Can "Multicultural" Education be a Source of Change in Alleviating Child Poverty?

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Abstract

The right to education is almost universally recognized as a fundamental right all over the world. However, oftentimes the goal of education, namely to "promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups" (Article 26, United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights), is not completely fulfilled, leading to the creation of an effectively flawed and disintegrating society and community. An effect of this disintegration is child poverty, especially in minority groups. Therefore, to tackle this issue, I suggest a multicultural education be provided to students; this shall not only create responsible, tolerant, and understanding adults in the future, it shall also help their careers, regardless of whether they come from Arts and Humanities or STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) backgrounds. In this paper, I critically analyzed the role of multicultural education and its influence on alleviating child poverty.

Keywords: *Child poverty, Culture, Global values, Multiculturalism, Multicultural education, National policy.*

Introduction

Child poverty is a major concern globally. Children are vulnerable in many parts of the world for several reasons and their rights are undermined very often in developing and middle-income countries. However, children in the industrialized countries are not safe always. Their lives are challenging too. Poverty creates more vulnerability for children. Lack of education, drop-out from school, socio-economic disadvantages, climate change, flood, drought, malnutrition and political violence have seen some common reasons for child poverty. Natural disasters in many countries, including Bangladesh, accelerated the rate of child poverty. The

alleviation of child poverty is therefore a great challenge for countries all over the world.

The basic reasons of child poverty are deep rooted with other factors such as, women's social status, their literacy rate, women's reproductive health, their participation in the development index, guarantee of their safe life and natural death and so forth. The low standard of living because of insufficient income, poor household resources, blurred job prospect, risky health condition and deprived education can prolong child poverty in a country. International organizations, for example, UNICEF and World Bank, are working in numerous sectors to alleviate child poverty. Education is the top among these.

Although worldwide the current education policy focusing that science and technological education along with business and vocational training can contribute positively to alleviate poverty this research argues that "multicultural" education can make these initiative more meaningful and significant. Multicultural education could signify the status of personhood and help to create a "self" identified with local culture but bonded with global values. As a result, children can overcome numerous social and cultural barriers those are seem very difficult to overcome only through a single national policy.

The Meaning of Education

Education plays a crucial role in our life to transform values, skill, knowledge and lifestyles. In modern days, education is closely related with the development of a meaningful life. Education helps us to use our knowledge and skill for the improvement of society. Sometimes, education is seen as a process of socialization. The knowledge and skills society demand can achieve only through education in modern times. Form a just society where there is no poverty or ignorable poverty level exists is the aim of many social and development organizations. So, there is a significant changes is the aim and nature of education throughout the years.

Many people from researchers, policy-makers to common one are directly or indirectly taking part in education. Education plays a very crucial role in the development of a country and nation building. It is hard to imagine a country without an education system. The aims of education are closely related to culture. Alfred North Whitehead in his paper "The Aims of Education" writes,

Culture is activity of thought, and receptiveness to beauty and humane feeling. Scraps of information have nothing to do with it. A merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God's earth. What we should aim at producing is men who possess both culture and expert knowledge in some special direction. Their expert knowledge will

give them the ground to start from, and their culture will lead them as deep as philosophy and as high as art. We have to remember that the valuable intellectual development is self-development, and that it mostly takes place between the ages of sixteen and thirty.[1]

According to this statement, Whitehead thinks that without culture or cultural education the real purpose of education may not be achieved.

