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The Relationship between Cultural Identity and Learning

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Abstract

Researchers and education theorists have been trying to understand the relationship between the learning and the social world. It has been a challenging research to integrate cultural identity into learning. Identity formation is a long complicated process and is gradually developed in social surroundings. Cultural backgrounds of learners are significant because ethnic, racial, linguistic, social, religious or economic differences can cause cultural disconnection leading corruption of motivation to learning. On the other hand, education inevitably brings shifts, however, learners' cultural identity plays a significant role in transmission of such values. The purpose of this study is to describe the relationship between learning and cultural identity. This research was done in a deductive approach which is a qualitative study and it is a descriptive and exploratory. Available research on learning at schools and cultural identity supports positive correlations between the two as it draws on approaches that utilise learners' social and cultural experiences. Researchers have investigated successful learners and found valuable insights into cultural identity. Teachers should be aware of the cultural identities of the students and should be able to designate their learning characteristics and motivation enhancing their learning achievement.

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1. Introduction

As a teacher, the researcher can state that the most problematic dilemma in classes is different types of students. To understand these differences' origin is important to increase the level of the education for each learner. As Jenkins (2004) expressed, there are 'individual identities' and 'collective identities' and these are two different physical conditions. The latter can be regarded as cultural identity while Eliot (Eagleton, 2005:133) defined culture

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as ‘all things making life liveable and composing society.’ Cultural Identity can be defined as individuals nature and nurture which includes their experiences, talents, skills, beliefs, values and knowledge, in other words, who they are, what their status is in their family, school, work, environment and country and, beyond that in the world as with globalisation the world is getting smaller. In all interpretations or definitions of ‘culture’ is a necessity to sustain and increase the motivation of learners. Since its effect on education can be high, researchers and education theorists have been trying to understand the relationship between the learning and the social world. Moreover, it has been a challenging research to integrate cultural identity into learning.

2. Methodology

The aim of this study is to describe and find out valuable links between cultural identity and learning. This will help to develop a basis to understand if there is a need to understand cultural identity differences in classes to maintain and increase the level of the education and to motivate the learners better. This research was done in a deductive approach; which is a qualitative study and it is also descriptive and exploratory. The researches based on some concepts and themes of a lot of studies and articles so as to develop an extensive theoretical framework.

3. The relationship between learning, motivation and cultural identity

Researchers have been investigating the relationship between learners and trying to understand the effect of their cultural identity on their learning. According to Peirce (1995) ‘social identity is multiple and contradictory’ and when it is thought that a learner cannot isolate his/her cultural identity while learning due to continual dependence on their cultural knowledge, in other words, cultural identity (Hinkel, 1999; Peirce, 1995; Tseng, 2002), it is clear that there is a link between learning and cultural identity. A learner’s cultural identity is a psychological shift for the learner to focus on learning. Ellis (2002) stated that ‘Learning is successful when learners are able to summon up or construct an identity that enables them to impose their right to be heard...’ Different aspects and dimensions of motivation, such as confidence, intellectual curiosity, attribution about past successes/failures, awards, punishments, materials, atmosphere, have been found out. Learners are motivated or unmotivated extrinsically or intrinsically, ‘Extrinsically motivated behaviours are the ones that the individual performers to receive some intrinsic reward or to avoid punishment, with intrinsically motivated behaviours the rewards are internal’ (Dornyei, 1994; 275). Although extrinsic motivation has been traditionally associated with exams, this research also explored the link between motivation and identity formation since it is believed cultural identity, which is constructed under different power changes across time, is one of the most effective extrinsic factors. The relation between motivation and identity formation can be seen under three significant groupings, which seem to exert upon the educational system: low level, medium level and high level. The last two groups want a high level of education. The cultural identity of each group affects motivation of their children to learning. However, Cruikshank, Bainer and Metcali (1995:32) stated ‘low SES families usually cannot or do not provide their children with the kind of early stimulation and academic preparation more typically afforded by middle- and upper-class families’. A learner’s desire to learn and the relationship with the actual commitment learning it are combined. Some researchers like Cushner, McClelland and Safford (1992) put forwarded types of multicultural education programmes one of which is ‘Teaching the culturally different’ shows the importance of cultural identity in learning and teaching. Therefore, learners’ cultural identity should be taken into consideration in education.

3.1 Cultural Identity

Culture is an important part of the structure of a society and can be defined as the life style of that society including every moment and relation and connection of individuals from birth to death. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) defined and argued 160 definitions of culture. As it can be understood, it is not easy to define ‘culture’ because it has too many meanings. First of all, culture is a social product, which every individual develops after learning. This product is usually full of emotions. When identity is taken into consideration, according to Burr

(1995) there are four concepts for identity under the word of ‘personality’ and these are individual differences, coherence, stability and the relationship of our personality to our behaviour. On the other hand, ethnic or national origin, religion, race, gender, language, country, education, occupation, age, family, status are the common elements of culture. Even it is sometimes impossible to create stereotypes for the combination of the same elements, the similarity for each individual having the same culture cannot be ignored.

4. Findings

Researchers have investigated successful learners and found valuable insights into cultural identity. Available research on learning at schools and cultural identity supports positive correlations between the two as it draws on approaches that utilise learners’ social and cultural experiences. For example, Navajo and Apache children are not likely to answer a question in class if it appears they are trying to compete with their peers. (Ingalls, unknown) Therefore, teachers should be aware of the cultural identities of the students, which designate their learning characteristics and motivation enhancing their learning achievement. Cultural backgrounds of learners are significant because ethnic, racial, linguistic, social, religious or economic differences can cause cultural disconnection leading corruption of motivation to learning. Researchers like Eleuterio (1997) and Hoelscher (1999) observed that classrooms filled with teachers and students who share their cultural identities build trust and foster stronger relationships, which leads to student engagement, higher motivation and excitement about learning together. Education inevitably brings shifts, however, learners’ cultural identity plays a significant role in transmission of such values.

The subject of taking cultural identity into consideration is a very important education act. Since globalisation is one of the most important topics on the agenda, teacher, educators and education researchers should draw their attention onto this issue and search for valuable solutions. This can be very vital in education institutions.

5.1. Classroom Strategies to develop awareness cultural Identity differences

According to their backgrounds, needs, ages, their learning strategies, each type of learner can come across with different problems during their educational life.

‘Students from distinct ethnic or cultural groups often experience both enculturation and acculturation in their new environment’ (Ortiz, 2000). Therefore, it is important to take these types of learners’ cultural identity into consideration as one of the vital difference. Cultural Identity is an important aspect to be considered since the method of teaching might vary according to their cultural expectations. Each different culture might require different activities and strategies to make learners be interested in lessons. Nevertheless, most teachers encounter students from different cultures in classes. Therefore, teachers have to work as much as possible and plan their lessons accordingly. This can be possible by being aware of cultural identity to see the features and characteristics of each learner better and more importantly to learn the learning strategies of each student to be able to teach mixed classes better. Factors related learners’ nationality, which might ease or unease their learning, should be searched. ‘Students who are in the encounter and immersion-emersion stages provide excellent examples of how exploration in the classroom can assist in the development of ‘self’ ’ (Ortiz, 2000).

5. Conclusion

Today the identity of learners affects their motivation, as it is a way of change to understand the social world around of them. Learners have been under different conditions, which influenced their motivation to learn. The researcher has experienced different attitudes of learners, who seem to have different cultural identity, like one learner tried to marginalize while the other highly valued learning and have been interested in to find out if there is a link between their motivation of learning and their cultural identity. Depending on the findings, it is clear that cultural identity is an important effect on learning and should be taken into consideration while teaching and learning.

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