Mapping Diversity and Equity Challenges in Moroccan Teacher Education

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Abstract

Background: Morocco, as a transit and destination hub for (im)migrants, has witnessed increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in its classrooms. **Specific Background:** While Moroccan education reforms promote equity, there is limited research on how effectively this is realized for Sub-Saharan migrant students. **Knowledge Gap:** The extent to which teacher education and classroom practices accommodate the needs of these students remains underexplored. **Aims:** This study investigates the perceptions of both Moroccan teachers and Sub-Saharan students regarding inclusivity, diversity, and equity in Moroccan schools. **Results:** Findings reveal that while teachers strive to create inclusive environments, the current curriculum and pedagogies fall short in addressing the cultural and linguistic diversity of Sub-Saharan students, leading to unequal learning experiences. **Novelty:** This research highlights the significant gap between policy intentions and practical implementation of inclusive education for migrant students. **Implications:** The study suggests the need for curriculum reform, enhanced teacher training, and intercultural awareness to foster equitable education for all students in Moroccan classrooms.

Keywords: inter-cultural diversity, inclusivity, equity, moroccan teacher education, sub-saharan students.

Introduction

For millennia, Morocco has been a host country for countless migrants and therefore it has been tinted with cultural and linguistic diversity at different sectors. Interestingly, the educational landscape is not an exception. As highlighted by Mohamadou Laouali (2018), "in 2017, the country hosted approximately 18,000 students from sub-Saharan African countries, up from just over 1,000 in 1994". This marked increase reflects not only Morocco's growing role as a destination for educational migration but also the challenges posed by managing diversity in educational institutions. In light of the recent educational reform underpinning its slogan of "for a school of equity, quality, and promotion", it is crucial to investigate whether equity and inclusivity align with the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity seen in Moroccan classrooms (Ministry of National Education, 2020).

Recent research has shown that diverse classrooms, if not managed inclusively, can inadvertently marginalize students from underrepresented backgrounds, limiting their academic achievements (O'Leary et al., 2020). Therefore, to ensure a quality education for sub-Saharan migrant pupils, pedagogical policies and teaching practices must be inclusive and equitable, offering equal schooling opportunities to students regardless of

their cultural, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds (El Boubekri & Saidi, 2022; Saidi, 2021). This is particularly relevant in the Moroccan context where historical power dynamics and linguistic hierarchies often influence educational practices, ensuing in imbalanced imaginations of intercultural relations (Saidi, 2024). Given these insights, this article seeks to explore how inclusivity and equity are realized in Moroccan teacher education and classrooms. Specifically, it aims to address the following questions:

1. How do Moroccan teaching practices address the specific needs of sub-Saharan migrant students?
2. To what extent do Moroccan teachers ensure equal learning opportunities for both Moroccan and sub-Saharan students in their classrooms?
3. What are the key factors that challenge intercultural diversity and inclusivity in Moroccan teacher education?

Literature Review

1. Multicultural Education: The Interplay Pedagogical Policies

Moroccan schools are continually becoming cross-culturally diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, language and nationality due to the incessant influx of (im)migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; therefore, adopting a pedagogy of inclusive, multicultural education is imperative. For this purpose, both teachers and policy-makers are compelled to create classrooms that are inter-culturally informed, inclusive, equitable and empowering for all students (Saidi & Boustar, 2024). Indeed, incorporating an integrative, inter-cultural approach to the Moroccan teaching contents, materials and practices is conducive to serving the needs of both local and African Sub-Saharan students as well as building a learning environment in which cultural and religious differences are valued, accepted and respected. In the pursuit of creating more inclusive and diverse educational environments, multiculturalism becomes the gateway to establishing the pillars of intercultural diversity, inclusivity, and social justice in Moroccan schools. It ensures that education is a tool for fostering social cohesion and justice, addressing systemic inequities that may arise in culturally diverse contexts (Gorski, 2008). This requires ongoing commitment from educators and policymakers to reevaluate curriculum content, teacher training programs, and school policies to ensure that they reflect and support the realities of an increasingly diverse student population in diverse contexts.