Multicultural Education

Culture is an important phenomenon in this globalized world. Education systems must incorporate it for creating global citizen. Many thinkers (e.g. Will Kymlica) suggested for a multicultural education to the citizens. UNESCO emphasizes multicultural education not just to provide a better education but to alleviate poverty and to build up a peaceful society. Multicultural education has been defined from various perspectives. According to the *Glossary of Education Reform* "multicultural education refers to any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds."[2] The *Victoria State Government* notes that "multicultural education gives students opportunities to build understanding and communication skills across cultures."[3] Among other goals of multicultural education it says that, "an appreciation of the importance of local, national and international interdependence in social, environmental, economic and political arenas and an understanding that mutual support in these areas is vital to local and global harmony."[4] All nations in the world are devoted to establish and maintain harmony both locally and globally. Multicultural education will help their citizens to achieve a deeper knowledge and understanding of own cultures and other's cultures. Promoting diversity is the main feature of multicultural education. Hence, like many other Governments, Victoria State Government of Australia sets their vision in line with multicultural education and states,

The Victorian Government's vision is for all Victorian learning and development settings to equip children and young people with the knowledge and skills to participate

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[1] Alfred North Whitehead, "The Aims of Education," Presidential Address to the Mathematical Association of England, (1916), 1, http://ayman980.com/class/Readings/The%20Aims%20of%20 Education%20Alfred%20Whitehead.pdf

[2] "Multicultural Educaţion," The Glossary of Education Reform for Journalists, Parents, and Education Reform, https://www.edglossary.org/multicultural-education/.

[3] Victoria State Government, Education and Training, https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/ teachers/teachingresources/multicultural/Pages/default.aspx.

[4] *Ibidem.*

in and contribute to our diverse society as active and informed citizens - locally, nationally and internationally.[5]

Multicultural education is not only seen as a new conceptual paradigm but it is also considered as a "movement" and a "process". In this context, Yilmaz comments,

Multicultural education is a movement dating back to the end of 1960s and the beginning of 1970s. It is an intellectual concept, a reformist movement and a process. Its basic idea is that all students have the equality of opportunities in education without being subjected to racial, ethnic, social class, or gender discrimination.[6]

Some scholars find multicultural education to foster core values essential in our social and professional lives such as, freedom, justice, equality, dignity and human rights.

Multicultural education is a philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity as acknowledged in various documents, such as the U.S. Declaration of Independence, constitutions of South Africa and the United States, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. It affirms our need to prepare student for their responsibilities in an interdependent world. It recognizes the role schools can play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society. It values cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. It challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of democratic principles of social justice.[7]

So, multicultural education is a holistic approach in education system where cultural differences were acknowledged and the value of diversity is promoted to achieve some fundamental goals such as democracy, freedom, rights, justice and equality to build a harmonious society globally.

The Goal of Multicultural Education

The main goal of multicultural education is to ensure that all students can have an opportunity to learn in an equally treated, justified and congenial atmosphere irrespective of their cultural background. Culture therefore may not a barrier but it is an advantage to learn in a diverse cultural environment. Along with teachers' training and competence in this new philosophy the school environment and teaching methodology must be changed. However, schools are obliged to teach various kinds of subjects including literature, sociology, humanities, arts and

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[5] *Ibidem.*

[6] Fatih Yilmaz "Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education: A Case Study of of Teacher Cadidates' Perceptions," *Cogent Education* 3 (2016): 1.

[7] The National Association for Multicultural Education https://www.nameorg.org/definitions_ of_multicultural_e.php.

most confined subjects such as, mathematics and science. Now, a question is very much relevant about the goals of multicultural education. Is there anything to do multicultural education with universally designed subjects such as mathematics and science? So, one might be convinced that for arts, humanities and literature multicultural education might be relevant but is it relevant for sciences?

Several educationists have outlined different goals of multicultural education. For example, James A. Banks have identified five basic goals of multicultural education. He suggests to incorporate the five dimensions: "1. content integration 2. the knowledge construction process 3. prejudice reduction 4. an equity pedagogy 5. an empowering school culture and social structure."[8]

The content integration creates an opportunity for the education provider to use examples and evidences from other cultural traditions. This practice will help the learners to think beyond their own culture and create respective attitude to other cultures. For some subjects such as arts, music and sociology, this integration is much easier and helpful but for other subjects, e.g. math and science it can help to understand the different perceptions even in the case of logic and reasoning.

