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Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Preparedness and Self-efficacy in Instructing Students From Diverse Cultural and Linguistic Backgrounds

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Abstract

This study aims to determine a connection between the pre-service teachers' perception of preparedness and their self-efficacy in instructing students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The researcher was guided by three research questions: 1) What are pre-service teachers' perceptions of their abilities to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students? 2) To what degree do pre-service teachers believe their teacher education program prepared them to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students? 3) To what extent do pre-service teachers' self-efficacy influence culturally and linguistically diverse students?

Participants were pre-service teachers (education undergraduates in their last year or last semester of graduation), community colleges, and university faculty in the North Texas area. A total of sixty-three participants participated in the study by completing a Teacher Demographic Questionnaire (TDQ) and the Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy scale (CRTSES) (Siwatu, 2006). Also, ten faculty participants participated in the study by completing a Faculty Member Questionnaire (FMQ). None of the faculty member participants expressed an interest in participating in the follow-up interviews. Demographic and preparedness questions from the TDQ were selected to identify similarities and differences. CRTSES data were totaled by the question, ranked based on mean score, and then grouped by means.

Results of the study indicated many pre-service teachers feel a significantly strong and positive perception of their abilities to instruct culturally linguistically diverse students, a high degree of preparedness received from their program (cultural awareness of the needs of CLD students), and more confidence (self-efficacy) in instructing students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The findings of this study are insightful for teacher preparation programs, faculty members in colleges and universities, coordinators and directors of field experience at the university level, and anyone tasked with mentoring and guiding pre-service teachers.

Keywords: teacher preparation, teacher perception, cultural awareness, self-efficacy, culturally linguistically diverse student (a student who comes from a home environment where a language other than English is spoken and whose cultural values and background may differ from the mainstream culture).

Categories: education, practice, diversity, multiculturalism

Introduction

In recent years, the demographic composition of the student population in the United States has increased in racial, linguistic, and ability-based diversity, yet the teacher workforce has continued to be predominantly comprised of white, middle-class females (Garcia et al., 2010; Gay, 2013; Howard, 2012; Sleeter, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). As this demographic shift continues, the need to ensure the preparation of teachers to instruct all students has become the responsibility of teacher preparation programs. However, researchers have found that efforts to mandate the inclusion of culturally based diversity standards and coursework have not necessarily ensured the quality preparation of pre-service teachers to meet the needs of such students (Banks et al., 2005; Howard, 2012).

According to Smith (2009), establishing sound pedagogy rooted in understanding individual students in terms of racial, cultural, and linguistic integration may help most teachers reach them by allowing students to express themselves from their perspectives and worldviews, which have the propensity to increase academic success. Keengwe (2010) stressed that teachers must not ignore or reject student cultural expressions of development because schools that acknowledge and use the wide range of cultural and linguistic expressions within the student bodies as a teaching and learning tool can benefit when trying to teach culturally diverse students. He also recommended that teachers experiment with cross-cultural approaches in their teachings to interact with diverse children effectively and minimize tension while at the same time encouraging diverse students to be comfortable in their academic setting (Keengwe, 2010).

Problem Statement

Today's classrooms continue to grow in cultural and linguistic diversity, with rapidly changing student populations in all corners of the United States, especially in immigrant destinations worldwide (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010; Wrigley, 2000). While students bring rich linguistic resources needed for multilingualism in a global world, they also face challenges in simultaneously learning another language and the content of academic disciplines. Unfortunately, teachers often enter classrooms underprepared for CLD students, resulting in deficit-based mindsets, low expectations, and simplified approaches to teaching and learning (de Cohen & Clewell, 2007).

