

Learning Needs in the Multicultural Classroom: Implications to Equitable Teaching

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Abstract

This qualitative study identified the learning needs of students in the multicultural classroom. The study utilised a semi-structured interview guide and data were gathered through focus group interviews of six ethnic groups, namely: *Asian, Black, Filipino, Filipino-American, Hispanic, and White*. Each group was comprised of eight to twelve members purposively sampled from the student population of one multicultural university in the Philippines for the collegiate year 2012-2013. The themes that emerged from the *Qualitative Data Analysis* of interview transcripts showed that learning needs in the multicultural classroom are *culturally responsive teaching, teacher immediacy behaviours, differentiated instruction, and teacher language competence and instructional clarity*. It is thus recommended that teachers rethink their approaches so that students from diverse cultural and language backgrounds will have equal learning opportunities. Further, it is deemed imperative to look into the curriculum and instruction to bring about changes in the way educational programmes are conceptualised, organised and taught.

Keywords: *learning needs, multicultural classroom, equitable teaching, culturally responsive teaching*

Introduction

Classrooms are a melting pot of various cultures which include differing worldviews, religious beliefs, values, abilities, languages, and family backgrounds of students. No matter how school administrators and teachers strive for homogeneity in the classroom, differences are inevitable and thus must be dealt with appropriately as this diversity may increase or impede students' learning success.

Because Multicultural Education (ME) seeks to promote equity and excellence across such variables as race, ethnicity, nationality, social class, regional groups, and language background, educators must understand the function language can play in either helping or inhibiting the educational fulfilment of individuals. As Ovando (1989) stated, 'a fair curricular process is one that builds on whatever socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds the students bring with them' (p. 215).

Students' language diversity in the classroom implies varying degrees of learning needs. These learning needs are related to educational outcomes—students' academic achievement in particular, and learning in general. Several studies (La Belle & Ward, 1994; Gersten, 1996; Trueba, 1988; Culatta, Tompkins, & Werts, 2003; Mattes & Omark, 1984; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1995) have attested the prevalence of educational inequality experienced by language and/or cultural minority students related to their inability to understand, speak, read and write standard English in the required school curriculum. Such case is no different in this multicultural university in the Philippines where students come from diverse language backgrounds and where English is used as medium of instruction.

The main goal of ME is to change teaching and learning approaches so that students of both genders, from diverse cultural and ethnic groups, and language backgrounds will have equal opportunities to learn in the classroom. This goal suggests that major changes ought to be made in the ways that educational programs are conceptualised, organised and taught. There is a dire need for students' learning needs to be identified

and analysed in order to transform and improve teaching approaches in multicultural classrooms. Hence, this study was pursued to identify the learning needs of students in the multicultural classroom, and analyse their implications to equitable teaching.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are deemed significant to the following: 1) *Students*—since their actual linguistic needs will be identified and analysed, teachers will look into ways to address them. They may benefit from a culture-sensitive and equitable teaching not only through improved academic achievement, but also through a more satisfying learning experience; 2) *Teachers*—they may glean insights from this study on transforming their perspectives and approaches in teaching their subject. This study may not only inspire them to adopt a multicultural perspective, but also inform and/or remind them to rethink and overhaul, if need be, their language habits and instructional strategies in the classroom; 3) *Administrators*—the findings of this study may be useful to them in areas of supervision of instruction, human resource management, professional development, teacher training, teacher evaluation and curriculum revision; 4) *Curriculum Developers*—the findings of this study may provide relevant inputs which they may integrate in constructing learning materials reflective of cultural diversity and language expectations and limitations; and 5) *Researchers*—this study may awaken further interest to explore something ‘novel’ in the field of multicultural teaching, such that educational outcomes will continue to improve through research-based practices.

Scope and Limitations

This study focused on purposively sampled college students of a multicultural university in the Philippines enrolled in the first semester of collegiate year 2012-2013. Since the purpose of the study was to identify and analyse students’ learning needs in the multicultural classroom, representations from 6 ethnic groups, namely: *Asian, Black, Filipino, Filipino-American, Hispanic and White*, comprised the final sample of the study. Only students in their first year and last year in the university were included in the study.

Learning Needs in the Classroom

Learning needs abound in a classroom where individual differences are limitless. Ovando (1989) stressed that in thinking in terms of pluralism or assimilation, it would be useful to view a particular society as a dynamic and complex cultural and linguistic organism that is constantly undergoing evolution, change and modification according to the nature of circumstances—a constructive pluralism in which maintenance, diversification and assimilation are taking place simultaneously under varying circumstances. And within such environment of constructive pluralism, blaming the student’s genetic, environmental, cultural or linguistic background for lack of academic success in the English-dominated classroom cannot be accepted. Programmes and practices can be implemented to redress past inequities experienced by both English-background students who come to our schools speaking stigmatised nonstandard versions of English as well as students whose primary language is not English.

According to Griffin and Barnes (1986), a good place to start in addressing learning needs is by examining what constitute effective teaching and learning classroom climates for students in general. They stated:

A composite picture of effective teachers drawn from this body of research findings would give attention to the following: the teacher’s establishment of a work orientation while maintaining a warm, supportive environment; a high level of organization with emphasis on management of the class to increase the productive use of time; active involvement with students to prevent misbehavior and prompt interventions to stop misbehavior; clear presentation of new material with opportunities for students to practice new skills; monitoring of student behavior; provision of feedback to students; assignment of individual seatwork; and systematic evaluation of student products (p. 18).

The growing body of research on teaching and learning cannot, by itself, suffice without due consideration of the importance of teacher effectiveness. Brophy (1992) mentioned that literature on effective teaching gave a significant contribution to education at large because of the recognised teachers’ roles in learning and systematic pursuits for research-based claims.

Teachers view the use of nonstandard English in the classroom in a seemingly negative way. However, effective teachers are open-minded enough to understand and address cultural and language barriers accordingly. According Ovando (1989), limited English proficiency cannot be singled out as the cause for school failure. As Torrey (1983) puts it, 'teachers should not judge children's language abilities by their schoolyard grammar' (p. 165). Instead, a more likely source of poor academic performance is the school's reaction and approach to language limitations. The challenge for students with limited English proficiency (LEP) is that they speak little English at all.

