OPEN ACCESS

Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences

ISSN 2538-919X

Identity and Belonging: Moroccan Youth Perspectives on Multicultural Education in the Diaspora

Abdelaaziz El Bakkali[1*] and Nadia Oufhim[2]

[1] Professor of Media and Cultural Anthropology, ASU, USA

[2] PhD Candidate, CREDIF, USMBA, Fes, Morocco

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Canada,
Moroccan Diaspora,
Multicultural Education

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines how the Moroccan diaspora students in Canadian schools experience cultural recognition, difference and belonging within multicultural educational settings. Despite Canada's long-standing reputation as a multicultural nation that is formally committed to diversity and inclusion, relatively little is known about how students from North Africa and specifically Moroccan backgrounds experience these policies in the schooling system. This study aims to address this critical gap by foregrounding Moroccan diaspora students' perceptions and lived experiences of multicultural education in Canada, with particular emphasis on how their identities are acknowledged, recognised, and supported within the sociocultural dynamics of the school environment. The sample consisted of eight male and female participants living in Montreal. Data were collected through online semi-structured interviews conducted in accordance with research ethics protocols that ensure confidentiality and anonymity of all responses. Findings reveal that recognition of Moroccan identity is manifested mainly through occasional practices that provide a momentary sense of pride and visibility that do not form part of the curriculum. Although formal equality in learning opportunities is widely acknowledged, curriculum contents engage with visual diversity that marginalize cultural realities, resulting in tokenistic representation. Overall, the study highlights that while commitments to multiculturalism promote institutional equality and respect, more far-reaching forms of recognition and identity validation for Moroccan diaspora students remain partially addressed.

1. Introduction

The growing presence of diaspora communities has stressed the need for devising effective strategies for promoting and maintaining core elements of cultural heritage while possibly acknowledging the coexistence of cultural differences within a certain community. For

*Corresponding author's E-mail address: aelbakka@asu.edu

Cite this article as:

El Bakkali, A., & Oufhim, N. (2026). Identity and Belonging: Moroccan Youth Perspectives on Multicultural Education in the Diaspora. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences, 9*(1): 38-53. https://doi.org/10.33422/jarss.v9i1.1756

supporting respect of diversity and raising cultural awareness and understanding, multicultural education fosters an inclusive environment that guarantees social cohesion and recognition of various cultural identities (Joshee et al., 2016). Students from diverse cultural backgrounds can not be understood simply as extensions of their parents' histories or identities, instead, their experiences and identities emerge through the interplay of class, gender, race and ethnicity mediated by culture as well as their particular historical and social positioning (Abdi & Ghosh, 2013).

Teaching in a multicultural context is not about using a one-size-fits all approach through diverse strategies and methods, rather it is about achieving equity and social justice as fundamental commitments of the learning process that is molded by Eurocentric perspectives, often sidelining disadvantaged groups (Howe & Lisi, 2023). On the basis of these premises, the current study set out to explore how multicultural education shapes Moroccan diaspora World Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities students' sense of belonging, perceived recognition and negotiation of cultural difference within Canadian educational contexts. Accordingly, the following research guiding questions have been raised: 1- How do Moroccan diaspora students in Canada perceive their lived experiences through the lens of cultural difference, recognition and identity negotiation within multicultural classrooms? 2- In what ways do socio-structural conditions such as institutional diversity policies and pedagogical practices empower and shape diaspora students' overall sense of inclusion and belonging?

2. Background

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Multicultural Education

This study is grounded in diverse theoretical standpoints which conceptualizes multicultural education as a critical shift that moves beyond superficial celebration of diversity to embrace inclusion, equality and recognition of difference as a substantial right. Multicultural education has been approached from multiple perspectives ranging from political philosophical position, pedagogical paradigm, critical sociocultural to frameworks of politics of difference. According to Parekh, multicultural education questions the Eurocentric and, by extension, monocultural focused content that dominates global north's educational system and fosters a sense of superiority, racial prejudice and threat because of perceived cultural difference by the majorities who tend to understand the minorities' differences" in terms of superficial generalizations and stereotypes and do them grave injustice"(Parekh, 2006, p. 226).

The latter points out that all cultures within a democratic society are worthy of equal dignity and recognition of their unique insights that enrich broader human knowledge "in which different cultures can engage in a mutually beneficial dialogue … moral and other traditions interrogate, challenge and probe each other, borrow and experiment with each other's ideas" (Parekh, p. 168).To strengthen intercultural competence in an increasingly globalized world, a culturally responsive and empowering education should be accorded to ethnic minorities or non-dominant groups who are disadvantaged, with less economic, political, cultural power and are more likely to experience marginalization than the majority group. (Nieto, 2017; Anggraeni et al., 2023; Lefringhausen & Geeraert, 2025).

These arguments highlight the need for educational approaches that go beyond structural inequalities ensuring that multicultural education should become a transformative tool for equality and active participation in an interconnected global society. Scholarship over time has stressed the need for responsive multicultural education, questioning the monocultural focused content that dominates the global north's educational system and fosters a sense of superiority and threat because of perceived cultural difference by the majorities who tend to understand

the minorities (Banks, 1995; Howe & Lisi, 2023). Accordingly, Banks has first developed four approaches that intend to guide the implementation and integration of multicultural content into the curricula for construing implicit biases and cultural worldviews that influence knowledge construction, then Banks has expanded his framework into five major dimensions to transform school practices and promote democratic justice affirming that "An equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievements of students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural and gender groups" (Banks, 1995, p. 392). Scholars such as Ladson-Billings has advanced Culturally Relevant Pedagogy that underscores the imperative World Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities to prompt reductionist understandings of culture in education toward transformative broader democratic empowerment that challenges structural inequalities both at school and society at large.

