

Multicultural Education For Strengthening Social Cohesion And Inclusive Learning Communities

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Abstract: Multicultural education plays an essential role in fostering inclusive learning environments and strengthening social cohesion in diverse societies. Educational institutions increasingly face cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity among students. Effective responses require pedagogical approaches that recognize diversity as an asset within the learning process. This study explores how multicultural education contributes to the development of inclusive learning communities and promotes social cohesion in schools. A qualitative descriptive approach was used, drawing on literature analysis and case-based observations of multicultural practices in educational settings. The findings indicate that multicultural education encourages mutual respect, cultural awareness, and collaborative learning among students from different backgrounds. Classroom strategies such as culturally responsive teaching, dialogic learning, and collaborative projects support inclusive participation. Schools that integrate multicultural values into curriculum design, school culture, and teacher professional development show stronger levels of student engagement and social interaction. Multicultural education also supports the formation of democratic attitudes and empathy among learners. These outcomes contribute to the development of inclusive learning communities where diversity becomes a source of shared learning rather than division. The study highlights the importance of institutional commitment, teacher readiness, and culturally responsive curriculum design in implementing multicultural education effectively.

Keywords: Multicultural Education, Social Cohesion, Inclusive Learning, Cultural Diversity, Learning Communities

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education systems operate within increasingly diverse social environments. Migration, globalization, and technological connectivity bring students from varied cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds into the same classrooms. Educational institutions encounter the task of creating learning environments that acknowledge diversity while sustaining shared social values. Schools no longer function solely as places for academic instruction. They also serve as social spaces where students learn to interact with individuals whose identities, traditions, and experiences differ from their own. Cultural diversity within educational settings

presents both opportunities and challenges. Positive engagement with diversity can promote intercultural understanding and cooperation, while insufficient attention to diversity may lead to misunderstanding, exclusion, and social fragmentation (Banks, 2016).

Multicultural education has developed as an important framework for responding to these realities. The concept refers to educational practices that recognize cultural diversity and support equitable participation in learning processes. Multicultural education encourages schools to examine curriculum content, teaching methods, and institutional structures so that all students feel represented and respected within the educational environment. This perspective does not only involve the inclusion of cultural topics within lessons. It also addresses issues related to equality, representation, and participation. Educational scholars describe multicultural education as a transformative approach that integrates cultural awareness into the entire educational system, including curriculum development, instructional strategies, and institutional policies (Nieto & Bode, 2018).

The integration of multicultural perspectives into education also reflects broader social developments. Globalization has intensified interactions between cultures through communication technologies, economic exchange, and international mobility. Students encounter diverse cultural expressions in daily life through digital media, global information networks, and transnational communities. Educational institutions are expected to prepare learners for participation in pluralistic societies where intercultural competence becomes essential. Intercultural competence refers to the ability to communicate effectively and respectfully with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This competence includes attitudes of openness, knowledge of cultural diversity, and skills for constructive dialogue (Deardorff, 2006).

Social cohesion represents one of the central goals connected with multicultural education. Social cohesion refers to the degree of trust, solidarity, and cooperation that exists among members of a society. Communities with strong social cohesion demonstrate mutual respect, shared responsibility, and inclusive participation in social institutions. Educational environments contribute significantly to this process because students develop social values through everyday interaction with peers and teachers. Classrooms serve as microcosms of society where young

individuals practice cooperation, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Educational experiences that promote inclusivity can nurture empathy and reduce social prejudice among students (Schleicher, 2018).

Schools play a crucial role in fostering these values through policies and pedagogical practices that emphasize inclusion. Inclusive educational environments support participation by students regardless of cultural background, language, gender, or socio-economic status. Teachers who apply inclusive strategies encourage students to express their perspectives and respect alternative viewpoints. Classroom activities often involve collaborative learning, reflective discussion, and problem-solving tasks that require cooperation among diverse groups of students. Such experiences help learners develop social awareness and strengthen their sense of belonging within the learning community (Gay, 2018).

Inclusive learning communities provide a meaningful context for implementing multicultural education. A learning community refers to an educational environment in which students and teachers collaborate in constructing knowledge and supporting one another's learning processes. These communities emphasize dialogue, shared responsibility, and mutual respect. Learning activities often involve group projects, interdisciplinary exploration, and discussion of real-world issues that reflect diverse cultural perspectives. Students participate actively in knowledge construction rather than simply receiving information from teachers. This approach encourages learners to reflect on their own cultural identities while appreciating the perspectives of others (Gorski, 2019).