Based on teacher effectiveness research, Macias (1986) identified some basic competencies for quality instruction for LEP students regardless of whether the teacher speaks the students' home language:

Use of active teaching behaviors, including giving directions clearly, describing tasks accurately, specifying how students will know when the tasks are completed correctly, and presenting new information by using appropriate strategies like explaining, outlining and demonstrating, keeping students' engagement in instructional tasks by pacing instruction appropriately, by involving students actively, and by expressing expectations for students' successful task completion, monitoring students' progress and providing immediate feedback when necessary (p. 37).

In addition to this, Macias found that significant instructional features for teachers who speak the students' first language included 'use of both languages for instruction, assuring not only understandable instruction, but a clear and positive environment and status for each language; the integration of English language development with academic skills development; understanding and appropriate use of the cultural background and diversity of the students to mediate learning, and classroom management' (p. 58).

Many teachers who work with LEP students are not bilingual, and they provide instruction in *English as a Second Language* (ESL) rather than bilingual instruction. Among the skills important to their task are a sound knowledge of how languages are naturally acquired and an explicit grasp of the rules of the English language coupled with an ability to convey such things as grammar rules through means other than lectures and drills. An important principle to keep in mind when working with language minority students is that their cognitive development must be launched from within a given sociolinguistic context. Even language socialisations have different patterns.

One implication of variations in language development is that the academic success that language minority students will experience in school hinges more on how these children are able to manipulate language in a variety of contexts and for different purposes than on the specific language they use. It follows that the school's responsibility is to provide a wide range of experiences that will facilitate language development for social interaction as well as language for academic prosperity (Heward & Orlansky, 1989).

In all likelihood, teachers will have bilingual students of varying English-language and academic abilities in their classes throughout their teaching career. Ruddell (2008) opined that it is the responsibility of teachers to provide full access to multicultural-sensitive curriculum in ways that enrich students' learning in the classroom.

The qualitative study of Tahtinen (2009) examined the types of academic, social, and linguistic support currently available to immigrant school-aged children and their families as they entered into a small mid-western community in the United States. Major findings of the study include: (a) the need for increased communication and access to services, (b) the need for more opportunities to learn English, and (c) the importance of maintaining native language skills and culture as an asset to the community.

Several studies assessed students' language needs in different contexts (Cohen, 2008; Dominguez, 2009; Steele, 2008; Vaklifard, 2008; Williams, 2009). These studies brought into focus the interlocking connection between linguistic and cultural diversity toward literacy teaching in English medium schools. As implicitly suggested, there can be no effective teaching not only of the target language but also teaching in content areas without deliberately identifying and addressing students' language needs.

As general knowledge, language can either be a building or stumbling block to learning. Although a high level of language proficiency may not be wholly associated with intelligence, one cannot effectively get his or her ideas across if not well-armed with language tools appropriate for any particular learning context as 'language skills support good thinking' (Vyhmeister, 2006, p. 63).

Language barriers or language deficiency among second or foreign language learners and poor vocabulary among first language learners have often been cited as the underlying causes of student failure (Brown, 1995; Choo, 2007; Dekker, 2003; Schiff-Myers, Djukic, McGovern-Lawler, & Perez, 1993; Trueba, 1988; Waters

& Vilches, 2008). Because of language issues, the teacher only has time to go over the subject material briefly and is not able to develop the students' cognitive skills in the classroom. Students with language difficulty are often the source of teacher anxiety (Johns & Espinoza, 1996). Unable to develop concepts with the learners in a language they understand well, the teachers cannot build on the cognitive skills, thereby stunting intellectual growth.

Characteristics of a Multicultural Classroom

Classrooms today have a diverse blend of many different cultures. Educators need to keep informed on the current trends and methodology regarding multicultural education. In addition, the classroom needs to reflect the diverse needs of these students. McIntyre (2012) affirms this:

Creating a multicultural environment in the classroom is an important step in the teaching profession. Now, more than ever, teachers need to be attentive to the benefits of creating an environment that is advantageous for diverse students—students who benefit of a good, multicultural classroom environment are more likely to excel in school. Furthermore, teachers who incorporate a multicultural environment in the classroom are more tolerant to the needs of their students. This creates a reciprocal understanding between teachers and students which in turn creates a positive learning environment. (para. 2)

Further, McIntyre posits that a multicultural classroom is open and non-judgemental, embraces language differences, and celebrates differences. Given the fact that differences abound in classrooms, it is deemed important that a teacher possesses an impartial stance in the way he/she deals with individual students. Genuinely understanding students means empathising with their language and cultural adjustment difficulties. And above all, diversity should not be viewed as a limitation, but rather as a strength to be celebrated and capitalised on.

Several studies (Cohen, 2008; Dominguez, 2009; Steele, 2008; Vakilifard, 2008; Williams, 2009) as cited in *Dissertation Abstracts International* (2010) had not only determined language needs but also highlighted the features of multicultural classrooms that promote effective teaching and learning process. Particularly, Baralis (2009) examined the long-term effects of a K-5 dual language programme (English-Spanish) on middle school student achievement and degree of acculturation in a suburban school district in New York. Those students with exposure to dual languages had consistently higher levels of biculturation than their counterparts. The characteristics of a multicultural classroom are similar to that of a learning environment that respects and values individuality and differences.

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Language Needs and Equitable Teaching

True teaching cannot exist without authentic consideration of learners. Banks and McGee Banks (1989) emphasised the binary relationship between effective teaching and equitable teaching. They argued that these two are interdependent. It means that teaching cannot be effective if it is not equitable, and it cannot be equitable if it is not effective.

Unlike the term “effective,” the term “equitable” has not been commonly attached to teaching. For the purpose of this study, “equitable” is deemed more appropriate to relate with multiculturalism in the classroom. But literature showed the “similarity” of both terms (Banks & McGee Banks, 1989). Hence much of the literature was gleaned from teaching effectiveness research as these would still pertain to equitable teaching.

Effective teaching is both a science and an art because it necessitates “great amounts of intuition, improvisation, and expressiveness, and effective teaching depends on high levels of creativity, sound

judgment, and insight” (Davis, 2001, An Art, A Science, A Profession section, para. 2). The art of teaching is a synergistic blend of three components: teacher, theory, and practice (Cain, 2007; Fromm, 1956).