As such, education should challenge structural Eurocentrism, validate and empower marginalized identities and treat cultural background differences as assets and sources of empowerment rather than deficits. Critical multicultural education argue that our identity is framed through others' recognition and acknowledgement of selfhood and difference given that when recognition is ignored or distorted, minority groups' freedom would be left undefined and unarticulated, thereby the minorities identity will be reduced to an oppressive practice (Taylor, 1994; Ghosh and Galczynski, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Boutte, 2022). These perspectives are consistent in arguing that equity-oriented teaching is a foundational commitment to social justice in education, where diversity is not acknowledged but leveraged to promote meaningful and democratic involvement. In this context, classism, racism and sexism are not perceived as assets of difference and distinct identities, but as a means of dominance that assign people positions of unequal distribution of power and resources that legitimize and normalize subjection of the minorities by the dominant group, hence the "The task of multicultural education is to reveal the structures of power relations and inequalities" (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014, p.7).

The arguments suggest that dimensions of difference are used by the dominant groups to maintain hierarchies which push minorities into subordinate positions that become normalized within social structures. In this context, multicultural education functions as a necessary means for challenging the power dynamics that perpetuate inequality and acknowledging students' cultural backgrounds and histories by peers, teachers and institutions, that would reduce the sense of denigration, and instead perceive visibility as a recognition rather than a stigmatization. Therefore, changes in the curriculum on equal terms by including minorities alongside the dominant community mean that students are just introduced to sociocultural knowledge about diverse worldviews. Multiculturalism on the other hand transcends the reflection of multiple perspectives in content to consider broader social and structural recognition at deeper levels of lived experiences and equal worth of individuals as a universal principle, contending that "School must not create a centre (an ethnocentric norm) that inevitably creates a periphery (the 'other'). Rather, the centre and periphery must come together in one space" (Ghosh & Galczynski, 2014, p. 4) where both sets of perspectives are highly regarded.

Multicultural education has remained ineffective in most Western countries despite multicultural programs and policies for including diverse ethnic perspectives beyond Western oriented discourses that privilege local epistemologies. The 1960s have been described as an era of 'identity politics' where struggles have been centered on recognition of cultural or group identities that have reshaped the Western politics and societies. These movements have urged for multicultural policies that value and safeguard ethnic minorities' cultural heritage within the democratic framework of the majority culture, with the aim of advancing intergroup harmony (Banks, 1986; Rattansi, 2011; Kyrilo, 2017). Interdisciplinary teacher education

should acknowledge transnationalism and lived realities to promote social cohesion through mutual adaptation of both the majority and minority groups where difference is normalized in mainstream society through supporting anti discrimination laws, engaging with diversity and adapting to new norms to alleviate the burden of change and relocation in the diaspora (Oikonomidoy, 2011; Lefringhausen & Geeraert, 2025). Multiculturalism has evolved but research in this area reveals deeper unease and resistant attitudes toward multicultural education since it is perceived as a challenge to dominant cultural norms. In most Western countries, multicultural education is still contested due to resistance from majority groups or fragmented policy regimes falling into tokenism rather than addressing structural inequalities and genuine commitment to diversity.

Lynch highlights that racism, prejudice and discrimination in some Western societies do not only affect minority groups but also the dominant cultural population which creates ethnic captivity, since minorities' contributions may be reduced to cultural symbolism which perpetuates monocultural education despite addition of multicultural content that underrepresent them both in curriculum and teacher education: "A lack of appropriate multicultural textbooks and materials complement cultural bias in control … and a cultural recalcitrance in teacher education as a whole, and lack of representation of ethnic minorities in the institutions of teacher education in particular" (Lynch, 1986, p. 143). Despite these wide-ranging theoretical debates, the voices of the diaspora students are not sufficiently foregrounded. To address this gap in the literature, this study shifts the focus from pedagogical practices and policy frameworks to the practical lived experiences of the Moroccan diaspora within the Canadian multicultural schooling system.

2.2. Multicultural Education in Canada

Canada's multicultural policy which was later formalized in 1988 affirmed that the Canadian Constitution stressed the need for preserving the multicultural heritage of the country as well as recognizing racial, ethnic, national and religious diversity as integral elements of cultural democracy, thereby enabling all citizens to engage in social life and public institutions irrespective of their cultural origins (James, 2001). Critical scholarship demonstrates that within neoliberal discourses, Canadian multicultural policy has recently shifted from legitimizing diversity as a strength to a predicament and even a threat to national safety and security. In this way, diversity would be reduced to an axis of division, where minority students endure stigmatization as a result of the intersection of neoliberal and neoconservative discourses in multicultural education, which position students from marginalized groups as carriers of deficits that educators are expected to correct.

