

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION VERSUS INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes some basic properties of multicultural education and intercultural communication. It discusses their differences as well as similarities. As societies throughout the world become more culturally diverse, there is a subsequent increase in intercultural contact among people in various contexts of their daily lives. Education has a special role to play in the concept, having in mind the encouragement of the development of human potential to acquire competences as the general ability of an individual. Multicultural education, on the other hand, involves a very wide and respectful attitude to all cultural values and traditions in the world. This kind of education method holds that all cultures have their own heritage and values. Interaction to diverse cultural traditions is a must for a balanced education system. Multicultural education suggests respectful attitudes to a region's native culture as well as others' culture. 'Tolerance' through diversity and unity is the learning goal of this system. Nevertheless, some philosophers have said that there is not a sufficient amount of cultural integration or fusion in multicultural education, since it actually encourages the co-existence of unchanged but mutually respectful cultures, meaning there is a possibility that the worst aspects of each culture may, unfortunately, be preserved. Intercultural communication, on the other hand, searches for linkages between one culture and another. The medium of communication could be language, dress, festivals, travels, trades and so forth. Finally, an evaluation has been done to answer the question of whether we should consider multicultural education or intercultural communication system for a better future.

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Introduction

Multicultural education is a new kind of thought which has the potential to be a successful alternative to mainstream education. In mainstream education, only geo-cultural heritage, values, traditions and practices are taught and emphasized. As a result, a student may come out with a perception that his or her own culture is superior or dominant over others. Such education seems to be less tolerant towards

other cultural traditions and values. Eventually, this methodology could be responsible to spread intolerant attitudes to society. Multicultural education, on the other hand, involves a very wide and respectful attitude to all cultural values and traditions in the world. This kind of education method holds that all cultures have their own heritage and values. Interaction to diverse cultural traditions is a must for a balanced education system. Multicultural education suggests respectful attitudes to a region's native culture as well as others' culture. 'Tolerance' through diversity and unity is the learning goal of this system.

Intercultural communication, on the other hand, searches for linkages between one culture and another. The medium of communication could be language, dress, festivals, travels, trades and so forth. Intercultural communication aims to learn other cultural values and traditions by 'mutual respect'. Cultural exchange enables two or more parties to understand their deep rooted feelings, emotions, values, and practices through mutual benefit.

Although multicultural education and intercultural communication has some similarities there are considerable differences among them. For example, both multicultural education and intercultural communication have the aim to learn others' cultural wisdom. However, their way of learning could be different. One teaches different cultural values in one classroom while the other teaches them in a diverse curriculum, methodology and practice.

In this paper, some basic properties of multicultural education and intercultural communication have been analyzed. It compares and discusses their differences as well as similarities. Finally, an evaluation has been done to answer the question of whether we should consider multicultural education or intercultural communication system for a better future.

II. Multicultural Education

As defined by the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension,

"Multicultural education is a vehicle for people who have different value systems, customs, and communication styles to discover ways to respectfully and effectively share resources, talents and ideas. It incorporates the idea that all students-regardless of their gender and social class, and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics should have an equal opportunity to learn. It recognizes that some students, because of these characteristics, have a better chance to learn in schools as they are currently structured, than do students who belong to other groups or who have different cultural characteristics."

Sensibly, multicultural education ought to be more widespread with the passage of time. Proof of that intuitive concept can be found in the book "Multicultural Education in the United States" by David E Washburn, Neil L. Brown, and Robert W. Abbott, which resolutely states,

*"Our data show that five of the six large school districts in that state [Iowa] have multicultural education programs. Of the states that Gollnick reports to have followed Iowa's lead, Maryland (thirteen of sixteen), Minnesota (eleven of thirteen), Nebraska (two of three), and New Jersey (seven of eleven), show high levels of involvement in multicultural education among their largest school districts. Delaware, which issued a comprehensive plan, but did not include an accountability system, has two of its four large districts reporting multicultural education programs. West Virginia, which requires counties to provide staff development in multicultural education, has six of eight large districts with [multicultural education] programs. Arkansas (three of five), Connecticut (four of five), Kansas (four of six), Kentucky (three of seven), Michigan (eleven of twenty-three), Ohio (ten of eighteen), and Washington (sixteen of twenty-six), are the other states that have policies related to multicultural education."*ⁱⁱ

