

Creating Culturally Responsive Inclusive Classrooms at Primary School Level: Prospects and Strategies

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Abstract

Every country has its own culture, that shapes its people as a nation. Pakistanis are a bunch of diverse lingual, geographical and tribal cultures. It seems very sacred for the people to not only preserve and promote their cultures but also some of them want their culture to be dominated. When these diversities come across the society; problems like stereotypes, unrest or extremism arise which are the by-products of cultural diversity. Consequently, there exists discordance that leads to conflicts and becomes a reason of hindrance in country's progress. The work on this topic has rarely been done in Pakistan so this study has been designed to expose the strategies for culturally responsive inclusive classrooms at primary school level. This descriptive study was based on a survey of 150 primary school teachers of general and inclusive schools of a metropolitan city Lahore. Collected data were analyzed by using inferential and descriptive statistics. Results revealed that there is no significant difference in the cultural diversities of general and inclusive primary schools and that diversity in learning styles, socio-economic backgrounds, individual opinions, communication style with teacher and classmates mostly exists. This creates learning difficulty, lack of cooperation, adjustment problem and intolerance towards different views as most teachers are not practicing culturally responsive strategies in classroom. Hence, it is suggested that interactive seating arrangement for one on one meeting and acknowledging attitude of teacher is needed. Teachers should frequently design team building activities and arrange field trips to represent their encouraging and appreciative attitude towards diversity so that difficulties can be minimized and diversity can be celebrated.

Keywords: Cultural diversity, culturally responsiveness, multicultural strategies, inclusive classroom.

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Introduction

Culture is an important ingredient of a nation that affects the views, values, hopes, loyalties, worries and fears of people. Pakistani culture is a combination of diverse provincial, lingual and tribal belongings, that portrays its people as a vibrant nation. Either it is food, dress code, language, religion or ancestry, Pakistani culture is diverse in its nature. People here may not be perceptive towards others' approach properly. They have different thoughts and want their culture to be dominant. When these diversities come across the society extremism, unrest, conflicts, stereotypes and other alike issues arise which seems the by-products of cultural diversity. As a result, there exists discordance that leads to strategic conflicts and becomes one reason of hindrance in the way of country's progress (Moshadi, 2011).

As Pakistan is a developing country, for it to stand in the line of developed countries there is also a need to direct the diverse competitiveness of its multicultural nation towards success (Spindler, 2003). Education plays a very important part in the progress of any nation and is responsible for its advancement towards success. It provides a platform to bring the people from diverse backgrounds at one place and teach them to understand, respect, appreciate the diversity and work collaboratively with each other (Tomlison, 2001). School as a formal place for providing education gives a chance to bring people at one place with their enormous range of knowledge, experiences, perspectives and insights to train and concentrate the diverse work force of a country towards success (Rothstein, 2008). It works with students and families with so many different values and belief systems according to their culture (Saifer, 2007).

There are various cultural diversities that teachers are expected to come across culturally varied classrooms including norms, beliefs, primary language, opinions, attitudes, behavioral styles, geography, learning styles, communication Styles, decision making styles, ways of conversating non-verbally and ways of dealing with conflict (Lee, 2008). Loden & Rosener (1991) stated the primary and secondary dimensions of cultural diversity. Primary dimensions are the things that cannot be transformed such as gender, age, race, physical traits and sexual orientation. Secondary dimensions are earnings, education, religious viewpoint, language, behavioral style, opinions, life experience, geographic locality, communication style and marital status (as cited in Mazur, 2010, p. 6).

Due to these differences, a cultural gap between students and teachers occurs and affect students' educational performance thus contributes to achievement gaps and sometimes causes their professional lag (Singal, 2008). Formerly conducted studies confirmed that discordance among cultures is a result of distrust, stereotyping, core-culture discussion and lingo difficulty. When such difficulties are not really considered, they become a reason of inability to endorse ideas, inability to get conformity on decisions and inability to get unified achievement (Worrell, 2009).

