Multiculturalism-Creativity-Innovation nexus and implications on higher education learning and teaching: The case of MARIHE 6

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Abstract

This study analyses the implications of multiculturalism on learning-teaching activities in universities. It is a case study on MARIHE 6 (Erasmus+ education program of the European Union (EU) coordinated by Danube University Krems, Austria). The study employed a qualitative research methodology and accompanying data collection instrument, namely individual interviews. Twelve respondents participated. The main findings indicate that multicultural experience is vital for creativity and innovativeness among students. Concerning learning and teaching, multiculturalism has both positive implications and challenges. As a positive implication, participants believe a multicultural classroom is vital for students' versatility. It is pivotal for students to acquire skills and knowledge that make them ready for the world with ever-growing diversity. However, a multicultural classroom may pose challenges. Due to differences in individuals' dispositions, there will be a sense of 'strangeness' among students, at least for a short period. Moreover, from the teaching perspective, balancing professional habitus and the diverse needs of a multicultural classroom is challenging.

Keywords: multiculturalism, implication, learning-teaching, higher education, innovation, creativity.

Introduction

The Master's program in Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE) is one of the most competitive graduate programs in the world. Based on its aim of fostering the internationalisation of higher education, the program selects applicants from many countries. For its 6th round, the program has accepted 22 applicants from 18 nations. The program subsumes students with diverse professional, academic and cultural backgrounds. Simply put, it is a multicultural classroom.

Multicultural education originated in the late 1960s (Guo & Jamal, 2007). According to Canen and Peters, the issue of multiculturalism, generally, "had its political home in civil rights, indigenous peoples' movements, in the critique of colonialism and neo-

colonialism, in citizenship rights, and in a robust notion of equality" (2005, p. 309). In the 1970s, multiculturalism has become an official policy in some countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand to address identity issues of their respective ethnic minorities (Canen & Peters, 2005; Portera, 2008; Tarozzi, 2012). Because it was believed that education systems are centres of monocultural socialisation, the politics of multiculturalism has been profound in education (Canen & Peters, 2005). Currently, due to globalisation and internationalisation of social, political, economic and cultural values, multiculturalism sustains its presence in almost all education systems and levels, including in higher education institutions.

Multiculturalism is a broad concept. It includes many issues such as language, ethnicity, religious orientation, gender orientation, disability, cultural and political affiliations, and socio-economic background (European University Association, 2018; Eskici, 2016). For this study, however, multiculturalism refers to individual and/or group social differences in terms of cultural and ethnic orientation, work-related experiences, and prior educational background(s). It is also important to note that multiculturalism does not mean multicultural education. According to Holm and Zilliacus, "multicultural education [refers] to the curriculum." The writers also argue that "a culturally diverse classroom (or a multicultural classroom) is not the same as a multicultural education classroom. Culturally diverse classrooms can have a monocultural curriculum" (2009, p. 13). Similarly, MARIHE is a multicultural classroom with a monocultural curriculum. This study, therefore, analyses the implication of multiculturalism on the learning and teaching activities based on the views of students and professors of the MARIHE 6 program.

In terms of organisation, this paper has five parts. The first part describes the 'case' and justifies the significance of the study. The second part – i.e. 'analytical concepts' – is allocated for the discussion of conceptual frameworks for the analysis. The third part of the paper presents the research questions and the methods used to answer them. The fourth part deals with a discussion and critical analysis of the implications of multiculturalism on the learning-teaching activities with particular reference to the MARIHE 6 group. Finally, the conclusion highlights the main points of the discussions.

Description of the 'case' and significance of the study

MARIHE is supported by the Erasmus+ program of the European Union (EU) under the action of an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree (EMJMD). The consortium includes Danube University Krems/Austria (coordinator), University of Tampere/Finland, Beijing Normal University/China, Osnabrück University of Applied Sciences/Germany, Eötvös Loránd University/Hungary, and Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology (deemed to be University)/India. As stated on the program website, it aims to foster excellence, innovation, and internationalisation in higher education institutions; to boost the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and support the EU's external action in the field of higher education; and to improve the level of competences and skills of Master graduates and their employability (www.marihe.eu).