Knowledge which is constructed in a cultural tradition is much more vivid than when it is constructed in abstract and imaginary ideas. The construction of knowledge is a complex process and culture plays a significant role in it. However, one might argue that knowledge is universal and culture has nothing to do with it. This kind of argument is shallow as we all know that children learn first from their own culture and society. All knowledge whether scientific or social has deep rooted historical identification and without understanding the background construction of any kind of knowledge will be superficial.

It is a very common observation that policy makers have different goals to achieve peace and resolve conflict. Prejudice reduction is a way to reduce negative attitude toward other culture, values and traditions through education. Children attend schools might have some preconceived ideas constructed through family values, print, online and social medias and news channels worldwide. Now, family, relatives or other members might not have enough training, education and time to clarify this. Multicultural education have an advantage to discuss, analyze and reduce the prejudice or negative attitudes toward other cultural values and traditions. According to Banks, the initiative of prejudice reduction may include

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[8] James A. Banks, "Multicultural Education: Characteristics and Goals," in *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*, eds. James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks (NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 20.

"positive images of the ethnic groups in the materials and the use of multiethnic materials in a consistent and sequential way."[9]

An equity pedagogy helps the students to understand the different solutions of the same problem in various cultural traditions. Students may not be aware that people living other parts of the world might face the same problem and they have their own solution to face this problem. A pedagogical approach would create a mental setup among the students to respect others' knowledge and achievements. Teachers will play an active role to realize the importance of multicultural initiative to face global challenges. Banks notes, "an equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, gender, and social-class groups."[10]

Without implementing a multicultural school environment and social structure, the main goal of multicultural education cannot be achieved. When students from diverse cultural traditions find that their cultural values and traditions were well accepted and cherished by the school they can feel equally important. This is a continuous process to empowering students. An empowering school culture and social structure will enable students to be confident, trustful, respectful upon his own as well as others' culture. Among other things, empowering school culture and social structure would include, as Banks mentions,

Grouping and labeling practices, sports participation, disproportionality inachievement, disproportionality in enrollment in gifted and special education programs, and the interaction of the staff and the students across ethnic and racial lines are important variables that need to be examined in order to create a school culture that empowers students from diverse racial and ethnic groups and from both gender groups.[11]

Child Poverty and Multicultural Education

Education has a profound influence in our life and policy making. Education helps us to realize and to perceive our lives from diverse insights. There are several problems in our society for example, poverty, scarcity, malnutrition, environmental pollution, global warming, climate change and illiteracy, which require a combined initiative to overcome. Education is the most important and effective initiative among these. Education can change our lives and perceptions from our deep rooted believes. Many people in the world specially children are

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[9] Banks, "Multicultural Education: Characteristics and Goals," 21.

[10] *Ibidem*, 22.

[11] *Ibidem*, 22.

living in poverty worldwide. Child poverty is a serious worry for a nation since children are the future citizens and leaders of the nation. Poverty is a significant barrier for the physical and mental development of a child. Malnutrition decreases children's performance. It can create life-long struggles for children. Education and poverty closely linked as poverty can push young children leaving education at a very early stage. So, we can say that poverty can damage a child's life, a society even a nation.

In recent days, child poverty has been conceived from much broader perspective. According to Polakow and Owiti,

Child poverty constitutes a global crisis with far-reaching implications for children's psychosocial, cognitive, and physical development, educational achievement, and future citizenship. Child poverty must also be understood in the broader context of children's rights, women's poverty and women's rights and examined in terms of the impact of globalization and neoliberal policies on the lives of children and their families in both poor and wealthy nations.[12]

Here, the authors claim that child poverty is not just related to the psychological, physical, social and cognitive development of the children rather it is also related to rights, globalization and effective policy-making.

