

# Teacher Candidates' Views Regarding Multicultural Education: A Case Study on Content Integration Dimension

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher candidates' perceptions regarding multicultural education in general, as well as to investigate whether content integration dimension is effective in terms of teaching multicultural education. Data for the study were collected from the semi-structured interviews performed with 10 teacher candidates. The participants were enrolled in the department of social sciences teaching of a faculty of education at a state university in Western Black Sea Region, Turkey. The results of the study revealed that teacher candidates' perceptions with regard to defining multicultural education, constructing the definition, promoting multicultural education, the place of multicultural education in teacher training programmes and the effect of content integration differ greatly based on their experiences and educational backgrounds.

**Keywords:** Multicultural Education, Content Integration, Teacher Candidates

## Introduction

Multiculturalism and multicultural education are two important phenomena in schools all over the world and with the growing diversity, educators encounter some challenges that demand new approaches to teaching and learning in multicultural classes. In the modern sense, multiculturalism usually refers to the variety in the societies with regards to culture, language, religion, gender and so on. The concept was defined as "A philosophical position and movement that assumes that the gender, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of a pluralistic society should be reflected in all of the institutionalized structures of educational institutions, including the staff, the norms and values, the curriculum, and the student body." (Banks & Banks, 2009, p. 447). Multiculturalism also refers to the societies living in the same state but speaking different languages, believing in different religions and belonging to a variety of

cultures and customs. Because of this, understanding and implementing multiculturalism is important not only the emphasis it puts on culture but also its contribution to both diverse societies and changing societies as a result of migration and other reasons. Within this process, multicultural education acts as a key concept in teaching the individuals to overcome social barriers caused by cultural diversities.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as a result of such elements as migration, technology, increasing number of shared items in social media, easy and fast transportation, multicultural education is better understood and the implementations at schools have rapidly increased. Furthermore, multicultural education has become a crucial element of school environment when the researchers started to investigate the schools in terms of educational inequalities along with the effect of external factors.

The term multicultural education is defined as “A reform movement designed to change the total educational environment so that students from diverse racial and ethnic groups, students of both genders, exceptional students, and students from each social-class group will experience equal educational opportunities in schools, colleges, and universities.” (Banks & Banks, 2009, p. 446)”. The effects of this reform have become an important aspect of teacher training programs, because today the differences among the students with regards to the race, ethnicity, culture and language are more than ever before (Milner, Flowers, Moore, Moore, & Flowers, 2003). For this reason, multicultural education aims at graduating teacher candidates cognizant of the differences in daily practices and skillful regarding the diversities (Barry & Lechner, 1995; Walker, Shafer, & Iiams, 2004). This aim can only be accomplished through the courses added to the teacher training programs and creating opportunities for the teacher candidates to encounter multicultural issues (Premier & Miller, 2010). Thus, teacher candidates can empathize with their students in terms of diversities. Furthermore, integrating multicultural education into teacher training programs could minimize the difficulties faced during teaching process and prospective teachers could better understand social equality and behave accordingly (Liggett & Finley, 2009). The studies carried out revealed that courses on multicultural education and field experiences added to the teacher training programs have positive effects on teacher candidates’ attitudes and efficacies (Bodur, 2012; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

While integrating multicultural education into the existing teacher training programs, it is crucial to move forward systematically. To this end, Banks (1993) presented five key dimensions of multiculturalism; (1) content integration; (2) the knowledge construction process; (3) prejudice reduction; (4) an equity pedagogy; and (5) an empowering school culture and social structure. These dimensions help the educators define more creative and effective reforms to implement multicultural education and set the limits and determine the scope of multicultural education.

The first dimension, content integration, is about using examples, activities and content from different cultures and groups to exemplify key concepts, principles,

generalizations, and theories in the subject area of an instructor (Banks & Banks, 2009). In this process, the integration is to be carried out in a logical fashion, not make-believe. Banks and Banks (2009) also states that some areas are more suitable for integrating the content than others. Especially in the courses in social studies, teachers have a great deal of opportunities to present multiculturalism. To this end, in this study multicultural education activities were integrated into classroom management course in social studies teaching programme. Therefore, the study can contribute to the design of multicultural education in such countries as Turkey where multicultural education course is not a part of teacher training programmes. Considering the practices in terms of multicultural education, it can be noted that the importance of the concept has long been recognized in the world and the curricula are designed in line with the goals of multicultural education. For instance, in the United States of America, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education implied the importance of cultural diversity in 1972 (Baptiste & Baptiste, 1980). 30 years later, multiculturalism was integrated into teacher training programs and after 15 years it was offered as a separate course for the teacher candidates at 54% of the universities (Levine & Cureton, 1992). In addition, The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) started to require "show evidence of planning for multicultural education in their curricula" from the institutions applying for accreditation (Ladson-Billings, 1999). In Turkey, Ministry of National Education (2006) added some competences related to cultural differences under "Teachers' Core Competences" in 2006 and recently started to emphasize the importance of multicultural education by adding course objectives and themes to the newly developed curricula.