Triandis (2000) in his research revealed that people of culturally diverse groups were probably less attracted to one another and had communication difficulties among each other than members of culturally same groups. Culturally diverse groups feel uncomfortable to communicate about their celebrations and beliefs because other people do not believe the same as if they do. The things they are normally interested in may not be the interesting ones for other cultural backdrops. Therefore, it becomes difficult for them to talk as they are often being judged by the people (Gay, 2002).

Difficulties in communication in an unknown language instead of the native one can create hurdles for families, damage peoples' confidence and become a cause of social isolation (Jordan et al., 2009). Students having different language backgrounds face this difficulty every day in schools. They are expected to learn and use a new language effectively. As a result, they experience poorer educational outcomes than their peers (Raju, 2007). When the different experiences, customs, and beliefs are not recognized, they may lead to miscommunication (Sperber, 2004). The ways of interpreting things especially with nonverbal language are also different in different cultures. If people do not minimize the differences, there is a chance that misunderstandings will arise (Rijamampianina, 2005).

Since the modern education system forces low-income families to enroll their children in average school systems where students are not generally given the equivalent opportunities and academic motivation as compare to well-off students. This leads to unequal patterns of intergenerational academic decisions for parents and child and results in social gap. When people from different socio-economic background interact with each other, they face adjustment problem, which creates learning disabilities, behavioral problems, child abuse and mental disturbance (Villegas, 2002).

Regardless of what geographic region one is from, it is universal for everyone to experience cultural adjustment. When people travel to a different cultural setting, they obviously bring their own backdrop and life experience along with them that shape their understandings and harmonize them in the new setting (Mitiku et al., 2014). "Culture shock" may be a familiar happening that portrays the anxiety, uncertainty and puzzlement that arise once getting into an unknown cultural setup. Individuals from a variety of tribal groups experience the problem of tolerating each other (Lee, 2010).

People due to cultural diversity are fearing of challenges. Parents' attitudes towards children's feelings about themselves are critical and may cause lack of confidence among children (Tobin, 2008). When parents show acceptance, their children receive good feelings about themselves and become more confident. If parents expect extraordinarily or they are over controlling, the children become confusing personalities (Brackenreed, 2008).

There is also a lack of respect among people due to cultural diversity. This is because people have less communication and rare relationships with each other (Tobin, 2008). They are biased towards culture, religion, traditions and their creeds. It shows that when there produces any type of cultural conflict in a particular situation then every individual supports his own culture that produces biases as well as many conflicts (Raju, 2007). When people come from different regions and cultures, they feel hesitation and difficulty to cooperate with the people that belong to the other religions or cultures. Therefore, the lack of cooperation becomes a challenge for them except adventure. All these problems lead towards the need of diagnosis and this can be brought about through inclusion (Clark, 2009).

According to UNESCO (2000), "Inclusion is an attempt to confirm that diverse learners—those with disabilities, having different languages and cultures, belong to different homes and family lives, having different interests and ways of learning – are exposed to teaching methods that reach them as individual learners. Inclusive education brings all students together in one classroom and community, without considering their strengths or weaknesses in any area, and seeks to maximize the potential of all students."

To manage a culturally diverse classroom by creating equal opportunities for all regarding academic success, personal development, and individual accomplishment is a pedagogical and social challenge to teachers. For this, a culturally responsive inclusive classroom environment is needed (Lynch, 2012). It demands that a teacher should be up-to-date about how minority children acknowledge the world, process and organize information. Educators must be responsive to stereotypes, ethnocentrism, and biases (Meister & Melnick, 2003). Management techniques should be applied to the physical settings likewise to the students' behavior. Teachers must be acquainted with the possible difficulties they will face during the implementation of techniques (Arantena, 2003).

For a teacher to manage unlike students well, he/she must study the cultural background of students by doing detailed research, reading books about different cultures, exchanging stories from other educators with similar situations or conversating with the students (Burke, 2001).

