Diversity Education in the MENA Region
Bridging the Gaps in Language Learning

Edited by
Hassan Abouabdelkader
Barry Tomalin

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FOREWORD

The wrangle of seventy-two sects, establish excuse for all
When truth, they saw not, the door of fable they beat (Hafiz)

This couplet, specially its first hemstitch, from Hafiz, a renowned Iranian poet, implies that different cultures baselessly and futilely fight because they cannot fathom the truth that there are so many men, so many minds. This call for peace and tolerance has been a recurrent theme throughout the history among the thinkers in different cultures to the extent that different figures such as John Lennon's "Imagine" song yearned for it.

Apart from these utopian calls, education systems can basically encounter diversity in three different ways including nativism, assimilationism, and pluralism. Nativism xenophobically considers difference foreign or even hostile, and assimilationism does not tolerate collective difference, unless it is melted in dominant culture, but pluralism endeavors to respect difference as a necessary condition for equality and prosperity just as a salad bowl requires its different ingredients to taste delectable. Today neither the nativist nor the assimilationist philosophies can provide an answer for society and the education system because they are, by and large, inconsistent with human rights such as freedom and dignity, the volume of migration and demographic dynamics, and structural inclusion. They can also pose threats to cohesion, social capital, citizenship, science, and economy. Therefore, there is a need to move from assimilationism toward informed pluralism. The patchwork culture, marked with legitimization of specificity and its interaction (not integration) with other cultures, is

generally a strength because, on the one hand, it can increase wellbeing, mental health, creative thinking, productivity, economic development, tolerance, understanding of one's culture of origin, and civility, and on the other hand, it can decrease social categorization, anxiety, conflict, polarization, and bias (Kim & Pierce, 2015; Montalvo & Reynal-Querol, 2014).

This need for pluralism incentivized many movements in educational research emerging in the form of fairness issues in argument-based approaches to validity, intercultural pragmatics, and culturally responsive pedagogy. However, the call for diversity and inclusion by any name, be it multicultural education or culturally responsive education, has not been sufficiently embraced yet by the stakeholders probably because humans are born ethnocentric, and education systems, which are responsible for developing humans, either were not concerned with diversity due to entrenched nativist or assimilationist philosophies or were scourged by a lack of support, determination, and evidence, if pluralistic. Banks' (2016, p. 3) argument that "multiculturalism could not have failed in Germany and the United Kingdom because it has never been effectively implemented in policy or practice" is a piece of evidence for the fact that diversity education has a precarious status even in the European countries.

When it comes to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and English language teaching, the situation gets even worse because they are largely imbued with infrastructural, political, ideological, and civil problems. No need to mention that the states in this region might not generally be considered true democracies in the western sense, and thus, it is apparent that democratic values including diversity education might not be as endorsed as they are in the western countries. This timely title not only showcases different interesting examples of negligence to multicultural education in the region but also troubleshoots the culprits in the light of factors including curriculum, learners, teachers, policy, ideology, and context.

As illustrated in this volume, English language education in the region is generally culture centric and politically motivated in different senses ranging from nativism to indifference. Educational policies in some countries, including Iran and Afghanistan, as conceived of in the light of essentialist renderings of Edward Said's orientalism, are ethnocentric, and thus unduly view English language teaching as "westoxification"—a Western cultural attack. However, as Barry Tomalin stated, quoting David Crystal, today English is no longer the language of the West because its non-native speakers outnumber the native ones. Some countries view it as a neutral

transmissionist phenomenon, better called a "petri dish at the service of mechanical imparting of linguistic competence to students" (Salmani Nodoushan, 2023, p. 97), void of cultural shade, wherein learners are oppressed because they are viewed as passive containers. In fact, some countries and, in turn, teachers consider English language teaching Tyrannosaurus rex and some a lingua franca (Hyland, 2006). However, according to Salmani Nodoushan (2023), the language classroom, as a society in interaction with the macro society, should be a "free milieu, where both the teacher and the students bring their affordances, aspirations, and free will to bear on both language learning and social development" (p. 109). Most of the chapters in this title serve this cause and through empirical research shed light on the gamers involved, such as the top-down and bottom-up factors.

