United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

Including minority culture in national educational programmes

Research Report

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"Out of this world"

Forum: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

Issue: Including minority culture in national educational programmes

Position: President

Introduction

In today's globalized world, the inclusion of minority cultures in national educational programmes is vital for promoting diversity, safeguarding cultural heritage, and acceptance of other cultures. Education takes a part in shaping societal values, norms, and collective identities. Nowadays many national systems overlook or underrepresent the cultural contributions of minority groups in their education programmes. The failure to include minority cultures in education can deepen social inequalities, discrimination, and misunderstanding.

Minority groups, which include ethnic, linguistic, religious, and indigenous communities, often have unique cultural practices, histories, and perspectives that contribute to the broader national and global fabric. By including these in educational curricula, governments and educators can help reduce prejudice, build empathy, and encourage mutual respect among diverse populations. However, integrating minority cultures into national curricula presents logistical, political, and social challenges that vary from country to country.

Definition of Key Terms

Minority culture:

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a minority culture is a group of people that exists of a fewer number of people than the whole population. A group in which members are sharing common identity and rights. The individuals in a minority culture are thinking differently than the rest of the population and they do have another culture.[1]

Prejudice:

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, prejudice is: “an unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially when formed without enough thought or knowledge.”[2] You will see this term multiple times in this research report because prejudice is one of the main reasons to include minority cultures in national educational programmes.

Educational programme:

“Coherent set or sequence of educational activities designed and organized to achieve predetermined learning objectives or accomplish a specific set of educational tasks over a sustained period. Within an educational programme, educational activities may also be grouped into sub-components variously described in national contexts as ‘courses’, ‘modules’, ‘units’, and/or ‘subjects’. A programme may have major components not normally characterized as courses, units, or modules – for example, play-based activities, periods of work experience, research projects and the preparation of dissertations.”[3]

General Overview

Importance of including minority cultures in education

[1] (UNHCR, sd)
[2] (Cambridge Dictionary, sd)
[3] (UIS, 2011)

Education that reflects the cultural diversity within a nation can help build bridges between majority and minority populations. When students learn about various cultural histories, languages, and traditions, they become more understanding of and empathetic toward people from different backgrounds. This will reduce stereotypes and prejudice. Also, there is a risk of cultural loss. "Minority and indigenous cultures around the world are seriously under threat, says Minority Rights Group International (MRG) in its annual flagship report, State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, which focuses in 2016 on culture and heritage."[4] Especially for minority cultures with oral traditions or endangered languages. By incorporating these cultures into the education system, schools help preserve these traditions for future generations, ensuring that unique languages, customs, and histories remain vibrant and relevant.

Representation in the curriculum can improve the sense of minority culture students of belonging and academic engagement. When students see their own histories and cultures reflected in what they study, they are more likely to feel valued and motivated, fostering a stronger connection to their education and identity. Exposure to different cultural perspectives enriches all students' learning experience. Understanding the histories, beliefs, and contributions of various minority groups enhances critical thinking, enriches discussions, and helps students develop a more comprehensive understanding of their country's identity and history.

Challenges in including minority cultures in national educational programmes

National educational programmes often strive for standardization to ensure consistency across regions. However, standardized curricula can overlook or inadequately address the unique needs and cultural contributions of minority groups, especially those concentrated in specific regions or communities. Creating a balance between a unified curriculum and regional customization is challenging, yet critical for meaningful inclusion.

Language plays a vital role in cultural identity. "Language is one of the most important parts of any culture. It is the way by which people communicate with one another, build relationships, and create a sense of community. There are roughly 6,500 spoken languages in the world today, and each is unique in a number of ways."[5] Incorporating multiple minority languages into national educational programs is complex and resource intensive. Translation of materials, development of textbooks, and teacher training in multiple languages require significant funding and commitment, which many countries will struggle to meet.

Integrating minority cultures into education can be politically sensitive, especially in regions where historical or ongoing conflicts exist between majority and minority groups. In some cases, inclusion efforts may face opposition from groups that view them as undermining national unity, or they may inadvertently emphasize past conflicts, risking further divisions.

Major Parties Involved

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

[4] (Minority Rights Group, 2016)
[5] (Holmes, 2015)

"The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) is the leading UN entity on human rights. We represent the world's commitment to the promotion and protection of the full range of human rights and freedoms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In carrying out our mission UN Human Rights: Pays equal attention to the realization of civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights, including the right to development"[6]

United Nations Educational Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

"UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It contributes to peace and security by promoting international cooperation in education, sciences, culture, communication and information. UNESCO promotes knowledge sharing and the free flow of ideas to accelerate mutual understanding and a more perfect knowledge of each other's lives. UNESCO's programmes contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in the 2030 Agenda, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015."[7]

All member countries of the United Nations:

It is the task of all members of the United Nations to integrate the resolution in their national educational programme. Progress can only be realized when all members will try their best to include minority cultures. By sharing information and working together, member states can make the implementations of the plans of inclusion easier and faster

[6] (OHCHR, sd)
[7] (UNESCO, sd)

Timeline of Events

1948 Universal declaration of human rights. “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, the Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 (General Assembly resolution 217 A) as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected and it has been translated into over 500 languages.”[8]

1960 Convention against discrimination in education. “1. The States Parties to this Convention agree that: a. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; it shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”[9]

1989 Convention on the rights of the child. “Article 29 1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to: (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.”[10]

2001 UNESCO universal declaration on cultural diversity. “Promoting through education and awareness of the positive value of cultural diversity and improving to this end both curriculum design and teacher education.”[11]

2007 UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. “The Declaration is the most comprehensive instrument detailing the rights of indigenous peoples in international law and policy, containing minimum standards for the recognition, protection and promotion of these rights. It establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, wellbeing and rights of the world's indigenous peoples.”[12]

[8] (UN, 1948)
[9] (UNESCO, 1960)
[10] (OHCHR, 1989)
[11] (UNESCO, 2001)
[12] (OHCHR, 2007)

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