However, what makes multicultural education such an ideal process for mass instruction? Put simply, it combines cultural integration, mass 'broad' education, and the cultivation of an 'inclusive' mindset in one neat package. In multicultural education, students learn from the best of all cultures, but concurrently, cultural diversity is encouraged by the very action of recognizing the unique and innate goodness that is found in every culture. Nevertheless, some philosophers have said that there is not a sufficient amount of cultural integration or fusion in multicultural education, since it actually encourages the co-existence of unchanged but mutually respectful cultures, meaning there is a possibility that the worst aspects of each culture may, unfortunately, be preserved. Proponents of multicultural education argue, on the other hand, as Arne Næss also opines about deep ecology,

*"If we didn't disagree on anything of importance [which Næss meant to be unecological practises, but which in this case could mean socially unfavourable practices] it means that we are getting into a kind of completely homogenous culture which is a terrible thing, so better to really dislike each other's position [which in this case could mean cultural view] than have no differences."*ⁱⁱⁱ

However, an unequivocal advantage of multiculturalism is that it fosters mutual respect among cultures. This is certainly an important point, considering the protectionist and populist agendas of most political parties and even supposed 'entities of peace' nowadays. At a time when President Donald Trump is counting on the hatred of Mexicans, immigrants and Muslims for votes, and even the Dalai Lama is opposing long-term immigration of African Muslims to Europe, perhaps multiculturalism is one of the ways most worthy of consideration when trying to develop a respectful and safe society for people from fantastically diverse cultures all around the world.

III. Intercultural Communication

A long-existing solution which has been proposed to combat the inflexibility of multicultural education is intercultural communication. As stated by the Spring Institute,

*"Intercultural communication focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms and the development of deep relationships. In an intercultural society, no one is left unchanged because everyone learns from one another and grows together."*ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

Intercultural communication is the method of creating this kind of society.

One of the advantages of intercultural communication is that it is able to, over time, create an association of cultures, thus meaning that any person from this kind of uniform culture shall easily be able to associate, rather than just respect, all of its component cultures.

Another said advantage is that since intercultural communication leads to a mixture of all cultures, it may be easier for a person to integrate into society than if the society was based off multiculturalism, as it is more likely that the respective cultures have something in common. That is, of course, better than each having respect for, yet unfamiliarity with, the other. Nevertheless, this argument is debatable, and shall be looked at in further detail in the eighth chapter.

Inversely, many philosophers argue that cultural diversity is better than cultural integration, since in the case of the latter no one culture is fully followed by the members of the community. A case could be made to show that, contrary to expectation, the people belonging to this homogenous culture shall actually find themselves isolated from people of their component cultures, who shun the former for not retaining a majority of the original cultural practices of the latter.

IV. Mainstream Education

Regardless of our speculations about the relative advantages and disadvantages of multicultural education and intercultural communication, by far the most widespread and prevalent form of education in the world today is mainstream education. A great example of that is the Bangladeshi public education system.

It is often said that in the textbooks taught at government schools in Bangladesh, minority communities such as tribal groups, including the Chakma, Marma and Garo communities, are highly underrepresented. Because this lacking exists in the education sector, so we can rest assured that multicultural education is not carried out in these schools.

The alternative route discussed in the previous chapter was intercultural communication. As the name implies, it deals with effective and positive communication between different cultural groups, which helps to foster trust through openness and respect. In Bangladesh, that would mean good relations between the tribal communities and the general Bengali-speaking public.

Instead of trust and openness, two very different things are the usual scenarios in Bangladesh:

i) We openly see certain Bengali individuals grabbing the lands of the tribal communities. To date, not many have been taken to account for their actions.

ii) The pace of development of the living standards, wages, availability of goods, etc. in tribal groups are not nearly as high as that in traditionally Bengali communities in Bangladesh. This is an indication that neither multicultural education nor intercultural communication is existent in dealings between minority and majority cultural groups in Bangladesh.

