U.S. secondary school graduates of different nationalities and their vision of multicultural education

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Abstract

In this fast growing globalized world, there is great urgency to revise the education curriculum and question the appropriateness of developing future generations who should be able to recognize the complexities and differences of our world. Consequently, in the U.S. diverse society   there is the urgent need to incorporate multicultural education in modern schooling. This article provides a comparative analysis of the responses of English and Spanish language speaking groups using survey that aimed to identify the attitudes of U.S. secondary school graduates of different nationalities towards the components characterizing multicultural education.

Keywords: Multicultural education, academic achievements, PTA(Parent-Teacher Association), curriculum and Extracurricular activities

Introduction

A great deal has been written on the subjects of educational expansion, change, and controversy. Historically, a major goal of the U.S. education system was the integration of all Americans into a national community. The review of events throughout the historical foundation of U.S. education gives the opportunity to avoid the repetition of the same mistakes that have already occurred in the process of creating a feasible and effective educational system.

The history of American Education is filled with many events telling of some success and some failures of its development. Educators are currently dealing with increased cultural and linguistic diversity in schools. The need to reframe the national agenda to create progressive and inclusive classrooms for all students is critical (Frey, 1998).

Nowadays education has become a big business in terms of money spent on training teachers, developing materials, and serving students. New issues are raised concerning the relationship of the school and the society. Advances in technology, economic depressions, huge waves of immigrants, demographic changes, conflicts over the meaning of democracy and the global village at large has led to demands for the re-evaluation of U.S. educational aims.

In multiracial and multiethnic societies such as the United States, a controversial issue is the various ways in which race, ethnicity, and culture might influence student learning in formal educational settings. This concern derives from the fact that students' scores of some racial and ethnic minority groups do not match the scores of European-American students or to those of students from other racial and ethnic minority groups (Morris, n.d.).

The perception of minorities in America is still very critical. Disbelieve in students' abilities based on prejudice and misconception concerning their achievements places racial and minority group members on the lowest academic tracks.

The ongoing discourse and practice of multicultural education is an attempt to abolish the possibilities of plurality through education (Hanley,n.d.).

The aim of multicultural education is to reduce divisions in race, ethnicity, and class by helping all students attain the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need in order to become active citizens in a democratic society and participate in social change (Valdez, 1999).

"Multicultural education relates to education and instruction designed for the cultures of several different races in an educational system. This approach to teaching and learning is based upon consensus building, respect, and fostering cultural pluralism within racial societies" (Wilson,n.d.).

Spring (1995) suggests five characteristics that a school **curriculum** should incorporate in order to create a moral equitable society: First of all, the school **curriculum** should be openly **antiracist and antidiscriminatory**. Students should feel **safe** about discussing sexism, racism, and discrimination. In addition, the curriculum should include the **history and cultural perspectives** of a broad range of peoples. Students should be taught to identify and challenge racism in society. The second characteristic is that multicultural education should be considered to be a **basic part of a student's general education**, which means that all students should study at least one foreign language and different cultural perspectives. Learning a foreign language normally includes culture-oriented topics and texts, as well as sensitivity towards culture. The

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third characteristic should be that multiculturalism is included in **all aspects of the curriculum** and in the general life of school, including bulletin boards, lunch rooms, and assemblies. In addition, the fourth characteristic is that multi**cultural education should** be important for all students. And, the fifth characteristic is that multicultural school curriculum should incorporate **social justice**.

It is commonly accepted that education is not exclusively learnt by reading the text-books or listening to the teacher; students can learn an incredible amount from their peers and through extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities are essential for any student. That is why most American schools run active extracurricular programs. Such activities focus on increasing awareness and understanding of various cultures and ethnic and racial backgrounds. In addition, involvement in these activities may be an important step toward positive racial, ethnic, or sexual-identity development.

Participation in any of extracurricular activities aims to develop students' self-respect, self-esteem, and self -confidence which should encourage them to accomplish successfully their academic and social goals.

Multicultural education should also aim to bridge the gap between the culture of the family and the culture of the school. To obtain higher student achievement in secondary schools. Wiles & Bondi (1989) suggest some variables, among which a high degree of parent involvement takes the essential place.