An effective teacher will endeavour to identify and address the students’ needs—individual, cultural, linguistic, moral and spiritual—towards holistic development (White, 1903). In terms of language ability mismatch between teachers and students and the seemingly scarce language background of teachers, August and Hakuta as cited in Rieger (2006) mentioned that:

many English language learners spend most of their academic life with teachers who speak only English and who are not prepared to fully understand their varying needs as English language learners. In order for today’s teachers to meet the challenge of educating a richly diverse generation of children, they need to learn a great deal about second language acquisition and effective pedagogy for English language learners through pre-service teacher education programs and in-service professional development opportunities. (p. 3)

In support to this pedagogical insight on language, Rieger also stated that a teacher’s understanding of the language acquisition process and pedagogy could not be, in any way, undermined. Undoubtedly, this knowledge will help teachers address the needs of linguistically diverse classroom learners. In addressing the social complexities of teaching in a multilingual classroom, Nash as cited in Rieger (2006, pp. 5-6) adapted the following recommendations in her Spanish classroom: 1) Smile when you see me, 2) Call me by name, 3) Let me know that you missed me when I was absent, 4) Recognise my own special talents, even if they do not show up on my report card, 5) Praise me when I do something right and 6) If you do not like something that I do, help me understand that you still like me as a person. These practices support the positive learning environment proposed by McIntyre (2012) which is a key element in the success of a multicultural classroom.

Methodology

This study employed a purely qualitative research method in which a semi-structured interview guide was utilised. Since the purpose of the study was to identify and analyze the various learning needs of students in the multicultural classroom, data were gathered through focus group interviews of six ethnic groups, namely: *Asian, Black, Filipino, Filipino-American, Hispanic* and *White*. Each group was comprised of 8 to 12 members purposively sampled from the student population of a multicultural university in the Philippines for the collegiate year 2012-2013. These groups were formed on the basis of their geographical origin and similarity in language and/or culture. In order to determine the population’s nationality and year level, two lists were procured from the University Registrar: a) master list of students enrolled in the first semester of collegiate year 2012-2013 (indicating the students’ course and year level), and b) master list of foreign students (by nationality, course, and year level). Then the researcher strategically clustered students into six ethnic groups ensuring balanced distribution based on the purpose of the study, particularly in terms of nationality, geographic location and year level. Students in their first or last year in the university were selected to provide variety in terms of perspectives and experiences in one focus group. For instance, the Asian group was comprised of two of each Thai, Indonesian, Korean, Japanese and Chinese nationalities; the two with similar nationality were of different year levels, such that the other one was in his/her first year and the other was in his/her fourth or last year in the university. This also proved to be helpful in providing language and social support to a freshman who seemed struggling with communication barriers (i.e., indistinct pronunciation, insufficient English vocabulary, *feeling shy to express*, etc.) as a fellow ‘countryman’ in his/her senior year provided support through language translation of the views and feelings shared by the former. Selection was strategically done such that there would be a balanced distribution according to the geographical location of students. I personally contacted each of the purposively sampled respondents to explain the requirements of the study and arrange focus group interview schedule with them. Finding a common free time among members in one group was the major challenge I encountered during data gathering. However, through persistence and sacrifice, researcher-proposed schedules were agreed upon by all. To ensure 100% attendance of the selected respondents, the following were executed: 1) I communicated with each student through mobile phone in order to get their confirmation to attend the scheduled interview, 2) Excuse letters noted and approved by the university research director were sent to professors of respondents whose interview conflicted with a class schedule, and 3) Meals were provided to all focus groups since the interview schedules fell either on a lunch break or after 5:30 pm which is dinner time. The duration of interviews ranged from one to two hours. For ethical considerations in the conduct of this study, respondents were assured of their anonymity

as respondents, confidentiality of the information they would be sharing and that their participation was voluntary, not compulsory. Then they were asked to sign an *informed consent* form to signify their willing participation and knowledge that the entire focus group interview session was to be video-recorded.

Instrumentation

The semi-structured interview guide was the sole instrument used in this study. It served as a guide in the conduct of focus group interviews. Its questions were divergent in nature and were gleaned from several literatures, particularly those that determined learning needs. The questions were validated by three experts: An ESL/EFL teacher, Education specialist and a Curriculum and Instruction teacher. Further, an informal pilot interview was conducted with a student who belongs to the language minority on campus. Below are the questions contained in the guide:

1. Who do you mostly interact with in school?
2. Tell me about your friends with respect to ethnic background and race.
3. What language do you use in your daily social interactions among your peers?
4. Have you experienced or seen anyone experience negative attitudes for speaking in their heritage/native language? If so, how did it make you feel?
5. How is your language interwoven into your culture?
6. How would you describe the overall university climate in terms of language use?
7. How about classroom climate?
8. In your schooling experience, what language difficulties do/did you have? Language needs in the classroom?
9. How do the school and/or your teachers address your language needs? What types of teaching strategies or activities do your teachers employ to address your cultural and linguistic uniqueness? Any suggestions?
10. In culturally and linguistically diverse university classrooms, how do you think a teacher can teach fairly so that ALL students will have equal opportunity for academic success?

Qualitative Data Analysis

In order to extract the themes leading to the identification and analysis of students' learning needs, qualitative analysis was employed. The inductive method of analysis is considered useful in drawing meaningful patterns of teacher qualities from the substantial data available. The qualitative data sources were the transcriptions from six audio-recorded focus group interviews. The researcher personally conducted the focus group interviews then a senior English major student was assigned to transcribe the interviews. For validation and transcript accuracy checking purposes, I hired another student to check the transcript's accuracy by listening to the interview audio files while reading the transcribed interviews. Several corrections were made at this stage. Then, for final validation and initial step in the data analysis, I went through the interview transcripts in relation to their respective audio files. A few errors were found and rectified. The edited and final transcriptions were printed and treated with the Qualitative Data Analysis Model of Serdet (1998). This study considered the very essence of qualitative analysis which is the extraction of themes that will emerge dominantly from the interview data. The analysis of interview transcriptions went through the process of noticing similar themes. The identified learning needs as extracted from the responses of respondents were analysed, through content analysis, vis-à-vis their implications to equitable teaching.

