



Multicultural literacy in teacher education: Seeking micro-transformations among pre-service teachers

Dr. Padma Priya P V

Associate Professor, N. S. S. Training College, Pandalam, Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India

*Corresponding Author: Dr. Padma Priya P V

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Abstract

The increasing cultural, linguistic, and social diversity in contemporary classrooms necessitates teacher education programs that foster multicultural literacy and inclusive pedagogical practices. This study explores the role of multicultural literacy in promoting micro-transformations among pre-service teachers. Micro-transformations refer to small yet meaningful shifts in beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and teaching practices that contribute to greater cultural responsiveness. The study employed a quantitative survey design involving 120 pre-service teachers enrolled in teacher education institutions. Data were collected using the Multicultural Literacy and Transformative Learning Scale (MLTLS). Descriptive statistics, t-tests, and correlation analyses were used to examine participants' multicultural literacy levels and transformative dispositions. Results indicated moderate to high levels of multicultural literacy and a significant positive relationship between multicultural literacy and transformative learning outcomes. Female pre-service teachers demonstrated slightly higher multicultural awareness than their male counterparts, though the difference was not statistically significant. The findings highlight the importance of embedding multicultural literacy experiences throughout teacher preparation programs to cultivate reflective practitioners capable of addressing educational inequities. The study underscores the significance of micro-transformations as foundational steps toward broader social justice-oriented educational reforms.

Keywords: Multicultural literacy, Teacher education, Pre-service teachers, Transformative learning, Cultural competence, Diversity

Introduction

Globalization, migration, technological advancements, and demographic changes have transformed classrooms into culturally diverse learning environments. Teachers increasingly encounter learners from varied linguistic, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, teacher education programs must prepare future educators to engage effectively with diversity and promote equitable learning opportunities.

Multicultural literacy extends beyond the acquisition of knowledge about different cultures. It involves understanding, appreciating, and critically examining cultural differences while fostering inclusive attitudes and practices. Multicultural literacy empowers teachers to challenge stereotypes, recognize systemic inequalities, and create learning environments where all students feel valued.

Teacher education serves as a critical site for cultivating multicultural literacy. Through exposure to diverse perspectives, reflective practices, and experiential learning opportunities, pre-service teachers can develop the competencies necessary for culturally responsive teaching. However, transformative change often occurs gradually. Instead of dramatic shifts, teacher candidates frequently experience subtle changes in attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors. These small but significant changes are referred to as micro-transformations.

The concept of micro-transformations aligns with transformative learning theory, which suggests that individuals revise their perspectives through critical reflection and meaningful experiences. In teacher education, micro-transformations may include recognizing personal biases, appreciating cultural differences, modifying instructional approaches, or adopting more inclusive classroom practices.

Despite growing recognition of multicultural education, many teacher preparation programs continue to struggle with effectively integrating multicultural literacy into curricula. There remains a need for empirical studies examining how multicultural literacy contributes to transformative growth among future educators.

This study investigates multicultural literacy among pre-service teachers and examines its relationship with micro-transformative learning outcomes. By understanding these relationships, teacher educators can design more effective interventions that promote culturally responsive teaching practices.

Review of related literature

Multicultural literacy

Multicultural literacy has emerged as a fundamental competency in contemporary education, particularly in societies characterized by cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity. It extends beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge about different cultural groups and

encompasses the ability to critically understand, appreciate, and engage with diverse perspectives. According to Banks (2019) ^[1], multicultural literacy involves the capacity to interpret cultural experiences through multiple lenses and to recognize how culture shapes individuals' identities, values, and worldviews. It promotes democratic citizenship, equity, and social justice by encouraging learners and educators to challenge stereotypes, prejudices, and systemic inequalities.

