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Research Article

Mapping Diversity and Inclusivity in Moroccan Teacher Education: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

This article underscores the importance of creating a more inclusive education that adheres to principles of inter-cultural diversity, equity and social justice in Moroccan public schools. Given that Morocco has been a transit and a destination hub for (im) migrants for quite a long time, Moroccan classes are becoming cross-culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse. In this regard, this article seeks to investigate the realization of inter-cultural diversity, inclusivity and equity in Moroccan teacher education in terms of teaching contents, materials, practices and pedagogies. It also probes the African Sub-Saharan students' perceptions as to the extent to which their learning needs and expectations are met in the classroom as well as other factors that either facilitate or hinder their learning process. In so doing, the study adopts a qualitative research method of data collection and analysis. 10 Moroccan teachers were randomly selected from different cities in the oriental region for an interview, followed by a total number of 15 African Sub-Saharan students. The interview text data indicate that inter-cultural education, inclusivity and equity are not fully exhibited in Moroccan teacher education due to a number of factors—among of which are textbooks, teaching pedagogies and discriminatory behaviors.

Keywords

Inter-cultural Diversity, Inclusivity, Equity, Moroccan Teacher Education, Sub-Saharan Students

1. Introduction

For millennia, Morocco has been a host country for countless migrants and therefore it has been tinted with cultural and linguistic diversity at different sectors. Interestingly, the educational landscape is not an exception. In the light of the recent educational reform underpinning its slogan of *'For a school of equity, quality and promotion',* it is of paramount importance to investigate whether equity and inclusivity go hand-in-hand with the ever-increasing inter-cultural diverse classes that reign today's Moroccan institutions. To guarantee a quality education for sub-Saharan migrant pupils, the pedagogical policies and, particularly, the teaching practices of practitioners ought to be inclusive and equitable for providing equal schooling opportunities for all students coming from whatsoever cultural, ethnical and linguistic backgrounds. In this respect, this article attempts to explore the realization of inclusivity and equity in Moroccan teacher education and classes. With this in mind, this article aims to answer the following questions:

1) Do Moroccan teaching Practices cater for the needs of Sub-Saharan Migrant students?
2) To what extent are Moroccan teachers objective in providing equal learning opportunities for both Moroc-

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can and Sub-Saharan learners in their classrooms?

3) Which factors hinder inter-cultural diversity and inclusivity in Moroccan teacher education?

2. Multicultural Education in Moroccan Classes: What Interplay Pedagogical Policies

Moroccan schools are continually becoming cross-culturally diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, language and nationality due to the incessant influx of (im) migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; therefore, adopting a pedagogy of inclusive, multicultural education (ME) is imperative. For this purpose, both teachers and policy-makers are compelled to create classrooms that are inter-culturally informed, inclusive, equitable and empowering for all students [1]. Indeed, incorporating an integrative, inter-cultural approach to the Moroccan teaching contents, materials and practices is conducive to serving the needs of both local and African Sub-Saharan students as well as building a learning environment in which cultural and religious differences are valued, accepted and respected. In such a pursuit, multiculturalism is the gateway to establishing the pillars of inter-cultural diversity, inclusivity and social justice in Moroccan schools.

Research on multiculturalism in schools has received a wider attention in the literature on cross-cultural diversity and equity in teacher education [2-4]. The National Association for Multicultural Education defines multicultural education as a "philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity" as well as "a process that permeates all aspects of school practices, policies, and organization" to ensure that all students achieve at the highest levels possible (NAME n.d.)". As a philosophical movement, multicultural education deems that gender, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of a pluralistic society should be reflected in the educational system, in hope to improve the achievement of marginalized students, prepare students to work across lines of difference and create a more culturally and socially just learning context [5]. In another definition advanced by [6], multicultural education denotes to "the policies, programs, and practices used in school to respect and promote ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity within geopolitical contexts". on the other hand, multicultural education is often viewed as a critique of the mono-cultural content and ethos of the current and prevailing Eurocentric system of education in the United since.

