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Research Article

Pre-service Teachers' Views on Multicultural Education Competencies: A Semi-Structured Interview Study

Öğretmen Adaylarının Çokkültürlü Eğitim Yeterliklerine İlişkin Görüşleri: Yarı Yapılandırılmış Bir Mülakat Çalışması

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Abstract

Purpose: *This study aims to determine preservice teachers' views regarding multicultural education competencies. It is significant in exploring how teacher candidates conceptualize multicultural education and their perceived self-efficacy within this domain.* ***Method:*** *Adopting a qualitative research design, the study utilized the Grounded Theory approach. The participants consisted of 12 teacher candidates selected through criterion and maximum diversity sampling methods. Data were collected via a semi-structured interview form and interpreted using content analysis, inductive descriptive analysis, and constant comparison analysis.* ***Findings:*** *The findings reveal that preservice teachers define multicultural education as an integrative and unifying process based on cultural diversity, respect for differences, and equal opportunities. While participants acknowledge the critical importance of multicultural competence for effective learning, teacher quality, and classroom management, they perceive their own current competencies as insufficient.* ***Conclusion:*** *The research concludes that although preservice teachers possess high awareness regarding the necessity and functions of multicultural education, they experience a lack of confidence in their practical implementation skills. This suggests a need for pedagogical enhancements in teacher education programs to bridge the gap between theoretical awareness and practical competency.*

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Öz

Amaç: *Bu çalışma, öğretmen adaylarının çokkültürlü eğitim yeterliklerine yönelik görüşlerini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, çokkültürlü eğitimin öğretmen adayları nezdindeki anlamını, önemini ve adayların bu konudaki öz yeterlik algılarını ortaya koyması bakımından önem taşımaktadır.* ***Yöntem:*** *Nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden temellendirilmiş kuram (Grounded Theory) yaklaşımının benimsendiği çalışmada, veriler uzman görüşleri doğrultusunda hazırlanan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu ile toplanmıştır. Araştırmanın katılımcılarını, amaçlı örnekleme yöntemlerinden ölçüt ve maksimum çeşitlilik örneklemesiyle belirlenen 12 öğretmen adayı oluşturmaktadır. Toplanan veriler; içerik analizi, tümevarımsal betimsel analiz ve sürekli karşılaştırmalı analiz teknikleri kullanılarak yorumlanmıştır.* ***Bulgular:*** *Bulgulara göre öğretmen adayları, çokkültürlü eğitimi kültürel çeşitliliğe uygun, birleştirici, farklılıklara saygı ve fırsat eşitliğine dayalı bir eğitim süreci olarak tanımlamaktadır. Katılımcılar; kültürel farklılıklar, etkili öğrenme, öğretmen kalitesi, sınıf yönetimi ve veli iş birliği gibi alanlarda çokkültürlü eğitim yeterliğini kritik bir unsur olarak görmelerine rağmen, kendi mevcut yeterliklerini yetersiz olarak algılamaktadır.* ***Sonuç:*** *Araştırma sonucunda, öğretmen adaylarının çokkültürlü eğitimin gerekliliği ve işlevi konusunda yüksek bir farkındalığa sahip oldukları ancak uygulama becerileri noktasında kendilerini eksik hissettikleri saptanmıştır. Bu durum, öğretmen yetiştirme programlarında çokkültürlü eğitim yeterliklerini artırmaya yönelik pratik düzenlemelere ihtiyaç duyulduğunu göstermektedir.*

Introduction

The number of individuals fleeing war, violence, conflict, or persecution worldwide and seeking refuge in other countries has steadily increased (Czaika & Kraler, 2020) along with persistent mass refugee movements (Oplatka, 2021). There are approximately 43 million refugees worldwide, of whom nearly 17 million are children (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2023). This phenomenon has led to a significant rise in the number of refugee students in host countries, posing various challenges to their education systems (Naslund-Hadley et al., 2020). Refugee migration is not merely a physical displacement but also a process of cultural transformation (Chwastek et al., 2021). This transformation underscores the growing importance of multicultural education, fostering a paradigm that embraces and supports cultural diversity within educational frameworks. Zohrabi et al. (2019) argue that the emergence of multicultural societies highlights the significance of cultural inclusion within education systems, while Stika (2012) asserts that this process also provides an opportunity to foster diverse perspectives and knowledge. According to Wulandari (2020), multicultural education promotes the view that cultural differences are regarded as a source of enrichment. Additionally, Copeland and Tarver (2020) suggest that multicultural education enhances interpersonal understanding and leverages historical and cultural heritage as a unifying force. In this context, multicultural education not only facilitates cultural inclusion but also plays a pivotal role in mitigating societal conflicts and reinforcing social ethics

(Nanggala, 2020). Despite the positive impact of multicultural education, a study by Geerlings et al. (2018) notes that teachers face difficulties in demonstrating competencies when working with multicultural student groups that exhibit cultural diversity. It also highlights that the competencies they display in teaching culturally diverse students are limited (Geerlings et al., 2018). Furthermore, Häggström et al. (2020) emphasize the challenges teachers experience in balancing assistive and guiding roles with their pedagogic responsibilities in multicultural schools.

In other words, while, on the one hand, teachers have such missions as supporting learning processes, on the other, they are required to adopt a sensitive approach to the individual needs of students. This, in turn, tends to cause a clash of roles, that is, a dilemma as to which role they are required to focus more (Aalto et al., 2024). At this exact point, multicultural education presents a comprehensive scope that shapes teachers who guide education systems and the change in such systems in a broad spectrum from cultural inclusion to social justice (Salimi & Rad, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to provide insight into how to enhance cultural inclusion in education by examining the multicultural education competencies of teacher candidates.

