
Theory and practice in a unique programme for Ethiopian pre-service teachers seen from a multicultural view point: A case study

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Abstract

The unique programme for Ethiopian pre-service teachers at an Israeli academic college of education integrates two central approaches to values-based education, the pluralistic and particular approach. The fundamental assumption underpinning a unique programme for Ethiopian pre-service teachers is providing response and equal opportunity to a population from different culture, namely: learning, acquiring a profession, being incorporated into the labour market and constituting an example for Ethiopian school pupils. This paper will present the perception of multicultural education and Ethiopians' place in teacher education programmes as a basis for the unique programme. The case study uncovers components of multicultural education. Moreover, the paper underscores the programme practical aspects, presenting its main assessment findings.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Multicultural Education, Ethiopian Immigrants, Teacher education programmes, Case study.

Theoretical background

Multiculturalism

The perception of multicultural education permeated the education system already in the 1960s, following social and political occurrences in the western world. It was mainly manifested in the field of curricula in universities and, later, in other educational institutions. Over the years the perception has undergone some changes: from the local-focused perception which views an immediate implementation in the curricula as its immediate goals and up to the perception of this field as an educational 'ideal' in a multicultural, democratic society. The new perception of multiculturalism is affected by the consequences of globalisation and technology processes. At the beginning, globalisation was perceived as a process which eliminates particular identities and turns the world into one village. Hence, it entails reaction and increases the search for a more limited and intimate collective identity – local, ethnic, religious and national – as well as sanctifies the past (Maaluf, 2010; Oron, 2010). Through renewed thinking, Yona (2011) highlights the need for the existence of a democratic and liberal society, formulating a multicultural agenda acknowledged by the political institutions which refer to relations between rights without preference to certain rights.

There are in fact two main approaches to values-based education which have developed in pluralistic societies, i.e. the pluralistic approach versus the particular approach. The pluralistic approach advocates an emphasis on values-based multicultural education which is inculcated in pupils. Conversely, the particular approach adheres to multicultural education, namely, differential education for each of the social groups, emphasising the specific values and culture of each group (Rego & Nieto, 2000).

Multicultural approach in teacher education programmes

The curriculum in teacher education programme should also reflect transformations in society and culture as well as the educational approaches which highlight differentiation in society and acknowledge them. The approach to multicultural education has to be echoed in all the programme pathways: education studies, didactic studies and disciplinary studies. Core studies will facilitate development of a uniform discourse of all learners as citizens in the country. Unique studies for different groups can exist in at least two frameworks. The first framework is learners' individual choice, whereby they would be able to choose courses which demonstrate elements of a culture they wish to learn. The second is a unique enhancement framework, for example in the Hebrew language and sometimes in the mother tongue, designed for learners whose mother tongue is not Hebrew. The pluralistic education for all will be manifested by the various courses in all three programme pathways (education studies, didactic studies and disciplinary studies) through varied approaches and presentation of cultural alternatives (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Sofer & Sigad, 2013).

Ethiopian immigrants in Israel

Most of the Ethiopian Jews have arrived to Israel since 1984 in immigration waves entitled 'Moses Operation', 'Queen of Sheba Operation' and 'Solomon Operation' and they number today about 85,000 citizens. Their voyage to Israel was full of suffering, adversity and arduous stories. However, most of them have been absorbed in the Israeli society; yet, still, the absorption process encompasses problems and hardships. Numerous immigrants experienced a cultural shock in their encounter with the Israeli society: for the first time in their life they had to use electricity, running water, travelling by bus, another diet, health services, new communication media, unfamiliar housing and physical environment, technological means and different weather conditions. Moreover, the meeting with the Israelis exposed them to a strange world: for the first time the Ethiopian immigrants met white Jews, Israelis who were not orthodox or observant, different social codes, different way of life and daily conduct, a hostile and discriminating attitude on the part of the entire Israeli population. What was most difficult was coping with individuals' freedom of choice (as opposed to almost non-existent freedom in Ethiopia) and with increasingly growing gaps between generations in the family and in the Ethiopian society (Ben-Ezer, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2013; Kalniski, Millet & Cohen, 2014).

Research question

How are components of multicultural education manifested in the unique programme for Ethiopian pre-service teachers?