Many teachers have neither extensive personal experiences nor professional training in cross-cultural diversity yet are placed in positions in which they must work with students from cultures very different from their own. (Banks et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Ingersoll, Merrill, & Ma, 2014; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 2001). The study was designed to answer three questions: *What are pre-service teachers' perceptions of their abilities to teach culturally linguistic diverse students? To what degree do pre-service teachers believe their teacher education program prepared them to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students? To what extent do pre-service teachers' self-efficacy influence teaching cultural and linguistically diverse students. It is hoped that insights developed from the study will allow teacher educators' administrators to evaluate their programs and identify areas that need to be eliminated or reinforced as they seek to help teachers be successful.*

Methods

Research Design

The design adopted in the research used both quantitative and qualitative methods to identify the most common factors that contribute to teacher preparation in instructing students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The teacher demographic questionnaire was used (Appendix A) based on the researcher's desire to collect demographic information regarding the type of preparation received by participants, experiences with field and coursework in preparation programs, age, gender, and race. The

teacher participants answered open and close-ended questions in the TDQ regarding their perception of their preparation to use culturally responsive teaching techniques.

Questionnaire (CRTSES)

The teacher self-efficacy scale CRTSES (Siwatu, 2006) was explicitly used as the primary instrument for collecting data concerning pre-service teachers' perception of preparedness to instruct culturally and linguistically students from diverse backgrounds.

Participants were prompted to answer the questions on the CRTSES survey according to their current perceptions of how well their pre-service program has prepared them to do each of the tasks as described in the CRTSES. The CRTSES survey was selected based on its successful use in previous studies (Chu, 2010; Coston, 2010; Fitchett, Starker, & Salyers, 2012; Lestrapes & Negishi, 2012; Siwatu, Polydore & Starker, 2009).

Faculty Member Questionnaire (FMQ) The faculty member questionnaire was used to elicit responses from faculty members. Furthermore, faculty members also answered a survey based on their approach to culturally responsive teaching within specific teacher preparation programs.

Subjects

Three hundred education undergraduates were contacted, and sixty-three education undergraduates completed the TDQ and CRTSES. All participants indicated a willingness to participate in the survey portion of the study and acknowledged their rights as a participant through the completion of an acknowledgment question at the beginning of the TDQ stating their consent. Participants reported being from various age groups, genders, racial/ethnic backgrounds, countries of birth, languages spoken, certification areas, and a variety of program types with varying types of field experiences. Thirty-five faculty members were contacted; only ten faculty members participated in the survey.

Data Collection

Data was collected from the sample of pre-service teachers; the teachers completed both the TDQ and CRTSES survey using a web-based program between June 11, 2019, and September 19, 2019. The researcher was the sole data collector, and electronic means were used for data collection to reduce bias and error. In recruiting the undergraduates, professors, university program directors, and school of education certification officers were contacted and asked to send the survey link to education undergraduates in their last year or last semester before graduation. The faculty members were contacted and sent the survey link by the deans of the School of Education.

Results

After the CRTSES was collected, the mean score for each question was calculated to understand the perceptions of the whole group for each question and then ranked from highest to lowest based on mean scores. Once organized, questions were grouped into one-point mean score ranges. Questions in each mean-field were examined to determine the topic addressed within the question and the level of confidence the pre-service teachers could apply the culturally responsive technique. After analyzing data from the Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale survey, the researcher compiled results from the Teacher Demographic Questionnaire (TDQ) to confirm the number of participants in each group and determine the age, race, and gender composition of the participants.

The data from TDQ questions and the faculty survey were coded for emerging themes and similarities based on the frequency in which participants mentioned topics to provide insight into the perceptions of preparedness held by teacher participants to instruct students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Glesne, 2011). Of the sixty-three education undergraduates, eight were

male (12.7 %), and thirty-nine were female (61.9%); Sixteen participants (25.4%) did not respond to the first three survey questions that elicit responses for gender, age, and racial/ethnic background. The age bracket with the highest representation percentage was 18-25 (58.7%) and the lowest was 45 and above.

The country of birth of most participants was from the United States with sixty-one participants, followed by China and Mexico with one participant each. Participants indicated being from one of the three program types: traditional 4-year university program, alternative certification, or other programs such as (alternative non-university based, alternative state agency/for-profit). They were asked to indicate the types of field experiences received, including student teaching, observation, virtual student teaching, and observation. Approximately 70% of participants reported obtaining preparation and certification through a traditional program (4-year university program), 1.6% indicated they pursued certification through an alternative university-based program, 3.2% indicated "other," and 25.4% stated no response on the survey questions.