The importance of parent involvement in education has become a major educational concern since the 1980s. School reformers have realized the significance of the family in school support and have tried to tip the scale back in favor of parent prerogatives and empowerment (Cooper, 1991).

Parents have long been active in starting new schools, working on boards of education, and making key decisions as taxpayers on school budgets and expenditures. At the center of the reformers in the United States stands an enduring belief that education is primarily a concern of the family, and that the role of the state is to support, fund and develop that ability of families to select and acquire the kind of education they require (Cooper, 1991).

School improvement research shows that parents are vital in supporting children's education, in preparing children to live in modern society and in helping to support improvements in education. When parents support the school and help their children with school work at home, the children achieve higher grades, have more positive attitudes, and gain more from school (Henderson, 1987). Better schools have stronger parent support, and higher achieving children have parents who stand firmly behind the school's mission and programs (Epstein, 1988; Henderson, 1987; Davies, 1988).

The survey presented in my previous article, "The Attitudes of U.S. Secondary School Graduates Towards the Components Characterizing Multicultural

Education" (Mesiridze, 2012), aimed to record the attitudes of American secondary school graduates in regard to bilingual education, secondary school curriculum, PTA and community involvement in American secondary schools. The article deals with two major groups: English-speaking (38%) and Spanish-speaking (32%), participants representing at the same time the dominant and dominated cultures of the U.S. society. This fact led me to an idea to carry out a comparative analysis of their perception of specific issues in my survey and considered it important to outline their views in this article.

100 U.S. second¬ary school graduates from both urban and rural districts participated in the research. The majority of them graduated school within last five years.

Comparative analysis of the responses provided by English and Spanish language speaking participants of the previous survey "The Attitudes of U.S. Secondary School Graduates Towards the Components Characterizing Multicultural Education" (Mesiridze, 2012).

Questions that I thought worthy to be chosen for the comparison are the following:

1) To what extent did your multicultural school curriculum help you to integrate in the mainstream of U.S. society? (circle the appropriate number: the lowest is 1 and the highest is 10)

1- 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10

2) Do ethnic minority students participate willingly and actively in extracurricular activities?

Yes ☐   No ☐

3) To what extent do PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) and school board participate to: (circle the appropriate number: the lowest is 1 and the highest is 10)

a) choose text-books

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10

b) develop curriculum

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10

c) organize extra curriculum activities

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10

d) influence the integration
of ethnic minorities

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10

4) What changes should be introduced into the school curriculum to help ethnic minority students to accomplish educational and social goals successfully? (tick one box only)
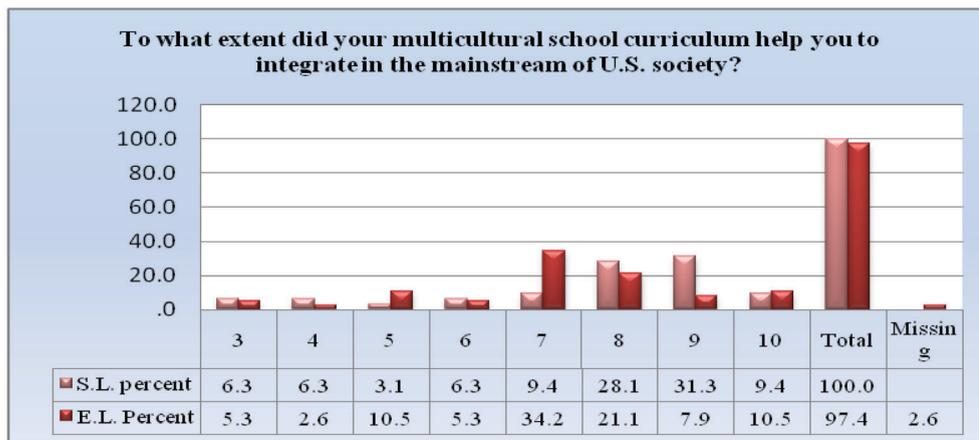
a) Academic subjects dealing with multiculturalism should be added

Yes ☐   No ☐

d) Transitional bilingual education is necessary to be introduced at elementary levels

Yes ☐   No ☐

b) PTA and community programs should be introduced

Yes ☐   No ☐

c) New academic programs should be introduced

The participants of these different language groups will be introduced in the analysis as E.L. – standing for English speaking group and S.L. – standing for Spanish speaking group, respresented almost equally (38% and 32%, respectively).

