



The Hague International Model United Nations

Forum: GA3 - Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee

Issue: Role of education in promoting respect for cultural diversity

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Introduction

Throughout the tangled history of human intelligence, education and institutions surrounding it have been utilized as means of presiding over nations and communities. The puissant nature of education effectively gives it the ability to both reflect upon a society's cultural qualities and carve them according to a desired interest. It is common, however, that education is predominantly defined as the instruction delivered to registered students in a school institution. Although this perception is what the majority of citizens observe that education is, it can come in distinct forms where knowledge becomes immensely dispersed in society. It is this omnipresent core of education that makes it applicable in almost every quotidian situation, whether it is in educational institutions or simply in textbooks and digital learning environments. Consequently, this diversity in the form of education gives it the ability to affect even the incremental aspects of human life, and primarily societal dynamics.

Culture is the fundamental manifestation of the intelligence and creativity of communities and nations, and like education, it is everywhere. The monomers of culture are the shared history, agony and experience that is embodied by a social group such as nations, religious institutions or ethnic groups. On a plethora of occasions, culture

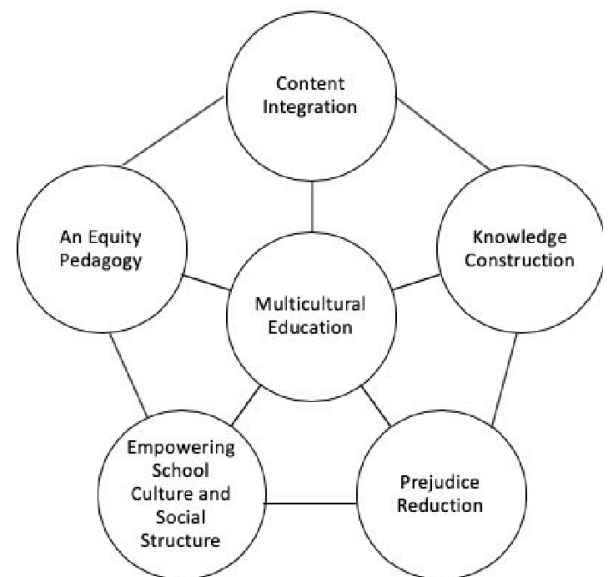


Figure 1: Concept map demonstrating the benefits of multicultural education (ResearchGate)¹

is largely shaped by the common agony encountered in the history of nations, such as wars, conquests and conflicts. The limitless variety of cultures creates a division woven by prejudice in the minds of some nations. Despite this, it is seemingly possible to overcome this cycle of constant discrimination and segregation. Due to its wide reach, education systems provide an impeccable ground to raise new generations in a way that is more capable of facilitating an environment where every individual can thrive and be content with their involvement in society. This ability alone demonstrates education's significance in addressing the root causes of discriminatory behavior, besides other atrocities that are widely discussed in the international community.

Definition of Key Terms

Discrimination

The unjust or disadvantaged treatment of a variety of societal groups, often concerning societal norms and deep-seated prejudices.

Marginalization

The general treatment towards certain individuals with an attitude that conveys insignificance, often comes with the act of peripheral societal support towards a certain group.

Assimilation

The gradual process of one losing their cultural, linguistic or religious identity, either through intentional perpetuations of the majority societal groups or through the natural processes and consequences of permanent immigration. Assimilation can also be executed through soft power initiatives conducted by major nations (i.e. the popularity of American culture globally, leading to the dominance of American media and broadcasting in culture).

Multiculturalism

The view that cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups, deserve special acknowledgment of their differences within a dominant political culture.

Background Information

The instillation of cultural norms and prejudices is mainly conducted through the mainstream education system that is highly affected by governmental bias or the political atmosphere of the contemporary globe. Thus, it is crucial to converge the international focus on the application of educational materials and curricula in both private and public institutions regarding the area of cultural richness.

In the aftermath of both World War I and World War II, the world gradually transitioned into a more unified and globalized medium. With the emergence of various waves of immigration from the colonies of more economically developed countries (MEDCs) at the time, along with migratory movements from underdeveloped nations, the uniform population of Western nations began experiencing alterations in their demographics, and the people certainly did not remain unfazed. This rapid change in the cultural base of these major nations started to attract attention from the peoples of North America and Europe, predominantly. Although this was a common occurrence all across the globe, because of the economic superiority of these nations, these locations received mass amounts of immigrants starting after the world finally came to order after the wars. This attention was not merely positive, however; discrimination and major prejudice against these new residents, along with the pre-existing diverse groups, started to rise, giving way to a hostile environment for diverse perspectives and cultures. Education, because of its reach to the younger generation, constitutes a vessel for both the instillation of a certain nation's culture and for the teaching to co-exist in a multicultural society.