Research on multiculturalism in schools has received a wider attention in the literature on cross-cultural diversity and equity in teacher education (Gay, 2012; Banks, 2004; Grant, 2011). In 1991, the National Association for Multicultural Education defines multicultural education as a "philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity" as well as "a process that permeates all aspects of school practices, policies, and organization" to ensure that all students achieve at the highest levels possible (NAME n.d.)". As a philosophical movement, multicultural education deems that gender, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of a pluralistic society should be reflected in the educational system, in hope to improve the achievement of marginalized students, prepare students to work across lines of difference and create a more culturally and socially just learning context (Banks, 2001). In another definition advanced by Geneva Gay

(2012: 1548), multicultural education denotes to "the policies, programs, and practices used in school to respect and promote ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity within geopolitical contexts". Carl Grant (2011: 549), on the other hand, views multicultural education as "a critique of the mono-cultural content and ethos of the current and prevailing Eurocentric system of education in the United since".

In particular, multicultural education is conceptualized as a philosophy and a movement that was motivated by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's in the United States to chart the course of inclusive educational policies and practices and to affirm the narratives of culturally diverse students and educators at all educational levels (Ndura & Dogbevia, 2013). In this context, Experts, scholars, and practitioners in multicultural education widely agree that one of its primary goals is to reform schools and other educational institutions to ensure educational equity for students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, especially those from traditionally marginalized groups (Banks, 2004; Nieto & Bode, 2007; Sleeter, 1997). Achieving this requires a comprehensive restructuring of all aspects of the educational process. This includes revising the curriculum, adopting inclusive teaching strategies, diversifying instructional materials, implementing equitable classroom management, and ensuring fair assessment of student performance. Additionally, it involves fostering strong school-community relationships and addressing educators' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Banks, 2004; Bennett, 2001; Sleeter & Grant, 1999; Sleeter, 1997). Banks (2004) outlines the key components of multicultural education in five dimensions: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture.

It should be noted that the multicultural approach to teacher education has its roots in critical pedagogy—a critical stance advocated by Paulo Freire (1970), who is particularly in favor of an inclusive and democratic education in which all students learning styles, values, beliefs and needs are catered for. In this light, given the increase in student mobility and classroom diversity worldwide, multicultural educators aspire to change the vision of schooling from being mono-lingual/cultural to multi-lingual/ cultural, offering an equitable and inter-culturally inclusive education. Pedagogically, multicultural approach calls on textbook designers and policy-makers to craft the entire curriculum in a way that targets the cultural and religious backgrounds of both native and (im)migrant students. Equally important, teachers whose classes are culturally and racially diverse must realize the differences among their students and integrate diversity education into the whole teaching practices (Alimail, 2016). In other words, they need to incorporate multicultural experiences into their classrooms and tailor their teaching practices to diverse students in terms of instructions and learning styles.

Another objective of multicultural education is to fight against stereotypes about minority groups by teaching students to be ethno-relative, tolerant and open to cultural differences (Rios & Stanton, 2011). This is only feasible when education aims to teach about diversity in order to reduce prejudices and students are helped to be develop the skills to communicate, live and interact meaningfully across lines of difference. In reference to Moroccan context, there is a dire need for a multicultural approach to teacher education in light of the increasing diversity of classrooms. The

materialization of this approach should cover the entire pedagogical policies as well as the teaching practices at the level of materials and contents presented to students.

2. Towards an Interculturally-responsive Pedagogy

An interculturally-responsive pedagogy is essential for fostering inclusivity and equity in today's diverse educational environments (Gay, 2002). Such a pedagogy not only acknowledges the cultural backgrounds of all students but also integrates these differences into the teaching and learning process, thus creating a more relevant and engaging educational experience for students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Gay, 2018). This approach goes beyond mere recognition of diversity; it requires the intentional development of teaching practices and materials that respond to the needs of students from marginalized and underrepresented groups, particularly in multicultural contexts like Morocco (Saidi & Boustar, 2024).

At the heart of an interculturally-responsive pedagogy is the goal of educational equity. This means creating opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-cultural backgrounds, to succeed academically and feel valued in the learning environment (Banks, 2019). The integration of culturally relevant content, teaching methods, and assessment practices allows students to see their own cultures reflected in their education, which not only fosters a sense of belonging but also enhances engagement and academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In this sense, interculturally-responsive pedagogy helps address the achievement gap that often exists between majority and minority students by promoting an inclusive curriculum that validates all learners' experiences (García, 2022).

Furthermore, an interculturally-responsive approach requires educators to critically examine their own biases and assumptions about students from different cultural backgrounds (Nieto, 2010). Teachers must move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to education and develop culturally competent strategies that meet the unique needs of each student. This involves rethinking classroom interactions, adjusting instructional methods, and embracing flexibility in curriculum delivery to ensure that diverse learning styles and perspectives are accommodated (Sleeter, 2011).