Then, the question arises, is this situation in Bangladesh only, or is it also prevalent in the majority of countries in the world?

Unfortunately, the reality is that truly, few countries, including many developed countries currently have highly multicultural policies, as shown in Will Kymlicka's Multiculturalism Policy Index for 2010 (shown below):

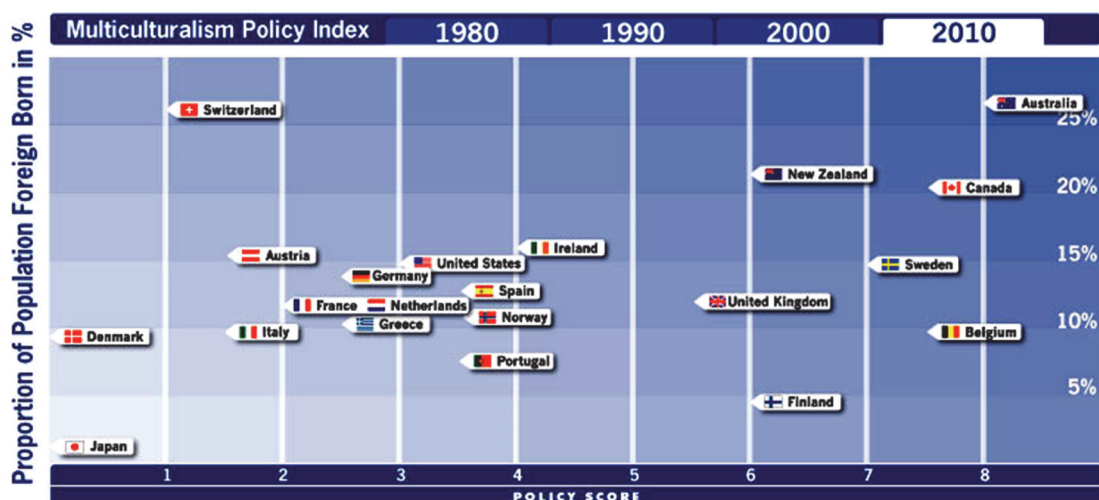


Figure 1: Multiculturalism Policy Index for 2010

Here, we can see that most developed countries have scores less than the mean of ~ 3.7 , and less than or equal to the mode and median of ~ 3.5 . Only 8 of the 21 represented countries have higher scores. The highest score is 8 but the lowest score of 0.

It is also important to note that the only Asian country on the list, Japan, which has a rigid 'mainstream' education system, has a policy score of exactly 0, though its percentage of foreign-born populations is a non-zero $\sim 0.9\%$.

Two other interesting findings of Kymlicka arise from this index, and they shall be discussed in high detail when we get to the penultimate chapter. It shall be said now, however, that these results shall have a big impact on our final decision on whether multicultural education or intercultural communication is better for the society.

V. Similarities and Differences Between Multicultural Education and Intercultural Communication

In this section, we shall be analyzing the similarities and differences between multiculturalism and intercultural education, while stating which method is from different viewpoints in the case of differences.

Similarities between the Two Approaches

There are mainly two similarities between intercultural communication and multicultural education.

Firstly, both of them place great emphasis on respecting and giving equal fundamental rights to people from different cultural communities. This is evident in both highly multicultural societies such as Australia and highly intercultural societies such as Ireland.

Secondly, both of them highly encourage peace, understanding, and co-habitation between people of different geo-political identities. This is a different thing from just being respectful to another person. White people in America do generally feign respect for the black, Latino, and Arab communities, who as citizens receive the same education, legal opportunities, travel and ownership rights, etc. as the former, but in reality there is a recent recession in the understanding and co-operation between the different communities. We can see direct evidence of this in the political campaigns run by certain individuals from the beginning of the twenty-first century onwards.

