

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE OF PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS BASED ON A PLURICULTURAL APPROACH

Dina Mamirbaeva, Ph.D., Docent of English Language and Literature Department of Nukus State Pedagogical Institute,
Ayna Saltamuratova, 1st year Doctorate student of Nukus State Pedagogical Institute,

1. Introduction

In today's globalized environment, English language education is no longer confined to grammatical accuracy or fluency. It encompasses the broader goal of enabling learners to communicate effectively in multicultural settings. Intercultural competence refers to the ability to understand, communicate, and interact effectively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This competence is particularly vital in educational settings, international business environments, and multicultural societies [1; 41]. Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are at the forefront of this transformation, acting as mediators between languages and cultures. Accordingly, the development of intercultural competence has emerged as a core component of teacher training.

Traditional language teaching often prioritizes linguistic proficiency, typically within the confines of a single cultural context—most commonly Anglo-American. This monocultural model fails to address the diverse realities of English as a global lingua franca, spoken in multiple social, geographical, and cultural contexts. A pluricultural approach, which recognizes the learner's multiple cultural identities and experiences, is more suitable for preparing future teachers to function in and facilitate intercultural communication.

This research is grounded in Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, which includes attitudes (openness and curiosity), knowledge (of social groups and practices), skills (of interpreting, relating, discovering, and interacting), and critical cultural awareness. The pluricultural approach, as defined by the Council of Europe, emphasizes the individual's ability to engage in relationships across multiple cultures rather than becoming "bicultural" in a target culture.

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of intercultural competence, teacher education programs in many contexts remain ill-equipped to develop these skills among pre-service teachers. Curricula often lack targeted activities and assessments that integrate cultural learning with language teaching methodologies. Moreover, there is limited empirical research on how pluriculturalism can be operationalized in teacher training, particularly for PreSETT students.

Methods

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative pre- and post-intervention surveys with qualitative interviews and classroom observations. This design allowed for both breadth and depth in assessing intercultural competence and the impact of the pluricultural approach.

Participants included 68 PreSETT students from Nukus State Pedagogical Institute. The sample was diverse in terms of age (20–25), gender (70% female, 30% male), and linguistic background. Participants were enrolled in their third or fourth year of teacher education programs specializing in English language teaching.

- **Intercultural Development Inventory:** Used to quantitatively measure students' intercultural competence.
- **Observation Checklist:** Monitored classroom interactions and engagement during the intervention.

The intervention consisted of an 8-week pluricultural training module integrated into their regular coursework. The module included:

- Case studies of intercultural encounters
- Role-playing scenarios

- Collaborative projects with international peers
- Critical reflection journals

Results

Initial results indicated that the majority of students (65%) were in the minimization stage of intercultural development—recognizing cultural differences but downplaying them to maintain harmony. Only 10% showed signs of acceptance or adaptation stages, suggesting a need for targeted intervention.

After the intervention:

- 45% of students advanced to the **acceptance** stage.
- 20% moved into the **adaptation** stage.
- Average intercultural competence scores increased by 22%, indicating statistically significant improvement.

Three key themes emerged from the interviews and reflections:

1. **Increased Cultural Curiosity:** Students reported a newfound interest in exploring cultures beyond their own and the Anglo-centric models usually taught.
2. **Improved Empathy and Communication:** Students shared stories of successful interactions with international peers, noting improved listening skills and cultural sensitivity.
3. **Teacher Identity Transformation:** Most of them started to see themselves not just as language instructors, but as cultural ambassadors and facilitators of global understanding.

Discussion

The findings support the hypothesis that a pluricultural approach significantly enhances the intercultural competence of PreSETT students. The movement from minimization to acceptance and adaptation aligns with Byram's framework and suggests that targeted interventions can yield meaningful progress within a relatively short time frame.

This study highlights several key implications:

- Pluricultural components should be embedded across multiple courses, not confined to isolated cultural studies.
- Educators must also be trained in intercultural methodologies to model these competencies effectively.
- Some students struggled to articulate complex cultural reflections in English.
- Cultural openness can be influenced by societal norms, and not all students were equally receptive.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that pluricultural approaches are not only viable but necessary for the development of intercultural competence among future English teachers. By equipping PreSETT students with the tools to navigate and mediate between cultures, teacher education programs can foster more empathetic, flexible, and globally minded educators.

Future research should explore longitudinal impacts, integration across diverse educational contexts, and the role of digital tools in fostering intercultural dialogue.

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