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An Analysis of a Pilot Questionnaire Study

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Perceptions of Educational Inclusion of the University Students in a Teacher Training Programme: An Analysis of a Pilot Questionnaire Study

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1. Background of the Study

As a multilingual society with a long history of taking immigrants and new-comers from across the globe, the United Kingdom, particularly England has been struggling with both the education of the children of ethnic minorities those of the native population. There are many children with English as an Additional Language (hereafter, EAL), that is, whose first or second language is not English. Davies (2012) states that “teaching and learning in UK schools takes place within the context of the mainstream curriculum” even if children have limited English proficiency. Teachers have always faced challenging situations when attempting to bring children developing EAL up to mainstream standards. However, additional specialist teaching and support staff exist in schools to support EAL children. These include;

- EAL (or EMA, ethnic minority achievement) consultants
- EAL co-ordinators
- EAL teachers
- Bilingual teaching assistants, EAL teaching assistants and Higher Level Teaching Assistants,
- NNEB (the National Nursery Examination

Board), learning mentors and learning support staff, as well as other staff who address the specific needs of pupils learning EAL

(Davies, 2012)

It appears that England had largely recognized and established the status and professionalism of the EAL specialists; however, many have less than satisfactory working conditions and job stability.

Mainstreaming has been more focused on training EAL specialists who can provide a better educational environment for the children of ethnic minorities. Moreover, the New Labour Party, which won the 1997 general election, emphasized the importance of education for the country in its campaign (Kobori 2010). After coming to power, it raised the issue of “social inclusion”, which was reflected in educational policy and strategy; including the National Literacy Strategies, Aiming High, Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant, and so on.

Studies of education of EAL children, using data of government websites¹, has been undertaken. After the general election, a collation of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrat Party assumed political power, as the New Labour Party was put aside. Since then, several radical education policy changes, which are still in flux, have been

prompted.

Moreover, it should be noted that there are no school subjects especially designed and provided for children who need additional support EAL or any related academic areas in the National Curriculum. With such educational conditions, national qualifications for the instruction of ethnic minority children do not yet exist.

However, with the recent rising awareness of teachers and schools of such children, universities teacher training curriculums have started to provide programmes or courses, but these are quite diverse. Several universities provide special programs or courses on ethnic minority children in schools at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. NALDIC (the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum), lists these programmes for the entire country.

2. Research Questions

Educational policies and teaching practice for EAL children in England have been studied (Watanabe, 2011). The more we understand the struggles of EAL specialists, the more we realize that class teachers are essential to challenge restrictedness. It is also necessary to study the curriculums of teacher training at the university level to have a clear perspective on inclusive education for EAL children.

In this study, therefore, we seek to discover if prospective mainstream teachers can be trained to carry out inclusive education and to understand their perceptions of "inclusion".

3. Methods

3.1 Curriculum

Manchester Metropolitan University has a long history of serving its city's large ethnic minority population, starting from the time of industrialization and continuing to the present. According to its

guidelines², The university seeks to prepare its teachers for the following tasks.

- Support bilingual pupils- provide support for bilingualism and multilingualism as cultural capital.
- Support language development of all learners including learners at various stages of EAL.
- Support all learners for life in a multilingual world.

It also attempts to link all academic programmes to Knowledge about language; support for the development of EAL; planning and teaching language and curriculum content; valuing multilingualism; awareness of community cohesion, integration and cultural diversity at the local, national and international levels and mindfulness of issues of equality and citizenship.

In Manchester Metropolitan University's BA primary program, students are encouraged to shape their studies to meet these aims: In the first or second year, they increase their awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, in the second and third year, they plan and teach language and curriculum content, and in the third or fourth year, they study and practice. According to the curriculum design, the BA primary program seeks to foster the inclusion of ethnic minority children through their grasp of EAL, as seen in Table 1 below.

As seen in Table 1, students in the Primary BA course use their own portfolios to develop a fundamental knowledge of EAL throughout four years. In the first year, they learn the role of the EAL specialist and how they can include EAL children into a school's curriculum. Then in the second year, they have the opportunity to explore the background and cultures of EAL students and EAL itself. In the third year, they look into inclusion and language. Both contents are strongly and directly related to education for children with EAL. Finally, in the fourth year, EAL specific sessions are provid-