Effective implementation of multicultural education hinges upon top-down and bottom-up policies. In this title, it is shown, consistent to Banks (2016), that top-down transformations such as curricular redressing and bottom-up measures including teacher training are two wings of a bird. This title using empirical examples from the MENA region reifies Richard's (2017) conception that the organizational curriculum (i.e., developed by the authorities) and the enacted curriculum (customized by the teachers) can interplay and culminate in an emergent curriculum, where learning as a form of sociocultural development is shaped. The insights offered in this title overall suggest teachers are at the heart of any educational endeavor including diversity education, and their identity is manifold and complex. In this regard, this book can also contribute to the call of Barkhuizen (2017) for more research into language teacher identity.

This book in nicely put discussions introduces cooperative learning or its less structured counterpart, that is, collaborative learning, as an effective means for the implementation of diversity education. There is no need to mention that this book is among a few titles, if not the first one, which taps into the importance of cooperative learning for diversity education in English language teaching in the region. This book not only credibly reflects the current status of knowledge about the merits and functions of cooperative learning in peace building and culturally responsive pedagogy (See, Ferguson-Patrick, 2020, 2022; Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 2014), but also is an admirable attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This book has an advantage over some others because it draws upon the research evidence about the classroom use of cooperative learning (e.g., Tamimy et al., 2023) and honestly notes that

the benefits of cooperative learning cannot be reaped unless they are effectively used. A word of caution is due here because cooperative learning, notwithstanding its suitability for diversity education, might not itself be by default consistent with the culture of some countries, specifically if they are considered too conservative and unassertive (see, Tamimy, 2019). Yet, it does not mean that eyes should be shut to its affordances; rather, it should be implemented with some modifications (Inns & Slavin, 2018).

Overall, the MENA region, despite its high cultural volatility arising due to the transition from traditionalism to modernism, not to mention post-modernism, and economic and political imperatives for global cooperation, is unfortunately still grappling with the rudimentary implementation of diversity education or even admitting the urgency for it, let alone its effective implementation. This is at odds with development visions many countries might have envisaged for themselves and democratic values such as peace and equality. This inattention will sooner or later show itself as social problems or even crises, which are better prevented than cured. This title, in accord with Banks (2016), depicts that the journey toward equity, diversity, and inclusion cannot be reduced to curriculum reforms, if reform at all, but also requires decent attention to intertwined players such as school culture, equitable pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and the knowledge construction process. Besides presenting the international reader with a less blurred image of the region, this book opens the black box of the complexity of English language teaching in this resource-rich part of the world so that researchers can find many interesting topics for their inquiries.

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Contents

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Abbreviations

AOU	Academic Online University
APS	Algeria Press Service
BEM	Brevet d'Enseignement Moyen
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CFL	Centre for Foreign Languages
CNES	Conseil National Economique, Social et Environnemental
CPBL	Cooperative Project-Based Learning
CSEFRS	Conseil Supérieur de l'Education, la CSEFRS Conseil Supérieure de l'Education, la Formation et de la Recherche Scientifique
DMIS	Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity
DRT	Discourse Representation Theory
EFA	Education for All
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
HE	Higher Education
IRCAM	Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe'
IT	Information Technology
LMD system	Licence (Bachelor), Master, Doctorate
MANCOVA	Multivariate Analysis of Covariance
MEN	Ministère de l'Education Nationale
MOOCs	Massive Open Online Courses
NCET	National Charter of Education, Training
NECL	The National E-Learning Center
NGO	Non Governmental organizations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONS	Office Nationale des Statistiques
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment

RC	Reading Comprehension
REE	Representation, Engagement, and Expression
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMU	Singapore Management University
T&L	Teaching and Learning
UDL	Universal design for learning
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

LIST OF CHARTS

LIST OF FIGURES

List of Graphs

LIST OF TABLES

The Challenge of Diversity Education: Defending the Devil or Adjusting the Clock?