This study, therefore, is significant for a couple of reasons. Primarily, the educational goals of the European Union (EU), such as – supporting learners to study in different member states – require a clear perception of how cultural diversity affects the learning-teaching process as well as learners' knowledge of research and innovation. Secondly, as indicated in the renewed EU agenda for higher education, "EU higher education and research programmes are increasing their focus on international cooperation, reflecting the range of expertise needed to solve complex global challenges" (European Commission, 2017, p. 11). In its report, the Commission affirms its commitment, inter alia, to ensure the quality of post-graduate studies and to support 'internationalisation at home' within European higher education institutions (Ibid). Thus, analysing the implications of cultural and educational diversity on learning and teaching activities is pivotal because it can substantially affect the realisation of these objectives. This study can give a glimpse of how the planned higher education strategies can work and evaluate the ability of higher education institutions to produce high-quality professionals.

Analytical concepts

Globalisation, cultural diversity and modern-day universities

Globalisation is one of the key factors that shape the global society in the past many decades. It speeds up interconnectivity and drives the global society to be more multicultural (Portera & Grant, 2017). If one aspect of globalisation is mobility, education

is one of the key drivers of it. Modern-day universities become home for students from diverse educational and cultural backgrounds. "Globalisation, the rise of new economies, and life in a multicultural society, challenges the very nature of educational institutions around the world" (Portera, 2008, p. 481; also see Portera & Grant, 2017). Globalisation compels universities to (re)adjust their mission and visions to the global context (Arsoy et al., 2021; Lemoine, Jenkins & Richardson, 2017; Portera & Grant, 2017). Therefore, coordinating education from a global perspective becomes a contemporary approach to learning and teaching (Lourenço, 2018). Likewise, a study by Höhle and Teichler shows that several European countries "quite strongly" emphasise the international perspectives of education (2013, p. 97).

Migration, climate change, war, gender and social inequality and poverty are global problems which need the united hands of the global society. Universities of the contemporary world are tasked to train people from different parts of the world on multifaceted skills and knowledge, to nurture social responsibilities, and thus to solve these problems of the global society. Simply put, universities of the modern age are places to incubate responsible citizens for the global society. They have to, as such, embrace multiculturalism. Investigating the ramifications of multiculturalism and 'multi-educationalism' in educating future professionals is, therefore, one of the key issues in higher education research.

Implication of multiculturalism on learning-teaching

When we talk about the issue of multiculturalism in higher education, one of the core topics to discuss is learning and teaching. Often, it is believed that a culturally diverse academic context enriches learning, encourages intercultural understanding and enhances learners' personal and social growth. As a study by Eskici (2016) indicates, multiculturalism at a higher education level helps students think in a versatile manner. Versatile thinking is also essential for citizens who are part of this interconnected and multi-connected world. In a multicultural classroom, educational and cultural value differences can also easily be reflected during students' participation and discussions. It in turn creates a diversity of learning and ways of approaching realities.

Diversity of views can also encourage students to seek partnerships. According to Eskici, "a multicultural educational atmosphere enables students to collaborate and to improve

relationships" (2016, p. 258). Therefore, according to participants of Eskici's study, it is invaluable to extend the cultural dimension of learning. And, because they facilitate the collaboration of different countries and individual participants, projects such as Erasmus+ should be reinforced.

However, multiculturalism has some challenges in learning-teaching activities. From the teachers' perspective, for instance, professors should have good knowledge of dealing with diversity and the will to learn from students. To valorise classroom diversity, they should also have the skills to avoid implicit, nonverbal and unconscious prejudice towards students (Shim, 2012). From the students' side, according to Shim (2012), due to differences in experiences of dispositions, in intercultural or multicultural contexts, discomfort and strangeness will appear.

Moreover, it is challenging to integrate the academic habitus with the diverse needs of a multicultural group. Habitus can be defined as "a socialized subjectivity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2002, quoted in Lawler, 2004, p. 111). According to Lawler "[i]t is a way of analysing how social relations become constituted within the self, but also how the self is constitutive of social relations" (2004, p. 111). Habitus is nurtured in people's behaviour progressively through their interactions with the social environment (Shim, 2012). Therefore, from an institutional perspective, academic/institutional habitus might refer to the values of a given university as an institutional identity in its interaction with the social environment. Hence, multiculturalism might need flexibility and continuous change of the academic/institutional habitus/identity. However, because it is an identity and/or symbolic capital, it is not easy to change institutional habitus to accommodate the demands of different stakeholders, such as students from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds.

