

MAPPING THE PATH BETWEEN MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE AND DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES IN TEACHER EDUCATION: A SEM APPROACH

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Abstract— This study investigated factors affecting pre-service teachers' multicultural attitudes and self-efficacy in Northern Cyprus. Using an observed-variable path model with 352 participants, the research tested five predictors: educational prejudice, support for multicultural education, attitudes toward democracy education, general democratic attitudes, and approaches to cultural differences. Data were analyzed with SPSS 27 and AMOS 24. Results showed that support for multicultural education strongly predicted multicultural attitudes, while lack of prejudice predicted both attitudes and self-efficacy. The other predictors did not have significant direct effects. Findings highlight the importance of reducing prejudice and strengthening multicultural pedagogy in teacher education programs.

Keywords— democratic attitude, multicultural competence, multicultural education, teacher education.

INTRODUCTION

Many countries now host more cultural diversity due to globalization. Schools are the most affected institutions. Migration and rapid advances in communication technologies have led to culturally mixed classrooms. Teachers play a central role in these environments. Schools are not only for transmitting knowledge, they are also places where values, cultural sensitivity, awareness, and inclusivity are built. This makes multicultural education essential.

Multicultural education has many definitions. In this study, based on Banks and Banks [1], multicultural education is defined as a system that ensures equal access to education regardless of religion, language, race, gender, age, social class, or economic status. To discuss multicultural education, democracy is essential. Education both sustains and protects democracy. With the growing number and diversity of students, teachers must be aware of multiculturalism and multicultural education. Multicultural education builds on equality, social justice, respect, and universal morality. It recognizes the needs of different groups, responds to them, and secures their rights as citizens [2]. Its four main elements are curriculum, teaching for social justice, equity, and multicultural competence [3]. In light of this information, examining teachers' multicultural competences, as well as their attitudes toward multicultural education, is considered crucial for promoting inclusive and equitable educational practices.

Teachers' multicultural competence improves communication with students from diverse backgrounds and helps create inclusive classrooms [4][5]. Multicultural education encourages critical thinking, avoids stereotypes, and promotes open perspectives [6]. This requires a democratic environment. It also develops students' awareness of values, human rights, equality, and justice. Teachers are responsible for building democratic societies and creating multicultural classrooms.

Multicultural competence can lead to more effective teaching. Teachers who build culturally responsive classrooms connect lessons with students' experiences [7]. Teachers need practical examples for multicultural instruction. These skills do not develop automatically, they must be taught in teacher training programs [8]. Teachers should feel both culturally and academically competent to teach in diverse classrooms. Studies on multiculturalism, particularly those focusing on teacher training, have been conducted [9][10][11][12][13][14].

In Cyprus, research on multicultural education has been conducted with preschool teachers [15], primary school teachers [16], university students [17], primary school principals [18], and academics [19]. Teacher training has also been studied [2][19]. In Southern Cyprus, research has focused on policies [20] and teacher training [21][22]. Other studies examined migrant students' adaptation [23] and language education [24].

Cyprus, by its very nature, is an island that receives a lot of immigration. Southern Cyprus had the third-highest rate of immigrants per 1,000 people in 2021 [25]. While the exact number of immigrants in Northern Cyprus is unknown, it is estimated that the number of foreigners living in the country has reached 100,000 [26]. The number of foreign students who came to study in the country, excluding immigrants, was 94.38 in 2022. Even just looking

at the number of students warrants discussion about multiculturalism. These numbers are high for a country with a population of 390,745, according to 2022 data [27]. From this perspective, it appears that many areas of multiculturalism, education, and teacher training in Northern Cyprus remain untouched.

This study aimed to test the direct effects of the variables of teachers candidates' educational prejudice, support for multicultural education, attitudes toward democracy education, general democratic attitudes, and approaches to cultural differences on multiculturalism-related attitudes and self-efficacy within a single observed-variable path model

METHOD

A. Research Model

This study used a quantitative design to examine pre-service teachers' multicultural competence and their attitudes toward democracy and multicultural education. A correlational screening model was applied. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) validated the measurement model.

