

Language in Multiculturalism for Peaceful Co-existence in Nile University, Abuja

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the role of language in multiculturalism for promoting peaceful co-existence in schools. With the study subjects' views, thoughts and beliefs, a quantitative descriptive survey was seen as the best research design. The population for the study is all the lecturers and students of Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 20 lecturers and 20 students from all the Departments. A 10-researcher-designed language in multiculturalism for peaceful co-existence questionnaire (5 for lecturers and 5 for students) as the instrument was given to experts in the language Department for content validity. A reliability index of 0.63 was obtained using Pearson *r* statistic at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The percentile technique was used to answer the two research questions. Findings indicated a high percentage in support of language as a unifying factor in Nigerian schools. It was concluded that the majority of the respondents agreed that language is an instrument of social engineering for multiculturalism to thrive in schools. Based on the findings and conclusion, it is recommended that the government should encourage multiculturalism in schools since it is identified as inseparable and twin-brother of language, as language itself is the lubricant for all academic endeavours, among other recommendations.

Keywords: Language; Multiculturalism; Co-existence; Institutions; Language Acquisition Device

INTRODUCTION

Recognising multicultural diversity is the aim of any democratic education system, and as a result, the diverse cultures in a particular country should be reflected in the education system of that country. Education Acts should be promulgated to include all cultures and so do all people-driven-constitutions of progressive nations. There have been serious concerns about the degree and level of preparedness on the part of educators to incorporate multiculturalism in their day-to-day teaching/learning processes. The fact that we now live in a global village where there is free movement of people of diverse cultures from one part of the world to the other which hitherto has made it incumbent upon people to accept and accommodate different views and beliefs held by other people from other parts of the world, has made Nigerian education system to be structured in a way to tolerate multiculturalism among other academic objectives. This has led to peaceful

co-existence among the students because the environment is devoid of tribal, racial or religious discrimination. The principle where there is peaceful co-existence among students of diverse cultures and backgrounds is what Bukaliya and Mapuranga (2021) and Buamila (2022) refer to as multiracial education. This system has permeated everywhere in Nigeria, The Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja as a typical example. This paper is, therefore, an appreciation from the teacher-learners point of view of the inclusion and implementation of multiculturalism in Nigerian academic institutions.

Language as a vehicle of communication is a creative systematic arbitrary vocal symbol that allows a group of people to communicate and interact successfully. It is also a system of signs (verbal or otherwise) intended for communication; it is a system since its constituents relate to each other in an intricate and yet organised fashion. Bello and Lawal (2012), Abdullahe (2020) and Adenle (2021) also affirm that language is intended for communication, for it can be safely assumed that we speak to pass on information to others. In another instance, Sather (2015) asserts that in globalisation, commerce, international communication and trade, language is foremost. However, Crystal (1987) argues that communication is not the only function of language. For this study, we take the position of the role played by language in promoting multiculturalism in schools as an appreciation of teacher-learners' view of peaceful co-existence. Without peaceful co-existence, there is no basis upon which to draw reasonable conclusions about diverse and intermingled relationships in various societies especially in academic environments where people come from different places characterised by different cultures (Johannae, 2017). In line with the above, Olajide (2018) affirms that language plays significant roles in the cultural, political, educational and socio-economic life of any society, as such, seeing language as a pivot for communal existence. The potential transparency in man-to-man relationships in any society is language. A better understanding of people in any society is the use of language.

Culture defines a people's way of life, indeed, it can be considered as the total of norms and values espoused and cherished by a particular people, and as such, if values are patterns of behaviour, the norms are standards of behaviour. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2006) and Hassan (2023) also see culture as the "customs, civilisation and achievements of a particular people or time". Culture is also seen as the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievements collectively. It is the ideals, customs and social behaviour of a particular people or society. It is also seen as the way of life of a particular people, especially as shown in their ordinary behaviour and habits, their attitudes towards each other, and their moral and religious attitudes. Culture is also the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs and values, level of tolerance, attitude and approaches to issues, among other social habits (Hassan, 2023).