To this end, the main purpose of the research was to investigate the perceptions of the teacher candidates regarding multicultural education after a 10-week content integration process. Based on this, answers to the following question were examined:

- What are the teacher candidates' perceptions with regards to multicultural education?

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

In this study, in order to gather data through interviews, case study approach, one of the most prevalent and important methods of qualitative data collection, was employed (Merriam, 1998; Myers & Newman, 2007). The reason behind the selection of case study as the research method was that it provided the researcher with the opportunity to deeply understand the participants' views through talking and listening to their observations.

## Participants

In the qualitative studies, to collect data purposeful sampling is widely used for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). For this purpose, ten teacher candidates were selected to participate in the study during the 2015-2016 spring semester. The participants were enrolled in 2-hour classroom management course within the teacher education program at the Department of Social Sciences Teaching of a faculty of education at a state university in Western Black Sea Region, Turkey. Prior to the selection of the participants 10 weeks of 14-week multicultural content integration program were completed.

## Data Collection Tool

The data for the study were collected through semi-structured interviews. 4 open-ended questions were prepared after reviewing the books, articles and theses in the field of multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 2009; Bodur, 2003; Dodici, 2011; Esposito, 2011; Jefferson, 2013; Mulder, 2010; Neuharth-Pritchett, Reiff, & Pearson, 2001). Based on expert opinion 2 more questions were added in order to broaden the scope of interviews. The final interview form included the following questions:

In your own words, please provide a description or definition of what you consider multicultural education to be.

- How did you construct your definition of multicultural education?
- What is your perception of how multiculturalism should be promoted in school settings?
- What do you think about the place of multicultural education in the courses you have taken so far?
- What is your opinion about the multicultural education activities during the classroom management course?

## Data Collection and Analysis

The interview for each participant was approximately lasted for 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded by voice recorder and transcribed for analysis. After finalizing the transcription process, the data were examined by using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 6) "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail." In this study, the procedures during data analysis and interpretation process were carried out under five headings; data management, reading and memoing, describing, classifying and interpreting the themes, interpreting the data, representing and visualizing (Creswell, 2007). In the first phase, a qualitative data set based on the interviews was created. In the second phase, the data contexts were interpreted as a whole. In this phase, each interview

transcript was carefully read line-by-line. In the third phase of the analysis process a coding system was developed to identify patterns of findings. The researcher used these patterns of findings, as developed through the coding system. Forth phase included the interpretation of the data and the researcher tried to reveal the relations among the findings. In the final phase, the representation and visualization were completed. In this phase, the findings were presented in tables and direct quotations were given.

## Findings

The findings of the study are presented under each interview question with regards to the themes and sub-themes.

### Teacher Candidates' Views Regarding the Definition of Multicultural Education

The findings about the teacher candidates' views regarding the definition of multicultural education are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Teacher candidates' views regarding the definition of multicultural education**

Theme	Sub-Theme	f
Differences	Culture	8
	Region	7
	Race	6
	Belief (Religion)	3
	Language	2
	Gender	2
	Traditions	1
Acceptance - Contribution	Blending - Including	5
	Accepting everyone	4
	Contributing	4
Prejudice	Education without prejudice	3

According to Table 1, it can be said that the teacher candidates focused on three themes; differences, acceptance and prejudice. When the sub-themes are examined, it is observed that 8 teacher candidates implied cultural differences and 7 teacher candidates focused on different regions in their definitions of multicultural education. Sample answers from teacher candidates are as follows:

“A type of education that cares about different beliefs and sects (St-1).”

“An educational perception accepting everyone with diversities and an educational environment where the existence of different races and genders are accepted (St-2).”

“Inclusion of different cultures into education and providing education for each culture (St-5).”

### 3.2. Teacher Candidates’ Views Regarding Construction of the Definition of Multicultural Education

The findings about the teacher candidates’ views regarding the construction the definition of multicultural education are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Teacher candidates’ views regarding construction of the definition of multicultural education**

Theme	Sub-Theme	f
Environment	University - Dormitory	8
	Region - Country	3
	Family	1
Differences	Different culture	4
	Race	4
	Language	3
	Food - Drink	2
	Traditions	2
	Experiences	Friends
Experiences	Sharing	8
	Experience	4
	Media	3
	Problems	Pressure
Discussion		2
Discrimination		1
Courses	Multicultural Education Practices	1

As seen in Table 2, the concepts that helped the teacher candidates construct the definition of multicultural education were environment, differences, experiences, problems and courses. When the participants’ views were examined, it was observed that friends as a sub-theme was the most cited concept (N=10). In addition, 8 participants implied the importance of university/dormitory and sharing in constructing the definition; however, some of the participants mentioned the effect of such negative issues as pressure, discussion and discrimination. On the other hand, only 1 participant referred to multicultural education practices, which indicates that the effect of environment and experiences is much more than the theoretical information provided during the activities. Sample answers from teacher candidates are as follows:

“In general, the places I have been, university and my friends are effective. Sometimes we encounter big problems based on multicultural issues and these

problems lead to bigger discussions. I realize that the habits related to food, drink, speaking, traditions are different (St.-1).”

