Multicultural Diverse Classroom
Addressing the Instructional Challenges and Reflections, from a Teacher’s Perspective

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Abstract
This paper focuses on personal experience and observation of a multicultural and diverse classroom. The main aim of this reflective study is to find out the effects of individual culture on a student’s life and how different cultures interact positively and negatively in an EFL class. The significance of this study is to devise some plans, to meet the demands of all the lifestyles in the EFL academic background. This experience led to some beneficial results based on the understanding of diverse classroom requirements and teacher’s challenges in handling the students of different cultural backgrounds. A group of students coming from various nationalities form a community inside the classroom; bear their learning styles based on their cultural history. This idea is quite challenging for the teacher. The author has discussed intensively: how culture and language relate to each other along with the role of a teacher in managing a diverse classroom. Finally, the author has recommended that the teacher’s special role in creating a methodology that addresses different cultures is essential. In this triangle of teacher, student, and institution, all three corners are equally imperative to form a strong EFL multicultural classroom entity.

Keywords: diverse EFL classroom, multinational classroom, culture, multicultural, teaching methods, teacher’s challenges

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1. Introduction
Some teachers consider a diverse multinational classroom as an enjoyable experience. They think that the range of nationalities in the classroom is an asset (Waugh, 2012). Their differing cultural personalities provide a vivid scope to the teachers to experiment with the English language teaching in an innovative style.

Many teachers today find themselves in a situation where they face the students belonging to various nationalities, which can sometimes prove challenging when keeping an atmosphere of equality and respect within the class (Scott, 2016). It creates an atmosphere of debate in Speaking and communicative relationship in Writing and Reading, inside the school. It depends upon the teacher’s perspective, how they take this diverse classroom: as an exciting challenge or an overwhelming threat. Teacher’s own cultural beliefs also play an essential role, which should be under control and used positively. The teacher’s role should be unbiased and kind. So the prejudice reduction describes lessons and activities teachers use to help students develop positive attitudes towards different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups (Bank, 2010).

A teacher is fully aware of this challenge, and it requires a thorough study on the part of the teacher also. Achieving learning objectives is not an easy task in a diverse classroom, so a comprehensive teaching plan is the responsibility of the teacher as well as the department. A teacher’s role lies in supporting multicultural understanding between pupils creating mutual respect, a positive working environment that prepares students for an active role in this diverse world we live in (Scott, 2016).

2. Literature Review
2.1 Definition of Multicultural Diverse classroom
A diverse multicultural classroom is an environment where both students and teachers belong to different ethnic backgrounds, accepting all races, cultures, and religions. (Hoosein, 2014)

A multicultural classroom has been defined as one in which there is a blend of students from various cultures, and it forms a diverse learning environment. (Nadda, 2017)

2.2. Investigating the phenomenon of a diverse multicultural classroom
First of all, when a teacher faces a diverse classroom, it is believed that teachers should investigate the components of a different class. Alismail (2016) suggests that all the Teachers need to understand multiculturalism in detail to provide equal education for all the students.

Linton (2018) concludes this in a vivid style. It is necessary for today’s teachers to come forward and face the challenge. The teacher should approach the students individually and try to stay impartial towards the students, to maximize individual learning experiences.

2.3. Management strategies in handling a diverse classroom
The teacher should encourage the students to speak freely and discuss their culture, ethnicity, and traditions with the teacher as well as the fellow students, to make others aware of their culture. (Friswell, Lowett, Reed, Turner, & Ponder, 2013). The third important step is: which strategies should be chosen by the teacher in English as a foreign language (EFL) diverse classroom. Viafara (2010) suggests
Teachers lead, organize, and monitor activities in the classroom providing ample occasions for students to listen to or engage in dialogues with them. Since they are regarded as expert users of the target language, teachers become models to show how the language works. (p.58)

2.4 Teacher’s endeavor inside and outside the classroom
Burnett (1999) further emphasizes the role of the teacher in this context: The good teachers of the culturally diverse students understand the differences of individuals and culture effectively and try to judge these differences in a positive way.

He also recommends the use of instructional strategies and learning activities that should have variety, because variety helps them to develop and strengthen other approaches to learning. Getting reliable information about the students will depend on the type of assessment and ethnographic sources (Ovando, Combs. 2018, p.27).

2.5 Modification of Curriculum
The last thing is the curriculum that every institute should choose and modify very carefully. Nadda (2017) refers to this point strongly, “thus today one of the major challenges faced by teachers in the transaction of the curriculum in the class is for these culturally different students” (p.741). The new curriculum will consist of a wide variety of teaching strategies that embrace the diverse cultures in the classroom (Parkerson, 2019).