In this context, multicultural education has positive implications such as harmony, respect, love, academic success, tolerance, empathy, pluralism, equity, equality, and social integration. Multicultural education develops positive inclusivity and a sense of respect by helping students get accustomed to diverse lifestyles, languages, cultures, and viewpoints (Mamatova, 2022). Additionally, it enhances students' critical thinking skills, character development, and emotional intelligence (Praswanti et al., 2023). In the literature, multiculturalism has been densely investigated in studies focusing on education programmes, teacher education, and its impact on students (Abacioglu et al., 2020; Beqiri & Sylaj, 2021; Enyew & Melesse, 2018; Parker, 2019; Rodríguez et al., 2020; Silva, 2022; Vassallo, 2020; Wang, 2021; Wei, 2018; Zohrabi et al., 2019). In this scope, this study differs from the previous studies in the sense that it aims to approach multiculturalism from a broader perspective, utilising the data obtained from the interviews with teacher candidates. This study aims to collect in-depth information by utilising qualitative research tools and specifically put forth the viewpoints of teacher candidates on their multicultural education competencies. This study is expected to contribute to understanding the multicultural teaching skills of teacher candidates and to improving these skills. In addition, it is foreseen that the study findings will present invaluable hints for policy-makers and implementers in the process of enhancing and updating teacher training programmes.

To this end, this study aims to put forth teacher candidates' opinions on their multicultural education competencies in a detailed and comprehensive manner. Within the scope of this primary objective, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the participants' opinions on the concept of multicultural education?

2. What are the participants' views on the importance of multicultural education skills?

3. How do the participants evaluate their own multicultural education skills?

4. Which practices have contributed to the participants' multicultural education proficiencies in their educational or daily lives?

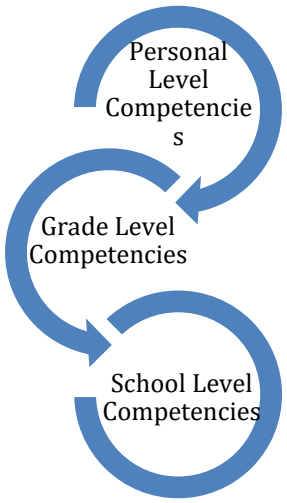
5. What are the participants' suggestions for enhancing multicultural education skills?

Conceptual Framework

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education generally means that individuals have equal educational opportunities regardless of their language, religion, race, ethnicity, and social and cultural characteristics (Banks & Banks, 2020). Today, the qualities of teachers who are aware of both their and students' cultures without any ethnic and cultural discrimination bear significance in terms of multicultural education. These qualities comprise cultural awareness, sociocultural consciousness, understanding of the living and cultural backgrounds of students, integration of such knowledge into teaching processes, and adoption of bias-free education goals (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Since teachers acting with cultural awareness provide an inclusive and fair environment in multicultural classrooms (Dolzhenko&Young, 2020), it helps implement a more effective education system (Steele & Leming, 2022). Banks (1991) categorises multicultural teacher competencies under three headings as "personal level competencies, grade-level competencies, and school-level competencies", as shown in Figure 1 (Taylor & Quintana, 2003). The classifications of teachers' multicultural education competencies are evaluated within the framework of teachers' observing all differences as cultural wealth, knowing the cultural value of others, creating educational environments suitable for cultural diversity, and having an understanding of multiculturalism (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Figure 1: *Teacher competencies for multicultural education (adapted from Banks, 1991; cited in Taylor & Quintana, 2003).*



In the literature, empirical studies conducted on multiculturalism can be divided into three categories. The first category comprises studies investigating the inclusion of multiculturalism in curriculum and education programmes. For instance, Enyew and Melesse (2018) examined the effect of multiculturalism on the academic environment in Ethiopian universities. Their research results showed that multiculturality found itself a place in education programmes. Wei (2018) observed that, as a response to economic growth and exam-oriented education, a modern framework of curriculum containing multiculturalism was developed. However, issues arising from traditional values and norms in a society manifesting resistance to change and problems of students expressing their diverse cultural identities in the classroom were identified to create a disconnection between policies and their implementation. Zohrabi et al. (2019) designed and developed a multicultural curriculum model for English language teaching in high schools in Iran, which experts then verified. While this study was an important step towards integrating multiculturality into Iran's English language teaching curriculum, it tackles only a limited aspect of multiculturality. The second study category investigates multiculturalism in relation to teacher training. One such study conducted by Parker (2019) looks into the significance of multicultural education for teacher candidates in higher education institutions. However, it is important to note that this study specifically tackled inclusivity training but not multicultural teacher training. In a study, Vassallo (2020) examined the changes in the understanding of multiculturalism following a course on multicultural education in which teachers participated. Similarly, some studies examine teachers' understanding of multicultural education (Alt & Raichel, 2020; Kong, 2024; Silva, 2022). The third study category comprises research on the impact of multiculturalism on students. In their study, Beqiri and Sylaj (2021) put forth that multiculturalism impacts students' socialisation. Indeed, there are similar studies in the literature (Abacioglu et al., 2020; Rodríguez et al., 2020; Wang, 2021).

Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted with semi-structured interviews complying with the qualitative approach to conduct an in-depth multicultural examination. The interview form comprised open-ended questions that aimed to reveal participants' viewpoints on multicultural education competencies without influencing them. In this scope, the data were analysed in compliance with open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, which are the analytical processes of Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Working Group

The study group comprised 12 prospective teachers studying in different departments of a state university in the Southeastern Anatolia region in the 2022-2023 academic year. The Southeastern Anatolian region, also known as Mesopotamia, located in a country like Türkiye where cultural diversity and integration are apparent, is a culturally and

historically rich region containing Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic communities. Also hosting diverse religious communities, this region lags from an economic standpoint. It houses about 8% of the total population of Türkiye and comprises nine out of 81 provinces of the country. The study participants were determined according to "criterion sampling and maximum diversity sampling" methods, which are non-probability-based purposive sampling. The participants were selected from candidates who completed courses or workshops on multicultural education or from teacher candidates who could speak more than one language. The participants were selected from various departments and grade levels. In this context, the participants were enrolled in different teacher education programs, including Religious Education, Guidance and Psychological Counseling, Social Studies Education, and Turkish Language Education. The inclusion of candidates from these distinct programs ensured disciplinary diversity and strengthened maximum variation within the sample.