“My experiences and my friends at the dormitory are effective. Having friends from different regions helped me understand their traditions and habits better. I have friends from Diyarbakır (a city located in the eastern part of Turkey), in the beginning we had some reservations but later we realized that we had common ground. These helped me construct the definition of multiculturalism (St. 10).

### **Teacher Candidates’ Views Regarding Their Perception of How Multiculturalism Should Be Promoted in School Settings.**

The findings about the teacher candidates’ views regarding their perception of how multiculturalism should be promoted in school settings are presented in Table 3.

As seen in Table 3, the themes related to the teacher candidates’ views regarding their perception of how multiculturalism should be promoted in school settings were education, communication, method/technique and negative issues. According to these findings, it can be said that the participants mainly implied sharing, language and presentations and activities in promoting multicultural education. Furthermore, teacher candidates emphasized the importance of raising teachers, academicians and students awareness with regard to multiculturalism and multicultural education. On the other hand, cultural repression comes to the fore as a negative issue. Sample answers from teacher candidates are as follows:

“It is important that teachers know their students well and be aware of the culture they were raised. Adding words or items from the students’ culture may help them embrace the school environment. Teachers should provide opportunities for the students to present themselves and their culture. Discussing these issues and freedom of thought are important for our classes (St.-3).”

“People have different cultures and cultural background, but teachers act as if there is only one culture in their classes. Sometimes teacher try to impose their political views and dominant culture. In my opinion, multiculturalism involves blending and sharing ideas. The group works in the classes become mono cultured when we choose the groups ourselves. We don’t know each other and we stay in our boundaries. Teachers should help us know and recognize each other. They should create opportunities for us (St.-9).”

**Table 3. Teacher candidates’ views regarding their perception of how multiculturalism should be promoted in school settings**

Theme	Sub-Theme	f
Education	Academician	3
	Teacher	3

	Student	3
Communication	Incorporation/sharing	6
	Language	5
	Communication	4
	Empathy	3
	Freedom of thought	1
Method/Technique	Presentation	5
	Activities (videos / games)	5
	Group work	1
Negative Issues	Pressure	6
	War	3
	Discussion	2
	Racism	2

### **Teacher Candidates' Views Regarding Multiculturalism in Teacher Training Programmes**

The findings about the teacher candidates' views multiculturalism in teacher training programmes are presented in Table 4.

As presented in Table 4, the findings with regards to multiculturalism in teacher training programmes were courses and issues. According to the results, it can be said that Classroom Management Course whose content was integrated into Multicultural Education Practices contributed most to the multicultural education. Moreover, the participants implied the contribution of Social Psychology Course in terms of gender equality. However, when the answers were investigated the effect of such problematic issues as pressure, fear, mono-culturalism and exclusion also came to the fore. Sample answers from teacher candidates are as follows:

"This is my 5<sup>th</sup> year, no course have contributed to multiculturalism so far. The courses mainly focused on dominant culture or just presented its theoretical information. These caused problems, there shouldn't be mono-cultural teacher. There are many people around us with diversities. We have to embrace them (St.-1)."

"Indeed, till this year, we haven't talked about multiculturalism. I noticed that people do not have same opportunities. Especially in our university we don't give much importance to multicultural issues. I am happy to talk about these kinds of subjects



and I believe this is freedom of thought. There are many courses where we can't talk about our culture. People with diversities are excluded in our classroom (St.-3)."

**Table 4. Teacher candidates' views regarding multiculturalism in teacher training programmes**

Theme	Sub-Theme	f
Courses	Classroom Management (Multicultural Education)	9
	Social Psychology (Gender)	3
Issues	Not mentioned in the courses	5
	Pressure / Fear	4
	Monocultural Course	2
	Exclusion / Discrimination	2

### **Teacher Candidates' Views Regarding Multicultural Education Activities during Classroom Management Courses**

The findings about the teacher candidates' views regarding multicultural education activities during classroom management courses are presented in Table 5.

As seen in Table 5, the themes related to teacher candidates' views regarding multicultural education activities during classroom management courses were content integration, activities during the course, a separate multicultural education course. The participants, in particular, stated the effectiveness of content integration and implied that the activities were of great significance in terms of raising awareness. However, dedicating only a part of a course to multicultural activities were regarded insufficient and the teacher candidates expressed their views about a compulsory or an elective course. Sample answers from teacher candidates are as follows:

"The theoretical information presented during the course and the video activities were effective. We learned how to emphasize with other cultures and diversities. It would be better to have a separate course rather than short activities in other courses (St.-1.)"

