Curriculum Development in Multicultural Education

Nino TVALCHRELIDZE*

Abstract

The evidence of the increasingly diverse society has brought forward the immergence of multiculturalism in the field of education. For the successful implementation of multiculturalism, substantial institutional changes are required. This includes but is no means limited to the shift from standard-based curriculum to multicultural transformative curriculum. This study is conducted to reveal how multicultural curriculum effects students' diversity awareness, engagement in learning, and feelings towards intergroup relationships. Also, how students assess the multiculturalism of the curriculum in Education Faculty English language Philology, bachelor level at IBSU.

Introduction

Over the past few decades educators have witnessed the increasing immergence of multiculturalism in the sphere of education, which is due to the extremely diverse society we are living today. As Banks and Banks (2004) defines multicultural education encompasses a movement in education that provides equal opportunities to study for students from diverse backgrounds based on ethnicity, culture, language, economic status, and ability/disability. Multicultural education is designed to prepare students for citizenship in a democratic society by teaching them to consider accomplishments of all individuals.

The major goal of multicultural education is to reform the school and other educational institutions to experience educational equality. Bennet (2007) describes multicultural education as "an approach to teaching and learning that is based on democratic values and beliefs; and affirms cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies in an independent world."(p.4) McLaren (2007) sees multiculturalism as "progressive" effort to address and accommodate the growing diversity within schools.

As the discussion around multicultural education and its successful implementation in the classroom grow, there is the rising consensus between most scholars and researchers that institutional changes including changes in the curriculum, teaching materials, teaching and learning styles, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of teachers and administration, and the goals, norms, and culture of educational institution should be made.

The purpose of this study is to clarify how multicultural curriculum made inroads into the operation of Education Faculty English language Philology bachelor level at IBSU and define its impacts on students.

Theoretical Framework and Literature review

Before discussing curriculum transformation stages, from monocultural curriculum, which reflects basing teaching on dominant values, and which is called "cultural hegemony" (Gramsci, 1971), to transformed curriculum, which denies hegemonic content, and includes the experiences and worldviews of marginalized groups, it is worth defining what curriculum is.

Cornbleth (1996) describes curriculum as a contextualized social process that includes interaction of teachers, students, and knowledge. Schwab (1983) defines curriculum as what teachers impart to students using suitable materials and actions.

What are the goals of curriculum? As Banks (2003) sees overall goals of the curriculum is to make content flexible, customizable to integrate assignments and activities that fit to students of various backgrounds, experiences, learning styles, abilities and disabilities, and above all to enable students transform their knowledge to succeed in nonacademic situations.

There has been a debate whether to edit existing, standard-based curriculum or take a transformative approach. Mostly conservative educators argued that diversified curriculum, that integrates issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, and class makes it more prone to social agendas that politicizes it (Finn, 1990) instead of promoting unity in diversity. As Grant (1994) explains struggle against multicultural curriculum transformation is based on the misconception that it is for minority students only and it weakens knowledge and erudition.

Dom Nwachukwu (2005), acting as an advocate to additive approach argues that multicultural content can be incorporated within standard curriculum and he identifies the ways to integrate multicultural insight at different stages within lesson planning like: goals and objectives; materials and resources; anticipatory set or entry; instructional input; guided practice; independent practice; assessment and evaluation. He supports his argument by noting the fact that teachers view multicultural education as yet another goal to undertake within their already excessively

* *A Doctorate Student at the Faculty of Education, International Black Sea University,Tbilisi,Georgia;*
E-mail: tvalchrelidzenina@yahoo.com

full teaching schedules.

However, proponents of curriculum transformation have proposed counter arguments. They have proposed theories advocating incorporation of multiple cultures in school curricula. Such theories present a long list including "culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1995), "culturally-responsive teaching" (Gay, 2000), "culturally sensitive instruction" (Boyer, 1993), and "multicultural instruction" (Saldana &Waxman, 1996). Ladson-Billings (1994) remarks on the necessity to present the perspectives of the students into the curriculum. Werner (1977) states: "program developers become the gate-keepers of reality definitions. They select, classify, and evaluate viewpoints and knowledge for inclusion within programs." Favaro (1981) claims that educational programs are often viewed in terms of problem solving. He believes that in examining a concept, such as multiculturalism, our first concern should be "problematizing and should allow teachers to become co-participants in the process."