Multiculturalism, creativity and innovation nexus

As discussed in the previous sections, nowadays, the higher education milieu has changed. Universities in different parts of the world become destinations for students with diverse academic and cultural backgrounds. This diversity, therefore, has implications for the learners, the academic content and the management of learning-teaching. For instance, multiculturalism is often related to the internationalisation of higher education. Indeed, internationalisation shapes institutional ethos, values and general structure of content

delivery for learners (de Wit & Hunter, 2015). These and other related changes that stem from internationalisation can be sources of creative and innovative ways of approaching reality. But what is creativity/innovation? How do multicultural contexts influence the cognitive style and learning of students? How can we define the nexus between multiculturalism, creativity and innovation?

According to Westwood and Low, "creativity and innovation are complex psychosocial processes involving numerous salient factors of which culture is but one" (2003, p. 235). Therefore, here, the discussion aims to show the important roles of culture in innovation and creativity in the ever-increasing multiculturalism education context around the globe.

Fundamentally, creativity is about individuals' cognitive processes. But it has also social dimensions. The cognitive processes of an individual can, significantly, be influenced by the external environment and cultural cues (Westwood & Low, 2003, p. 235; also see Saad, Damian, Benet-Martı́nez, Moons & Robins, 2012). Moreover, Westwood and Low argue that "creativity is part of the innovation process. Innovations are the practical application of creative ideas" (2003, p. 236; Ricarda, Alexander & Sascha, 2015). The social values and specific contexts where an individual's learning or socialisation takes place can have vital roles in shaping her/his cognitive ability and, therefore, her/his creativity and innovativeness. In this sense, one can safely argue that there is a symbiotic relationship between creativity and innovation on the one side and social contexts (basically, culture and education) on the other side.

Westwood and Low (2003) state that creativity and/or innovation can influence a social context and vice versa. To put it in context, multicultural learning and social contexts such as the MARIHE classroom can be influenced by and influence the learners' independent, flexible and creative thinking regarding the issues they are studying (for instance, how to approach research and innovation activities in higher education). In this sense, multiculturalism is an added value because educational and national diversities are often linked with diversity of cognitive styles, enlargement of knowledge and ability to retrieve unconventional knowledge (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky & Chiu, 2008; Ricarda, Alexander & Sascha, 2015). Indeed, in a multicultural classroom, students might face incongruent concepts with their prior knowledge and values. However, incongruent concepts provoke exploration into their interrelations (Leung et al, 2008, p. 172). As a

result, exposure to such multiple forms of knowledge and knowledge sources fosters cognitive adaptation, insight learning, the ability to synthesise and encode different forms of information in different ways as well as the ability to access normally inaccessible knowledge (Leung et al., 2008; Saad et al., 2012). All these traits are precursors of creativity and innovativeness. It is even claimed that exposure to multiculturalism "in and of itself can enhance creativity" (Leung et al., 2008, p. 169).

Moreover, multicultural academic contexts and mobility programs are vital for the expansion of intercultural teams and cooperation (Likeschová & Tichá, 2013). Concurrently, multicultural teams increase creativity and innovation (Gassmann, 2001; Likeschová & Tichá, 2013; Ricarda, Alexander & Sascha, 2015; Saad et al., 2012). Because there is less or no conformity in a heterogeneous group, diversity encourages individuals to speak what is in their minds. Likewise, personality studies indicate that creative people tend to be nonconforming (Leung et al., 2008). The other issue, which is quite specific to mobility programs such as MARIHE, is that the mobility of students and professors to different education milieus can encourage the development of necessary traits for creativity among individuals. For instance, a study by Likeschová and Tichá indicates that during mobility, students will experience important qualities which can trigger creativity and innovativeness, such as spontaneity, confidence, willingness to take a stand against conventions and destroy barriers between individual disciplines (2013, p. 351). Ricarda, Alexander & Sascha (2015), correspondingly, argue that environmental changes are sources of ideas for innovation and creativity. The mobility of students and professionals to different places is also crucial to get access to 'tacit knowledge' in nations that might not be coded easily to transmit through conventional channels of communication (Gassmann, 2001).