Data Collection Tool

The data were collected using a semi-structured interview format created by the researchers upon examining extensive literature available on multicultural education. The reason for using a semi-structured interview format in the study was to determine how the participants, in their own words, attribute meaning to the research phenomenon (Greasley & Ashworth, 2007). To create the data collection tool, draft questions were first prepared and presented to two language experts and three field experts experienced in qualitative research to ensure content validity. In line with the suggestions of language and field experts, two questions ("What is competence?" and "Which practices in your educational or daily life have negatively affected your multicultural education competency?") were eliminated, and five main questions and follow-up questions related to these main questions were included. Pilot interviews were conducted with two participants to ensure the clarity of the semi-structured interview form. As a result of the pilot interviews, some parts of the questions were revised, and the data collection tool was finalised. The interview questions are as follows:

1. What do you think multicultural education is? Can you define it?

2. Why are multicultural education skills important for prospective teachers? Can you justify your explanations?

3. How do you evaluate your multicultural education abilities? Can you explain whether your level of multicultural education is sufficient? Provide your own justifications.

4. Which practices (courses, activities, studies, etc.) in your educational or daily life have contributed to your multicultural education abilities? Can you provide an explanation?

5. What are your suggestions for enhancing multicultural education proficiency? Provide your own explanations.

Data Collection

The research data were obtained from interviews carried out with 12 prospective teachers. The participants were also informed that they could leave the study at any time, that the research did not carry any risk, and that participation was voluntary. Approval was obtained from the participants for recording their voices. Each interview lasted approximately 35 minutes. The participants were coded using the letter "P", and a number was added to each participant code (e.g. P1, P2, etc.).

Analysing the Data

Microsoft Word-compatible MAXQDA 2020 qualitative data analysis software was used in this study. The data from the study were analysed by open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, which are analytical procedures/stages of Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 2006). In the study, data in the open coding process were examined in detail, and repeating themes in the statements of participants were identified. Axial coding was utilised to explore, arrange, and merge the correlations between the themes identified by open coding. To ensure coherence, interrelationships were established between the codes and categories identified through axial coding. Thus, these procedures/stages followed throughout the study ensured the association of analytical procedures of Grounded Theory with data and particularisation of the results with reference to specific findings. To ensure internal reliability, a consistency analysis was conducted. For this purpose, Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula [Reliability = Number of Agreements / (Total Number of Agreements + Disagreements)] was used. In qualitative research, an agreement level of 90% or above between the researcher and an independent expert coder is generally considered acceptable. In this study, the interview data were coded independently by the researcher and by a predetermined expert familiar with qualitative analysis. As a result of this comparison, the reliability values were calculated separately for each research question as follows: 91% for "What do you think multicultural education is?", 90% for "Why are multicultural education skills important for prospective teachers?", 93% for "How do you evaluate your multicultural education abilities?", 92% for "Which practices contribute to your multicultural education abilities?", and 90% for "What are your suggestions for enhancing multicultural education proficiency?". These values indicate that the level of internal reliability obtained for this study is within the acceptable and desired range.

Content analysis, inductive descriptive analysis, and constant comparison techniques were used to interpret the research data. The reason for the use of a variety of analysis methods in the study was to analyse the varying dimensions of the data more comprehensively. Thanks to the content analysis, it was possible to analyse the participants' opinions on multicultural education competencies in an in-depth manner,

and repetitive themes and significant elements in the statements of the participants were revealed (Creswell, 2013). Inductive descriptive analysis was utilised to thoroughly explore the participants' opinions on multicultural education. This analysis type was opted for since it ensured the meaningful interpretation of the data from the participants' viewpoint (Moustakas, 1994). Through inductive descriptive analysis, profound knowledge was collected on such topics as how participants perceived multicultural education competencies and how these competencies can be gained. With comparison analysis, similarities and differences between various participants were identified. Therefore, these three analysis types revealed the similarities and differences between direct quotations (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019) and contributed to thoroughly understanding multicultural education competencies from different perspectives and tackling the opinions on multicultural education competencies holistically. Furthermore, the emerging codes and themes were continuously compared with relevant concepts in the multicultural education literature, and the final thematic structure was interpreted in relation to this theoretical framework, which strengthened the theoretical coherence of the findings. In addition, data triangulation was employed by comparing the interview transcripts, audio recordings, and researcher notes taken during and immediately after the interviews. This triangulation process ensured that the themes were supported by multiple sources of evidence and increased the credibility of the results.

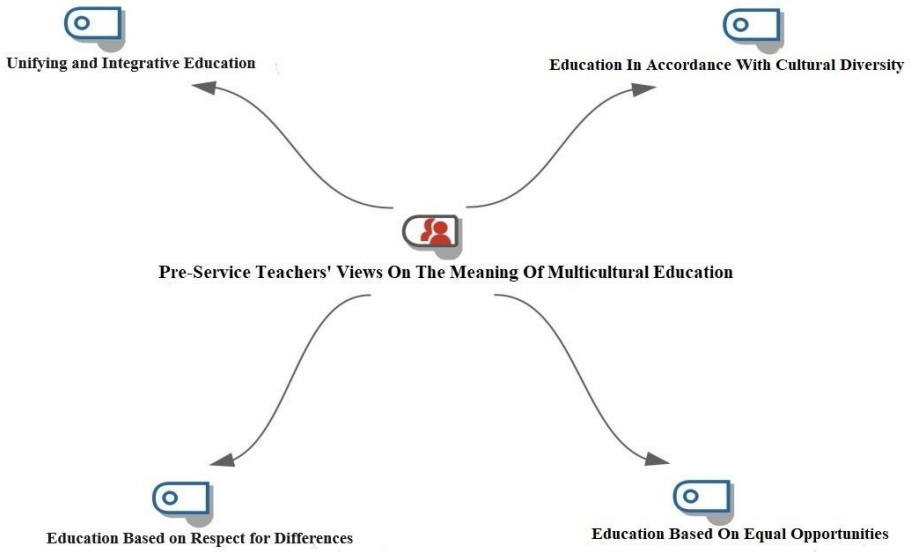
Findings

The research findings are presented as subheadings according to the answers given by the participants to the questions prepared within the scope of the research objectives.

