

The Role of Multicultural Education in Constructing a Democratic-pluralistic Society in Iran

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Abstract: Multicultural education, as an educational reform movement, has been given ample attention since 1960s. It has sought to promote the democratic values and educational equality in culturally and racially diverse communities. One of the most important issues at the forefront of education in multi-ethnic societies is how to bring social cohesion by helping people from different cultural, racial, linguistic and ethnic groups develop the positive intergroup attitudes. Given the importance of multicultural education in recognizing and respecting diversity, this paper seeks to investigate how multicultural education can promote the construction of a democratic society. In this qualitative investigation, data was collected through individual interviews, focus group discussions and oral history. The well-known technique of Delphi method was used to analyse the data. The results reveal that multicultural-pluralistic education is poised to maintain educational equilibrium, and develop cross-cultural knowledge and values. Indeed, paying attention to pluralist education can be a way of making democracy more accessible by building on what can be prevented from achieving cultural diversity. As long as the dominant discourses rooted in pre-modern eras do not open the way to play the signs and the presence of the abandoned and marginalized groups, practicing of the democracy will only remain in the realm of constructing and creating political inputs. The liberation from of such institutions, which itself has become the most fundamental challenge of human life, has gone through the reconstruction and the foundation of a focused and non-pluralistic educational system. Something that doubles the hope of achieving progress and freedom in society.

Keywords: multicultural education; multi-cultural system; democratic society; cultural-ethnic diversity.

Introduction

In fact, the formal education system, as part of the political structure of society attempts to produce and reproduce the political and social subjects for a defined time and place. Governments and political factions try to prevail through education, a wide range of selective laws and policies to apply their insights, in a way that achieving of national and political ideals become smoother. Such an approach, especially in modern western countries not only did not provide public appearance and formation of educational public spheres, but also overcame the centralized educational structure that helped bourgeois and middle-class discourse. It was used as a means for monitoring and firm foundation for the ideological and strategic domination of governments over citizens; therefore its consequences have been; social inequality and racial, ethnic and cultural discrimination. The concept of social and cultural inequality in recent decades suffered a severe criticism. Basil Bernstein, referring to linguistic duality among children in lower and higher classes, notes the limited language of the lower classes against the extended language skills of children of the upper classes. In his view, the education system has provoked more to maintain social inequalities between these two categories, because the educational system has been more consistent with the language and values of middle and higher classes than the lower classes; this caused the lower classes endure the inequalities and assumed it natural (Giddens, 1999).

Recent developments after 1970, especially the final movement named as the ENDS which has sealed end all the biases and modern prescriptions, (like the subject, the end of ideology, the end of History, Macro narratives etc.) and the necessity of return to the humanistic and pluralistic education system, have been highlighted. Although functional and pragmatic perspectives consider education as a

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response to social and economic needs of society, but critics of such an approach view it as a form of passive consumption, and the creation of the Guardian organization, in which the educational system functions to normalize the unconditional accepting of the existing social order.

Such criticism for reviewing the educational system as an approach has paved the way for shaping the public sphere and democracy. Modern thinkers point to the critical function of education in creating an ideal society and free citizens; and hence pluralistic and critical attention to education (Giroux 2002). We need to pay attention to what is perhaps the educational system of multiculturalism. Such an approach rebuilds the realm of education, not only as a place for education, but as a democratic position that include all cultures and ethnic groups. This ideal will pave the way to achieve a peaceful democracy and equality. It provides an opportunity to students and teachers to use their critical capacity in order to change social and cultural forms and norms. Such capacity with regard to cultural diversity and social and cultural pluralism in countries like Iran, creates the additional development on various aspects. On the other hand, it would create a more equitable distribution of job opportunities and social situations that leads to the elimination or reduction of social and economic inequalities in society.