The TDQ was developed to gain insight into the types of preparation received and the demographic characteristics of the pre-service teachers. The TDQ comprised yes/no, multichoice, and word text questions, each accompanied by request for explanation and space for participants to respond further in a short answer. Five primary themes emerged from the TDQ data:

- Most of the participants indicated that student/clinical teaching (field experience) was the most beneficial in preparing them to instruct CLD students.
- Most participants believed they were prepared to use students' cultures as learning vehicles.
- The participants confidently believe the preparation program has adequately prepared them to meet the needs of CLD students.
- Participants indicated they were exposed to the concept of culturally responsive teaching during their teacher preparation.
- On a scale of 1-10, some participants seem confused about how prepared they are to instruct CLD students.
- Participants also indicated that working with culturally and linguistically diverse students is what they needed most to prepare them to instruct CLD students.
- Most participants indicated that multicultural education was a significant need addressed by teacher preparation programs.

A more detailed examination of TDQ questions revealed the following information.

Students culture as a vehicle for learning. When asked to answer TDQ Question 15: Do you feel you are prepared to use students' cultures as vehicles for learning, 49.2 % of the participants reported Yes, indicating they felt ready to use their students' culture as a vehicle for learning in their classrooms. When asked to respond regarding their ability to meet the needs of CLD students (Question 16), 52.4% of participants answered that they were prepared, and 11.1% answered that they were not prepared. Though 52.4% responded they were ready in Question 16, indicators in response to Question 18 demonstrated a disconnect between the introduced theory, actual implementation in real classrooms, and lack of perceived preparedness after being taught the concept of culturally responsive teaching.

Field experience in the preparation program is most beneficial in instructing CLD students. Questions on the TDQ addressed participants' preparation in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students, asking participants to identify experiences, types of practice, the portion of the program most beneficial, and the needs met by the teacher preparation program. Results indicated that 63.5% of the participants

were exposed to culturally responsive teaching strategies during their programs (using students' cultures and interests to build understanding and relevance in the curriculum) in (Question 14), and 49.2% felt they were prepared to use students' culture as a vehicle for learning (Question 15 and 16). This suggested preparation programs did expose participants to culturally responsive teaching concepts to prepare them to meet the needs of CLD students.

A majority of participants felt they were exposed to culturally responsive teaching and did feel prepared to utilize students' cultures once in the classroom. While participants generally felt unprepared to use culturally responsive teaching to meet the needs of CLD students, they did feel student teaching was more beneficial to their preparedness to meet CLD students' needs than observation and coursework, which was indicated as the least generous portion of preparation programs at addressing cultural and linguistic needs of the learners. Overall, it seems teachers are being exposed to theories that may aid in their ability to meet the needs of CLD students but feel not all portions of their program prepare them to instruct the CLD students.

Findings from the Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale Survey were used to answer research question 3. All sixty-three participants were asked to complete the 41-question Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy scale (CRTSES) survey (Siwatu, 2006). Participants were asked to answer each question on a scale of 0-10, with ten being the highest (complete confidence) and 0 the lowest (no confidence at all). Answers for each question were totaled, and the mean was calculated to gain a sense of average responses for each question for these participants. The exact process was repeated for all questions of the CRTSES. Question 32 of the CRTSES received the highest mean score of 8.41(1.22), which indicated participants, in general, felt prepared to build trusting relationships with diverse students. Question 37 has the second-highest mean score (7.97; 1.44), which addressed participants' self-efficacy to obtain information about student's academic interests. In Question 36 (7.61; 1.62), participants also expressed a high level of self-efficacy using examples that are familiar to students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Questions with low mean scores focused on revising instructional materials to include a better representation of cultural groups and implementing strategies to minimize the effects of the mismatch between their students' home culture and the school culture. Question 18 and 22 on the CRTSES had mean scores between 5.08 (2.93) and 5.23 (3.36), respectively; these questions examined participants' self-efficacy in praising English Language Learners for their accomplishments using a phrase in their native language and greeting English Language Learners with a word in their native language.