Many organizations, such as UN, UNICEF, WB working on the alleviation of poverty. Multicultural education has much potentialities to alleviate poverty. Lewis notes,

Meeting the challenges of poverty and understanding how poverty relates to and impacts student academic achievement requires much more from teachers than just teaching but rather an understanding of social awareness as well as a level of empathy and genuine concern for students and their families. What will help us achieve this level of understanding further is to grasp where our achievement gaps are with lower income students as well as how to effectively reach them and provide opportunities for their growth and progress.[13]

Here author points out that to alleviate poverty we must need to understand the deeper meaning of poverty first and teachers have a great role to play in this context. General curriculum may require understanding of inequalities among different levels in society. However, multicultural education requires understanding of these inequalities with a participation of teachers, parents and children with more empathy and concern. All of our poverty in society is not

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[12] Valerie Polakow and Syprose Owiti, "Child Poverty, Rights, and Well-being," http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199791231/obo-9780199791231-0134.xml.

[13] Pam Lewis, "Investigating Critical and Contemporary Issues in Education: Challenges of Poverty," https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Investigating_Critical_%26_Contemporary_Issues_in_Education/Challenges_of_Poverty.

momentary. Some poverty are created artificially and establish for social structure and practice. In other words, for our social and cultural values. In a report, Humanium which works on child's rights globally, notes that

In developing and developed countries alike, children do not have access to basic education because of inequalities that originate in sex, health and cultural identity (ethnic origin, language, religion). These children find themselves on the margins of the education system and do not benefit from learning that is vital to their intellectual and social development.[14]

Therefore, multicultural education has a very positive effect on child's poverty alleviation both at individual and collective levels.

Global Initiatives Taken to Alleviate Child Poverty

Numerous organizations both governmental and non-governmental are working on alleviating poverty. UNICEF pays keen attention to alleviate poverty globally. One of its mottos regarding child poverty is "A World Free from Child Poverty". They have taken an initiative called "Milestones" program where main focuses are "building an understanding of child poverty amongst key stakeholders, officially and routinely measuring child poverty, and putting the issue on the map through concerted advocacy."[15] According to the UNICEF to alleviate child poverty multi-dimensional approaches should be taken. They suggested that both different kinds of policies and programs are necessary. Although policies are usually taken by the particular government programs are set to achieve a particular long-term initiative goal.

The UN has set forth its eight Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) by 2015 where the first one is "to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger". Although it is an exclusive program and includes all kinds of poverty child poverty is among its priority. The MGDs have later transformed into Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its first agenda is "No Poverty" or "end poverty in all its from Everywhere"[16]:

UNDP is working closely to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) set forth by UN. It allocates a huge amount of money for poverty alleviation. In its fact sheet UNDP notes,

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[14] "Right to Education: Situation around the World," Humanium, accessed May 21, 2019, https://www.humanium.org/en/right-to-education/.

[15] UNICEF, "Milestone 4: Reducing Child Poverty through Policy and Programme Change," https://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/Child_Poverty_SDG_Guide-Milestone_4-March_2017.pdf.

[16] UN, "Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform Our World," http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html.

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As a trusted multilateral partner serving 166 developing countries around the world, UNDP is uniquely positioned to help advocate for change, connect countries to the knowledge and resources they need, and coordinate the efforts of the UN at the country level. UNDP invests nearly $US1 billion every year in fighting poverty and advancing progress towards the MDGs.[17]

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In the previous discussion, we have seen that many initiative has been taken to alleviate child poverty. Some advancements have been achieved in reducing child poverty. However, many children in the world are facing serious poverty and living much below the standard of acceptable living. The world is even much complex and education may not be just limited to science, technology and professional skill development. In today's world student also need to understand the inter-relations between education, democracy, freedom, justice, rights, equality and liberty. Modern educations and education thinkers are therefore emphasizing comprehensive and holistic education method.

The world becoming more and more global and so schools are getting diverse students from different social, cultural, religious, ethnic backgrounds. Traditional education system may not be completely appropriate to face this reality. A multicultural education system where students will get a more opportunity to learn their own and other cultural values, realize the values of diversity and solving the same problems by different traditional wisdom is required.