Pre-Service Teachers' Views on the Meaning of Multicultural Education

To determine the views of the 12 prospective teachers on multicultural education, they were asked, "What do you think multicultural education is? Can you define it?" The responses of pre-service teachers about multicultural education are given in Figure 2.

Figure 2: *Pre-service teachers' views on the meaning of multicultural education*



As shown in Figure 2, the pre-service teachers' views on the meaning of multicultural education are grouped under four sub-themes: "unifying and integrative education; education in accordance with cultural diversity; education based on respect for differences and education based on equal opportunities". Explanations for these sub-themes are given below.

Unifying and Integrative Education: The pre-service teachers, multicultural education as the participation of people from different religions, languages, ethnicities, and traditions in education by uniting them under a single heading. The female participant P7, a 4th-grade student, defined multicultural education as *"The blending of different cultures together in education..."*. P10 defined multicultural education as *"Providing education in the same environment with different cultural groups and conducting educational activities by including different cultures...".*

Education in accordance with Cultural Diversity: Teacher candidates defined multicultural education as education practices shaped by the traditions, customs, and social structure of regions where students from various communities and cultural backgrounds inhabit. Multicultural education is observed to be perceived as an inclusive practice accommodating the unique cultural identities of students and aiming to embrace diversity. For instance, while *P1* defined multicultural education as *"providing individuals possessing multiple cultures with education in the same environment…" P5* put an emphasis on *"organising the education process in accordance with cultural diversity…"*. *P11*, on the other hand, noted it as *"co-existence of various cultures and adoption of an education concept in line with the acceptance of this cultural diversity…"*.

Education based on Respect Differences: In the sub-theme of 'education based on respect differences', participant P6 stated their opinion that multicultural education is an approach, and participant P6 stated their view that multicultural education is an approach that places respect for diversity in the centre. P6 elaborated on this concept metaphorically and likened multicultural education to "*the spirit of al-Rumi in which all cultures co-exist in tolerance and mutual understanding…"*

Education Based on Equal Opportunities: Of the teacher candidate group, participant P8 defined multicultural education as an approach ensuring equal access to education for every individual, regardless of ethnicity. Per P8, *"Individuals from different race, gender, belief, and social backgrounds should be included in a unified curriculum and should take advantage of equal education opportunities…"*

Pre-service Teachers' Views on Why Multicultural Education Skills are Important

To determine prospective teachers' views on why multicultural education skills are important, they were asked, "Why are multicultural education skills important for prospective teachers? Can you justify your explanations?" A summary of pre-service teachers' views on the importance of multicultural education skills is given in Figure 3.

Figure 3: *Pre-service teachers' views on why multicultural education skills are important*

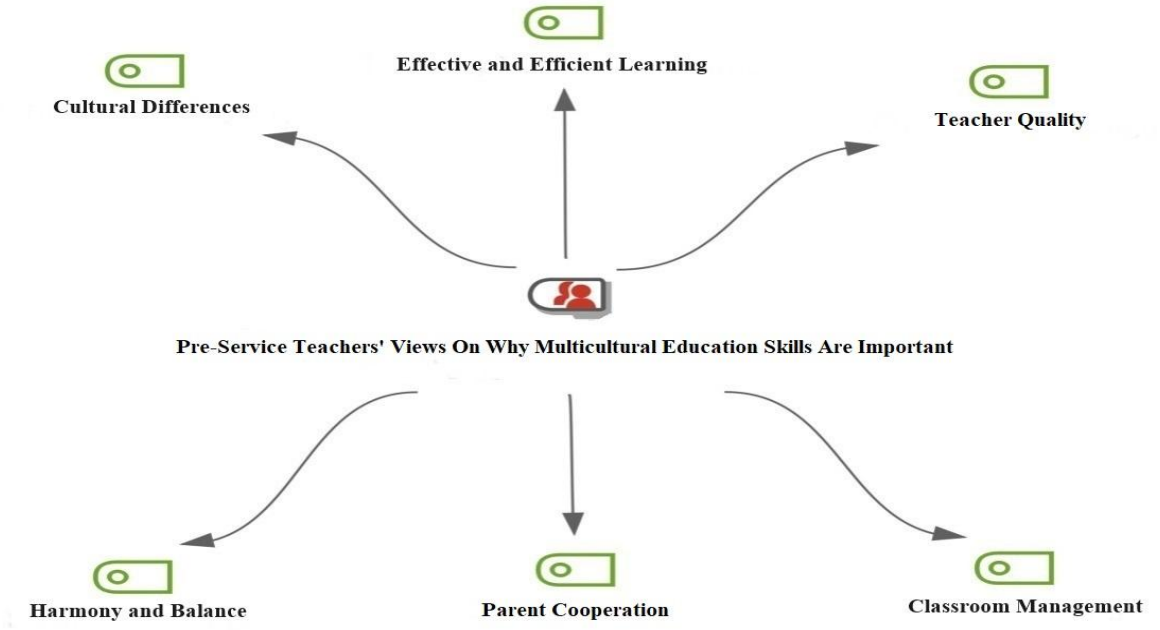


Figure 3 shows that pre-service teachers' views on the importance of multicultural education skills are divided into six sub-themes: cultural differences, effective and efficient learning, teacher quality, harmony and balance, parent cooperation and classroom management". The sub-themes identified by pre-service teachers regarding the importance of multicultural education skills are explained below.

Cultural Differences: In this study, per the participants stating their opinions under the cultural differences sub-theme, the presence of students from different cultural backgrounds at schools and the multicultural composition of the Turkish society underscore that teacher candidates improving their multicultural education competencies is a critical need. Participant P4 stated, "I think multicultural education skills are important. Generally, students come from different cultures. Teachers should have multicultural education skills in terms of adapting to students from different cultures." The participant coded P13 said, "It would be more useful to provide education by understanding and blending their cultures without contradicting the region's culture. If this is not taken into consideration, a negative perspective towards the teacher and the school will be formed by both students, parents and society."