When posed with the first question mentioned above, the results of the responses show that for S.L. group the multicultural curriculum was more helpful than for E.L. group, though assessments of both groups on the numerical scale are positive.
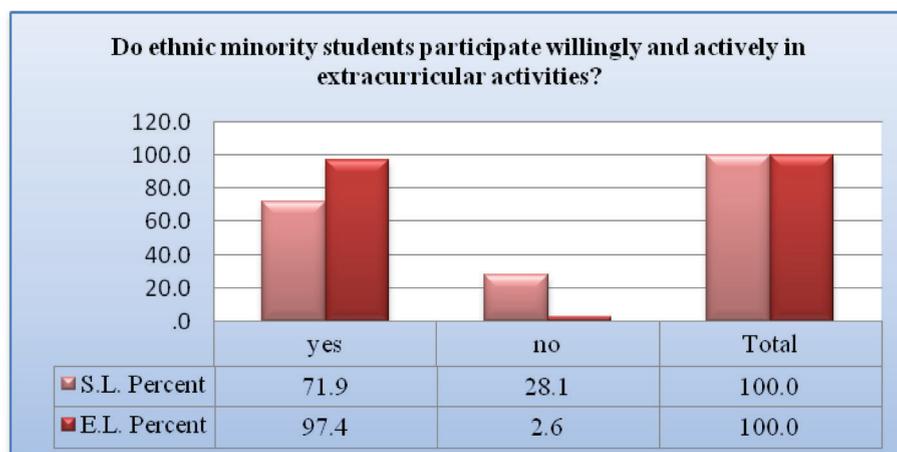
When posed with the first question mentioned above, the results of the responses show that for S.L. group the multicultural curriculum was more helpful than for E.L. group, though assessments of both groups on the numerical scale are positive.

Figure 1.1.1. Question 1

To what extent did your multicultural school curriculum help you to integrate in the mainstream of U.S. society?

	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	Missing
S.L. percent	6.3	6.3	3.1	6.3	9.4	28.1	31.3	9.4	100.0	
E.L. Percent	5.3	2.6	10.5	5.3	34.2	21.1	7.9	10.5	97.4	2.6

The figure 1.1.2. reveals that 97.4% of E.L. group participants hold the notion that ethnic minority students participate willingly and actively in extracurricular activities. 71.9% of S.L participants share the same notion.

Figure 1.1.2. Question 2

Do ethnic minority students participate willingly and actively in extracurricular activities?

	yes	no	Total
S.L. Percent	71.9	28.1	100.0
E.L. Percent	97.4	2.6	100.0

When the survey participants of these two groups were presented with the third question and the list of options for this question, the figures revealed that S.L. group respondents fully answered the questions, while 2 participants of E.L. group left the answers blank. The overall picture of the figures shows that their options of the issues presented in the questions is over the average with more or less differences in estimating them on the numerical scale.

Figure 1.1.3. Question 3 (a)

To which extent do PTA (Parent-Teacher-Association) and school board participate to: choose text-books