Today's classrooms educate ever more culturally diverse students who are connected with each other in a globalized and interconnected world. Therefore, it is very likely that there would arise some contradictions in culturally diverse classrooms that need to be harmonized in a peaceful manner. For this purpose, the classroom environment should be culturally responsive, all-inclusive and devoted to foster the passion for learning and preparing the students to succeed in and outside the school. The teacher has to make the students feel safe and secure, self-confident and proud of their individuality. Instead of feeling, students have to shed their native language, culture, and traditions; they feel empowered by their uniqueness.

Review of Literature

Teachers should build a sense of community and a respectful culture in the classrooms. Students from diverse backgrounds should be accepted and fairly treated by both the teachers and the classmates. Accordingly, teachers must create and uphold the standards of behavior that can be established by giving respectful treatment to all in the classroom (Stitcher et al., 2009). One strategy for fostering respectful environments is to build a strong classroom community in which students focus on helping others as well as themselves. Research suggests that collective classrooms not only positively affect social outcomes for students, but they also benefit academic achievement (Trumbull, 2005).

Different teaching methods and activities ought to be utilized by the teachers to fulfill the needs of students having diverse learning abilities, styles, backdrops or experiences by the means of universal design principles to make classroom accomplishments. For example, presenting information both in oral and visual manner to aid the learners with auditory and visual impairments plus for those with different learning preferences (Brown, 2004).

Encouragement of open and regular communication; shared decision-making and ideas along with shared dedication by the teacher can promote culturally responsive attitudes and practices among students. A strong association between the student, teacher and principal can sustain student learning and this learning is enhanced with the supportive and safe school environment (Bennett, 2001).

When asking questions or giving instructions, arrange wait time for culturally different students to strengthen classroom interest and consequently the improvement of critical thinking skills (Sperber, 2004). Instructors can build up a collection of feasible responses to students for the confirmation of fair treatment of all like repeating the question or allowing time for students to think before expecting an answer, rethinking the question, summarizing the question or asking it from an alternate edge. This may offer the learners a much better comprehension of the question (Burke, 2001).

Encouragement of staff, administrators and educators towards calling students by their names develops the feeling of being valued among them. School calendars, which contain the needs of culturally diverse students, develop the feeling of acceptance and counseling the relationship between staff and students encourage mutual respect and understanding among them (Thapa et al., 2013).

Teachers should use caution to misinterpret the behaviors of students from diverse ethnic groups. For example, what teachers might interpret as a rude behavior might be a reserve cultural pattern of eye contact (Loreman, 2007). To promote equity in a classroom, a teacher must be involved towards cultural norms and perception of simple behavior such as making eye contact (Tobin, 2008).

Peer-mediated instruction capitalizes students' instructional power and facilitates meaningful participation of students (Paris, 2017). It belongs to any teaching strategy in which students become tutors of other students. Cooperative group learning strategies and peer tutoring are the two types of peer-mediated instruction that hold up inclusive education (Savage, 2015).

Cooperative learning is upheld by a rich research providing confirmation for its influence to empower learners to learn and work situations where their personal qualities are perceived and their individual needs are concentrated (Freeman et al., 2008). Central to the various models of cooperative group learning are five conditions. First, a joint assignment or learning activity suitable for the group task. Second, small group learning in groups of five or less participants. Third, an attention on the utilization of helpful practices. Fourth, individual responsibility and fifth, commitment regarding involvement and learning of each participant of the group (Bucholz, 2009).

Creating vocabulary walls with unlike language words might be a sound technique that exhibits regard and appreciation in support of all spoken languages in multilingual and varied classrooms (Mitiku et al., 2014). Educators ought to consider allowing the students to utilize their maternal language in class for learning, elucidation and communication as it might produce a democratic worldwide experience for both learners and instructors (Villa, 2005).

It is essential for the teachers to participate in open discussions about diversities in classroom to develop an attitude of acceptance (Leflot, 2010). Teachers may employ self-reflection techniques to attain higher levels of cultural competency like (a) Involve in both self-reflective thinking and writing; (b) Investigate individual and family histories; (c) Accept participation in different gatherings; (d) Visit or study about effective instructors in various settings; and (e) Build up an appreciation for diversities (Aronson, 2016). Once teachers develop this knowledge about themselves, they will be better situated to recognize cultural biases in their teaching and adjust their practices accordingly. They will also be more open to diversity and thus better able to serve their students (Weinstein et al., 2004).