Effective and Efficient Learning: Teacher candidates stated that multicultural education skills are required for effective and efficient education. In the effective and efficient sub-theme, multicultural education competencies allow teachers to actively include students from different cultural backgrounds in the education process by integrating them into the classroom environment. Teachers lacking this competency may cause students to lag in learning processes by neglecting cultural differences. In this regard, P5 noted, "A person who has multicultural education proficiency will have the opportunity to host different cultures together in the classroom and add them to the teaching/learning process. A teacher unaware of multicultural education will cause students to fall behind in the classroom environment."

Teacher Quality: A teacher's possession of multicultural education competency is a fundamental element directly affecting the education process. When considering that the teaching profession can be practised in various geographical regions of Türkiye in 81

provinces with varying socio-cultural characteristics, the importance of having multicultural competencies becomes more apparent. P9, a 20-year-old male participant, said, "It is very important for a teacher to have multicultural education skills since the greater the multicultural education competency, the higher the quality of the education

Harmony and Balance: According to the participants who expressed their opinions under the sub-theme of adaptation and balance (equilibrium), multicultural education proficiency is necessary for students' adaptation to the school and their balance. This was specified by P4: "The level of the teacher's multicultural competence should be at the required level... Otherwise, there will be serious problems in both the teacher's and the students' adaptation to the classroom and the school."

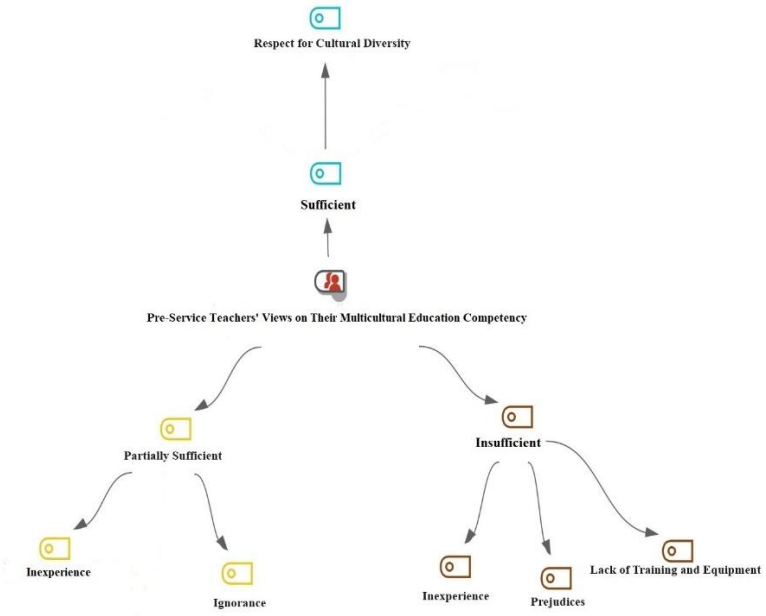
Parent Cooperation: Considering that each province and region has unique cultural characteristics, it is important for the teacher candidates to pay attention to not only the cultural backgrounds of students but also the impact of such cultural structure on parent-teacher cooperation for an effective education process. In this context, P9 said, "Each province and each region have its own cultural characteristics. When we get involved in the work, we will realise that we need to know about the students' cultures in the student-parent dialogue in the region where we work..." and pointed to parental cooperation.

Classroom Management: Creating order in a classroom with cultural diversity requires the teacher to understand the individual cultural backgrounds of students and to plan the classroom management strategies accordingly. P3 stated that multicultural education competency is necessary for classroom authority and classroom order and said, "As prospective teachers, our multicultural education ability should be at a sufficient level. It is necessary for us to provide order and peace in the classroom."

Pre-Service Teachers' Views on Their Multicultural Education Competency

To determine the pre-service teachers' views on how they evaluate their multicultural education competency, the following question was asked: "How do you evaluate your multicultural education abilities? Can you explain whether your level of multicultural education is sufficient? Provide your own justifications." Pre-service teachers' opinions about their multicultural education competencies are given in Figure 4.

Figure 4: *Pre-Service Teachers' Views on Their Multicultural Education Competency*



As shown in Figure 4, the pre-service teachers' views concerning their own perceived level of multicultural education competencies are collected in three sub-themes and six codes as sufficient, partially sufficient, and insufficient. These sub-themes and codes are elaborated below.

Sufficient: Participants who considered their multicultural education competency sufficient attributed the reason to the respect for cultural diversity. The following code was formed under the corresponding sub-theme.

Respect for Cultural Diversity: Pre-service teachers who noted their respect for cultural diversity, emphasised that cultural diversity is a natural consequence of life and that cultural differences should be respected. In this regard, participant P9 expressed their opinions: *"Since I will try to learn the culture of the region where I work, I can organise activities accordingly. As people from many different cultures co-exist, it is important to respect cultural differences."*

Partially Sufficient: According to pre-service teachers who believe their multicultural education competency is partially sufficient, communication, experience, and knowledge play a determining role in multicultural education competencies. The following codes are elaborated under the partially sufficient sub-theme.

Inexperience: Participant P1, who stated that they were not at an adequate level due to their inexperience, evaluated their multicultural education adequacy as partial and attributed it to not spending the necessary time among people with diverse social characteristics and not possessing sufficient experience.

Ignorance: Pre-service teacher P6, who stated that they did not have the required knowledge for multicultural education, said, *"I try to analyse and understand the cultural structure of the society I am in more closely. However, I do not have enough knowledge about the methods and techniques used for multicultural education..."* and commented on their level of multicultural education as partially sufficient.

Insufficient: Pre-service teachers stated that their multicultural education competency was insufficient. The participants believed that inexperience, prejudices, and lack of education and equipment are at the root of multicultural educational shortcomings. Below are explanations about the codes occurring in the inadequate sub-theme.