Cultural assimilation through education

One way that discrimination against a certain culture is when society is taught to believe that a certain culture should be altered to fit into another. There have been numerous instances where this application was utilized in order to marginalize cultural communities and reaffirm the common belief that a certain dominant culture is superior to others. One instance in human history was the Canadian Residential School System concerning the culture of the Indigenous peoples. Over the course of its 150-year history², Inuit and Métis children attended these schools and were intentionally separated from their communities and cultures. The essential aim of this school system was to first physically separate these infants from their families to isolate them from their respective cultures, and then to instill Canadian values that are largely influenced by European culture and norms. Furthermore, it was the government's intention that these children were to be separated from their cultures and then assimilated into being spiritually and culturally "Canadians". This initiative, executed by the Canadian government itself, can be viewed as one way education was utilized to disrespect cultures. Showcasing a colonialist perspective, this practice evidently exemplifies the absence of aiming to promote respect in education that has been persisting for hundreds of years. Some other instances are the religious schooling institutions in the continent of Africa as a product of the colonial past of the continent and the contemporary dominance of languages in colonies of colonizer nations. These means are still used in order to gradually instill the idea that some cultures are superior, which ultimately causes disrespect between nations.

Disrespect as a result of a lack of initiative

If left to its own, humankind is inclined to see itself and its culture as superior to others. The way to eliminate this sense of discrimination in a community is to manually teach them the principles of

co-existing as humans and not as separate cultural counterparts. In its 2013 report “Intercultural Competences: Conceptual and Operational Framework,” United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)³ states that “intercultural competences”, living in cultural diversity, can solely be achieved through the application of education and training. This effectively suggests that education works to ensure a balanced environment where respect is ensured, and all cultures exist equally. One instance that showcases the detriments of the absence of these initiatives is anti-Rohingya discrimination in Myanmar. Human Rights Watch (HRW) explains that the Rohingya culture is explicitly excluded from the educational system of the government of Myanmar. The instruction of the education system completely omits the history and cultural progression of the Rohingya people, who have dwelled on the land for ages. UNESCO in another report states: “In Myanmar, the absence of intercultural and diversity education has allowed deep-rooted prejudices against minority groups, particularly the Rohingya, to persist and harden”. Hence, although this pattern is fairly common across all countries, this is a vivid example of how the lack of governmental initiatives to overcome loathing and discrimination might lead to the exacerbation of the situation at hand.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

UNESCO

One of the single most crucial organizations that is immensely active in the domain of cultural preservation and diversity is UNESCO, which converges its focus on the protection, cultivation and development of manifestations of human intellectual ability. UNESCO has reviewed major issues regarding cultural discrimination all throughout the globe and has produced reports and initiatives regarding this area.

- Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2 November 2001 (**UNESCO General Conference, 31st Session**)
- Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 19 November 1974 (**UNESCO General Conference, 18th Session**)
- UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education, 2006

The European Union (EU)

Although being perpetrators of discrimination in the past, European states now seemingly are a group of states that value diversity the most. The European Union (EU) constitutes a significant actor in the promotion of respect for cultural diversity through education, largely due to its governance over one of the world’s most culturally heterogeneous regions. Through initiatives such as Erasmus+, the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, and its policies on multilingualism, the Union

actively encourages intercultural dialogue, mobility, and inclusive learning environments across its 27 member states.

United States of America (USA)

A living example of a culturally diverse environment. Various administrations in the US have worked towards reconciling with their past of endeavoring to assimilate indigenous communities and heavily discriminating against African-Americans. Currently, the US is one of the most prominent nations that generally places great importance on incorporating diverse cultures in its education system. Even though it is not completely successful, the US constitutes a great example of a nation where using education as a means of promoting respect for cultural diversity is required to construct a fruitful society.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
2 November 2001	UNESCO adopts the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity ⁴ , formally recognizing cultural diversity as a common heritage of humanity and linking it to education.
17 October 2003	UNESCO adopts the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage ⁵ , strengthening international commitment to preserving cultural expressions, languages, and traditions.
10 December 2008	UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Articles 14 & 15 guarantee Indigenous Peoples the right to culturally appropriate education and to maintain languages and traditions through schools. ⁶
25 September 2015	Adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the UN General Assembly

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The international community, after witnessing the atrocities of the world wars, have concluded that unity in diversity was the sole way to maintain peace in the globe. Hence, major world nations have taken initiatives to implement cultural diversity in their educational systems. Western nations that receive a mass number of immigrants and thus have increasing diversity have implemented the teaching that diversity is not something that is detrimental to society but something that enriches it. Schools that serve minorities in their own language such as Sorbian and Danish schools in Germany or Armenian and Greek schools in Türkiye are examples of countries endeavoring to give other cultures the opportunity to co-exist respectfully in a diverse environment.

