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Developing inclusive materials for glocal pedagogy: Addressing special educational needs in multicultural English programmes

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Introduction

As a lecturer working at the University of Science and Technology MISIS in Moscow, Russia, I have constantly observed that teaching a Master's course on special educational needs (SEN) to students for whom English is a foreign language has been challenged by many factors. First, teaching learners with SEN is highly contextualized and rooted in local educational practices and knowledge. After finishing the Master's degree course, the teachers will return to their home countries or will be working in various countries of the world (for example, Vietnam, China, Tanzania, Egypt, Syria, Nigeria), which have their own long-established rules and regulations in special educational needs. Official institutions in every country include different needs and learning difficulties in their definitions of SEN, each with their own idiosyncratic and varied manifestations. Different regions have different procedures for collaboration between school administration and parents, teachers and parents and other key issues. Hence, the course should equip the students with relevant knowledge of educational legislation in terms of working with learners with SEN in their countries. It should also address how these needs are identified and dealt with by psychologists, neuropsychologists, speech therapists alongside school administration and teachers.

Secondly, teacher education should take into account local practices in dealing with learners with SEN. Oftentimes they stem from the knowledge generated by local specialists and official educational bodies. So, what is required in this situation are articles exploring local contexts, videos demonstrating real life examples of behavior of learners with SEN, artefacts demonstrating how they write, read, speak, behave and communicate with their teachers and peers. Voices of local parents and teachers should be also represented in teacher education courses.

Given that the course is conducted using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), all the aforementioned components should be in English. The main issue and dilemma are that there is a scarcity of local materials in English on special educational needs from the students' countries. From my personal observation, the majority of such materials in English exemplify learners and educational contexts in Anglophone countries, whereas local cases and practices are represented in local languages. Some infrequent exceptions are materials designed and developed by local teachers of English. However, as Canagarajah (2002) argues, 'in the professional sense, practitioners develop a knowledge of accomplishing their work in ways that are not acknowledged or recommended by the authorities/experts' (p. 243). In Russia, for example, these materials are mostly self-published in a limited number of copies and distributed through social networks and personal sites.

Besides, there exist numerous parallel terminologies in the SEN domain in various countries, which pre-service teachers should be aware of. For example, in Russia dyslexia (a learning disability manifested by a lack of proficiency in reading) and dysgraphia (a written language learning disability) are singled out as two discrete disabilities, whereas in other countries dyslexia serves as an umbrella term for these two special educational needs.

Such concerns lead to a set of questions, such as:

- How can the course include diverse geocultural contexts?
- How can international student-teachers contribute to the course and make it more localized?

In this article, my intention is to outline how glocalization (Robertson, 1995) can be used as a framework, offering a pluriversal approach (Escobar, 2018) instead of ontological universality.

Why glocalize SEN education?

Roudometof (2016) offers the following definition of *glocalization*: 'refraction of globalization through the local' (p. 79). In other words, similar to a ray of light bending upon entering into another medium, glocalization as a lens can transform the vision of the world by seeing the global through the local. Another analogy from physics could enhance our understanding of glocalization as 'diffraction', offered by Bayley (2018, p. 39). Diffraction is a physical process and can be observed when light passes through an opening and spreads out. It becomes more pronounced with narrower openings.

Metaphorically speaking, diffraction in our teaching context denotes looking at a small unit of a phenomenon (local) and seeing its bigger picture in a larger social and professional landscape (global). In a similar vein, Appadurai (1990) points out the difference between seeing the local within a global landscape as opposed to an ideoscape. As the result of synergy of the local and the global, new knowledge is created, shaping student-teachers' views on teaching learners with SEN and helping them drift from a static view of special educational needs to one which is more dynamic and well-rounded.

As I mentioned before, one of the obstacles in the way of glocalization is that when the course is delivered in English, the materials and the entire input (videos, articles) are most frequently in English too. I have made an attempt to find videos in English about dyslexic learners in Tanzania or Russia, for example, but I did not find a wide choice. Most videos are about Anglocentric countries. Similarly, the majority of scholarly research on special educational needs is published in English. However, a lot of research remains unnoticed and unavailable outside the local scholarly circles if written in local languages. Such research is often considered insignificant and limited to local communities because of the dominant standing of English as a communication medium and the wide proliferation of western-based products (Gray, 2002).

