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Multiculturalism and Integration: Challenges, Strategies and Prospects of Students' Integration in Educational Environment and Society

Abstract

The study presents arguments on multiculturalism and integration and aims to look into the challenges, strategies, and prospects of the students' integration in the educational environment and society. Reasonable literature exists on its different aspects and the assumed relationship of multiculturalism and academic integration into the educational environment in different countries. The existing literature was identified to review and discuss the concerning arguments on the issue. Different strategies have been reviewed to acculturate with the main emphasis on academic integration before focusing on the interplay of the processes of multiculturalism and integration and the probability for students' integration in the academic culture. It was found that multiculturalism and integration interplay in varying ways, and there is a likelihood that students can integrate into a multicultural environment of an educational institute where culturally diverse groups of the students' respect diversity and intercultural strategies supported by the host institute which helps them integrate.

Key Words: Multiculturalism, Student Integration, Institutional Environment, Acculturation, Intercultural strategies, Diversity.

Introduction

Integration and multiculturalism are the two strategies of acculturation. In other words, two sides of a coin of acculturation: the former is used by the non-dominant cultural groups within the larger society to seek a relationship with the host society while maintaining their heritage culture and identity and the later one, on the other hand, is employed by the counterpart larger society that respects ethnocultural groups' cultural identity and diversity and provide them opportunities to interact with diverse dominant and non-dominant cultural groups in the larger society ([Anier, Badea, Berthon, & Guimond, 2018](#); [Merola, Coelen, & Hofman, 2019](#); [Moore & Barker, 2012](#); [Safdar, Chuong, Lewis, 2013](#)).

Traditionally, multiculturalism describes the cultural pluralism that occurs as a result of migration towards a society. [Berry \(2015\)](#) asserts that it may exist in consequence of "colonization, slavery and refugees and immigration movements" (p. 21). Also, [Brooks \(2002\)](#) argues that in cultural pluralism, diverse cultural or ethnic groups of people live collectively in a socio-political 'shared framework'. Sam and [Berry \(2009\)](#) supplemented that contemporarily, it is hard to find a uni-culture society with a unique culture, language, and single identity. Accepting and respecting cultural diversity is the soul of multiculturalism. [Beairsto & Carrigan \(2004\)](#) argue that "multiculturalism is based on a celebration of diversity, not the pursuit of uniformity" (p. 1). Further, we are distinguished by the culture, yet we are associated with the commonalities and similarities human beings share.

According to [Schierup \(1997\)](#), the term was originated in the United Kingdom and Canada before it traveled to Europe and America. In Germany, it occurred in the early 1980s during the debates on church and social education. In an educational perspective, [Urciuoli \(2010\)](#) states that multiculturalism refers to the established student groups and organizations such as Latino, African-American, and Asian, which are identified as socio-cultural forums on the educational platform. The peers, teaching faculty, and administrative staff of the institution also refer to these students for social and academic activities of the diverse groups of the students.

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In the view of [Berry \(2005\)](#), integration is the tendency of a person from different cultural backgrounds to become part of the host culture and interact with other members of the society in a way to adapt the basic values of the culture while retaining one's cultural heritage. Also, [Tinto's \(1993\)](#) theory of student integration considerably emphasizes the role of interaction between students and their educational environment as a focal point to integrate into the educational environment of the institutions. Mainly, academic and social integration are essential elements to achieve the desired level of integration in educational set up ([Kastoryano, 2018](#); [Lovitts, 2001](#); [Tinto, 1997](#)). [Tiemann \(2004\)](#) distinguishes between four dimensions of the term integration; structural integration describes the status of affiliation, cultural integration explains the ways societal life is learned, social integration takes into account the acceptance and participation in social events and activities and, indemnification integration deals with the individuals/groups identification to the host society. [Inglis \(2011\)](#) used the concept incorporation as a substitute term due to ambiguities adjoining the concept of integration in order to avoid confusion with the assimilation. She further argued three dimensions of incorporation while describing the incorporation (integration) of Australian youth in a multicultural and transnational world.

Objectives and Methodology

The objectives of the study were to:

- find the relationship between multiculturalism and socio-academic integration in the educational setting and society.
- identify the challenges of students' integration in the educational environment and society.
- review the intercultural strategies and determine prospects of students' integration in the educational environment and the broader society.

An extensive literature was reviewed in the broader field of multiculturalism and student integration to answer the questions related to the cited objectives of the study. A wide range of literature was identified, reviewed, and organized with appropriate citations in order to address the objectives and corresponding questions. The researchers sought examples and case of student integration in European context while comparing with some other parts of the world. The study has implications for the prospective students who intend to study abroad in an international university and multicultural country.

