

Competence Multicultural Teachers Amidst Demographic Shifts: Implications for Educational Services

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*Bhakti Iskandar, Nunuk Hariyati, Neni Mariana, Kaniati Amalia, Amrozi Khamidi, Rangga^{*123456} 

¹²³⁴⁵⁶Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia.

Corresponding author: angga.23057@mhs.unesa.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Global demographic shifts have made classrooms increasingly multicultural, demanding adequate multicultural competence from educators. This article aims to examine the urgency of teachers' multicultural competence in addressing the challenges of diversity and its implications for the quality of educational services. Using an integrative literature review method, this article analyzes 38 empirical studies and theoretical sources published between 2020 and 2025, sourced from databases such as Scopus, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns and themes related to multicultural competence and educational service quality. The findings indicate that multicultural competence plays an important role in supporting various dimensions of educational service quality. The article also emphasizes the need to strengthen teachers' capacities in responding to multiculturalism to create inclusive, responsive, and high-quality educational services. These findings offer strategic implications for education policy development, teacher training, and the evaluation of diversity-based educational service quality.

Keywords: *Multicultural Competence, Educational Service Quality, Demographic Shifts, Multiculturalism.*

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INTRODUCTION

Education systems around the world are undergoing significant changes in response to an increasingly diverse student population (Akcaoglu & Aarsal, 2022; Cerna et al., 2021; Erdem, 2020; Feng et al., 2024; Mou et al., 2024; OECD, 2019, 2021; Widodo & Chotimah, 2023) these shifts are not only impacting the geographic distribution of populations but are also influencing the social and cultural dynamics within educational institutions. This necessitates adjustments in the delivery of educational services, as classrooms become increasingly multicultural. A growing number of children are affected by cross-border displacement, either as students or as members of migrant families. Children who relocate with their families or pursue education abroad further enrich the cultural diversity of schools.

Demographic shifts give rise to diversity in schools. Cultural diversity in the classroom or school environment presents challenges that necessitate different educational services. Educational institutions, such as schools, must provide welcoming, equitable, and high-quality services to all students, regardless of their cultural background, and ensure equal opportunities and support for every individual, including those from minority cultural groups, so that no one is left behind (Rawls, 1999). Without an inclusive approach, there is a risk of marginalization or systemic discrimination. The increasing cultural diversity in learning environments requires educational services to be more responsive to the needs of all students, including those from minority or migrant backgrounds.

Educational success is measured not only by the quality of outcomes—such as grades, academic performance, or curriculum achievement—but also by the quality of services provided, the ability of teachers and school staff to recognize, appreciate, and respond to

students' cultural diversity, and how well educators can establish equitable and supportive relationships within multicultural classrooms. Therefore, it is important to examine how teachers' multicultural competence can influence the quality of educational services, particularly in addressing demographic dynamics.

Multicultural Competence

Multicultural competence is an important conceptual framework for understanding and responding to cultural complexity in educational settings. As a theoretical foundation, multicultural competence helps outline how professional practice can be adapted to remain relevant and equitable within diverse social contexts. This model, formulated by Sue et al. (1992), has become a central foundation in shaping policies and practices that prioritize equity, inclusivity, and cultural responsiveness across various human service fields. It encompasses awareness of one's own culture (awareness), understanding of other cultures (knowledge), and cross-cultural communication skills (skills), which are essential for fostering a safe, inclusive, and empowering learning environment for every student.

Multicultural competence includes teachers' awareness of personal bias, understanding of students' cultural backgrounds, and skills in creating equitable and inclusive interactions. In other words, multicultural competence is not only a set of knowledge and skills, but also a foundation of professional attitudes that underlie educational practices that are sensitive to diversity. This framework helps educators navigate the social and cultural challenges that arise in multicultural classrooms, and ensures that each student feels valued and supported in their learning process. Strengthening teachers' multicultural competence is an intervention that can be carried out so that educational institutions are able to provide adaptive, equitable, and quality services for all students in response to demographic changes (Deardorff, 2006; Sue et al., 1992).