1. Differences between the Two Approaches

We can differentiate between multicultural education and intercultural communication on the basis of two criteria: Method and Consequences.

2. Difference in Methods of the Two Approaches

In multicultural education, representation of minority geo-cultural identities is guaranteed as part of the formal education programme. As a result, children of all cultures learn about the others, and because the education system must be non-segregationist in any truly multicultural society, so there is definitely going to be positive communication and interaction between the different cultural communities. However, though there exists the development of inter-cultural respect, amicability, and familiarity, there is little change to the individual cultures themselves, since multicultural education fosters cultural diversity, not cultural change.

On the other hand, intercultural communication only emphasises 'deep' inter-cultural communication, and thus cultural combination, since all cultures learn from each other and no one remains unchanged.

3. Difference in Consequences of the Two Approaches

There are mainly two consequences of multicultural education that are different from intercultural communication:

i) It fosters cultural diversity and prevents the formation of a homogenous culture. Therefore, the original geo-cultural identity of the peoples are preserved safely, and they are not forced to combine with other cultures.

ii) Thus, the cultural heritage of all the constituent cultures, which includes their unique food, lifestyles, festivals, etc., is still retained and celebrated by them and others.

However, if someone wishes to be part of another, or a combined, culture, then he or she is free to do so and it is left entirely to the individual's choice and desire.

In the case of intercultural communication, the opposites of the first two points are resultant, furthermore, the point made in the previous paragraph is left not to choice, but to order.

Nevertheless, in both cases, all the constituent cultures are respected, and all of them are friend, hospitable, and supportive of the others. The common goal of both the two approaches is, after all, creating a harmonious society, but it is the different answers to the "How should the cultural fabric be of such a society?" that leads to the two different and distinct approaches, and their respective emphasis, ideas, methods, and consequences.

VI. Differences between Multicultural Education and Mainstream Education

Quite clearly at this stage, there are no major similarities between multicultural education and mainstream education.

However, there are two major differences:

Firstly, in multicultural education, all cultures have representation in books, lectures, and other educational materials, so that all cultural communities learn to respect each other and be amiable towards each other.

Secondly, in multicultural education, cultural diversity is encouraged, but in mainstream education, cultural integration into the major culture of the state is encouraged. An extreme example of this is China. The Chinese 'education camps' for both adults and children in Xinjiang specifically target the major cultural minority in China, that is, the Uighur Muslims. As a result, in the words of Dr. Adrian Zenz, "I believe the evidence points to what we must call cultural genocide."ⁱ That is the perfect example of how awry mainstream education may go from the creation of a harmonious society. On the other hand, newcomers regularly state the most multicultural societies around the world as the friendliest, most welcoming, and 'safest' places that they have ever called 'home'.

VII. Similarities and Differences Between Intercultural Communication and Mainstream Education

Unlike with multicultural education, there is a major similarity between intercultural communication and mainstream education. An example of this might be the South African education system. Here, the South African culture is constantly changing due to widespread interactions between the white, Xhosa, Indian, and Afrikaans communities. However, the latter three groups are underrepresented in the education system, and though we get into a homogenous culture, we still have sub-cultural conflicts. Thus, the result is not very different from that of mainstream education, and so it could be counted as a similarity of consequence.

The differences between the two, on the other hand, are twofold.

Firstly, in intercultural communication, the speed of the process of cultural combination is almost fully dependent on how willing a particular community is to integrate. It is by no means forced upon them by setting a time limit. However, that is the scenario when it comes to mainstream education. In every country around the world with a non-multicultural, non-interculturally communicative, mainstream education system, most minority cultures are forced to assimilate into a new homogenous culture in a rather constrained period, usually between 30 and 100 years, and in extreme cases, in under 20 years.

Secondly, in intercultural communication, there is some form of respect and dignity for all cultures. However, in the mainstream education system, because of the underrepresentation and low treatment of cultural minorities there, there is a lack of respect for others. As a result, cultural conflict arises, which is exactly why most countries are switching away from mainstream education to multicultural education and intercultural communication.