Based on these results, participants in this study feel more confident to build relationships and a sense of trust, which may indicate a high self-efficacy. Participants felt somewhat sure to obtain information regarding their students' academic interests. Still, they did not feel confident to specifically address the contributions of diverse groups to particular subjects or incorporate the native language of their students into their instruction. This lack of confidence to integrate language and manage the contributions of diverse groups for specific issues may indicate that these areas are not emphasized in preparation programs.

A total of sixty-five faculty members were contacted seeking their participation in the study. A total of ten faculty members responded; however, some faculty did not complete all questions on the survey. Faculty participants reported years of teaching experience and the number of undergraduates' courses they teach; 40% reported teaching between 10-20 years, and 55% indicated they lead between 1-5 undergraduates' practices in their colleges and universities.

Similarities among the TDQ, CRTSES, and FMQ

Common to all data sources was the idea that pre-service teachers need to feel confident to meet the needs of CLD students by using culturally responsive teaching techniques. Questions on the CRTSES (Siwatu, 2006) regarding culturally responsive teaching were rated the highest, meaning participants feel comfortable and prepared to meet the needs of CLD students using culturally responsive teaching strategies. On the TDQ, participants were asked to indicate their preparedness to use culturally responsive teaching to meet the needs of CLD students on a scale of 1-10. In both cases, the scores suggested participants feel confident and comfortably prepared to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students by using culturally responsive teaching; all responses shared the same opinion based on answers to Question 6.

Exposure to culturally responsive techniques and preparedness to use them also emerged from multiple data sources. In the TDQ, participants reported being exposed to culturally responsive teaching during their program through data from CRTSES questions regarding the implementation of culturally responsive skills had high mean scores, indicating participants feel prepared to use culturally responsive techniques and abilities. A high response rate was recorded in the faculty member questionnaire Question 7 when asked: How does culturally responsive teaching impact your students? 43% responded, "About half the time." These responses revealed that a majority of the faculty members are aware and exposed to culturally responsive teaching.

Differences among the TDQ, CRTSES, and FMQ

Inconsistency of response structure to some questions in the TDQ and Faculty questionnaire and the nature of the CRTSES prohibited some comparison of information. The scale value questions on the CRTSES survey focused exclusively on participants' self-efficacy to use culturally responsive techniques. Therefore, they were not conducive to supporting values from other data sources. Participants were asked primarily short answers and open-ended questions on various related topics. Fortunately, results from the current study indicated pre-service teachers have strong self-efficacy and, thus, are ready to instruct students who may be culturally and linguistically different successfully. Data from the combined sources produced several significant findings and were supported by existing literature:

- Pre-service teachers were exposed to the concept of Culturally Responsive Teaching (Ferreira, Ryan, and Davis, 2015; Fullan, 2013)
- A strong belief that a teacher preparation program has adequately prepared them to meet the needs of culturally linguistic diverse students (Darling-Hammond, 2006)
- Readiness and preparedness to use students' culture as vehicles of learning (Ladson-Billings, 2000)
- Student clinical teaching and field experiences are most beneficial in preparing pre-service teachers to instruct culturally linguistic diverse students (Brevik, 2009; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 2001)
- What pre-service teachers need most to prepare them to instruct culturally linguistically diverse students is the opportunity to work with diverse students.
- Building relationships and developing a sense of trust increases teachers' self-efficacy (Gay, 2002, 2010; Mcknown and Weinstein, 2009),
- Some faculty members commit to intentionally incorporating culturally responsive teaching in their classes (Krasnoff, 2016).

Discussion and Implications

Implications for Practice

Public demand for better quality teachers and a shift in the demographics of America's public-school student population have all motivated teacher education programs to change how teacher preparation is being facilitated (Hammerness, 2006a).

The findings of this study are insightful for teacher preparation programs, faculty members in colleges and universities, coordinators and directors of field experience at the university level, and anyone tasked with mentoring and guiding pre-service teachers. The findings describe pre-service teachers' perceptions of the quality of preparation programs and provide insight into what aspects were most beneficial in preparing them to instruct culturally linguistic diverse students. Coordinators and directors of field experience and faculty in teacher preparation programs may benefit from the study.