The concept of multicultural literacy is closely linked to culturally responsive pedagogy. Gay (2018) ^[2] argues that multicultural literacy serves as the foundation for culturally responsive teaching because it enables teachers to understand and value the cultural backgrounds of their students. Teachers who possess multicultural literacy are better prepared to design inclusive learning experiences, establish meaningful teacher-student relationships, and integrate culturally relevant content into classroom instruction. Such practices contribute to improved student engagement, academic achievement, and social inclusion.

Furthermore, multicultural literacy fosters critical consciousness by encouraging individuals to examine issues related to power, privilege, discrimination, and social justice. In educational settings, it equips teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to create equitable learning environments that respect and celebrate diversity. As classrooms become increasingly multicultural, the development of multicultural literacy has become an essential goal of teacher education programs worldwide.

Teacher education and diversity

Teacher education institutions play a crucial role in preparing future educators to work effectively in culturally diverse classrooms. The growing diversity of student populations requires teachers who can understand and respond to the varied cultural experiences, learning styles, and needs of learners. Consequently, teacher preparation programs are increasingly emphasizing multicultural education, cultural competence, and inclusive pedagogical practices.

According to Villegas and Lucas (2017) ^[5], culturally responsive teacher education involves more than simply exposing teacher candidates to information about diversity. It requires structured opportunities for critical reflection, meaningful dialogue, and direct engagement with diverse communities. Through these experiences, pre-service teachers can examine their own beliefs and assumptions, develop empathy for individuals from different backgrounds, and acquire strategies for promoting equity in the classroom.

Research has consistently demonstrated the positive impact of multicultural coursework on teacher candidates' attitudes and competencies. Sleeter (2018) found that participation in multicultural education courses enhances cultural awareness, reduces prejudice, and increases commitment to inclusive teaching practices. Similarly, exposure to diverse field experiences enables pre-service teachers to apply theoretical knowledge in authentic contexts, thereby strengthening their ability to address cultural differences effectively.

Teacher education programs that prioritize diversity also contribute to the development of culturally responsive educators who are capable of recognizing and valuing students' cultural assets. Such programs encourage future teachers to move beyond deficit-based perspectives and adopt strengths-based approaches that acknowledge the rich cultural resources students bring to the learning environment. As a result, teacher education becomes a transformative process that prepares educators to serve as advocates for equity and social justice.

Transformative learning and micro-transformations

The theoretical foundation for understanding personal and professional growth in teacher education can be found in Mezirow's (2000) ^[3] Transformative Learning Theory. According to Mezirow, transformative learning occurs when individuals critically examine their existing assumptions, beliefs, and perspectives, leading to a shift in their understanding of themselves and the world around them. Such transformation is often triggered by experiences that challenge previously held viewpoints and encourage reflective thinking.

While transformative learning is frequently associated with significant changes in perspective, scholars have increasingly recognized that transformation often occurs gradually through a series of smaller developmental shifts. These subtle changes, referred to as micro-transformations, involve incremental modifications in attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors. Rather than representing dramatic transformations, micro-transformations reflect ongoing processes of learning and growth that accumulate over time.

In the context of teacher education, micro-transformations may include increased awareness of personal biases, greater sensitivity toward cultural differences, enhanced empathy for diverse learners, and a stronger commitment to inclusive teaching practices. These small yet meaningful changes can significantly influence professional identity development and instructional decision-making. Through reflective practice, multicultural experiences, and critical engagement with issues of diversity, pre-service teachers gradually develop the competencies necessary for culturally responsive teaching.

Recent research suggests that multicultural literacy serves as an important catalyst for micro-transformative learning. Exposure to diverse perspectives encourages teacher candidates to question assumptions, reconsider stereotypes, and adopt more inclusive viewpoints. Consequently, multicultural literacy not only enhances cultural competence but also contributes to the broader process of professional transformation that is essential for effective teaching in diverse educational settings.