Hassan Abouabdelkader ⬤

1 What Is Diversity Education? How Does It Relate to Language Learning, and What Aspects of Diversity Education Are Concerned? Is It a Real Issue in Language Pedagogy in MENA?

Based on the complexities inherent in the concept of diversity education itself, it is essential to put to the front the main claims of this volume by answering the above questions as they are reflected in the constituent chapters of the book. As it occurs in most fields of research, the issue of diversity in recent times has arisen to counter the discrimination and disparities between the sexes and races. As a result, several movements have upsurged to defend the rights of certain communities despite the still-existing controversies expressed by movements that seek to defend the identity of certain groups or fight the discrimination suffered by others, let alone the defenders of environmental legal rights, including biodiversity. All these discriminations are rooted in people's education and upbringing

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and forged by educational patterns dictated by adult communities to serve some specific objectives. This book is not about all of these. It simply addresses meaningful aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion that disallow the ills perpetrated in the language curricula and pedagogies and hamper learners of all ages, races, genders, and strata from development and growth.

The argument beneath this search is that using diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), as a buzzword that fits all, is unproductive unless it is given its real value and consideration. In the field of education, each of these entities drastically impacts the lives of whole generations. Their misuse in education impacts the social and psychological lives of millions of individuals. By associating the principles of diversity education with language learning, this book argues that language is closely related to people's thinking and actions and considers all the related concepts, such as equity and inclusion, as the main catalyst of human destiny, the trigger of students' engagement and interest in learning, and a manipulator of their drives and ambitions.

As it linguistically stands, diversity education refers to the extent to which an educational context or pedagogy offers equitable and inclusive opportunities for learners from diverse classes, genders, and races, as well as with diverse mental and physical abilities, on the one hand, and fights disparities, inequities, and inequalities among all learners, on the other. These challenges are taken into consideration in this volume both inside and outside the language classroom as a step toward promoting students' learning outcomes and well-being.

The 15 chapters of this book consider diversity issues as a propeller of learners' energy and enthusiasm for learning and a source of their success and learning outcomes. These chapters do not only address the way diversity education decisions in language education need to be considered from perspectives that promote students' learning, support what praises and encourages students, leverage their learning outcomes, and improve their universal understanding, but also warn against those features that impede their progress and generate inequalities among students.

Why write this book? Before engaging in this quest for solutions to the ills of learning in this emerging region, several questions came to mind. Some of these questions are: Why should education matters be investigated from dimensions that pertain to other fields of inquiry than classroom practices? Why should we scourge a noble enterprise with political

buzzwords that are often used to propagandize unreachable and unsolvable issues?

On reflecting upon the historical developments of language teaching theories and approaches throughout the past four decades from my own experience as a language teacher, I realized that most trends of past research on language teaching methods have been unicentral on a trending issue. First, they were dedicated to the way languages need to be taught, focusing on teaching content and instructions and giving more attention to linguistic and metalinguistic issues such as themes, grammar, vocabulary variations, and language skills. The learning of any of these course components has always been proposed with no consideration at all for the human factor. Later, the shift to the way they can be learned with more focus on the teaching approaches that can best carry out the job surged as a key to language instruction. The shift to learner-motivational drives towards engaging learners in communicative activities and interaction (such as the teaching of standards, language skills, and strategies for learning) has now emerged as an influential trend in learner-centered approaches and pedagogies. Currently, the new generations of learners have changed, as have the social conditions, paving the way for new trends in research and suggesting new orientations in language learning methodologies. The diversity trend has come to raise issues that are socially, technologically, and timewise connected, putting learners at the forefront of language education needs. In this new orientation, pedagogical concern has moved to the restoration of what past pedagogies have damaged, which hampered learning and prevented many students from the previous generations from achieving their goals.