"There were positive effects, we continue the discussion after the course; however, there weren't long-term effects. I would love to attend an elective multicultural education course. I also would like to talk about myself (St.6)."

**Table 5. Teacher candidates' views regarding multicultural education activities during classroom management courses**

Theme	Sub Theme	f
Content Integration	Effective	8
	Awareness	4
	Empathy	1
Activities during the course	Videos	6
	Discussions	1
	Presentations	1
A separate Multicultural Education Course	Elective Multicultural Education	8
	Compulsory Multicultural Education	3

### Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, teacher candidates' perceptions regarding multicultural education and the effect of content integration dimension on their perceptions in terms of teaching multicultural education were investigated. The results of the study revealed that teacher candidates' perceptions with regard to defining multicultural education, constructing the definition, promoting multicultural education, the place of multicultural education in teacher training programmes and the effect of content integration differ greatly based on their experiences and educational background. The results of the 1<sup>st</sup> interview question revealed the participants, in general, do not base their definition of multicultural education on theoretical knowledge. Most of them associated multicultural education with race, language, religion, accepting others and contributing; however, they did not mention multicultural education as a reform movement or its relation to disability, giftedness or gender. This finding implies that content integration process was not effective in terms of teaching a more comprehensive definition of multicultural education. The findings of the study carried out by Sia and Mosher (1994) revealed that the participants defined multicultural education as learning about, respecting and accepting other cultures. Alanay (2015) and Atasayar (2015) also stated that teacher candidates viewed multiculturalism and multicultural education as respecting and recognizing religion, language, race, socio-economic background, tolerance and empathy.

With regards to the construction of the definition of multicultural education, the participants emphasized the effect of the environment they live in and their experiences. To this end, it can be noted that using a variety of teaching methods and considering the effect of university or dormitory environment and friends when planning multicultural education are of great significance. In a study conducted by Demirsoy (2013), half of participants also implied that they were affected by the multicultural environment in their university and the students coming from other cultures contribute to their perceptions and knowledge. The findings of the study, on the other hand, revealed that the effect of multicultural education practices on the construction of definition of multicultural education was very little. However, Bodur

(2003) noted that the participants in his study mostly based their definitions on the experiences they gained during multicultural education courses.

The results revealed that the actors in the education process (academicians, teachers and students), the means of communication and the methods utilized during the courses were the agents to promote multiculturalism in school settings. According to the findings, a more comprehensive approach embracing both the school environment and out-of-school time should be adopted to recognize and promote multiculturalism. Furthermore, supporting the education environment with such methods and techniques as presentations, video activities, group work and so on is important. In a study carried out by Estupinan (2010) stated that the teacher candidates implied the importance of teaching strategies, multicultural classroom management strategies, group activities and presentations to introduce different cultures in promoting multicultural education. Besides the activities carried out in the school, creating opportunities to establish communication with other cultures out of the school was regarded as a crucial component of promoting multicultural education. The results of some other studies also imply the importance of teaching techniques and styles, empathy, interaction and communication (Alanay, 2015; Brady, 2014; Demirsoy, 2013; Estupinan, 2010).

The teacher candidates participating in the study noted that they did not have any course on multicultural education or talk about multiculturalism till 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. In addition, the findings revealed that the concept of culture was not mentioned even in courses where culture is a part of content and sometimes the participants face discussions leading to assimilation. However, the results indicate that the teacher candidates were aware of the need for multicultural education. Other studies also implied such a need and the deficiencies in teacher training programmes in terms of multicultural education (Alanay, 2015; Brady, 2014; Esen, 2009; Estupinan, 2010; Gray, 2010; Kaya, 2014).

The results of this study revealed that integrating the content of multicultural education during the classroom management courses was effective in terms raising awareness of the participants regarding the diversities encountered in and out of the classroom environment. Most of the participants implied that they recognized the differences with the help of the videos, presentations and discussions. Furthermore, the teacher candidates noted that the move beyond awareness and to take action a multicultural education course either compulsory or elective should be added to teacher training programmes. These findings are in line with the studies carried in other countries (Barry & Lechner, 1995; Bodur, 2003; Brady, 2014; Capella-Santana, 1995; Estupinan, 2010). As a result the study carried out by Brady (2014), it was expressed that teacher candidates need more courses supported with field practices and workshops on multicultural education. Barry and Lechner (1995) also implied that teacher candidates have positive attitude towards multicultural education and they want more courses to improve their skills.

Finally, it can be stated that although content integration supports multicultural education as an introductory phase, faculties should move beyond and start to add separate courses on multiculturalism to the teacher training programmes.

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