Quality of Education Services

Quality education amidst demographic shifts demands more than just academic achievement (Banks & Banks, 2016; OECD, 2018); it requires the presence of educational services that are equitable, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all learners. Thus, the quality of educational services becomes an important conceptual framework that cannot be separated from the principles of multiculturalism.

Service quality is defined as the customer's perception of how well a service meets or exceeds their expectations (Gronroos, 1984). He explained that service quality depends not only on the final outcome, but also on "what" service is delivered (technical quality) and "how" the service is delivered (functional quality). It is important to distinguish between technical quality and outcome quality, as noted by Garvin (1987), who emphasizes the end product seen at the conclusion of a process. In contrast, technical quality is experienced during the process itself. For example, in the context of vocational high school education, one indicator of outcome quality is a competency certificate, while technical quality involves hands-on practice using industry-standard equipment. Students experience the final result as excellent service supported by quality assurances and superior facilities. Functional quality, on the other hand, reflects how teachers and schools deliver services in a fair, inclusive manner that respects cultural diversity. Furthermore, the image of the school as an institution responsive to the diverse needs of students plays a vital role in building public trust and shaping perceptions of service quality. Schools with a positive image not only attract students and parents, but also cultivate a supportive, open, and respectful learning climate. Therefore, the service quality framework proposed by (Gronroos, 1984) offers a valuable foundation for understanding how multicultural educational services can be more comprehensively designed and evaluated.

This perspective aligns with the SERVQUAL model of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988), which identifies five key dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles—all of which are highly relevant in the context of multicultural education. In diverse educational settings, the dimensions of empathy and responsiveness

become particularly crucial, as they require educators to be attentive and sensitive to the individual needs of students from varying cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds. Meanwhile, assurance and reliability help strengthen trust among students and parents regarding institutional quality, supported by tangible evidence of inclusive facilities and practices. Thus, the SERVQUAL model complements Grönroos' (1984) framework by offering a more operational and applicable structure for evaluating and enhancing educational services in the face of increasing diversity.

Johnston (1995) views quality as dynamic, contextual, and highly dependent on the expectations and values of service recipients. He outlines several determinants of service quality, including consistency, flexibility, reliability, communication, speed, competence, accessibility, attitude, empathy, and the ability to adjust to individual needs. These elements are particularly relevant in multicultural education, where students from minority communities may be more sensitive to subtle discriminatory treatment or a lack of cultural representation in instructional content. Therefore, superior service quality in Johnston's view depends not only on consistency and efficiency, but also on interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, and an institution's ability to foster positive, equitable, and empowering experiences for all learners.

The quality of educational services is not determined solely by curriculum or infrastructure, but also by how services are perceived and experienced by students both personally and culturally. This approach underscores the importance of designing educational services that are not only technically effective but also equitable, inclusive, and culturally relevant.

METHODS

This study uses an integrative literature review approach, which is a purposeful method for unifying and synthesizing various theoretical and empirical studies in a critical manner to build a comprehensive understanding of a particular issue (Torraco, 2005). This approach is chosen because it allows the researcher to systematically review and integrate the results of previous studies, particularly in relation to teachers' multicultural competence, demographic shifts, and their implications for the quality of educational services. In the data collection process, the researcher conducted a systematic literature search using keywords such as *multicultural competence*, *teacher competency*, *demographic shifts*, *educational service quality*, *multicultural education*, and *inclusive education*. The search was carried out across several leading academic databases, namely Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, SAGE Journals, Taylor & Francis Online, and ScienceDirect.

The inclusion criteria for selecting literature sources included: articles published in reputable scientific journals, academic books, or research reports; published between 2020 and 2025; written in either Indonesian or English; and explicitly discussing the issues of multicultural competence, demographic change, and educational services in the context of formal education. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria covered articles that were not relevant to the study's focus, non-scientific popular articles, and documents unavailable in full-text versions. From the initial filtering results, a total of 38 articles met the criteria and were further analyzed in this study.

