Teaching in multicultural classrooms through an intercultural perspective on citizenship

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1 Introduction

Nowadays, the rapid technological development, modernism and subsequent socioeconomic development, globalization trends, the relaxation or abolition of borders, and the increase in migratory and refugee flows have significantly facilitated human mobility and communication worldwide. Within this evolving framework, nation-states are becoming increasingly open to cultural diversity, as individuals bring with them distinct identities that shape modern multicultural societies (Berry and Sam, 2014). Consequently, individuals representing diverse social, ethnic, and cultural groups within a given national state territory seek recognition and advocate for their social inclusion.

The imperative of social inclusion is particularly critical in the light of the profound transformations in the cultural composition of populations on a global scale. It constitutes the only viable pathway toward achieving harmonious and peaceful coexistence, grounded in principles of equity, social justice, and intercultural dialogue—both at the national and international levels. This need becomes even more pressing in an era characterized by political, social, and economic upheavals, where isolationist tendencies among states, the resurgence of far-right discourse, and the proliferation of hate speech have fostered a new and fluid form of racism (Archakis and Tsakona, 2024). In response to these challenges, intercultural education, with a focus on fostering global citizenship, emerges as an essential mechanism for maintaining social cohesion and ensuring the equitable coexistence of individuals and groups with diverse ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

The concept of citizenship encompasses the development of individuals and communities who engage in critical thinking and take proactive initiatives for social and political action at multiple levels. In this context, the intersection of civic education and intercultural pedagogy raises significant questions regarding the recognition of linguistic and cultural rights for minority and migrant populations within the nation-state framework (Bauböck, 2006). The institutional recognition of diverse cultural codes inevitably exerts a transformative influence on national educational systems, necessitating reforms in curricular objectives, instructional content, and teaching methods. Such reforms should aim not only at addressing the representational needs of minority and migrant populations but also at cultivating intercultural competence among all students, equipping them with the skills required for active participation in an increasingly interconnected world.

This article argues that interculturally oriented pedagogy serves as a pivotal mechanism for fostering citizenship (Cogan and Derricot, 1998) by shifting the educational paradigm from a monocultural to an intercultural framework. Furthermore, it underscores the

necessity of integrating intercultural perspectives across disciplinary curricula as a means of promoting mutual understanding and fostering respect for cultural diversity. Given the fundamental role of intercultural education in shaping democratic and socially responsible citizens, this article seeks to encourage educators to adopt intercultural approaches from early childhood education onward. Additionally, it advocates for the inclusion of intercultural objectives, methodologies, instructional strategies, and best practices in curriculum development. Specifically, the integration of digital tools, such as game-based learning and Duolingo, contributes to language skill acquisition in multicultural classrooms and fosters an environment of intercultural communication within the learning space. Such an approach will enhance the capacity of educational institutions to fulfill their role in preparing students to live and prosper in contemporary multicultural societies.

2 Overcoming the monocultural paradigm in contemporary school

Monocultural education reflects an educational policy that promotes the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the dominant ethnocultural group of a state, ignoring other minority groups residing within the state and their distinct linguistic and cultural features. The monocultural model was reinforced by the policy of assimilation, which aimed to prepare students from minority social groups to adopt the characteristics of the dominant ethnocultural group, ensuring their integration in a functional and effective manner. This model prevailed in classical immigration countries until the 1960s, with the goal of merging foreign cultures into the dominant culture through the socialization process of immigrant children into the principles and values of the dominant culture (Banks, 2006).

In practice, children are taught only the official language of the school, while the use of mother tongues and the preservation of cultural characteristics from their country of origin are perceived as obstacles to the process of social integration in the host country. Consequently, the teaching of mother tongues and cultural elements of diverse students is not included in the official school curriculum. This reinforces the perception that students with a migrant or refugee background are solely responsible for their academic success or failure and, by extension, for their successful or unsuccessful social integration. The deficit hypothesis and the notion of inadequate cultural capital have served as starting points for interpreting the academic failure of these students, suggesting a dysfunctional form of socialization (Glazer, 1997).

However, such an approach legitimizes institutional racism and shifts the responsibility of the educational system onto the students themselves, ultimately leading to educational and social exclusion. At the same time, the monocultural model excludes the richness of intercultural interaction and exchange from the learning process, affecting both minority and majority students. Particularly regarding bilingualism, recent research has questioned previous claims that the teaching of mother tongues hinders a child's development. On the contrary, bilingualism and even multilingualism are now recognized as beneficial to children's

development and are considered valuable skills in the modern era (Banks and Banks, 2007).