Methodology

The study presented in this paper is part of a comprehensive research conducted by the qualitative-interpretive method and it constitutes a case study. A 'case study' serves research of teaching and learning. One of its most important advantages resides in its ability to offer insights about events in the actual contexts and sites in which they transpire. The case study is inductive because it presents the data out of the situation independently of the assumptions. It facilitates manifestation of great sensitivity, diagnosis and display of situations from various points of view (Shkedi, 2005; Shkedi, 2012). Data are collected by means of content analysis of ten documents associated with the unique programme: position papers, minutes of the steering committee meetings, programme assessment reports and annual summaries of the programme coordinator.

Findings

The findings obtained from the content analysis of the different documents will be presented according to the following topics: justification for launching the programme; the programme objectives; the programme principles; multicultural components in the programme; programme assessment; and the steering committee.

Justification for launching the programme

The training programme for Ethiopian immigrants at the college was conceived out of needs from the field and it is grounded in the principles of multicultural education. The programme aims to educate Ethiopian pre-service teachers for working in the education system. Thus, they will be able to work in integrative classes, not only of Ethiopian pupils. They will become an authority at school and in the teachers' lounge regarding everything connected with the ethnic group, its language, heritage, culture and behavioural codes of individuals and the community. This requires professional human resources belonging to this ethnic group for working with Ethiopian children and with all other Israeli children. The purpose is to have Ethiopian teachers who are integrated in the Israeli community and constitute an integral part of it and not a separate teacher group. There is no doubt that these pre-service teachers have unique needs and, consequently, a unique education programme should be planned for them. This programme is designed to nurture, empower and grow Ethiopian pre-service teachers while being sensitive to the different collective and individual needs (Millet, 2001; Kalniski, 2013).

The programme objectives

- Educate Ethiopian pre-service teachers for teaching at schools and kindergartens with the purpose of coping with multicultural and heterogeneous challenges of education and with the specific difficulties of absorbing and educating members of the Ethiopian community who learn in Israel.
- Provide an appropriate opportunity to members of the Ethiopian community for being integrated in the Israeli society by acquiring the teaching profession.
- Respond throughout the studies to the unique needs of pre-service teachers with a different background.
- Integrate the unique capabilities characteristic of the Ethiopian community for shaping teachers' image in Israel.

The programme principles

The programme embodies the following principles:

- Compliance with unique acceptance prerequisites defined for the group.
- A flexible training pathway which includes studies during the summer holiday.
- Studies of core competences and elective courses of the Faculty of Education.
- Additional teaching-training hours at the education stage.
- Integration of pedagogical subjects and of theoretical and practical areas.
- Involvement in peer-activities and in the community.
- Development of the personal-professional image based on individual beliefs and philosophies.

Multicultural components in the programme

The world of contents

The programme comprises contents and sources from the heritage of the Ethiopian immigrants and they are learnt in various courses. Throughout the first year of studies, when the pre-service teachers [hereinafter – students] studied in separate classes, the learning was based on topics and issues from the Ethiopian culture. The class discourse became relevant and authentic and the students fully identified with both the learning process and their heritage. This learning process drew the students closer to their heritage, exposed new facets of their life which were not necessarily familiar to them. They got acquainted with their legacy and were proud of it, hoping they would inculcate it to pupils in the education system.

The teacher-educators taught the Ethiopian students as a separate (homogeneous) group and as a group integrated with other students (heterogeneous). They underscored the importance of creating opportunities for discourse about the heritage, presenting narratives from the students' personal world, analysing texts taken from the Ethiopian culture. One of the female-lecturers in the literature course expressed her opinion: *"It is highly important to allocate room for the legacy... I take texts from their culture and work on them..."*. A second female-lecturer pointed out it was essential to express their heritage, for example: *"If I teach poetry, then I bring poems written by Ethiopian immigrants and/or assist them to write down poems and narratives from their world, the narrative of their immigration to Israel..."*. Another example is taken from a computer application course, in which the female-lecturer gave assignments of searching on the Internet information about the Ethiopian community (Millet & Gilad, 2004).