To prevent or relieve inequalities in education, this paper seeks to discover that whether a common educational content should be provided for all students or the opportunity to design specific educational content according to the various ethnics within schools, cities, and provinces and countries is needed. This will raise the following questions. Is it possible to develop the educational content that include cultural differences and challenging stereotypes? Should the curriculum be guided by stakeholders and community groups with them be delegated to local authorities and schools under a general framework? Another important thing that planners and policy makers must deal with is the status of language teaching. In order to improve the academic performance, it seems essential to promote the use of bilingual education at schools in culturally and ethnically mixed areas. Decision-making about such things is usually taken from political point of view. These decisions surely affect the equality of educational and market opportunities, cultural diversity and identity. Generally, the answer should be given by paying more attention to pluralistic education that considered as postmodernist approach that flourishes the rejected identities the marginalized cultures. Pluralistic education prepares the society for the development, and promotes greater tolerance and critical approaches to social development. The post-modern education can be effective for such an ideal environment in developing societies like Iran, which has a multi-ethnic context. The problem of ethnic and national identity in recent decades has become an important issue - especially in countries with ethnic and cultural diversity (Rabbani et al., 2009). Therefore, one of important problems is that how ethnic groups should link and interact with each other in such societies. In other words, it has been proposed that the extensive relations between social units help to solidify social integration (Tavasoli and Qasimi, 2002).

Previous Researches

Cultural diversity is the most basic property of societies throughout the world. The cultural variation, particularly after political developments in post-World War II became one of the most challenging issues related to modern democracy. Park (2000) named different types of cultural diversity in the community as follow: a) subcultural diversity: members of such groups sharing values and meaning with the dominant culture, are trying to offer different lifestyle or space for conventional family structure within the same culture. b) Diversity of attitude: some community members have different towards the principles and values of the dominant culture; they try to substitute the some values with alternatives. For example, feminists are critical of patriarchal policies, and religious groups are critical of secular trends. c) Diversity of the community or society; different groups in modern societies with self-awareness and a more or less organized communities act according to their own belief system and their practical environment such as, immigrants, religious communities or indigenous people (Parekh, 2000).

Pluralistic Education

Multicultural education is a perfect reform of process and school policies related to education system and students. This type of training challenges different strains of racism and all forms of discrimination between different social groups, and recognizes pluralism and cultural diversity (Nieto & Bode, 2007).

Of course, definitions of multicultural education have changed over time. In the 1990s, American theorist of multicultural education emphasized on the importance of "social reconstruction" to overcome racist attitudes, social and cultural discrimination and inequality in access to power (Grant & Sleeter, 1999). James Banks as one of the most famous theorist of multi-cultural education argues that in order to have complete and correct implementation of multicultural education, teachers and officials should adhere correctly to five principles. In case of teaching concepts and skills, they should use different sources belonging to different social and cultural groups to help students learn this fact that knowledge is obtained from various sources. This will help students to view and learn intergroup attitudes and behaviors. Teachers need to modify their practices and teaching strategies in a way that students from different groups, races, cultures and social classes have fair and equal educational experiences. Furthermore, the overall culture of the school environment should be organized in such a way that students from different social and cultural groups in the school enjoy equal status (James & Bank cited in Sleeter, 2005).

Bank (1993) believes that the second phase of a multi-cultural education began when educators interested in ethnic studies, found that ethnic studies need to be noted in school curricula and teacher training. Accordingly, multi-ethnic education should be the basis for multicultural education, which aims to create structural and systematic changes in the educational environment of schools, which is intended to increase educational equality and justice (Bank, 1993). Nieto and Bode, to accentuate the goals of multicultural education, posit that any program would be worthless without focusing on the following three principles. 1. Eliminating inequalities and promoting equal access to educational opportunities. 2. Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of all students and providing high-quality education for all of them. 3. Providing equal opportunities for all students as members of a democratic society in order to develop their critical thinking and creativity (Nieto & Bode, 2007).

