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**DEVELOPING THE FUTURE PRIMARY TEACHERS’  
MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE**

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***Abstract***

The issues of multicultural education and the development of future primary school teachers’ multicultural competence are being explored at the Department of Pedagogy and Methods of Pre-School and Primary Education of the Birsk Branch of Bashkir State University (Bashkortostan, Russia). In 2016-2018 we conducted a research aimed at the theoretical justification and experimental verification of the pedagogical conditions directed towards promoting the effective development of prospective primary school teachers’ multicultural competence. Structurally the multicultural competence of the future primary school teacher consisted of motivational, cognitive and operational components. The experimental findings demonstrated a substantial growth of the future teachers’ multicultural competence and a positive dynamic of the enhancement of their preparedness within the corresponding components. Developing the multicultural competence of prospective teachers requires a core of teacher educators who have themselves attained a required level of multicultural sensitivity and expertise and who have a good understanding of the world as being culturally and ethnically pluralistic. Detailed accounts of research need to be conducted to comparatively learn how the issues of the development of pre-service and in-service teachers’ multicultural competence are designed and implemented in different countries.

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**Keywords:** Multicultural competence, future primary school teacher, primary school, attitude, knowledge, skills.



## **1. Introduction**

Russia is currently witnessing an unprecedented growth of human diversity. Growing numbers of people from different cultural and ethnic groups are interacting with increased regularity and frequency. Ethnic Russians constitute 80% of the entire population, the Tatars make up 4%. The overall ethnic mosaic encompasses more than 130 ethnic groups. Especially diverse is the Republic of Bashkortostan, the first autonomous entity in the former Soviet Union. Russians, Tatars, Bashkirs, Chuvashes, Mari, Udmurts, Ukrainians, Mordvinians, Byelorussians, and Germans inhabit this republic. Thirteen languages, native to various local ethnic groups, are instructed in primary and secondary schools, content areas are taught in six native languages

## **2. Problem Statement**

Throughout Russia, the increasing and changing diversity has a considerable influence on all sides of life and necessitates the design and implementation of multicultural education on all hierarchical levels, ranging from secondary schools to universities and on to the programs of adult education. First of all, human diversity and socioeconomic innovations challenge primary education; therefore issues of the preparation of future primary school teachers come to the forefront of the system of national education. It is necessary to add that there is an increasing need for multicultural education all over the world (Banks, 1997; Banks, 2001; Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2006; Sinagatullin, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to: (1) attract attention of the teaching/learning communities to the essential issues of human diversity and multicultural education, (2) substantiate theoretically and empirically the necessity of developing future primary school teachers' multicultural competence that includes motivational, cognitive and operational components, and (3) mark out future research directions.

## **3. Research Questions**

Based on the previous considerations on human diversity and the necessity to develop prospective teachers' multicultural competence, we put forward the following research questions:

- Why is it important to take into consideration the issues of ethnocultural diversity and multicultural values while preparing future teachers to work in multicultural classrooms?
- What dimensions is multicultural education characterized by?
- Why is it important to help prospective teachers and educators to become multiculturally competent?
- What are the best ways of developing pre-service teachers' multicultural competence?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The study aimed at the theoretical justification and experimental verification of the pedagogical conditions directed towards promoting the effective development of prospective primary school teachers' multicultural competence.

## 5. Research Methods

The experiment was conducted at the Department of Pedagogy and Methods of Pre-School and Primary Education (DPMPPE) at the Birsk Branch of Bashkir State University (Bashkortostan, Russia) for two consecutive years in the same group of prospective teachers. The participants were fourth-year students who then went on their last year of study. The sample size included 15 students, and the study was guided by the authors and a group of their colleagues.

The following methods were used in the study: review of the scientific and methodological literature on multicultural education and relevant issues, method of pedagogical model elaboration, surveys, interviews, personal conversations with pre-service teachers, tests, a pedagogical experiment.