It should be noted that the multicultural approach to teacher education has its roots in critical pedagogy—a critical stance advocated by [7], who is particularly in favor of an inclusive and democratic education in which all students learning styles, values, beliefs and needs are catered for. In this light, given the increase in student mobility and classroom diversity worldwide, multicultural educators aspire to change the vision of schooling from being mono-lingual/cultural to multi-lingual/ cultural, offering an equitable and inter-culturally inclusive education. Pedagogically, multicultural approach calls on textbook designers and policy-makers to craft the entire curriculum in a way that targets the cultural and religious backgrounds of both native and (im) migrant students. Equally important, teachers whose classes are culturally and racially diverse must realize the differences among their students and integrate diversity education into the whole teaching practices [8]. In other words, they need to incorporate multicultural experiences into their classrooms and tailor their teaching practices to diverse students in terms of instructions and learning styles.

Another objective of multicultural education is to fight against stereotypes about minority groups by teaching students to be ethno-relative, tolerant and open to cultural differences [9]. This is only feasible when education aims to teach about diversity in order to reduce prejudices and students are helped to be develop the skills to communicate, live and interact meaningfully across lines of difference. In reference to Moroccan context, there is a dire need for a multicultural approach to teacher education in light of the increasing diversity of classrooms. The materialization of this approach should cover the entire pedagogical policies as well as the teaching practices at the level of materials and contents presented to students.

3. A Conceptual Framework of Multicultural Education

Adopting a pedagogy of multicultural education, inclusivity and equity in teacher education demands the integration of ethnic and racial content in school curriculum [10]. The latter generally refers to incorporating materials from diverse sources such as examples, facts, stories and traditions from different cultural groups. Besides, an equity pedagogy is evident when educators build on the unique strengths, cultural values, and habits of cultural groups in designing pedagogical practices. Also teachers should use teaching methods that are consistent with the learning styles of diverse groups.

In the literature, four approaches have been developed to underlie multicultural education, equity and inclusivity. Firstly, the contributions approach, which emphasizes the contributions of minority/ migrant groups to the whole society, stresses on the integration of stories, special days, celebrations and common narratives of ethnic groups into the curriculum. Secondly, the addictive approach calls on addressing ethnic cultural heritage themes and perspectives to the curriculum. Here, both approaches have a common goal—that is helping students to challenge discrimination and inequality in schools. The third approach, transformative, is purely critical as it seeks to teach students to explore cultures and diversity from a global perspective. The aim of this approach is to promote democracy by education for equity and social justice. In the vein, [11] maintains that the transformative approach enables

students to approach the perspectives and behaviours of minority students from their own cultural backgrounds and at the same time increase their understanding of several cultures. The last approach, social action, aims to teach students to respect cultural differences across diverse students and draws their attention to realize inequality and discrimination in the school, thus empowering them to think critically about these issues. From these perspectives, it is high time the materialization of inter-cultural education, inclusivity and equity in Moroccan teacher education were researched.

4. Research Method

4.1. Research Participants

The present study involved a total of 25 participants, comprising sub-Saharan migrant learners and Moroccan teachers who work in various school districts across the eastern region of Morocco. This specific population was selected due to its accessibility and relevance, particularly given the significant increase in the number of sub-Saharan migrants residing in the eastern cities of Morocco. Consequently, the chosen teachers are more likely to encounter sub-Saharan pupils in their classrooms. The sample of Moroccan instructors includes both novice and experienced male and female teachers, with teaching experience ranging from 3 to over 15 years. To ensure representativeness and minimize bias, a random sampling technique was employed in selecting the participating teachers. This method was chosen for its objectivity, as it allows for the selection of participants without preconceived notions or specific criteria, thereby providing a more accurate reflection of the broader teaching population in the region. Additionally, random sampling enhances the study's generalizability, ensuring that the findings can be more reliably applied to similar contexts beyond the immediate sample. The inclusion of both novice and expert teachers across different schools further enriches the data, offering a holistic view of the current state of intercultural education in the region.

