

ERTAN ALTINSOY

Aksaray University, Turkey

*ertanaltinsoy@gmail.com*

SERKAN BOYRAZ

Aksaray University, Turkey

*serkan.boyraz@gmail.com*

TOLGA ÇITAK

Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey

*tolga.citaktr@gmail.com*

DOI: 10.13166/JMS/92514

JOURNAL OF MODERN  
SCIENCE TOM 2/37/2018,  
P. 307-318

## MULTICULTURALISM: ARE PRE-SERVICE ELT TEACHERS READY FOR IT?<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate pre-service ELT teacher's awareness of and attitudes towards multicultural teaching and learning.

This qualitative study employs survey method and the data was collected through the shortened version of "Preservice Teachers' Attitudes about and Awareness of Multicultural Teaching and Learning Scale" which includes 18 items in three sub-dimensions, namely awareness of multicultural issues, the effect of professional courses on dealing with multicultural approaches to education and interest in additional training in multicultural approaches to education.

The participants as pre-service ELT teachers are commonly aware of multicultural issues in schools.

It can be seen that the student-teachers escape facing cultural diversity despite training provided by the university. However, the results show that the participants are eager to receive further training in multicultural education. This can be related to the gap between theory and practice in which students may not be taught what is required in the field.

**KEYWORDS:** *multiculturalism, Diversity in Education, pre-service, ELT, teacher*

## INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism has been used as an umbrella term to characterize the moral and political claims of a wide range of marginalized groups, including African Americans, women, LGBT people, and people with disabilities (Glazer 1997, Hollinger 1995, Taylor 1992; as cited in Song, 2016). However, contemporary theories of multiculturalism, which originated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, tend to focus their arguments on immigrants who are ethnic and religious minorities (e.g. Latinos in the U.S., Muslims in Western Europe), minority nations (e.g. Catalans, Basque, Welsh, Québécois), and indigenous peoples (e.g. Native peoples in North America, Australia, and New Zealand). Recently, Turkey has become a host of many cultural diverse identities. Especially with the inflow of Syrian refugees, teachers have started to confront multicultural issues in learning environments more often. Emin (2016) states in his study that Turkey hosts over 2.5 million Syrians of which 625.000 are in need of basic education. In order to tackle these multicultural difficulties especially in public schools, pre-service teachers have to be trained accordingly. However, pre-service teachers trained at universities are not given trainings on multiculturalism which they might confront later in their teaching career where they have to teach culturally different groups of students. Therefore, this study focuses on pre-service ELT teachers' awareness and attitudes towards multicultural learning and teaching. In this respect, the following research questions will guide the study:

1. What are pre-service ELT teachers' awareness level of multiculturalism in education?
2. According to pre-service ELT teachers, how adequate is their education in terms of multiculturalism in education?
3. How willing are the pre-service ELT teachers to receive more training on multiculturalism in education?

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Multiculturalism has become much more prevalent in today's globalised world which results in people migrating from one country to another due to variety of reasons such as wars, trade, education, etc. As a result, the number of monocultural countries is scarcely any. Thus, the number of challenges

surrounding multicultural education has increased because of the impact of the monocultural educational policies which ignores multiculturalism and multicultural issues. In this regard, Gibson (2004) stated that most teachers who come from monocultural areas are facing communication problems especially in meaningful interactions with culturally different groups. Although multiculturalism is a trendy topic in education today, the courses on multiculturalism and multiculturalist education provided by the teacher training programs are quite a few and those few programs providing courses only in theory lacking practical applications of multiculturalism. As a result, recent studies presented that novice teachers are not competent enough to deal with the challenges and problems posed by multicultural education. Barry & Lechner (1995) conducted a study on awareness of multicultural teaching and learning with the participation of 73 pre-service teachers and they concluded that while most of the respondents are aware of issues concerning multicultural education, they are undecided about how to communicate with children and families from culturally diverse backgrounds and teach them. Therefore, multicultural training is highly required not only theoretically but also with practice in the field. Similarly, Goodwin (1994) stated that pre-service teachers are unsure of conceptualizing multicultural education as they lack equipping their students with the skills, attitudes, materials, content and instructional practices that will enable them to teach a group of children from a diverse cultural and ethnic background. Although multicultural trainings at universities are given to pre-service teachers, no further instructions are given despite the positive effect on teacher-students (Bennett, 1989). In this respect, multicultural training should proceed along with the period of study enabling students to gain theoretical knowledge applicable in the field. Besides, these educational trainings should ensure that students appreciate their cultural differences (Clark, 2010). Additionally, teacher training programs including multicultural training should embody a clear framework and objectives enhancing not only students' but also teachers' awareness of multiculturalism and bridge the gap between theory and practice providing students to witness realistic multicultural issues in public schools. According to the study of Bhargava et al. (2004) and Bustamante et al. (2009), educators struggle defining to promote multiculturalism in learning