Educational research demonstrates that inclusive learning environments can strengthen interpersonal relationships among students. Students who experience respectful interaction within diverse classrooms develop greater empathy and openness toward cultural differences. These experiences reduce stereotypes and encourage constructive engagement with diversity. Educational practices that promote collaboration and dialogue also contribute to the development of democratic attitudes among learners. Students learn to value fairness, respect diverse perspectives, and participate responsibly within group activities (Banks, 2016).

Institutional support represents an essential factor in the successful implementation of multicultural education. School leadership, curriculum design, and teacher professional development influence how multicultural values are integrated into daily learning activities. Teachers require preparation that enables them to address cultural diversity within their classrooms. Professional development programs often focus on culturally responsive teaching, inclusive curriculum design, and strategies for facilitating intercultural dialogue. Schools that prioritize these initiatives tend to create environments where diversity becomes a resource for collective learning rather than a source of division (Gay, 2018).

The development of multicultural educational practices holds particular importance in contemporary societies characterized by rapid social change. Students will encounter diverse cultural communities throughout their personal and professional lives. Educational experiences that cultivate intercultural awareness and social responsibility prepare learners for constructive participation in pluralistic societies. Multicultural education offers a framework through which schools can support these goals while promoting social harmony within diverse communities.

This study explores how multicultural education contributes to strengthening social cohesion and the development of inclusive learning communities in educational settings. The research focuses on pedagogical practices, institutional support, and classroom interactions that promote multicultural values. Understanding these dynamics can provide insights into how educational institutions create environments that support both academic learning and positive social relationships among diverse groups of students.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine how multicultural education contributes to strengthening social cohesion and developing inclusive learning communities in educational settings. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore educational phenomena through interpretative analysis of concepts, experiences, and documented practices. This approach is widely used in educational research because it enables a deeper understanding of

complex social and pedagogical processes that occur within learning environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study relied on document-based data sources to analyze theoretical perspectives and educational practices related to multicultural education. Academic journal articles, scholarly books, educational policy documents, and institutional reports were selected as primary sources of information. A purposive sampling strategy was applied to identify literature that specifically discusses multicultural pedagogy, inclusive education, and the development of collaborative learning communities in culturally diverse contexts. Publications were selected based on relevance, academic credibility, and contribution to the understanding of multicultural learning environments.

The document review process focused on identifying conceptual frameworks and examples of educational practices that promote inclusivity. Special attention was given to studies discussing culturally responsive teaching, inclusive curriculum design, and classroom interaction among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Educational literature describing teacher roles, school leadership, and institutional policies supporting diversity in education was also included in the analysis. Document analysis provides a structured way to examine existing knowledge and generate insights regarding educational strategies and practices (Bowen, 2009).

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis procedure to identify recurring patterns within the selected literature. Thematic analysis is commonly used in qualitative research to interpret meaning from textual data and to categorize ideas into conceptual themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process began with an intensive reading of the collected sources to identify key ideas related to multicultural education, social cohesion, and inclusive learning environments. Initial coding involved marking statements and concepts that reflect strategies for managing diversity within educational contexts.

These coded concepts were then organized into broader thematic categories that represent core dimensions of multicultural educational practices. Three main themes emerged from the analysis. The first theme relates to multicultural pedagogy, including culturally responsive teaching strategies, representation of diverse cultural perspectives in curriculum materials, and

dialogic learning activities. The second theme concerns institutional culture, which includes school leadership, educational policies, and teacher professional development programs that support inclusive educational practices. The third theme focuses on student interaction, particularly collaborative learning activities, intercultural communication, and peer engagement in diverse classrooms.

Interpretation of the findings involved examining relationships among these themes to understand how multicultural educational practices influence inclusive learning environments. The analysis highlights patterns indicating that culturally responsive pedagogy, supportive institutional structures, and positive student interactions contribute to the development of social cohesion within educational communities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Multicultural Pedagogy in Inclusive Classrooms

The analysis of the selected literature indicates that multicultural pedagogy plays a central role in fostering inclusive learning environments. Multicultural pedagogy refers to instructional approaches that acknowledge the cultural identities, experiences, and perspectives of students within the learning process. Teachers who apply multicultural pedagogical strategies design learning activities that integrate diverse cultural narratives, social contexts, and historical perspectives. Such practices allow students to see their cultural backgrounds represented in educational content, which contributes to a stronger sense of belonging in the classroom (Banks, 2016).