VIII. Multicultural Education or Intercultural Communication?

In this section, we shall complete our comparative analysis of multicultural education and intercultural communication by arguing that we consider multicultural education to be superior to intercultural communication. There are mainly three reasons for this decision.

Firstly, we shall look at the scenarios where the plans of action are not carried out properly. In case of multicultural education, that could be when adequate representation is not given to minorities in educational materials. However, the different communities are still bound to meet each other, so intercultural communication is still carried out as a part of an attempt at multiculturalism. This

means that in the failure of the latter, the former, being a component, is the lower step, or 'cushion'. An example of this is the formerly mentioned country of South Africa. It is a multicultural society, but the education system has been pushed a step down from multicultural education to intercultural communication. Despite that, black South Africans receive a very high level of representative power in the country, as shown by the widely acclaimed South African cricket team and all the post-apartheid Presidents of South Africa.

On the other hand, in case of the failure of intercultural communication, the result will be mainstream education, and in the worst case scenario, "cultural genocide", with varying levels of severity. The latter part was explained in more detail in section six.

Now, we can draw a conclusion from the above analysis:

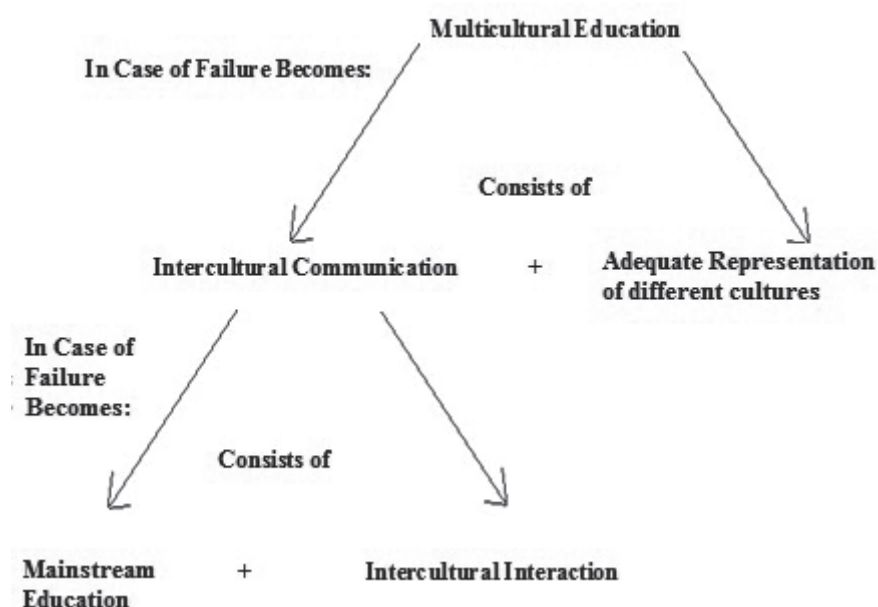
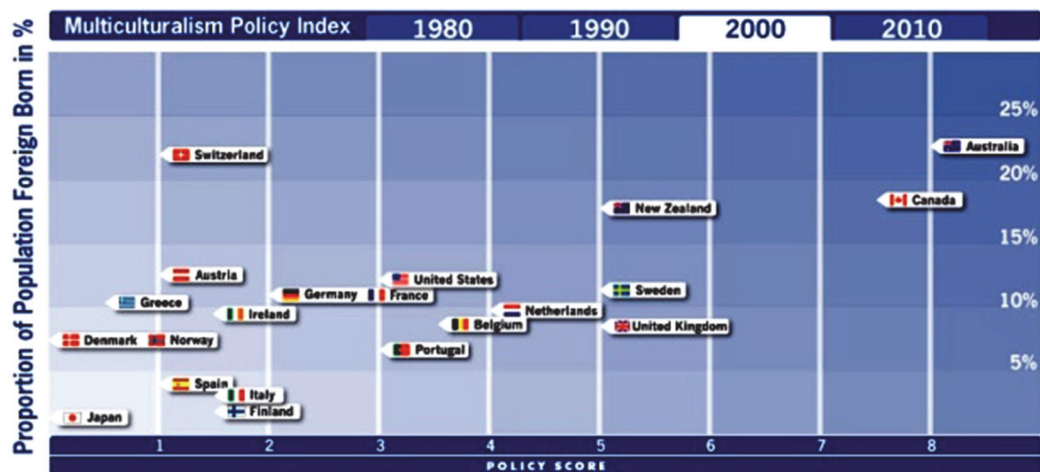
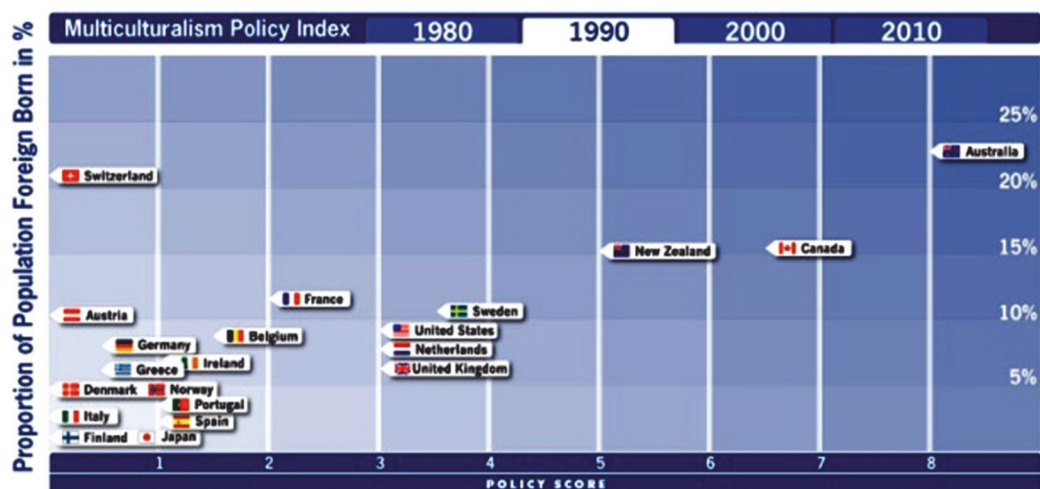


