



The Experience of Multiculturalism in Schools in Malta: a qualitative exploration

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Multiculturalism refers to

“a broad set of mutually reinforcing approaches or methodologies concerning the incorporation and participation of immigrants and ethnic minorities and their modes of cultural/religious difference”

Multilingualism, religious pluralism, and transnationalism are making the multicultural experience more challenging.

Steven Vertovec (2010)

List of Nationalities in State Schools in Malta

(research and development section MEDE October 2016)

Albania

Algeria

Armenia

Australia

Austria

Bangladesh

Belarus

Belgium

Bosnia & Herzegovina

Botswana

Brazil

Bulgaria

Burkina Faso

Cambodia

Cameroon

Canada

Chad

Chile

China

Croatia

Cuba

Cyprus

Czech

Republic

Denmark

Egypt

Eritrea

Estonia

Ethiopia

Finland

France

Georgia

Germany

Greece

Ghana

Guatemala

Hungary

Iceland

India

Indonesia

Iran

Iraq

Ireland

Israel



Italy	Macedonia	Poland	Sweden
Ivory Coast	Malaysia	Portugal	Switzerland
Jamaica	Mexico	Romania	Syria
Japan	Moldova	Russia	Thailand
Jordan	Mongolia	Serbia	Togo
Kenya	Montenegro	Serbia & Montenegro	Tunisia
Korea, South	Morocco	Sierra Leone	Turkey
Latvia	Namibia	Slovakia	Ukraine
Lebanon	Netherlands	Slovenia	United Kingdom
Liberia	Nigeria	Somalia	United States
Libya	Norway	South Africa	Zimbawe
Palestine	Pakistan	Spain	
Panama	Peru	Sri Lanka	
Lithuania	Philippines	Sudan	



97
nationalities

1. Motivations for the Research

being a teacher myself

- challenges in the face of increasing national and ethnic diversity in schools
- experiencing the challenges with colleagues both in the same school and in other schools

'the sociological imagination'

- to discover more about this social phenomenon

The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society.
(C. Wright Mills)

2. Context

'multiculturalism' – the term

as a political project

- promotes cultural diversity in both private and public spheres (as opposed to assimilation)
- to develop democratic citizenship

to refer to a multicultural society

- this implies cultural diversity in a society (in the demographic sense)
- *"il-multikulturalizmu f' Malta qed jiżdied"*
(multiculturalism in Malta is increasing)

In the research question and sub-questions the term 'multiculturalism' is used in the demographic sense.

Citizenship

*the development of rights and duties embedded in
a sense of belonging*

- Multiculturalism is a political endeavour “engaged first and foremost [in] developing new models of **democratic citizenship**, grounded in human rights ideals” (Will Kymlicka 2010)
- The meaning of citizenship in this study is built on Ralf Dahrendorf’s (1974) idea of the term which goes beyond the legal aspect, focusing more on its **evolutionary character** combining human beings’ aspirations for equality, liberty and life chances.
- The definition also tries to capture Bkikhu Parekh’s (2006) idea of ‘**belonging**’ as a citizen, that is being accepted and feeling welcome.



Hence, citizenship here implies

“the continuous evolution of rights and duties aimed at developing a sense of belonging among residents of a particular place in a particular time.”

**Applied to the
experience in the school
as a ‘society in miniature’
(Emile Durkheim)**

'the multiculturalism backlash'

- **politically, multiculturalism has suffered a backlash**

“Reports of multiculturalism’s death are very much exaggerated
[...] we need to keep in mind the different forms that
multiculturalism takes, only some of which have faced a serious
backlash”

(Kymlicka, 2010)

It is imperative to examine the conditions that existed in
different countries prior to the implementation of
multiculturalist policies.

- **different scenarios in schools too**

In Malta a large number of nationalities (Oct 2016 – 97 nationalities)

Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) 2015

(new results of 2014-2020 will be published by the end of 2020)

<https://www.mipex.eu/>

As regards Migrant Integration Policies, Malta ranked 33rd out of 38 countries scoring 40 points out of 100 falling into the 'slightly unfavourable' category

In the area of education Malta scored 19 out of 100 falling into the 'unfavourable category'



MIPEX points out that Malta still lacks a lot when it comes to:

1. policies regarding **teacher training**, vis-à-vis multiculturalism
2. **support to schools** in the face of the increasing phenomenon of multiculturalism
3. **support to migrant pupils**, such as no support for social integration, immigrant languages, cultures or parental outreach

“despite the fact that Malta’s National Curriculum Framework places diversity as one of the core principles across the curriculum for all pupils to learn about minority groups, different languages and cultures”

<https://curriculum.gov.mt/en/Resources/The-NCF/Pages/default.aspx>

3. The Research Questions

The main research question:

How, if at all, does multiculturalism impact the experiences of pupils and teachers at school?