Classroom learning materials represent one of the most visible aspects of multicultural pedagogy. Instructional resources that include diverse examples, cultural narratives, and global perspectives encourage students to develop broader understandings of society. When students encounter multiple cultural viewpoints within learning materials, they gain opportunities to reflect on their own cultural identities while appreciating the experiences of others. This process strengthens intercultural awareness and supports the development of inclusive learning communities (Gay, 2018).

Teachers also play a significant role in facilitating culturally responsive instruction. Educators who adopt culturally responsive teaching strategies consider the cultural backgrounds, communication styles, and learning preferences of their students when designing instructional activities. Culturally responsive teaching supports equitable participation by encouraging students to contribute their experiences and perspectives during classroom discussions. Educational research suggests that such approaches increase student engagement and improve academic participation among learners from diverse backgrounds (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

Dialogic learning represents another important strategy within multicultural classrooms. Dialogic learning involves structured discussions that encourage students to exchange ideas, share cultural perspectives, and reflect on social issues. Through dialogic interaction, students learn to express their viewpoints while listening respectfully to others. Classroom dialogue promotes critical thinking and allows students to examine complex social topics related to culture, identity, and diversity. Educational scholars argue that dialogic practices support the development of democratic values because students learn to engage constructively with different perspectives (Alexander, 2018).

The implementation of dialogic learning also strengthens interpersonal relationships within the classroom. Students who participate in open discussions develop greater empathy toward peers whose cultural experiences differ from their own. Dialogue creates opportunities for students to challenge stereotypes and reconsider assumptions about other cultural groups. As a result, classrooms become spaces where diversity is treated as a valuable source of learning rather than a barrier to interaction (Deardorff, 2006).

Collaborative learning activities further support multicultural engagement in inclusive classrooms. Collaborative learning involves group-based learning tasks that require students to work together to achieve shared goals. Group projects, cooperative problem-solving tasks, and peer learning activities encourage students from different cultural backgrounds to interact regularly. These interactions create opportunities for students to exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and develop shared understanding (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Collaborative learning also encourages the development of social responsibility and teamwork. Students participating in collaborative activities learn to value different viewpoints while working toward common objectives. This experience strengthens interpersonal communication skills and encourages students to respect diverse perspectives within the group. Educational research indicates that collaborative learning environments contribute to improved social interaction and greater mutual respect among students (Gillies, 2016).

The integration of multicultural pedagogy, dialogic learning, and collaborative learning creates a supportive foundation for inclusive education. These approaches encourage active participation, mutual respect, and shared learning experiences among students. Inclusive classrooms that apply these strategies often demonstrate stronger levels of social interaction and collective engagement among learners.

Educational institutions that support multicultural pedagogical practices also contribute to broader social cohesion. Schools function as social environments where students develop attitudes toward diversity that extend beyond the classroom. When students learn to collaborate, communicate, and respect cultural differences within school settings, they develop skills necessary for participation in pluralistic societies. Multicultural education thus serves not only as a pedagogical framework but also as a social foundation for promoting inclusive communities and constructive intercultural relationships.

School Culture and Institutional Support

The effectiveness of multicultural education is closely related to the institutional environment in which teaching and learning occur. Schools function as social institutions that shape values, norms, and patterns of interaction among students and teachers. A school culture that prioritizes inclusivity creates conditions where multicultural education can be implemented effectively. Institutional commitment becomes a fundamental factor in establishing educational practices that recognize diversity and promote equitable participation among learners (UNESCO, 2017).

School culture refers to the collective values, beliefs, and practices that guide interactions within an educational institution. Inclusive school cultures encourage respect for diversity,

collaboration among students, and equitable opportunities for participation in learning activities. When school policies explicitly support diversity and inclusion, teachers and students are more likely to engage in practices that value cultural differences. Educational research indicates that inclusive school cultures positively influence student engagement, academic achievement, and social relationships within classrooms (Thapa et al., 2013).