Despite the challenges, local knowledge adds value to the syllabi for SEN programmes. Even some controversial and more debatable facets of local knowledge become food for thought. For example, Russian education still bears the enduring legacy of 'defectology', an integrated approach which 'brings together psychology, medicine, philosophy, sociology and political theory in order to diagnose, educate and rehabilitate people with mental and physical handicaps' (Rouse et al., 2000, p. 8). In fact, it 'strengthens the segregated provisions' (Florian & Becirevic, 2011, p. 375) and emphasizes the supremacy of biological and psycho-physiological treatment over inclusive education. Yet, the Soviet concept of defectology gave rise to valuable research in psychology, dyslexia treatment, speech therapy, and systemic rehabilitation of learners with special educational needs.

Another example of controversial approaches is the attitude towards albinism in sub-Saharan African regions. Albinism is 'a genetic condition caused by a deficit in production of the pigment melanin' (Franklin et al., 2018). People with albinism are considered disabled due to their poor vision, which is understandable. Simultaneously, there are a lot of folklore and mythological biases against them, which stigmatize and marginalize such people (Ndomondo, 2015).

Such local and contextualized wisdom can be easily labeled as inferior compared to western knowledge and practices, however 'anti-essentialist critiques of modernity' (Pennycook, 2017, p. 57) should take such vernacularity into account. Here, vernacular denotes 'a state of being native, original, and contextual to geography and places' (Suartika & Nichols, 2020, p. vii). Instead of eschewing some controversial local views on special educational needs, one should recognize them as food for thought and make an attempt to understand their strengths and weaknesses within their local contexts.

Glocalized materials

Articles and books

The course reading included articles and books of three types: (a) those written by local authors and published in English but featuring various geographical contexts, preferably of the students' countries; (b) those written in local languages and summarized in English by the students; (c) those written and published in English by Western scholars. For example, we read articles about teaching children with special educational needs in rural settings in various countries and identify what problems they have in common and in what way they differ. I ask students to search for articles on inclusion and special educational needs written by the authors from their countries which have been published in their local languages. After that, they are asked to present the summary in English to the whole group. This redresses the balance in the course towards local authors and adds a polyphony of voices to the course materials

Videos and films

The course on special educational needs is highly practical and requires a sufficient number of videos to illustrate manifestations of neurodiversity, behaviour, and speech patterns of learners with SEN. As a teacher I interact with parents of learners with various learning difficulties in Russia. I asked them to share videos of their children studying, playing and doing everyday routines. They gave me permission to use these short videos in my university classes. In one of the videos,

a 13-year-old boy was filmed during his English class, and in the second one, a girl with Down syndrome was doing maths.

Videos showcasing the way inclusion is implemented in the countries where the students come from were also included. Despite limited video material on some countries, all videos from the same region proved to be relevant. For example, we watched a video about autistic children in South Africa in a group with two students from African countries.

Furthermore, episodes from local films were used to illustrate certain issues. For example, I showed a scene from *A Hostess of an Orphanage* (*Khozyaika Detskogo Doma* in Russian), a Soviet film illustrating teacher-child relationships. Such films contextualized the course and provided examples of interaction between various actors of the educational process. Apart from entertainment, films 'offer unique scope for getting acquainted with other cultures' (Nedergaard-Larsen, 1993, p. 207). This was a compelling and informative cultural experience, albeit entailing explanation of extralinguistic culture-bound problems. School realia, teacher-parent meetings, interaction between school administration and other actors of the educational process demanded translation. What added to the glocalized approach was the discussion of cultural schemas (Sharifian, 2014). For example, such lexical items as 'orphanage' or 'adoptive family' evoked multiple interpretations from people who have grown up in different contexts.

Local cases

During the course, stories emerged as real-life cases and vignettes in interactive theatre, which were discussed by the students. In interactive theatre, or 'forum theatre', the students are offered performance sketches with a follow-up discussion and analysis. These sketches, or vignettes, are used as cases and stories illustrative of school environment through which the students' perceptions and attitudes could be identified. The sketches are collected either by the students, or by myself during my 25-year-long teaching practice at schools. The students are asked to act out the scenes from school life and then analyse what was happening.[1]

Case 1. Patimat, 9 years old

Patimat has speech-related difficulties. The child exhibits challenges with motor skills and peer interactions, does not want to draw, and does not hold scissors well. It is difficult to take her for a walk: she does not want to fasten buttons herself. There is a disorder of successive functions (she cannot consistently reproduce a series of actions). There are difficulties with mirrored writing of letters. She perceives visual instructions easier than verbal ones.