Our experience indicates that the structure and content of the model for developing prospective teachers' multicultural competence should consist of motivational, cognitive and operational components. The motivational component embodies a graduate's attitude that determines his or her professional position towards the teaching profession. The cognitive component is responsible for the knowledge base that the graduate needs in the context of the contemporary human diversity. The operational component includes skills indispensable for pre-service teachers to communicate with the representatives of different cultural backgrounds. Thus, according to the model, future teachers' multicultural competence encompasses attitudes, global knowledge, and skills that they need to favorably and effectively work with ethnically and culturally diverse school children. Eventually, the Department staff was faced with two tasks: how to guide future teachers to develop their multicultural competence; and at the same time consider how to transfer prospective teachers' competence to the children who will be in their charge when pre-service teachers start their teaching careers.

At the initial stage of the experiment, i.e. at the beginning of the 2016-2017 academic year, we conducted the survey which measured the prospective teachers' multicultural competence. We calculated the qualitative and quantitative parameters of their multicultural competence along the continuum from the low to mid- and on to high grade by using the three-grade criterion: the high grade, the mid-grade and the low grade. The high grade equated with the indicator from 8 to 10; the mid-grade – from 4 to 7; the low grade – from 1 to 3. We conjectured that prospective teachers with a high grade of multicultural competence would possess a positive and tolerant attitude to human diversity, would strive to enhance their multicultural horizons, would have a considerable amount of multicultural knowledge base and an ability to use proper multicultural skills in dealing with a diversity of students. In short, this level presupposes that a prospective teacher has multicultural attitudes, knowledge base and skills on a sufficiently high scale. Consequently, the mid-grade of prospective teachers' competence corresponded to a lower level of these characteristics. The low grade was in accordance with still lower characteristics.

We began the experiment by infusing the teacher education curriculum with multicultural content in the forms of small add-on themes and topics. The prospective teachers enhanced their multicultural competence by acquiring multicultural knowledge at lectures and seminars on pedagogical subjects and while studying the disciplines on cultural studies.

In 2017 the students were offered the special course 'Developing the future primary school teachers' multicultural competence' that encompassed the topics such as 'The essence of multicultural education', 'Multicultural vs. civic education', 'Psychological aspects of multicultural education',

‘Multicultural education vs. ethnopedagogy’, ‘Working in multiethnic and multicultural classes’. Pre-service teachers gained insights into the fact that the key idea of multicultural education is to create all necessary conditions for all school students (regardless of their ethnic, cultural, gender, and social class background) to improve academic achievement. They began to understand that, while working in a primary school, it would be necessary to create a relevant classroom environment to address the ethnic and cultural needs of all children, to maintain positive and tolerant attitudes to the diversity of students and to the notion of the alien, and to provide extra guidance and support for children with alternative behavior and alternative health.

The DPMPPE faculty equipped future teachers with specific skills that would enable them to effectively teach in multicultural classes, interact and function well in an interdependent and multicultural society. First and foremost, pre-service teachers need to be skillful in interacting with their pupils and colleagues at school as well as with people from different socio-cultural and ethno-linguistic backgrounds in Bashkortostan and in the Russian Federation in general.

The Department faculty also developed the would-be teachers’ skills of scientific research by supervising term papers and final field projects. Fifth-year students who were required to write field projects on pedagogy willingly selected topics devoted to multicultural education. Most of the students carried out experiments in primary schools during student teaching and prepared experimental projects. They opted for the themes such as ‘Developing primary school students’ multicultural competence’, ‘Teaching in ethnically diverse classes’, ‘Using folk pedagogy during extra-curricular time’, ‘Working with a diversity of students in a rural school’ and other related topics.