The vehicle for the successful utilisation of multiculturalism in any society, especially in educational society is language. However, marginalised ethnic minorities in some societies (educational institutions inclusive) have cried foul on the non-recognition of their cultures by the dominant cultures. Schools are expected to socialise learners in the various socio-cultural beliefs, values and norms, but adverse is the case in that there has been considerable attention to some cultures at the expense of others. There have been several studies about the role of language in societies, especially academic institutions, but as far as this researcher is concerned, no study has been carried out concerning the role of language in multiculturalism for promoting peaceful co-existence in academic institutions. Part of this gap in research is what this study tried to fill.

The following research questions are generated and answered to give this study a focus: Do teachers believe that language plays a role in multiculturalism for peaceful co-existence? Do students realise that language is a vehicle for sustainable multiculturalism in Nigerian schools?

LITERATURE REVIEW: INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE ON MULTICULTURALISM FOR PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE IN SCHOOLS

The importance of language in our daily interaction cannot be gained. Since language is human, it is hoped that there is a language faculty in the human brain that enables any normal child to learn any language with relative ease. Contrary views argue that there is no such faculty since language derives from general purpose mechanisms of the brain. However, Chomsky (1972) and Paolillo (2019) posit that recent experiments with brain images, especially Position Emission Tomography (PET) and Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (FMRI), reveal that both arguments are not entirely unfounded. Whatever the argument, both camps acknowledge the centrality of language in human cognitive development.