Inexperience: Multicultural education competency is related to experiences. People with extensive life experiences also have much better multicultural education skills. The male participant P2, a 2nd-grade student, elaborated on the reason for the inadequacy of multicultural education competency: *"Personally, multicultural* education *is a very new concept for me... It is a situation that I have never encountered or experienced... At this stage, my past experiences in life do not enhance my multicultural education competency."*

Prejudices: Prejudices and tunnel vision that pre-service teachers develop towards certain cultural norms and values under the influence of their social circle negatively impact their multicultural education competencies. P12, older than the other participants, used an analogy to explain how he perceived the situation: *"We have a dismissive view of various cultures, whether it's due to family or social environment. When we see something different, we immediately prejudge... I think this is the biggest problem for multicultural education competency..."*

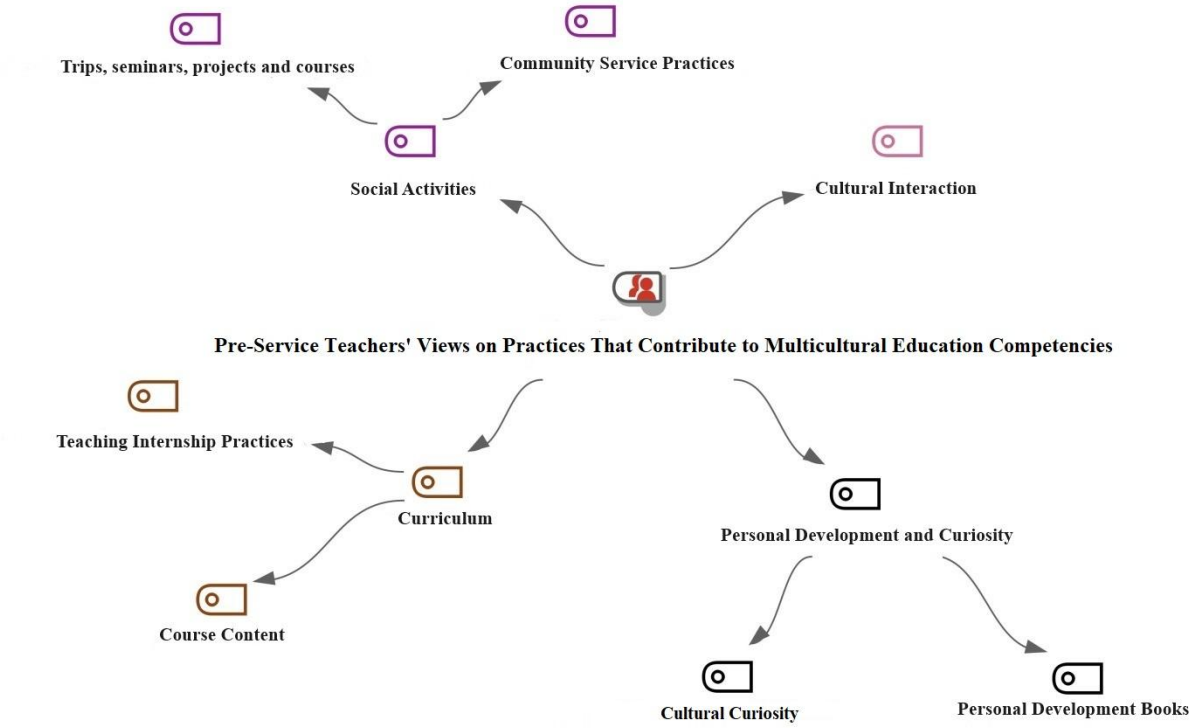
Lack of Training and Equipment: The pre-service teachers identified the primary factors limiting multicultural education competency as a lack of professional training and

insufficient instructional resources. With regard to the lack of training and equipment, participant coded P3 said, *"My skills are inadequate because there is no serious training process I had to take for this. Also, I have not yet encountered the cultures of each region..."* Participant P8 said, *"While I was studying, I had friends from foreign countries. I also had friends from different cities. I have travelled to many places in Türkiye and have had first-hand experience of their culture. But I still do not consider myself competent in this regard... I need to broaden my horizons more and have the necessary equipment."*

Pre-Service Teachers' Views on Practices That Contribute to Multicultural Education Competencies

To determine the opinions of prospective teachers about the practices that contribute to multicultural education competencies, they were asked the following question: "Which practices (courses, activities, studies, etc.) have contributed to your multicultural education competencies in your educational or daily life? Can you provide explanations?" Pre-service teachers' opinions about the practices that contribute to multicultural education competencies are given in Figure 5.

Figure 5: *Pre-service teachers' views on practices that contribute to multicultural education competencies*



As can be seen in Figure 5, the pre-service teachers' views on the practices that contribute to multicultural education competencies were collected in four sub-themes and six codes: "social activities, cultural interaction, curriculum, and personal development and curiosity".

Social Activities: The pre-service teachers who expressed their opinions in the sub-theme of social activities stated that social activities that increase cooperation and solidarity with others contribute to multicultural education competency. The following codes were formed in the sub-theme of social activities.

Trips, Seminars, Projects and Courses: Teacher candidates have consistently stated that the trips, seminars, projects, and courses they attended throughout their academic journeys

enriched their insights into diverse cultures and improved their multicultural education competencies. For example, P7 noted, *"I think travelling has contributed to my multicultural education skills. The fact that I participated in the Erasmus* project *had an incredibly positive effect on my multicultural education competency."* Similarly, P11 said, *"Traveling and observing, social studies... I benefit from seminars on communication."*

Community Service Practices: Participants stated that community service practices, such as landscaping and aid activities carried out for the benefit of society, contributed to their multicultural education competencies. P12 drew attention to community service practices, saying, *"Community service practices had an incredibly positive effect on my multicultural* education *competency."*

Cultural Interaction: Participants mentioned that interacting with other cultures increased their multicultural education competencies. In this regard, participant coded P9 stated, *"...I know how to do folk dances from various cultures. When I go to a region, the fact that I dance like them at their weddings makes them happy. Therefore, teachers who are familiar with cultures other than their own may have better communication with parents..."*

Curriculum: The pre-service teachers noted that the course content they were exposed to in their educational life and the teaching placement practices they did in the schools they attended positively impacted their multicultural education ability. Explanations about the codes formed within the scope of this sub-theme are given below.

