

Review Paper on Significance of Culture on Learning Environment

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Abstract

At global level, there is growing concern about how to educate all people and comprehend the minutiae of human learning. Given this fact, culture has become a preeminent factor in understanding learners and learning. Studies on Cultural diversity in Educational Institutes has been regularly conducted as the number of students from various religion, race, ethnicity, region is on a rise in such Institutes. Studying abroad is seen as an opportunity to learn more about new cultures, languages and gain a deeper understanding about people around the world. This conceptual review paper aims at creating an understanding about the ways in which such diverse crowd influence the overall learning environment. Learning environment comprises of all the interchanges among participants as well as with the facilitator while conducting an educational exercise. The paper studies whether the already existing foundation among culturally diverse individuals acts as an aid in the teaching learning process. It draws out detrimental findings from previous relevant articles and also discusses implications of each one on the topic. While concluding the review article summarises the key points that emerged from prior studies into few conceptual viewpoints and also provides direction for future studies on the same subject.

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Introduction

Educational institutions are considered as social institutions because they cater to larger needs of society (Turkkahraman, 2015). Due to constant change at all levels in the society , education reflects sustainable and evolving to meet needs. Culture , which is core part of the society plays significant role in education institutions for prompts and motivation among

students as well as educators(Sikkema and Sauerwein, 2015) Hofstede a noted psychologist defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede,2011).The term Culturally diverse in broader sense is often used considering any or all factors that are-ethnicity ,culture and race in an individual.(Sue,2009).

Majority of the nations have a multicultural population. (Loo, 1999). Similarly, People belonging to diverse cultures are often seen being part of Contemporary Workplace environment. Individuals from different cultural origin tend to form an effective Talent pool and act as a point of attraction for clients across the globe (Adler ,1991). However, the benefits of having Culturally diverse employees is not restricted just to this. It is also observed that when firms provide uniform and fitted opportunities to employees who form a minority group with respect to culture, they gain a competitive advantage in the industry and reap greater returns. (Barbara Mazur Politechnika Bialostocka, 2010). The prerequisite for reaping the benefits of Diversity is having a proper Diversity Management System.

Another key example of a setup where Cultural Diversity is much talked about is Higher Education providing institutes such as Universities, Colleges and many other professionals schools. In the last few decades, the number of students enrolled in these Institutes has furthermore increased especially in India. (Thorat,2013). Often Higher education acts as a facilitator for Transforming Learners of Today into Workforce for Tomorrow. This has also made all parties related to the learners hold education and training institutes increasingly accountable. (Albert, 1991; Eaton, 2003).

Primarily the end result of an educational exercise which can be aimed at enhancing Knowledge, Skill or Ability is referred as Learning Objectives. According to Svanstrom " Once the outcomes of learning for Sustainable Development have been agreed on, the strategies for teaching and assessing these outcomes must also be chosen. Curricula, syllabi, and teaching and learning activities have to be formed so as to reach the Learning Outcomes. ". (Svanstorm,2008, p. 349).

Learning Outcomes are usually formed by a collaboration between the facilitators and the University board or other concerned authorities. Whereas the execution part relies on the facilitators. Through this paper the authors are reviewing on the impact of cultural diversity on the execution strategy i.e. the setting of Curricula, syllabi and learning activities.

Extensive studies in the past have established relationships between Cultural diversity and Level of Innovation in a Company (Ozgen,Nijkamp and Poot,2013),Monetary and Non-Monetary returns to Students and Society (Bowen and Bok,1998;Bowen,Bok and Burkhart,1999),Problem Solving and reducing the levels of unchallenged decision making(References Needed), organisation flexibility (Morgan,1989) and other aspects.

The purpose of this review paper is to amalgamate various crucial research work done previously on the topic and bring out a systematic conclusion on the subject of Cultural Diversity in Educational Institutes. Researchers want to provide summarised insights on How Cultural Diversity influence facilitators approach towards setting and achieving Learning

Outcomes along with the Learners. The review paper considers studies conducted in the area of Diversity in Education across different countries.

Methodology

The research is a qualitative literature review on Cultural Diversity as a factor in Higher Education and its impact on Learning outcomes that are set for various educational exercises. The study aims at reviewing journal articles, books for the same purpose. In the sections that follow relevant journals are used to draw more insights on the subject of Cultural Diversity and its effect on various facets of learning. The final parts of the article comprise of a summed-up outlook that was gathered by analysing previous related research works on “cultural diversity management” and “diversity in education” and a way forward for future studies on the subject.