The data analysis process was conducted using thematic analysis, a qualitative technique aimed at identifying and organizing the main themes from the reviewed literature. The analysis stages began with data reduction by selecting the most relevant literature, followed by grouping the data into several main thematic categories such as: educational challenges in facing demographic shifts, the urgency of developing multicultural competence in the context of inclusive education, and the contribution of multicultural competence to improving the quality of educational services. In the final stage, the researcher interpreted the relationships between themes and concepts found in the literature to draw conclusions and formulate a deeper understanding of the importance of multicultural competence in an increasingly diverse and heterogeneous society. Thus, this study not only serves as a summary

of existing literature, but also provides both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of educational policies and practices that are responsive to diversity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Shifts and the Challenges of Multicultural Education

The increase in international migration flows and global demographic dynamics has transformed the social and cultural landscape in many countries, including within their education systems. The demographic shift, marked by greater human mobility across borders, has created a new reality in the educational world. Reports from the OECD (2019) and a study by Cerna et al. (2021) highlight a significant rise in the number of children involved in international migration, both as direct migrants and as children of migrant workers. The immediate consequence is that classroom compositions have become increasingly diverse in terms of students’ ethnicity, language, and socio-cultural backgrounds. In this context, teachers are no longer merely transmitters of subject matter, but are expected to serve as facilitators capable of bridging cultural differences and fostering an inclusive learning environment. A study by Lu et al. (2022) emphasizes that this diversity necessitates a more complex and responsive approach to education, calling for a model that can comprehensively assess teachers' beliefs, self-efficacy, and pedagogical practices within the framework of multicultural education. Migration, with its wide-ranging impacts on social and school structures, underscores the importance of understanding how teachers perceive, interpret, and respond to cultural diversity in their classrooms.

This global trend is shifting the educational paradigm from a homogeneous model to one that must accommodate increasing social and cultural complexity. Educational institutions can no longer rely solely on implementing a national curriculum; they are now also required to adopt approaches that are sensitive to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Ladson-Billings (2021) emphasizes that culturally relevant pedagogy – such as selecting teaching materials that reflect students' diverse identities – can enhance students’ sense of belonging and increase the engagement of minority learners. The presence of migrant children or students from minority communities is often accompanied by challenges related to the language of instruction, gaps in educational access, and differences in social norms that can influence both the learning process and social interactions at school. Banks (2020) adds that in order for educational services to be truly inclusive, the curriculum and classroom interactions must be meaningfully integrated with the cultural values of students. Several studies highlighting these challenges are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Multicultural Education Studies amidst Demographic Shifts

Researchers and Years	Study Context	Relevant Studies	Implications towards Multicultural Education
Feng et al. (2024)	Urban schools in China and Europe	Multicultural classes challenge teachers to build equal relationships.	Teacher training in cross-cultural communication becomes very important
Mou et al. (2024)	Multicultural education for prospective teachers	Prospective teachers are lacking prepared face competence multicultural	The importance of ongoing and contextually relevant multicultural training throughout a teacher's career.
(Salim & Aprison, 2024)	Multicultural Education Based on Local	Multicultural education can be instilled through	Integrating local wisdom into the curriculum can

Researchers and Years	Study Context	Relevant Studies	Implications towards Multicultural Education
	Wisdom in the Minangkabau tribe, Indonesia	formal, extracurricular, and environmental approaches, as well as through the roles of family and society. Local values such as tolerance, mutual cooperation, and traditional proverbs serve as foundational elements in shaping multicultural attitudes.	enhance the acceptance of differences and reduce the potential for conflict among cultural groups in a pluralistic society. Teachers must play an active role in both teaching and exemplifying these values.
Promsri et al. (2023)	Strengthening competence multicultural through participation participatory media creation learning at the level school basic in Thailand	There are schools that have characteristics multicultural, one of which is caused by differences ethnicity and migration	Through intervention this, both teachers and student experience improvement competence multicultural
(Rogahang et al., 2023)	Practice education inclusive in Indonesia	Teachers employ various strategies to address the challenges of understanding both local cultural identities and global expectations. An inclusive classroom environment provides the flexibility needed for meaningful interactions between teachers and students.	Confirm importance approach teaching dynamic and flexible for answer need diverse participant educate
Widodo & Chotimah (2023)	Compilation instrument competence multicultural in Indonesian	Stage development of developed countries Keep going leading to the formation of public multicultural. Multicultural education own obstacles that are behind primordialism of religion, region, and group	There are still many teachers who feel not enough ready to handle different students culture and language. The need for integration lesson multicultural to various aspect life at school, good eye