Teaching Internship Practices: Participants P3 and P4 pointed out that teaching practices contributed to multicultural education skills. In this regard, P3 summarised their views: "*The lessons I did in my teaching practice allowed me to see multicultural education close up."*

Course Content: The pre-service teachers highlighted the role of specific courses in improving multicultural education competencies. P1, *"...Some courses had a contribution to it. For example, the sociology course..."* This viewpoint underlines the importance of integrating diverse and interdisciplinary course contents into teacher training programmes

Personal Development and Curiosity: The pre-service teachers stated that their multicultural education competency was primarily shaped by their curiosity and interest in the lives of people from different cultures and the books they read for personal development. The codes formed depending on personal growth and curiosity sub-theme are given below.

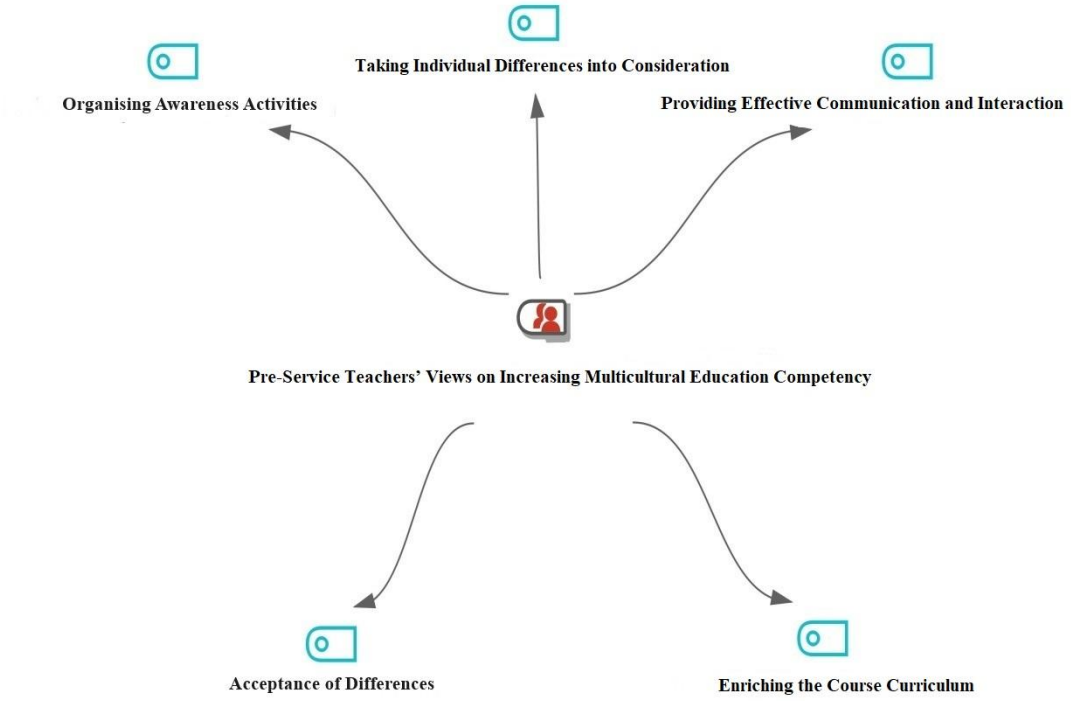
Cultural Curiosity/Curiosity towards how others live: Participants stated that the existence of different cultures attracted their attention and that they made extra efforts to learn about these cultures. P5 expressed their thoughts on this code*: "Throughout my life, I have always been curious about different cultures. I can say that I particularly try to learn some dialects..."*

Books on Personal Development: According to P2, books on personal development addressing a variety of subjects contribute to multicultural education competency. P2's opinion on this issue is as follows: *"...Also, another issue that I attach great importance to is reading a lot of books. I think it was useful for me to do both. For this reason, the personal development books I read on communication and interaction have definitely contributed to my multicultural education skills..."*

Pre-Service Teachers' Views on Increasing Multicultural Education Competency

To determine pre-service teachers' views on increasing multicultural education competency, the following question was asked: "What are your suggestions for improving multicultural education competency? Provide your own explanations." The suggestions of pre-service teachers about improving their multicultural education competencies are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: *Pre-service teachers' views on improving multicultural education competency*



As seen from Figure 6, pre-service teachers' opinions on improving multicultural education competencies are grouped under five sub-themes: organising awareness activities, taking individual differences into consideration, providing effective communication and interaction, accepting differences, and enriching the course curriculum. Explanations for these sub-themes are given below.

Organising Awareness Activities: Participants believe that various activities such as seminars, courses, trips, observations, projects, meetings and watching profile-raising videos enhance multicultural education proficiency. The participants' opinions underline the importance of various awareness and cultural experience-oriented activities in enhancing multicultural education competencies. The participant coded P7 said, *"All prospective teachers who will be newly assigned or relocated to a region where cultural differences are significant should participate in various cultural activities and exercises to prepare for these differences. Studies can be organised so that they know what the differences are, normal or unusual for the destination region."*

Taking Individual Differences into Consideration: The participants who expressed their opinions under the heading of taking individual differences into consideration drew attention to the fact that educational and training environments should be organised by considering the students' individual characteristics*: "We should prepare our lessons according to the individual differences of children. We should appeal to every child. Prioritising student characteristics (culture, language, interests, competencies, and strengths) is a must for multicultural education."*

Providing Effective Communication and Interaction: The participants P8 and P11 stated that it is necessary to be in constant communication and interaction with students to increase multicultural education competency. Under this heading, P8 said, *"We should ensure mutual interaction, communication, and interaction environments. Communicating with different cultures will be beneficial."* Participant P11 stated, *"Being in contact with schools from different countries and cities... Sharing experiences and information are beneficial."* Based on these findings, it may be noted that specifically establishing communication and sharing experiences with individuals belonging to diverse cultures are effective in enhancing multicultural education competencies.