Figure 1. A simplified version of language acquisition device functions

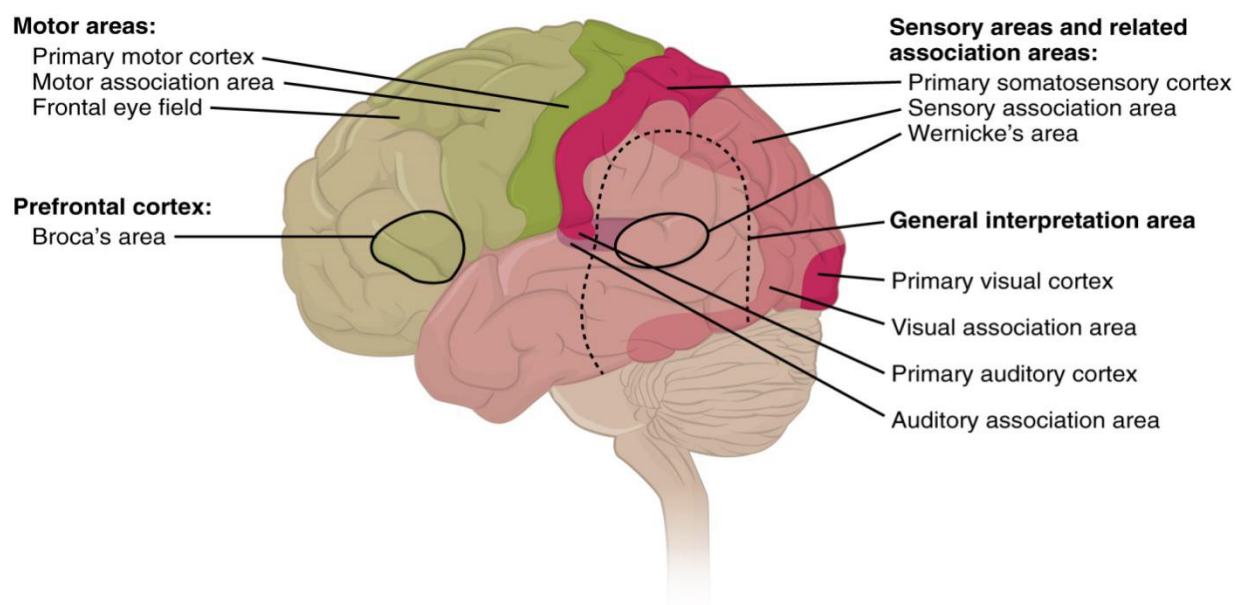


Fig. 2. Complementary specialisation of cerebral hemisphere

Culture as a product of the human mind, registered in human brain, is defined, propagated and sustained through language. The relationship between language and culture is indisputably symbiotic. Language serves as an expression of culture without being entirely synonymous with it. In most cases, a language forms a basis for ethnic, regional, national or international identity (http://africa.peacelink.org/wajibu/articles/art_4485.htm Retrieved on 3rd September, 2022) and Olaoye (2022). The concept of peaceful co-existence finds resonance in the adoption of a functional language around which the diverse communities can rely on. In France, for instance, the forceful adoption of French as the national language significantly reduced the import and value of the ten-plus regional dialects. In light of this, the French could boast of a true national culture as a result of a unifying language. The same could be said of the adoption of Kiswahili in Tanzania. In Kenya, the concept of nationhood remains elusive, probably due to cultural ambivalence. Patria (2021) and Lawson (2022) surmise that human language resides in culture and vice versa. Otto (2023) is of the view that the power of language to reflect culture and influence thinking was first proposed by an American linguist and anthropologist, Edward Sapir (1884-1939) and his student, Benjamin Whorf (1897-1941). Sapir-Whorf hypothesis asserts that the way we think, view the world and adjust within cultural milieu is determined by our language, just as Oha, Uwajeh & Daniel (2021) argue that man is an embodiment of culture.

Language, (English by implication), is the foremost language of globalisation, the official language of communication, commerce and of course, administration in Nigeria. Also, the life-wire of the Nigerian educational system lies in English language because students' ability to interact within the multicultural setting of a nation like Nigeria and undertake higher education in any discipline depends largely on the student's achievement in the English language through effective communication so that students can fit in the social environment where they find themselves. Teachers and students from diverse cultural backgrounds use and see language as an instrument of social engineering. Similarly, Bello and Lawal (2012) and Bukaliya and Mapuranga (2021) think that multiculturalism in education focuses on the transformation process to promote

the ideals of democracy in a pluralistic society. Learners are open to the spectrum of cultural diversities and differences as strengths but not as weaknesses (Holmis, 2020).

Multiculturalism is a philosophical approach that explores the relationship that exists between cultural diversity and human freedom as well as their well-being while offering justifications for accommodating claims of cultural minorities in legal and political institutions and policies in any society (<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com2023>). Multiculturalism also describes how a given society deals with cultural diversity. In another development, multiculturalism also philosophises that distinct identities and cultural groups should be acknowledged, preserved and supported in society, thus making individuals global citizens, to make everyone have a sense of belonging anywhere (<https://www.studysmater.co.uk.multiculturalism.com2024>).

Multicultural education is a set of educational strategies developed to provide students with knowledge about the histories, cultures and contributions of diverse groups, and the need to see and tolerate fellow beings regardless of nature or/ and race (<https://seeonline.american.edu> 19 May 2020). Multicultural education is what schools implement to establish equitable educational opportunities for all their students regardless of race or nationality. Multicultural education is an educational philosophy that focuses on celebrating cultural differences while also recognising the importance of some challenges that could be encountered with the belief that students and their nationalities and experiences should be placed at the centre of their mind, thus tolerating and cooperation with one another in their learning environment (<https://coed.dypvp.edu.in2024>).

In another instance, the term multicultural education points towards one issue which is the idea of celebrating cultural diversity in educational institutions. Duhon, Mundy, Leder, LeBert & Amney-Dixon (2020), Wilson (2020) and Olaoye (2023) see multiculturalism in education as an instruction that is designed for the cultures of several different races in educational system. This approach to pedagogy is based upon consensus building, respect, and fostering cultural pluralism within racial societies. Thus, multiculturalism in education acknowledges and incorporates positive racial idiosyncrasies into classroom atmospheres. Banks & Banks (1993), Trudgill (2021) view multiculturalism in education as a welcome development whose major aim was to create enabling environment for equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class and cultural groups. It could therefore be inferred from this that the presence of multiculturalism in education will help students to acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate and communicate with peoples from diverse groups in order to create a civic and a moral community that works for the common good of all.