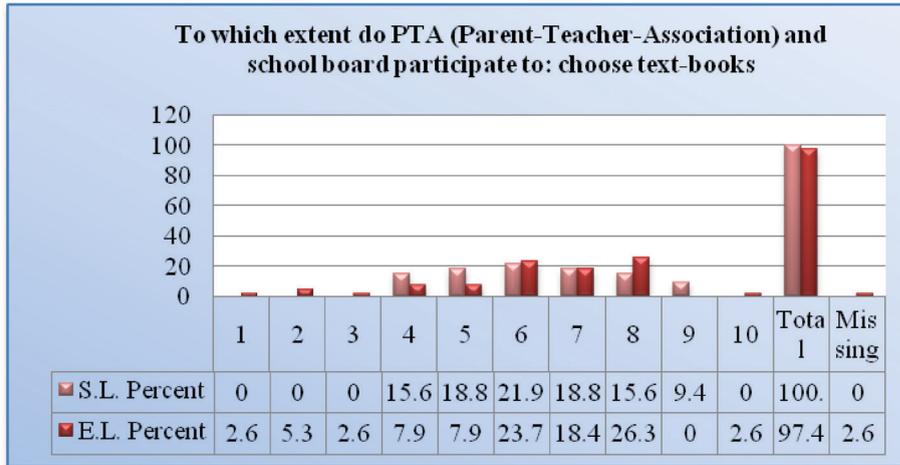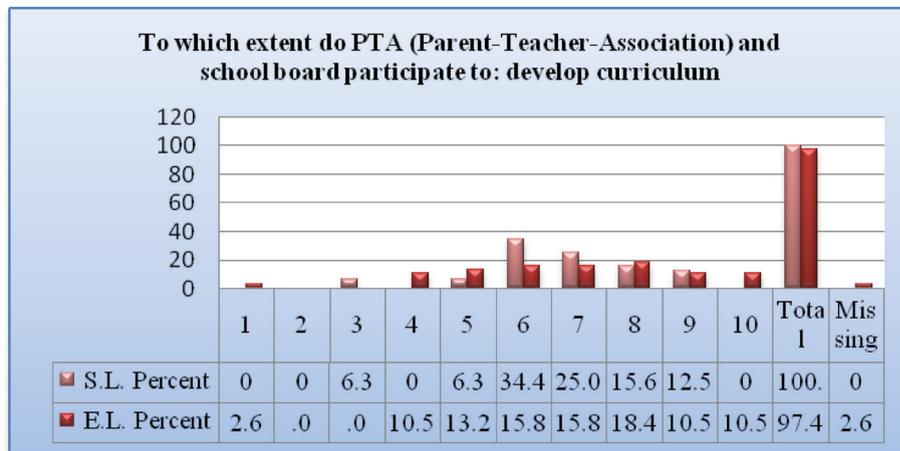|	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	Missing
S.L. Percent	0	0	0	15.6	18.8	21.9	18.8	15.6	9.4	0	100.	0
E.L. Percent	2.6	5.3	2.6	7.9	7.9	23.7	18.4	26.3	0	2.6	97.4	2.6

Figure 1.1.3. shows that both group participants, totally 37.2% scaled the extent of PTA and school board participation in choosing text-books with number 7. In general 65.7% of S.L. group participants and 71% of E.L. participants chose high assesment of 6-10 points on the numerical scale.

Figure 1.1.4. Question 3 (b)

To which extent do PTA (Parent-Teacher-Association) and school board participate to: develop curriculum

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	Missing
S.L. Percent	0	0	6.3	0	6.3	34.4	25.0	15.6	12.5	0	100.	0
E.L. Percent	2.6	.0	.0	10.5	13.2	15.8	15.8	18.4	10.5	10.5	97.4	2.6

According to **Figure 1.1.4.** it is vital that the extent of PTA and school board participation in curriculum development is over average with high assessments of 6-10 points on the numerical scale.

Figure 1.1.5. shows that all participants evaluate the extent of PTA and school board participation in organizing extracurricular activities over average points. Though, if we judge according to the percentages, it is notable that the S.L. group participants are less satisfied with this issue which indicates that it is necessary to enhance PTA and school board participation in organizing extracurricular activities.

According to **Figure 1.1.6.** the extent of PTA and school board participation in having influence on integration of ethnic minorities in the mainstream of U.S. society is assessed positively by choosing high assessment of 6-10 points on the numerical scale.