Researchers and Years	Study Context	Relevant Studies	Implications towards Multicultural Education
		Restrictions implementation education multicultural only depend on eye lesson education citizenship	lesson besides education citizenship and also in the situation outside activity intracurricular
Akcaoglu & Arsal (2022)	Multiculturalism and primary school teacher education in Turkey	The occurrence improvement diversity culture in schools in a way suddenly and make institution teacher education is not Ready. Differences in social norms interfere with student interactions and class participation.	An inclusive and empathetic teaching approach is needed
Sari (2022)	Identity culture student Indonesian Overseas Schools in Singapore	Cross-cultural enrichment, seen from the mix of languages. Singapore Indonesian School fosters national character with educators who maintain Indonesian culture as a foundation.	The importance of strengthening the role of schools and educators in instilling national values amidst diversity without eliminating individual cultural identities.
Wang (2022)	Strengthening program analysis competence multicultural for teachers in the environment minority Chinese ethnicity	Competence multicultural become important for mediate differences, managing learning spaces that are sensitive to students' diverse backgrounds.	There is a need to develop approaches that are more flexible, contextual and sensitive to local realities. For achieving multiethnic educational success
(Lu et al., 2022)	Know how teachers deal with diversity culture in practice teach	Global middle face improvement diversity demographic consequence migration international. Teachers face limited training, overly	School need make curriculum unit education that supports multicultural education with space for teachers to explore locally appropriate approaches.

Researchers and Years	Study Context	Relevant Studies	Implications towards Multicultural Education
		standardized curricula, and social or political pressures that hinder inclusive initiatives.	
Rahayuningtyas et al. (2021)	Maintain inheritance Indonesian culture in formation character Indonesian students at Indonesian School Kuala Lumpur	Preservation country of origin but need done although be in a different country	Multicultural education is needed so that educational services for students can maintain the culture of their country of origin without fear of discrimination from the majority group.
(Ladson-Billings, 2021)	Relevant pedagogy with cultural	The importance of integrating student culture into the learning process to improve academic outcomes and critical awareness.	Selection of teaching materials that reflect diversity, strengthen the sense of belonging and increase the participation of minority students.
Cerna et al. (2021)	OECD countries, international migration	The increasing mobility of migrant families is putting pressure on national education systems to adapt.	Schools need to implement culturally responsive policies and transition support programs.
(OECD, 2021)	Global trends in education post pandemic and migration	Schools face digital and language divide among migrant students	The need to improve teacher competency in diversity
The Last Supper (2020)	Competency Scale Development Multicultural For prospective teacher	Increasing diversity Good in a way local and also globally due to changes demographics	Prospective teachers can conduct self-assessment for knowing position competence multicultural they

The increasing diversity in modern classrooms demands that teacher education programs equip prospective teachers with the skills to create equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students (Feng et al., 2024). In addition, OECD (2021) explains that schools face digital and language divides among migrant students, indicating the need to improve teacher competencies in diversity. Cerna et al. (2021) from the OECD noted that the increasing mobility of migrant families puts pressure on national education systems to adapt, requiring schools to implement culturally responsive policies and transition support programs.

Global demographic shifts have increased cultural diversity in the classroom, requiring adjustments in educational practices. At the multinational level, SEAMEO supports teachers in Southeast Asia in dealing with the dynamics of cultural diversity in the classroom

Saenghong (2023). In ASEAN countries such as Malaysia and Thailand, schools are now facing new challenges in managing classrooms amidst increasing diversity (Saenghong, 2023). At the national level, Feng et al. (2024) highlighted that urban schools in China and Europe face challenges in building equitable relationships in multicultural classrooms, making teacher training in cross-cultural communication highly important.