Multiculturalism in education, according to Bello (2016) and Windfall (2016), is that, learners take the role of social change agents. This implies that learners have the opportunities to identify the problem of social inequalities and the resultant oppression and marginalisation of minority groups so that they may come up with strategies to change the status quo and create an enduring multicultural society. This leads to the re-constructionism points of social engineering where the old oppressive social practices are ostensibly destroyed and a new social order is reconstructed to create an egalitarian society, and thus, enhancing tolerance among learners and reducing stigma, prejudice and discrimination. Banks & Banks (1993), Bukaliya & Mapuranga (2021) and Millos (2021) claim that lack of support from teachers and educational administrators as well as neo-colonialism tendencies can impede smooth atmospheric condition that can support multiculturalism in academic environment. Multiculturalism in academic environments held in

highest esteem because of its linguistic versatility, it facilitates inter-personal, inter-ethnic, and, or inter-racial communication. Mujeli (2020) also agrees that multiculturalism in academic institutions enhances mutual understanding of the people whose culture one is familiar with. Similarly, Buamila (2016), Lawton (2017) and Bukati (2022) confirm that multiculturalism in schools removes ethnocentrism, ethnic phobia, ethnic chauvinism and suspicion or biases among learners. Multiculturalism in schools broadens learners' horizon; the more cultures one is exposed to, the wider one's knowledge of the world is, hence, the more exposed and cosmopolitan one becomes. In support of the above, Olanusi (2012), Fakunle (2015) and Falola (2019) surmise that multiculturalism in academic institutions enhances access to the world of technology, and hence world educational advancement. In a similar vein, Mujeli (2020) surmise that the issue of peaceful co-existence finds resonance in the adoption of a concept around which diverse nations can rely on, as such, curriculum developers should incorporate multiculturalism in schools' curriculum, governments at all levels and agencies should also see the need to make peaceful co-existence their watch word so that the entire world will be worth living in. They should also put in place proactive monitoring teams or organisations, country by country and continent by continent to see to its implementation. This study therefore, seeks that peaceful co-existence transcends beyond academic institutions more so that human existence cuts across all facets of life.

To survive in any multicultural society, especially in academic institution, the following characteristics are laid out such as, there must be:

1. Respect for diversity: This is a very vital characteristic in multicultural education which means recognising and valuing each student's unique cultural background, identity and experiences. It also means creating an environment where everyone feels safe to express his or her thoughts and opinions without fear of judgment or discrimination. This includes respecting different languages, religions, customs, values, beliefs and lifestyles.
2. Inclusive curriculum: There should be a curriculum that reflects the diversity of cultures in and outside the classroom setting by incorporating materials from a variety of cultures in and outside the classroom so that all students can see themselves as being represented in the curriculum. It also means teaching about different cultures in a respectful way that avoids stereotypes or oversimplifications of other people's cultures. Here, invitations to people of different cultures could be carried out in the school to share their knowledge and experiences when it comes to certain cultural traditions such as preparing food, attires, music and dance, etc.
3. Equality-focused instruction: here, this characteristic addresses systemic inequalities in society and ensures all students have access to equal education regardless of their background or identity. This means using culturally responsive teaching strategies to engage students from diverse backgrounds in meaningful learning experiences. It also means providing additional support for students who may be struggling due to language barriers or other factors related to their cultural background or identity. If this is done, it will create a dynamic, equitable learning environment for every student and staff member, thus everybody would be seen as a citizen of the world.