And the following sub-questions:

- 1. To what extent do Maltese identity markers affect the multicultural schooling experience of pupils and teachers?**
- 2. How, if at all, does multiculturalism affect the school climate?**
- 3. To what extent is the multicultural schooling experience a product of teachers' perceptions and behaviours?**
- 4. In what ways is the making of citizenship in the school affected by increasing multiculturalism?**

4. Research Methods and Methods of Analysis

► Qualitative study

A **case study** of a State secondary school was carried out using the **qualitative interview** as the main tool.

The interviews were carried out **on the field**, supplemented by observation.

7 types of interviews were developed: 1 for pupils, 1 for subject teachers, 1 for guidance teachers, 1 for the Head of School, 1 for the Assistant Head of School, 1 for the Head of the Migrant Learners Unit, 1 for the Head of the Department of Inclusion at the University of Malta

► Sampling

Strategic non random sampling was used for both pupils and teachers.

► Analysis of the data

Thematic analysis was used.

Pupil Sample

chosen from Year 9 (aged 13) for two main reasons:

1. had the largest number of different nationalities
2. the only co-ed year in the school

Teacher Sample

- 1 P.E. teacher
- 1 P.S.C.D. teacher
- 1 Religion teacher
- 1 Social Studies teacher
- 1 I.C.T teacher
- 1 'Maltese as a Foreign Language Teacher'
- 2 Guidance teachers

The term '**non-Maltese**' is used to refer to the pupils in my sample who migrated to Malta, while the term '**Maltese**' refers to the pupils who were born and always resided in Malta.

Pupil Interviewees' Profiles

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Parents' Nationality</u>	<u>Religious Affiliation</u>	<u>Native Language/s</u>	<u>Maltese and English Languages</u>	<u>Time in Malta</u>	<u>Time in School</u>
Cody	Australian	both Australian	none	English	only English	2 years	from beginning of year
Khaled	Libyan	both Libyan	Muslim	Arabic	Maltese & English	3 years	from beginning of year
David	Maltese	both Maltese	Catholic	Maltese	Maltese & English	since birth	from beginning of year
Julian	Maltese	both Maltese	Catholic	Maltese	Maltese & English	since birth	from beginning of year
Anna	Maltese	both Maltese	Catholic	Maltese	Maltese & English	since birth	from beginning of year
Maria	Maltese	both Maltese	Catholic	Maltese	Maltese & English	since birth	from beginning of year
Malak	Maltese	father Lebanese, mother Maltese	Muslim	Maltese & Arabic	Maltese & English	since birth	4 months
Farah	Maltese	father Palestinian, mother Maltese	Muslim	Maltese & Arabic	Maltese & English	since birth	4 months
Niya	Pakistani	both Pakistani	Catholic	Urdu	only English	3 years	from beginning of year
Alek	Serbian	both Serbian	Christian Orthodox	Serbian	very little English	7 months	6 months
Novak	Serbian	both Serbian	Christian Orthodox	Serbian	Maltese and English	5 years	from beginning of year
Sami	Syrian	both Syrian	Muslim	Kurdish	none	4 months	3 weeks

5. Key themes and Findings

Expert Interviews Data - Themes

1. *The Background :*

- the establishment of Migrant Learners Unit in 2013 as a result of uneasiness felt by teachers
- there are more statistics today by we still don't know what to do with them

2. *The Challenges:*

- migrant pupils turning up at random times throughout the year
- the large number of different nationalities

3. *Training:*

- No teachers have been specifically trained so far to teach migrant learners
- All leaders in the educational system must be targeted for training

Field Data - Themes

1. *Barriers*

The main *barriers* to fostering meaningful contact, integration and a sense of belonging were:

- **language** (prominence of Maltese language)
- **religious affiliation** (prominence of Catholic Religion)
- **lack of teacher training**

2. Bridges

These challenges are dealt with by improvising coping methods that help in building *bridges* to overcome the *barriers*:

- teaching '**Maltese as a Foreign Language**'
- **translating** exam papers and lesson resources
- **code switching** by teachers
- asking **pupils to support each other**
- communicating notices in the morning **assembly** in English besides Maltese
- a '**buddy system**' and support by guidance teachers
- the school system is explained to **parents** of non-Maltese pupils on a one-to-one basis.