Table 1. BA Primary-Suggested Order of Tasks

Y 1	Being and Be-coming a teacher	Core1- English, Math, Science	Foundation1 Inclusive curriculum	Specialaization Including the role of the EAL specialist	Professional Practice and Review1
Y 2	Professional Practice: The Primary Curriculum	Professi onal Review (PDR plus MFL)	Identity and Diversity Exploration of cultural context and specific session EAL	Student Enquiry2 Personalization of learning (Core)	Foundation Subjects
Y 3	Professional Practice: Creative Curriculum PDR review portfolio and track confidence EAL	SEN and Inclusion	Core- Student Enquiry3: Assessment in the core curriculum- Language across the curriculum	Approaches to Learning/ Approaches to Curriculum	
Y 4	Core Curriculum: Management of change Specific EAL session in English	Approaches to Curriculum	Approaches to Learning	Professional Practice:	

(Flynn, J. 2012. *English as an Additional Language Portfolio*, p.5)

ed. It is clear that all students in this course of study are ready to become teachers of multicultural classes. Conversely, the PGCE programme is only one year in length, allowing less time for training and experience regarding EAL and diversity.

It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of the teacher training programme of Manchester Metropolitan University. However, we may gauge its success to some extent by questioning university students and analysing their responses.

3.2 Questionnaire

Considering the importance of training to

change teacher awareness and attitudes towards ethnic minority children, we wondered how prospective teachers perceived the term inclusion in the school context and the teaching of ethnic minority children. The research was founded on certain assumptions or hypotheses.

1. University students are not confident in teaching multicultural classes.
2. University students understand the term inclusion as it relates to special educational needs.

Assumption 1 stems from the legacy of the stereotypical view that English people are not eager to learn about community or foreign languages. If

this is the case and they cannot manipulate other languages, they will be less confident in teaching EAL children in the mainstream. The second assumption is that prospective teachers may misunderstand that children developing EAL have special educational needs. Thus, they should be assessed to clarify if they have learning difficulties or need language learning support (Gravelle 1996, Cline and Shamsi 2000). Bearing these assumptions in mind, we distributed a questionnaire to determine the perceptions of inclusive education of university students.

3.2.1 Subjects

A pilot study was conducted at Manchester metropolitan University. The subjects were 18 – undergraduate students of the School of Education and 13 students of the Course of Postgraduate Certificate in Education in November, 2011. In all, 31 valid questionnaires were collected.

3.2.2 Questions

The questionnaire asked about their current status, gender, and their preferred school teaching key stage or level. It also asked them about the languages that they can use in teaching. Their ethnicities were not noted in this study. However, their linguistic backgrounds were sought, since these are very useful in English schools to support ethnic minority children. Bilingual teachers would be a great help for children with English as an Additional Language. Therefore, the 19 languages were listed: Bengali, Panjabi, Urdu, French, German, Polish, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Turkish, Hindu, Irish, Arabic, Portuguese, Somali, Chinese, Bulgarian, Russian, and Pashto. These languages were arranged in the list according to current estimates of the minority ethnic populations of Great Britain³ that employ them.

As for question four, the subjects were asked whether they had classroom experience relevant to studying children from ethnic minorities. Question five concerned their confidence in teaching children English as an Additional Language in the mainstream. Question six then asked about their interpretation of inclusive education of ethnic minority children. Finally, one question asked about their view on “inclusive education” for ethnic minority children. Specifically, they are asked if they think local authorities and schools should support classroom teachers by choosing two possible options listed by the researchers, such as the employment of more bilingual teacher assistants, the employment of more teachers from ethnic minorities, provision of on-the-job training for teachers, and the provi-

sion of more translated learning materials in the first languages of children.

4. Findings

The study group included 18 BA undergraduate students (two males, 15 females, and one unknown) and 13 graduate students on the PGCE programme (two males, ten females, and one unknown); thus, 31 questionnaires were collected in total. Hereafter, undergraduate students are described with U and postgraduate students with P.

First, it should be shown how they answered of the question of what languages they could use for teaching subjects.

The languages available for teaching were quite diverse; however, no subject chose Polish, Dutch, Italian, Turkish, Portuguese, or Chinese.

According to the findings, therefore, French and German were the major languages of the subjects in teaching since these two languages are in British schools. Urdu is the second choice, since it is the national language of Pakistan, and of Muslims who live in Pakistan and India. This group is wide-

Table 2. Languages for classroom teaching

Language	Number of subjects
French	7
Urdu	5
German	4
Spanish	3
Panjabi	3
Arabic	2
Hindi	2
Bengali	1
Somali	1
Welsh	1
Sign Language	1

ly present in England. In fact, according to the Census 2011⁴, Pakistani migrants are most visible in Manchester, which reflects the numbers of Urdu and Panjabi, both spoken in Pakistan and India (Table 2). They are community languages in Manchester.