Results and Discussion

In this study, *ethnic group pertains to a group of university students coming from similar geographic location or sharing common language, racial, and national or cultural norms*. The actual data showed that the six ethnic groups were comprised of different nationalities as operationally defined in this study, such as follows: 1) *Asian*—pertains to a group of university student population coming from Asian countries such as Indonesia, Korea, Myanmar, China, etc.; 2) *Black*—refers to a group of university students coming from African continent such as Angola, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Congo, Rwanda, etc.; 3) *Filipino*—a group of university students who were born and raised in the Philippines; they are natives of the land who grew up in Luzon,

Visayas or Mindanao; 4) *Filipino-American*—a group of university students who are Filipinos by blood, but American by culture, language and exposure; they may be born in the Philippines or in the United States, or Filipino citizen or Fil-Am citizen but the dominant part of their growing years was in the foreign land; 5) *Hispanic*—a group of university students coming from South American continent such as Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Costa Rica, Brazil, etc.; and 6) *White*—a group of university students coming from any part of USA and Europe. Table 1 presents the nationality or origin composition of six ethnic groups.

Emerging Themes from Interview Transcript Analysis

Using *Serdet's Qualitative Data Analysis Model* in treating interview transcripts, five general themes had emerged. These themes, which centred on the learning needs in the multicultural classroom, are *culturally responsive teaching, teacher immediacy behaviours, differentiated instruction, instructional clarity* and *teacher language competence*.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

On top of all the needs which were expressed during focus group interviews, all respondents were one in saying that they need a culturally responsive teaching. Concepts such as cultural diversity, cultural sensitivity, cultural respect and the like kept recurring across all the focus group interviews conducted.

"I would say, 'awareness' because as long as [the university] has so many international students, so many cultures and language and then the accent and the pronunciation, we will always have these difficulties because we just have to, if we are trying them, teachers and students we have to try harder to understand each other. . . [and] so [is] the culture." (Black Group)

"Especially 'po' (Filipino word indicating respect) [if] your topic is so wide and it pertains to, I mean the definition of that subject or that concept that you are talking to is that it has different meaning in different cultures. So I think if the teacher is willing enough or interested enough to ask the students what's that in their culture 'katulad ng sinabi natin kanina na' (Just like what we said earlier), we will ask them, 'Paano 'to sa inyong culture, anong ginagawa ninyo' (How is this in your culture? What do you do with it) so we should show interest." (Filipino Group)

Table 1: Nationality/Origin Composition of Six Ethnic Group

Ethnic Group		Nationality/Origin (# in a group)
1.	ASIAN	a. Papua New Guinean (1)
		b. Thai (2)
		c. Indonesian (2)
		d. Japanese (2)
		e. Korean (2)
		f. Bangladeshi (1)
		g. Chinese (2)
1.	BLACK	a. Kenyan(2)
		b. Malawian (1)
		c. Zambian (1)
		d. Angolan (1)
		e. Congolese (1)
		f. Zimbabwean (1)
		g. Tanzanian (1)
		h. Ghanaian (1)
		i. Rwandese (1)

2.	FILIPINO	a. Northern Luzon (3) b. Central Luzon (1) c. Southern Luzon (1) d. Central Visayas (2) e. Northern Mindanao (1) f. Southern Mindanao (2)
3.	FILIPINO-AMERICAN	a. Philippine-born (3) b. US-born (3)
4.	HISPANIC	a. Brazilian (1) b. Colombian (1) c. Honduran (2) d. Mexican (1)
5.	WHITE	a. American (4) b. British (1) c. South African (1)

Two Asian students expressed the importance of open-mindedness and cultural respect, not only by the teacher, but even amongst students in the classroom:

"It's not really my experience but it's my friend's. Some, it depends on your culture. . . Sometimes it [is] insensitive with their culture or it is not appropriate so sometimes some teachers, not just teachers, some people cannot understand that because they don't really associate with that culture. So of course the person or the people might not try or might not intend to like offend them, but for the person especially that my friend is new. That person got a little offended since they didn't know the person's culture. Of course, the person has to get used to the culture that there should be some kind of way to let everyone understand the other cultures and of course the Filipino culture also. It's 'more easy' [easier] to understand and not offend each other [by] making them not want to learn." (Asian Group)

"I just wanna say like maybe, if the classmates I am not asking them to learn our culture but to understand to be open-minded and try to help 'those' because sometimes, it depends on their culture that they don't. For Japanese people, we don't want to bother other people. It is a bother to them. So it is hard for some people to ask help. It is really culture. If some people would go out trying to help those . . . maybe it could really be a big help to those who need." (Asian Group)

One student in Black group, a Zambian, suggested that the university should seriously consider the multicultural needs as a whole, not only the language. He seemed to denote that there are no adequate measures done to address students' learning needs, especially when it comes to the plurality of cultures that abound on campus:

"I believe a study should be done by the university to teachers to understand the multicultural society that we live. It is not only about language. There are a couple of other factors which have to be dealt. We should study about them, too." (Black Group)

It is noteworthy that a culturally responsive teaching includes teachers' initiative in establishing a positive learning environment, where everyone is encouraged to respect each other because their teacher shows a good example of cultural respect. According to Borich (2011),

Bias in a way the teacher interacts with students is undesirable in any form, but it is particularly distasteful when it pertains to students who belong to a cultural, ethnic, or linguistic minority. Our nation and our educational system are based on respect for individual differences of all types. (p. 28)

This means that our classrooms become one of the most important showplaces of democratic values. It is disturbing that researchers report frequent ethnic bias or cultural insensitivity during student-teacher interactions in mixed-ethnic classrooms. Studies (Dillon, 1989; Tharp & Gallimore, 1991) have pointed out that

many actions of teachers diminish the classroom participation of minority students and/or build resentment because the actions are culturally incongruent.

As educators, Gottlieb (2006) stressed that we are constantly challenged to make informed decisions about our students; to do so, we plan, gather, and analyse information from multiple resources over time so that the results are meaningful to teaching and learning.

Cooper (2011) discussed culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as an approach to teaching and learning that builds on the 'cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them.' Also referred to as *culturally relevant*, *culturally congruent*, and *culturally compatible*, this approach of working with students of diverse backgrounds affirms the identities of students and builds upon who students are and what they bring with them to school.