These structural inequalities need to be addressed by the government that prioritizes personal morality over social equality, though diversity is recognized still at a symbolic level (Jenson, 1998; Joshee et al., 2016; Radhouane & Akkari, 2022). In accordance with this perspective, James (2001) affirms that multicultural education in Canada is framed through monocultural pedagogy where minority cultures are merely added without changing the core curriculum or power structures. This approach, as James suggests, treats cultures as symbolic elements that are celebrated in certain events such traditional clothing, festivals, food etc, which reinforces the idea that students' backgrounds are mere celebrations that are excluded from the Canadian social life: "In some cases, expressions of culture were represented in terms of food, 'costume' (dress), art, dance, religious symbols and practices, and/or talks about the norms governing eye contact. Becoming acquainted with these symbols represents the 'tourist culture' - the idea that these cultural expressions are 'elsewhere' outside of Canada" (James, 2001, p. 175). The tourist approach stresses the idea that the students learn about cultures as if they are visiting a museum

or on a safari, failing to recognize their everyday presence and lived realities within Canadian society. From another perspective, Brown (2007) shows that imperial knowledge regimes continue to permeate Canadian schools, where African diaspora communities are represented superficially and their histories are largely excluded. Brown argues that although Canadian multiculturalism presents itself as inclusive, it in fact masks enduring colonial hierarchies of race and language that still shape whose accent, linguistic practices and cultures are valued, resulting in limited efforts to meaningfully integrate the narratives of racialized diaspora. Early critiques that have been developed by James (2001) and Brown (2007) retain contemporary relevance and find resonance in recent Canadian studies. In this context, scholars argue that an effective multicultural education centers on how far policies and curricula engage with incorporating minority identities in mainstream education.

Integrating diverse worldviews into the curriculum is substantial for transforming the harmful self-images often experienced by marginalized groups and for promoting diverse identities that are fragmented by exclusion, thereby determining what counts as valuable knowledge can not be limited to incomplete or one-sided perspectives that reinforce prejudice and unequal recognition of different groups. Thereby, educators and policy makers should demonstrate commitment to meaningful integration of people's identities and values into mainstream society that constitutes the core of Canadian multicultural ideals which fall short of realization (Abdi & Ghosh, 2013; Kymlicka, 2015; Joshee et al. 2016).

Hence, realizing democracy through a multicultural education lens should respect the equal dignity of all people and promote a school culture where everyone's identity is affirmed. Though several elements of the curriculum still make distinctions and mark certain groups as different or less fully Canadian, however the overall trend is toward a more rights-based conception of citizenship since 'Human rights and diversity are celebrated as part of the national and pedagogical techniques to promote multiple perspectives and empower individual citizens are a main focus' (Bromley, 2011, p. 161).

Notwithstanding these initiatives, recent Canadian research scholarship has further foregrounded the gap between governmental commitments to multicultural education and experiences of racialization within institutional contexts. Empirical research reveals that colonial hierarchies which structure teachers' education remain intact and restrict their intercultural and equity-driven practices that are not approached through a decolonial lens (El Masri & Desai Trilokekar, 2019). Altogether, within the established research in Canada, little consideration has been devoted to students' voices to examine how multicultural education is experienced in everyday practices. A framework that guides the present study's area of inquiry into Moroccan diaspora perceptions of belonging and recognition within the Canadian schooling system.

2.3. Lived Experiences of Diaspora in Diverse Multicultural Contexts

To contextualize the Canadian case within contemporary empirical studies, a growing body of scholarship in multicultural education has increasingly turned interest in the lived experiences of the diaspora communities across diverse countries: Vienna, Netherlands and Spain. These studies seek to explore how students navigate educational systems that often reflect dominant cultural norms and pedagogical expectations. Research in this area shows that teachers' perceptions of religious diversity are largely framed as a pedagogical challenge rather than an enrichment. Although some teachers acknowledge positive religious aspects of diversity, the overall picture is one of implicit othering of Muslim students and minorities constructing their identities as 'other' that is excluded from the mainstream culture of the schooling system, which underscores the need for genuinely critical equity-oriented multicultural education.

Thereby, anti-discriminatory teaching practices positively impact students' motivation and overall social relations, supporting the diaspora through promoting positive inclusion across peer groups (Gracia-Sanchez, 2016; Abacioglu et al., 2019; Sibasi Singh, 2022). Empirical evidence also reveals that cultural responsive teaching is still lacking in the Western school system since teachers adopt an instructional pedagogy of indifference, perpetuating cultural dominant norms that sideline minorities. Diversity is celebrated through cultural events such as culinary and costumes' traditions that are well-received by the diaspora parents, while overlooking discussions of identity and marginalization. Though the diaspora parents in certain instances report contentment with their children's educational achievements, parental involvement in the schooling system is very limited which deepens marginalisation and weakens opportunities of recognition and identification (Torres-Zaragoza, 2025a, 2025b).

These recently observed international patterns provide crucial analytical frameworks for addressing adjacent dynamics that may emerge within the Canadian multicultural educational system. Within this analytical framework, Although multicultural education has been the subject of substantial scholarly attention in recent decades, studies that specifically examine multicultural schooling within diasporic communities remain comparatively dearth. Existing research on minority students in the diaspora has predominantly centered on teachers' practices, institutional policies and parental evaluation of the educational contexts, overlooking the voices of the students themselves.

Given the limited scope of research, the perspectives of Moroccan diaspora students, one of the steadily growing North African communities in Canada, are particularly understudied. Consequently, little is known about how these learners respond to the multicultural frameworks that shape their experiences. To address this much needed gap, the present study seeks to explore the perceptions and the lived experiences of Moroccan diaspora students within Canadian multicultural contexts. It focuses mainly on how their identities are acknowledged, recognized and supported across the sociocultural and institutional dimensions of schooling, including classroom practices, peer interactions, curriculum representation and broader school culture. By centering the voices of the students, the study aims to generate a nuanced understanding of the ways Moroccan learners navigate belonging, cultural visibility and identity within the multicultural Canadian multicultural system.