3. *Relations*

- Maltese and non-Maltese pupils **do not mix a lot** in the school's playgrounds
- There is slightly **more interaction in the classrooms**
- Maltese pupils had mainly Maltese **friends**, non-Maltese pupils had a mix of Maltese and non-Maltese
- **Newcomers** are shown support
- Niya who wears the **hijab** is wary of approaching newcomers
- All pupils support each other **when absent from school** to catch up
- There is a pattern of "***aħna l-Maltin u huma l-barranin***" ('us' the Maltese and 'them' the foreigners) which often leads to conflict and peer victimisation



4. *Belonging*

- The **Maltese pupils** in my sample felt a sense of belonging to Malta.
- The **non-Maltese pupils** felt more a sense of belonging to their native country irrespective of the amount of time they have been residing in Malta.
- The **non-Maltese and the non-Catholic** pupils lacked in their sense of belonging to the school.



6. Answers to Research Question and Sub-questions

- i. To what extent do Maltese identity markers affect the multicultural schooling experience of pupils and teachers?*
- The extent of the influence of **the Maltese language** and **the Catholic religion**, as identity markers, on the multicultural schooling experience of pupils and teachers is large.
 - The prevalence of the Maltese language and the Catholic religion is giving rise to **a sense of uneasiness and exclusion** in an increasingly multicultural environment, characterised by multilingualism and religious pluralism.



ii. *How, if at all, does multiculturalism (in the demographic sense) affect the school climate?*

- Multiculturalism affects relations, referred to as the school climate, **both positively and negatively**. The findings of this study pointed towards a mixture of separateness and interaction, of positive and negative relations, in different situations during school hours.
- Positive relations and interaction do not result automatically from **mere contact**.
- Instances of **conflict and peer victimisation** were found.



iii. To what extent is the multicultural schooling experience a product of teachers' perceptions and behaviours?

- Teachers develop **coping methods** (such as code switching and translating teaching resources and exam papers) in their attempt to be as inclusive as possible, however, these coping methods are not enough and at times may not even work out.
- The perceptions of the teachers in my sample regarding multiculturalism are positive in the sense that the teachers are willing to learn more about cultural diversity. However, the data reveals that these **perceptions do not automatically translate into inclusive behaviour** especially since no training was provided.



iv. *In what ways is the making of citizenship in the school affected by increasing multiculturalism (in the demographic sense)?*


- **Insensitivity** towards the increase in pupils with different national and ethnic backgrounds is felt. This does not induce a sense of belonging and active participation in the daily schooling experience by the non-Maltese and non-Catholic pupils.
- The notion of **citizenship** upheld in this study is not being cultivated.
- Pupils carry with them to school, **identities** originating from family background and other experiences outside the school. Nothing is being done to acknowledge and incorporate these in the schooling experience of pupils and teachers.

7. Conclusions

- This study has shown that ethnic and national variety are **not easily balanced**.
- The situation is one of **a mixture of assimilation and indifference** towards the increasing ethnic and national diversity in the school.
- The sense of belonging to the school by non-Maltese and non-Catholic pupils is lacking and an **'us' versus 'them'** ambience is present.
- The study concludes that a sense of belonging is not being cultivated among the non-Maltese and non-Catholic pupils and that meaningful contact between pupils must be stimulated and not left to chance. **'Mere contact does not automatically lead to meaningful contact.'**

8. Recommendations

- i. **more research** - This is needed especially at the secondary level of schooling
- ii. **multicultural training** - Teachers feel lost in this school. Support needs to start with teachers, they can then in turn support the pupils. Moreover, 'teacher training' has to be converted into 'leader training'. This will include also the Senior Management Team, including Heads, Assistant Heads of Schools and Education Officers. Leaders support teachers, teachers support pupils.
- iii. **multicultural syllabi** - These will give more space to knowledge about different nationalities and ethnicities and ways how these cultural diversities can be expressed in the classroom.
- iv. **religion** - If religion lessons are to continue (in State schools) they should be given to pupils according to their religious affiliation. This can be done by employing peripatetic teachers. Religious activities, if they are to continue, they should be as comprehensive as possible so as to not focus only on the Catholic religion.
- v. **extra-curricular activities** - Extra-curricular activities tend to dismantle the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy leading to more interaction and meaningful contact between Maltese and non-Maltese pupils. The organisation of these type of activities is to be promoted.



Bauman (2001) warns that balancing ethnic variety is not an easy process, rather he sees it as a “long and perhaps tortuous [...] political process” but one that yields valuable results, thus worth striving for.

“No culture embodies all that is valuable in human life...[d]ifferent cultures correct and complement each other, expand each other’s horizons of thought and alert each other to new forms of fulfilment” (Parekh, 2006).