

Beyond Bindis, Bhajis, Bangles, and Bhangra: Exploring Multiculturalism in Southwest England Primary Schools, Early Research Findings

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Abstract : Education as a discipline will probably be shaped by the importance it places on a conceptual, curricular, and pedagogical need to shift the emphasis toward transformative classrooms working for positive change through cultural diversity. Awareness of cultural diversity and race equality has heightened following George Floyd's killing in the USA in 2020. This increasing awareness is particularly relevant in areas of historically low ethnic diversity which have lately experienced a rise in ethnic minority populations and where inclusive growth is a challenge. This research study aims to explore the perspectives of practitioners, students, and parents towards multiculturalism in four South West England primary schools. A qualitative case study methodology has been adopted framed by sociocultural theory. Data were collected through virtually conducted semi-structured interviews with school practitioners and parents, observation of students' classroom activities, and documentary analysis of classroom displays. Although one-third of the school population includes ethnically diverse children, BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) characters featured in children's books published in Britain in 2019 were almost invisible, let alone a BAME main character. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) are vocal about extending the Curriculum beyond the academic and technical arenas for pupils' broader development and creation of an understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. However, race equality and community cohesion which could help in the students' broader development are not Ofsted's school inspection criteria. The absence of culturally diverse content in the school curriculum highlighted by the 1985 Swann Report and 2007 Ajegbo Report makes England's National Curriculum look like a Brexit policy three decades before Brexit. A revised National Curriculum may be the starting point with the teachers as curriculum framers playing a significant part. The task design is crucial where teachers can place equal importance on the interwoven elements of "how", "what" and "why" the task is taught. Teachers need to build confidence in encouraging difficult conversations around racism, fear, indifference, and ignorance breaking the stereotypical barriers, thus helping to create students' conception of a multicultural Britain. Research showed that trainee teachers in predominantly White areas often exhibit confined perspectives while educating children. Irrespective of the geographical location, school teachers can be equipped with culturally responsive initial and continuous professional development necessary to impart multicultural education. This may aid in the reduction of employees' unconscious bias. This becomes distinctly pertinent to avoid horrific cases in the future like the recent one in Hackney where a Black teenager was strip-searched during period wrongly suspected of cannabis possession. Early research findings show participants' eagerness for more ethnic diversity content incorporated in teaching and learning. However, schools are considerably dependent on the knowledge-focused Primary National Curriculum in England. Moreover, they handle issues around the intersectionality of disability, poverty, and gender. Teachers were trained in times when foregrounding ethnicity matters was not happening. Therefore, preoccupied with Curriculum requirements, intersectionality issues, and teacher preparations, schools exhibit an incapacity due to which keeping momentum on ethnic diversity is somewhat endangered.

Keywords : case study, curriculum decolonisation, inclusive education, multiculturalism, qualitative research in Covid19 times

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