Supporters of curriculum transformation maintain that this is the best possibility to promote balance, equity, and social justice; and reduce marginalization. Smith (1997) discovered that diversity initiatives, in the curriculum and in the classroom have a positive impact on students' attitudes and feelings towards racial issues. Furthermore, he found that extensive institutional change in teaching methods, curriculum, and classroom climate benefit both groups: minority and majority students. More importantly, Scott (1994) illustrates that curriculum transformation goes beyond the scopes of academic responsibility and attains moral compulsion: "We have an academic responsibility and a moral obligation to provide students with an inclusive education that will enable them to deal with the contingencies of living in a diverse world. Research shows that when students are taught from an inclusive curriculum they are eager to learn; they are more engaged in teaching/learning processes. They want more inclusive course content throughout the education process. Faculty who are involved in integrating diversity into their curriculum report that their teaching is revitalized, their student evaluations improved, and their overall job satisfaction increased."(p.67)

Over the years, a few models of curriculum transformation have been advanced (Banks, 2005; Butler & Schmitz, 1991; Grant & Sleeter, 2005; McIntosh, 1995; Aoki, 1978).

Aoki suggests critical-reflective framework as an approach to curriculum development. It is radical transformation from "accepted" curriculum development models. The critical-reflective framework calls upon the teacher and student to enter his/her own historical progress as it relates to multiculturalism. The critical-reflective framework requires that established meanings and values relating to multiculturalism be raised to conscious level. Wojtila (1979) sees such an approach as emancipating the individual by exposing the taken-for-granted; such disclosure can lead to self-governance. Goulder (1974) sees the critical-reflective framework as a binding together of reflection upon the world and the action to transform the world.

Grant & Sleeter (2005) created a practical book, Turning on learning: Five approaches for multicultural teaching plans for race, class, gender, and disability, that focuses on specific lessons and units in different subject areas.

Most popular models were developed by Banks. The first model provides a framework of four different types of multicultural curriculum reform. The second model consists of five elements: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy (teaching strategies, delivery methods), and empowering school culture (policies and practices promoted throughout the program).

Thus, curriculum transformation entails changes in materials, activities, questions, methods of delivery, as well as identifies new ways of teaching and learning and focuses on student-centered pedagogy.

The focus of this study became Faculty of Education, English Philology bachelor level at IBSU. It is relatively new faculty in the university, but all three levels of tertiary education (Bachelor, Master, and PhD) are represented successfully. Outstandingly multicultural curriculum of the faculty includes following courses: British Culture and Multicultural Studies; Introduction to World Literatures; British Landmarks; British Pop Culture; Methods of Teaching English; Culture of Georgian Oral and Written Communication; Elective language 1, 2, 3, 4.

The mission of the faculty is to enhance cross-cultural awareness and support the communication between cultures.

The goal of the faculty is to provide students with contemporary knowledge and adequate skills in the field of English philology using range of student-centered, inquiry-based methods: problem-based learning, project-based learning, computer-assisted learning, discovery learning.

Method

The research was conducted based on the data obtained from Education Faculty English Philology bachelor level students at IBSU. The justifications for the choice of this faculty are listed below:

• It is relatively new faculty in the university

• Mixed nationality groups that are presented on the faculty have more potential to reveal interesting data

• The center-point in the study was language curriculum development and effects

The Education Faculty at bachelor level encompasses totally 65 students. So, 65 questionnaires were distributed using the online survey software package www.surveymonkey.com and 50 were completed and returned. The

following link will allow you to see the questionnaire:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/2ZQNF3F

Some responses were added manually.

Results

Question 1: How would you rate effectiveness of Education Faculty curriculum?

Majority of students (63%) rated the effectiveness of Faculty curriculum as *Very effective*. Only 36 % thinks that it is *Moderately effective* and all other points received 0%

Question 2: How would you rate content of textbooks, tapes, videos used at Education Faculty?

The research showed that 26% of students are *Moderately satisfied* and 70% are *Very satisfied*. Though 4% of students are only *Slightly satisfied.*

Question 3: Do different courses in the curriculum improve cultural understanding?

Majority of the participants (60%) answered positively. Item *Moderately improve received* 36%. Only very little percentage (4%) of students think that different disciplines *Slightly improve* their cultural understanding.

Question 4: Do you believe every student has opportunity to learn despite ethnicity, race, gender, ability?