Teaching strategies

Teaching processes in the Ethiopian students' class are grounded in the understanding that these students' learning styles are culture-dependent. Hence, extensive attention is paid to the teaching styles of the lecturers, which match as much as possible the students' learning styles. The teacher-educators emphasized the need for changing and adapting the teaching methods to the Ethiopian students. Moreover, they pointed out that they had changed their teaching methods mainly with regard to pace and illustration. For example: reading texts at a slow pace, in a different intonation and with many breaks in order to ensure that the students actually understand and follow the course of the lesson. Or in linguistic literacy, it was essential to dedicate more time to the teaching of fundamental concepts and core competences, mainly in written and spoken expression. One of the male-lecturers said that he worked with the students both individually and collectively in order to assist them with the learnt material: *"I devote to them many hours beyond the allocated teaching hours"* (Millet & Gilad, 2004).

Faculty members

Faculty members involved in the education programme were chosen meticulously and with a multicultural orientation. They are aware of the multicultural perception in education as well as of the differentiation between the students learning at the college. The faculty members are particularly aware of the Ethiopian culture features and the complexity of Ethiopian pre-service teachers' way of conduct. A working procedure was planned, according to which the lecturers teaching in that pathway maintain a continuous contact with the students. The purpose was adapting the programme to the students' unique needs, monitoring their personal development and bridging between the needs and the academic requirements (without undermining the academic level). Connecting and mediating between all the elements enabled a synergetic and effective work. In order to expand acquaintance with the students and with the Ethiopian community in general, the faculty members studied also in the workshop about the Ethiopian culture, emphasising features of values and education throughout all the training years (Millet & Gilad, 2004).

A learning centre

As part of the cultural discourse, an 'Ethiopian Jewry Heritage' learning centre was set up at the college, organising workshops, educational activities and focused assignments designed to unveil the community's legacy. At this centre, all students learning in all the departments and pathways meet in order to get acquainted and be exposed to the Ethiopian immigrants' culture. The learning centre encompasses six foci: a map of Ethiopia, village life of Jews, political background in Ethiopia, 'Moses Operation', 'Solomon Operation' and 'I am this child' (Millet, Gilad & Kalnisky, 2004).

Practicum

An instruction and practicum setup was established in schools and complementary education institutions such as: Culture, Youth and Sport Centres, afternoon clubs and enrichment studies. Practical experience in teaching started in the students' second year of studies. In addition to the teaching of learning subjects at school, the pre-service teachers taught the Ethiopian Jewry heritage in class through Ethiopian customs and folklore. Families of the school pupils and of the pre-service

teachers were partners to this process. Furthermore, pupil groups came for a study day at the Ethiopian immigrants' centre at the college under the guidance of the students attending the unique programme (Kalnisky, 2008).

Equalitarian pedagogy

The programme comprised individual and collective assistance frameworks in light of the students' needs and the characteristics of this unique population. These frameworks provided massive support to Ethiopians in their theoretical and practical studies and underscored the development of individual and collective processes.

Individual support: The issues which required individual reference were: need for guidance in the general re-organisation in life areas – work, studies, family, support and personal counselling, diagnosis of learning disability, assistance in learning and inculcation of core learning skills, reference to cultural patterns which promote/inhibit adjustment, orientation in the essence of the academic learning, mediation with internal and external institutions, guidance and assistance in economic issues and so on. The rationale underpinning this approach is that supporting individuals will allow them to channel their energy for academic assignments and attainments.

Mentoring: Individual mentoring constituted another way for supporting the students. It focused on individual help in learning. The mentoring was provided by excellent students from various faculties, e.g. mathematics, sciences, history and more. This help was effective from an academic point of view and led to secondary benefits in adjustment to studies at the college and the friendships formed between the students.

In order to support the mentors in their unique role, several workshop encounters were organised, highlighting the mentor's role, support and mentor-mentee relationships. Individual mentoring constituted another way of supporting the students. It focused on individual help in learning.

Collective support: Effectiveness of the procedural-collective work resulted from the level of homogeneity in the raised issues. The collective coping facilitated ventilation of pressure and enabled building new attitudes and approaches. The issues suitable for collective work were: question of identity (self, national, ethnic); conflicts and harmony of people's roles in society (parenthood, profession, work, family); professional identity (self-efficacy, self-professional image, developing the ability to be a different teacher). Additional issues which were addressed collectively related to academic needs: emphasis on learning strategies, specific courses focusing on language, speech and correct pronunciation, support of teachers in their practical teaching experience (Kalnisky, 2008).