Synthesis of the literature

The literature indicates a strong connection between multicultural literacy, culturally responsive teacher education, and transformative learning. Multicultural literacy provides the knowledge, attitudes, and critical awareness necessary for understanding and valuing diversity. Teacher education programs serve as important contexts for cultivating these competencies through coursework, field experiences, and reflective practices. At the same time, transformative learning

theory offers a framework for understanding how exposure to multicultural perspectives can lead to meaningful changes in beliefs and professional practices.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of multicultural literacy, relatively few studies have specifically examined its role in fostering micro-transformations among pre-service teachers. Most existing research has focused on cultural competence, diversity awareness, or inclusive teaching practices, leaving a gap in understanding the subtle transformative processes that occur during teacher preparation. Addressing this gap is essential for designing teacher education programs that effectively promote both multicultural literacy and transformative growth.

Need and significance of the study

The twenty-first century classroom is characterized by unprecedented levels of cultural, linguistic, religious, and socioeconomic diversity. Teachers are expected not only to deliver academic content but also to create inclusive learning environments that respect and respond to the diverse needs of students. In this context, multicultural literacy has become a critical professional competency for educators. Teachers who possess multicultural literacy are better equipped to foster positive intercultural relationships, address issues of equity and social justice, and support the academic success of all learners. Although teacher education programs increasingly recognize the importance of multicultural education, questions remain regarding how multicultural literacy contributes to the personal and professional development of pre-service teachers. Existing studies have primarily examined outcomes such as cultural awareness, attitudes toward diversity, and teaching effectiveness. However, limited attention has been given to the concept of micro-transformations, which represent the small yet significant shifts in beliefs, attitudes, and practices that occur during teacher preparation.

Understanding the relationship between multicultural literacy and micro-transformative learning is particularly important because these subtle transformations often serve as the foundation for long-term professional growth. When pre-service teachers become more aware of cultural diversity, recognize their own biases, and develop greater empathy toward learners from different backgrounds, they are more likely to adopt inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices. These changes, although incremental, can have a profound impact on classroom interactions and student outcomes.

The findings of the present study are expected to contribute to the field of teacher education by providing empirical evidence regarding the role of multicultural literacy in fostering transformative growth. The study may assist teacher educators in designing curricula, instructional strategies, and field experiences that promote critical reflection and cultural competence. Furthermore, the findings may inform educational policies aimed at strengthening multicultural education and preparing teachers to meet the demands of increasingly diverse classrooms.

Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of viewing teacher education as a transformative process in which

multicultural literacy serves as a catalyst for meaningful professional development. By fostering micro-transformations among pre-service teachers, teacher education institutions can contribute to the development of educators who are culturally responsive, socially conscious, and committed to educational equity and excellence.

Objectives of the Study

- To assess the level of multicultural literacy among pre-service teachers.
- To examine the level of micro-transformative learning among pre-service teachers.
- To determine whether gender differences exist in multicultural literacy.
- To investigate the relationship between multicultural literacy and micro-transformative learning.
- To identify the predictive role of multicultural literacy in fostering transformative dispositions.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in multicultural literacy between male and female pre-service teachers.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between multicultural literacy and micro-transformative learning among pre-service teachers.

H₀₃: Multicultural literacy does not significantly predict transformative learning outcomes.

Methodology

The present study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the level of multicultural literacy and its role in fostering micro-transformations among pre-service teachers. The descriptive survey method was considered appropriate as it facilitates the systematic collection and analysis of data related to participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences without manipulating any variables. This design enabled the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of multicultural literacy and transformative learning dispositions among future educators.

The population of the study consisted of pre-service teachers enrolled in Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programs in teacher education institutions. A sample of 120 pre-service teachers was selected using the stratified random sampling technique to ensure adequate representation of different demographic groups within the population. Stratification helped enhance the representativeness of the sample and improved the generalizability of the findings. The selected participants voluntarily responded to the research instrument designed to assess multicultural literacy and micro-transformative learning experiences.