Criticism of the assimilationist approach paved the way for adopting approaches that acknowledge cultural differences, leading to the development of multicultural and subsequently intercultural education models. Although assimilationist views remain dominant among many educators, and several educational systems continue to follow a monocultural orientation—such as the Greek educational system—there has been a recent shift toward adopting multicultural and intercultural practices that encourage change within schools (Magos, 2022). Intercultural education is essential not only in multicultural but also in monocultural environments, as it provides a necessary framework for encountering cultural diversity and fostering a climate of respect, acceptance, and interaction with otherness within the school environment and later in society (Dowling, 2010).

The key concept for implementing intercultural education is permeability. It must permeate all levels of education: educational policy, teacher training and professional development, curricula, textbooks, educational materials, teaching methods, and the broader school reality (Gotovos, 2020: p. 132). In this way, encountering the "other" is not limited to superficial and often folkloric presentations of different cultures—such as food, music, and traditions. Instead, it focuses on meaningful engagement with the "other" through acceptance, interaction, and the development of critical thinking regarding crucial issues such as discrimination, social inequalities, racism, and the struggle for rights in the modern world. The evolution of intercultural education shifts the emphasis from students' identities to learning outcomes and individual development through an empowering and liberating pedagogy. Its goal is to educate students in a way that enables them to acquire knowledge, develop skills, find their own voice in the contemporary world, and reflect on their role as citizens in modern societies (Gay, 2000). This is why contemporary academic discourse increasingly emphasizes intercultural education, citizenship, and critical intercultural education.

In the context of this shift away from the monocultural paradigm, educational systems worldwide have successfully integrated multicultural elements into their curricula and/or implemented intercultural practices in their schools (Banks, 2004). Notable examples include Canada, which seeks to link peace education with citizenship education and social justice (Evans and Hundy, 2000); the United Kingdom, which promotes the vision of a diverse democratic society by introducing citizenship education at an early stage (Figueroa, 2001); and Germany, which has aimed to move beyond the "us-vs.-them" divide toward the pursuit of an inclusive "we" (Luchtenberg, 2002).

3 Building citizenship through intercultural education

Recognizing that intercultural orientation in education influences the type of citizen a state aims to shape (Groski, 2012), the following question arises: how can we practically support the introduction of interculturality in education, both in terms of school culture and the organization of lesson instruction, in a way that fosters citizens who are critical of social realities,

interculturally competent, observant, capable of processing information and questioning the reliability of information and stereotypical narratives about the "other"? At a theoretical level, the answer seems relatively straightforward, considering the development of intercultural education as a field of science of education aiming at empowering individuals regarding their identities and positions in society. However, what happens when we attempt the transition from theory to practice?

According to the Council of Europe (2008: p. 10), one of the key directions of intercultural education is the promotion of intercultural dialogue between individuals or groups from different ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, based on respect and mutual understanding. This encounter and interaction with different cultures constitutes the primary objective of promoting inclusive education today. This becomes even more significant when considering the dynamic nature of culture as a broader concept that encompasses various levels, such as experiences, interests, values, attitudes, social languages, and discourses. The complexity of cultural identities presents a challenge for contemporary educators and researchers, as culture, understood as a socially constructed and dynamic entity, is constantly shaped and reshaped through communicative interactions.

As noted by Hajisoteriou and Angelides (2016: p. 367), intercultural education must emphasize the dynamic nature of cultural diversity as an unstable blend of similarity and difference in the modern world. Within this framework, education that seeks to transcend its monocultural character and support a critical approach to intercultural education requires a systematic effort to raise students' awareness. This should be achieved through appropriate teaching methods starting from early childhood education, which should not be limited to the mere acceptance of diversity or the celebration of difference (Kailin, 2002: p. 54). At the same time, intercultural education must address issues of social discrimination, inequalities, and racism, engaging in a dialogue about power relations and mechanisms of reproduction, such as dominant ideology, stereotypes, and prejudice. From this perspective, the intercultural approach aligns with multicultural education and anti-racist education, recognizing that intercultural exchange in the school environment is not only about personal views and attitudes toward specific situations but, more importantly, about the deeper influences of the social and cultural references that each person brings into this exchange (Min Shim, 2012). Thus, intercultural education seeks to cultivate critically thinking citizens who engage in intercultural dialogue, focusing on equal educational opportunities, social justice, and, consequently, equitable participation in society.