4. Cultural competency development: this characteristic in multicultural education involves helping students to develop an understanding and appreciation for different cultures through activities such as field trips to museums or cultural events; engaging with guest speakers from different backgrounds; or participating in service learning projects with organisations from different communities. Students can also learn and develop cultural competency skills and how to freely interact respectfully with people from other cultures both in and outside the classroom setting.
5. Collaborating learning environment: here, this characteristic in multicultural education is where all students feel free and comfortable working together regardless of their cultural background or identity. This includes creating opportunities for meaningful dialogues between students from different backgrounds so that it will be very easy to learn each other's perspectives and experiences while developing mutual respect for one another's differences. It also means encouraging collaboration among teachers so that they can share the best ideas and practices for creating a more equitable learning environment for all students irrespective of their cultural backgrounds or identity.
6. Students' empowerment: this is another important characteristic in multicultural education anchors on giving all the students ownership over their learning by giving them the opportunity and leverage to explore the topics that relate to their cultures as well as those cultures outside their own cultures to appreciate the aesthetics of various cultures they are exposed to. By so doing, they would be opportune to lead projects relating to multiculturalism and encouraged to take part in decision-making processes within and outside classroom settings such as choosing topics for discussion or deciding on group related to multiculturalism topics. Encouraging students to engage in activities like these would assist them in gaining confidence in themselves while developing an understanding of how they can fit into a larger society context beyond just their own culture or identity group.
7. Community enlargement: this is another important characteristic in multicultural education, and it is of the view that it is very expedient to connect classrooms with members from diverse communities outside the confines of the school environment so that all students can gain a better understanding of how people from different backgrounds interact with one another on a daily basis. By engaging with different members from diverse communities outside the confines of their school environment, teachers can help to create more meaningful connections between what is being taught inside the classroom setting and what is happening out there in real life. Multiculturalism education has become increasingly important as human society continues to become more diverse each day. These showcase the fact that, if well incorporated and implemented in academic environment, we will be able to create more equitable learning environments where all students will feel free, respected, have sense of belonging, included, empowered, engaged and valued regardless of their cultural background or identity. (<https://www.studysmater.co.uk/multiculturalism.com2024>). From the aforementioned, it is therefore care that if one is emotionally attached to one's tribe, religion or political

leaning to the point that truth and justice become secondary considerations, one's exposure is useless because he or she can no longer reason beyond petty sentiment due to cultural superiority, if this happens, then one becomes a liability to mankind.

METHOD

This study is a quantitative descriptive survey research carried out in The Nile University of Nigeria. The population for the study is all the lecturers and students of the Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select twenty (20) lecturers and twenty (20) students from all the departments. A 10-researcher-designed language in multiculturalism for peaceful co-existence questionnaire (RDLMPQC) (5 for lecturers and 5 for students) as the instrument was given to experts in the Language Department for their contents' validity, while a reliability index of 0.63 was obtained using Pearson *r* statistic at 0.05 alpha level of significance. Frequency counts and percentage distribution statistical techniques were used to answer the two research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results in Table 1 indicator 1 showed that 20 respondents representing 100% agreed that language is a unifying factor in schools. This aligned with the position of Bukaliya & Mapuranga (2021) who opine that language is a unifying factor in that it leads to peaceful co-existence because the environment is devoid of tribal, racial or religious discrimination.

Table 1: Do teachers believe that language plays role in multiculturalism for peaceful co-existence?

	Indicator	Agree		Disagree	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	Language is a unifying factor in schools	20	100%		
2	I support multiculturalism in academic institutions	17	85%	3	15%
3	Language is an instrument of social engineering in schools	19	95%	1	5%
4	Lack of support from teachers and educational administrators as well as neo-colonialism tendencies can impede smooth atmospheric condition that can support multiculturalism in academic environment	15	75%	5	25%
5	Should multiculturalism be included in university curriculum?	19	95%	1	5%

Close in rank to this high frequency is the stand of 19 respondents representing 95% in indicators 3 and 5 respectively who agreed that language is an instrument of social engineering in schools as well as subscribing to multiculturalism to be included in the university curriculum, while 1 respondent representing 5% each respectively disagreed. These findings are in agreement with the assertions of Duhon, Mundy, Leder, LeBert and Amney-Dixon (2020) and Wilson (2020) who contend that multiculturalism in education as an instruction that is designed for the cultures of several different races in educational system. Wilson asserts that this approach to pedagogy is based upon consensus building, respect, and fostering cultural pluralism within racial societies. Thus, multiculturalism in education acknowledges and incorporates positive racial idiosyncrasies into classroom atmospheres. The findings also connote Banks and Banks' (1993) view that multiculturalism in education as a welcome development whose major aim was to create enabling environment for equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class and cultural groups. Arguably, Banks and Banks state that the presence of multiculturalism in education will help students to acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate and communicate with peoples from diverse groups in order to create a civic and a moral community that works for the common good.