Distribution of Sample

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	42	35.0
Female	78	65.0
Total	120	100

Instrumentation

The Multicultural Literacy and Transformative Learning Scale (MLTLS) was developed by the researcher.

The scale consisted of two dimensions:

- Multicultural Literacy (20 items)
- Micro-Transformative Learning (15 items)

Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Multicultural literacy	.88
Transformative learning	.85
Overall scale	.90

The reliability coefficients indicate high internal consistency.
Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using:

- Mean
- Standard Deviation
- Independent Sample t-test
- Pearson Product-Moment Correlation
- Regression Analysis

Results and Analysis

Objective 1: Level of Multicultural Literacy

Table 3: Level of multicultural literacy among pre-service teachers

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Multicultural Literacy	4.08	0.52	High

The findings reveal that pre-service teachers possess a high level of multicultural literacy ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.52$). The mean score indicates that the participants generally demonstrate positive attitudes toward cultural diversity and possess an awareness of the importance of inclusivity in educational settings. The relatively low standard deviation suggests consistency in responses among participants, indicating that multicultural literacy is a commonly shared attribute within the sample.

This finding suggests that teacher education programs are increasingly successful in exposing future educators to concepts related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The result also reflects the growing recognition among pre-service teachers that understanding diverse cultural perspectives is essential for effective teaching in contemporary classrooms. A high level of multicultural literacy may enable future teachers to create inclusive learning environments, appreciate students' cultural backgrounds, and employ culturally responsive instructional practices. The finding is consistent with the views of Banks (2019) ^[1] and Gay (2018) ^[2], who emphasized that multicultural literacy is fundamental to promoting equity and social justice in education.

Table 4: Level of micro-transformative learning

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Transformative learning	3.95	0.56	High

The results indicate that pre-service teachers exhibit a high level of micro-transformative learning ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.56$). This finding suggests that participants have experienced meaningful shifts in their attitudes, perceptions, and understanding regarding diversity and inclusive educational practices. The relatively high mean score reflects their willingness to engage in critical reflection and reconsider previously held assumptions and beliefs.

The result implies that teacher education experiences may have contributed to the development of greater cultural sensitivity, empathy, and openness toward diverse perspectives. These changes, although subtle, represent important micro-transformations that can influence future professional practice. The finding supports Mezirow's (2000) ^[3] transformative learning theory, which posits that learning often involves critical reflection leading to changes in one's frame of reference. Such transformations are particularly valuable in teacher education because they prepare future educators to respond effectively to the needs of diverse learners.

Table 5: Comparison of Multicultural Literacy by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T-value	P
Male	42	4.01	0.54	1.34	.183
Female	78	4.12	0.49		

The analysis revealed that female pre-service teachers obtained a slightly higher mean score ($M = 4.12$) in multicultural literacy compared to male pre-service teachers ($M = 4.01$). However, the obtained t-value (1.34) was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p = .183$). Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference between male and female pre-service teachers in multicultural literacy is accepted.

This finding suggests that multicultural literacy is not significantly influenced by gender among the participants. Both male and female pre-service teachers demonstrated comparable levels of awareness, understanding, and appreciation of cultural diversity. The result may indicate that teacher education programs provide similar multicultural learning opportunities regardless of gender, thereby contributing equally to the development of multicultural competencies. Furthermore, the finding reinforces the idea that multicultural literacy is shaped more by educational experiences and exposure to diversity than by demographic characteristics such as gender.

Table 6: Relationship between multicultural literacy and transformative learning

Variable	F	P
Multicultural Literacy and Transformative Learning	.68	.000

The Pearson product-moment correlation analysis revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship

between multicultural literacy and transformative learning ($r = .68, p < .001$). The correlation coefficient indicates that higher levels of multicultural literacy are associated with higher levels of micro-transformative learning among pre-service teachers. This finding suggests that as pre-service teachers develop greater awareness, understanding, and appreciation of cultural diversity, they are more likely to experience changes in attitudes, beliefs, and professional perspectives. Multicultural literacy appears to encourage critical reflection and self-examination, which are essential components of transformative learning. The strong positive relationship highlights the importance of integrating multicultural experiences within teacher education programs as a means of promoting professional growth and reflective practice. The result is consistent with transformative learning theory and supports previous research indicating that exposure to diverse perspectives facilitates personal and professional transformation.