Challenges of Socio-Academic Integration

The dimensions stated in the introduction may be viewed in education settings. The first is related to the degree of socio-economic disadvantage realized by people in minority. Students, groups of minority having migrant backgrounds may face this situation during educational participation and job exploration that influence their financial position and participation in the wider society. In Australia, according to the [Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission \(1973\)](#), educational inequity has been observed as the primary policy issue which influenced females, labor class, and rural and minority students. The second concerns with the extent of individuals' network of social relations within their group and to other ethnocultural dominant and non-dominant groups in the society. The third aspect deals with the students' belongingness expressed in terms of identification and citizenship that may be influenced by the attitude of the larger society. [Inglis \(2011\)](#) concluded that "changing immigration policies, source countries and global changes all affect how they [the youth] are incorporated" in a multicultural society like Australia (p. 176).

From a psychological perspective, [Berry \(2015\)](#) argues that integration involves process (how people manage their everyday experiences; such as learning, perception etc.), competencies (built up as a result of experiences; such as abilities, attitude, values), and performance (activities presented through explicit behavior; such as projects etc.). In an education setting, for example, most of the international students go through the process of language learning in the host country institution. They acquire language competence depending upon the formal and informal opportunities available inside and outside the campus. Consequently, they will perform their language abilities, which will be promoted based on their competence, social environment of the

host institution, and motivation to speak the language during the ongoing class, seminars, and formal and informal interaction.

Similarly, other than language, students attempt to learn social norms, fundamental values, and essential skills necessary to maintain relations with their peers, academic and administration staff of the institution in order to integrate into the new system. Memory, in converse to forgetting, is a tool to retain these learned behaviors. Competencies are affective: that is emotional such as; attitude, identities, and values as well as cognitive: that is intellectual such as; knowledge of ordinary and complex abilities (Berry, 2011). Integration involves affective and cognitive competencies both about students' cultural background and identity and those competencies required to seek relationships with the socio-cultural and academic environment of the host institution. In a multicultural environment of the educational institutions, students perform in a specific context, which is influenced by the reward and punishment by the other groups. Thus, attitudes, identities, and values of the integrating students are expressed in the view of the social and academic context and the benefits associated with these behaviors.

The cultural vision of integration is known as multiculturalism. This involves two principles: first is the acceptance of cultural diversity posed as a variety of cultures in a larger society, and second is equitable participation of the constituent groups in that society. The cultural diversity serves the primary source of the shared national and political framework. The equal access of basic human needs and rights to all the ethnocultural groups within the dominant society is the core of a multicultural society (Alsubaie, 2015; Berry, 2011; Kastoryano, R. (2018). In an educational context, students' integration in the multicultural environment of the international institutions requires accommodative policies and plans as well as an appropriate accommodating attitude by the minority students. This accommodation requires that the needs of all students from different cultural backgrounds should be met, and they should be encouraged to adopt the fundamental socio-cultural and academic values of the institution by providing a conducive environment.

Intercultural Strategies and Integration

According to Berry (1980) Intercultural strategies are referred to various strategies in which different types of groups (dominant or non-dominant) and individuals residing in plural societies have different preferences to engage each other in several processes. Berry further explains that these different ways to engage diverse groups are based on the extent to which they wish to uphold their cultural identity, and the degree they desire to interact with other groups in the larger society in order to seek a relationship. In other words, in multicultural societies, different ethnocultural groups adopt a range of strategies to establish relations with each other that may lead to gradual assimilation in the larger society.

According to Berry (2011, 2015), there are four strategies by which people acculturate in a plural society depending upon the two issues: their preference for retaining their cultural heritage and identity and the relative priority for establishing contacts and involving in the larger society. Keeping in view the non-dominant group's stance, the assimilation occurs when people do not desire to sustain their heritage culture, and lose much of their identity attempting to interact regularly with other cultural groups for their absorption. It may be noted that, in acculturation, the individuals or the groups rather lose some of their cultural identity, and they are recognized primarily as part of the minority group, particularly in biculturalism. This concept was posed by LaFromboise, Coleman & Gerton (1993). On the contrary to assimilation, the other alternative known as separation appears when people intend to uphold their cultural heritage but seek to avoid relationships with other groups.

The integration strategy is determined when the acculturating people are interested in preserving their cultural heritage and prefer to interact with others at the same time. Maintaining one's cultural identity and engaging as an essential part of the host society simultaneously is a salient feature of this process. Modood (2011) distinguishes between assimilation and integration as former being the processes that influence change and relationships among the groups viewed as one-way, and the incoming groups affect the larger society marginally for their settlement. In contrast, the latter is characterized by a two-way process of interaction where both majority and minority ethnic

groups contribute to the common goal of achieving intercultural relations. Finally, marginalization is defined as the situation when people lack interest in cultural preservation and not willing to interact with others.