Acceptance of Differences: Under the sub-theme of accepting differences, the pre-service teacher P4 conveyed a suggestion. P4 emphasised the need to be understanding towards different cultures and expressed their thoughts: *"Individual and cultural differences are natural; the main responsibility of pre-service teachers should be to accept these differences without denying them and improve the quality of the education service."*

Enriching The Course Curriculum: P1 stated that, for multicultural education competency, pre-service teachers should take social science courses such as sociology and anthropology. The participant P1 explained their opinion: *"I think that sociology and anthropology courses should be given sufficient time in education faculties for multicultural education competency..."* It may be noted that these fields provided teacher candidates with a comprehensive perspective on the topics of understanding diverse cultures, analysing social structures, and developing sensitivity towards cultural differences.

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

According to the results of the study, it was determined that prospective teachers defined multicultural education as unifying and inclusive education, education in accordance with cultural diversity, education based on respect for differences, and education based on equal opportunities. In many domestic and foreign studies, participants' views were established on the concept of multicultural education as unifying and integrative education that is suitable for different cultural values blends different human experiences, and is carried out for everyone regardless of ethnic origin, age, and gender (Ateş & Şahin, 2021; Banks, 2010; Gay, 2010; Yıldırım, 2021). In this context, pre-service teachers' views on the meaning of multicultural education were supported by the literature, and pre-service teachers correctly perceived the concept of multicultural education. However, today's studies that do not correspond to the current study brought forward the various limitations of multicultural education in different scopes. For instance, in South Korea, multicultural education policies are criticised for concentrating predominantly on assimilation and cultural adaptation, and instead of understanding ethnic and cultural differences, for targeting the integration of individuals into the local culture. Thus, education policies were reported not to support equality in practice (Lee et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2023).

Pre-service teachers emphasised that multicultural education skills are important in terms of cultural differences, effective and efficient learning, teacher quality, harmony and balance, parent cooperation and classroom management. Studies in the literature established that the participants view multicultural education as an advantage and as

important because it ensures global thinking, respect and tolerance for different cultures, overcomes prejudices, creates an awareness of co-existing, and develops a sense of empathy (Gay, 1994; Parker, 2019; Yıldırım, 2021). Within this framework, the results of the study are consistent with the results of similar studies in the literature. However, Ezer et al. (2006) suggested that having a positive attitude or opinion about multicultural education may not be sufficient for multicultural education practices. Lambeth and Smith (2016) highlight that teachers need to gain new knowledge and applied skills to teach all children effectively, thanks to schools becoming gradually more diverse. This study established that the courses improving teachers' multicultural education competencies provide significant benefits in terms of class management. However, Bilgin (2023) emphasises that these skills need not be limited solely to theoretical courses and that action-oriented approaches should be adopted to practise inclusive applications in actual classroom scenarios effectively. This poses a critical requirement from the perspective of teacher candidates, turning theoretical information into practical skills.

A significant number of pre-service teachers believe that their multicultural education skills are inadequate. The reasons for this are inexperience, prejudice, lack of education and equipment; participants who think that multicultural education competency is at an adequate level attach importance to equality in education, cultural diversity and respect for differences; participants who think that multicultural education competency is partially adequate attribute it to poor communication, inexperience and ignorance. The fact that teacher candidates possess limited experience in or familiarity with multicultural education is a widespread issue in other contexts as well. Nonetheless, this study not only defined the existence of this deficiency but also brought theoretical and practical depth to the literature by putting forth the causes (lack of experience, prejudices, and insufficient education), their impact, and solutions. Such detailed analyses may help with the development of more targeted interventions for teacher training programmes in the field of multicultural education. Specifically, insufficient training programmes and applied modules for multicultural education competencies cause a plethora of teacher candidates to feel inadequate about this. This finding supports the view that was also stated in previous studies, arguing that multicultural competencies can be improved by systematic training (Abduh et al., 2023; Borge et al., 2020; Lantz et al., 2018).

The pre-service teachers defined the practices contributing to multicultural education skills as social activities, cultural interaction, curriculum, personal development, and curiosity. The pre-service teachers stated that trips, projects, courses and community service activities within the scope of social activities; teaching internship practices and course contents under the title of curriculum; curiosity about cultures and books for personal development in the context of personal development and curiosity were helpful. Many studies concluded that course content and curriculum are very determinant and important for multicultural education (Agiro, 2012; Arıkan, 2005). For this reason, the results of the current study regarding the practices that contribute to

multicultural education competencies are concluded to have been largely supported by the relevant studies mentioned in the literature.

Results of the study established that pre-service teachers made suggestions for increasing multicultural education skills such as organising awareness-raising activities, taking individual differences into account, providing effective communication and interaction, accepting differences, and enhancing the course curriculum. However, more attention is drawn to the arrangement of course contents and curricula for multicultural education in the literature. For example, Yıldırım (2021) suggested that course curricula should be eased and their contents should be enhanced, and various out-of-school field trips should be organized to address the problems encountered in multicultural education practices.In this context, there is a need for a structure that accepts all differences in establishing an understanding of multicultural education in educational processes. This is because multicultural education eliminates discrimination by increasing interaction between individuals (Banks, 2010).

Various suggestions can be made to practitioners and researchers. For practitioners, courses on multicultural education can be included in the course curricula of pre-service teachers. Awareness and consciousness studies on multicultural education can be emphasised through trips, seminars, courses, projects, internships and community service activities. It may be helpful for teacher training departments to include humanities such as sociology and anthropology in the axis of respect for differences, effective communication, and cultural diversity. As for the researchers, the suggestion is that the study should be carried out with pre-service teachers studying in various universities.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the study group consisted of only 12 pre-service teachers studying in different departments of a state university. This situation limits the generalisability of the findings obtained. In addition, since the study was conducted with a qualitative research method, although the aim of the research is to understand in depth, the fact that it is not supported by quantitative data makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive view in measuring multicultural competence levels. Another limitation is that the number of participants is limited and the sample does not reflect all cultural representations, although it is selected on the basis of maximum diversity.

Ethical Approval

For this study, ethical approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Siirt University (Siirt, Türkiye) on April 11, 2023, with the decision number 4622.

Author Contributions

Mehmet Nezir Çevik: Conceptualisation, Theoretical Background, Methodology, Data Analysis, Data Visualisation, Writing, Review and Editing, Funding Acquisition

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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The author confirm that no generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used in the writing, research, or preparation of this manuscript.

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