Institutional commitment to multicultural education is often reflected in curriculum design. Schools that prioritize multicultural values incorporate diverse cultural perspectives into learning materials and classroom activities. Curriculum content may include examples from various cultural traditions, historical narratives from multiple communities, and global perspectives on social issues. These elements allow students to develop broader understandings of cultural diversity and social interdependence. Curriculum integration also enables learners to recognize the relevance of cultural diversity within academic subjects such as history, language, and social studies (Sleeter, 2018).

Professional development programs for teachers represent another important component of institutional support. Teachers play a crucial role in translating multicultural educational principles into classroom practices. Training programs that focus on intercultural competence, culturally responsive teaching, and inclusive pedagogy equip teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to address diversity within their classrooms. Research suggests that teachers who participate in such programs demonstrate greater confidence in facilitating inclusive learning environments and supporting diverse student populations (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016).

School leadership significantly influences the development of inclusive educational cultures. Administrators establish policies, allocate resources, and create structures that support multicultural education initiatives. Effective school leaders promote open communication among teachers, students, and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. Leadership practices that emphasize participation and dialogue encourage the entire school community to contribute to inclusive educational goals. Studies in educational leadership highlight that principals who advocate for diversity and equity help cultivate positive school climates that support multicultural learning (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

Leadership support also encourages collaborative relationships between schools and surrounding communities. Partnerships with families, local organizations, and community groups enable schools to incorporate local cultural knowledge into educational activities. Cultural festivals, community dialogues, and student forums create opportunities for interaction between students and diverse cultural groups. These initiatives help strengthen mutual understanding and build trust between educational institutions and the communities they serve (Ishimaru, 2020).

Institutional structures that encourage student participation also contribute to inclusive school environments. Student councils, peer mentoring programs, and intercultural dialogue activities provide platforms for students to express their perspectives and engage with diverse viewpoints. Participation in these activities strengthens students' sense of belonging and promotes democratic engagement within the school community. Educational studies show that inclusive participation opportunities enhance students' social awareness and interpersonal relationships (OECD, 2021).

Curriculum flexibility represents another dimension of institutional support for multicultural education. Flexible curricula allow teachers to adapt learning materials to reflect the cultural backgrounds and experiences of their students. Teachers may incorporate local cultural practices, community knowledge, and contemporary social issues into classroom discussions. This adaptability enables educators to connect academic content with the lived experiences of learners. Flexible curricular approaches also support contextual learning, which increases student engagement and relevance of learning activities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Institutional support structures create conditions that allow multicultural education to flourish within schools. Inclusive policies, teacher professional development, community engagement, and flexible curriculum design work together to establish environments that respect diversity and encourage collaborative learning. These institutional elements reinforce the idea that multicultural education extends beyond classroom instruction. The entire educational environment contributes to shaping inclusive attitudes and social cohesion among students.

Educational institutions that actively support multicultural principles demonstrate stronger capacities to respond to cultural diversity in contemporary societies. School culture, leadership

practices, and institutional policies function collectively to create learning environments where students develop respect for diversity and responsibility toward their communities. Through sustained institutional commitment, schools become spaces where multicultural education contributes to inclusive learning communities and stronger social relationships among students.

Multicultural Education and Social Cohesion

Multicultural education plays an important role in strengthening social cohesion among students within diverse educational settings. Social cohesion refers to the capacity of individuals within a community to maintain positive relationships, mutual trust, and shared responsibility. In school environments, social cohesion emerges through daily interactions among students from different cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds. Educational practices that acknowledge diversity encourage students to develop empathy and mutual respect, which are essential elements of cohesive learning communities (Durkheim, 2014; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017).

Classroom interactions represent one of the primary contexts where multicultural education influences social cohesion. When students participate in learning activities that recognize diverse cultural perspectives, they gain opportunities to understand the experiences and viewpoints of others. Such interactions encourage the development of intercultural awareness and reduce prejudice among learners. Studies in intercultural education indicate that structured exposure to diverse perspectives within classrooms helps students develop more inclusive attitudes and stronger interpersonal relationships (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Inclusive learning environments contribute significantly to reducing stereotypes and social distance between cultural groups. Social distance refers to the perceived gap between individuals from different backgrounds in terms of trust, acceptance, and interaction. Schools that promote inclusive policies and multicultural learning practices provide opportunities for students to interact with peers from diverse communities in constructive ways. Regular interaction within collaborative learning environments encourages students to move beyond preconceived stereotypes and develop meaningful relationships with classmates who possess different cultural identities (Dessel, 2010).