On the other hand, the intercultural strategies employed by non-dominant ethnocultural groups may be influenced by the power of the dominant group of the larger society (Berry, 1974). For instance, the integration strategy is undertaken when the dominant group allows other groups to pursue their cultural heritage openly while providing them the opportunity of inclusiveness. Thus, a stage is set by the dominant group to accommodate other groups when they adopt fundamental values of the host society, and the accommodating society helps them acculturate by meeting their needs in a collective life within the larger society.

Similarly, when the larger society helps other groups to maintain the relations but restricts to preserve their identity, the assimilation strategy of the non-dominant group turns into a melting point due to enforcement by the dominant group. Likewise, when separation and marginalization are imposed by the dominant group instead adapted by ethnocultural groups, it takes the form of other strategies known as segregation and exclusion, respectively. Finally, when cultural diversity is respected by larger society allowing the inclusion of the other ethnocultural groups, the phenomenon is called multiculturalism (Berry, 2011; Grigoryev & Berry, 2017). This encourages a pluralistic model that serves to pursue shared national goals and needs by dealing with distinct cultures and allowing diverse cultural groups to work with each other (LaFromboise et. al., 1993). However, inconsistencies and conflicts between the preferences of non-dominant groups for the acculturating strategies they employ and the forced alternative strategies enacted by the larger society cause difficulties for the acculturating groups or individuals, which is called acculturative stress (Berry, 2011; Grigoryev & Berry, 2017). Several studies show that individuals were engaged in these four intercultural strategies. According to Berry, Kalin, and Taylor (1977, p. 2.10), "a large majority of Canadians endorse multicultural ideology as the way for ethnocultural and immigrant groups to relate to each other".

Prospects of Students' Integration

Multiculturalism is an approach to integration guided by the principles of reciprocity, equity, diversity, and participation in the society compatible with the multicultural conceptualization of the function of modern societies (Berry, 2005). That is why; the issue of accommodating diverse cultures throughout Europe has been challenged. Vasta (2009) argues that "in many countries, there appears to be a retreat from multiculturalism, both in policy and public discourses, and a shift towards demands for integration of immigrants into dominant values, culture and social behavior" (p. 51). Gordon (1964) focused on the situation of Afro Americans in America and observed that there are a few relationships and contacts between different ethnic groups in the multicultural society of America. Therefore, he inferred that the feeling of oneness in American society faced two barriers of integration: the ethnic group and the social class. It implies that the process of assimilation (sometimes used interchangeably with integration) was not accomplished, and it reached the level of acculturation. Schierup (1997) describes that due to the failure of assimilation or melting point of the ethnic groups in America, the rise of the multicultural society gains more significance.

Nevertheless, according to Berry (2009, 2015), it has been assumed since long that the cultural diversity in such multicultural societies will disappear gradually as a result of the contact among diverse cultures, producing new values and customs, rather than the emergence of cultural homogenization and domination. Berry (2011, p. 2.2), added that cultural group relations model in plural societies "accommodates the interests and needs of the numerous cultural groups, and which are fully incorporated as *ethnocultural groups* into this national framework [*the larger society*]". In contrast, in the *mainstream-minority* model, the minority groups rest on the boundary of the mainstream society unless they merge as an integral part of that mainstream society. This model assumes cultural pluralism as a problem to be solved, whereas the multicultural view asserts that this is a resource, and there is a need for inclusiveness supported by effective policies and programs.

Vasta (2009) argues that “multiculturalism is seen as a form of tribalism. Many believe it segregates ethnic minorities and immigrants from the mainstream society” (p. 47). Nevertheless, it has been observed in many studies that a multicultural environment in educational institutions has positive effects on the socio-cultural and academic output of different students ([Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan, & Landreman, 2002](#)). [Huddleston \(2011\)](#) states that in Australia, students study civics and citizenship, which is included in the curricula, appraised and compared in different states. Similarly, Canada also promotes intercultural education in schools and the larger society. Schools can independently run foreign language programs, and schools manage in a way that all students can study the language and culture of other migrant students.

