

Curriculum and Instruction of Multicultural Education

The **curriculum and instruction of multicultural education** refer to the ways in which cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, social-class, gender, and other forms of diversity are incorporated into the curriculum and classroom teaching. According to **James A. Banks**, multicultural education is not simply the addition of information about different cultures. It involves a broader transformation of curriculum, teaching methods, school culture, and educational practices to provide **educational equality for students from diverse groups**.

Multicultural Curriculum

A multicultural curriculum is a curriculum that recognises the experiences, histories, knowledge, values and perspectives of different cultural and social groups.

It aims to ensure that the curriculum is not limited to the experiences of only the dominant cultural group.

Major characteristics of a multicultural curriculum

1. **Representation of diverse cultures**
The curriculum should include the histories, contributions, experiences and perspectives of different cultural and social groups.
2. **Multiple perspectives**
Social and historical events should be studied from different perspectives rather than from only one dominant viewpoint.
3. **Equality and inclusion**
The curriculum should provide appropriate representation to minority, disadvantaged and marginalised groups.
4. **Reduction of stereotypes**
Textbooks and other learning materials should avoid negative, stereotypical or distorted representations of cultural groups.
5. **Development of intercultural understanding**
Students should learn to understand and respect people belonging to different cultures.
6. **Connection with students' experiences**
Students' cultural backgrounds and community experiences can be used as resources for learning.
7. **Development of critical thinking**
Students should examine how knowledge is selected, interpreted and presented.

Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum

James A. Banks identifies **four major approaches to multicultural curriculum reform: Contributions Approach, Additive Approach, Transformation Approach, and Decision-Making and Social Action Approach**. These approaches represent increasing levels of curriculum change—from simply adding

cultural content to fundamentally transforming the curriculum and encouraging students to take informed social action.

1. Contributions Approach

The **Contributions Approach** is the most basic level of multicultural curriculum reform. In this approach, the existing curriculum remains largely unchanged, but the contributions and achievements of different cultural, ethnic, racial, or social groups are added. Teachers may introduce important personalities, cultural heroes and heroines, festivals, historical events, artistic traditions, or other cultural contributions. The main purpose is to make students aware of the contributions made by diverse groups without substantially changing the structure or organisation of the existing curriculum. Banks considers this an initial stage of multicultural curriculum reform.

Major Features

1. Adds contributions of different cultural and ethnic groups.
2. Gives attention to cultural heroes, heroines and important personalities.
3. Includes selected cultural events, festivals and traditions.
4. Makes relatively little change to the existing curriculum structure.
5. Can be easily incorporated into existing subjects.

Advantages

1. **Easy to implement** without completely redesigning the curriculum.
2. **Increases visibility** of culturally diverse groups.
3. Helps students become familiar with the **contributions of different communities**.
4. Can serve as an **initial step toward multicultural curriculum development**.

Limitations

1. May provide only a **superficial treatment of cultural diversity**.
2. The dominant perspective of the existing curriculum remains largely unchanged.
3. Cultural contributions may be presented as **isolated topics** rather than connected to broader social issues.
4. It may not adequately address **prejudice, discrimination, inequality and social injustice**.

2. Additive Approach

The **Additive Approach** involves adding multicultural content, concepts, themes, perspectives, or units to the existing curriculum without fundamentally changing its basic structure, goals, or organisation. For example, a teacher may add a unit on the history, literature, or experiences of a particular cultural group to an existing course. Unlike the Contributions Approach, which often focuses on selected personalities or events, the Additive Approach can introduce broader cultural themes and units. However, the underlying framework of the mainstream curriculum remains essentially unchanged.

Major Features

1. Adds **new multicultural units, themes, concepts or topics**.
2. Introduces information about different cultural and social groups.
3. Retains the **basic structure and organisation** of the existing curriculum.
4. Can be applied to subjects such as history, literature, social science and language.
5. Provides broader multicultural content than the Contributions Approach.