Figure 2: Cases and Components of the two types of Education

This concept clearly shows the superiority by depth of multicultural education over intercultural communication. Perhaps in recognition of this, there has been an increase in multicultural policy scores for most developed and highly-educated countries around the world.

That is perhaps best reflected by the demonstration of the evolution of such countries' scores in Kymlicka's Multiculturalism Policy Index. The indices are shown below:



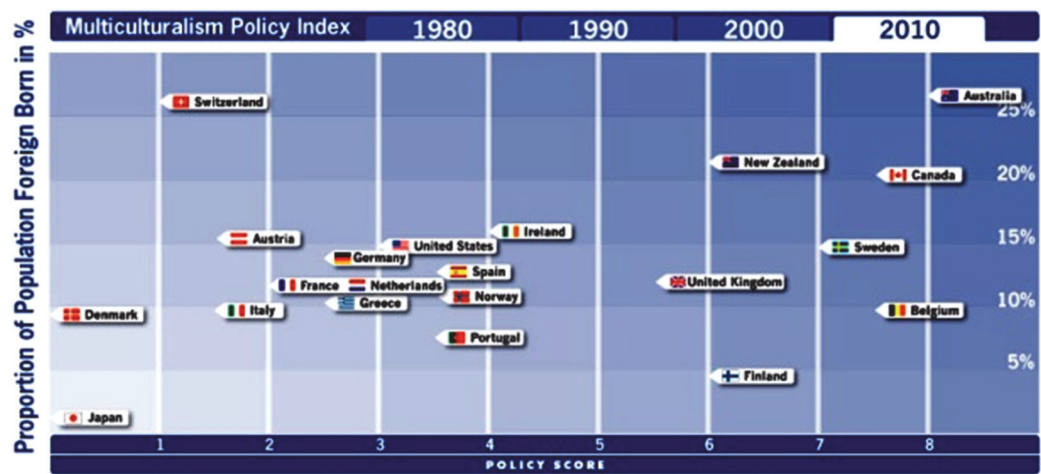


Figure 3: Multiculturalism Policy Indices: 1980-2010ⁱⁱ

Here, there are two main points of interest:

- i) The mean and median of the multiculturalism policy index scores, and
- ii) The yearly rate of growth of the mean and median of the multiculturalism policy index scores.