Group-based learning activities also play an important role in strengthening social cohesion. Collaborative learning tasks require students to communicate, negotiate ideas, and work together toward common goals. These experiences encourage students to appreciate different perspectives and develop shared responsibility within group activities. Educational research suggests that cooperative learning structures can significantly improve intergroup relations among students and contribute to the formation of inclusive learning communities (Slavin, 2015).

Multicultural education also supports the development of empathy among students. Empathy refers to the ability to understand and share the feelings and perspectives of others. Classroom discussions that address cultural experiences, social issues, and community perspectives provide opportunities for students to reflect on the lives of individuals from different backgrounds. Such reflective learning experiences strengthen emotional understanding and reduce cultural misunderstandings among learners. Empathy development within educational contexts contributes to the formation of respectful relationships and constructive communication within diverse communities (Batson et al., 1997).

Educational experiences that emphasize equality, participation, and dialogue also nurture democratic values among students. Democratic education encourages learners to express their opinions, listen to alternative perspectives, and engage in respectful debate. Classroom environments that support open dialogue allow students to practice democratic participation in everyday learning activities. Through these experiences, students develop skills such as critical thinking, collaborative decision-making, and respectful communication (Gutmann, 1999).

Participation in inclusive educational environments encourages students to take responsibility for maintaining positive social relationships within their communities. Students learn that diversity represents a valuable resource for collective learning rather than a source of division. Educational scholars argue that schools function as important social institutions where democratic citizenship and civic responsibility are cultivated. Students who learn within inclusive environments tend to demonstrate stronger commitments to social justice, fairness, and community engagement (Biesta, 2011).

The influence of multicultural education extends beyond the classroom environment. Attitudes and social skills developed in school settings often shape how students interact within broader social contexts. Students who develop intercultural understanding and respect for diversity are more likely to engage constructively with individuals from different communities in society. These competencies are particularly important in contemporary societies characterized by cultural diversity and global interconnectedness (Vertovec, 2007).

Multicultural education therefore contributes to both educational and social outcomes. Inclusive classrooms create opportunities for students to develop empathy, mutual respect, and collaborative skills through interaction with diverse peers. These experiences strengthen social cohesion within schools while preparing students for participation in pluralistic societies. Educational systems that prioritize multicultural learning practices play a crucial role in promoting inclusive communities and sustainable social relationships among future generations.

CONCLUSION

Multicultural education provides a meaningful framework for strengthening social cohesion and developing inclusive learning communities within contemporary educational environments. Schools increasingly operate in culturally diverse contexts where students bring different identities, experiences, and perspectives into the classroom. Educational practices that recognize and respect this diversity encourage students to engage in constructive interaction with peers from different backgrounds. Inclusive pedagogical approaches create learning environments where students participate actively in discussions, collaborative projects, and reflective dialogue. These experiences support the development of mutual respect, intercultural understanding, and shared responsibility among learners. When diversity is integrated into curriculum design and classroom activities, students gain opportunities to explore multiple perspectives and broaden their social awareness. Such learning processes encourage students to view diversity as a valuable element of collective learning rather than a source of division. Through these experiences, classrooms function not only as academic spaces but also as communities where students practice cooperation, empathy, and constructive communication.

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of culturally responsive teaching, institutional commitment, and supportive school cultures in the successful implementation of multicultural education. Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating inclusive learning by designing instructional strategies that reflect the cultural backgrounds and experiences of students. School leadership and institutional policies also contribute significantly by establishing environments that promote diversity, participation, and equitable learning opportunities. Schools that integrate multicultural values into curriculum structures, professional development programs, and community engagement initiatives create stronger foundations for inclusive education. Inclusive learning communities help students develop empathy, democratic attitudes, and social responsibility through everyday interaction with diverse peers. These competencies extend beyond classroom settings and influence how students engage within broader social contexts. Educational institutions that prioritize multicultural education contribute to the preparation of learners who are capable of living and collaborating within pluralistic societies. Strengthening multicultural educational practices therefore represents an important step toward building more inclusive, cooperative, and socially cohesive communities.

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