to include the culture of students from different groups in a learning environment. Multicultural education has its roots in the times of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s in the United States. Although the starting point was to get the rights of African Americans living in the US, multicultural education was later used as an inclusive term to include the rights of many disadvantaged groups in society such as women, people with disabilities, and old people (Banks, 2010a; Trecker, 1973). Teachers have a key role in the inclusion of multiculturalism in educational settings and helping their students to gain a critical multicultural viewpoint and develop respect for diversity (Başbay, 2014). As a result, teachers are expected to redesign the curriculum accordingly, offer appropriate learning situations, and create opportunities to eliminate any kind of prejudice in their classes.

To restructure teaching in line with the principles of multicultural education, it is recommended to utilize multicultural content distributed across all aspects and dimensions of the curriculum rather than offering it as a separate course (Cırık, 2008; Wahdini, 2014). This requires multiculturalism to be integrated with different fields and addressed in an interdisciplinary context. In this case, foreign language education stands out as an appropriate field where multicultural educational practices can be used thanks to the flexibility of the content of language classrooms and its role to enable communication among people and cultures (British Council, 2009; Cates, 2002; Hosack, 2018). This chapter explains the relationship between multicultural education and foreign language teaching by suggesting the restructuring of curriculum through a framework. This suggestion is supported with some practical examples that the researchers implemented in a Turkish university English language classroom as explained in the context part of the chapter. Although this chapter specifically focuses on how the suggested framework can be utilized in English language teaching, this framework could be used to integrate multiculturalism into any learning field or setting.

BACKGROUND

Multicultural Education and English Language Teaching

English language classes help students to communicate through the acquisition of skills, which include reading, listening, writing, and speaking. However, it is often discussed that this should not be the only aim of English teachers. In addition to the acquisition of these skills, language learners are expected to gain awareness about the problems in the world and evaluate these problems from different perspectives with the help of the content handled in the language classrooms (Byram, 1989; Hosack, 2011; Pratama

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