The structural analysis used observed-variable SEM. The model included only observed variables and did not define latent variables. Five predictors were tested: educational prejudice, support for multicultural education, attitudes toward democracy education, general democratic attitudes, and approaches to cultural differences. To account for conceptual overlap, nine residual covariances between these variables were released. The model was defined with one degree of freedom. Each endogenous variable was directly predicted by multicultural attitude and self-efficacy.

In this study, the structural part was tested only with observed variables; therefore, the model is a path analysis (observed-variable SEM). The measurement dimensions and reliability of the scales were verified with CFA in a separate step, but latent variables and measurement errors were not separately estimated within the structural model. This choice was made to increase the model's parsimony, parameter/sample ratio, and reporting clarity.

The participants were 352 pre-service teachers studying at a university in Northern Cyprus. All volunteered for the study. Convenience sampling was used.

B. Data Collection Tools

Democracy and Multicultural Education Attitude Scale, developed by Toraman, Acar, and Aydın [28]. It includes 27 items in five dimensions: attitude toward multicultural education, attitude toward democracy, prejudiced attitude toward multicultural education, attitude toward democracy education, and attitude toward cultural differences. Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes toward democracy and multicultural education.

Multicultural Competence Scale, developed by Guyton and Wesche [29] and adapted into Turkish by Akcaoglu and Arsal [30]. The Turkish version has 26 items across three subscales: experience, attitude, and self-efficacy. Since the experience dimension is used only for comparison purposes, no calculation is made.

C. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with IBM SPSS 27 and AMOS 24 in three stages. Firstly, Preliminary analyses and reliability were carried out. At this stage, descriptive statistics, outlier and normality checks, and Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency were introduced. Measurement validity (CFA) was then examined. CFA tested the factor structure of each scale. Goodness-of-fit was assessed using χ^2/df , CFI, TLI, RMSEA, PCLOSE, and SRMR. Standardized factor loadings, composite reliability, and alpha values were reported. Changes were based solely on theoretical reasons. Finally, a structural model (path analysis) was performed. The observed composite scores formed the structural model. Attitude and self-efficacy were exogenous variables with covariance allowed between them. Measures of education, culture, democracy, and cultural diversity were endogenous variables. Covariances between endogenous residuals were excluded due to conceptual overlap. Fit indices are reported along with standardized path coefficients (β) and 95% confidence intervals.

FINDINGS

Model Fit: The observed-variable path model with 352 participants showed strong fit with the data. Results were $\chi^2(1) = 0.031$, $p = .860$, $\chi^2/df = 0.031$, GFI = 1.00, AGFI = .999, RMR = .040, CFI = 1.000, TLI = 1.03, IFI = 1.002, NFI = 1.000, RMSEA = .00, 90% CI [.00, .086], and PCLOSE = .901. Parsimony indices were low (PNFI = .048, PCFI = .048) because the model was nearly saturated. As a result, conclusions relied mainly on the size of the path coefficients and R^2 values. The model satisfied accepted fit criteria: $\chi^2/df < 2$, CFI, TLI, and GFI $\geq .95$, and RMSEA $\leq .06$.

Relationships Between Predictors: All five predictors were positively correlated with each other ($r = .21$ to $.71$). Attitudes toward democracy education and general democratic attitudes had the strongest correlation ($r = .707$). Support for multicultural education correlated with both general democratic attitudes ($r = .540$) and attitudes toward democracy education ($r = .454$). Approach to cultural differences correlated positively with other predictors but at lower levels ($r = .21$ to $.36$). The stability of standard errors across 4,000 bootstrap samples showed the coefficients were reliable.

