



Investigation of pre-service English language teachers' readiness for teaching in multicultural environments

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the perceived readiness of Turkish pre-service English language teachers to instruct within multicultural classroom environments. As demographic diversity expands in educational contexts, the development of professional competencies and intercultural awareness has become increasingly essential for prospective educators. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of multicultural education and intercultural communicative competence, this study examines the self-reported readiness of third- and fourth-year English Language Teaching (ELT) candidates through a mixed-methods design incorporating questionnaires and interviews. Findings indicate that fourth-year participants reported higher personal readiness, while third-year candidates demonstrated stronger professional readiness, tentatively attributed to the recency of relevant coursework. Participants without prior teaching experience scored higher professionally, suggesting a theory-practice gap within current preparation programs. Candidates from multicultural family backgrounds exhibited higher readiness across both dimensions, with differences attaining statistical significance for overall readiness. Although participants expressed favorable inclinations toward multicultural pedagogy, interview data consistently underscored the perceived insufficiency of experiential training opportunities. These findings highlight the necessity of embedding reflective practice and culturally responsive approaches into pre-service teacher education curricula to better equip future English language educators in Türkiye for diverse classroom contexts.

Keywords

Multicultural education,
Teacher readiness,
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Introduction

As globalization rapidly reshapes contemporary societies, educators, particularly English language teachers must develop the specialized competence required to manage and instruct effectively within multicultural classrooms (Banks, 2009). Because English functions as the global lingua franca, it is uniquely positioned as a language taught to students from vast and intersecting cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Crystal, 2003). Such profound classroom diversity introduces both rich pedagogical opportunities and complex

instructional challenges, requiring educators to simultaneously facilitate language development while fostering intercultural awareness and inclusive practices (Byram, 1997). For pre-service teachers, acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively teach in these diverse classroom dynamics has become an important component of professional growth and efficacy (Gay, 2010).

Multicultural education, deeply rooted in the principles of equity, is defined as a critical instructional philosophy designed to meet the academic and social needs of heterogeneous student populations through inclusive, socially just practices (Banks, 2009; Nieto, 2017). According to the philosophy of multicultural education, formal schooling should mirror and respect the cultural diversity of its learners. Banks (2009) contends that educational systems in multicultural nations must move beyond surface-level cultural acknowledgment toward structural reforms that ensure equitable participation and academic access for all cultural and linguistic groups. Within this paradigm, culturally responsive teaching becomes indispensable, as it explicitly places students' cultural knowledge and home experiences at the center of classroom instruction (Gay, 2010). Ladson-Billings' (1995) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy further underscores this orientation by focusing on three critical pillars: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. This framework encourages educators not only to recognize pluralistic student backgrounds but also to critically interrogate structural inequities within the broader educational landscape (Nieto, 2017). In teacher education literature, this dynamic capacity is conceptualized as "teacher readiness", which is commonly defined as educators' self-perceived ability to effectively support and teach students from varied linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a).

For teacher candidates, holistic readiness results from a complex interaction of theoretical knowledge, applied pedagogical techniques, self-efficacy beliefs, and a critical awareness of how personal cultural frameworks shape classroom judgments (Bandura, 1997; Gay, 2010; Shulman, 1987). However, a well-known problem identified in teacher education programs is the clear discrepancy between theoretical consciousness and actual practical execution (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Zeichner, 2009). Trainees regularly demonstrate deficiencies in their practical readiness to meet the needs of diverse learners, particularly within contexts incorporating displaced or migrant student populations (Durmuş & Korkmaz, 2023). A key obstacle lies in the insufficient integration of experiential learning, reflective practice, and sustained multicultural curriculum integration within university training programs (Kırkgöz, 2009; Villegas & Lucas, 2002b). While candidates often adopt a highly positive attitudinal stance toward diversity, they frequently express a lack of efficacy regarding concrete, classroom-level practices such as managing diverse student interactions, adapting instructional materials, and implementing differentiated instruction strategies. The gap between welcoming diversity in theory and actually managing it in practice is a common characteristic and problem of intercultural competence. Generally understood as the ability to interact effectively and appropriately across cultural boundaries while remaining critically aware of one's own biases (Byram, 1997), the intercultural competence is rarely a single skill. Instead, it functions as a mix of practical knowledge, hands-on teaching skills, personal attitudes, and systemic cultural awareness. Deardorff's (2006) process model, for example, illustrates that individual attitudes

such as curiosity, openness, and empathy function as necessary precursors to, but do not automatically guarantee, the applied knowledge and skills required for effective cross-cultural intervention. In the present study, teacher readiness is addressed from two dimensions: the personal readiness subscale captures the internal attitudinal and dispositional components of intercultural competence, whereas the professional readiness subscale measures the applied, classroom-level competencies explicitly associated with culturally responsive teaching practices. Understanding this two-dimensional nature of readiness is particularly critical within the Turkish educational context.