Other than cultural issues, Westwood and Low (2003) assert that differences in creative capacity between groups or individuals can be influenced by institutional/systemic factors. For instance, the way educational activities are managed and the manner a learning-teaching process takes place can substantially influence creativity/innovativeness. Creativity, which is the basis of innovation, is often produced at an individual level (Ricarda, Alexander & Sascha, 2015). Therefore, students' freedom to interact and view issues from different perspectives can be a triggering point to bring innovative ideas. Like unduly centralised government or a high power distance is equated

with a poor level of innovativeness (Ibid), a centralised or undemocratic learning-teaching system in universities can be paralleled with an insufficient level of creativity or innovativeness.

Studies indicate that "all people are capable of creative acts" (Westwood & Low, 2003, p. 244; also see Leung et al., 2008). Thus, among other issues, differences in creativity and innovativeness among individuals can be determined by their learning experiences. A teaching-learning context that does not invoke students' critical thinking, synthesising capabilities and preferences to inquire cannot be a sufficient condition for creativity and innovation. Particularly, in a multicultural classroom, cultural diversity in itself is no guarantee to utilise diverse individual knowledge unless the learning-teaching platform is accustomed to facilitating cross-cultural learning. When students are allowed to interact, they will be exposed to a range of cognitive scripts and new ideas that can urge them to devise a combination of new concepts (Leung et al., 2008).

Research questions and methodology

The researcher poses the following three research questions:

RQ1: What is multiculturalism for students and professors?
RQ2: What are the implications of multiculturalism on learning and teaching in universities (according to students and professors)?
RQ3: How does multiculturalism enhance creativity and/or innovation?

By focussing on MARIHE 6, the study employs a qualitative case study approach. According to Creswell, a study aims to explore an issue "within a bounded system", a case study is one of the preferred methods of a qualitative study (2013, p. 97). Moreover, because multiculturalism is a multifaceted issue, it is better to study it "in its real-world context" (Yin, 2014, p. 2). Ten students and two professors[1] participated in the study. Both students and professors were selected purposively. Nationality and educational backgrounds were important factors to select student-interviewees. The study includes only professors who teach in the MARIHE 6 program.

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[1] Professors who responded in writing but were not interviewed face-to-face are not included in the analysis.

Data were collected using semi-structured individual interviews. The researcher collected the data in two stages[2]. First, semi-structured questions were emailed to the participants. After collecting and reading all the responses, face-to-face individual interviews were conducted to get further clarification on the responses from email interviews and for additional questions. During the face-to-face interviews, the study participants were asked open-ended questions and responses were tape-recorded. The main points of the interviews were selected and transcribed. In terms of analysis, the study uses a thematic analysis. The themes of the discussions were developed based on the research questions, the general sense of interview responses and the literature. Then, discussions take place in a narrative form illustrated with pertinent quotations from the individual interviewees.

Discussion and analysis

Defining multiculturalism: views from students and professors

To analyse the implications of multiculturalism on the learning and teaching process, defining it is fundamental. The researcher asked both students and professors to define multiculturalism in their understanding. One of the student-interviewees succinctly states that "multiculturalism is respecting and learning from different cultures, experiences and stories, and expecting reciprocity from others" (personal communication, October 21, 2019). Another student-interviewee defines multiculturalism as "the idea that each of us, with our own biases and perceptions of life, can bring inherent/tacit/implicit knowledge to a diverse group, along with our practices in social and academic settings" (personal communication, October 21, 2019). This definition indicates that culture is a lifestyle which subsumes different aspects of our life. The academic context, therefore, is an aspect of culture that can influence our way of life and worldviews. Some others also perceive multiculturalism as a situation where two or more cultures live together.

Generally, to define multiculturalism, the informants often use terms such as 'diversity', 'respect', 'tolerance', 'coexistence', 'embracing others', and 'dignity'. The intent of these terms reflects that the basis of multicultural synchronicity is respecting each other's values.