At the finishing stages of the pedagogical experiment we conducted a final survey. The questionnaire included a series of items on multicultural education and related issues. The participants were asked to provide written accounts; in some cases, they were interviewed in a question-answer mode. Following are students’ sample reflective statements:

- ‘I understand multicultural education as an education that is needed in our republic. In Bashkortostan more than 10 ethnic groups live in harmony...’
- ‘When I was a schoolgirl I never heard of multicultural education. Now I am aware of the fact that such an education is necessary in all educational institutions. In our rural school there were 11 students – Russians, Mari, and Tatars among them. .... I guess that I will also work with a diverse student population when I start my career’.
- ‘A multicultural world is close because I have the Internet at hand’.
- ‘I am a Mari student. If I happen to work in a class with only Mari students, I will, nevertheless, tell kids about cultures and customs of other ethnic groups’.
- ‘Equipped with the Internet, we today can find any information on any nationality’.
- ‘Not only Russia, but also other countries are becoming increasingly multicultural’.
- ‘Multicultural education is closely connected with ethno-pedagogy. I think that the former is wider in scope than the latter’.
- ‘Human diversity brings forth the necessity of multiethnic education... Interestingly, there are a lot of ethnically mixed families in Russia. Their children seem to possess two native languages!’

The comments above demonstrate that the candidate teachers started exhibiting a sincere and positive attitude toward human diversity and the phenomenon of multicultural education and became more competent in their ability to interpret these and related issues.

## 6. Findings

Table 01 illustrates the initial and final scores obtained during the experiment in 2016 and 2018 correspondingly. In the table, the symbol *N* equals with the number of participants whose multicultural competence corresponds to the high, mid- or low grade. As seen from the results presented in Table 1 for the period from 2016 to 2018, there has been an increase in the level of multicultural competence.

**Table 01.** Multicultural competence of the future primary school teachers

Multicultural competence	N	%	N	%
	2016		2018	
High grade	1	7%	6	40%
Mid-grade	3	20%	7	46,7%
Low grade	11	73,3 %	2	13,3%

Our findings indicate that the participants began exhibiting a greater understanding of the nature of multicultural education and human diversity, demonstrated a deeper understanding of other domains of education and everyday life and began to look positively toward working in culturally diverse classrooms. The candidate teachers became more competent in their ability to interpret the fundamentals and essence of their future profession.

Prospective teachers gained more knowledge on multiculturalism and mastered their techniques and strategies of instruction and interaction with children. They enhanced their knowledge base about other cultures and ways of life and learned to adequately and judiciously interpret other peoples' modes of behavior, customs and mentality. They obtained a set of specific skills to address the challenges of the increasing diversity. They became skilled in their ability to interact with their peers from other ethnic groups. The would-be teachers acquired classroom management skills and came to an understanding that the quality of classroom management is largely dependent on how well the educator knows pupils' interactional and relational styles, learning styles and cognitive preferences, pupils' core values as well as their socialization patterns. Future teachers recognized firmly the necessity to continually enhance their multicultural competency. They exhibited a greater understanding of the fact that they should not only enhance their own multicultural competence but also know how to enhance the multicultural competence of pupils who will be in their charge. Also, judging from our interviews and personal conversations with pre-service teachers, they showed signs of evidence of being more sophisticated in terms of multicultural and global sensitivity and began exhibiting readiness to further conceptualize the ideas and strategies of multicultural education.

## 7. Conclusion

The study has drawn readers' attention to the paradigm of multicultural education being elaborated at the DPMPPE. Apparently, there is no exact blueprint for building future educators' multicultural and

cross-cultural understanding and competence. Developing the multicultural competence of prospective teachers requires a core of teacher educators who have themselves attained a required level of multicultural sensitivity and expertise and who have a good understanding of the world as being culturally and ethnically pluralistic.

Obviously, future research is needed to shed more light on the issues highlighted by the present study, for instance, by focusing on developing the multicultural competence of a larger number of prospective teachers. Detailed accounts of research need to be conducted to comparatively learn how the issues of the development of pre-service and in-service teachers' multicultural competence are designed and implemented in different countries. While education has attempted to address the needs of a changing society with varying degrees of success for decades (Dresser, 1996; Cushner, 2006), we are confident that concepts related to multicultural competence will not remain on the margins but will become important issues of the institutional mission.

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