Case 2. Anna, 14 years old

Anna communicates little with other children and teachers. She does not participate in games, and she tries to be alone. There are stereotyped repetitive movements - she can open and close a pencil case for the entire lesson. Anna has a very good memory – involuntary auditory and visual. Her carers need to be careful when playing music in the classroom or bringing new objects, toys, etc. into it: recently Anna became hysterical because of a musical toy that someone played in the class. There are cases of self-injury over seemingly trivial matters.

In class, the SEN teachers discussed possible approaches, interventions and solutions for these learners.

Local epistemologies

The pluriverse of epistemologies and the idea of a curriculum contents as 'the world in which many worlds would co-exist' (Mignolo, 2011, p. 71) bring to the foreground various academic contexts and socio-educational practices. Creating a curriculum that acknowledges and values diverse ways of knowing requires a shift away from the traditional Western-centric curriculum towards one that incorporates multiple knowledge systems and perspectives. In doing so, we can 'empower those who have been epistemically disempowered by the theo- and egopolitics of knowledge' (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 61) and those who have been historically marginalized and oppressed by colonial and capitalist systems.

Although many works by Soviet pedagogues as well as speech therapists have never been translated into English, I have incorporated them into the course. For example, the psychological structure of writing was analyzed (Luria, 1950) and a model of the formation of writing skill, describing its complex brain organization, was developed by the Soviet neuropsychologists (Akhutina, 2018; Luria, 1950). Several key cognitive prerequisites for reading and writing were developed (Egorov, 1953; Elkonin, 1989; Kornev, 1995; Lalaeva, 1989; Luria, 1962).

Glocalised output

Students' presentations

I typically ask all international students to prepare Power Point presentations about inclusive education

1. For example, one of the scenes we acted out was as follows: the teacher forced a neurodiverse 5th grade learner (with dyslexia) to read aloud a text in class, which is usually quite difficult for some neurodiverse learners. After watching this scene, I asked the students what they would do if they were the teacher and saw the child struggle that much over reading out loud in English. There were different opinions as to whether the teacher should insist on her reading aloud or not.

and teaching learners with special educational needs in the countries of their origin. The students inform others in the group about the history of inclusion in their country, the latest developments in legislation and predicaments schools and parents have to tackle.

To illustrate, a student from Tanzania highlighted an interesting feature of the special educational needs framework in their country. According to this framework, people with albinism are considered disabled and are often stigmatized and discriminated against in the sub-Saharan countries (Franklin et al., 2018; Ndomondo, 2015). Importantly, children with albinism are not automatically included in the list of those who need special education in other countries of the world. Thus, it makes sense to explore this issue further and debate how justified and evidence-based this attitude is.

In Russian classification of special educational needs, or 'limited health abilities' as they are still called in legal documents, there is a similar case. Such diagnosis as 'psychic development delay' (a lag in mental, cognitive, or psychological growth) does not exist in other countries. In a similar vein, other differences and similarities between national legislation and local practices can be focused on and explored further by the whole group.

Some students offered cases involving their local contexts for other students to think of some solutions. For example, the following scenario was used:

> *Suppose you are a school principal in Tanzania. You are going to accept some learners with albinism. Think of some measures to prevent stigmatization and discrimination towards such learners.*

Assessment

The majority of assessment tasks on the course are grounded in local contexts. As Emmanuel et al. (2022) claim, since glocal education concentrates on the local context via the prism of national and global paradigms, it has an impact on evaluation in terms of design and intention.

During the course, I asked the students to complete the following collaborative and individual written assignments:

1. Write a brief information sheet about the characteristics and difficulties of students with dyslexia (300 words) for a group of teachers in your school.
2. You are a research assistant to the Head of the Federal Education Agency (Ministry) in your country, who needs to develop an anti-bullying program for inclusive schools in order to prevent bullying of learners with autism. Design and develop recommendations for the program.

Such context-grounded assignments completed in small multicultural groups allowed the students to compare different contexts they teach in and brainstorm various approaches to inclusion and teaching learners with SEN.

For example, the tasks mentioned above allowed the student-teachers to think of acting as learners' advocates. Learners with special educational needs are particularly vulnerable at schools and are often denied the right to attend English lessons under the pretext that they are not able to learn foreign languages or that they are not capable of doing this because they struggle with their native language.