3. Methodology and Motivating factors leading to the discussion
As a teacher, the author encountered a diverse classroom setting, while teaching the Intensive English course (a blend of all English Language Skills) to the students of level 1 of King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia.

There came the students from various nationalities (Saudi Arabian, Yemeni, Algerian, Egyptian, Syrian, Sudanese, Palestinian, Indian, Pakistani, Burmese, etc.) in the classroom. Their ages were between 16-20 years. The class consisted of almost 40 students. The author observed all the students and addressed them individually inside and outside the classroom. They appeared in office hours and found the freedom to talk about their cultures and learning styles. It was a classroom that initiated different challenges to meet the learning requirements of all these students, coming from different cultures, carrying their customs and rituals. Understanding their backgrounds and learning styles was another challenge. The author has highlighted these challenges and their solutions also.

4. Analysis and Discussion
While analyzing a diverse classroom, the author noticed that there are two major types of students: Arabs and non- Arabs. They were different based on their mother-tongue. In an EFL classroom, these students behave differently, and dealing with them was a challenging task. Students from South Asia (India, Pakistan), had their cultural background; on the other hand, students from the Middle East had their specific culture and social norms. So teaching to such a variegated group has been an uphill task that proved very beneficial in discovering comprehensive teaching methodologies.

Comparison of Arab and non-Arab students
The Arab students (Algerians, Palestinians, Egyptians, Yemenis, and Sudanese), although belonging to different nationalities, almost share the same mother tongue and same culture. Such students vary
in their understanding of a foreign language. The reason is that their schooling was in their native country with specific settings of their homeland. Later traveling to another state and exposing it to a different environment and contexts may hinder their ability to learn a foreign language.

Although Arab students share the same language (Arabic) to communicate with each other, but still, some colloquial expressions vary from country to country. They feel difficulty in understanding different aspects of the English language such as grammatical structures, including tenses (present, past, and future), parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.), and pronunciation as they mix English sounds with Arabic. They are very poor in fluency and developing dictionary skills. Their native language and local colloquial expressions create a barrier in learning a foreign language (Husain & Wahid, 2008).

The second type of student is those who are entirely from another culture (non-Arabs), carrying an educational background in their natural settings or at least bearing a different native language. Such students feel disturbed and are upset when they are sharing a classroom with Arab peers and learning a foreign language. So they face a dual challenge: communicating with peers of different native languages and learning a new language.

The second type of student mentioned above develops two kinds of reactions: Negative and Positive. Positively they may like to share and communicate with their peers and try to learn from them in their typical way. Negatively their reaction may be of anger, frustration, fright, and confusion. In addition to communicating their peers, they have to learn a new language, in a unique academic setting and environment. So many things are simultaneously unknown and unique for them. These obscure and new things may block the learning process until the threat goes.

5. Challenges faced by the teachers
The challenges faced by the teachers are also diverse:
A) Addressing the multicultural groups
B) Developing the know-how of individual cultures and behaviors
C) Developing strategies and materials to facilitate the learning process of a foreign language
D) Understanding the learning styles of a variety of students
These challenges are discussed collectively under the following headings:
1- Behavioral problems
2- Environmental Challenges
3- Curriculum Challenges

5.1 Behavioral Problems (faced inside the classroom)
It is a fact that a teacher faces different types of behaviors inside the classroom during his/her teaching process. Some students are unwilling to learn English grammatical rules as they find them challenging, and at the same time, some students show weird behaviors when they are asked to speak in a classroom. Some students feel demotivated in learning a foreign language. These behaviors become more complicated when teachers face a multicultural classroom. Here the knowledge of background and cultures play an important role in modifying the classroom behaviors.

5.2 Environmental challenges
Teachers create an environment that is supposed to be friendly enough for students to learn a foreign language. In a diverse, multicultural classroom, it’s a massive challenge for the teacher to create such an environment that makes every student feel at home. Certain students are shy and reluctant to such a limit that they don’t participate in any classroom activity. The teacher has to devise a plan to encourage and support them by creating a friendly and socially free environment, inside the class.

5.3 Curriculum Challenges
The challenges faced by the teachers regarding a particular curriculum are intense and complex, because, in a diverse classroom, the students often face trouble in understanding certain materials and instructions, presented in specific EFL syllabus. Again their backgrounds and cultural diversity make it hard for them to understand a set of instructions. The teacher should independently choose, modify, and reconstruct such a syllabus or specific areas of the prescribed curriculum to make it understandable for a diverse group of students. For years, I have convinced the teachers to improve and modify their curriculum and it’s not difficult to do. (Linton, 2018)

6. Findings- The Importance of researchers and qualified teacher
Teacher’s responsibility is to meet all the challenges, inside and outside an EFL classroom, in a very effective manner.