Multicultural education, on one hand, is the main foundation for a democratic society; and on the other, it is a criteria for the commitment and belief of politicians for constructing a democratic society. It is a main criteria for distinguishing democratic societies from non-democratic ones. From this perspective, multicultural education means recognizing cultural, social and ethnic differences in society. However, such differences can become a source of discrimination and inequality, and impose many material and spiritual costs on society. This study investigates the multicultural education at three levels: micro (people such as teachers, professors, students, and their thoughts), mezzo (cultural and educational settings, such as schools and universities) macro level (educational system). The educational system consists of four components, namely: 1) input: pupils, students; 2) factors affecting system: teachers, books and educational content, and learning environment; 3) output: culture and knowledge generated; 4) feedback: evaluation process. Preparing the ground for software development means creation of change in its input processing (the students) in a way that meets all the characteristics of modern humans. They can influence the environment in such a way to establish proper and appropriate changes due to the tremendous waves of modernity. Such a person from the perspective of Inkeles has the following features: 1. the enjoyment of free opinion and attention to the diversity of ideas. 2. Willingness to organizing and planning. 3. The potential of environmental mastery. 4. Knowledge of the world. 5. Respect for others. 6. Belief in science and technology. 7. Respect for equality and respect for the rights of others.

Post-modern Approach

The idea of postmodernism as a universal notion refers to an attitude of skepticism, or rejection towards ideologies and different tenets of universalism, it dates back to World War II in the West, especially after the transformation of the angle of view toward the universe. All in all, postmodern notion is typically characterized by tendencies to pluralism, and epistemological and moral relativism. Uncertainty to Meta narratives and critical interpretations of the structures that had prevailed during the modern era on human subjects, caused movement that decentralizes all that would become the center or the foundation. Postmodernism with the negation of viewing the world as an interconnected whole, coherent and inclusive, and rejects any expected final solution and a definitive answer. As a spirit of pluralism and modernism disbelief questions the legitimacy of knowledge, authority of reason, centrality

of man and nature and the rule of dominant ideas in the world. It has created a shift in world opinion (Pourbayram, 2010). Such a situation is presented by Derrida as a critique of Logocentric. Indeed, the postmodern thought paved the way for formation of a trend which shaped the choice of orientation, uncertainty, complexity, multiple forms of multiculturalism and understanding of the world and texts.

Otherness and rejection of the whole orientation

This approach directly associated with the concept of pluralism and rejection of any whole-oriented approach. Accordingly postmodernism is tied to cultural diversity. The main essence of the idea of cultural diversity, is the acceptance of identity of other cultures, although they are sub-culture. It means that in education, educational policy and planning should be decentralized in a way that the disadvantaged and the marginalized, the minorities of any category including: ethnic, linguistic, cultural and gender should be considered (Pakseresht, 2007). On this basis, according to Marshall and Peters (1994), postmodernism is not just a political, philosophical and aesthetic movement, but it is advisable to take it into account as a rational and complex plan of thought and practice (Marshall & Peter, 1994). Postmodernism, with an emphasis on the principle of freedom from the bondage of the grand narratives, raised concepts such as deconstruction, decentralization, remove the core and confirmed the word of otherness and respect for differences, and the necessity of criticizing the dominant discourse as a whole. Thus, this period can be seen as the culmination of cash, also called post critical period. (Hoy, 2004)

Agency and subject theory

Cartesian approach toward the 'thinking me' and the idea of "I think, therefore I am" is considered as a dominant aspect of modern subject. According to this idea which seeks a stable point, the man turned to the center of the universe and the basic foundation of understanding the world. So the modern subject, is a self-contained subject and based on the "I". Such a subject is always constitutive of the personal narrative of existence and identity, without having to have another in its place. The modern subject has the potential of self-regulation and self-awareness, thus social and political institutions and foundations always have in place in terms of unity and truth. It means the sameness of being, and thought. The idea of postmodernism by challenging this status and considering the subject criticizes the self-centered and self-sufficient modern perspective. Thinkers of this school believe that subject of self-acceptance and integration is ideological. In this vision, the subject and the self-form as the result of interaction with others. The subject always is not a centralized whole and it is schizophrenic, and only in interaction with others can achieve its identity reconstruction and epistemological knowledge of self. Such a reversal in the ontology of the subject, is the very foundation of the theory of postmodernism.