environments due to the fact that they have a lack of cultural awareness and limited intellection of how cultural differences may affect school practices. This limited understanding has been related to the biases of the educators and negative perceptions towards the practice of multicultural education (Alviar-Martin & Ho, 2011; Luther, 2009). In respect thereof, multicultural training is not necessary just for students but also for educators whose own notion of multiculturalism is created mentally in students' minds. As seen in Nelson and Guerra (2013), educators' attitudes towards multicultural education are highly affected by their own limited cultural awareness and the unwillingness to work with culturally diverse students. Usually, educators who come from a monocultural background tend to have limited knowledge about the cultural traditions, values, and beliefs of their students (Cicchelli & Cho, 2007). Therefore, they have inconvenience emphasizing with the cultural realities available in their classrooms (Schoorman & Bogotch, 2010). In this regard, enhancing teacher's awareness of multiculturalism and administering them to consider their own near-by multicultural environment will provide to compare theory and practice of multicultural issues available and will contribute to further multicultural training programs.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed quantitative design and survey method that is generally used to measure or evaluate the general characteristics of a topic, universe or program (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) to investigate pre-service ELT teacher's awareness of and attitudes towards multicultural teaching and learning which was conducted at Aksaray University, Faculty of Education, ELT Department, Turkey with the participation of approximately 120 Turkish EFL pre-service English language teachers who were conveniently available during an available course. The ages of pre-service teachers that participated in this study ranged between 19 and 23 which were chosen from all grades including students from the preparatory year. Due to the availability of foreign students at the university and the obligatory practicum for the senior students which takes place in different primary and secondary schools where also refugee pupils are available, opinions of pre-service ELT teachers were collected via a questionnaire during an available course. In this respect, to answer the

research questions a descriptive analysis (frequencies) was used. A Likert-type of a 5-point questionnaire (see Appendix A) developed by Nancy H. Barry & Judith V. Lechner (1995) was adopted to investigate pre-service ELT teachers' awareness of and attitudes towards multicultural teaching and learning. The adopted questionnaire includes 18 items divided into four parts which are respectively the demographic part in which students were asked about their preferences about religiously, culturally, and ethnically diverse classrooms, awareness of multicultural issues in education, beliefs of pre-service teachers about sufficient preparation for multicultural classes and the interest in additional training in multicultural approaches by pre-service ELT teacher which were handed out to the students at a convenient time during the lectures.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the research findings. First, awareness of multicultural issues will be introduced. Next, the results of beliefs of pre-service teachers about sufficient preparation for multicultural classes will be shown. Finally, the results of interest in additional training in multicultural approaches will be presented.

### Results of Preferences about Religiously, Culturally, Ethnically Diverse Classrooms

Table 1.1.

Preferences about religiously, culturally, ethnically diverse classrooms

Preferences	Homogeneous		Diverse	
	n	%	n	%
Religiously	51	43.6	66	56.4
Culturally	41	35	76	65
Ethnically	44	37.6	73	62.4

According to table 1.1, it is seen that the sample group mostly preferred diverse classrooms in each sub dimension when compared with the other variables. This result may be attributed to the participants' specialized field

and the fact that they are well aware that they are going to teach to students who are culturally and ethnically diverse. However, comparing these two with the religiously different preferences variable, it was seen that the percentage is less. The reason might be religious homogeneity in most parts of Turkey. Briefly, the table clearly presents that the participants prefer to teach to religiously, culturally and ethnically diverse students.