3. Method

The current study adopts a qualitative research approach aimed at exploring Moroccan diaspora youth's perceptions and experiences of multicultural education in Canadian academic settings. The study adopts a focused interview-based design and prioritizes the participants' voices and lived realities that are not directly captured through classroom observations or documents analysis. The study seeks to understand how the participants make sense of their educational practices and how they negotiate and give meaning to their inclusion within the Canadian schooling system.

3.1. Participants' Background Information

The sample included 8 male and female students, their ages ranged from 15 to 24, all of them were from Montreal. All of the participants identify as Moroccan, some of them were born in Montreal and others immigrated with their parents at early ages and joined primary schools in the diaspora and were largely socialized in the host country. The study included participants currently enrolled at different levels of secondary and post-secondary education, some of them completed their study and entered employment. International students who had not been

socialized within the Canadian schooling system were excluded. Most of the participants reported that their parents had immigrated to Canada over 20 years ago.

3.2. Sampling Strategy

Participants were initially recruited using purposive sampling guided by the inclusion parameters with lived experiences of multicultural education in Canada. Snowball sampling was subsequently used, since the target diaspora were hard to reach, whereby the participants nominate peers within their networks who meet the study's eligibility standards. This approach facilitates the access to the participants who might have been difficult to contact given the researcher's location outside Canada. The final sample comprised participants from different school levels, including individuals who had completed their studies but had previously experienced multicultural education which made variation in the sample.

3.3. Ethical Procedures

Informed consent was obtained from the participants to take part in semi-structured interviews to provide insights into their personal experiences in diverse educational contexts. To safeguard confidentiality, participants' names were anonymized and were assigned labels instead with reference to certain demographic characteristics such as 'male/female participant, university level'. All identifying information was omitted to protect confidentiality.

3.4. Data Collection and Procedure

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews that were scheduled at intervals of three to five days taking into consideration the availability of the participants and the interview duration that was between 20 to 40 minutes. The rationale for using a semi-structured interview is that it is "more powerful in the sense that it allows the researcher (s) … to acquire in depth information from the informants" (Mashuri et al., 2022, p. 29). The interviews were conducted online using Whatsapp voice messages as a flexible application for gathering data, given its widespread accessibility and affordance for synchronous communication. The interview guide was composed of open-ended questions through which the researcher "leads the subject towards certain themes" (Kvale, 1996, p. 34).

Answers were elicited in relation to the core objectives of the study and research questions which include participants' educational experiences, perceptions of multicultural education in everyday schooling practices and reflections on recognition, inclusion and institutional support within the Canadian educational contexts, while permitting flexibility for participants to provide issues they consider significant. The interviews were conducted in the participants' preferred language (Moroccan dialect, French including some English statements). Shared linguistic and cultural elements with the participants enhanced trust and enabled them to communicate lived experiences of schooling and belonging. This proximity on the other hand may risk assumptions embedded in cultural commonality.

Accordingly, reflexivity was maintained throughout data collection and interpretation as an ongoing process to enhance rigor, trustworthiness and credibility of the findings. Interviews were translated into English by the researcher who is fluent in these languages and cross-checked using translation software as a supportive tool and reviewed to promote consistency while maintaining contextual and cultural specific meanings. Audio recordings were transcribed using Microsoft (365) Word. All transcripts were anonymized by removing identifying details and non-lexical utterances (fillers, repetitions, false starts). The participants were assigned codes (P1, P2 etc) which were used in the presentation of the findings. After

grouping, refining and grouping the codes, they were compared across transcripts to check similarity in perspectives, to ensure coherence and to categorize the codes into relevant themes that were used to build up a plan for thematic analysis and interpretation. All the themes were reviewed, renamed and developed inductively from the data and the analysis was guided by the theoretical underpinnings to contextualize the participants' lived experiences of visibility and inclusion within the educational contexts in the diaspora. An audit trail was maintained throughout the analytic process to capture emerging meanings across the transcripts to advance trustworthiness and transparency of the analysis.

4. Results

4.1 Structural and Institutional Conditions of Inclusion: Perceptions of Difference and Recognition

The data revealed foundational findings related to the participants' outlook on difference and recognition. The participants reported that their Moroccan identity is acknowledged mainly in religious feasts when they are absent or when students fast in the month of Ramadan.

> *"But this acknowledgement is not supported at school through classroom discussions or certain celebrations on special days"* (male, secondary school level), which may affect peers' perceptions and reinforce stereotypes among peers especially for certain religious events.
>
> *"When I used to study in a class where most diaspora students were Muslim, the school administration used to contact us to inquire about our potential absences …to schedule alternative activities so that we do not miss exams or lessons, now that we moved to another area where Muslims are few, I just send a message beforehand to inform the administration of my absence in religious celebrations"* (female participant, secondary school level)

However, the participants said that in certain annual school events, they feel culturally valued and recognised through showcasing cultural diversity of students' countries of origin:

> *"When I was in primary school, our school used to celebrate cultural diversity by offering us the opportunity to represent and show our cultural culinary traditions and Moroccan attire that made me proud of my belonging"*(male participant, college level)
>
> *"Many times, in primary school, teachers used to ask us to bring traditional food that represents our country of origin to share with the class, it was amazing"* (female, university level)

These 'Ethics days as described by most of the participants highlight differences and a sense of pride. In some school contexts, students reported that on certain occasions they contribute articles about their traditions, culture or experiences to school magazines:

> *"After gaining the teachers' approval of the topic, the principals authorize the publication of our articles both on the school's website and magazine. This makes me feel proud of my belonging and my country's cultural heritage that is perceived as a form of cultural diversity and richness"* (female participant, secondary school level).