Türkiye possesses a long history of deep domestic ethnic and linguistic diversity, encompassing Kurds, Arabs, Circassians, Armenians, Assyrians, and Romani citizens (Aydın, 2013). This existing pluralistic landscape has grown even more complex in recent years following the arrival of approximately 3.6 million Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2023), whose educational integration has presented profound communicative and structural challenges in public schools. Both historic minorities and newly arrived migrant learners frequently face marginalization due to severe language barriers, rigid standardized testing pressures, and implicit cultural biases (Ertaşoğlu, 2024). These issues reflect critical gaps in national teacher education programs, which have historically prioritized conventional language proficiency and standard methodologies over critical intercultural pedagogy (Durmuş & Korkmaz, 2023). Centralized national curricula and a rigid structural emphasis on uniform national identity often conflict with the decentralizing aims of multicultural education, severely limiting teachers' perceived autonomy to make culturally responsive instructional decisions (Aydın, 2013; Kırkgöz, 2009). Despite the growing diversity characterizing Turkish classrooms, empirical investigations explicitly targeting the readiness of pre-service English language teachers to operate within multicultural contexts remain underexplored (Bayyurt, 2012). Recent scholarship notes that Turkish Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programs frequently neglect comprehensive multicultural pedagogy, leaving teacher candidates highly underprepared to adapt instruction for diverse student bodies (Ertaşoğlu, 2024). Therefore, more research is needed to determine how pre-service teachers develop authentic multicultural efficacy and to identify the specific curricular adaptations necessary to support Türkiye's heterogeneous student populations (Barutçu et al., 2024; Kırkgöz, 2009).

The present study aims to address this gap by investigating how third- and fourth-year pre-service English teachers in Türkiye perceive their readiness to teach in multicultural settings. 'Readiness' in this study refers to pre-service teachers' perceived preparedness in both professional competencies and personal dispositions for working in culturally diverse classrooms. By examining these perspectives, the study seeks to inform improvements in teacher education curricula and contribute to the development of culturally responsive educators (Banks, 2009; Gay, 2010). It also contributes to ongoing discussions on teacher readiness by focusing on an underexplored population pre-service English teachers in Türkiye and provides preliminary insights into how teacher education curricula may better prepare candidates for culturally diverse classrooms. Drawing on frameworks such as culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Dearsdorff, 2006), the study situates these concepts within the Turkish educational context. The research is guided by the following questions:

RQ1. What are pre-service English teachers' self-reported readiness levels for teaching in multicultural contexts?

- a. Do these levels vary by:
 - i. grade level?
 - ii. teaching experience?
 - iii. upbringing?

RQ2. What are pre-service English teachers' views regarding teaching in multicultural contexts, in terms of perceived importance, benefits, and challenges?

Method

Setting and participants

The study was conducted at a public university in Türkiye. The setting was selected due to its accessibility to undergraduate English Language Teaching (ELT) students. The target population consisted of third- and fourth-year ELT pre-service teachers enrolled during the 2024-2025 spring semester. A convenience sampling with purposive criteria was used to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria of being in the final two years of the program. These students were selected because they had completed core ELT coursework, and fourth-year students had additionally gained practicum experience, enabling more informed reflections on multicultural teaching. A total of 76 volunteers completed the questionnaire. Of these 76 survey participants, a smaller subgroup was selected for the qualitative phase. Interview participants were chosen through voluntary self-selection followed by purposive consideration to ensure variation in gender, year level, and teaching experience. Ultimately, 5 participants completed semi-structured interviews. Among the survey participants, 39 (51.3%) were third-year students and 37 (48.7%) were fourth-year students. Regarding gender, 40 (52.6%) were female, 34 (44.7%) were male, and 2 (2.6%) did not specify gender. In terms of teaching experience, 42 (55.3%) reported some experience, while 34 (44.7%) reported none. Most participants ($n = 67$, 88.2%) did not have a multicultural family background.