Structural Paths: The model includes two endogenous (predicted) variables: attitude (attitude related to multiculturalism) and self-efficacy; and five exogenous (predictor) variables are prejudice toward education, support for multicultural education, attitude toward democracy education, general democratic attitude, and approach to cultural differences. Support for multicultural education had the strongest and most significant effect

on attitude ($\beta = .559$, $b = .254$, $SE = .027$, $C.R. = 9.492$, $p < .001$), followed by prejudice toward education with a smaller but significant effect ($\beta = .150$, $b = .049$, $SE = .017$, $C.R. = 2.920$, $p = .003$). In contrast, no significant effects were found on attitude for general democracy ($\beta = .066$, $b = .051$, $SE = .053$, $C.R. = 0.968$, $p = .333$), attitude toward democracy education ($\beta = -.053$, $b = -.047$, $SE = .056$, $C.R. = -0.833$, $p = .405$), and approach to cultural differences ($\beta = .015$, $b = .012$, $SE = .039$, $C.R. = 0.304$, $p = .761$).

In terms of self-efficacy, the only significant and medium-sized predictor was prejudice toward education ($\beta = .328$, $b = .643$, $SE = .123$, $C.R. = 5.232$, $p < .001$); the effect of support for multicultural education remained at trend level ($\beta = .130$, $b = .353$, $SE = .195$, $C.R. = 1.813$, $p = .070$) and attitude towards democracy education ($\beta = -.091$, $b = -.481$, $SE = .410$, $C.R. = -1.174$, $p = .241$), general democracy attitude ($\beta = .056$, $b = .262$, $SE = .386$, $C.R. = 0.678$, $p = .498$) and approach to cultural differences ($\beta = -.017$, $b = -.085$, $SE = .286$, $C.R. = -0.296$, $p = .768$) were not found to have significant effects on self-efficacy.

Table 1: Model Fit Indices for the Observed-Variable Path Model

Index	Recommended Cut-off	Observed Value	Interpretation
χ^2 (df, p)	$p > .05$	0.031 (df = 1, $p = .860$)	Excellent
χ^2/df	< 2 (acceptable < 3)	0.031	Excellent
GFI / AGFI	$\geq .95$ / $\geq .90$	1.000 / .999	Excellent
RMR	$\leq .08$.040	Good
CFI / TLI / IFI / NFI	$\geq .95$	1.000 / 1.03 / 1.002 / 1.000	Excellent
RMSEA (90% CI)	$\leq .06$.000 (.000–.086)	Excellent (close fit)
PCLOSE	$> .05$.901	Close fit
PNFI / PCFI	— (parsimony indicator)	.048 / .048	Low (near-saturated)
Hoelter's N (.05)	≥ 200	34,896	Very high

Note. χ^2 = Chi-square goodness of fit statistic; df = degrees of freedom; GFI = Goodness-of-Fit Index; AGFI = Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index; RMR = Root Mean Square Residual; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; IFI = Incremental Fit Index; NFI = Normed Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; PCLOSE = p-value for test of close fit

Fit Indices Summary: The fit indices confirmed an excellent fit. χ^2/df was 0.031, well below the threshold of 2. GFI, AGFI, CFI, IFI, and NFI were all at or above 1.00. RMSEA was .000 with PCLOSE = .901, indicating close fit. RMR was .040, within acceptable limits. Parsimony indices were low due to near saturation, but Hoelter's N was 34,896, showing strong model stability.

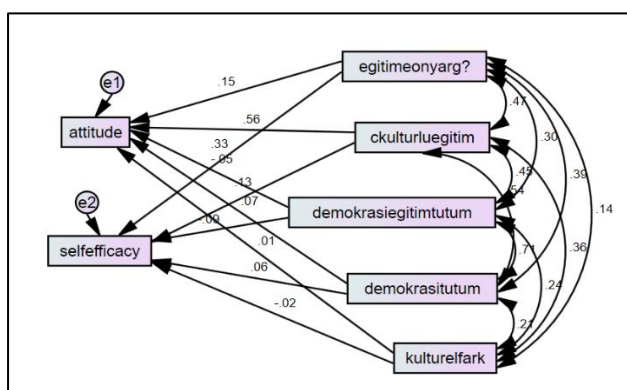


Figure 1. Observed-variable path model of the effects of five predictors on multicultural attitude and self-efficacy