This means that the students negotiate cultural visibility and belonging since they take part in the school's discourse through sharing some aspects of their Moroccan identity. In particular instances, Moroccan students experience feelings of otherness with respect to cultural difference which reinforces misrecognition and exclusion preventing the diaspora from

expressing their full identities. The students reported that they avoid discussing issues related to cultural values with peers so as not to be seen as not fit-in with the existing dominant culture:

> *"I always avoid engaging in discussions about cultural issues especially religion because they are met with misunderstanding or irrelevant by my peers"* (male participant, secondary school level).

Refraining from bringing up religious issues is an alternative strategy for social adaptation and softening of otherness. The students also discussed adjusting their self-representation to feel included within the norms of the institutional context. This feeling of being different is also reinforced when certain teachers restrict the incorporation of the students' linguistic backgrounds and identities such as speaking Arabic among Moroccan peers:

> *"I was not really represented by the teachers in the diverse context at school. I remember sometimes talking a couple of Moroccan words with peers, which was not appreciated by the teacher who insisted on using just French language in class"* (female participant, college level).

This practice makes the Moroccan diaspora express that their inclusivity is reduced since the dominant language is reinforced. However, according to some students, they used to study Arabic one hour once a week on the basis of the school's decision to incorporate it into the curriculum in response to demographic data showing a high proportion of students whose mother tongue is Arabic.

> *"Here we are obliged to attend the school that is located in our neighbourhood. We don't have to choose the school of our preference. If the percentage of Arabic-speaking students or any other language is considerable, the school integrates that language in the school system. Unfortunately, this law has been cancelled with the new governmental changes. My siblings are no longer provided with the opportunity to study Arabic*" (male participant, university student)

> *"In the region where we live, Arabic is not taught at all. I learned Arabic and the Qur'an on weekends in a private school, ... from four to six hours a week. Other schooling options are available to students: Islamic schools ... I had an experience of three years in these schools which follow the same curriculum ... but the time devoted to Arabic and Islamic education is insufficient"* (female participant, employed)

These new circumstances seem to limit cultural visibility and recognition of linguistic identity. Institutional dynamics within the Canadian educational settings that shape the Moroccan diaspora students' experiences of inclusion with respect to curriculum content are also accounted for. The participants were required to report whether practical realization of multicultural principles is reflected in the pedagogical practices. In this regard, most of the students pointed out that they feel represented in the content of certain subjects especially in the primary school through illustrations which contain photos of diverse minorities or through including some Moroccan names in the textual material:

> *"The photos do not only include people of the dominant culture, but also photos of diverse individuals from other countries. In some subjects we encounter examples that include Arab names such Abdellah, Mehdi etc that are part of the textual material"* (female participant, secondary school level).

The inclusion of Moroccan names in the curricula fosters a sense of belonging among Moroccan diaspora students. However, this representation remains superficial since the content is not related to Moroccan students' culture, history or realities. Therefore, the curriculum

demonstrates tokenism through nominal and visual representations that appear in examples, but the content fails to connect to the students' sociocultural contexts.

> *"I have never come across some content that is written by Moroccan authors."* (female participant, secondary school level).

This perception suggests that the students feel unrepresented in the educational material which is centred mainly on the references of the host culture. Turning to another aspect of the findings, the students reported that the schools do not promote the faith of the dominant cultural group. The participants' accounts describe a secular educational approach that does not favour certain religious principles over others or impose them on pupils of various faiths.

> *"We used to discuss religious aspects of Islam as we would do for other religions, we had a program that was called -Etique et culture religieuse- We talk about religious practices and beliefs in general"* (female participant, college level).

> *"Every student in class is treated equally regardless of his or her religious affiliation, we just study about practices and beliefs of different religions in the world in broad terms. We learn together with no religion being privileged"* (male participant, secondary school level).

With regard to this point, all the students express a sense of respect for all minorities, which ensures equal treatment of students from different religious or cultural backgrounds. However, problems related to religious belonging still raise tensions among peers which may be due to external influences such as media or individuals' social backgrounds that shape attitudes and perceptions:

> *"In some situations, I feel that some non-Muslim peers show some kind of resentment towards Muslim minorities at school. I remember one day when I was in primary school, my classmate insulted me because of my religious identity, stating that she hates Muslims. I was deeply hurt, but the principal ensured fairness in resolving the problem"* (female participant, employed).

This suggests that students are not accepted or respected for their beliefs that are different from the mainstream culture. The participants were asked to state the extent to which the school promotes the diaspora's feeling of being equal and integrated into the school culture. Most of them said that the difference between them is not recognised since all the pupils receive formal equal opportunities of learning and educational development, though in certain instances the diaspora express a feeling of disconnection from the institutional environment:

> *"All the students are given equal chances to develop their learning competencies, but there are a couple of instances where I feel out of place with discussions or just people around me, but most of the time the school staff don't treat me as an outsider or that different, no"* (male participant, secondary school level).