Literature Review

A paper by **Konan et.al.,2010** challenged the common belief of administration in many countries of western Europe. The study recorded performance of students who had migrated from other countries and also another group of native learners through a common parameter of testing. The results showed improved performance of both these parties studying in the common institute. Often immigrants across the globe are criticised for lowering standards of educational institutes and affecting classroom learnings but the above-mentioned study brought out contrary revelations. The author further suggested the rationale of “Ingroup threat” which made the native students to strive and level their performance with the other immigrant group of students. As for the minority group the academic achievement was seen as a result of constantly exercising tactical thinking and complex reasoning. They were more habitual of such ways of problem solving due to learning about different countries and cultures and adjusting in the same.

“Creativity thrives on diversity” (Morgan, 1989). Following in the lines of infusing inventiveness through Diversity, Cultural Diversity was seen a factor improving creativity not only in adult learners but also in children going to elementary school. (Vezzali and Gocłowska,2016)

While the above discussed paper focused on communicating about the positive outcomes of diversity in learning experience. Another research article by Jabbar and Mirza(2019) talks about bringing reforms in curricula, policies and procedure. With an increase in the cultural diversity in higher education providing institutes the pedagogical method requires continuous revision. Traditional curricula might not be able to serve the learning needs of diverse crowds efficiently. Adding to the mentioned point, the paper also included the inefficiency of providing an inclusive, validating and affirming environment. Interestingly this paper validates our deliberation about whether cultural diversity have an effect on setting and achieving learning outcomes. Another article by (Jabbar and Hardaker.,2013) confirms it further. The paper proposes five-pillar framework which broadly comprises of a culturally sensitive approach, catering the resources for learning, having an educational strategy, creating an environment of equality and so on. Its further stresses upon having a culturally

responsive approach for designing the Teaching Methodology. While interviewing the respondents a major challenge emerged. The Facilitators mentioned the increasing number of students being admitted due to the pressure from administration. They wanted to create an approach which increases the level of engagement with students but failed to do so because of the increased number of admissions.

The kind of impact that cultural diversity can have on learning are explained in few other researches. One of them being by Usher and Barak(2019) One of the key findings of the study correlates bio demographic diversity along with task related diversity and innovation linearly. Bio demographic diversity includes aspect such as gender, age, religion and ethnicity. These aspects can be safely concluded as “Cultural Diversity”.

Innovation is often seen as a recommended way of problem solving. In a culturally diverse classroom environment wherein the learners are innovative with respect to discussions, assignments, group activities the learning environment will likely be positively impacted. Encouragingly these can have a significant effect on facilitator’s Methodology as well as expectations. In the topics that allow so, stress over group activities i.e. Projects, Discussions might increase with the likely outcome of greater peer learning. Additionally, the Facilitator might even feel encouraged to disseminate a greater share of information, modify the kind of assignments and tests assuming that the students can absorb it perfectly. When individuals work in a culturally diverse environment the strategies for tackling problems has to be changed because the customary ways of doing things might not work effectively. In all such cases learning outcomes for the educational exercise would be greatly impacted. Largely the pedagogy and methodology were dynamic for providing a better educational experience.

Milliken and Martins (1996) tried to study diversity from multiple perspectives and reach towards a justifiable conclusion. The article included an in-depth study of the effect of diversity at Individual, Group and Organisational level. The findings were that groups in which members were different from one another deliberately tried to drive away the diversity factor. This was majorly because of decrease in the satisfaction of member, differences in opinion and higher rates. Although the study focused on diversity management in the workplace the findings cannot be completely ignored in educational context. Students from diverse group can be a possible cause of intergroup conflicts, creation of barriers and an ineffective behaviour while adapting to the changes. Again, the solution lies in continuous alterations in facilitators methods of teaching so that the above-mentioned disruptions can be effectively handled or altogether avoided. In the case of teachers, many decisions are on the spot, unconsciously and at rare times driven by inferred practices or beliefs. (Korthagen, 2010).

The paper authored by Milliken and Martins, 1996 also brought up the aspect of increase in cost while creating and executing a diversity friendly policy. At times these costs can exceed the cognitive and symbolic benefits. This was in majority an observation in many workplaces that followed the culture of promoting diversity just for the mere sake of doing a politically correct thing. Although this is observed in educational institutes as well. Although the costs incurred towards diversity are relatively low.

Gurin and Dey(20020 in their article reflected upon the aim of making education “Equitable and Just”. Classroom discussion, Diversity programmes, peer learning and other such form of interaction supports Education for all. The paper includes few interesting legislative judgements on the subject of Diversity. Classroom discussion, Diversity programmes, peer learning and other such form of interaction supports Education for all.