## Results of Awareness of Multicultural Issues

Table 1.2.

### Awareness of multicultural issues

Awareness Level	n	%
Low	9	7.7
Intermediate	26	22.2
High	82	70.1

As seen in Table 4.2, the number of 70.1 percent of 117 students in total show that the students are aware of the multicultural issues in Turkey. 22.2 percent of the sample group stated that they are aware at an intermediate level. However, 7.7 percent of the students which is the smallest group report that they are not aware of the multicultural issues available in Turkey. Similar to Larke's (1990) study in which participants are aware of the issues related to multiculturalism, it can be said that most pre-service teachers are well aware of multicultural issues especially senior students who come across with students from different ethnic backgrounds during their practicum weeks because of the fact that Turkey has turned out to be a multicultural country due to massive immigration from the countries which are currently at war and there is a considerable number of refugee children who are in need of basic education which means that the possibility of meeting with those children at school is quite high.

## Results of Beliefs of pre-service Teachers about Sufficient Preparation for Multicultural Classes

Table 1.3.

**Beliefs of pre-service teachers about sufficient preparation for multicultural classes**

No	Questionnaire Item		1	2	3	4	5	X	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	My professional education courses have presented me with techniques for bringing a variety of cultures into the classroom.	f	5	11	36	42	23	3,573	Agree
		%	4,3	9,4	30,8	35,9	19,7		
5	My professional education courses made me more aware of cultural diversity.	f	3	9	30	45	30	3,769	Agree
		%	2,6	7,7	25,6	38,5	25,6		
6	My professional education courses have made me more aware of the need for cultural diversity in education.	f	6	15	28	43	25	3,564	Agree
		%	5,1	12,8	23,9	36,8	21,4		
7	My professional education courses have presented me with techniques for effectively teaching children whose national and/or racial backgrounds differ from my own.	f	9	17	39	37	15	3,274	Undec
		%	7,7	14,5	33,3	31,6	12,8		
8	My professional education courses have presented me with techniques for effectively teaching children whose cultural identity differs from my own.	f	3	20	45	39	10	3,282	Undec
		%	2,6	17,1	38,5	33,3	8,5		
9	My professional education courses have presented me with techniques for effectively teaching children whose religious beliefs differ from my own.	f	10	30	42	25	10	2,957	Undec
		%	8,5	25,6	35,9	21,4	8,5		
10	My professional education courses have helped me to communicate with students from diverse backgrounds.	f	8	17	22	46	24	3,521	Agree
		%	6,8	14,5	18,8	39,3	20,5		

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	My professional education courses have me the knowledge to be able to locate and evaluate culturally diverse materials.	f	9	11	34	44	19	3,453	Agree
		%	7,7	9,4	29,1	37,6	16,2		
12	My professional education courses have helped me to communicate with the families of students from diverse backgrounds.	f	5	24	36	38	14	3,274	Undec
		%	4,3	20,5	30,8	32,5	12		
13	When I complete my training at this university, I will be sufficiently prepared to meet the educational needs of students from diverse ethnic and cultural heritages.	f	5	12	28	43	29	3,675	Agree
		%	4,3	10,3	23,9	36,8	24,8		
14	When I complete my training at this university, I will be sufficiently prepared to teach my students about different cultures.	f	3	8	27	38	41	3,906	Agree
		%	2,6	6,8	23,1	32,5	35		

The items from 4 to 14 were about the sufficiency of the participants' teacher training program to equip them with the ability to deal with multicultural issues. The respondents expressed that they received adequate training on multicultural approaches to education from their teacher training courses (Item 4,  $M = 3,573$ ; Item 5,  $M = 3,769$ ; Item 6,  $M = 3, 564$ ). However, when it comes to teaching to students from diverse ethnic backgrounds participants expressed less agreement and they are undecided in their responses (Item 7,  $M = 3,274$ ; Item 8,  $M = 3,282$ , Item 9,  $M = 2,957$ ). This could lead us to theory and practice gap in multicultural education in teacher training institutions. Although teacher training courses provide information on multicultural issues and multicultural education, the students may not find enough opportunities to have first-hand experience. Similarly, Gay (1995) argued that there is a significant gap between theory and practice of multicultural education and Webb-Johnson, Artiles, Trent, Jackson, & Velox (1998) reported that big steps have been made to improve the theoretical instructions, however practice of multicultural education is still debated controversially. Therefore, multicultural