Additionally, interculturally-responsive pedagogy supports the development of students' intercultural competence, which is crucial for living and working in a globalized world (Deardorff, 2006). By incorporating intercultural awareness and skills into classroom practices, educators help students build empathy, cross-cultural understanding, and critical thinking skills—key competencies for navigating complex social and cultural landscapes (Bennett, 2008).

Adopting a pedagogy of multicultural education, inclusivity and equity in teacher education demands the integration of ethnic and racial content in school curriculum (Banks, 1994). The latter generally refers to incorporating materials from diverse sources such as examples, facts, stories and traditions from different cultural groups. Besides, an equity pedagogy is evident when educators build on the unique strengths, cultural values, and habits of cultural groups in designing pedagogical practices. Also teachers should use teaching methods that are consistent with the learning styles of diverse groups.

Banks (1994) developed four approaches underlying multicultural education, equity and inclusivity. Firstly, the contributions approach, which emphasizes the contributions of minority/ migrant groups to the whole society, stresses on the integration of stories, special days, celebrations and common narratives of ethnic groups into the curriculum. Secondly, the addictive approach calls on addressing ethnic cultural heritage themes and perspectives to the curriculum. Here, both approaches have a common goal—that is helping students to challenge discrimination and inequality in schools. The third approach, transformative, is purely critical as it seeks to teach students to explore cultures and diversity from a global perspective. The aim of this approach is to promote democracy by education for equity and social justice. In the vein, Rothenberg (2000) maintains that the transformative approach enables students to approach the perspectives and behaviours of minority students from their own cultural backgrounds and at the same time increase their understanding of several cultures. The last approach, social action, aims to teach students to respect cultural differences across diverse students and draws their attention to realize inequality and discrimination in the school, thus empowering them to think critically about these issues. From these perspectives, it is high time the materialization of inter-cultural education, inclusivity and equity in Moroccan teacher education were researched.

Method

A. Research Approach

A qualitative approach was employed in this study, which proved instrumental in gaining comprehensive insights into how sub-Saharan migrant students' needs are addressed through teachers' practices, as well as in understanding the factors that hinder inclusivity and equity between native and migrant students in Moroccan schools. This method allowed for a deeper exploration of the complexities surrounding the experiences of sub-Saharan African pupils within the Moroccan educational system. By focusing on participants' lived experiences and perspectives, the qualitative approach provided rich, detailed data that helped illuminate the nuanced ways in which educational practices either support or undermine inclusivity and equity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Moreover, the adoption of a qualitative approach was crucial for enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research is particularly effective in contexts where the goal is to understand the meaning-making processes of individuals within their specific social environments. In this study, the use of semi-structured interviews and other qualitative data collection methods allowed for the capture of authentic, context-specific insights, thereby ensuring that the findings accurately reflected the realities of both teachers and students. This methodological choice not only strengthened the credibility of the research but also provided a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to fostering inclusivity and equity for migrant students in Moroccan schools.

B. Research Participants

The number of subjects who have taken part in the present study totaled 25subjects. The population sample chosen is sub-Saharan migrant learners and Moroccan teachers who teach in different school districts across the eastern region of the kingdom. This sample population was chosen because of its convenience which is manifested at the level of ease of access and also due to the fact that Eastern Morocco witnessed a huge increase of sub-Saharan migrants who reside in different oriental cities. Therefore, the selected teachers are more likely to receive sub-Saharan pupils in their classes. The sample of the Moroccan instructors includes both novice and expert male and female subjects, whose teaching experience range from 3 to more than 15 years. Random sampling is the technique used in order to choose a representative sample of tutors. This technique of sampling was chosen because it is more objective.

C. Data Collection Instruments

The data collection tool used for gathering qualitative data was a semi-structured interview, which provided respondents with the time and flexibility to express their opinions on the subject matter in a detailed manner. This approach allowed the researcher to probe deeper into specific areas of interest, facilitating the exploration of complex themes and nuances that might not have emerged through more structured methods. The semi-structured format also enabled the researcher to adapt the interview questions based on the participants' responses, thus capturing a richer and more comprehensive understanding of their perspectives and experiences related to the topic. By allowing for open-ended discussions, the interview process helped uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, and attitudes that are critical for a thorough analysis of the research subject.