Majority (52%) think all students are equal. 44% rated *Moderately believe* .Very surprisingly, 2% of participants think that not all students have equal opportunity to study. Further 2% assumes that they have very little possibility to study.
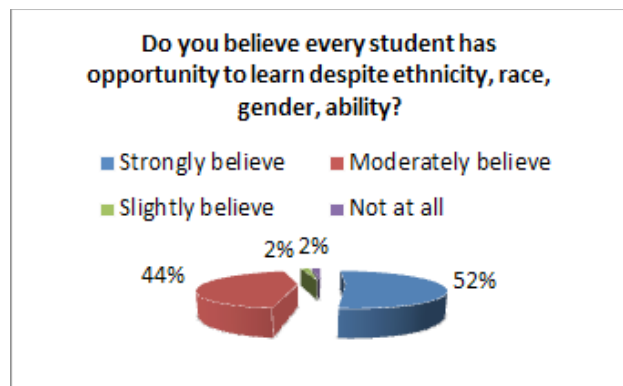

Figure 1.1. Equal Educational Opportunities

Question 5: Who benefits from multicultural curriculum?

56% think all students benefit equally. 30% of participants voted for majority groups.10% of research participants share the ideology with opponents of curriculum transformation and think that minority groups benefit more.
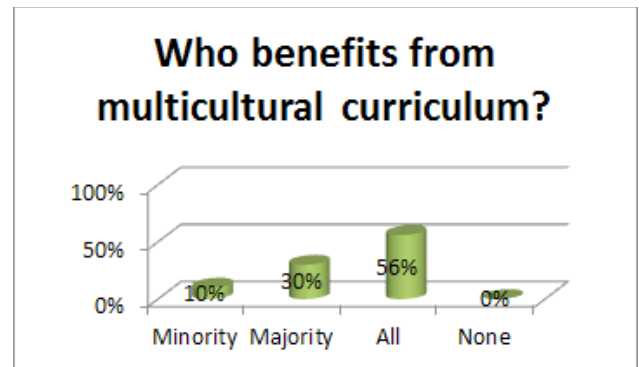

Figure 1.2. Efficiency of Multicultural Curriculum

Question 6: Do the curricula used at Education Faculty enhance students' engagement?

Equal percentage of research participants (6%) ticked either *Slightly enhance* or Not at all enhance. Again majority of them assumes that Education Faculty curricula have positive effect on student motivation and engagement. However 20% of them think that more have to be done to engage students.

Question 7: Do you think your feelings have improved towards diverse group relationships?

The researched data highlighted that 66% of participants value diverse groups more and respect their culture. Another 24 % thinks that curriculum moderately improved their feelings and further 4% and 6% of applicants rate it as *Slightly improved* and Not at all *improved respectfully*.
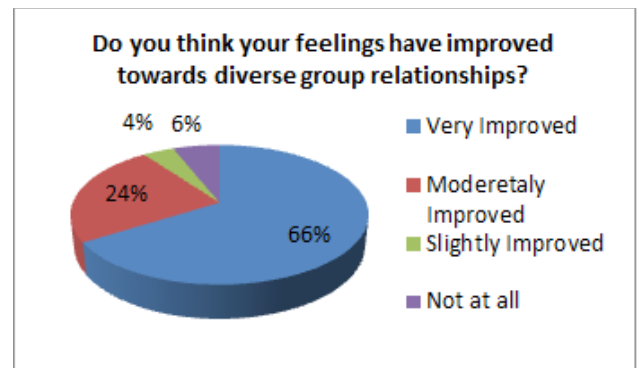

Figure 1.3. The role of curriculum in raising cultural awareness

Conclusion

At the university level, the role of the faculty is essential to decide the curriculum trends. Faculty worldviews determine what knowledge or values are planned to convey to students and which methods to adapt while doing so.

Infusion of various perspectives into the educational system will extend students understandings of the complexity of the society today, and to make unity in diversity, transformation of standard-based curriculum is vital.

Multicultural curriculum considerably promotes students cultural awareness, motivation and engagement and

enhances diverse group relationships.

As some students (though, only 2%) detected unequal opportunity for all groups to study, and as student-centered, democracy-based education should reach the needs and concerns of each individuals, in future studies attention to the motives of differentiation will be appreciated to meet the full potential of every student.

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