education in teacher training institutions lacks in transferring theory to practice due to not clarified objectives and aims. In this context, Gibson (as cited in Hoffman, 1996) stated that the field of multicultural education abounds with untested and not supportable goals, strategies, and outcomes. In addition, it could be interpreted that information delivered at universities and teacher-training institutions may not match with the realities of public schools with culturally diverse classrooms as reported by Schulze (2009) who stated that pre-service teachers either forget what they have been taught at the university when they go to the field or complain about the difficulties.

### Results of Interest in Additional Training in Multicultural Approaches

Table 1.4.

#### Interest in additional training in multicultural approaches

No	Questionnaire Item		1	2	3	4	5	X	
15	I would like to receive more training in ways to teach students with different identities.	f	3	10	20	41	43	3,949	Agree
		%	2,6	8,5	17,1	35	36,8		
16	I would like to receive more training in ways to bring other cultures into the classroom.	f	1	8	35	36	37	3,855	Agree
		%	0,9	6,8	29,9	30,8	31,6		
17	I would like to receive more training in evaluating the educational achievements of students from culturally diverse backgrounds.	f	0	10	19	53	35	3,966	Agree
		%	0	8,5	16,2	45,3	29,9		
18	I would like to receive more training in identifying and evaluating culturally diverse materials for use in the classroom.	f	1	12	19	48	37	3,923	Agree
		%	0,9	10,3	16,2	41	31,6		

Although the participants expressed that they received sufficient training and education on teaching to culturally diverse students, majority of them stated willingness and interest in receiving further education on multicultural issues. The finding is consistent with the finding of Barry & Lechner (1995) whose participants were also eager to receive additional training in multicultural education. Barry and Lechner (1995) attributed it to the participants' very little confidence in their abilities of multicultural teaching. Similarly, the participants in the present study may lack confidence of multicultural education and realize the importance of multicultural education in the following years because of the number of refugees in the society and their children in Turkish educational system.

## CONCLUSION

Since Turkey has been becoming a multicultural country, multicultural issues have started to occur in teaching and learning. It is a fact that teachers used to monocultural teaching and learning environments will have difficulties in order to reach each student in the classroom. Therefore, pre-service teachers, especially teachers of language subject have to be aware of multicultural diversity. According to the findings, the participants as pre-service ELT teachers are commonly aware of multicultural issues in schools. Although these findings are similar to the findings of Larke (1990), it can be seen that the student-teachers escape facing cultural diversity despite training provided by the university. However, contrary to the findings of Barry & Lechner (1995), the results show that the participants are eager to receive further training in multicultural education. This can be related to the gap between theory and practice in which students may not be taught what is required in the field.

## Limitations of the Study

The limitation of this study was that the study is only limited to pre-service ELT teachers at Aksaray University. Besides, the Anatolian region may not be equivalent to other regions in terms of cultural diversity. Therefore, these results cannot be generalized to all pre-service teachers in Turkey. In order to make generalizations, a bigger sample size is required.

## Suggestions for Further Studies

As mentioned in the previous section, a bigger sample size may help to make generalizations. Besides, the difference between the multicultural training given at universities and what pre-service teachers face at public schools may be investigated to reveal the shortcoming of multicultural training at universities in Turkey. Besides, a qualitative study may be conducted in order to get in depth information to shed light onto students' perspectives on the theory and practice gap. For example, in Mueller and O'Connor's (2007) study, it was aimed to receive reflections of preservice teachers in the multicultural education course to define their own social positioning, inform their frames of references and influence their capacities to practice equitable education.