Teacher Immediacy Behaviours

Teacher immediacy is characterized by verbal and nonverbal behaviours that reduce physical and/or psychological distance between teachers and students. According to Gorham (1988), verbal immediacy includes the use of humour, frequent use of student name, encouragement of discussion and following up on student-initiated comments, encouraging future contact with students, and sharing of personal examples; while nonverbal immediacy includes smiling, eye contact, vocal expressiveness, open gestures and body movement behaviours done by the teacher. During the interview, I sensed the seemingly strong need of students for teacher immediacy behaviours to be practiced in the classrooms:

"I have one teacher like that. If you cannot understand, you are afraid to ask because they treat you it's like a damn. You feel afraid to ask." (Hispanic Group)

"Some teachers, you say something and they just cut you off and it's kind of you are not important. So when they interrupt you, that is unfriendly. Some teachers don't listen." (Hispanic Group)

One student even emphasised the importance of student-teacher relationship in learning, and that this relationship must spring from a teacher's sense of being a Christian and being connected to God:

"Maybe don't look at it as academic but when a teacher is a Christian and you can see that, it helps. The atmosphere is different in the classroom. When you have a teacher who knows you, well, everyone has weaknesses. We're not perfect. Sometimes, prejudices come up or pride or what else. . . Sometimes the teacher is very opinionated and learning and learning is not about forcing an opinion on someone. Well, learning, one teacher who is connected to God and that is brought in the classroom, half of the problems are gone when it comes to relationship." (Hispanic Group)

Most of the respondents shared how some of their teachers would get offended when corrected, or annoyed when students tried to clarify the lesson presented:

"But I think the problem with that is, I just noticed this, it is that they get very offended if you tell them to say certain things. . . Like 'Ma'am can you please enunciate it better so that we can understand.' And then parang (like), 'Ang arte mo,' Like that.... "No ma'am it's just that I am trying to help out other students who talk to me that they could not understand." (Filipino-American Group)

"Well, we, Africans, think that there are some foreigners in the class who don't know English. I think teachers should forgive them because there are some foreigners like in the countries they come from, they do not use English. So it is good for the teachers to understand the African or the foreigners because some of the students [are] from Korea, from China. They don't know English. I think as a teacher, you should ask the students, 'Do you want to ask [about] what I was teaching?'" (Black Group)

Respondents went on expressing their need for teachers' genuine care and concern towards their needs, such that this concern motivates teacher's pleasant verbal and nonverbal behaviours in and out of the classroom:

"It is good for every teacher to have a personal concern for every student." (White Group)

"Yeah, if a student feels the teacher's personal concern, I mean if the teacher I feel is involved. . . It's just like they would adjust to each other and the teacher would go down to the students' level and know the problem. Example if the students are doing exam and the students did not perform well, they should talk to the student. That way, the student would perform better." (Black Group)

"But almost all teachers are not there during consultation time and if they are there, I am made to feel that I am a nuisance when I share my concerns." (Asian Group)

"I think the best strategy is Jesus' example. Jesus was the best teacher. He mingled with the students." (Black Group)

"A good teacher doesn't leave a student behind. . . ." (White Group)

"In my experience, one teacher like when I asked her, she made me feel like, 'Why are you so stupid?'" (Asian Group)

A group of Filipino respondents expressed their sentiment about how some of their teachers' tone of voice, demeanour, facial expressions and even choice of words could dampen their motivation to learn. It seemed that they got carried away by the topic that most of them spoke in Filipino language:

"Another thing is communication techniques. Kasi (because) some of the teachers . . . hindi siya ganoon ka approachable kaya (they are not approachable) instead na parang yung ano mo matuto (your aim is to learn), since hindi naman approachable ang teachers mo (but the teachers are not approachable). So parang wala lang din (you won't be motivated to learn)."

"May mga teachers na pagdating pa lang sa classroom, nakasimangot na . . . (There are teachers who are already frowning even upon coming into the classroom)."

"Pero kung mali man ang student, try to say something na hindi nakaka-hurt sa feelings ng student Even if the student commits a mistake, try to say something that does not hurt student's feelings)."

"Kasi may mga teacher po na halimbawa, 'May mga tanong pa ba kayo?' Kapag tinanong naman sila, sasabihin nila, 'Diba na-discuss na natin ito?' Kaysa naman pagalitan pa hindi nalang magtatanong (There are teachers who ask if students have questions. But if we ask, they will say, 'Haven't we already discussed this?' So as not to be reprimanded, we don't care to ask anymore)."

In traditional classrooms, researchers found that teachers' immediacy behaviours can lessen the psychological distance between themselves and their students, leading to more effective learning and motivation (Christophel, 1990; Gorham, 1988; Kelley & Gorham 1988; Menzel & Carrel, 1999; Myers et al., 1998). Further, sharing personal stories and examples, responding quickly, responding in a friendly tone, and creating a safe psychological environment for student participation can provide the needed caring presence that encourages student engagement (Swan & Richardson, 2003).

Differentiated Instruction

Respondents across all focus groups brought up the need for teachers to vary their teaching strategies to suit the different needs of students, particularly in a multicultural classroom. Though the White group acknowledged the fact that the university has several academic strengths, they boldly shared their perceptions on the quality of teaching and learning process they experienced:

"I think teachers here in the Philippines for the whole three years that I have been here, teachers have one way of teaching. They don't adjust . . . they don't adopt. It's just like they go on with the syllabus. I don't care what your issues are. That's how I feel."

"Not all teachers consider learning styles because some classes are full of audio people. Some are just visual. So things like that. If you are studying with a class with visual, they don't get anything when you write things on the board. They don't get anything. You will come out of the class like "What?" But you could have adjusted some of your teaching criteria."

"One thing is . . . I saw the biggest problem here is that there is no textbook. Most teachers ask students to go to the copy center, spend a long time in line just to photocopy a small piece of material. It's a waste of time."

The Asian group also revealed similar predicaments in terms of learning difficulties.

"Some teachers are just writing on the board and the handwriting is very hard to understand. When we asked the teacher, "Oh anyway, this is my handwriting. Whether you like it or not, this is my handwriting."

"I think, maybe we can use media, a video. A teacher may find a video related to the topic so that the students can get some insights about the things that are discussed by their teacher."

"If I were on a teacher's shoe, I think I could give them [students] equal chance but in case of different range of understanding, learning and the background, the value of equal chance may be different for each student. . . so teachers need to discover the individual needs, so he can know what to do."