Implications for Pre-Service Teacher Preparation. Pre-service teacher education programs /institutions have, over the years, developed some notoriety for being large and complex organizations that are slow to adapt and difficult to change (Fullan, 2013). Ferreira, Ryan, and Davis (2015) concluded that to affect and sustain change in pre-service teacher education programs, the programs must be mainstreamed so that all stakeholders interested in teacher education preparation are willing to change and adapt to the demands of students, communities, and schools. Ferreira, Ryan, and Davis (2015) noted that the overarching goal is to facilitate change across a whole system. According to Ferreira et al. (2015), the fundamental goal is to have a holistic approach to educator preparation programs to ensure that change occurs concurrently across several policy-to-practice levels within pre-service education programs.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the responses to the survey enabled the researcher to predict the current findings, there was a drop-off in the answers. For example, some participants who started the study did not complete it. Also, the demographic questions presented limitations because some participants skipped them. Additionally, some participants failed to respond to questions related to gender and ethnicity and country of birth. Another limitation is that there may be biased responses when using self-reported data. Participants may not have provided an accurate assessment of the cultural awareness, interactions, or self-efficacy. Participants may have underemphasized their level of cultural interactions and self-efficacy. Additionally, the study can be replicated with a larger sample to allow for generalization.

Conclusions

This study indicates a strong connection between pre-service teachers' preparedness, cultural awareness, and self-efficacy in instructing culturally and linguistically diverse students. Even though this study is limited in scope, it provides implications for future research that may further improve teacher education programs in preparing pre-service teachers. Future research on multicultural awareness training on pre-service teachers' success toward their self-efficacy in instructing diverse students should be further explored.

APPENDIX A.

PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PREPAREDNESS & SELF-EFFICACY IN INSTRUCTING STUDENTS FROM DIVERSE CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTIC BACKGROUNDS

TEACHER PREPARATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

With which of the following genders do you closely identify?

- Male
- Female

Please state your country of birth.....

Please indicate the age bracket that best identifies your age?

- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 45 & above

What is your racial/ethnic background?

- African American
- European American
- Hispanic American
- Asian American
- Native American
- Others (Please specify)

Please list any language(s) spoken other than English Language.....

What is your certification area?

- EC6 Generalist
- EC6 Liberal Studies
- 4-8 Generalist
- 7-12 Generalist
- EC6 Bilingual

Where is your teacher training program located? (City, State)

What type of teacher training program are you involved in?

- 4-year university
- Alternative certification
- Other.....

Which of the following best describes the length of field experiences you have received so far?

- Less than 16 semesters
- 17-32 semesters
- 32 or more semesters

In the current semester, are you student/clinical teaching?.....

Where do you plan to student/clinical teach?.....

Does your TEP allow students to select student/clinical teaching placements?.....

Please indicate all types of field experience you receive during your preparation program, e.g. (Observation opportunities, virtual observation, or student teaching opportunities).

.....

In any of your TEP coursework or experiences, were you exposed to the concept of Culturally Responsive Teaching (using students' cultures and interests to build understanding and relevance in the curriculum)?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Do you feel you are prepared to use students' cultures as vehicles for learning?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Do you feel your preparation program has adequately prepared you to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students?

- Yes

- No
- Not sure

What portion of your program do you think is most beneficial in preparing you to instruct culturally linguistically diverse students? Please briefly explain

- Coursework.....
- Observation field experience.....
- Student/clinical teaching field experience.....
- Other (if other, please explain)

What portion of your program is least beneficial in preparing you to meet the needs of culturally linguistically diverse students?

- Coursework
- Observation field experience
- Student /clinical teaching field experience
- Other (if other, please explain)

On a scale of 1(lowest)-10(highest), rate how prepared you are to instruct culturally linguistically diverse students.

- 110

Please describe the preparation you are presently receiving in your program to instruct culturally linguistically diverse students.

.....
Please describe what you think is most beneficial in preparing you in TPP to instruct culturally linguistically diverse students.

.....
Please describe what you think pre-service teachers need most to be prepared to instruct linguistically culturally diverse students.

.....
Which of these needs were addressed by your Teacher Preparation Program (TPP)?.....
.....

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