Result and Discussion

A. Result

The discussion of findings is interpreted and discussed in terms of themes that featured notably in the interviews. The data is analyzed in order to answer the research questions of this study and, thus, to achieve its main objectives.

1. Teachers' Perceptions of Intercultural Education and Equity

Most teachers from different Moroccan schools highlighted that there must be some pedagogical adjustments for maintaining an inter-cultural inclusive education for sub-Saharan students. This adaptation should be undergone at the level of reforming the content of textbooks, teaching materials, practices and pedagogies. Despite promoting an equitable teaching-learning process in the classroom, teachers claimed that there are a number of factors that hinder the learning process of sub-Saharan migrant learners. The content of the textbooks and the overall teaching-learning materials are designed under the Moroccan community's beliefs, assumptions and conventions which, in turn, overlook the integration of the cultural aspects related to sub-Saharan values and principles. Consequently, the cultural representation of the cultural other is neglected as Moroccan students' knowledge of their sub-Saharan classmates' racial background is limited in comparison to sub-

Saharan learners' repertoire of the Moroccan society as a whole. In this vein, most of the teachers agreed that it is of a paramount importance for sub-Saharan students to be aware of Moroccan cultural features as it will boost their adjustment to Moroccan inhabitants which will, as a result, foster their ties and build strong rapport with students as noticed today in Moroccan classes. In this line of thought, one of the teachers claimed that:

Well, what I can frankly reveal is that sometimes I find Moroccan textbooks biased towards the inclusion of Moroccan cultural aspects while the sub-Saharan culture is totally missing. Maybe that's because this sub-Saharan migration is something new in Morocco as we didn't have before sub-Saharan learners in Moroccan classes. One of the positive things about this issue is that it's beneficial for sub-Saharan learners because the content of the textbooks might get them more and more familiar with the Moroccan community and I started noticing a positive connection between native learners and migrant students in classes.

2. Teachers' Practices of intercultural education and Inclusivity

As far as the teaching practices and the pedagogies implemented in their classes, it is highly emphasized by teachers that there is an intensive exertion of efforts to make the teaching strategies adaptable for creating an inter-cultural learning environment through making sub-Saharan students engaged and included. This challenge is explained due to the fact of teachers' lack of training in dealing with students' holding different cultural and linguistic repertoires. However, bringing extra-curricular materials, designing their own activities and tasks, organizing inter-cultural contests, assigning project works and using a comprehensive language of instruction are all new creative tools and alternatives that most of the interviewed teachers carry out to reinforce the inter-cultural dimension in their classes and, thus, sustaining equity between all students. In this regards, a teacher asserted that:

The problem is that our teaching training didn't cover pedagogical practices targeting other cultural contexts. I think that most teachers or at least the upcoming teachers should be trained enough to be able to deal with classes of mixed identities and cultures. Personally, I can't deny that I make great efforts in attempting to provide equal opportunities for both Moroccan and sub-Saharan learners. I always assign task that incorporate a mishmash of Moroccan and African culture and I ask Moroccan students to work with their sub-Saharan classmates in small groups about a given cultural aspect related to both communities and I also design my own lessons that cove information about migrant learners' society. By this way, they feel motivated and engaged in the classroom.

3. Sub-Saharan Migrant Learners' Experiences

Taking into consideration sub-Saharan migrant learners' perceptions towards the teaching practices of their teachers and the general learning environment they are exposed to, there is a correlation between the qualitative findings gathered from the part of the teachers and the part of the students. This correlation manifests itself at the level of sub-Saharan learners' consensus on acknowledging their teachers' effort

to design innovative materials to make the learning process inclusive. However, the components of Moroccan textbooks disregard sub-Saharan migrants' requirements as they are sketched under the Moroccan framework. Relatedly, one of the sub-Saharan learners proclaimed that:

I noticed that our teachers try their best to come up with their own materials and their methodology is effective since I feel involved and our difference is taken into consideration. It's true that If feel the content of the textbooks unrepresentative of the sub-Saharan minority but this lack is compensated by teachers' strategies. I mean teachers often bring some lessons that talk about our own ethnic culture. When there is a special event in school, our teachers ask us to work on a cultural aspect of our country and present it to Moroccan classmates or other Moroccan students.