Advantages

1. Provides **more extensive multicultural content** than simply studying cultural heroes.
2. Can be introduced without completely restructuring the curriculum.
3. Gives students opportunities to learn about **different cultural experiences and perspectives**.
4. Helps teachers gradually expand the cultural scope of existing courses.

Limitations

1. The added content may remain **separate from the main curriculum**.
2. The underlying assumptions of the existing curriculum may remain unchanged.
3. It can lead to **curriculum overload** because additional topics are added.
4. Multicultural perspectives may continue to be treated as **secondary or supplementary**.
5. It may not sufficiently challenge dominant interpretations of knowledge.

3. Transformation Approach

The **Transformation Approach** represents a deeper level of multicultural curriculum reform. Instead of simply adding cultural information, the curriculum itself is reorganised so that students can examine concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspectives of different cultural, ethnic, racial, gender and social groups. The approach encourages students to understand that knowledge can be viewed from different perspectives and that the experiences of historically marginalised groups are also important sources of knowledge. Thus, transformation changes not only the content of the curriculum but also the way students understand and interpret knowledge.

Major Features

1. **Restructures the curriculum** to incorporate multiple perspectives.
2. Examines issues from the viewpoints of different cultural and social groups.
3. Challenges **single or dominant interpretations of knowledge**.
4. Encourages students to critically examine how knowledge is constructed.
5. Integrates multicultural perspectives throughout the curriculum rather than keeping them as separate units.

Advantages

1. Provides a **deeper understanding of cultural diversity**.
2. Encourages **critical thinking and critical examination of knowledge**.
3. Gives greater recognition to historically marginalised perspectives.

4. Helps students understand complex social and historical issues from **multiple viewpoints**.
5. Promotes greater **educational inclusiveness and equity**.

Limitations

1. Requires substantial **curriculum restructuring and teacher preparation**.
2. Teachers may need additional knowledge and resources to present multiple perspectives effectively.
3. It can be **time-consuming** to redesign existing courses and teaching materials.
4. Some institutions or teachers may resist changes to established curriculum structures.
5. Poor implementation may result in confusion or oversimplification of complex cultural perspectives.

4. Decision-Making and Social Action Approach

The **Decision-Making and Social Action Approach** is the most action-oriented approach to multicultural curriculum reform. It incorporates the principles of the Transformation Approach but goes further by encouraging students to examine important social issues, consider different perspectives, make informed decisions, and take appropriate action. Students therefore move from **knowledge and understanding to critical analysis, decision-making and social participation**. The approach connects multicultural education with democratic citizenship and encourages learners to apply what they learn to real social problems.

Major Features

1. Includes the **multiple perspectives** of the Transformation Approach.
2. Students examine **real social and cultural problems**.
3. Encourages critical analysis and informed decision-making.
4. Students develop possible solutions to social problems.
5. Encourages students to undertake **appropriate social action**.

Advantages

1. Connects classroom learning with **real-life social issues**.
2. Develops **critical thinking and problem-solving skills**.
3. Promotes democratic participation and **active citizenship**.
4. Encourages students to develop a sense of **social responsibility**.
5. Helps students move from understanding social problems to considering ways of addressing them.

Limitations

1. Requires considerable **time and planning**.
2. Teachers need appropriate skills to facilitate sensitive social and cultural discussions.
3. Some social issues may be **complex or controversial**.
4. Schools may face difficulties in providing opportunities for meaningful social action.
5. Poorly designed activities may result in **superficial or symbolic action** rather than meaningful learning.

Instruction in Multicultural Education

Instruction in Multicultural Education refers to the teaching-learning process in which teachers recognise and respond to the cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, social-class, gender and other forms of diversity among learners. It is concerned not only with **what is taught**, but also with **how it is taught**, how students participate, how classroom relationships are developed, and how teaching practices provide equitable opportunities for students from different backgrounds. Banks identifies **equity pedagogy** as one of the five major dimensions of multicultural education.

1. Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching connects classroom learning with students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, languages and prior knowledge. Teachers can use local examples, community experiences, stories, literature and cultural knowledge as resources for teaching. The purpose is not to stereotype students according to their cultural background, but to recognise their existing knowledge and experiences as valuable resources for learning.

Major features:

- Recognises students' cultural backgrounds.
- Connects lessons with students' experiences.
- Uses culturally relevant examples and materials.
- Respects different cultural perspectives.
- Builds connections between home, community and school knowledge.

Advantages:

- Makes learning more meaningful.
- Increases student participation.
- Helps students value their cultural identity.
- Builds stronger connections between students and teachers.

Limitations:

- Requires teachers to understand cultural diversity.
- Teachers may unintentionally rely on stereotypes.
- Appropriate cultural resources may not always be available.
- It requires careful adaptation to individual students.

2. Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is an important instructional strategy in a multicultural classroom. Students from different cultural and social backgrounds work together to complete common learning tasks. Through

meaningful cooperation, students interact with classmates who may have different experiences and perspectives.

Major features:

- Students work in small groups.
- Groups can include learners from different backgrounds.
- Students share responsibility for learning.
- Group members discuss and solve problems together.
- Individual participation is combined with group achievement.

Advantages:

- Promotes interaction among diverse students.
- Develops cooperation and communication.
- Provides opportunities to understand different perspectives.
- Can reduce social distance between groups.
- Encourages active learning.

Limitations:

- Some students may dominate group activities.
- Cultural or language differences may create communication difficulties.
- Poorly organised groups may not provide equal participation.
- Teachers need to monitor group interaction carefully.

3. Discussion and Dialogue

Discussion and dialogue allow students to express their opinions and listen to different perspectives. In multicultural education, classroom discussion can be used to explore issues such as culture, language, religion, equality, discrimination and social justice. The teacher should create an environment where different viewpoints can be expressed respectfully.

Major features:

- Encourages open communication.
- Allows students to express different viewpoints.
- Promotes listening and respectful disagreement.
- Uses social and cultural issues as learning topics.
- Encourages critical examination of assumptions.

Advantages:

- Develops critical thinking.
- Promotes mutual understanding.
- Improves communication skills.
- Helps students recognise multiple perspectives.

Limitations:

- Sensitive issues may create disagreement.
- Some students may hesitate to express their views.
- Stronger personalities may dominate discussion.
- Teachers need skill to manage controversial issues.

4. Role Play and Simulation

Role play involves giving students different roles or situations so that they can examine an issue from another person's perspective. It can be particularly useful for developing understanding of cultural differences, discrimination, social inequality and interpersonal relationships.

For example, students may act out a situation involving a language barrier or cultural misunderstanding and then discuss the experience.

Major features:

- Students take different roles.
- Real or hypothetical social situations are used.
- Students examine situations from different perspectives.
- Reflection and discussion follow the activity.

Advantages:

- Develops empathy.
- Encourages perspective-taking.
- Makes learning active.
- Improves communication and social skills.

Limitations:

- Some students may feel uncomfortable performing.
- Sensitive issues may be oversimplified.
- Requires adequate preparation and classroom time.
- Inappropriate role assignment may reinforce stereotypes.

5. Use of Diverse Teaching and Learning Materials

Multicultural instruction requires teaching materials that represent different cultural and social groups fairly. Teachers can use textbooks, biographies, literature, photographs, films, historical documents, local materials and community resources.

Materials should not present one culture as superior or represent other groups through negative stereotypes.

Major features:

- Includes diverse cultural perspectives.
- Uses examples from different communities.
- Represents historically marginalised groups.
- Avoids stereotypes and prejudice.
- Uses both local and wider cultural resources.

Advantages:

- Broadens students' knowledge.
- Provides greater cultural representation.
- Challenges stereotypes.
- Makes the curriculum more inclusive.

Limitations:

- Suitable materials may be difficult to find.
- Some textbooks may contain cultural bias.
- Teachers need to evaluate materials critically.
- Additional resources may require time and cost.