Critical Regionalism

Critical regionalism is against the globalization and universalism which can be considered as the immediate result of the modern era. General approach of the modern age ranged for the development of universal pursuit of truth, knowledge, and culture. Such an approach without acknowledging relativism, considers the life based on the immutable laws as always true, while the idea of regionalism follows a critical approach in tailoring programs and cultural products, their social identity and local characteristics. In such a situation, history, language and perception of space as a position are important. In general, critical regionalism resists assimilation and homogenization of the modern era and modernization process. As a result, critical regionalism with its critical strain is a theoretical alternative approach, wants to look critically at local levels and tastes, and help flow the abandoned and unnoticed interests and desires. Such a view will replace the macro culture with subcultures. Such an attitude rather than considers sub-cultures as inefficient and belonging to marginal social and local groups, views them as centers of resistance against the central, macro and homogenizing culture. This clearly shows political position of post-modernism.

This idea relates to Paul Ricoeur's distinction between culture as local and specific phenomenon and civilization as the universal and dominant as it considers the opposition between nature and technology. As a result, if the modern age discourse, crush nature (specific local culture) the discourse of post-modern based on returning to nature and local culture. Postmodernism, as a philosophical and social point of view, is broad and general and to some extent is vague, it is not so coherent about education.

But due to the thinkers of the postmodernism school, the main lines and outlines of them in education can be noticed. Among the points noticed by proponents of this school in the field of education, their respect for ethnic, gender and racial minorities, and their attention to the multicultural education can be highlighted. Postmodernism by accepting the equality of all cultures, seeks to provoke the cultural diversity through education. Postmodernists' opinion supports the idea that allows everyone's voice to be heard, and bolsters the tolerance among different groups in a society.

Farahani (2004), in his book about postmodernism and education, stated that the possibility of creating and implementing a comprehensive and systematic program for the upbringing and development from teachers points of view does not exist, he accentuates some principles in his books as follow. 1. Training critical citizens (education must give students the opportunity to develop their critical capacity to meet their social and political change). 2. Providing conditions for radical democracy (it can establish deep bonds between different perspectives). 3. Emphasis on constructive dialogue knowledge, 4. Examining the differences and system differences in an educational goal (education should help students to notice the differences that it had neglected before). 5. Valuing the practicality of knowledge (students should be considered as both producer and consumer of knowledge). 6. Noticing cultural studies (the postmodern cultural studies provide tools that teachers and other stakeholders are able to deal with these cases critically). 7. Promoting self-creativity (self-expression through creativity is possible and creativity may also be possible through culture criticism and self-criticism).

Giroux, an American theorist of education, tried to predict the strains of postmodern education. Giroux inspired by the American tradition of democracy, makes free direct relationship between democracies. Accordingly, education must not only to be understood as the creating of knowledge, but also the creator of the subjects and political actors as well. Critical pedagogy rather than reject the language of politics, should link the public education to the requirements of a critical democracy (Giroux, 2002). Based on this vision, educational institution not only serves as a provider of training, but also takes responsibility for protecting citizenship, identity, and restoring individual and social self-determination. Giroux believes that thinkers of the postmodern pedagogy must provide the theoretical turn in their own language, a language that the opposite of solidarity and political vocabulary allows you to issues of power, justice, and the fight against inequality and to release a unique and superior narrative and try not to reduce this basic issues into neglected ones. As a result, knowledge of curriculum not to be considered as a sacred text, but as part of an employment no end to the kinds of stories and traditions that can be read and re-formulated in different political circumstances.

Generally, on the basis of this critical approach, students have different and diverse identities education should be a place for the removal of hierarchy and disposed discourses and a place for free expression. Such a policy suggests that between the personal and the political issue, must be a kind of relation that do not reduce the political issue into personal one and vice versa, but try to reinforce the connection between the two to address and resist racism, gender, ethnic and cultural discrimination and class exploitation.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach. It employed individual interviews, focus group discussions and oral history for data collection. The important point is that apart from documenting the quality of personal experience, ideology and mentality, information on social structures and social movements and institutions can be collected (Frosoni, 1998). Any qualitative research even poorly designed studies, can have valuable hints to the theories. (Alasutari, 1996) Therefore, the methodology of qualitative research provides tools focusing on the meaning, power and engagement in social life (Zokaei, 2002). In this study, 20 teachers from primary and secondary schools, 10 university lecturers in the field of humanities, and some local authorities were interviewed. The sample was purposefully selected and individual and group interviews (focus groups) were conducted. The participants were asked for their opinions on the issues related to multicultural education. Finally, to analyse data the techniques of grounded theory (G.T.) were used. In fact, this study used two types of samples taken at the same time. The two samples were: purposive sampling and theoretical sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select subjects for