The Filipino group elucidated the same insights that justify students' earnest need for a differentiated instruction to address student needs:

"So ang suggestion ko po kasi po hindi lahat ng mga estudyante ay may kakayahang magsalita, so yung iba magaling talaga. Mayroon talagang magagaling sa klase na kahit na isang ano pa lang, pick up na agad nila. So ang ano ko po, sana doon, sa unang klase pa lang po, dapat sana, alamin ng teacher kung ano ang mga kahinaan ng mga estudyante, tapos mag-isip siya kung ano ang mga strategy niya upang matugonan and pangangailangan ng lahat ng estudyante (Since not all students have the ability to express, unlike others who are eloquent in class. . . they can easily understand the concepts taught, I suggest that on the first day of classes, the teacher should know students' weaknesses. Then she has to think of strategies to address those weaknesses)."

"For me, more illustrations. They [teachers] should give more illustrations. Even though kahit mahina ang voice nila, mayroon silang illustration na makakatulong . . . (Even if the teacher's voice is soft or not very audible, the illustrations can help students understand)."

"Pwede naman pong lahat ay projected po talaga para take time talaga silang magbasa (The teacher may project or show all the materials and so they can take time to read)."

"Enough materials at saka dapat marami rin siyang enough choices . . . pag walang electricity at least may written handout siya. Kasi ganoon ang nangyayari sa amin (Teachers should have enough choices, so that if there is no electric power, he/she has a printed handout. That is what is happening to us)."

Two of the Black group respondents shared that there was no equal chance for learning in the university. They backed up this seemingly informal assessment with personal classroom observations and experiences:

"I can say that there is no equal chance of learning. You see . . . a teacher should care. You see, we have different kinds of students. Some learn by listening and if language is a barrier, how they are speaking in class, they won't learn easily. Some actually are visual learners so if you speak perfectly but you have a bad power point, they still won't get you. So if a teacher doesn't care of every students sitting in the classroom, they can try to understand, what type of learning [do] you want [for]him or her? What I can do for this student? The teacher really has to care. The major classes, it becomes easy but in general classes, it is hard because most students do not even know their own learning styles."

"In my opinion, no equal chance. [The university] basically has auditory learners, go to class, listen, attend class, always check in the class, lower grades and that means that if you study in the library, though you get the same content, you are going to flunk the class which means it is not fair for everyone. Some students need a room and they can dance around and they study in the pool. But if you are forced to sit down in the class for you to pass, it becomes unfair to others although most students have continuous routine from elementary school. It is not a perfect system for everyone."

That respondent sharing about the need for a room where students can dance, perhaps while studying, or study in the pool area, implies the need for a differentiated instruction. It is a reality that not all students who sit in the class can maximise learning because these students might have other ways of learning at their best. This seems to bear a repercussion to curriculum as well. On the other hand, the all-nursing Filipino-American group seemed to find handouts as an effective instructional material:

"I think, handouts are very good idea. Just like to give a visual for them to understand what words are being said or to just have so whatever the teachers are saying, it is actually seen. Instead of just listening and what was that word exactly?"

Two respondents from Hispanic group expressed their difficulty in coping up with dictated quizzes:

"In printed quiz, I feel confident and not pressured. I just can sit down and concentrate and not listening. But if he [teacher] is giving a quiz to write, you don't have enough time to think. But for those who are speaking in English, they can write fast. It's good but for those have limitations, it is stressful."

"I have a problem about that but the teacher knows about that. It is about quiz because sometimes you study hard, but when sometimes you write, you answer well and then the teacher starts to ask the question, 1,2,3,4 and then one is one minute I think. You don't have time to finish, they start the second one and then I have to leave the class because I cannot follow. Then the next class, the teacher asked me, 'Why you left the class?' I said, 'I cannot do the quiz that's why I left the class.' But still I lost points because I don't show up on time and then I have to go back and then I lost many quizzes."

In addition, same members from the Hispanic group accentuated their need for learning options. During the interview, I sensed the dire exigency of this need as they went on suggesting that teachers give options for academic requirements, and that they should consider other dimensions of intelligences and measures of assessment:

"You are mentioning different ways people learn, sometimes I feel like the teacher has usually in the classroom to do a group project or a term paper something like that. Maybe to reach everyone, or maybe the language problem can also be addressed in this way. Maybe they can have 3 or 4 options and they can advise you, 'You will do this one. I think you will do better with this one.' The person just chooses, not that it is easier than the other things so that I choose the easiest one to go out of it. But I know where my learning is, where I learn better, maybe, I will not do research. Maybe, I will do a project."

"Yeah so if the project is done outside of my schedule, give me another option. Let me do research or let me read five books and let me give you a paper. I will learn like that. But don't tell me at such a date, you have to perform or dramatized a script and I don't learn in it. It is stressful."

"I was thinking about the multiple intelligences. I was gonna suggest just also instead of just lectures and you know deadlines for this assignment. You know options? It is good to have options. I think the principal or the head teacher should let teachers upgrade themselves. You have courses to upgrade yourselves to the new trends of education because some teachers have been teaching 30 years, even though if it's just lecture, everybody listens. To me, I'm giving you all the information. But they don't know new theories, new trends in education and technology. They can use to improve learning, to improve opportunity for students' learning as much as listening. So I think, using methods, also bring yourself every year having short classes like two or three weeks just learning new methods."

This theme is considered to be the root of the other four themes, as the latter may interplay with differentiated instruction. According to Borich (2011), differentiated instruction provides the opportunity for the teacher to consider multiple characteristics of the learner simultaneously in choosing an instructional strategy for a particular learner and learning objective. Therefore, differentiated instruction is ideally suited for a heterogeneous classroom, in which learning histories, learning styles, learner interests, and skills as well as disabilities representing special populations may impair learning.