4.2. Research Approach

A qualitative approach was employed in this study, which proved instrumental in gaining comprehensive insights into how sub-Saharan migrant students' needs are addressed through teachers' practices, as well as in understanding the factors that hinder inclusivity and equity between native and migrant students in Moroccan schools. This method allowed for a deeper exploration of the complexities surrounding the experiences of sub-Saharan African pupils within the Moroccan educational system. By focusing on participants' lived experiences and perspectives, the qualitative approach provided rich, detailed data that helped illuminate the nuanced ways in which educational practices either support or undermine inclusivity and equity [12].

Moreover, the adoption of a qualitative approach was crucial for enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. According to [13], qualitative research is particularly effective in contexts where the goal is to understand the meaning-making processes of individuals within their specific social environments. In this study, the use of semi-structured interviews and other qualitative data collection methods allowed for the capture of authentic, context-specific insights, thereby ensuring that the findings accurately reflected the realities of both teachers and students. This methodological choice not only strengthened the credibility of the research but also provided a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to fostering inclusivity and equity for migrant students in Moroccan schools.

5. Data Collection Instruments

The data collection tool used for gathering qualitative data was a semi-structured interview, which provided respondents with the time and flexibility to express their opinions on the subject matter in a detailed manner. This approach allowed the researcher to probe deeper into specific areas of interest, facilitating the exploration of complex themes and nuances that might not have emerged through more structured methods. The semi-structured format also enabled the researcher to adapt the interview questions based on the participants' responses, thus capturing a richer and more comprehensive understanding of their perspectives and experiences related to the topic. By allowing for open-ended discussions, the interview process helped uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, and attitudes that are critical for a thorough analysis of the research subject.

6. Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study was structured around the identification and interpretation of key themes that prominently emerged during the interviews. These themes were meticulously analyzed to ensure they directly addressed the research questions and contributed to achieving the study's primary objectives. The thematic analysis method was employed as the primary tool for interpreting the qualitative data, which allowed the researcher to systematically categorize and examine recurring patterns within the participants' responses [14].

7. Findings

In compliance with the research design adopted in this study, the results are displayed synchronically in that qualitative results are presented and explained first, followed by content data analysis. Generally, data obtained from both qualitative and content analysis can be classified into three themes: (a) Teachers' Perceptions of Intercultural Education

and Diversity, (b) Teachers' Practices Inter-cultural education and Inclusivity, (c) Sub-Saharan Migrants' Educational Experiences, and (d) Issue of Discrimination and Inequality in Moroccan Classes.

7.1. Teachers' Perceptions of Inter-Cultural Education and Equity

Most teachers from different Moroccan schools highlighted that there must be some pedagogical adjustments for maintaining an inter-cultural inclusive education for sub-Saharan students. This adaptation should be undergone at the level of reforming the content of textbooks, teaching materials, practices and pedagogies. Despite promoting an equitable teaching-learning process in the classroom, teachers claimed that there are a number of factors that hinder the learning process of sub-Saharan migrant learners. The content of the textbooks and the overall teaching-learning materials are designed under the Moroccan community's beliefs, assumptions and conventions which, in turn, overlook the integration of the cultural aspects related to sub-Saharan values and principles. Consequently, the cultural representation of the cultural other is neglected as Moroccan students' knowledge of their sub-Saharan classmates' racial background is limited in comparison to sub-Saharan learners' repertoire of the Moroccan society as a whole. In this vein, most of the teachers agreed that it is of a paramount importance for sub-Saharan students to be aware of Moroccan cultural features as it will boost their adjustment to Moroccan inhabitants which will, as a result, foster their ties and build strong rapport with students as noticed today in Moroccan classes. In this line of thought, one of the teachers claimed that:

Well, what I can frankly reveal is that sometimes I find Moroccan textbooks biased towards the inclusion of Moroccan cultural aspects while the sub-Saharan culture is totally missing. Maybe that's because this sub-Saharan migration is something new in Morocco as we didn't have before sub-Saharan learners in Moroccan classes. One of the positive things about this issue is that it's beneficial for sub-Saharan learners because the content of the textbooks might get them more and more familiar with the Moroccan community and I started noticing a positive connection between native learners and migrant students in classes.