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[2] This is for student-interviewees. Only face-to-face interviews were conducted with professors.

From the professors' perspective, multiculturalism is about "living together at every level without any exception; without 'buts'" (personal communication, MARIHE 6 professor, October 10, 2019). This definition suggests that the different people living together should have similar rights, responsibilities and access to opportunities in a given community. It indicates that there should not be any dominant culture which sets the rules of action which all other cultures must follow. For the other professor-interviewee, multiculturalism is "another way to explain diversity" (personal communication, October 10, 2019). According to him, in addition to cultural values, diversity can include (understanding) differences in thinking and behaviour. Respecting these differences enhances interaction and collaborative learning.

In sum, the definitions given by the informants indicate that multiculturalism is about diversity and living together by discovering the middle ground in the jungle of differences. Thus, what implications does this have on learning and teaching?

Implication of multiculturalism on learning and teaching

The principal aim of this study is to critically analyse the views of students and professors towards the implications of multiculturalism on learning-teaching activities. Accordingly, to the question of whether the multicultural classroom they are part of influences their learning, all of the student-interviewees responded that it has substantial impacts.

According to the respondents, diversity is vital to learn how to approach similar issues from different perspectives. One student-interviewee claims that being in a culturally and academically diverse group is "a unique opportunity for students to consider and discuss topics from different points of view" (personal communication, October 18, 2019). Another student-interviewee adds that studying in a multicultural classroom teaches her how to view issues from multiple angles that she might not have considered without the diversity in culture. Correspondingly, Eskici (2016) confirms that a multicultural learning environment helps students think in a versatile manner. From this, it is possible to infer that in a multicultural group, the experiences of each student can be a rich source of learning.

In a similar vein, another student-interviewee argues that when different individuals come together for similar objectives,

> each participant cannot avoid counterparts because all [have] common objectives – [for instance, in MARIHE 6] earning the degree in research and innovation in higher education; so, this objective obliges them to remain open and learn, to different degrees, from different cultures (personal communication, October 17, 2019).

Exposure to different viewpoints can help students broaden their learning horizons. It, according to one student-informant, prompts them to bring 'creative and innovative thoughts' that facilitate learning from each other. Usually, when students interact in this manner, one can argue that they will be induced to think transcendentally. Thus, cross-cultural learning in a multicultural group is central to developing skills for adapting to new realities, collaborating and improving learning (personal communication, MARIHE 6 professor, October 18, 2019; Eskici, 2016).

A multicultural classroom is also a good stage to learn compassion. One student-interviewee says that being in a multicultural group allows her to develop empathy, humility and appreciation towards others' cultures. Sympathy and appreciation of cultural differences are also foundations of learning in a multicultural world. These qualities might even be included among the most important competencies modern-day universities should focus on to get their students ready "for the world with an ever-growing diversity" (Veronica, 2017, p. 1). Moreover, as indicated by the study participants, multiculturalism influences students' communication skills. They believe that the diversity of the student population teaches them how to negotiate and find a middle ground in arguments. Notably, Lourenço (2018) claims that critical thinking, effective communication and negotiation skills are the most important skills students of the modern age should acquire.

Notwithstanding the positive implications, according to the student-interviewees, a multicultural group can also be a source of some challenges. One interviewee observes that sub-groups are created in the group (i.e. MARIHE 6). These cliques might also have enfeebled the bonds among all members. Another student-interviewee indicates that due to the diversity of the student population, there seem to be "linguistic misunderstandings"

which, of course, affect the learning and teaching process for at least a short period (personal communication, October 18, 2019). Due to differences in individuals' dispositions, a sense of 'strangeness' is another challenge students in a multicultural classroom would face (Arsoy et al., 2021; Shim, 2012).