6. Equity Pedagogy

Equity pedagogy is one of the central dimensions of Banks's multicultural education framework. It refers to teaching practices that provide students from different racial, ethnic, cultural and social groups with equitable opportunities to achieve academically.

Equity pedagogy does **not** mean lowering academic standards. Rather, teachers may modify instructional strategies, classroom activities, examples and learning support according to students' different backgrounds and learning needs.

Major features:

- Provides equitable learning opportunities.
- Recognises differences in learners' experiences.
- Uses varied teaching strategies.
- Encourages participation of all learners.
- Maintains appropriate academic expectations.

Advantages:

- Promotes educational equality.
- Supports learners from diverse backgrounds.
- Can improve participation and achievement.
- Reduces barriers to learning.

Limitations:

- Requires skilled teachers.

- Individual differences can be difficult to identify accurately.
- Adaptation of teaching requires additional planning.
- Equity may be misunderstood as simply treating every student identically.

7. Differentiated Instruction

In a multicultural classroom, learners may differ in language, prior knowledge, learning experiences, abilities and interests. **Differentiated instruction** involves adapting teaching and learning activities to accommodate these differences while maintaining appropriate learning objectives.

Teachers may vary:

- learning activities;
- examples;
- instructional materials;
- pace of learning;
- forms of student participation;
- assessment methods.

Advantages:

- Responds to learner diversity.
- Supports students with different learning needs.
- Encourages greater participation.
- Provides multiple ways of learning.

Limitations:

- Requires considerable teacher planning.
- Difficult to implement in very large classes.
- Teachers may need additional resources.
- Excessive differentiation can make classroom management difficult.

8. Inclusive Classroom Participation

Multicultural instruction requires that **all students have meaningful opportunities to participate**. Teachers should avoid favouring students on the basis of culture, ethnicity, language, religion, gender or social background.

The teacher can encourage participation through:

- group work;
- pair work;
- classroom discussion;
- presentations;
- projects;

- peer learning;
- individual activities.

The objective is to create a classroom in which every learner feels **respected, included and valued**.

9. Multicultural Assessment

Assessment is also an important part of multicultural instruction. Assessment practices should provide equitable opportunities for students and should be examined for possible cultural or linguistic bias.

Teachers can use different forms of assessment, such as:

- written tests;
- projects;
- presentations;
- portfolios;
- practical activities;
- group activities;
- classroom participation.

The *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* literature specifically includes **classroom assessment and diversity** as an important area of multicultural educational practice.

10. Role of the Teacher in Multicultural Instruction

The teacher is central to effective multicultural instruction.

A teacher should:

1. **Understand cultural diversity** among learners.
2. **Examine personal biases and assumptions.**
3. **Respect students' cultural identities.**
4. **Use inclusive teaching materials.**
5. **Encourage interaction among diverse students.**
6. **Use equitable teaching practices.**
7. **Challenge stereotypes and prejudice.**
8. **Provide opportunities for all students to participate.**
9. **Encourage critical thinking and multiple perspectives.**
10. **Create a democratic and respectful classroom environment.**

The teacher therefore acts not merely as a transmitter of information but also as a **facilitator of intercultural understanding and educational equality**.

11. Important Principles of Multicultural Instruction

The major principles can be summarised as follows:

1. Principle of Equality

Every learner should have equitable opportunities to learn and achieve.

2. Principle of Cultural Respect

Different cultural identities should be respected and valued.

3. Principle of Inclusion

All learners should be included in classroom activities.

4. Principle of Multiple Perspectives

Students should be exposed to different viewpoints.

5. Principle of Active Participation

Learners should actively participate in the teaching-learning process.

6. Principle of Critical Thinking

Students should critically examine stereotypes, assumptions and social issues.

7. Principle of Cooperation

Students from different backgrounds should have opportunities to learn together.

8. Principle of Cultural Responsiveness

Teaching should recognise students' cultural experiences and prior knowledge.

Issues Related to Multicultural Education

Multicultural education aims to provide equal and meaningful educational opportunities to learners from different cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious and social backgrounds. However, its implementation faces several challenges. The following are **15 major issues**, explained in simple language.