To the forth question introduced at the beginning of comparison analysis the overall picture is the following. S.L group participants fully answered the questions. From E.L. group 2 respondents left the answers blank. The results revealed that the survey participants of both groups agree with the statements by giving high percentage to the positive answers.
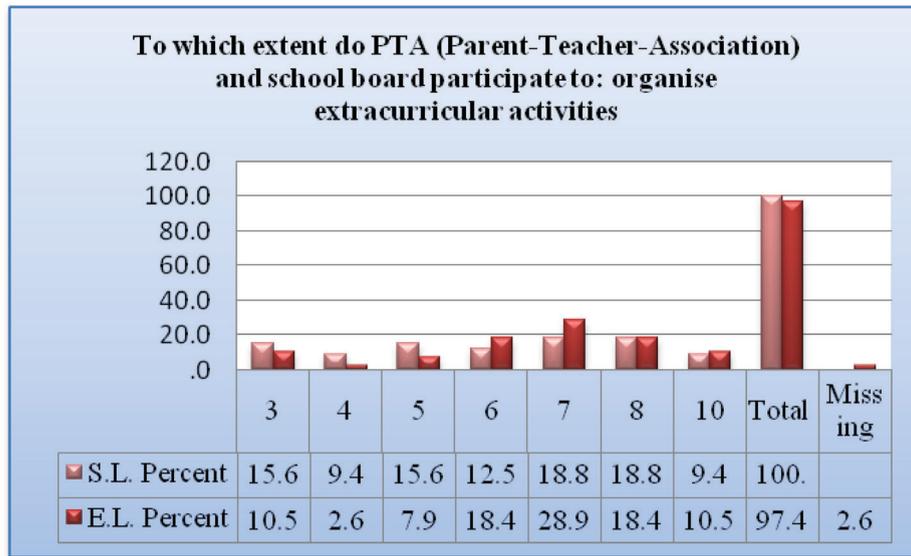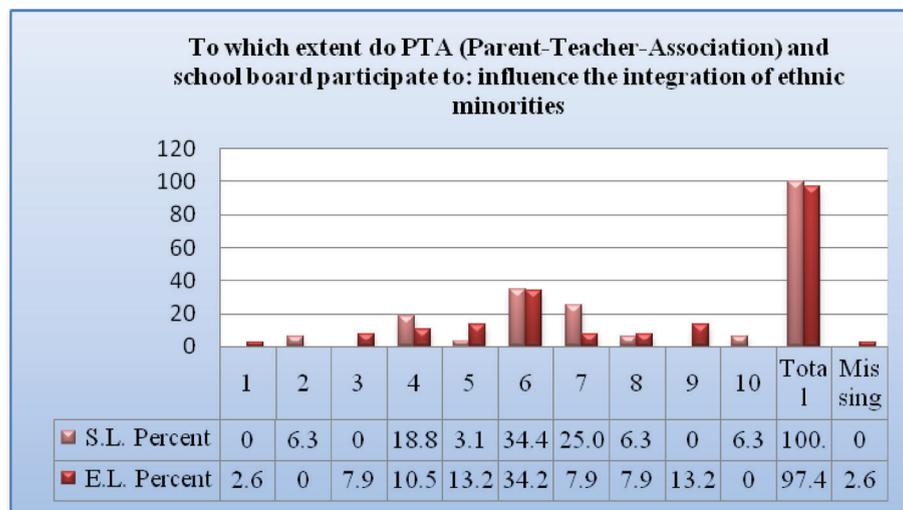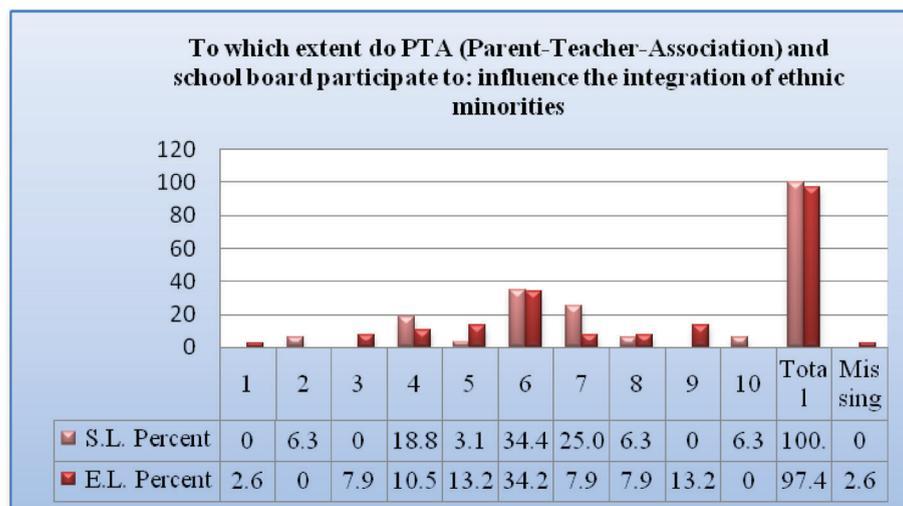
Figure 1.1.5. Question 3 (c)