interview, and theoretical sampling was employed to determine the number, location and the data needed for research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 35 participants over a two-month period. Initially 50 people were invited for interview, 39 of them agreed to participate in the study. The researcher explained the purposes of the study, and they were told that the interviews would remain totally confidential. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes. The interviews were held in mother tongue of the participants.

Factors Affecting Multicultural Education

As can be seen from the research paradigm, a combination of factors of post-modern education including curriculum, use of media and cultural and ethnic diversity have affected the multicultural education. The concise description of each, as well as some confounding factors and consequences, and the strategies used in the operations of multi-cultural education, and its role in reconstruction of democratic society are presented.

Postmodern Curriculum

Postmodern curriculum focuses on topics that raise awareness of cultural, historical, political, ecological, aesthetic and theological issues. Curriculum should be designed in such a way that put people in the process of "becoming". Curriculum development should encourage discovery learning, it needs to stimulate the development of creativity and critical thinking. As mentioned, the postmodern curriculum is against any type of generalization, does not relate learning exclusively to the transfer of relevant knowledge, looks at science as an interdisciplinary field, believes that no object(goal) is superior to the other, and believes that the sole criterion of excellence is due to difference, diversity and ambiguity, critical wisdom and revelation.

Postmodern School

The concept of school in the post-modern thought, like the cognitive structure, roots in the process of freedom and democracy. School in such a state is fluid, and its place is retrospective and does not escape from the lack of consensus and conflict, and no longer emphasizes the rational aspects of life. Interaction in postmodern schools is not limited to the intellectual and morals which everyone brings to school, but in these schools, heterogeneity and differences in opinions either ontologically or methodologically are commendable, and they don't hinder coordination and participation. Here's discourse, knowledge-based and device-even to produce knowledge. Due to postmodern perspective, knowledge is the discursive product of the educational system in the community. Therefore, it appreciates freedom and democracy, and demands any type of challenging discourse. Hence, the school is an institution that challenges the whole oriented, centralized and totalitarian structures.

Postmodernism sees the teaching materials and other resources as a source for presentation of ideas and information, a place for the deconstruction and criticism of determinant discourses. In general, postmodernism, does not see the science as the main source of fact, but science is always conceptual discourse that is related to the representation of power and domination. In the postmodern approach, knowledge is considered as a way to escape from the totalitarian, hegemonic and authoritarian rule in terms of the science, because such knowledge does not confirm that it is the final solution or absolute truth. Such knowledge is trying to be practically used and instead the domination of man and nature has a relationship with it. This humanistic approach has been used by postmodernism as an alternative to object-oriented and totalitarian orientation approach of modern science.

Postmodern teacher

In postmodern education, the boundary between teacher and critic has declined. Here, a teacher is responsible for learning and organizing the environment for learning, and preparing the conditions for students criticize the dominant discourses. In short, in postmodernism schools: a) teachers are the pioneers, and guides the learning experiences. They have a coordinating role. His role is to teach students "how to learn", b) teachers have a central role to facilitate the learning process, and to bolster students' creativity) students and teachers learn together.

Postmodern teaching methods

One of the post-modern teaching methods which they consider to replace the scientific method, is the method of deconstruction. In which both teachers and students should have deconstructive approach toward the dominant discourse. Postmodernists believe that students should be encouraged to find new ways to overwriting elements and stories so that they are able to find a new way to read a text and divide it into sub-components. Teaching methods in postmodernism can be summarized as follows (Farahani, 2004). 1. Postmodernisms places great emphasis on dialogue and democratic methods of teaching. 2. Cooperative group learning and interaction between individuals and between work groups is encouraged. 3. Independent learning along with interactive learning is concerned. 4. Streams of alternative learning curriculum are used instead of modern programs. 5. The emphasis is on deconstruction methods, simulation and discourse analysis. 6. The conversational education is a key pillar.