A voyage to Ethiopia: Towards the end of the B.Ed. studies each class went to Ethiopia for a professional exploration of the students' origin. The voyage included visits to educational institutions and colleges of education, encounters with education policy-makers in Ethiopia, visits to the villages where the students were born and to other meaningful sites (Gilad, 2006).

The programme assessment

The programme assessment constituted an integral part of the programme and it was performed already during its first stages. The assessment findings were based on assessment reports of the Assessment and Research Unit of the college. The assessment objectives were: identifying, characterising and providing information about the processes transpiring during all the programme stages, giving a full and updated picture of the students' attitude towards the programme as well as shaping and improving it for the coming academic year.

The main findings indicate that the students attending the programme are satisfied with it to great extent, particularly with the individual attention to academic, personal and emotional needs and with the supporting setup at the college. The findings show that the points of strength included three areas: the programme framework and components, expansion of knowledge and competences and contribution to the Ethiopian community. The students felt that, throughout their studies, they acquired knowledge and tools which would be extremely useful and beneficial in their future work.

Nevertheless, the students pointed out several difficulties experienced during their studies in the programme: overloaded syllabus in the programme as well as organisational, personal and economic problems.

Moreover, the findings illustrate high satisfaction particularly with the graduates' journeys to Ethiopia, *"this is a dream come true"*.

The thorough academic engagement in the history of Ethiopian Jews' heritage in a special course built following the establishment of this pathway entailed questions of Jewish and Israeli identity and enhanced the 'local patriotism' of the Ethiopian learners in the programme (Oren, 2002; Pasternak, 2006; Inbar, 2008).

The steering committee

Two steering committees – one internal and the other external - accompanied the programme. They managed to leverage the introduction of changes in contents, support and assistance processes on the academic level by expanding and consolidating the academic mentoring mechanism; the economic level by choosing a scholarship coordinator among the Ethiopian community members; and on the social level by means of extra-curricular activities during every year of the programme (Kalnisky, 2007).

Discussion

The unique programme for Ethiopians is based on a pluralistic perception which emphasises multicultural education in the teacher education system and its different sectors, in this case the Ethiopian population. This teacher education programme comprise studies in two frameworks. One is a separate framework for reinforcing the cultural identity and coping with the personal needs of Ethiopian immigrants as a lever for enhancing their self image. The second is an integrated framework for the purpose of promoting the self-professional image. Both frameworks enable formation of a holistic and high-quality training setup.

Over the years, there was criticism for and against the two approaches to values-based education: multicultural education and sectorial multicultural education. The Israeli education system has adopted aspects of both the pluralistic and particular approach. The unique programme adhered to the pluralistic approach as a guiding approach. However, the first year of studies in the programme combines also elements from the particular approach (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The significance of values-based education to multiculturalism is increasingly growing in the divided Israeli society. It is necessary to create a new educational ideology which acknowledges the values-based meaning of social pluralism in order to develop processes of tolerance and mutual respect between different social groups. Cuban (2000) and McGee Banks (2000) argue that focusing on the cultivation of learners' personal identity and its relation to their cultural identity and existence within the wide society in which they live – are some of the main principles to be fostered in teacher education programmes. There is a consensus that the key principle which should orient teacher education today is nurturing learners as citizens in a democratic and pluralistic society by engaging in concepts such as social justice, equality and differentiation. In parallel, studies have investigated the integration of the programme graduates in the Israeli education system, the multicultural perceptions of the programme lecturers and perception of teachers' role by Ethiopian pre-service teachers.

In an age of changes and striving for multicultural education, based on intellectual education and education based on moral and values, it is important to inculcate in pre-service teachers and other pupils in the education system the following principles: getting acquainted with the beliefs of the other culture, understanding its collective narrative, acknowledging the legitimacy of other people's rights, reflective elucidation of perceiving others, constant discourse and empathy for the learning of others, willingness and openness to be affected by values of others.

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