Demographic shifts do not always occur across countries; for example, internal demographic changes triggered by urbanization, population mobility, and national education policies have reshaped the representation and educational needs of minority groups. This is shown in the findings of Wang (2022) noted that the challenges are no longer merely about preserving culture, but also about how the education system can inclusively and fairly serve minority groups amidst the dominance of the majority culture. In this context, educators' multicultural competence becomes essential for bridging differences, designing equitable communication, and managing learning spaces that are sensitive to diverse student backgrounds. Wang (2022) concluded that achieving success in multiethnic education requires a more flexible, contextual, and locally responsive approach. Education must be able to appreciate cultural identity without sacrificing national unity.

Akcaoglu and Arsal (2022) in Türkiye observed that the sudden increase in cultural diversity in schools left teacher training institutions unprepared, necessitating an inclusive and empathetic teaching approach. Sari (2022) examined the cultural identities of students at Indonesian Overseas Schools in Singapore, finding that cross-cultural enrichment is evident through the mix of languages, and emphasizing the importance of strengthening the roles of schools and educators in instilling national values amid diversity without erasing individual cultural identities. Widodo and Chotimah (2023) emphasized that in Indonesia, multicultural education faces obstacles due to religious, regional, and group-based primordialism, as well as implementation limitations that rely solely on civic education subjects.

The growing cultural diversity in classrooms, driven by demographic shifts, demands that educators and educational institutions be prepared to respond appropriately. Classrooms with diverse cultural backgrounds pose challenges to the effectiveness of teaching and learning activities (Mou et al., 2024). This situation creates new challenges that are not only technical but also cultural and pedagogical. Multicultural education can no longer be treated as an additional approach, but must become the primary framework in curriculum design, teacher training, and school policy. Teachers' lack of preparedness in managing diversity, as revealed by Mou et al. (2024), can hinder the creation of fair and inclusive learning environments. Therefore, multicultural competence among teachers is a crucial aspect that must be developed systematically and sustainably. Demographic shifts require a transformation in the education system to accommodate diversity and truly empower students from all backgrounds. Teacher competencies must go beyond pedagogical and professional skills and be strengthened with multicultural competencies that enable them to become culturally sensitive, inclusive, and adaptive learning facilitators in an increasingly diverse society.

The Urgency of Multicultural Competence Amidst Demographic Shifts

In an increasingly multicultural educational context, the ability of educators to communicate and adapt learning approaches to the cultural diversity of students greatly influences students' perceptions of the quality of educational services they receive. Therefore, multicultural competence is essential to creating an inclusive, equitable, and empowering learning environment where every student feels accepted and valued regardless of their cultural background (Banks, 2020; C. Sleeter, 2012; C. E. Sleeter, 2013).

Multicultural competence is a crucial element in preparing prospective teachers to face challenges in heterogeneous classrooms within increasingly diverse educational settings. Choompunuch et al. (2024) affirm that mastery of multicultural competence can serve as the foundation of teacher professionalism in interacting effectively with students from different cultural backgrounds. Cultural awareness enables teachers to understand and appreciate differences; cultural knowledge provides insights into diverse practices and values; while

personal skills, such as effective communication and adaptability, enable teachers to implement responsive teaching approaches.

Uslu & Özgün (2023) based on their research, convey that diversity gives rise to the need for a multicultural educational approach so that students from various cultural backgrounds can learn in an inclusive environment.

Teachers play a pivotal role in realizing multicultural education, as they interact directly with students and shape classroom dynamics. Uslu & Özgün (2023) also explain that teachers' perceptions of multicultural competence are influenced by direct experiences with diversity, such as teaching in different areas and working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Formal education or training has not shown a significant influence, indicating the need to improve the quality of more practical and applicable multicultural training.