Such an expansion of pedagogical activity with an intercultural orientation—whether through content selection or the application of teaching methods and practices—opens the path for a focus on parameters that define citizenship. As originally outlined by Marshal (2009: p. 153), citizenship encompasses the development of an individual's civil, political, and social rights in modern Western societies. Over time, this concept has expanded beyond its traditional association with the nation-state to include transnational entities that promote European citizenship (Naval et al., 2002) and global organizations advocating for global governance and cosmopolitan citizenship (Symeonidis, 2015)

opening a dialogue between global and intercultural citizenship (Portera, 2023). Further broadening the concept of citizenship education and its multidimensional nature (Cogan and Bukow, 1997; Cogan and Derricot, 1998) has resulted from the integration of citizenship education with intercultural (or multicultural, as it is sometimes termed) education (Bevelander and Taras, 2013; Moddood and Meer, 2013). The ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity within educational institutions in modern societies, combined with the notion of rights-based citizenship as articulated by Marshal (2009) in relation to social class, creates demands for the recognition of linguistic and cultural rights (Taylor, 1994) by minority and immigrant populations within the national states where they reside (Bauböck, 2006).

From this perspective, we argue that intercultural education, with an emphasis on fostering citizenship in terms of inclusion, equality, and intercultural communication, necessitates the active recognition of the "other." This recognition should be promoted through bilingualism and multilingualism, as well as through the creation of open learning environments where diverse cultural elements and identities interact. Such an approach within both the learning process and the broader school environment paves the way for critical and democratic citizenship education. The role of education is crucial in achieving this goal—not only in shaping citizens who are informed and responsible but also in cultivating active and engaged individuals who contribute to society (Tsiougkou et al., 2017).

In the context of the implementation of intercultural education, curricula with a clear intercultural orientation have been developed since the preschool age (Dermans-Sparks and Ramsey, 2006). A characteristic example is the case of Whāriki, a program that is open to both indigenous and non-indigenous cultures (Mac Naughton, 2020). At the same time, good practices in the application of intercultural education are being developed with the aim of fostering intercultural skills (Wagner et al., 2018). One of the most effective teaching methods involves the use of digital tools based on artificial intelligence and game-based learning, as they enhance listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, which are considered critical for multilingual students in the context of fostering intercultural competence and acquiring language proficiency (Kazu and Kuvvetli, 2025). The role of the teacher is particularly crucial in the successful implementation of intercultural education in practice. Specifically, the approach to issues related to interculturalism, diversity, and identities is a focus of recent research aimed at highlighting interculturality in the classroom, as reflected through the development of qualitative studies, case studies, and the creation of rubrics for the assessment and self-assessment of intercultural teaching and pedagogical practices (Perry and Southwell, 2011; Tupas, 2014; Młynarczuk-Sokołowska, 2022). All these so-called good practices contribute to finding the optimal balance in the implementation of the intercultural education model.

4 Conclusions

Although there is significant variation in the operationalization of the term "intercultural education," while it is often confused with the term "multicultural education" (Holm and Zilliacus, 2009), it

appears that intercultural learning and intercultural dialogue are now being promoted as dynamic and interdependent structures. The more an individual engages in meaningful interaction with others, the more they learn about themselves and others. Likewise, the more they learn, the more willing they become to participate in authentic intercultural dialogue (Rapanta and Trovão, 2021).

This shift in intercultural education toward a dynamic ethical, social, and cultural perspective—one that transcends the monocultural nature of national education—fosters intercultural knowledge, competence, and sensitivity. It is particularly important in shaping educational policies that aim for inclusion and reinforce linguistic and cultural literacy. Such an approach seeks to cultivate young people's worldviews, attitudes, and competencies by developing intercultural learning experiences (UNESCO, 2009).

Indeed, in an increasingly digitalized educational landscape, technology-enhanced language learning has gained prominence as a tool for fostering linguistic diversity and inclusion in multicultural classrooms. Research highlights that digital game-based language learning can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition, offering interactive and engaging methods for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Kazu and Kuvvetli, 2023). Additionally, mobile-assisted language learning applications, such as Duolingo, have been found to improve students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, making them valuable resources for intercultural education (Kazu and Kuvvetli, 2025). These tools provide learners with personalized, adaptive learning experiences, enabling them to develop language proficiency in an inclusive and self-paced manner. Integrating such digital resources into intercultural education frameworks can support linguistic equity, promote multilingualism, and foster global citizenship by facilitating meaningful interactions across different cultural and linguistic groups.

According to Faas (2010), all education is potentially intercultural, as it involves the interaction, integration, and inclusion of diverse groups. This is precisely the challenge of education today: to build an intercultural education rooted in citizenship, empowering learners in diverse and multifaceted ways so that they may become the future citizens of a world in constant motion, where identities, rights, and roles are continuously negotiated.

Author contributions

FK: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

Conflict of interest

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

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

Publisher's note

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