> *"Regardless of our cultural or religious affiliations, teachers treat us all the same. Once we attend the classroom, the same standards are applied to all students. We receive equal treatment"* (female participant, secondary school level)

In occasional cases, the students reported that discussions around cultural issues are set in classroom interactions which allow for relating their cultural context to the overall reality. Teachers in certain instances create space for sharing perspectives, traditions or experiences from the students' communities of origin:

> *"Teachers sometimes connect lesson content to our realities. They devise questions that adapt to every student and relate to his or her cultural background most of the time in*

English class or in 'Culture et Citoyenneté Quebequoise" (male participant, university student).

"We don't study about the culture of a specific country, for example Morocco, but we have courses that cover cultural themes in general" (female participant, secondary school level).

This indicates that inclusion policies at the structural level are well-suited to ensure equity in learning, but may fall short in addressing cultural belonging since students show feelings of being out of place which suggest that recognition and identity validation continue to be incomplete.

5. Discussion

The findings reveal some sort of conditional visibility within the school environment when the students reported that their identities were occasionally acknowledged through indirect references when they were absent in the periods of religious events or showcasing cultural values as reflected in culinary practices and traditional dress. This acknowledgement is dependent on specific circumstances in which students' identities are recognized rather than being consistent or unconditional. This recognition lacks institutional support in daily school practices. Also, the students expressed that their identities are recognised through contributing to school magazines where they are invited to share articles about their traditions. While such participation represents a valuable opportunity for self-presentation and cultural visibility, its significance must be perceived in light of the broader symbolic recognition that tends to be symbolic and performative.

The fact that students' cultural constituents do not form part of the school policy and teaching-learning practices reflects Taylor's (1994) standpoint that this representation is superficial since students' identities are not fully engaged with. It also aligns with Hall's (1990) stance that representation without full participation in the dominant regime may leave identities unempowered since the school environment does not validate difference institutionally. The findings also disclose that the participants manage self-expression to feel fit within the mainstream culture that is institutionally reinforced and socially accepted. The students' avoidance of topics related to Moroccan cultural values can be seen as a strategy of identity negotiation to lessen perceived differences. This suggests that the students experience a tension between their self-presentation and social acceptance and adaptation, indicating that belonging is conditioned upon cultural camouflage of visible difference.

These results align with diverse studies where students adopt avoidance coping strategies in peer education contexts because of difference and fear of misunderstanding or marginalization (Naparan & Balimbingan, 2020). This feeling of otherness is also manifested when the language of the diaspora is delegitimized by institutional settings which suggests a denial of linguistic identity through which they express who they are. The students' attempts to use Arabic signals a desire for recognition and belonging, while the institutional context reinforces difference and otherness. However, the educational system includes Arabic in the curriculum in case the proportion of diaspora is considerable which can be interpreted as partial or conditional recognition of difference.

This institutional acknowledgement of linguistic presence and cultural diversity can be viewed as a tokenistic act rather than a structural commitment to pluralism, which signifies that difference is represented in symbolic form that is not incorporated into the core academic system or institutional ethos. From the perspective of multicultural education theory, the inclusion of Arabic only once a week is perceived as a symbolic recognition of diversity

through limited curricular slots or occasional events that prevent legitimate inclusion of minority cultural diversity that reflect core pedagogical transformations (banks, 1995; Nieto, 2017). Therefore, this situation embodies partial recognition that is not fully valued unless the diaspora constitutes a significant collective presence (Taylor, 1994). This mere symbolic inclusion may risk exclusion of students' heritage language that really matters for identity (Kim & Chao, 2009). Moreover, the students' names are included in the textbooks which can generate a sense of pride and institutional awareness of diversity. This inclusion of minority through minor references to superficial cultural constituents such as names reflects a tokenistic acknowledgement, while the main narratives remain monocultural affirming the dominance of the mainstream culture. Therefore, the otherness of the diaspora community may be reinforced since the histories, experiences, perspectives and cultural backgrounds of the students are not equally incorporated into the collectivistic pedagogical system (Ohito et al., 2020; Shanmugaraj, 2023).

The reference to isolated examples of students' cultures reflects a surface level engagement with diversity rather than connecting content to the students' lived experiences where their identities are validated and affirmed through a culturally responsive approach for achieving multicultural justice in diaspora schools (Ladson & Billings, 2014; Gay, 2018). Moreover, the participants report that they feel represented when discussions are occasionally set around issues that are related to the students' realities, but in certain instances the students feel out of place within the educational system. The students' identities are highlighted in certain teacher-centred activities that are not devised by structural systems which seem to naturalize inequalities through surface level recognition and paradoxical reinforcement of disinclusion. This supports Power and Frandji's (2010) argument that difference is valued without altering power relations that sustain marginalization. Therefore, the inclusion of the students' experiences into the dominant educational structure remains superficial since it fails to affirm students' identities. The participants contend that the Canadian school system is formally secular and committed to neutrality, ostensibly ensuring that no single religion is privileged over another.

Yet, despite this institutional discourse of equality, students from minority backgrounds continue to experience subtle and overt resentment from peers within educational settings. Such experiences reveal that stigmatization persists along ethnic and cultural lines, suggesting that diversity is accepted only when it remains discreet and largely invisible within institutional spaces. In other words, inclusion appears conditional based on minimizing visible markers of difference. These findings resonate with Settles et al. (2019), who argue that invisibility can operate as a socially imposed strategy to prevent exclusion rather than a genuine recognition and valuing of diversity. Pressures to blend in one's cultural identity function as mechanisms of othering and reinforcement of marginalization. Thereby, what is presented as secular equality, may in practice produce hierarchies of belonging where minority students are expected to suppress their cultural visibility to avoid being positioned as outsiders within the school environment.