Furthermore, a professor-interviewee highlights that accommodating different interests is challenging. Setting the foundation of the learning-teaching process in a manner it accommodates the divergent needs of a multicultural group is arduous, particularly in the first semester, he states. Similarly, participants in a study by Clarke, Drennan, Hayde and Politis (2015) claim that the diversity of student profiles poses challenges to their teaching performance. In a parallel line of thought, students interviewed for the study agree that, due to especially, work and educational background differences, there are significant disparities in perceiving new information and knowledge during lectures and group discussions. Accordingly, bringing all students with all their differences on board and letting them learn from each other needs a high degree of effort. It is because as "we are not the sole authors of our perceptions, thoughts, and (re)actions", it is not easy to change our pre-existing socialised subjectivity (habitus) (Bourdieu cited in Shim, 2012, p. 221; also see Lawler, 2004) and adapt to a new situation.

The other challenge of multiculturalism is related to the extra work it will sustain on professors. In a multicultural classroom, professors might be needed to develop their teaching material according to the diversity and changing demands of the learners. By assessing the interests of their students, they have to update their courses unceasingly. It creates extra work (personal communication, professor, October 18, 2019). Concurrently, this entails that universities are required to regularly balance their academic habitus and the diversity of the student population (Cartwright, 2021).

In sum, the shreds of evidence in this study indicate that the positive implications of multiculturalism on learning-teaching appear to surpass the challenges it poses to students and professors. Therefore, international programs such as MARIHE would be advised to valorise diversity and design accommodating approaches to learning-teaching.

The role of multiculturalism on students' creativity and innovativeness

Multicultural groups are believed to be sources of creativity and innovativeness (Gassmann, 2001; Ricarda, Alexander & Sascha, 2015). As already stated, MARIHE 6 subsumes students from 18 different nations with diverse academic backgrounds. This aspect of the program is an appropriate context to utilise the promises of a multicultural team/classroom as a source of various ideas that provoke innovation and creativity. Similarly, the study participants believe that the different focusses of students' academic background and cultural orientation do have substantial roles in the enlargement of knowledge. The student-interviewees generally are positive about the class diversity in provoking creative/innovative ideas vis-à-vis their study. The students' intercultural collaborations are believed to improve their group performances and creativity due to the synergies formed by the amalgamation of different perspectives. The respondents claim, as demonstrated in class (group) presentations and deliberations, students with different academic backgrounds and nationalities show impressive fusion in terms of content, presentation style and understanding of issues from different perspectives. Likewise, many scholars argue that multiculturalism can be linked with the diversity of cognitive styles, enlargement of knowledge and ability to retrieve unconventional knowledge (Leung et al., 2008; Ricarda, Alexander & Sascha, 2015).

One student-interviewee claims that diverse mind-sets substantially help to bring different creative ways to solve problems, particularly in group work. Leung et al., 2008, likewise find that creativity is facilitated in collaborative groups with diverse members. Another student-interviewee believes that educational and cultural diversity helps her to re-shape some of her pre-existing domain of understanding regarding the global 'realities' (personal communication, October 21, 2019). Correspondingly, Ogrutan, Machidon and Dinu (2019) write that creativity can be defined as an act or idea of changing the existing domain. The interviewees, moreover, believe that internationalising and/or diversifying the cultural composition of education programs, such as MARIHE, is tremendously important to promote creativity and innovation in higher education research.

Many student-interviewees often refer to their collaborative group work with students of diverse cultures as well as academic experiences and the dynamism they experience to bring innovative ideas to solve challenges in their tasks. A multicultural group can enhance the accessibility of the amount of information or communication required to

produce knowledge and achieve an objective. In a similar vein, as mentioned by David Campbell (2019) in his conceptualisation of the quadruple and quintuple helix innovation systems, multiculturalism and creativity are among the central elements in the fourth helix of the extended complexity in knowledge production and knowledge application (innovation).

Based on the literature and reflections of the study informants, one can argue that given the rapid global interconnectedness and the growing salience of intercultural dynamics in educational environments, the promotion of cultural diversity in a classroom and utilising the diversity of knowledge to create and innovate is imperative. According to Leung and her colleagues, bringing students from different educational and cultural backgrounds together creates a multicultural experience that "potentially make people more facile at creative problem solving and idea generation" (2008, p. 177). Therefore, educators should value the positive features of multiculturalism and should incur efforts to reshape educational institutions to value cultural diversity.