DISCUSSION

This study examined how preservice teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy toward multiculturalism were influenced by five different variables. The findings indicate that the strongest predictors for these two variables were support for multicultural education and prejudice toward education (a high score on the scale represents no prejudice). The level of support for multicultural education significantly and strongly positively influenced preservice teachers' multicultural attitudes ($\beta = .559$). This result suggests that teachers' appreciation of cultural pluralism in the classroom and their emphasis on multicultural education in the curriculum positively influence their attitudes toward different cultures. Indeed, the literature also considers appreciating cultural diversity as a richness and developing sensitivity to diverse student backgrounds as prerequisites for teaching cultural competence [1]. In other words, a preservice teacher's embrace of multicultural education is closely related to their willingness to engage in activities that support cultural diversity in the classroom, and this attitude is considered critical for effective and inclusive teaching [2].

The second important factor in explaining the multicultural attitude variable is the level of prejudice toward education. Considering that high scores on the scale reflect candidates' unprejudiced educational attitudes, our finding suggests that preservice teachers' unprejudiced approach in educational settings facilitates their development of a more positive attitude toward multicultural issues. In particular, it is known that teachers with fewer prejudices or stereotypes about working with students from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds are more likely to believe in increasing the participation and success of these students in the classroom [3]. Indeed, while negative cultural stereotypes can undermine a teacher's belief that they can facilitate the learning of students from disadvantaged groups, adopting a multicultural perspective has been found to strengthen the perception of self-efficacy in teaching [4]. Therefore, a preservice teacher's unprejudiced nature can be considered a factor that positively supports both their attitude and their perception of self-efficacy.

When the results of the study on the multicultural self-efficacy dimension are examined, it is seen that among the five variables, only the educational prejudice variable (i.e., low prejudice level) has a significant and moderate effect on preservice teachers' perception of self-efficacy ($\beta = .328$). This finding suggests that having a non-prejudiced and egalitarian understanding in educational environments is associated with preservice teachers feeling more competent in culturally diverse classrooms. Studies in the literature also support this conclusion: If teachers hold negative attitudes and stereotypes towards certain groups, their self-efficacy beliefs in their ability to effectively educate students from diverse backgrounds are weakened; on the other hand, a positive approach to multiculturalism increases teachers' perception of self-efficacy [4]. For example, the findings of Chwastek et al. [31] and Gutentag et al. [32] showed that cultural prejudices reduce teachers' confidence in their ability to manage classrooms and motivate students, while cultural awareness and a positive attitude strengthen this confidence. From this perspective, it can be argued that reducing prejudices is the most critical element in developing preservice teachers' self-efficacy. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the level of support for multicultural education did not have a statistically significant effect on self-efficacy (it remained only at the trend level, $p \approx .07$). This suggests that embracing multicultural education as a value alone may not be sufficient to make a preservice teacher feel competent. Even if a preservice teacher supports multicultural education in principle, additional skills or experiences are likely necessary to gain confidence in working effectively with students from different cultures in the classroom. Indeed, Öztürk and Kayış emphasized the key role of developing intercultural sensitivity in this regard in their study; they demonstrated that simply having a positive attitude, without intercultural sensitivity, is not sufficient to increase self-efficacy [33]. This statement implies that preservice teachers' positive perspective on multiculturalism should be supported with sensitivity and skills that can translate into practical behavior and classroom interaction. Therefore, while a positive attitude toward multicultural education is a prerequisite, it is crucial that candidates are equipped with intercultural interaction experiences, empathy, and pedagogical adaptation skills for this to have an impact on self-efficacy.