The goal of differentiated instruction is to give learners alternate paths with which to learn. Students working below grade level may be given resources that retrace major objectives that have already been taught, whereas learners above grade level may be asked to produce work that requires more complex and advanced thinking. By varying teaching strategies, the teacher makes sure that each student has the opportunity to learn in a manner compatible with his or her own learning strengths and preferences. The curriculum is no longer defined in terms of what a teacher will teach but rather in terms of what a student will be able to demonstrate. Honey and Mumford as cited in Glover and Law (2002) emphasised that learning is as much about developing personal competence as about accumulating knowledge. Jester and Miller (2000) espoused the four styles of learning, namely:

- 1) Visual/Verbal: relying on what is seen and in a written language format;
- 2) Visual/Non-verbal: relying on what is seen but presented via pictorial or graphic media;
- 3) Tactile/Kinaesthetic: relying on physical involvement, for example, experimentation and hands-on; and
- 4) Auditory/Verbal: relying on the presentation of material in oral language format

Buskist and Benassi (2012) stated that audio and visual technologies are becoming increasingly common in education because teachers find that they are easy to use and students find that they enhance their classroom experiences. As with social technologies, some audio and visual technologies that were not originally designed for educational instruction are finding their way into college and university teaching. Most of the technologies in this category are widely available, easily accessible, cost-effective, and require minimal technical know-how. Buskist and Benassi also emphasised that the focus on professional development is particularly important in light of the rapidly changing nature of today's student body. Filling the classrooms of colleges and universities is a new breed of student: individuals who have grown up online with much of the world's knowledge a mouse-click away. Although these tech-savvy students present new challenges for faculty, the effective use of technology in the classroom has the potential to make teaching and learning more impactful and fulfilling. With the rapid evolution of technology, it has perhaps never been more important to remember that professional development does not end with the completion of graduate school. Instead, it is a lifelong process that requires individuals to stay abreast of pedagogical research development and implement teaching methods that promote high levels of student learning.

Teacher Language Competence and Instructional Clarity

As I re-analysed the interview data, I realised that *teacher language competence* and *instructional clarity* cannot be separated. The instances shared by the respondents that pertain to either of these two are always intertwined with the other. The following interview transcriptions would prove the team-up of these two themes. Further, it did not come as a surprise to find that students would need effective communication in the classroom, for after all, what would teaching be without communication? All the ethnic groups, except for the Filipino group, conveyed their "learning anxiety" about some teachers who, despite their presence in the classroom, would still "dominantly" use the Filipino language in teaching. The Asian group vividly shared their experiences:

"If the teacher is not really English-oriented and there is [are] really [a] few foreigners, they tend to speak Tagalog if they knew that there are [a] few foreigners. And since the majority is Filipinos, they want to express to the majority which is Tagalog."

"We don't feel like we belong . . . It's me and the other foreign students. Okay how come you know the teacher is talking without considering us? And then we will be asking our other friends but they wouldn't know how to really, you know, explain to us again in English."

"Like when they speak, it's not the right accent. So it is hard for me to understand."

"It's like when a question is asked, the teacher says it in Filipino so it's like we have to ask our friends and the teacher shows any interest in answering questions that are asked by us, foreign students. It is like,

"I already answered because sometimes, they hardly [find it hard to] speak in English."

"Sometimes I cannot understand teachers saying because like teachers are speaking too fast."

The Black group expressed similar experiences regarding teachers' ostensibly inconsiderate language stance in the classroom:

"Yeah! During my freshman year, my first semester here in [this university], whenever our teacher used Tagalog in class, it would upset me because I've been trying to understand. Why can't he see me? No, it's just hard to fully understand. . . I normally focus in class. One of my teachers before, he kept changing languages, English-Tagalog, English-Tagalog. And I have to say, "Sir, I am not dumb but I fail in your class because you continuously use Tagalog."

"I think it depends to [upon] all of us. If you know some Tagalog, you see you are a foreigner and you cannot understand Tagalog and it's a major turn off. Whenever you come to class, the teacher just starts talking and like you know your mind just goes off even if you are really focused. You think, 'Oh, I will just wash my clothes and stuff,' but automatically, your brain just loses its focus and it is not really good because we came here to study. So we end up nothing in class. First day, second day. . . eventually you miss classes, absences and you don't know if you have assignments and at the end, [everything is] piling up."

Two students pointed out that a teacher's English language limitations, or Philippine variety of English, can affect influence how he/she uses English as medium of instruction and writes instructions in English, thereby affecting student understanding:

"It is something with sentence structure. If someone is thinking in Tagalog and end up writing it to English, the way they construct the sentence would be difficult for you to understand. So even if I speak quickly, I'm trying to understand the alternating words. The structure sometimes is confusing even in some examinations. The question asked, it looks straight and it's very confusing and as a teacher, they will be saying it's clear. So it's kind of...I'm getting to use to it now but the structure is sometimes different. They say something and mean something else."

"Sometimes, they tend to . . . not all, tense is not really correct. He uses something in the past but he is not really talking about the past. Okay, that's confusing. I'm like trying to understand and comprehend what he is really trying to mean."

On a different note, the Filipino-American group observed that general subject teachers tended to use "Tagalog" or "Tagalog" when teaching. They shared that their major subjects were not really a problem, since their teachers would solely use English as medium of instruction:

"I noticed that most of our major subjects are more taught in English but a lot of my minors are like its mostly like Tagalog or Taglish."

"I have a class where the teacher has a really different accent and he spoke Taglish so whenever there were slides or powerpoint or anything, when we took notes it's really hard to understand what he was saying and he would talk fast like, 'What are you saying?'"

Grammar constraints of teachers were also pointed out as barriers to instructional clarity:

"Sometimes, it is grammatically wrong."

"Sometimes, it can be misleading like it is confusing sometimes. But that is easily fixed. You just ask. But it's just minor...and little grammatical errors."

One Filipino-American student whose mother hailed from Mindanao was quite prudent in stating sweeping statements, specifically about those who speak a dialect. She, herself, knew how to speak the Visayan dialect but she expressed how teachers with prominent regional dialect can affect the understanding of the lesson:

"English with their thick Tagalog or Visayan accent because students would just focus on the funny intonation instead of listening to the lesson and then yeah . . . they just talk and talk."

The Hispanic group's statements further gave proofs of the interplay between teacher's English language competence and instructional clarity:

"Some teachers are giving explanation in Tagalog and then spend time with that and then speak quick English. So we feel like we did not get the essence. But it's only a few teachers, mostly in general subjects."

"I just wanna skip class because it's just like I cannot understand. Better read your book at home because at school, you cannot understand. So why go to class?"