Culturally responsive instruction depends on the possibility that the learners learn best once course content identifies with their own particular experiences and perspectives and teaching styles reproduce students' social behavioral standards (Obgu, 2000). Accordingly, culturally well-informed teachers utilize their cultural knowledge, past experiences, their frames of reference, and presentation styles of ethnically diverse learners to shape learning more significant and successful for them (Barker et al., 2009).

Cultural notations are structured by the language and communication styles of people and are the source of conveying ideas and thoughts. The approach of perception has strong effect on how learners connect with learning tasks and show their command on them. If they are absent, both students and teachers will feel difficulty to understand one another and to express their learned competencies. Teachers should translate those styles to their own particular instructional situations (Black, 2006).

Expectations that teachers have about the capabilities of their students can be reflected by physical environment of the schools through culturally relevant pictures, posters and instructional materials (Bennett, 2001). Bulletin boards also reflect a collective view in both content and the way the entire team designed to bridge culturally diverse classrooms (Villegas, 2002).

To make sure that students are able to prosper in this academic environment, teachers need to provide each of them the quality education they deserve-one that concentrates on the whole child, provides quality education and builds a safe and secure learning environment. Accordingly, the teachers must improve the capacity of understanding diversity and be sensitive to students' perspectives and experiences, specially manage the cultural diversity for the benefit of all students. Several studies have been conducted on various diversities but the work on cultural diversity has been done rarely in Pakistani scenario therefore, the intention of the study was to discover the strategies to create culturally responsive inclusive classrooms at primary school level.

Objectives of the study

The study followed following objectives:

1. To identify the cultural diversities in primary schools.
2. To examine the need for inclusion within the schools of rural and urban areas.
3. To compare the difficulties of culturally diverse students from rural and urban schools.
4. To explore strategies to create culturally responsive inclusive classrooms.

Research Questions

To attain objectives of study, the subsequent research questions were designed:

1. Which cultural diversities (primary language, opinions, socioeconomic background, religion, geography, learning styles, communication Styles, decision-making styles) are there in culturally inclusive primary classrooms?
2. Is there a need for cultural inclusion within the primary school of rural and urban areas?
3. Is there any difference in the difficulties of culturally diverse students from rural and urban schools?
4. Which strategies can create culturally responsive inclusive classrooms at primary level?

Significance of the study

Primary school teachers are the principal prospective beneficiaries of this study, as it will highlight the difficulties caused by cultural diversity and may create awareness of the need of cultural inclusion. This study might be helpful to create a concerned community with an atmosphere of equality and partnership where each person would be optimistic to contribute to others, the classroom, the school or the society at large. The study will also serve in building positive self-esteem in students, will allow them to communicate their differences and value just and fair treatment for all. It may play a great role in meeting the individual needs of students and preparing them for citizenship at the same place. This research has academic significance too because it highlighted different strategies that teachers can use to tackle with culturally diverse students by minimizing the cultural gap between them and enabling them to adjust among one another.

Method and Procedure

This quantitative study was descriptive in nature. The study was delimited, to only the primary school teachers of District Lahore due to the time, social and financial constraints. Population of the study consisted of primary school teachers of Lahore. Sample of the study comprised of randomly selected 150 primary school teachers i.e. 100 from general and 50 from inclusive schools.

Survey was conducted through a self-report questionnaire based on Likert five-point type rating scale (1 to 5 as 'never' to 'always' respectively). The questionnaire was designed for primary school teachers in the light of literature review. Items of the questionnaire were divided into three factors according to the objectives. Experts' opinion was taken on the questionnaire to ensure content validity of the instrument. Each item of the instrument was discussed, modified, updated and then finalized in the light of experts'

opinion. Reliability of the instrument was determined through pilot testing and the value of Cronbach's Alpha was ($\alpha = .805$). For the field administration, selected schools were visited. Purpose and objectives were described to the sample and questionnaires were distributed for data collection. The privacy of personal information and respect for subject involved were especially considered during the conduct of this study.