Design and instruments

This research adopts a mixed-methods methodology that integrates numerical and narrative data collection techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire measuring pre-service English teachers' perceived readiness for teaching in multicultural classrooms, including professional and personal readiness subscales. In addition, qualitative data were obtained from interview questions designed to capture participants' explanations, reflections, and personal views regarding multicultural teaching contexts. A convergent mixed-methods design was employed, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and analyzed separately, the former to identify trends and group differences, the latter to explore participants' interpretations, before being integrated during the interpretation phase. Using both approaches allows for statistical examination of readiness levels and group differences (Johnson et al., 2007) while also providing richer insight into participants' perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As mentioned above, data were collected using two primary instruments: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. As the first instrument, the Culturally Responsive

Teaching Scale (CRTS; Karataş & Oral, 2017), was used to assess pre-service English teachers' perceived readiness for multicultural classrooms. The scale was selected because it was specifically developed and validated within the Turkish teacher education context to measure culturally responsive teaching dispositions among pre-service teachers, making it particularly appropriate for the target population of this study. The instrument was used without modification and consisted of 26 items in total: 21 Likert-scale items measuring two constructs, personal readiness (12 items) and professional readiness (9 items), and 5 items collecting demographic information.

The questionnaire was administered face-to-face, and participants completed it voluntarily within approximately 10-15 minutes. It was administered in Turkish to prevent misinterpretation and ensure linguistic accuracy. It included two sections: the demographic information section consisting of 5 questions and the scale section consisting of CRTS. Demographic items collected data on participants' academic year, gender, teaching experience, internship experience, and multicultural family background. Teaching experience in this study referred to non-formal instructional settings such as language courses, summer schools, and private tutoring, rather than formal classroom teaching in primary, secondary, or higher education institutions. Multicultural family background was operationalized as a binary item asking whether the participant grew up in a family with members from different cultural, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds. All scale items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly agree"), with 3 representing "Undecisive."

To complement the quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposively selected subgroup of participants who volunteered to take part in the qualitative phase. The interviews were conducted in Turkish to ensure participants could express themselves freely and with precision. While the interview protocol included 11 open-ended questions developed by the researcher based on relevant literature, the semi-structured format allowed for follow-up questions and flexible probing based on participants' responses, enabling a more in-depth exploration of their views. The questions were reviewed by three ELT experts with over six years of experience, and minor revisions were made for clarity and content relevance. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee prior to data collection. Also, written informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study.

Procedures

A pilot study was conducted with 10 third- and fourth-year ELT students (5 male, 5 female) from a Turkish public university to refine the research instruments (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants were recruited via social media, and both the survey and interviews were administered online to accommodate participants' scheduling constraints and availability. These individuals were not included in the main study. The questionnaire took about 8 minutes to complete. It was completed without reported difficulties, but participants suggested only minor formatting adjustments. Based on their feedback, the researcher expanded gender options beyond the binary categories. The interview guide was also piloted with two female volunteers who had completed the survey. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes and was audio-recorded. Both participants confirmed the clarity of the questions, and no revisions were deemed necessary.

After pilot testing the instruments, the primary questionnaire was distributed in classroom settings with faculty cooperation. Survey respondents who volunteered to participate in the interview phase provided their contact information for follow-up scheduling. From those who expressed willingness, interview participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure variation in gender, year level, and teaching experience. Ultimately, 5 participants completed semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and was conducted online. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Ethical procedures were strictly followed throughout the study. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and notified of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. All digital data were stored in password-protected files, and identifying information was removed to ensure confidentiality and protect participant privacy.

All analytical procedures were designed to directly address the research questions and ensure methodological consistency. Quantitative data were analyzed using Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 32). Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were first calculated to determine pre-service teachers' perceived personal, professional, and overall readiness levels. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences in readiness levels based on grade level, teaching experience, and multicultural upbringing. These inferential analyses were used to identify statistically significant group differences across key demographic variables.

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. A coefficient of $\geq .70$ was considered acceptable and $\geq .80$ as good reliability (Field, 2018). The original scale demonstrated strong reliability in prior research (Karataş & Oral, 2017), with $\alpha = .85$ for personal readiness, $\alpha = .89$ for professional readiness, and $\alpha = .86$ overall. In the present study, reliability coefficients were $\alpha = .88$ for personal readiness, $\alpha = .865$ for professional readiness, and $\alpha = .88$ for the overall scale, indicating high internal consistency.