After exploring experiences of Middle Eastern students' in a Malaysian university regarding multiculturalism in higher education, [Pandian \(2008\)](#) found that the existence of many international students is even inadequate to cultivate inter-cultural interaction and understanding. Nevertheless, international and local students perceived that a conducive acculturative environment in the university could foster their intercultural relations. Also, the author suggests that higher education institutions should contribute to executing “peer-pairing programs, cooperative learning, and residential programs” for establishing intercultural relations. Moreover, they need to “be exposed to the establishment of various social support networks, to ensure that they participate in external affairs and can solve their challenges that are encountered as a result of their status as international students studying in a foreign land” (p.56).

[Cheng & Zhao \(2004\)](#) investigated the college students' level of participation in specific activities and events and its connection to multicultural learning and found a “powerful educational effect of college activities concerning multicultural learning” (p. 1). They further found that students perceived diversity-friendly environment of the campus is directly linked with their perceived gains in multicultural competence, and in some cases, the student group leaders become more influential than their peers, which tends to change the campus environment more positively. Also, diverse students' characteristics “highlight the challenges facing the higher education community aiming at achieving the noble goals of diversity and multiculturalism on campus” (p. 6).

[Medved, Franco, Gao, and Yang \(2013\)](#) while investigating group separation, language barriers and cultural differences in teaching international students in Lund University (LU), Sweden, found that though international students in LU has increased they had to face certain problems particularly culture shock and foreign language that caused the emergence of issues in teaching such as “group separation, language barriers, and cultural differences” (p. 1). Group separation may result in social isolation from the host students that creates a communication gap, resultantly erecting language, and the cultural wall between local and international students.

In a multicultural environment of an educational institution, education itself serves diverse functions in educating and creating awareness about the processes that help them to adjust to the environment. [Schwirner \(2005\)](#) states that “education means one of the most important conditions for integration, for children and youth of migrant families as it means a chance for cultural, social and identificatory integration” (P. 23). Moreover, students' participation in the educational process can help them to initiate and maintain a sense of affiliation with the host students, and provide further opportunities for education can lead them to understand and cope with the cultural differences (Tiemann;2004; [Zentrum für Türkeistudien; 2001](#)). Therefore, education is not only a tool for integration but it created a multicultural environment within educational institutions in countries like Australia, Canada, America, England and the other may pose certain conditions in the multicultural atmosphere that may promote or hinder integration of the students ([Gui, Safdar, & Berry, 2016](#); Schachner, He, Heizmann, & Van de Vijver, 2017).

In an educational environment, particularly, and in all the segments of social life, in general, language is one of the ways to integrate. Language is a great discovery that paves the way for human relations and subsequent behaviors and other related phenomena in the socio-cultural life of individuals and groups, [Clyne \(1991\)](#) asserts that language is the most potent and inevitable source of communication, cultural identity and expression, and a vital tool for cognitive development and stimulation for human action and thought. [Clyne \(2011\)](#) states that “a high degree of language shift from the community language to English [the local language] is indicative of assimilation. A low

degree of shift can reflect multiculturalism or a desire to segregate but does not necessarily indicate a reluctance to integrate.” (p. 62).

The primary goals of Australia and Canada, the earliest supporters of multiculturalism, is to provide opportunities to the immigrants of the national language(s) learning, engage them in the society equally, and identify them with the host society (Huddleston, 2011; Gui, Safdar, & [Berry, 2016](#); Schachner, He, Heizmann, & Van de Vijver, 2017). At the same time, people are allowed to express their cultural heritage and language according to their desires. These countries have managed to promote integration through national language learning and multiculturalism. The multiculturalism policy of these two countries is beneficial for the children in the state. In Australia, the Government prefers that students should master Asian and foreign languages and learn about the culture.

Huddleston (2011), further added that both the countries provide high-quality language learning courses in English (and French for Canada). The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) – an instrument that assesses the integration policies in all EU states, Norway, Switzerland, Canada, and USA; found that children in England are not provided such opportunities for English language learning as compared to these countries and other immigration states. It has been observed that “all the students in England have been recently learning about citizenship, identity, diversity, and community cohesion. However, this curriculum may be scrapped by the current government” (p. 12).

Conclusion

Given the arguments presented in the paper, there is a probability that students may integrate in the multicultural environment of an educational institution where a culturally diverse group of students study together. Also, designing appropriate student's activities, programs, and policies by the student union and administration of the host institution may promote cultural diversity and equity for participation. Thus, the preference for implementation of integration and intercultural strategies may result in greater harmony among diverse groups of students studying in an academic environment and living together in a larger society. It is noticeable that the academic integration is a two-way approach that emphasizes not only adaptation by the migrant student community but also facilitation by the host university and the student community in particular. Policies must focus on the barriers to integration, such as discrimination, inequality, needs to adapt and acquiring the skills for participation.

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