5.1 Implications and Limitations

The findings of the study carry significant implications that underscore the need for practical reforms by incorporating historical and social realities of the diaspora in the curriculum design beyond symbolic diversity. Pedagogical programs should support teachers in advancing teaching approaches that help shift institutional practices from visual diversity toward meaningful engagement and inclusion. Also, the participants' experiences reveal that language norms and instructional practices constitute ambivalent spaces where both recognition and

misrecognition coexist, stressing the need for language policies and anti-bias initiatives that address institutional sources of symbolic inclusion. Although this study provides important insights into Moroccan youth diaspora experiences of multicultural education, several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample size may not fully capture the variation of the diaspora pupils which limits the generalizability of the findings. Also, the data relies largely on self-reported perceptions that are not supported by classroom observations to investigate how multicultural education unfolds within this specific context. Also, the findings should be interpreted in relation to the country's multicultural policy paradigm, language norms and structural diversity-driven frameworks. Despite these limitations, the study offers insights that may be transferable to other multicultural educational contexts. The patterns of recognition and tokenism highlighted in this study may be compatible with other populations in diverse educational contexts, even where policy frameworks vary across sites.

6. Conclusion

The study aims at examining Moroccan diaspora students' perceptions and lived experiences of multicultural education within the Canadian context. It further investigates the extent to which existing educational practices, curricular representations and institutional practices support or constrain their sense of belonging, visibility and recognition. The findings uncover a complex interplay and coexistence of multicultural ideals and uneven practices of inclusion. While schools formally celebrate diversity and selective acknowledgement of certain cultural elements, these institutional practices reflect a symbolic and conditional model of inclusion.

Likewise, the curriculum's tokenistic design together with students' own strategies to minimize the perceived difference of cultural background and identities reinforce the dominance of mainstream norms and place Moroccan diaspora cultural knowledge and realities to the margins. Taken together, although there are efforts to recognize diversity in multicultural contexts, these initiatives rarely move beyond the performative level and may not fully encompass meaningful validation of the students' identities. Acknowledgement We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Scientific Committee of the conference for considering and supporting the presentation of this paper at the conference. We are also grateful to the editors and reviewers for their time, constructive engagement and thoughtful evaluation of this work.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Abdelaaziz El Bakkali for his supervisory guidance and insightful feedback throughout this work. My thanks also go to the participants for their time and valuable contributions to this paper.

References

Abacioglu, C. S., Isvoranu, A.-M., Verkuyten, M., Thijs, J., & Epskamp, S. (2019). Exploring multicultural classroom dynamics: A network analysis. *Journal of School Psychology*, *74*, 90–105. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2019.02.003

Abdi, A. A., & Ghosh, R. (2013). *Education and the politics of difference: Canadian perspectives*. Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.

Anggraeni, N. N., Sholikhah Ustaadza, L., & Komalasari, K. (2023). Multicultural education in Indonesian diaspora families (study case: Gelin community). *Educative Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, *1*(2), 79–86. https://doi.org/10.37985/educative.v1i2.76

Banks, J. A. (1995). Multicultural education and curriculum transformation. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *64*(4), 390. https://doi.org/10.2307/2967262

Boutte, G. S. (2022). *Educating African American students*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003164456

Bromley, P. (2011). Multiculturalism and human rights in civic education: The case of British Columbia, Canada. *Educational Research*, *53*(2), 151–164. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2011.572363

Brown, Y. (2007). Ghosts in the Canadian multicultural machine: A tale of the absent presence of black people. *Journal of Black Studies*, *38*(3), 374–387. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934707306572

García-Sánchez, I. M. (2016). Multiculturalism and its discontents: Essentializing ethnic Moroccan and Roma identities in classroom discourse in Spain. In H. Samy Alim, J. R. Rickford, & A. F. Ball (Eds.), *Raciolinguistics: How language shapes our Ideas about race* (pp. 291–308). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190625696.003.0017

Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press. https://books.google.co.ma/books/about/Culturally_Responsive_Teaching.html?id=rYspC7C-zowC&redir_esc=y

Ghosh, R., & Galczynski, M. (2014). *Redefining multicultural education : Inclusion and the right to be different*. Canadian Scholar's Press. https://books.google.co.ma/books/about/Redefining_Multicultural_Education.html?id=8l36oAEACAAJ&redir_esc=y

Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222–237). Lawrence & Wishart. https://archive.org/details/identitycommunit0000unse_j2f9

Hall, S. (2021). *Selected writings on race and difference* (P. Gilroy & R. W. Gilmore, Eds.). Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1hhj1b9.1

Howe, W. A., & Lisi, P. (2020). *Becoming a multicultural educator : Developing awareness, gaining skills, and taking action*. Sage Publications, Inc. https://archive.org/details/becomingmulticul0000howe/page/n5/mode/2up

Howe, W. A., & Lisi, P. L. (2023). *Becoming a multicultural educator*. SAGE Publications. https://books.google.co.ma/books/about/Becoming_a_Multicultural_Educator.html?id=APi6EAAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y