7.2. Teachers' Practices Intercultural Education and Inclusivity

As far as the teaching practices and the pedagogies implemented in their classes, it is highly emphasized by teachers that there is an intensive exertion of efforts to make the teaching strategies adaptable for creating an inter-cultural learning environment through making sub-Saharan students engaged and included. This challenge is explained due to the fact of teachers' lack of training in dealing with students' holding different cultural and linguistic repertoires. However,

bringing extra-curricular materials, designing their own activities and tasks, organizing inter-cultural contests, assigning project works and using a comprehensive language of instruction are all new creative tools and alternatives that most of the interviewed teachers carry out to reinforce the inter-cultural dimension in their classes and, thus, sustaining equity between all students. In this regards, a teacher asserted that:

The problem is that our teaching training didn't cover pedagogical practices targeting other cultural contexts. I think that most teachers or at least the upcoming teachers should be trained enough to be able to deal with classes of mixed identities and cultures. Personally, I can't deny that I make great efforts in attempting to provide equal opportunities for both Moroccan and sub-Saharan learners. I always assign task that incorporate a mishmash of Moroccan and African culture and I ask Moroccan students to work with their sub-Saharan classmates in small groups about a given cultural aspect related to both communities and I also design my own lessons that cove information about migrant learners' society. By this way, they feel motivated and engaged in the classroom.

7.3. Sub-Saharan Migrants' Educational Experiences

Taking into consideration sub-Saharan migrant learners' perceptions towards the teaching practices of their teachers and the general learning environment they are exposed to, there is a correlation between the qualitative findings gathered from the part of the teachers and the part of the students. This correlation manifests itself at the level of sub-Saharan learners' consensus on acknowledging their teachers' effort to design innovative materials to make the learning process inclusive. However, the components of Moroccan textbooks disregard sub-Saharan migrants' requirements as they are sketched under the Moroccan framework. Relatedly, one of the sub-Saharan learners expressed that:

I noticed that our teachers try their best to come up with their own materials and their methodology is effective since I feel involved and our difference is taken into consideration. It's true that If feel the content of the textbooks unrepresentative of the sub-Saharan minority but this lack is compensated by teachers' strategies. I mean teachers often bring some lessons that talk about our own ethnic culture. When there is a special event in school, our teachers ask us to work on a cultural aspect of our country and present it to Moroccan classmates or other Moroccan students.

7.4. Issue of Discrimination and Inequality in Moroccan Classes

Nevertheless, it is argued by the interviewed students that sometimes their relationship with some of their Moroccan classmates is not solidly maintained due to Moroccans' lack of awareness about the cultural heritage of sub-Saharan mi-

grants, the stigma attached to dark-skinned people and the issue of acceptance within the mainstream group. The stereotypical images alongside the inappropriate representations attributed to migrant learners explain the attitudinal barriers that sub-Saharan learners face in Moroccan schools. In the light of the aforementioned restrictions, most of the respondents chose not to self-disclose themselves owing to either the whole society's attitude or to their fellow classmates' narrow-mindset. One of the sub-Saharan students stressed that:

Honestly, my sub-Saharan friends and I have experienced racism from the part of some Moroccan students several times. I don't like it when they give us that awkward look because of our different skin color or our unfamiliar mother tongue. Their attitude towards us makes us segregate ourselves from them and not to befriend them. We have been called ''Niggers'' so many times. I think this is because of their lack of maturity and tolerance. Well, at the same time, I can't also deny that we have some very few good Moroccan friends who are well-mannered and who have a high level of accepting the cultural other as we work together on some school tasks without any hate or discrimination. I don't know if this is a cultural-construct or a matter of one's individual mindset.