The other three variables in the study—attitude toward democracy education, general democracy attitude, and approach to cultural differences—did not exhibit a significant direct effect on attitude or self-efficacy in the model. This finding may be surprising at first glance, as the concepts of democracy and multiculturalism are theoretically interconnected. For example, Özen [34], based on the view that democracy is the foundation of multicultural education and multicultural education is the continuity of democracy, evaluated prospective teachers' attitudes towards democracy and multiculturalism together [6]. In another study, prospective teachers' attitudes towards democracy and democracy education were reported to be "very positive" while their attitudes towards multicultural education and cultural differences were reported to be relatively lower (positive but more moderate) [7]. This suggests that while embracing democratic values is widespread, this may not be directly internalized to the same extent as multicultural sensitivity and practices. Indeed, in our study, overall democratic attitude scores were likely quite high; however, a positive view of democracy alone did not determine the candidates' attitudes towards cultural diversity or their perception of self-efficacy in this regard. The lack of statistical separation of the effect of democratic attitudes appears to be related to the inclusion of more specific variables, such as support for multicultural education, in the model. Correlation analysis revealed that individuals with high democratic awareness generally view multiculturalism positively ($r \approx .45-.54$ between democratic attitudes and support for multicultural education); however, because this shared variance is more directly captured by the multicultural variable in the structural model, democratic attitudes no longer contribute. This finding suggests that prospective teachers' internalization of general democratic values may only play an indirect or predisposing role in multicultural classroom practices. In other words, prospective teachers' support for democratic principles such as

equality and participation for all certainly underpins the ideals of multicultural education; however, to demonstrate adaptation and inclusiveness towards different cultures in classroom practice, they must prioritize multicultural pedagogy more specifically and remain unbiased.

Consequently, among the five predictor variables in our model, support for multicultural education and a non-prejudiced educational attitude stood out as the primary factors shaping preservice teachers' attitudes toward multicultural environments and their self-efficacy beliefs. The other variables (democracy-related attitudes and general sensitivity to cultural differences), however, shared a high degree of variance with these two key variables and were not directly influential. These findings are consistent with general trends emphasized in the literature: Teachers' positive approach to cultural diversity and freedom from prejudice strengthen both their willingness to implement cultural pluralism in the classroom and their belief in their ability to do so [3][4]. Conversely, being pro-democracy or expressing openness to diversity at an abstract level may not translate into attitudes and competence dimensions if concrete multicultural education practices are not supported and personal sensitivities are not developed. Therefore, as the findings indicate, in teacher education programs, making candidates aware of their own prejudices and providing them with intercultural experiences should be a priority, as should developing attitudes towards multicultural pedagogy [5].

CONCLUSION

This study examined factors that influence pre-service teachers' multicultural attitudes and self-efficacy within a single structural model. The results showed that support for multicultural education most strongly predicted prospective teachers' general attitudes toward cultural diversity, while the level of prejudice toward education was a significant determinant of both attitude and self-efficacy. On the other hand, the direct effects of democratic attitudes and approaching cultural differences were not statistically significant in the controlled model. In light of these findings, it can be argued that raising awareness of preservice teachers' multicultural competencies, particularly regarding their lack of prejudice and open-mindedness, and fostering their adoption of multicultural education approaches are critical for developing their multicultural competencies.

The findings also offer some practical implications for teacher training programs: Simply embracing the concepts of democracy and equality may not be sufficient for prospective teachers; in addition, they need to be directly supported with multicultural pedagogical content and gain experience in different cultural environments. In particular, encouraging candidates to question their own prejudices and increasing their cultural awareness will both positively reinforce their attitudes towards multicultural environments and strengthen their self-efficacy beliefs that they can teach effectively in these environments. Practical steps include adding multicultural content to teacher education curricula, organizing workshops, and creating opportunities for candidates to interact with diverse cultural groups. These activities will improve teachers' attitudes toward diversity and increase their confidence in teaching in multicultural classrooms. The findings also show the need for future research. Studies with different samples and mixed methods can test the stability of these results. Expanding research in this way will help refine teacher education programs and make them more effective in preparing teachers for culturally diverse classrooms.

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