1. Cultural Bias in Curriculum

Sometimes the curriculum gives more importance to the history, culture and experiences of the dominant group. The contributions and experiences of minority or marginalised communities may receive less attention. This can make some students feel that their culture and identity are not properly represented in education.

2. Language Diversity

Students may speak different languages at home and may not be equally comfortable with the language used in school. This can create difficulties in understanding lessons, participating in classroom activities and expressing ideas. Language differences can therefore affect students' learning and academic performance.

3. Prejudice and Stereotyping

Students may have preconceived ideas about people belonging to other cultural, ethnic, religious or social groups. Stereotypes can also be present in textbooks and teaching materials. Such attitudes may create misunderstanding, discrimination and negative relationships among students from different backgrounds.

4. Religious Diversity

Students may belong to different religious communities and follow different beliefs, traditions and practices. If teachers or educational materials favour one religious group, other students may feel excluded. Schools therefore need to maintain respect, equality and sensitivity towards different religious backgrounds.

5. Social and Economic Inequality

Students come from families with different economic and social conditions. Some may have better access to books, technology, private tuition and other learning resources. These differences can affect educational achievement and participation, making it difficult to provide genuinely equal educational opportunities.

6. Caste and Social Discrimination

In societies where caste and social divisions exist, students may experience discrimination or exclusion because of their social background. Such experiences can affect confidence, classroom participation and academic development. Multicultural education needs to promote equality, dignity and respectful relationships among all social groups.

7. Gender Inequality

Gender stereotypes can influence classroom participation, subject choices, textbooks and teachers' expectations. Students may receive different opportunities because of their gender. Multicultural education therefore needs to challenge traditional gender roles and provide equal opportunities for all learners, regardless of gender.

8. Lack of Teacher Preparation

Teachers may not always receive sufficient training to work effectively in culturally diverse classrooms. They may lack knowledge about different cultures, languages and inclusive teaching methods. Without proper preparation, teachers may unintentionally use biased practices or fail to respond appropriately to students' diverse needs.

9. Lack of Suitable Teaching Materials

Good multicultural education requires textbooks and learning materials that represent different cultures fairly. However, suitable materials may not always be available. Some textbooks may ignore minority

groups or present them through stereotypes. Teachers therefore need to carefully select and evaluate educational resources.

10. Resistance to Curriculum Change

Some teachers, administrators or institutions may prefer traditional curriculum practices and may be unwilling to introduce multicultural perspectives. They may consider multicultural education unnecessary or believe that it increases the workload. Such resistance can make meaningful curriculum reform difficult.

11. Tokenism and Superficial Treatment

Multicultural education can sometimes be reduced to celebrating festivals, discussing traditional food, clothing or famous cultural personalities. Such activities may create awareness but do not address deeper issues such as inequality, discrimination, prejudice and unequal educational opportunities. Therefore, multicultural education should go beyond cultural celebrations.

12. Dominant Cultural Perspective

Even when different cultures are included, the dominant cultural perspective may continue to control the curriculum. Minority perspectives may be presented only as additional information. This can prevent students from developing a balanced understanding of history, society and knowledge from multiple viewpoints.

13. Classroom Conflict and Misunderstanding

Differences in language, religion, customs, values and social practices can sometimes create misunderstanding among students. If these differences are not handled carefully, they may lead to conflict or social division. Teachers need to promote communication, cooperation, respect and peaceful interaction among learners.

14. Assessment and Evaluation Problems

Standardised assessment may not always consider differences in students' language, culture and educational experiences. Some questions or examples may be unfamiliar to certain groups of learners. Therefore, assessment practices need to be fair, inclusive and sensitive to cultural and linguistic diversity.

15. Balancing Unity and Diversity

Multicultural education needs to maintain a balance between respecting cultural differences and developing a sense of common identity. Excessive emphasis on differences may create social divisions, while ignoring differences may suppress cultural identities. Education should therefore promote both **cultural diversity** and **social unity**.