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Editorial: Educational policies and practices in emerging multicultural contexts

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Editorial on the Research Topic
Educational policies and practices in emerging multicultural contexts

Introduction

The rapid growth of multilingual and multicultural classrooms around the globe is largely a result of recent economic, environmental, and political changes. As societies become increasingly diverse, educational systems must evolve to meet the diverse needs of students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This transformation calls for a reassessment of current educational policies and practices to ensure they promote equity, inclusivity, and effective learning for everyone.

Traditionally, many national education systems have been influenced by monolingual and monocultural ideologies. In these settings, cultural and linguistic diversity is frequently overlooked, marginalized, or even suppressed. Long-standing minority groups, along with newly arrived students, often face significant educational obstacles that hinder their academic success and social integration. These systemic issues highlight the urgent need to address the inequalities that persist in educational access, representation in curricula, and teaching strategies. In this series of papers, we explore how the introduction of multilingual and multicultural policies and practices presents challenges to the existing educational systems.

One major challenge in implementing culturally and linguistically responsive instruction is the lack of institutional support and teacher training (Cummins, 2000; García and Lin, 2017). Hopkins et al. study on bilingual education in the Czech-Polish border region highlights the urgent need for structured policy interventions to prepare teachers to foster multilingual competencies, particularly for linguistically minoritized students. In this regard, bilingual education programs must be aligned with the cultural and linguistic realities of the communities they serve. The study also emphasizes the importance of community engagement and parental involvement, which are often overlooked in top-down policy decisions. Unless the local languages and perspectives are incorporated, bilingual education programs risk becoming ineffective and disconnected from the students' lived experiences (Hornberger, 2002).

In a different context, Rocha et al. examine the impact of sociocultural factors on academic performance, focusing on disparities in educational access and digital resources, particularly among indigenous communities in the Peruvian Amazon. Their findings align with global studies by Warschauer (2003) and UNESCO (2021), which show that indigenous students face structural barriers, including limited access to digital infrastructure and culturally relevant curricula. Similar to the Czech-Polish case, Rocha et al. also suggest a bottom-up process. They argue that merely acknowledging cultural diversity is insufficient; systemic reforms are needed to integrate indigenous knowledge and perspectives into national curricula. In other words, policies promoting intercultural education must move beyond symbolic inclusion and address these deeper inequities (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1994).

Focusing on the case of northern Cyprus, Erkanlı et al. highlight that multicultural education is positively received by primary school teachers, yet they struggle to implement elements of such a complex concept in their everyday teaching practices due to insufficient training and resources. This aligns with previous studies (Gay, 2010; Banks, 2015) which stress the need for comprehensive professional development to bridge the gap between teachers' attitudes and practice. Similar to other cases in this Research Topic, the results of this study emphasize the importance of a substantial curriculum reform to reflect diverse cultural perspectives, echoing findings by Ladson-Billings (1995) on the significance of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Lee et al.'s paper presents a different angle concerning multilingual education. It takes a closer look at the cultural challenges (i.e., Western and Eastern schools of thought, classroom behavioral rules, different levels of proficiency) faced by the UK-China joint institutes and shows why those programs must develop innovative educational and training approaches to ensure beneficial, positive and rewarding student experiences. The collected data identifies student learning, student engagement, student feedback, teaching evaluations, and the transition from high school to university as key areas of challenge. The findings, similar to Li's (2021) and El Hashash's (2021) studies, emphasize the critical role of reflective practices in such cross-cultural endeavors and the paramount importance of acknowledging and addressing the cultural differences between the collaborating institutions and student groups.

Finally, Shahbari-Kassem et al.'s article reminds us of the vast array of multilingual and multicultural contexts. The authors start by presenting the sociolinguistic phenomenon of diglossia between spoken and written Arabic and how this requires kindergarten teachers to "code switch" between those to expose young students to storybooks and improve their narrative skills. The study's significance is its novel contribution to understanding the intricate connection between early language development, language exposure and diglossia. By emphasizing the critical role of scaffolded storybook reading, researchers underscore the crucial role of carefully selecting and presenting stories that gradually bridge the gap between spoken and written Arabic. This approach aligns with the scaffolding method in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory.

These studies highlight the necessity for global education systems to go beyond symbolic inclusion and actively implement policies to bridge these gaps.

Conclusion

To address the complexities of multicultural and multilingual education, policymakers and educators must move beyond superficial inclusivity and take tangible steps toward systemic change. The studies discussed in this Research Topic collectively emphasize the need for well-structured policies that acknowledge linguistic and cultural diversity while providing educators with the necessary training and resources. Without institutional support and curriculum reforms, the challenges faced by linguistically and culturally diverse students will persist, reinforcing existing inequalities in education.

A key takeaway from these studies is the importance of community engagement and context-specific approaches. Whether in bilingual education, digital access for indigenous students, or cross-cultural collaborations, meaningful inclusion requires more than just policy adjustments—it demands a shift in perspective. Schools must integrate local knowledge, encourage parental involvement, and provide teachers with the tools to implement culturally responsive pedagogies effectively.

Ultimately, the success of educational policies in emerging multicultural contexts depends on their ability to create learning environments that empower all students. Moving forward, educational institutions must prioritize inclusivity not as an abstract principle but as a foundational element of pedagogy and policy. Only through sustained efforts at local, national, and global levels can education systems truly reflect the diversity of the societies they serve.

Author contributions

ÇÇ: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. YÇ: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. ÇH: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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