"Because sometimes, they [teachers] don't know how to explain well in English. . . that is why they speak in Tagalog. But it is becoming difficult for foreigners. I think teachers should learn how to express themselves clearly."

With due fairness to those teachers who ensure that they are not only proficient in English language, but they are also making classroom communications clear, one student commended those who are doing the extra mile to explain nicely:

"Sometimes for me on the exams, the wording is a little bit weird like when they are asking a question you don't sometimes like how they word it. They explain too long, they just lost what they want to ask. And we have told teachers that and they have like actually listened to us or if I have a question, they are really nice. They do come and they really explain what the question is asking but some teachers, they don't know how to explain any other way."

One student from the Filipino group also mentioned of the same concern a student in the Black group had pertaining to vague instructions and questions in the examinations. This student cited the grammatical mistakes in sentence constructions, making the test items too ambiguous:

"I have also observed in one of my classes. In the exam, the sentences are so complex. I mean you can't really understand what kind of answer a teacher is looking for and so the tendency is, hindi maintindihan so hindi ko na alam kung ano ang isasagot (Since the question can't be understood, I don't know what to answer). And so aside from the sentence structure, very complicated, grammar pa niya. . . And so especially with, kasi may mga times na tinatanong niya (there are times that a teacher asks), it is not correct)grammar, kung papansinin mo yung grammar. And so malilito talaga ang estudyante."

Again, the issue on teacher's fast-paced talking was brought up, such that if the teacher speaks too fast, instructional clarity is compromised. As a result, a student would lose the lustre of his/her motivation to learn:

"I experienced kasi that time noong second year when I took English subject. Yung parang instead namamotivatekang mag-aral, walana, kasiparanghindimosiyamaintindihankahitgaanosiyakafluent mag English. Some teachers are very fast talking po."

The interview data revealed how students struggled with teacher language limitations and their relation to the quality of instructional clarity in the classroom. In this study, it was found that students equated insufficient English competence with instructional quality in spoken and written forms. Instructional clarity, as stated by

Cruickshank, Jenkuns, and Metcalf (2009), has been the focus of much research ever since Rosenshine and Furst (1971) identified it as the 'most promising teacher variable related to student achievement.' Instructional clarity refers to the teacher's ability to provide instruction that helps students come to a clear and accurate understanding of important concepts or ideas. Thus, clarity is something students achieve, not something the teacher does. However, research has identified specific teacher behaviours that students say help them achieve this clarity of understanding (Hines, 1981; Hines, Kennedy, & Cruickshank, 1985). For students with learning disabilities, the clarity of the teacher is of critical importance (Banikowski, 1999; Winter, 2001).

Further, according to students, clear teachers emphasise important points by repeating them, writing them on the board or in presentations, pausing after stating them, and reviewing them. They monitor students' clarity of understanding by asking questions and providing students with activities and experiences that allow them to apply their knowledge. When students do not understand, clear teachers repeat, review, or rephrase important points. Not surprisingly, teachers who most often and most proficiently use these behaviours to help students understand are associated with significantly greater student learning and satisfaction than teachers who do not (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Hativa, 1998; Holpin, Easterday, & Elrod, 1994; Metcalf, 1992; Metcalf & Cruickshank, 1991).

In similar vein, language proficiency constitutes the foundation of the professional confidence of non-native teachers who use or should use English as medium of instruction. Language competence has been rated as the most essential characteristic of a good teacher according to Lange, as cited in Eslami and Fatahi (2008). Berry, as cited in Eslami and Fatahi (2008) conducted a study of two groups of English teachers teaching at the secondary level in Poland. His aim was to determine which of three components (methodology, theory of language teaching, or language improvement) they needed most. Language improvement was ranked as the most important for both groups, and methodology was second, while the two groups ranked theory a poor third. According to Doff, as cited in Eslami and Fatahi (2008), a teacher's confidence in the classroom is undermined by a poor command of the English language. Poor command of the language can affect the self-esteem and professional status of the teacher and interfere with simple teaching procedures. Furthermore, it can keep the teacher from fulfilling the pedagogical requirements of a more communicative approach to language teaching.

Conclusion

Learning needs abound in a multicultural classroom. In the learning context of the university where the study was conducted, this research was deemed imperative to specifically identify and address the varying needs of the student population from over 50 countries. Findings indicated that the learning needs in the multicultural classroom are *culturally responsive teaching*, *teacher immediacy behaviours*, *differentiated instruction* and *teacher language competence and instructional clarity*. Each of these themes bears implications to equitable teaching. Students need a culturally responsive teaching, such that if a teacher is culturally sensitive, he/she will endeavour to know student backgrounds and capabilities and eventually make teaching preparation relevant to the needs of actual students with no one left behind. Upon knowing individual students, a teacher can then employ differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all, considering their strengths and learning styles. This learning need is the root of all the other themes as the latter build on the former. Moreover, a good teacher who has committed and taken steps towards culturally responsive teaching will, by all means, employ various teaching strategies. Teacher verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviours will then be manifested as these put across messages of love and concern towards individual students in spite of who they are. Furthermore, since the teacher desires to reach out to students' needs, he/she will use the language of instruction masterfully so that effective communication will eventually lead to mutual understanding and respect.

Multicultural education aims for equitable teaching which means that there is equal learning opportunity among all students of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The findings entail the overarching need for school administration to formulate curriculum and instruction policies for foreign students; teachers need to do learning needs assessment at the start of classes in relation to students' knowledge and skills of the subject matter; negotiate modifications in the course syllabus with the students; and teachers to become more equipped with pedagogical tools and up-to-date teaching media; need to further improve instructional communication skill in English, both in spoken and written forms. Teacher immediacy behaviours need to be enhanced and practiced as these are integral to students' psychological well-being affecting their attitudes towards learning. Finally, data analysis showed students' need for teacher's English language competence as

this impinges on instructional clarity. Respondents cited teachers' frequent use of the Filipino language as a manifestation of the latter's apathy towards their needs as international students, Filipino students included. Hence, teachers need to seriously reflect upon their current practices and see how these affect not only student learning, but also student harmonious development at large. It is thus recommended that teachers rethink their approaches so that students from diverse cultural and language backgrounds will have equal learning opportunities. Further, it is deemed imperative to look into the curriculum and instruction to bring about changes in the way educational programs are conceptualised, organised, and taught.

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