The effectiveness of inclusive practices is highly dependent on teachers' readiness to create open, reflective, and participatory learning environments. This confirms that multicultural competence is a core ability for developing adaptive and socially relevant pedagogical strategies. The importance of this competency is reinforced through various studies conducted from 2020 to 2024, as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Study on the Urgency of Multi-Multicultural Competence

Researchers and Years	Study Context	Relevant Studies	Implications of Multicultural Education
(Theeuwes et al., 2025)	<i>Cultural noticing</i> teacher during learning in Dutch cities and villages	Teachers do not always recognize classroom events from a cultural lens; "paradox of tolerance"; unconscious stereotyping; importance of students' cultural curiosity	Teacher education needs to emphasize <i>cultural noticing</i> , cultural self-awareness, and interpretation without prejudice. A more reflective and practical approach is needed in teacher training.
Choompunuch et al. (2024)	Exploration component competence multicultural between prospective teachers in Thailand	The increasing diversity in classrooms makes multicultural competence a crucial construct in teacher education.	Do evaluation related competence multicultural become very important for candidate self in teaching in a class that has diversity culture
(Chen, 2024)	Study about practice implementation competence multicultural in Taiwan	Real interactions increase empathy, social awareness, and identity as social actors. in understand the social pressures faced by minority groups	Action-based learning strengthens multicultural competence. Integration of community-based pedagogy and social reflection in higher education curriculum is needed.
Mou et al. (2024)	Multicultural education for	Prospective teachers are lacking prepared	Emphasizing the importance of

Researchers and Years	Study Context	Relevant Studies	Implications of Multicultural Education
	prospective teachers	face competence multicultural	ongoing and contextually relevant multicultural training throughout a teacher's career, not just limited to pre-service education.
Uslu & Ozgun (2023)	Teachers' perceptions of competence multicultural	Teachers with multicultural competence are able to manage diverse classes inclusively, while without this competence there is a risk of conflict, decreased motivation, and injustice.	Teacher Multicultural Competence as a Key Factor in answer challenge multicultural
Saenghong (2023)	SEAMEO's role in promote competence multiculturalism in the ASEAN region	SEAMEO is highly committed in promote competence multicultural to teachers in the ASEAN region	Support institution international give opportunity collaboration related with strengthening competence multicultural for teacher with
Promsri et al. (2023)	Strengthening competence multicultural through participation making learning media at the level school basic in Thailand	Teacher participation in create learning media multicultural	Role of the head school as the mover required in make policy in the form of a program that can in a way direct or no direct strengthen competence multicultural teachers.
Widodo & Chotimah (2023)	Compilation instrument competence multicultural in Indonesian	Competency scale multicultural has succeed One to reveal construct single competence multicultural consisting of from three dimensions that is <i>awareness, knowledge, and skills</i>	With ready tool measuring competence multicultural, necessary responded by the institution education prospective teachers with designing a capable educational program grow

Researchers and Years	Study Context	Relevant Studies	Implications of Multicultural Education
			competence multicultural for the prospective teacher Alone
(Rifani et al., 2022)	Multicultural Competence of BK Teachers in Multicultural Counseling Services	Guidance and counseling teachers face significant challenges in serving clients with different cultural backgrounds. The competencies required include self-awareness, understanding of client culture, and multicultural intervention skills.	The training and development of BK teachers must explicitly include multicultural dimensions so that counseling is truly relevant, empathetic, and effective for students from various cultural and social backgrounds.
Akcaoglu & Aarsal (2022)	Multiculturalism and primary school teacher education in Turkey	The occurrence improvement diversity culture in schools in a way suddenly and make institution teacher education is not ready.	Prospective teachers need equipped the skills, attitudes and knowledge required for teaching in the environment multicultural.
Wang (2022)	Strengthening program analysis competence multicultural for teachers in the environment minority Chinese ethnicity	Lack of support to strengthening competence multicultural to future teacher candidates. In addition, found that influence external can influence practice multicultural prospective teacher	Required support external including institution government in practice competence multicultural teachers with provide programs that provide chance train directly in the environment multicultural
Finck et al., (2021)	Competence factors multicultural	The multicultural competence scale consists of 5 factors: <i>Cultural Openness</i> , <i>Conscience of Racism</i> , <i>Empathy</i> , <i>Resentment</i> , and <i>Anxiety</i> . The instrument is proven to be valid and reliable.	Measurement of multicultural competence needs to be sensitive to local social and historical contexts.