To which extent do PTA (Parent-Teacher-Association) and school board participate to: organise extracurricular activities

	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	Total	Missing
S.L. Percent	15.6	9.4	15.6	12.5	18.8	18.8	9.4	100.	
E.L. Percent	10.5	2.6	7.9	18.4	28.9	18.4	10.5	97.4	2.6

Figure 1.1.6. Question 3 (d)

To which extent do PTA (Parent-Teacher-Association) and school board participate to: influence the integration of ethnic minorities

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	Missing
S.L. Percent	0	6.3	0	18.8	3.1	34.4	25.0	6.3	0	6.3	100.	0
E.L. Percent	2.6	0	7.9	10.5	13.2	34.2	7.9	7.9	13.2	0	97.4	2.6

Figure 1.1.7. Question 4 (a)

To which extent do PTA (Parent-Teacher-Association) and school board participate to: influence the integration of ethnic minorities

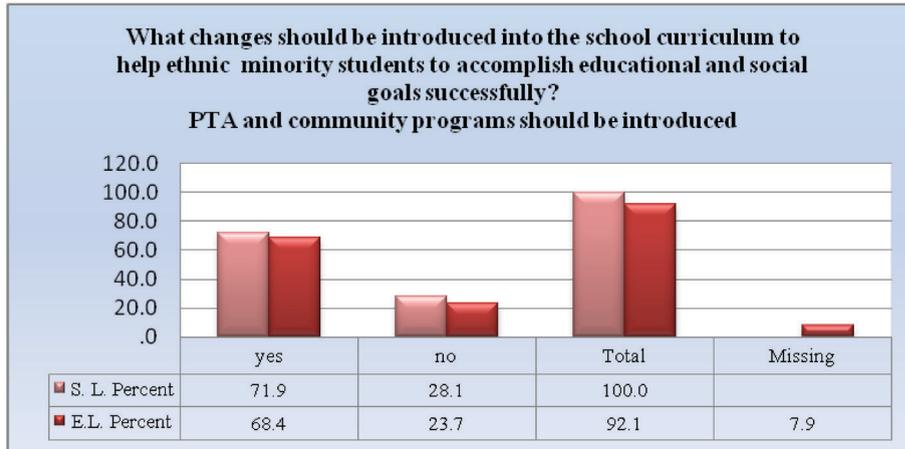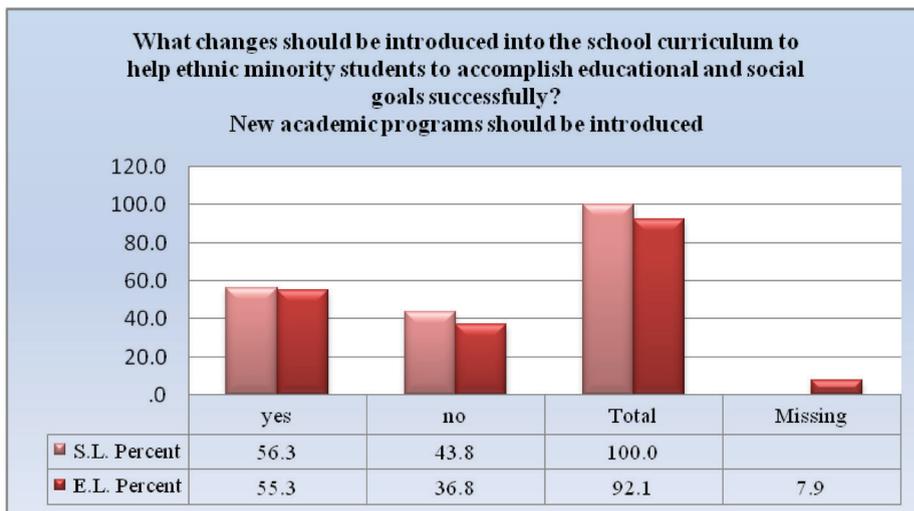|	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	Missing
S.L. Percent	0	6.3	0	18.8	3.1	34.4	25.0	6.3	0	6.3	100.	0
E.L. Percent	2.6	0	7.9	10.5	13.2	34.2	7.9	7.9	13.2	0	97.4	2.6

According to the results shown in **Figure 1.1.7,** It is possible to conclude that the treatment of multiculturalism in academic subjects is not sufficient in the given sample (among the respondents) and a number of academic subjects dealing with multiculturalism should be added to help ethic minority students to accomplish educational and social goals successfully.