Postmodern student

Postmodern education is mainly student-centred. From the perspective of postmodernism, a student-centred classroom, is a kind of class where opportunities for social interaction, research and independent studies, creativity and ability to provide experience with different learning styles is fully provided. In such classes, the student creates and produces the knowledge. Based on the deconstructive approach, he is encouraged to be aware and critical of the fact that the author's intentions are not always consistent with reality. Critical reading of the text has the advantage that it does not allow the structure to impose and affect the meaning; this is a hint for students to understand that the meaning is multiple and multilayer. In this perspective, students are encouraged while reading the literature, to understand the contradictions and inconsistencies, and help students develop their analytical knowledge.

Human relations at postmodern schools

Postmodern teachers do not consider the human relations only from the social point of view, but they respect it and believe that dialogue is the main origin of knowledge and truth. Human relations in the post-modern approach are flexible, diverse and constantly growing. In postmodern thinking, decision-making is not something that one person does it alone, but it involves norms, structure, work, people's expectations and compliance of managers which all affect the decision making in the organization. The concept of dialogue is a kind of refresh to refresh and re-invited the outcasts and marginalized. It fetches a solid basis for the development of democracy. If we accept that fundamentalism begins when the conversation ends, it must be said that human relations of postmodernism always consider a harbinger of a return to dialogue to make the process of democracy and freedom prevail. Thus, a glimmer of hope of democracy in society can be seen when the marginalized are invited to have a say in their education.

Conclusion

Education in a democratic society plays a crucial role in helping all members of the community to make full use of their abilities as a human being and mobilize the community life and resources. To achieve this goal, education as a development process of the human mind must be liberated from ignorance and bigotry. Education should give students much scope for creativity and logical reasoning. Any educational approach that stifles tolerance and critical thinking, has no place in multicultural education. Today, multicultural education can play a leading role in providing a democratic society, and it has attracted the attention of writers and critics. All in all the use and implementation of multicultural education seems essential as it:

- Offers alternative views on information.
- Gives a sense of belonging to the cultural and ethnic groups as they think that they have a place in science, literature and history.
- Decreases racial stereotypes, offensive and humiliating prejudices and ethnocentric and racist tendencies in society.
- Promotes organic cohesion of society.
- Reinforces the minorities and the marginalized groups so that they have a voice in their society.

- Paves the way for the formation and development of democracy.