Results

Data were collected from the sample teachers. The collected data were tabulated and analyzed by using Descriptive statistics (%age, mean and standard deviation) and Inferential statistics (t-test). Conclusions and recommendations were made on the basis of results of data analysis which are given below.

Table 1

Cultural Diversities in Culturally Inclusive Classrooms (N=150)

Statements	% of diversities	Mean (\bar{x})	S.D (σ)
One language	06%	4.10	0.910
Individual opinion	63%	3.93	0.920
Socio-economic background	68%	4.01	1.084
Same religion	07%	2.23	0.886
Geographical region (urban)	59%	3.49	1.360
Geographical region (rural)	37%	3.05	1.375
Learning style	79%	4.19	0.925
Decision-making style	58%	3.74	1.234
Communication style with teacher	68%	3.85	1.110
Communication style with classmates	67%	3.91	1.025

Table 1 identifies the mean scores of cultural diversities in culturally inclusive primary classrooms. Learning style (Mean=4.19), socio-economic background (Mean=4.01), individual opinion (Mean=3.93), decision-making style (Mean=3.74), communication style with classmates (Mean=3.91) and with the teacher (Mean=3.85) have high mean score on other diversities. It revealed that these diversities mostly exist in the culturally inclusive primary classrooms.

Table 2*Difference between Difficulties of Rural and Urban School Students due to Cultural Diversity (N=150)*

	School area	N	Mean (\bar{x})	S.D (σ)	t	df	Sig. (p)
Difficulties	Rural	82	49.15	7.278	-.421	147.998	.036
	Urban	68	49.60	6.005			
	Total	150	83.83	11.39			

Table 2 shows the difference between difficulties faced by urban and rural students due to diversity in the classrooms. The t-value (-.421) is significant ($p=0.36$) at .05 level of significance. The difficulties of culturally diverse students of rural area schools are significantly different from the difficulties of culturally diverse students of urban area schools. Mean scores of the difficulties propose that culturally diverse students from urban area schools comparatively face more difficulties.

Table 3*Difficulties of Rural and Urban School Students due to Cultural Diversity (N=150)*

Statements	Rural (N=82)		Urban (N=68)	
	Mean (\bar{x})	S.D (σ)	Mean (\bar{x})	S.D (σ)
Difficulty to understand each other	2.99	1.212	3.03	1.171
Medium of instruction	4.05	1.005	4.10	0.866
Learning difficulty	4.00	1.030	4.15	1.083
Lack of Confidence	3.09	0.773	3.04	0.937
Intolerance towards different views	3.50	1.091	3.26	1.087
Respect towards others' opinion	3.57	1.217	3.31	1.330
Religious belief gap	3.02	1.267	2.78	1.325
Social gap	2.80	1.478	2.72	1.359
Cultural biases	2.78	1.054	3.03	1.106
Communication gap	3.13	1.120	2.93	1.250
Understanding of non-verbal expressions	3.02	1.065	2.97	1.065
Adjustment problem due to different social status	3.27	1.228	3.41	1.082
Adjustment problem due to different economic status	3.06	1.270	3.40	1.053
Lack of cooperation	3.38	1.244	3.84	1.154

Table 3 shows the problems of culturally diverse students. The two groups differ with respect to high and low mean score on different subscales. Rural and Urban area school students have high mean score on learning difficulty (Mean= 4.00, 4.15), medium of instruction problem (Mean=4.05, 4.10). Lack of cooperation (Mean= 3.84) and adjustment problem due to social (Mean= 3.41) and socio-economic status (Mean= 3.40) are also the major difficulties faced by urban school students.