Because language plays a crucial role in the life of individuals, the functions and purposes of language learning are no longer concerned with learning the language per se. Any endeavor remains useless unless it integrates language education as a priority that promotes new means of adaptability and integration of all the conditions involved in learning. According to this perspective, the notions of 'language curriculum' and 'course contents and pedagogies' are no longer separate entities, with 'curriculum' being the property of educational policymakers who prescribe the ingredients of the recipe as a product, on the one hand, and 'course contents, pedagogies, and assessments', as a separate task the accomplishment of which is the responsibility of experts and practitioners who translate the 'good-looking parcel of thoughts and philosophies' into practical guidelines. Teamwork and collaboration between all the stakeholders are

considered, in this book, as salient components of diversity education. The students and teachers have now joined the club and become determining agents in the design of what to teach and how to teach it.

Like most new paradigms, such as leadership, sustainability, constructivism, and collaborative learning, diversity education principles are issues that originate in political, economic, and other fields and reflect transdisciplinary knowledge. They have made the equation equal between teachers and learners in terms of appreciation and made teaching and learning two sides of the same coin. Language learning practices have nowadays urged teachers to go beyond the old boundaries and make more efforts to resolve the existing inequal and disruptive classrooms and pave the way for all students to be active contributors and benefactors of real-time conditions and resources (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019) without denying the local languages, culture, and traditions of the people (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 330).

2   For Whom Does Diversity Education Bell Ring?

The relevance of diversity education as a theme of this book lies in its compelling and initiating forces that impact the issue of quality education assurance in the MENA countries. Theoretically, the issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity share common principles and insights; yet they are not conceived of in this book as interchangeable, and each of them has specific effects and implications. As complementary concepts, they are the concern of all the stakeholders in language education, and all of them lend themselves to the requirements of quality education assurance. As reflected in the chapters of the book, these subtle distinctions show that they are complementary and include the principles of motivation, collaboration, and quality education standards which leverage human rights, sustainability, and promotion of human ability. What makes this book distinctive is that it reconsiders the existing pedagogical trends in terms of the current social upheavals and with reference to the principles of development and progress needed in twenty-first-century education.

The main argument of this book is that international education in MENA is at the mercy of inappropriate and sometimes repressive educational policies that lead to inequitable learning outcomes and ignominious structural inequalities in higher education (Chap. 14). In many of these countries, educational policies are still using 'culture-centric approaches' to glorify old achievements and obscure learners' prospects, diverting

students from reality. In addition to praising the positive aspects of these cultures, this book offers insights into the dysfunctions taking place and prompts new ways of cooperation within and between communities in the MENA region.

The chapters included in this volume put diversity education, equity, and inclusion in language learning at the forefront of the approaches to language instruction. The contributions examine matters related to educational policies and practices in the MENA region that impact students' learning. The works presented in the volume suggest that language learning is considered as a determining factor of human development in most countries investigated and reveal that educational policies and curricula in the whole region are a major concern in all its countries. The countries incorporated in this book include Morocco and Algeria from North Africa, Palestine, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Iran from Asia. These works also reflect the concerns and worries of educationalists in the MENA region. They all portray the inequities and problems incurred by these communities and highlight their achievements, credentials, and expectations.

The first incentive underlying the choice of diversity education in this book is that teaching languages is not a matter of staffing learners with knowledge of the foreign language. Instead, it is much more a matter of how teaching and learning are perceived as indissociable catalysts that synergize the educational systems (Ahmed & Abouabdelkader, 2016) and resolve the existing inequities undermined by learners from the lower strata, the disabled, and others in the MENA countries.

The second incentive underlying this search as a potential source of inspiration that propelled our curiosity to probe the ills and credentials of learning languages in MENA countries is that there have been several attempts to improve learning pedagogies in this region both at the theoretical and practical levels. Unfortunately, achievement of these objectives is reported to be hampered by constraints and policies for which teachers are not responsible (See Chaps. 12 and 14). The researchers involved in this volume have succinctly highlighted the significance of curricular orientations, multicultural education contents, inappropriate pedagogies, and inequitable assessments, in teacher training programs, and re-evaluated language policies as key considerations in fostering a more inclusive educational environment (Bougroum & Ibourk, 2011; Ichou & Fathi, 2022; Imouri, 2021).