Researchers and Years	Study Context	Relevant Studies	Implications of Multicultural Education
Futaqi (2021)	Strengthening competence multicultural	Multicultural competence is not only for social harmony, but also a strategy for progress and global excellence.	Educational institutions need to transform from a monocultural system to a multicultural one. Multicultural competence must be the main pillar in creating institutional and student excellence in global competition.

Multicultural competence in teaching does not arise automatically from general teaching experience. Teachers are often inadequately prepared in this regard, making it essential to build such competence specifically through relevant education and training programs (Mou et al., 2024). That matter also Theeuwes et al. (2025) similarly found that most teachers do not automatically interpret classroom dynamics as manifestations of cultural differences, reflecting a weak capacity for cultural noticing. Teachers tend to attribute student behaviors to individual or psychological factors, without adequately considering their socio-cultural backgrounds. In addition, Uslu & Özgün (2023) emphasized that teaching students from diverse cultural backgrounds requires specific pedagogical skills, including the adaptation of materials, inclusive classroom management, and strategies to reduce ethnic stereotypes. These findings underscore the urgent need to reform teacher education by placing greater emphasis on equipping future educators with the skills to address cultural diversity directly, rather than relying solely on general or homogeneous teaching experiences.

Reforming teacher education is therefore essential to ensure that educators are prepared to address the complexities of cultural diversity. However, support for developing multicultural competence among prospective teachers remains limited (Wang, 2022). any teacher education institutions are still unprepared for the demographic shifts taking place (Akcaoglu & Aarsal, 2022). Their research shows that teachers are frequently underprepared in terms of knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for inclusive and cross-cultural pedagogy. Teacher training must incorporate the development of open-minded attitudes, intercultural communication skills, and practical knowledge of sociocultural diversity.

Efforts to strengthen multicultural competence have also attracted international attention. Saenghong (2023) highlights the importance of strategic policies under the SEAMEO framework in supporting Southeast Asian teachers in addressing classroom diversity. He emphasizes that multicultural competence must be cultivated through structured training programs, regional collaboration, and integration of multicultural values into teacher education curricula. SEAMEO positions teachers not merely as knowledge transmitters, but as agents of social transformation who play a vital role in building equitable and inclusive learning spaces. These findings indicate that the development of multicultural competence cannot rely solely on individual initiative; it must be embedded in sustainable national and regional educational policies. Improving teachers' cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural communication skills is an essential condition for providing relevant and responsive education.

Chen (2024) explored the implementation of socially-engaged pedagogical strategies aimed at enhancing students' multicultural competence in Taiwan. Through experiential learning involving direct interaction with Southeast Asian immigrant women – via interviews, field observations, and community-based activities – students demonstrated increased

empathy, awareness of social injustice, and a stronger self-perception as agents of change. These findings show that experiential, context-linked learning promotes a deeper understanding of multiculturalism compared to purely theoretical approaches. Chen's study highlights the importance of transformative learning that integrates cognitive, affective, and critical reflection components.

Therefore, multicultural competence is a key factor in ensuring the effectiveness of educational services in culturally heterogeneous environments. When students come from diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, a one-size-fits-all approach risks perpetuating exclusion and deepening inequality. Multicultural competence enables educators to recognize differences, foster inclusive relationships, and deliver content in ways that are sensitive to students' cultural contexts. It supports inclusive education by reducing bias, tailoring pedagogical strategies, and building trust among learners (Banks, 2020; Banks & Banks, 2016; Sleeter, 2012). Finck et al. (2021) multicultural competence is not only cognitive but also encompasses affective dimensions and critical awareness of structural inequities. It serves as a crucial foundation for maintaining the quality of educational services while positioning diversity as a strength rather than a barrier. Teachers who are multiculturally competent are better equipped to create inclusive classrooms, avoid cultural prejudice, and design empathetic, responsive learning environments tailored to their students' diverse experiences.