## References

- Alviar-Martin, T., Ho, L. (2011). "So, where do they fit in?" *Teachers' perspectives of multicultural education and diversity in Singapore*, "Teaching & Teacher Education" No. 27(1), pp. 127–135. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2010.07.009.
- Barry, N.H., Lechner J.V. (1995). *Preservice teachers' attitudes about and awareness of multicultural teaching and learning*, "Teaching and Teacher Education" No. 11(2), pp. 149–161. ISSN 0742-051X.
- Bennett, C., Niggler, T., Stage, F. (1990). *Preservice multicultural teacher education: Predictors of student readiness*, "Teaching and Teacher Education" No. 6(3), pp. 243–254. ISSN 0742-051X.
- Bhargava, A., Hawley, L.D., Scott, C.L. (2004). *An investigation of students' perceptions of multicultural education experiences in a school of education*, "Multicultural Education", No. 11(4), pp. 18–22. ISSN 1068-3844.
- Bustamante, R.M., Nelson, J.A., Onwuegbuzie, A.J. (2009). *Assessing schoolwide cultural competence: Implications for school leadership preparation*, "Educational Administration Quarterly" No. 45 (5), pp. 793–827. doi: 10.1177/0013161X09347277.
- Cicchelli, T., Cho, S. (2007). *Teacher multicultural attitudes*, "Education and Urban Society" No. 39(3), pp. 370–381. doi: 10.1177/0013124506298061.
- Clark, L. (2010). *Productive dissonance: A musical-analytical exploration of teacher educator perceptions in a multicultural education program*, "International Journal of Multicultural Education", 12(1), pp. 1–15. ISSN 1934-5267.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge/Falmer. ISBN 9780415368780.

- Emin, M.N. (2016). *Türkiye'deki Suriyeli çocukların eğitimi*, Ankara: SETA Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum. ISBN 9786054023783.
- Gay, G. (1995). *Bridging Multicultural Theory and Practice*, "Multicultural Education" No. 3(1), pp. 4–9.
- Goodwin, Ch. (1994). *Professional Vision*, "American Anthropologist" No. 96(3), pp. 606–633. ISSN 1548-1433.
- Hoffman, D. M. (1996). *Culture and self in multicultural education: Reflections on discourse, text, and practice*, "American Educational Research Journal" No. 33(3), pp. 545–569. ISSN 0002-8312.
- Larke, P.J. (1990). *Cultural diversity awareness inventory: Assessing the sensitivity of pre-service teachers*, "Action in Teacher Education" No. 12(3), pp. 23–30. ISSN 0162-6620.
- Mueller, J., O'Connor, C. (2007). *Telling and retelling about self and "others": How pre-service teachers (re)interpret privilege and disadvantage in one college classroom*, "Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies" No. 23, pp. 840–856.
- Nelson, S.W., Guerra, P.L. (2014). *Educator belief and cultural knowledge: Implications for school improvement efforts*, "Educational Administration Quarterly" No. 50(1), pp. 67–95. doi: 10.1177/0013161X13488595.
- Schoorman, D., Bogotch, I. (2010). *Conceptualizations of multicultural education among teachers: Implications for practice in universities and schools*, "Teaching and Teacher Education" No. 26, pp. 1041–1048. ISSN 0742-051X.
- Webb-Johnson, G., Artiles, A.J., Trent, S.C., Jackson, C.W., Velox, A. (1998). *The Status of Research on Multicultural Education in Teacher Education and Special Education Problems, Pitfalls, and Promises*, "Remedial and Special Education" No. 19(1), pp. 7–15. ISSN 0741-9325.

## Internet sources

- Gibson, C. (2004). *Multicultural pre-service education: Promising multicultural pre-service teacher education initiatives*. "Radical Pedagogy" No. 6(1), [http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue6\\_1/gibson.html](http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue6_1/gibson.html) (access 10.05.2018).
- Schulze, C. (2009). *Bridging the gap: teacher education bottom up*. In: CELT (ed.), *Teacher Education Issues and Developments in EFL*, "Vienna English Working Papers" No. 18(3), <http://anglistik.univie.ac.at/views.current-issue> (access 10.05.2018).
- Song, S. (2016). *Multiculturalism*. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/multiculturalism> (access 10.05.2018).

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This paper was presented in 1. International Social Sciences and Educational Research Symposium (ISCER) that was held in Antalya on 3–5 November 2017.