To prove the importance of qualified and experienced teachers and researchers, an example of a project funded by the National Center of Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning in Tucson, Arizona, in 1993, is worth mentioning.

The findings of this project are practicable and adaptable for the teachers of universal settings. I also suggest following the same strategies to become effective teachers in a culturally diverse classroom. This project emphasized three main areas:

1- The Community—Teacher’s interaction with the families, visiting them, studying “funds of knowledge.”
2- Teacher’s labs—Allowing the teachers to share their findings with other teachers and researchers to form a collaboration
3- The teachers would examine the Schools—the existing teaching methods, and make innovations according to the study of “funds of knowledge.”

The result presented in this project was very positive and beneficial: an emergence of teachers who were ethnographers as well as qualitative researchers. The relationship between teachers and students changed.

The institutions should adopt this type of planning and they should bring forward all the available resources to produce a lot of teachers who are active in solving the problems of a multicultural diverse classroom. These teachers will also suggest effective strategies for their colleagues.

The author has studied the individual behaviors, and developed a friendly relationship with students, questioned them about their country and their schooling. The author posed her image as a neutral observer, having no emotional attachment with any specific nationality. These curious efforts
to make English classes the most effective and spontaneous were based on patience and devoting ample time. If a teacher provides these students confidence and treats them equally, they may prove themselves the best communicators inside and outside class. After applying the same technique, they started putting efforts in learning a foreign language, in the presence of a healthy competitive environment.

7. Role of Teacher to overcome the challenges of a Diverse EFL Classroom
The role of a teacher is discussed extensively, keeping in mind the above-mentioned challenges of a diverse and multicultural classroom. Moore & Hasen (2012) are of the view “today’s classroom must celebrate diversity.” (p.4)

7.1 Developing a keen knowledge of cultures and their relation with language
The teacher should know that the students inside the classroom carry their learning, customs, rituals, and social norms. While standing in an EFL classroom, the teacher should bear in mind that although these students have different cultural traits, still they share some common traits. The teacher should try to use these common traits in the classroom and eliminate prejudice. For example, in a Saudi classroom setting, although there are different nationalities, they are all Muslims and share Islamic culture. The teacher should realize their values and make them learn a foreign language by respecting these values and traits. In this context, Hinkel (2014) suggests a strategy that:

In EFL settings, learners can work on short questionnaires that also have the goal of identifying the manifestations of culture in language use and heightening learner’s awareness of politeness, norms, socio-cultural variables, pragmatic functions and linguistic forms of speech acts (e.g., the types of “softening” devices and their variability) in their first language. (p.25)

7.2. The nature of a cultural shock needs attention
The students in a diverse classroom setting have cultural similarities, and dissimilarities, different traditions, and education systems. The teacher teaching EFL course should understand these cultural differences that result in cultural shock.

English as a foreign language, carrying a specific curriculum taught in non-native classrooms is culturally different. The teacher should create an association of cultures or familiarize the students with a new cultural context, in a very effective way, to avoid cultural shock.

The best way is to create a multicultural environment inside the classroom where all the students having their unique cultures are provided equal opportunities to participate in all the activities. Teacher’s respect for their cultural backgrounds will facilitate EFL learning and bridge the gap between cultures and eliminate cultural shock.

7.3. Understanding non-verbal symbols
In a multicultural classroom, students, sometimes express themselves with symbols, like gestures, facial expressions, and body language. These symbols must be interpreted well by the EFL teachers. For example, an Indian student will express herself in an entirely different way as compared to an Arab student. Indian students will be extrovert and expressive whereas, an Arab student will be soft-
spoken and timid in her body language. Her spoken style and accent will also be unique as compared to the Arab student. This may create laughter and sometimes embarrassment on her part. The teacher should assist such students shrewdly, in adopting the cultural norms and classroom environment in which they are at that time.

7.4. Creating an emotionally positive classroom climate
The teacher should show respect for all the cultures, and students belonging to different cultures, by creating a positive classroom climate.

The teacher can learn a few phrases in their native language, can label items inside the classroom, can create opportunities and praise, can provide supportive feedback, etc.

Robins, Lindsey, and Terrell tell a story that a person viewed icebergs through special glasses. He could see the whole structure of each iceberg above and below the waterline. After examining multiple icebergs, it was clear to him that each was unique; no two were the same. Using this illustration, the researchers concluded that, as teachers become proficient at comprehending the cultural traits, they will learn more about their students. They will view each student from a particular set of lenses that helps them recognize and appreciate him or her as a unique individual. (Linton, 2018)

7.5. Emphasize Co-operative Learning
Cooperative-Learning has proved the best results so far. According to Nadda (2017), “The general idea behind co-operative learning is that making small heterogeneous groups of students so that they can master the various aspects of a particular task” (p.743). This approach will help to motivate the students and develop interpersonal skills among the students. They will learn from their peers and promote a definite social relationship between culturally different students.