Professors as learning and intercultural mediators

Professors do have substantial roles in boosting understanding between students. One professor-interviewee argues that in a multicultural group such as MARIHE 6, professors can influence the way students interact. Furthermore, according to student-interviewees, professors of a multicultural group are creators of common symbols of interaction and networks of learning among their students.

However, one student-interviewee stated that, so far, students' participation and contributions to learning are limited by the professors' linear teaching style. According to the student-interviewees, professors take the stage as fountains of knowledge. Correspondingly, a professor interviewed for the study affirms that although many European universities do have multicultural classrooms, it is difficult to see diverse styles of teaching that match the miscellaneous needs of their students (personal communication, MARIHE 6 professor, October 18, 2019).

Thus, according to some of the student-interviewees, the real influence of multiculturalism on students is observed in group work and individual interactions. It implies that professors should not act only as knowledge transmitters. Managing a

multicultural classroom democratically and embedding intercultural and global perspectives in their learning-teaching activities are also their responsibilities. As a student-interviewee argues, although they are experts in their respective subjects, professors should not do passive lectures. They are required to facilitate learning and promote diversity of views (Arsoy et al., 2021).

Summary and conclusion

The diversity of MARIHE 6 students in terms of educational and cultural backgrounds and motivations creates cross-cultural learning. Accordingly, the student-interviewees specify several implications on their attitudes, cultural awareness and worldviews. Cultural diversity benefits students in developing shared and broader perspectives towards each other. The way students enquire, discourse, and interact with each other seems to influence their understanding of 'others' transcending national barriers. The interaction between students with different academic and work experiences enhances their awareness of course-specific issues as well. They, for instance, claim that it helps them realise how varied the higher education systems in different parts of the world are.

As the views of the respondents and the current trends indicate, higher education institutions around the world will increasingly become scenes of multiculturalism. Accordingly, they are expected to appropriate the cultural and academic diversity of learners as inputs to advance learning. Embedding global dimensions would enhance learners' ability to deal with different educational and cultural identities constructively. It unites a diverse group of individuals for a common global goal. Thus, the key is "an understanding that [multicultural] education is indispensable for all students, even in monocultural contexts" (Lourenço, 2018, p. 66).

However, synthesising standardised principles of teaching that are designed for a monocultural curriculum and accommodating diverse learning habits of multicultural classrooms is a real challenge that universities might face. Furthermore, a high degree of heterogeneity challenges the authority of professors in deciding learning approaches for their students. Therefore, dealing with these issues is imperative.

Moreover, a multicultural classroom needs a diverse group of professors. The MARIHE 6 program, in this regard, is a good example. It has professors of different nationalities

with immense professional and cultural experiences. However, the diversity of professors might not be enough. A multicultural classroom also needs professors who can genuinely consider the views of students as an asset to (re)discover new ways of teaching. It demands a high level of professional competence and willingness to develop their teaching and students' learning approaches based on the plurality of views.

Regarding the nexus between multiculturalism, creativity and innovation, as many empirical studies and the participants of this study confirm, multiculturalism influences students' creativity and innovativeness. A multicultural classroom can help students develop traits of creativity and innovativeness, such as insight learning, the ability to encode different forms of information in different ways, diversity of cognitive styles and the ability to retrieve unconventional knowledge. Moreover, it is believed that environmental changes are sources of ideas for innovation. Therefore, as a mobility program and a multicultural classroom, MARIHE has a program structure and student composition conducive to the germination of creativity and innovativeness.

In conclusion, to highlight it again, universities of the modern age are trigger points of multiculturalism. Therefore, universalising learning-teaching approaches is not a choice but a basic assignment that universities should do efficaciously. In this respect, as an exchange program, MARIHE 6 appears to be on the right track in fostering the internationalisation of education and accommodating multiculturalism, particularly regarding the diversity of students and professors. However, more efforts will be needed not to make this multicultural classroom a mere site of transmission of hard facts from one side and to utilise the potential of multiculturalism for creativity, knowledge production and innovation (knowledge application). In other words, as stated by Karacsony, Pásztóová, Vinichenko and Huszka, "a functional relationship between the teacher and the student and the proper curriculum design are essential elements for an effective educational process" in a multicultural setting (2022, p. 2).

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