James , C. E. (2001). Multiculturalism, diversity and education in the Canadian context: The search for an inclusive pedagogy . In C. A. Grant & J. L. Lei (Eds.), *Global constructions of multicultural education: Theories and realities* (pp. 169–199). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. https://archive.org/details/globalconstructi0000unse

Jenson, J. (1998). Mapping social cohesion: The state of Canadian research. *Canadian Policy Research Networks*. https://www.academia.edu/26949106/Mapping_Social_Cohesion_The_State_of_Canadian_Research

Joshee, R., Peck, C., Thompson, L. A., Chareka, O., & Sears, A. (2016). Multicultural education, diversity, and citizenship in Canada. *Learning from Difference: Comparative Accounts of Multicultural Education*, 35–50. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-26880-4_3

Kim, S. Y., & Chao, R. K. (2009). Heritage language fluency, ethnic identity, and school effort of immigrant Chinese and Mexico adolescents. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *15*(1), 27–37. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013052

Kirylo, J. D. (2017). An overview of multicultural education in the USA: grandest social experiment. *Social Studies Research and Practice*, *12*(3), 354–357. https://doi.org/10.1108/ssrp-06-2017-0029

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research Interviewing*. Sage Publications, Inc. https://pdfcoffee.com/kvale-steinar-interviews-an-introduction-to-qualitative-research-interviewing-1996-sage-publications-inc-pdf-free.html

Kymlicka, W. (2015). The three lives of multiculturalism. In S. Guo & L. Wong (Eds.), *Revisiting Multiculturalism in Canada* (pp. 17–35). Sense Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6300-208-0_2

Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the remix. *Harvard Educational Review*, *84*(1), 74–84. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.p2rj131485484751

Lefringhausen, K., & Geeraert, N. (2025). Multiculturalism in the United kingdom: Past, present, and future directions. In P. Genkova, M. Flynn, M. Morley, & M. Rašticová (Eds.), *Handbook of diversity competence* (pp. 75–92). Springer, Charm. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-69308-3_6

Lynch, J. (1986). Multicultural education in Western Europe. In J. A. Banks & J. Lynch (Eds.), *Multicultural education in Western societies*. HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON. https://archive.org/details/multiculturaledu0000unse_z1k3/mode/1up?view=theater

Mashuri, S., Sarib, M., Rasak, A., Alhabsyi, F., & Ruslin, R. (2022). Semi-structured interview: A methodological reflection on the development of a qualitative research instrument in educational studies ruslin. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *12*(1), 22–29. https://doi.org/10.9790/7388-1201052229

Naparan, G. B., & Balimbingan, N. A. (2020). Challenges and coping mechanisms of Muslim students in a Catholic higher education institution. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, *2*(1), 100021. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2020.100021

Nieto, S. (2017). Re-imagining multicultural education: New visions, new possibilities. *Multicultural Education Review*, *9*(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615x.2016.1276671

Ohito, E. O., Lyiscott, J., Green, K. L., & Wilcox, S. E. (2020). This moment is the curriculum: Equity, inclusion, and collectivist critical curriculum mapping for study abroad programs in the COVID-19 era. *Journal of Experiential Education*, *44*(1), 10–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825920979652

Oikonomidoy, E. (2011). Immigrant-responsive multicultural education in the United States. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, *5*(1), 17–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/15595692.2011.534400

Parekh, B. C. (2006). *Rethinking multiculturalism : Cultural diversity and political theory*. Palgrave Macmillan, , Cop. https://books.google.co.ma/books/about/Rethinking_Multiculturalism.html?id=Ajx-AoUIW6wC&redir_esc=y

Power, S., & Frandji, D. (2010). Education markets, the new politics of recognition and the increasing fatalism towards inequality. *Journal of Education Policy*, *25*(3), 385–396. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930903576404

Radhouane, M., & Akkari, A. (2022). *Intercultural approaches to education : From theory to practice*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-70825-2

Rattansi, A. (2011). *Multiculturalism : A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press. https://books.google.ne/books?id=0ThgCDPKu0MC&printsec=copyright&hl=fr#v=onepage&q&f=false

Settles, I. H., Buchanan, N. T., & Dotson, K. (2019). Scrutinized but not recognized: (In)visibility and hypervisibility experiences of faculty of color. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *113*(113), 62–74. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.06.003

Shanmugaraj, S. (2023). From Ananthi to Anna: Teacher colonization of student names among Tamil Canadians. *Journal of Critical Race Inquiry*, *10*(1), 43–63. https://doi.org/10.24908/jcri.v10i1.15675

Subasi Singh, S. (2022). Enriching or challenging? The attitudes of Viennese teachers towards religious diversity in urban schools. *Intercultural Education*, *33*(5), 526–539. https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2022.2144116

Taylor, C. (1994). *Multiculturalism: examining the politics of recognition*. Princeton Univ. Press. https://ercbgd.org.rs/images/stories/multi-kulti-biblioteka/CHARLES%20TAYLOR%20MULTICULTURALISM%20AND%20POLITICS%20OF%20RECOGNITION.pdf

Torres-Zaragoza, L. (2025a). Moroccan Muslim students' cultural and religious diversity recognition in Spanish schools. A critical multiculturalism analysis from their mothers' perspectives. *Frontiers in Education*, *10*. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1649446

Torres-Zaragoza, L. (2025b). Parental Involvement on Education: Moroccan Muslim Migrant Parents' Perspectives with Children Enrolled in Spanish Schools. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, *16*(2), 871–889. https://doi.org/10.15503/jecs2025.3.871.889