7.6. Teacher’s behavior should be unbiased and neutral
The teacher should develop a fair, positive behavior in her and avoid favoritism, discrimination, and prejudice. The teacher should provide equal opportunities for learning, to all the students in a multicultural classroom. Personal likings based on racism and favoritism needs to avoid strictly. It affects negatively on the learning process and emotionally disturbs the students. The teacher should recognize achievements justly. It’s vice versa; even the students should also learn to be unbiased and impartial while learning a foreign language.

7.7. Understanding different learning styles
A teacher is a judge as well as the analyzer, who differentiates between different learning styles by sharp analysis and then judges the potential of the individual student. Reiff (1997) writes, “Even when teaching college students, culturally responsible instruction and assessment should promote learner sensitivity by recognizing student style differences.” (p. 62)

Every teacher knows that students, mainly belonging to diverse cultural backgrounds, have different learning styles. For example; some are auditory learners- who learn best by hearing, some are physical learners- who learn best through hands-on activities. Sensitive teachers can identify learning styles and factors, affecting the learning process, through careful observation. Teachers
should accommodate these differences in learning styles, by showing flexibility and willingness to experiment with different techniques. It will maximize the learning of a foreign language. For visual learners, teachers can use diagrams (posters, web), visual projects (ppt), videos, graphic design software. It will also help other learners, as seeing enhances learning.

7.8. Realistic Expectations from students
Teachers have many expectations from the students as they are the product of their hard work. Moore and Hasen, (2012) explain, “Teachers need to set realistic expectations for all the students when making assignments, giving presentations, conducting discussions, and grading examinations.” (p.6). These expectations are formed by keeping in mind the diversity of the classroom. It requires such tasks by the teachers that are easy to perform, by all the students. For example, Non-Saudi students (Indians, Pakistanis, Syrian, and Algerians, etc.) are good at speaking English, whereas, Saudi students are good at visual arts and English accents. Thus, teachers should keep in mind all these diversities in the classroom.

7.9. Understanding the students with special needs
Another issue regarding the individual needs of the students that our institutions often ignore. “Thus, teachers must be prepared to identify diverse student’s strengths, weaknesses, aspirations, limitations, and special needs.” (Moore & Hasen, 2012. p.7)

Every diverse classroom has some students with special needs. The role of the teacher is very tough here. They have to identify such students and devise the specific strategies to teach these students. “For example, they create outlines, concept maps, and other visual aids for students who have difficulty processing complex concepts.” (Moore & Hasen, 2012. pp.7-8)

Teachers need to plan for working with students who have special needs. Listening teachers may use recorded audios inside classes. Especially during exams, teachers should use modifications in assignments as well as exam papers.

7.10. Understanding student’s differences
In a multicultural classroom, there are some gifted students, along with weak and slow learners. A teacher should use such techniques as peer group learning, co-operative learning, peer tutoring, community problem solving, self-directed learning, etc. to make foreign language learning easy for the students having different learning capacities. There is no hard and fast rule to understand the differences. Rather, it is a style of thinking about teaching and learning that gives value to the individual students and can be implemented in the classroom in many ways.” (Moore & Hasen, 2012. p.22)

8. Recommendations
After going through this experience and a careful study of the diverse groups, I found that there are specific requirements to be fulfilled, to make this diverse EFL classroom perfect and producing positive learning. These are my suggestions:

1- There should be a friendly communicative relationship between students and the teacher
2- The teacher should devise new methods of teaching to fulfill the learning needs of the students.
3- There should be room for modifying the curriculum according to the student’s learning styles.
4- The teachers should play the role of researchers, always planning, investigating the needs of a diverse classroom, and sharing their experiences with their peers.

9. Conclusion
The teachers should be skilled and trained enough to manage and provide effective teaching in a multicultural EFL classroom.

Malik, Rehman & Ajmal (2011) has recommended that the new teachers should be trained according to the requisites of a multicultural classroom so that they are fully aware of the procedure of dealing with students of a diverse cultural background. The institutions are also responsible for selecting such innovative teachers to address the needs of a diverse classroom. The teachers should be monitored and facilitated in doing research work, experimenting, and carrying different projects to enhance the learning process in a diverse classroom.

To fulfill the demands of multiculturalism, the schools need to strive for the implementation of the specific policies for all classrooms to follow. However, there are plenty of initiatives that individual teachers can take to help their classes specifically (Scott, 2016).

Teaching a multicultural classroom is a phenomenal experience and it becomes enjoyable and produces maximum learning outcomes. The teachers should utilize this diversity inside and outside the classroom, in planning specific teaching methodologies and research work.

About the author
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