An initiative of including more about diversity in the curricula cannot replace the overall gain of having diverse learners. Although the inclusion of such a matter can always act as a supplement for the main goal. This is because the majority of learnings come from interactions and instead of having theoretical knowledge.

The paper explains the role of college administration in encourage learning from diversity by creating a supportive environment. Interactions with the learners should be promoted wherein the learners can share beliefs, opinions about things that they value or condemn, viewpoints, problem solving approaches and much more. It is a shared responsibility of administration as well as concerned facilitators. A curriculum that makes most of diverse perspectives without affronting any kind of cultural beliefs needs to be remodelled. As the teaching methods can be modified but unless the pedagogy subscribes to similar ideology the benefits won't be maximised.

A careful observation of the kind of relationship that diverse peer group has can act as a guideline for the facilitator. It can be done by observing the pattern of discussions that they have on something or the kind of solutions that they come up with or can be as simple as their preference while forming a group for an exercise. This way the programmes designed towards aiming for inclusion, greater learning and fewer intergroup conflicts and chaos tend to be more successful.

The findings of an article by (López et.al 2018) indicated an overall positive outlook of teachers on the subject of Diversity. Although differences were observed while dealing with specific aspects related to diversity

Shibao and Jamal.(2007) in their article mention the significance of creating a framework wherein the faculty and learners are firstly ready to fully accept diversity. It is an educational responsibility to integrate all the difference that arise through members belonging to diverse cultures. Needless to mention unless properly managed the benefits of diversity will not be adequately reflected in the learning outcomes. Instead diverse students will become a source of mere chaos in a classroom. The responsibility of such management does partly lie on the Facilitator. And for evaluating Facilitators own attitude towards diversity and the approach they would adopt to promote it among learners the “Intercultural Education Model” is suggested in the paper. The model talks about on creating awareness at faculty level about culturally diverse learners and the need to tweak teaching styles accordingly. Such a model can be implemented in a classroom to transform both syllabus and pedagogy. Teaching style complimented by change in the pedagogy can prove to be successful in dealing effectively with Cultural Diversity. Overall, the stress should be towards developing a positive

perception about cultural diversity and then working on creating an inclusive learning environment.

Immigration and encouraging policies for international students is also observed across most of the institutes in the recent years. This facilitates exchange of Customs, Values, beliefs and tradition between international and other students. Rahman and Alwi (2018) have elaborated on the need to increase awareness and a feeling of appreciation for diverse culture. This acts as a prerequisite in both workplaces and educational institutes before implementing any diversity related program. They mention a need for active changes in the entire learning culture of the organisation before inviting international students.

Conclusion

By an in-depth review of past studies on the subject of Cultural Diversity in Educational Institutes few inferences can be safely drawn by the Authors. A Prominent conclusion that has surfaced is that Diversity does affect the Learning Environment in Educational Institutes. Most of the studies indicated that Cultural diversity provides a greater learning opportunity but only after fulfilment of few conditions. These Conditions include the wholehearted acceptance from learners' and facilitator's side for the induced differences. This is needless say followed by the efforts that faculty member and concerned administration need to take. A more flexible approach which encourages cross interaction and peer to peer learning can foster learning among students. These efforts broadly included curriculum modification and the need to review and change teaching methodology. A methodology that would cater to the different learning traditions of students belonging to diverse groups was found to be the best suited. Another vital condition was Managing Diversity in such a way that the negative effects some of which includes intergroup conflicts, dissatisfaction and chaos could be minimised. Creation of an effective learning environment which included students belonging to different culture also involved some costs. However proper diversity management was seen as the solution to minimise such cost and reap a greater share of benefits. Role of culture in learning moves beyond views , it is about structuring methods, process and instances which are suitable for individual and groups (Young, 2014). There is growing concern over inclusion of cultural aspect in designing curriculum to delivery, hence this review of literature can contribute to the various findings.

Future research direction

Interestingly the study found out impact of "Cultural Diversity" in the learning environment. A serious gap was found in the field of inter relationship between "Cultural Diversity" and "Cognitive Diversity". Cognitive diversity comprises of Education and Training, Work Experience, Hobbies and Interests, Introversion or extraversion and such related factors. Additionally, it will be interesting to measure the level of effect of these two different diversities on the various facets that form a learning Environment. Also, the scenario of cultural diversity in countries that observe higher magnitude of migration is relatively complex. There are groups of diverse native individuals as well as immigrants. More research about interchanges between these parties and its overall impact on educational outcome can

be undertaken too. Prospective researches can focus on the above discussed Tenets for bringing more light on the subject.

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