Various organizations of the UN have also published conventions and reports on how education should be utilized towards an aim to achieve a more culturally inclusive society. One example is the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which eventually passed unanimously in the General Assembly. Pieces of documents that are similar to this have been produced by the UN and international organizations, and they recognized the significance of education in ameliorating respect for cultures but also the detriments of maliciously using education to assimilate communities. The Declaration of Human Rights⁷ also solidifies and commands the use of education by saying: “It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace”.

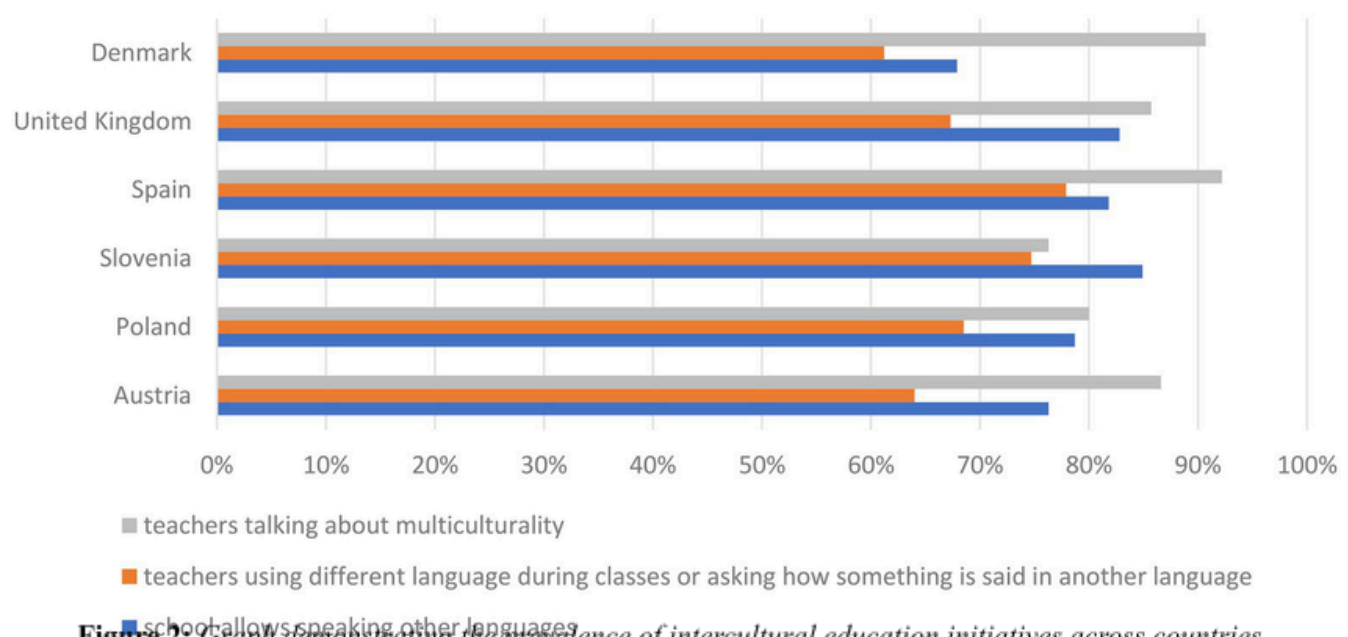


Figure 2: Graph demonstrating the prevalence of intercultural education initiatives across countries (ResearchGate)⁸

Possible Solutions

Although past solutions exist, the prominent issue of disrespect and discrimination against cultures still persists. One way to consolidate respect for cultural diversity is to require, by law, that educational systems to promote diversity. Even though international reports and conventions point towards a similar initiative, the merely discourse-oriented and effectively non-binding nature of these products is insufficient in constituting a legal ground for all countries to follow. Thus, the implementation of a binding agreement in international law that is more intertwined with the national legislative systems of member states is crucial in setting a fundamental ground. After this base application, initiatives to partly internationalize education and accept norms of cultural inclusion can be applied to achieve a common ground on what curricula should be taught to the new generation. This new educational ground, in order for it to be beneficial, shall be aimed to include all countries and all communities equally, where the final long-term goal is to create an international education system that relies solely on science, technology and factual information. A possible resolution on the matter should also include means to

prosecute states or organisations that intentionally assimilate individuals, and should eliminate the chance of non-compliance.

Endnotes

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Appendix or Appendices

I. UNESCO World Atlas of Languages

<https://www.unesco.org/en/world-atlas-languages>

II. UNICEF – Inclusive Education Global Framework

<https://www.unicef.org/education/inclusive-education>

III. OECD – Global Competence Framework

<https://www.oecd.org/education/Global-competence-for-an-inclusive-world.pdf>

IV. UNDESA – Indigenous Peoples Portal

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/>