Our findings are represented below:

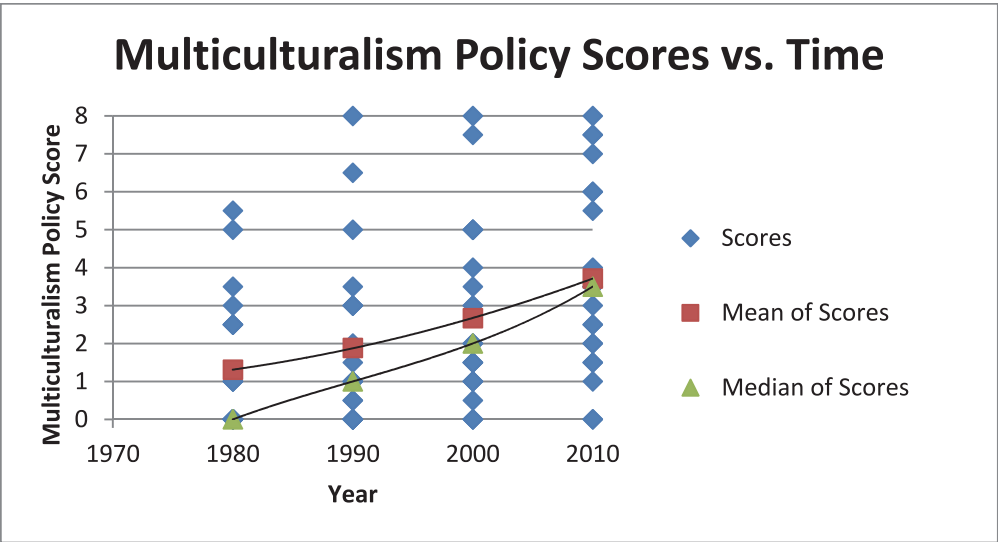


Figure 4: Mean and Median of Multicultural Index Scores

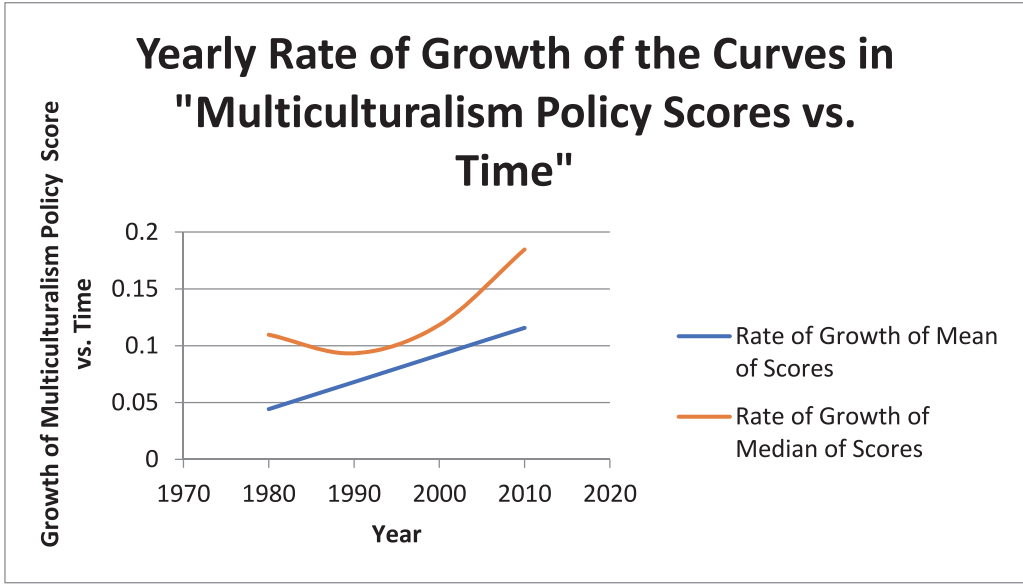


Figure 5: Yearly rate of growth of mean and median of Multicultural Index Scores

As the graphs clearly show, the mean and median of the multiculturalism index scores are both increasing with the passage of time. Not only that, it is also evident that there has been an increase of the yearly rate of growth of the mean and median of multiculturalism index scores.¹ This leads us to two conclusions, both of which agree with our own opinion:

Firstly, more and more countries are implementing multicultural policies, and Secondly, that this is now increasing at an ever-faster rate.

Thus, we conclude that multicultural education is favourable over intercultural communication, both in the long-term and on a large scale.

IX. Conclusion

In this paper, we looked at the respective similarities, differences, and pros and cons of multicultural education, intercultural communication, and mainstream education, and eventually delivered a verdict on the favorability of either in the long-term and on a large scale.

¹ Equations for Figure 4: The polynomial equations P_{Mean} of order 2 and P_{Median} of order 3 that give the obtained values.

Values for figure 5: $\frac{d}{dt}(P_{Mean})$ and $\frac{d}{dt}(P_{Median})$, in that order.

We started off by defining multicultural education. We said that it recognizes the varying needs and concerns of students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and provides adequate representation on educational materials to all cultures. Then, we deduced the two obvious effects of multicultural education: firstly, it tries to ensure cultural diversity, and secondly, it ensures all cultures respect each other in the non-homogenous cultural fabric of the society.

After that, we moved on to intercultural communication. Here, the cultures all interact in such a way that all cultures learn from each other, so nobody remains the same. The arguments for and against intercultural communication include, (i) it leads to a homogenous culture, (ii) it allows more cultural variety in the resultant culture, which makes it easier for those people to interact with others from the component cultures, and (iii) no *one* culture is strictly adhered to.