The task on the information sheet about dyslexia highlighted some well-rooted traditions in treating dyslexic learners in different countries. The teachers discussed possible reaction to this information sheet from their peers and foresaw the objections that can arise. Working in groups the teachers exchanged their experience, beliefs and fears with regard to learners with special educational needs. The teachers who come from the educational contexts where inclusion has a long-standing history shared their experience of debunking myths about low learning agility in learners with SEN and showed some difficulties learners with, for example, dyslexia may have to deal with in class (see Appendix 1, *Figure 1*).

Task 2, developing the anti-bullying prevention program, required doing research of best practices around the world and discussing if they are applicable in other educational contexts. Simultaneously, the teachers discussed the reasons why bullying happens and how it stems from the structure of society, for example, social classes, castes, privileged groups (see Appendix 1, *Figure 2*).

Such discussions also raised an important dilemma of agency vs. structure in educational institutions. Through the discussion of multiple local contexts, the teachers saw a bigger picture of schools as institutions. Can teachers act as agents of change? Is society 'a web of crystallized interactions' (Simmel, 1955, p. 35) or is it a monolith people cannot influence much? As Martin (2009) argues, 'society can seem like a thing outside us and frequently opposed to us, when it is nothing but the aggregate of our own actions' (p. 2). Completing the aforementioned assignments in multinational groups, the teachers conversed on their agency in promoting positive attitude towards learners with SEN.

Discussion and conclusion

In a world 'increasingly characterised by competition, commercialisation, self-interest and status building'

(Knight, 2018, p. 18), glocalization could potentially become a tool for sustaining openness and combine 'international outlook with national distinction' (Trippestad, 2016, p. 11). In our contemporary education realities, universities are viewed as transcultural sites where participants from various social contexts, linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact.

What glocalized learning should aim at is helping the learner make sense of their experiences and lived reality. In glocalized teaching and learning, the emphasis is on critical thought and comprehension of significant and pertinent links between learners' local and global perspectives. Students bring a variety of cultural worldviews to the 'third culture space' (Bhabha, 1994) represented by universities, charting their common futures by respectfully exchanging their cultural richness (Patel & Lynch, 2013).

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Appendix 1

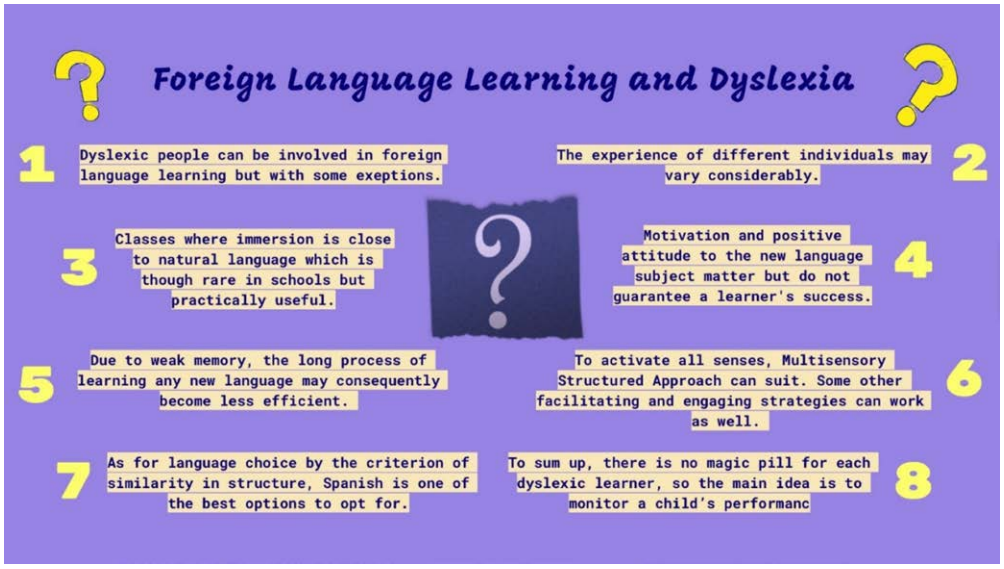

Figure 1: Dyslexic learners and learning foreign languages (Spelling errors in the original)

Figure 2: Anti-bullying program for inclusive schools