8. Discussion

The findings revealed that while some teachers are actively working to adapt their teaching practices to meet the diverse needs of sub-Saharan migrant students, significant challenges remain. These challenges include language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and a lack of resources tailored to the specific needs of migrant students. Many teachers expressed a willingness to support these students but felt constrained by the rigid curriculum and limited institutional support. For instance, several educators noted that the current curriculum does not adequately reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the student body, making it difficult to engage migrant students meaningfully.

Moreover, the study highlighted how systemic issues within the Moroccan schooling system contribute to the marginalization of sub-Saharan African pupils. Factors such as socio-economic disparities, racial biases, and the lack of targeted policies for migrant students exacerbate the difficulties these pupils face. Teachers reported that these systemic barriers often lead to inequities in access to educational resources and opportunities, resulting in a significant achievement gap between native students and their migrant counterparts.

On a similar premise, Sub-Saharan migrant students consistently reported feeling marginalized and underrepresented within the educational system, echoing the concerns raised by their teachers regarding the lack of culturally responsive teaching practices. Many students expressed that the curriculum often fails to reflect their cultural backgrounds, leading to a sense of disconnection and alienation in the classroom.

This sentiment aligns with teachers' observations that the current curriculum does not adequately address the diverse needs of migrant students, which hinders their ability to fully engage these learners.

Moreover, sub-Saharan migrant learners highlighted challenges related to language barriers and cultural differences, which further complicate their educational experiences. These students often felt that their linguistic and cultural identities were not sufficiently acknowledged or valued in the classroom, contributing to feelings of exclusion. This perception is consistent with the teachers' accounts of struggling to bridge cultural gaps and provide relevant educational support within a rigid and standardized system.

The correlation between the perceptions of teachers and students underscores the systemic nature of the challenges faced by sub-Saharan migrant learners in Moroccan schools. Both groups identified similar obstacles to inclusivity and equity, pointing to the need for a more culturally responsive approach to education. These findings suggest that addressing the educational needs of migrant students requires a concerted effort from both educators and policymakers to implement changes that promote a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background.

Overall, the alignment between the perspectives of sub-Saharan migrant students and their teachers highlights the urgent need for reforms that address the systemic inequities within the educational system. By fostering greater cultural awareness and implementing practices that reflect the diverse identities of all students, Moroccan schools can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for sub-Saharan migrants and other marginalized groups.

9. Conclusion

As a conclusion, this article seeks to critically reflect on some of the major challenges facing multicultural and multilingual classrooms, specifically focusing on the establishment of intercultural education, equity, and inclusivity within the context of Moroccan teacher education. The literature consistently argues that multicultural education is a viable and necessary approach to fostering an inclusive, equitable, and just educational environment in classrooms that are culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse [15]. This approach not only supports the academic success of all students but also promotes social cohesion by encouraging mutual respect and understanding among individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

The findings of this study underscore the urgent need to recalibrate teaching content, practices, and pedagogies to better address the diverse needs of both local and migrant students at various educational levels and across different contexts. Specifically, it calls for a more culturally responsive curriculum that acknowledges and values the cultural and linguistic diversity of the student population. This involves

integrating culturally relevant materials and perspectives into the curriculum, fostering an educational environment where all students feel seen, respected, and supported.

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of professional development for teachers, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively manage and embrace diversity in the classroom. Teachers must be prepared to implement pedagogical strategies that not only accommodate but also celebrate cultural differences, thereby creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In addition, the findings suggest that educational institutions should adopt policies and practices that actively promote inclusivity and equity, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have equal access to quality education. This might include initiatives such as targeted support for migrant students, anti-bias training for educators, and the creation of a more inclusive school culture that challenges systemic inequalities and fosters a sense of belonging for all students (Nieto, 2017).

Ultimately, this article calls for a comprehensive and systemic approach to intercultural education in Morocco—one that is rooted in the principles of equity, inclusivity, and social justice [16]. By adjusting teaching contents, practices, and pedagogies to better serve the needs of diverse student populations, Moroccan education can move closer to realizing its goals of fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Abbreviations

ME   Multicultural Education

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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