Table 4
Strategies used by Teachers to Create Culturally Inclusive Classrooms (N=150)

Statements	% of strategies used	Mean (\bar{x})	S.D (σ)
Heterogeneous grouping	12%	4.17	1.134
Supportive work environment	18%	3.12	0.897
Individual accountability	16%	3.71	1.137
Field trips	30%	3.08	1.282
Cross-cultural linguistic awareness	26%	3.14	1.153
Visual aids	20%	3.50	1.134
Culturally contextualized learning materials	24%	3.39	1.231
Current & relevant bulletin boards	24%	3.37	1.167
Acknowledging attitude	17%	3.87	1.183
Collaborative learning skills	17%	3.40	1.111
English as medium of instruction	19%	3.33	1.109
Urdu as medium of instruction	22%	3.52	1.304
Punjabi as medium of instruction	1%	1.55	0.848
Real life examples	22%	3.20	1.141
Cross-cultural examples in instruction	9%	3.65	1.069
One on one meetings	10%	3.86	1.030
Peer coaching strategies	22%	3.49	1.140
Probing & clarifying techniques	21%	3.36	1.064
Team building activities	13%	3.71	1.113
Individual assignments	12%	3.64	0.978
Formative assessment	12%	3.87	1.047
Interactive seating arrangement for teacher	13%	3.76	1.086
Interactive seating arrangement for students	40%	2.70	0.801
Think time/ wait time	9%	3.55	0.945
Calling students by name	13%	3.81	1.133
Encourages to call peers by names	13%	3.82	1.118
Open and informal communication	18%	3.25	0.984
Training to develop unbiased opinion	15%	3.66	1.098
Seek multiple perspectives	18%	3.83	1.284
Eye contact with each student	8%	3.99	1.096
Attention giving behavior	16%	3.63	1.126
Head nodding	26%	3.37	1.261
Nonverbal cues	18%	3.43	1.096
Student-designed activities	70%	1.91	1.089
Student participation in lesson planning	64%	2.49	0.896
Encouragement	28%	3.35	1.311
Respect for minorities	21%	3.63	1.245
Open discussion about rituals of different religions	34%	3.06	1.322
Effective dealing with critical situations	28%	3.59	1.400

Table 4 indicates the strategies to create culturally inclusive classrooms. Heterogeneous grouping (Mean=4.17), eye contact with each student (Mean=3.99), formative assessment (Mean=3.87), acknowledging attitude (Mean=3.87), one on one meetings (Mean=3.86), interactive seating arrangement for teacher (Mean=3.76), individual accountability (Mean=3.71), team building activities (Mean=3.71), individual assignments (Mean=3.64), attention giving behavior (Mean=3.63) and think time (Mean=3.55) have high mean scores. This revealed that teachers mostly use these strategies in the classrooms and other strategies also used by teachers.

Conclusion & Recommendation

In an educational system, it is important to have diverse learners not just making realistic setup but also motivate people grow up outside the boundaries and learn more about the unfamiliar cultures. Culturally diverse classrooms can prepare students for the actual world so that they could be able to convey their opinion from a learned viewpoint (Chirag, 2012).

The results drawn from analyzed data can be concluded that diversity in learning style, language diversity, socio-economic background, individual opinion, communication style with classmates and with the teacher mostly exist in culturally diverse classrooms. Due to these diversities, students face some difficulties, that are learning difficulty, medium of instruction problem, lack of cooperation among students, lack of respect towards others' opinion and intolerance towards different views in class. The results also showed that the difficulties of culturally diverse students of rural area schools are to some extent different from the difficulties of culturally diverse students of urban area schools. Teachers are unable to cope with the aforementioned difficulties because student designed activities, their participation in lesson planning, field trips, cross-cultural linguistic awareness, inclusion of real life examples and teaching collaborative learning skills have least or no use in classrooms (Chirag, 2012; Edwards, 2003; Levesque, 2014; Saifer & Barton, 2007). Therefore, it is concluded that teachers should use the strategies to create culturally responsive inclusive classroom at primary school level (Farooq, 2013, 2016).

It is recommended that interactive seating arrangement for one on one meeting and acknowledging attitude of teacher is needed. Teachers should frequently design team building activities as well as individual assignments for students. Moreover, they should also arrange field trips to portray the encouraging and appreciative attitude towards the diversity so that difficulties can be minimized and diversities can be accepted.

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