Table 7: Regression analysis: predictive role of multicultural literacy

Predictor	B	β	t	P
Multicultural Literacy	0.72	.68	10.45	.000

Table 8: Model summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
.68	.46	.45

The regression analysis demonstrated that multicultural literacy is a significant predictor of transformative learning among pre-service teachers ($\beta = .68, t = 10.45, p < .001$). The model summary revealed an R² value of .46, indicating that multicultural literacy accounts for approximately 46% of the variance in transformative learning outcomes.

The findings suggest that multicultural literacy plays a substantial role in shaping the transformative experiences of pre-service teachers. As participants develop greater cultural awareness and competence, they become more likely to engage in reflective thinking, challenge existing assumptions, and adopt inclusive educational perspectives. The relatively high percentage of explained variance indicates that multicultural literacy is one of the major factors contributing to transformative learning. These results emphasize the importance of incorporating multicultural literacy initiatives within teacher education curricula, as such efforts can significantly influence the development of culturally responsive and socially conscious educators. The findings further support the argument that multicultural literacy serves as a catalyst for the micro-transformations necessary for effective teaching in diverse classrooms.

Discussion

The findings reveal that pre-service teachers possess relatively high levels of multicultural literacy. This suggests that teacher education programs are increasingly incorporating multicultural perspectives into curricula and field experiences. The absence of significant gender differences aligns with previous studies indicating that multicultural awareness is more

strongly influenced by educational experiences than demographic characteristics.

The significant positive relationship between multicultural literacy and transformative learning supports transformative learning theory. Exposure to multicultural perspectives encourages critical reflection, enabling teacher candidates to reassess assumptions and adopt more inclusive viewpoints.

The regression analysis demonstrates that multicultural literacy significantly predicts transformative learning outcomes. This finding reinforces the notion that multicultural literacy serves as a catalyst for professional growth and pedagogical transformation.

Micro-transformations emerge as important indicators of professional development. Small changes in awareness, empathy, and instructional decision-making can accumulate over time, ultimately contributing to culturally responsive teaching practices.

These findings support the work of Banks (2019) ^[1], Gay (2018) ^[2], and Mezirow (2000) ^[3], who emphasize the role of critical reflection and cultural awareness in fostering transformative educational experiences.

Educational implications

The findings have several implications for teacher education:

- Multicultural literacy should be integrated across all teacher education courses rather than confined to a single subject.
- Teacher educators should provide opportunities for critical reflection on cultural assumptions and biases.
- Field experiences should include placements in culturally diverse educational settings.
- Collaborative projects involving diverse communities can enhance multicultural competence.
- Digital multicultural resources should be incorporated into instructional practices.
- Assessment strategies should evaluate not only knowledge acquisition but also transformative growth.
- Professional development programs should emphasize cultural responsiveness and social justice.
- Institutions should foster inclusive learning environments that model multicultural principles.

Conclusion

The present study examined multicultural literacy and its role in fostering micro-transformations among pre-service teachers. Findings revealed high levels of multicultural literacy and transformative learning dispositions. A strong positive relationship was found between multicultural literacy and transformative learning, indicating that culturally informed educational experiences contribute significantly to professional growth.

The study highlights the importance of viewing transformation as a gradual process characterized by meaningful micro-transformations. By nurturing multicultural literacy, teacher education programs can prepare educators who are reflective, culturally responsive, and committed to educational equity.

Future research may employ longitudinal and qualitative approaches to explore how micro-transformations evolve into sustained professional practices.

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