It should be noted that the answers of graduates and undergraduate students differ. There is only one P student who marked more than one language for teaching. (This may be because at P level most of those with experience with languages may have chosen to teach a language and this group were Religious education students. Conversely all primary students are given instruction in teaching a modern foreign language.) The student concerned marked Urdu, and Hindi at basic levels and Spanish at a conversational level. The other 12 P students did not mark any at all. However, only two U students did not mark any. U9 and U18 responded that they could use another five languages, including English.

In this study, the number of subjects were limited. All U students wanted to become primary school teachers and P students secondary school teachers. They can be divided into two groups; the first includes primary schoolteachers that can use two or three languages other than English in teaching, while the other group comprises prospective secondary school teachers that can only employ English. This finding is interesting if it could be applied to the general language readiness of school teachers in England.

Next, we look at question four; Have you had any experience studying in a multicultural classroom environment? The results are shown in Table 3 below.

Looking at Table 3, the ratio of U students with experience in multicultural classroom environments (always, often, and sometimes) and those without such experience (seldom and never) is 13: 9. Thus more than 60% of U students have some experi-

Table 3. Learning experience in multicultural classroom environment

Frequency/ Programme	Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
U	2	1	10	6	3
P	0	2	1	2	4
Total	2	3	11	8	7

ence. In comparison, the ratio of P students is 3: 6; thus, about 67% of P students have little or no experience in multicultural classroom environments.

Question five concerned the confidence of students in teaching EAL children in mainstream classes. Again, the answers between U and P students were completely different. In all, 16 out of 18 U students replied that they were confident, whereas only two out of 13 P students did so; the other 11 P students were not confident.

As for their reasons, of the 11 non-confident P students, most had little or no experience. In contrast, 16 confident U students indicated that they had some experience (six students), could use knowledge learnt at the university (five students), or could use languages other than English in teaching (two students).

Moreover, one of the U students wrote that as she had been an EAL child she thus felt fairly confident of her ability to teach other children who struggled with English. According to the explanations of this student and of others and of the results of questions three to five, the students who can use languages other than English and/or who have some experience of learning in multicultural classes regard their futures or possibilities as teachers of such classes with more confidence.

Question six concerned the students' understanding of the term "inclusive education" from the perspectives of children from ethnic minorities. Here are some of their free descriptions.

U: I feel that every child should be given an inclusive education to meet their individual needs.

- U (12): Education that includes everyone in the classroom
- U (17): Adapting lessons and resources which enable EAL children to access the National Curriculum
- P (1): Feel a part of the class- catered for, Relate to their lives
- P (4): Translated worksheets, Sensitive to cultural values
- P (9): What enables that child to fully access the National Curriculum so that they have the same opportunities as every other child in education and can achieve their potential?

Both U and P students emphasized the importance of giving children the opportunity to access the National Curriculum. In addition, as U (9) mentioned earlier, we can understand that bi and multilingual students may have particular insights into the needs of children developing EAL.

The last question concerned the support of local authorities and schools for classroom teachers. Table 4 shows the possible strategies chosen.

Table 4. Possible strategies for inclusive education that should/could be provided by local authorities and schools

Strategies number	Possible strategies	Subject number
5	Encourage parents of children with EAL to help their children with school work at home	12
2	Provide more freely available teacher training programmes	9
1	Employ more bilingual teaching assistants	7
6	Provide on-the job training for teachers	5
9	Provide more translated learning materials in children's first language	5
8	Employ more multilingual teachers	4

Thus, the students felt that parents of children with EAL need more educational supports at home. They also supported having more bilingual teacher assistants, (seven subjects).

Comparing the U and P students, six out of seven U students favoured this option, and this group was comprised of those who could use languages other than English.

5. Conclusions

Interestingly, we see that language learning and the experience of learning in multicultural classes make people more confident in working in multicultural settings. Providing more opportunity to study languages other than English will be needed for teacher training.

Looking at the curriculum and the students perceptions of inclusive education at Manchester Metropolitan University, we grasp that teacher training plays a big role in developing opportunities in education. Students see that inclusive education offers a greater opportunity for children developing EAL to access the National Curriculum.

This small study has several limitations, including the number of subjects and the interpretation of their answers. However, little attention has been paid to teacher training for inclusive education that focuses on children who are developing EAL. It needs to be determined by government that teachers are qualified to meet the needs of such children. This is too important to be jeopardized by party politics.

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Notes:

1. NALDIC EAL Research Topics

<http://www.naldic.org.uk/research-and-informaton/eal-research-topics>.

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