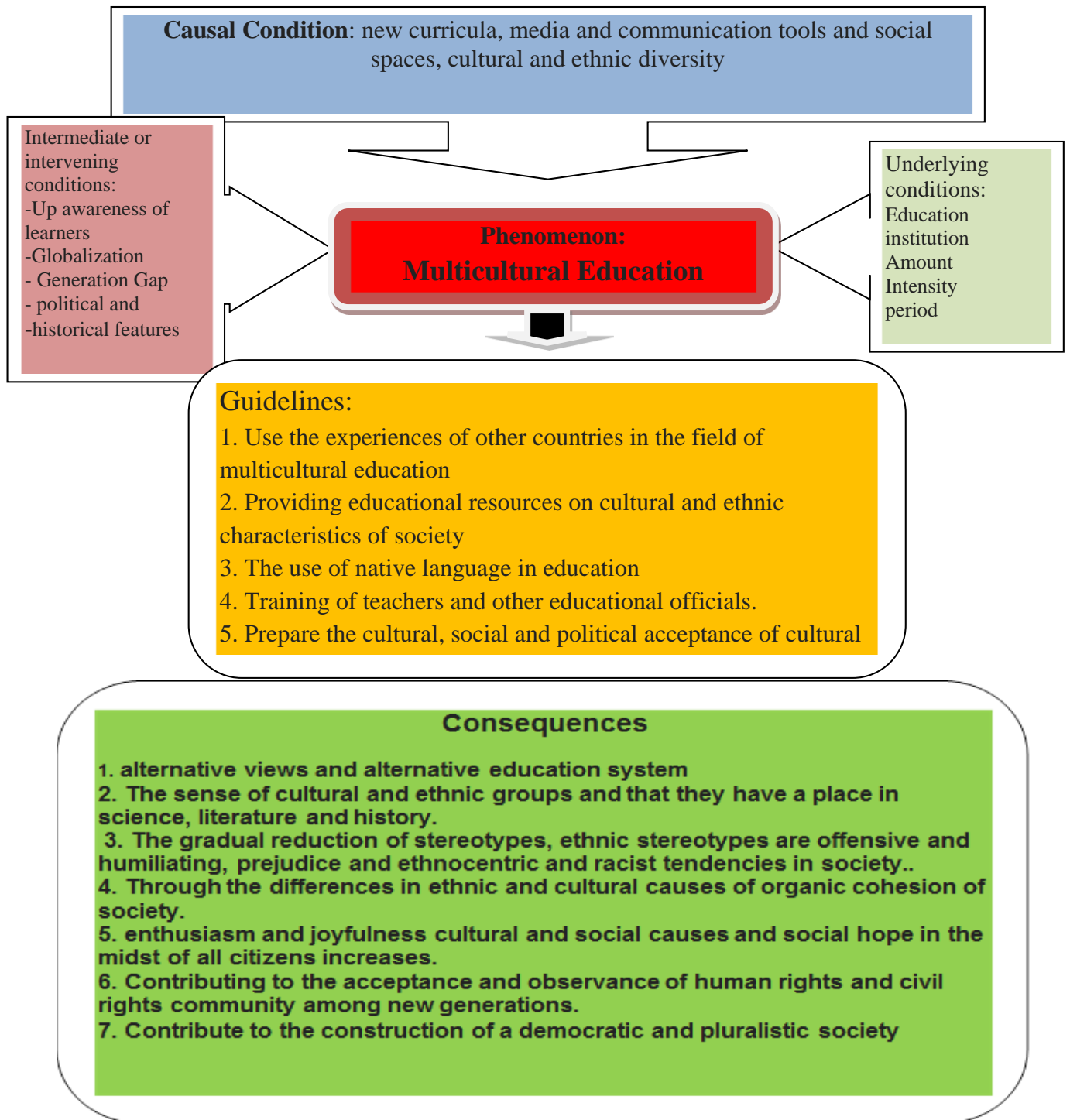


Figure (1): research paradigm model

Pluralistic society is not simply a society where different religious or ethnic groups live in harmony, and they have equal civil and political rights; but a pluralistic society is a society where members of each group respect the culture and values of other groups. In such communities, tolerance and respect are given ample attention. In fact, a person don't have respect for another culture that he does not recognize it or does not have any information about it (Putnam, 2004).

Indeed, education is tasked with preparing individuals for society where people need to respect and tolerate each other in order to live in harmony. In other words, the realization of this important fact is one of the functions of multicultural education. Of course, this goal will not be achieved unless there is an organic connection between educational institutions and society. The idea of multiculturalism is to extend and institutionalize cultural diversity within the nation-state through the legal system, educational system, politics, government, health and housing. Indeed, Multicultural education pays the respect for the customs, religious practices and language of different ethnic groups (Mills & Bravyt, 2006). Such a principle is the most basic principles of social and political democracy, that it can be attributed to the theoretical foundations of human agency, the subject of postmodern theory, and critical regionalism. In such circumstances deconstruction is a way to achieve a pluralism, freedom and democracy in society. Hence, this goal will not be achieved except through attention to multicultural education in schools and educational institutions of society.

In fact, attention to the pluralistic education through deconstruction of what can be a hindrance in the way of achieving cultural diversity, can makes it easier to achieve democracy with less social and political costs. As long as the door to the presence of all cultural and social outcasts and marginalized of society is not provided, we cannot see the realization of true democracy. Such an important issue needs to change the attitude of people, especially children in schools and educational institutions. Basically, social tolerance should be at the forefront of education agenda especially in culturally an ethnically mixed societies. Thus, students learn to show great tolerance toward different attitudes. A right path to democracy passes through deconstruction and reconstruction of central and non-pluralistic educational systems.

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