Child poverty is a global phenomenon. When children need education to prepare themselves for future life, many of them are far behind because of poverty. Multicultural education helps the students to learn various subjects matter in emphasizing culture. Poverty is deep rooted in cultural practice. Multicultural education inspires students to learn and apply knowledge in their own cultural settings.

Child poverty is a direct consequence of socio-cultural background. As such, it is intrinsically related with the "poverty cycle", where poverty is caused due to inequality in opportunity, wealth, and vulnerability. However, it is a fact universally acknowledged that a child in possession of a good education must be in contention for a good job, a job which will in turn provide opportunity and wealth and thus reduce vulnerability. So, a "good education" can alleviate child poverty.

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[17] UNDP, "Fact Sheets: United Nations Development Programme," http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Fast%20Facts%20Poverty%20Reduction.pdf.

But what really is a "good education"? To answer that question, we have to look at the inner workings and structure of the classroom. In today's world, classrooms are getting more and more diverse, with students from radically different social and cultural backgrounds attending the same educational institutions at an ever increasing rate.

As a result, to create responsible adults of tomorrow, who have civic sense and have no indication of bias whatsoever against any communities, regardless of their social, cultural, geographical or physical attributes, education must be given to the children in such a way that it gives a voice to all communities, it does not portray any of them as objects fit for discrimination, and it represents all of mankind as equals. Much of this is not found in the traditional education systems of developing countries, where child poverty is found with high rates, but these are at the very core of multicultural education. So, multicultural education is of course a source of change in alleviating child poverty.

Finally, we shall look at multicultural education from an economical or business perspective. We have claimed the moral and intellectual superiority of multicultural education over traditional education systems. In fact, the cost of multicultural education is going to be the same as that of the traditional education system. As most people are already aware of the benefits of choosing the former, the stakeholders of the latter shall decrease, causing a decrease in their profits. In order to return back to their original profit amounts, therefore, they shall have to perform three economic operations: i) highly increase the quality and experience of their faculty, ii) integrate multicultural education into their current education curriculum, and iii) lastly, decrease the fee per student below that of the multicultural education-based school. This effect of competition is going to have three major consequences: i) highly increase the quality of education as a whole, ii) include multicultural ideals and syllabi in the teaching curriculum, and iii) allow more families of lower incomes to afford education for their children, as the cost is now lower. All these points shall be great strides towards alleviating child poverty, as proven by the previous paragraph.

Thus, in conclusion drawn from all the previous points, multicultural education not only has the potential to be a source of change in alleviating child poverty, but rather it seems a must if a nation wishes to alleviate child poverty from the face of its populace.

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Conclusion

To conclude, in this report, I have highlighted the supreme importance of multicultural education, education based on cultural desegregation, diversity, unity, and values, in this changing world. Multicultural education has one main goal: it wishes to ensure that all students can have an opportunity to learn in an equally treated, justified and congenial atmosphere irrespective of their gender, color, race, religious and cultural background. That is not only a moral obligation of the population towards all its members, rather it is also a prerequisite for a peaceful, poverty-less society. That is because, multicultural education is a "wholesome" education system: it not only creates academically educated generations, but creates morally educated generations as well. This shall cause increased competition in the job market, which shall in turn reduce unemployment and thus poverty.

Furthermore, from a very grassroots level, child poverty is going to be reduced as well by taking several effective initiatives in various levels. That is because, with the implications of a business model based on multicultural education, the cost of education as a whole is going to go down, whereas the quality of the education is going to increase. This shall not only enable more children to go to school, but also to get a better education for a better life. This shall follow a chain connection, which eventually alleviate poverty as a whole from the face of the nation. Of course, the holistic education offered by a multicultural education system is unparalleled, and is an important additional benefit for the well-being of the nation.

All these reasons thus decisively conclude that multicultural education is certainly going to be perhaps the most important source of change in alleviating child poverty in a nation, be it developed, or developing.

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