In section four, we analyzed mainstream education. Briefly stated, little to no advantage was found there, instead, we found that it generally leads to cultural intolerance and lack of respect for the geo-cultural identities of other cultures. Furthermore, we found that, even though the support for multicultural education is increasing around the world, most developed nations are yet to complete the transition from mainstream to multicultural education, though they are trying.

After that, we discussed the similarities and differences between multicultural education and intercultural communication. Their similarities are that (i) they both encourage intercultural respect, and (ii) they both support peaceful co-habitation between different cultures. The main difference is in the retention of cultural diversity and the avoidance of homogeneity in the case of multicultural education, and the opposite in the case of intercultural communication.

Then, in section six, we highlighted the lack of intercultural respect and cultural diversity in purely mainstream education compared to multicultural education, drawing the example of ethnic intolerance of Xinjiang in the mainstream-education-dominated country of China.

Before moving on to the conclusion, we discussed the similarities and differences between intercultural communication and mainstream education. The major similarity is, all cultural minorities tend to be underrepresented in educational materials in both cases. The main differences, on the other hand, are: (i) in intercultural communication, the time period for the achievement of homogeneity is dependent on how willing a culture is to compound or integrate, but there is no such scope for choice in as mainstream education system, and (ii) in intercultural communication, there is respect between all the component cultures, due to the presence of positive intercultural interaction.

Finally, we came to section eight, where we decided our preference and stated our reasons. Firstly, we deduced that multicultural education is really the combination of intercultural communication and the adequate representation of different cultures, while intercultural communication is the summation of mainstream education and intercultural interaction.

In realization of this, and finding the ever-increasing implementation and rate of implementation of multicultural education by most developed governments around the world (the data was sourced from Kymlicka's Multiculturalism Policy Index), we conclude that in the long-term and on the large scale, multicultural education is a far better alternative to mainstream education than intercultural communication.

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Disclosure statement

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