4. The Issue of Discrimination and Inequality in Moroccan Classes

Nevertheless, it is argued by the interviewed students that sometimes their relationship with some of their Moroccan classmates is not solidly maintained due to Moroccans' lack of awareness about the cultural heritage of sub-Saharan migrants, the stigma attached to dark-skinned people and the issue of acceptance within the mainstream group. The stereotypical images alongside the inappropriate representations attributed to migrant learners explain the attitudinal barriers that sub-Saharan learners face in Moroccan schools. In the light of the aforementioned restrictions, most of the respondents chose not to self-disclose themselves owing to either the whole society's attitude or to their fellow classmates' narrow-mindset. One of the sub-Saharan students voiced out that:

Honestly, my sub-Saharan friends and I have experienced racism from the part of some Moroccan students several times. I don't like it when they give us that awkward look because of our different skin color or our unfamiliar mother tongue. Their attitude towards us makes us segregate ourselves from them and not to befriend them. We have been called ''Niggers'' so many times. I think this is because of their lack of maturity and tolerance. Well, at the same time, I can't also deny that we have some very few good Moroccan friends who are well-mannered and who have a high level of accepting the cultural other as we work together on some school tasks without any hate or discrimination. I don't know if this is a cultural-construct or a matter of one's individual mindset.

B. Discussion

The findings revealed a complex reality where, despite the efforts of some teachers to adapt their teaching practices to better serve sub-Saharan migrant students, substantial challenges persist. Language barriers emerged as one of the most significant obstacles, with many migrant students struggling to navigate instruction delivered predominantly in Arabic and French, languages that may not align with their linguistic backgrounds. This perspective aligns with El Bouberki and Saidi' study (2022) who showcase a number of linguistic and cultural challenges that sub-Saharan learners encounter during their studies in Morocco. This language disconnect

not only hinders students' academic progress but also exacerbates feelings of exclusion, as their home languages are rarely acknowledged or incorporated into the curriculum. Furthermore, cultural misunderstandings between teachers and students frequently arise, resulting from a lack of cultural competency and intercultural training among educators (Gay, 2007).

Teachers who participated in the study expressed a genuine willingness to support migrant students but felt hamstrung by rigid curricular structures and the limited institutional resources available to them. The current curriculum, they reported, does not adequately reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the student body, making it challenging to engage migrant students in a meaningful way. This highlights a critical need for curricular reform that integrates culturally relevant content and promotes intercultural awareness among all students (Banks, 2014). Teachers also emphasized the importance of additional resources, such as multilingual teaching materials and specialized training in intercultural pedagogy, to better serve their diverse classrooms (Sleeter, 2011).

Beyond classroom practices, the study uncovered systemic issues within the Moroccan schooling system that contribute to the marginalization of sub-Saharan African students. Socio-economic disparities were frequently cited, as many migrant families face financial hardships that limit their children's access to educational resources such as textbooks, tutoring, or extracurricular activities (Saidi & Boustar, 2024). Additionally, racial biases, both implicit and explicit, continue to shape the educational experiences of migrant students, with some teachers and peers holding prejudiced views that negatively impact classroom dynamics (Gorski, 2008).

The lack of targeted policies for migrant students further exacerbates these challenges. While Morocco's educational policies emphasize inclusivity and equity, their implementation often falls short, particularly for migrant populations (El Idrissi, 2021). Teachers reported that systemic barriers, such as underfunded schools and insufficient professional development on multicultural education, contribute to inequities in access to educational resources and opportunities. These issues collectively lead to a widening achievement gap between native Moroccan students and their sub-Saharan migrant counterparts, underscoring the urgent need for systemic change (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In summary, while individual teachers are striving to create more inclusive and supportive learning environments, structural and systemic issues within the Moroccan educational system significantly impede their efforts. Addressing these challenges will require not only curricular reforms and teacher training but also targeted policies and institutional support to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have equitable access to quality education.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, this article attempts to reflect on some of the big issues facing multicultural/lingual classes—that is the establishment of inter-cultural education, equity and inclusivity in Moroccan teacher education. It is argued in the literature that multicultural education is a feasible approach to maintaining an inclusive, equitable and just education in cross-culturally, racially and ethnically diverse classes. The findings of

this article call on adjusting the teaching contents, practices and pedagogies in a way that serves the needs of both local and migrant students across different educational levels and contexts.

Originality Statement

The author[s] declare that this article is their own work and to the best of their knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the published of any other published materials, except where due acknowledgement is made in the article. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom author[s] have work, is explicitly acknowledged in the article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author[s] declare that this article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Copyright Statement

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