Close to the above in rank are 17 and 15 respondents representing 85% and 75% in indicators 2 and 4 respectively supporting multiculturalism in academic institutions and also agreed that lack of support from teachers and educational administrators as well as neo-colonialism tendencies can impede smooth atmospheric condition that can support multiculturalism in academic environment, while 3 and 5 respondents representing 15% and 25% respectively stood against. These findings are supported by the studies of Bello (2016) that teachers and students from diverse cultural background use and see language as an instrument of social engineering. Similarly, Bukaliya & Mapuranga (2021) are of the opinion that multiculturalism in education focuses on the transformation process to promote the ideals of democracy in a pluralistic society. They assert further that learners are open to the spectrum of cultural diversity and differences as strengths but not as weaknesses, and as such, scholars seem to point towards one issue which is the idea of celebrating cultural diversity in educational institutions.

Table 2: Do students realise that language is a vehicle for sustainable multiculturalism in Nigerian schools?

	Indicator	Agree		Disagree	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	The presence of multiculturalism in schools will help students to acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to function effectively in the society through language	19	95%	1	5%
2	Language is a vehicle for sustainable multiculturalism in Nigerian schools	20	100%		
3	Students from diverse cultural background use and see language as an instrument of social engineering	19	95%	1	5%
4	No language, no multiculturalism in schools	19	95%	1	5%
5	I support multiculturalism in academic institutions	19	95%	1	5%

Results in Table 2 indicator 2 showed that 20 respondents representing 100% agreed that language is a vehicle for sustainable multiculturalism in Nigerian schools. These findings connote the study of Bukaliya & Mapuranga (2021) that language is a unifying factor in that it leads to peaceful co-existence, because the environment is devoid of tribal, racial or religious discrimination. Results in indicators 1, 3, 4 and 5 indicated that 19 respondents (95%) agreed that the presence of multiculturalism in schools will help students to acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to function effectively in the society through language; students from diverse cultural background use and see language as an instrument of social engineering; they agreed that no language no multiculturalism in schools, and so supported multiculturalism in academic institutions, while only 1 respondent each (5%) in indicators 1, 3, 4 and 5 went against. These findings also are in consonance with the findings of Duhon, Mundy, Leder, LeBert and Amney-Dixon (2020) and Wilson (2020) that see multiculturalism in education as an instruction that is designed for the cultures of several different races in educational system. Wilson further asserts that this approach to pedagogy is based upon consensus building, respect, and fostering cultural pluralism within racial societies. Thus, multiculturalism in education acknowledges and incorporates positive racial idiosyncrasies into classroom atmospheres. The findings also connote Banks and Banks' (1993) view that multiculturalism in education as a welcome development whose major aim was to create enabling environment for equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class and cultural groups. Also, Buamila (2016), Lawton (2017) and Bukati (2022) who confirm that multiculturalism in schools removes ethnocentrism, ethnic phobia, ethnic chauvinism and suspicion or biases among learners. Banks & Banks (1993) state that the presence of multiculturalism in education will help students to acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate and communicate with peoples from diverse groups in order to create a civic and a moral community that works for the common good.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the findings and conclusion of the study, it is recommended that governments at all levels should encourage and tolerate multiculturalism in academic institutions since it has been identified as inseparable and twin-brother of language, and since language itself is the vehicle as well as the lubricant for all academic endeavours. Similarly, curriculum developers should incorporate multiculturalism in the schools' curriculum while proactive monitoring team is put in place to see to its implementation. Teachers, apart from the contents of the curriculum, should create ways of celebrating cultural diversity in their respective schools; engage in holiday celebration; music and art celebration; establishing multicultural library in schools; creating avenue to listen to guest speakers and interviews from people of different cultural backgrounds; organising cross-cultural quiz; engaging in travels and tourism; develop the habit of attending cultural restaurants occasionally; viewing and engaging in multicultural games, among several others.

In conclusion, majority of the respondents (teachers and students) agreed that language is an instrument of social engineering for multiculturalism to strive in academic institutions among several other things. Findings of the study revealed that multiculturalism in education is a welcome development because its major aim was to create enabling environment for equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class and cultural groups. The findings further revealed that introduction of multiculturalism in educational institutions will help students to acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate and communicate with peoples from diverse groups in order to create a civic and a moral community that works for the common good.

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