Figure 1.1.8. Question 4 (b)

The idea of introducing PTA and community programs to accomplish educational and social goals successfully was supported with S.L. group participants' 71.9% positive answers, which proves that such programs are necessary to be implemented for ethnic minorities in schooling process.
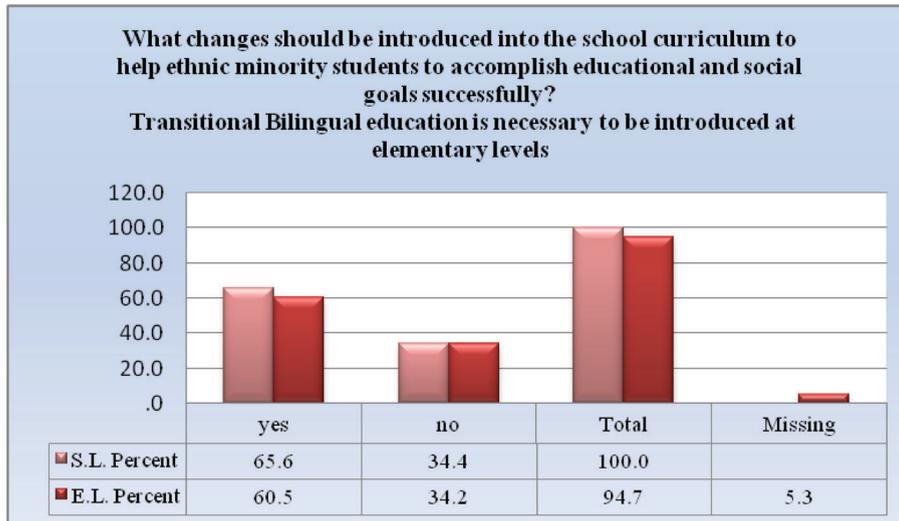
Figure 1.1.9. Question 4 (c)

The introduction of new academic programs is supported by 56.3% of S.L. group respondents and 55.3% of E.L. group participants, which I think may be dictated by ineffectiveness of those academic programs which were part of their secondary school curriculum.

As Figure 1.1.10 reveals, S.L. respondents support transitional bilingual education at elementary levels with 65.6% of positive answers, which is not surprising as they encounter the problems at school because of language barrier. They think that this program will give them the equal opportunity to succeed in their studies. It is also worth mentioning that the majority of E.L. group participants also consider this program necessary for ethnic minority students to accomplish educational and social goals successfully.

Conclusion

Multicultural education is a continuing process within the U.S. democratic, pluralistic society that never ends. Creating the democratic ideals that Myrdal (1944) called ``American Creed`` values – values such as justice, equality, and freedom, are its major goals. They can never be totally achieved; however, citizens within a democratic society must continually work toward accomplishing them.

Figure 1.1.10. Question 4 (d)

	yes	no	Total	Missing
S.L. Percent	65.6	34.4	100.0	
E.L. Percent	60.5	34.2	94.7	5.3

Based on the results of comparative analyzes, it is evident that the need for new academic subjects and programs dealing with multiculturalism, PTA and community programs, extracurricular activities, and the introduction of bilingual education at elementary levels are of paramount importance. The PTA organization in the school should become more active to help students to overcome ethnic diversity problems at school. The necessity to enhance the PTA and school board participation in choosing text-books, developing curriculum, organizing extracurricular activities and increasing the influence on students' integration into the mainstream of U.S. society is also vital.

I agree that this is a complex process, but I also consider that a multicultural secondary education will serve as the grounds to the complex process of maintaining diversity and national unity in the democratic United States.

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