Implications of Multicultural Competence on the Quality of Educational Services

Multicultural competence, as defined by (Pope-Davis et al., 2023; Sue et al., 1992) explains that teachers with multicultural competence are aware of the diversity and cultural biases in their environment (multicultural awareness), understand the differences between their own culture and other cultures where they teach (multicultural knowledge), and know how to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (multicultural skills).

Multicultural competence can be seen as a strategic tool to improve both technical and functional quality within the Service Quality framework (Gronroos, 1984). From the technical quality perspective, teachers with multicultural knowledge will be more accurate in designing curricula and teaching materials that meet the needs of diverse learners, so that "what" students receive truly reflects cultural diversity and avoids miscommunication. Meanwhile, teachers with multicultural skills can more easily adapt to different norms and learning styles, ensuring that the process of delivering educational services is free from cultural bias. In terms of functional quality, multicultural awareness enriches the "how" dimension of interaction, meaning how teachers communicate and build empathetic relationships with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, increasing students' perceptions of comfort, responsiveness, and trust (Grönroos, 1984).

Within the SERVQUAL framework developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), multicultural competence can strengthen the five dimensions of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Regarding tangibles, culturally aware teachers will be more sensitive in arranging learning environments that reflect symbolic diversity and cultural representations, such as visual materials, language of instruction, and contextual examples. In the reliability dimension, multicultural knowledge enables teachers to design learning services that are consistent and unbiased, so that promises of educational services, such as fairness in assessment or access to guidance, can be equally fulfilled for all students. In the responsiveness dimension, teachers with multicultural skills are able to respond to students' needs quickly and appropriately, including addressing cultural dynamics that influence learning or communication styles. In the assurance dimension, this competence builds students' sense of security and trust through communication that respects their cultural values, strengthening perceptions of teacher professionalism and reliability. Finally, in the empathy dimension, multicultural awareness helps teachers build emotional closeness and genuine concern for each student's unique background, creating a caring and meaningful pedagogical relationship.

Thus, multicultural competence is not merely a complement but a prerequisite for realizing both dimensions of educational service quality: both “what” is taught and “how” it is taught, so that the quality of educational services becomes more inclusive, effective, and reliable (Gronroos, 1984; Pope-Davis et al., 2023). Multicultural competence also directly contributes to strengthening the five SERVQUAL dimensions, making educational services not only high quality in terms of procedures and outcomes but also in how they are delivered to students with attention to humanitarian aspects that respect diversity (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Pope-Davis et al., 2023). Based on this literature review, the implications between multicultural competence and educational service quality can be clearly seen.

CONCLUSION

In response to demographic shifts that are making classrooms increasingly multicultural (Akcaoglu & Aarsal, 2022; Cerna et al., 2021; Erdem, 2020; Feng et al., 2024; Mou et al., 2024; OECD, 2019, 2021; Widodo & Chotimah, 2023), many countries have begun efforts to adapt their educational approaches (Akcaoglu & Aarsal, 2022; Feng et al., 2024; Promsri et al., 2023; Rogahang et al., 2023; Saenghong, 2023; Wang, 2022; Widodo & Chotimah, 2023), whether by diversifying the teaching workforce, integrating diversity into the curriculum, training both current and prospective teachers, or implementing holistic inclusion plans. In this context, multicultural competence is a strategic element that cannot be overlooked (Pope-Davis et al., 2023; Sue et al., 1992). The presence of students from diverse cultural backgrounds requires educators to have not only pedagogical competence but also the awareness, knowledge, and skills to respond effectively to the multicultural environment in schools. More than just additional competencies, multicultural competence theoretically has direct implications for the quality of educational services. Teachers who possess these competencies are better equipped to design culturally relevant learning materials, deliver instruction fairly and inclusively, and build empathetic and trusting relationships with students. Therefore, multicultural competence is not only essential for the success of the teaching and learning process but also forms the foundation for building a quality, equitable, and responsive education service system that embraces diversity.

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