Qualitative data were analyzed using a three-cycle coding process adapted from Saldaña's (2021) coding framework, progressing from descriptive to thematic and then theoretical coding. Interviews were transcribed verbatim in Turkish, and a second academic independently checked all interview transcripts for accuracy to enhance credibility. Coding was conducted manually to ensure close engagement with the data. To strengthen trustworthiness, initial codes were compared and discussed between the researcher and the second reviewer until consensus was reached on emerging themes. Figure 1 below summarizes the stages of data collection and analysis processes.

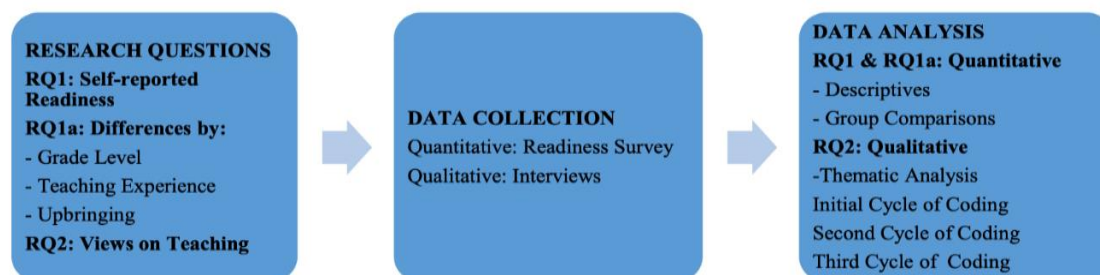


Figure 1. *Data collection and analysis processes*

Results

Quantitative Data Results

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all items and for each construct. Participants reported very high personal readiness ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.53$), indicating strong confidence in their personal capacity to work in multicultural settings. Professional readiness was comparatively lower ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.70$), suggesting greater uncertainty regarding pedagogical strategies for diverse classrooms. Overall readiness remained high ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.47$). A closer examination of the professional readiness items indicated that lower scores were primarily associated with items related to classroom management in culturally diverse settings, adapting instructional materials for multicultural learners, and implementing differentiated instruction strategies. In contrast, higher ratings were observed for items related to general awareness of cultural diversity. These patterns suggest that while participants feel cognitively and attitudinally prepared, they perceive limitations in practical instructional competencies for multicultural classrooms. Table 1 gives the descriptive statistics for personal readiness items.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for personal readiness items

Item Number	Item Description	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	I'm ready to teach in a culturally diverse classroom.	4.01	0.84
2	I am curious about the cultural values that my students have.	4.43	0.79
3	I know I need to consider my students' cultural values while I guide their learning.	4.45	0.86
4	I enjoy interacting with culturally different people.	4.43	0.69
5	In my classroom, I don't allow my students to discriminate against one another due to their cultural differences.	4.63	0.98
6	In my opinion, it's fun to teach in a culturally diverse classroom	4.32	0.86
8	Considering cultural diversity, I can teach anywhere in Türkiye.	3.39	1.09
9	Both inside and outside the classroom, I would like to increase interactions with my students who are not native speakers of Turkish by learning words and sentences from their native languages.	4.04	0.93
12	In my opinion, students should be encouraged to give specific examples related to their own cultures during class time.	4.32	0.75
13	I think that students' academic success will increase if teaching is carried out considering their cultural environment in which they grew up.	4.34	0.64
16	I prefer to teach in a place where there are culturally different people than me.	3.84	0.96
17	I think that our education system, from preschool to university, should be re-shaped to represent cultural diversity in Türkiye.	4.30	0.83

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

As shown in Table 1, participants demonstrated high personal readiness, with most item means above 4. Only Items 8 and 16 fell below this level ($M = 3.39$ and $M = 3.84$). Mean scores ranged from 3.39 to 4.63, and standard deviations (0.64-1.09) indicated generally consistent responses. Item 5 ("In my classroom, I don't allow students to discriminate due to cultural differences") had the highest mean ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.98$), reflecting strong support for equity. Item 8 ("Considering cultural diversity, I can teach anywhere in Türkiye") had the lowest mean

($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.09$), signaling varying confidence in adapting to different cultural contexts. The most consistent agreement appeared in Item 13 (“Students’ academic success improves when teaching considers their cultural environment”, $SD = 0.64$). Alongside personal readiness measures, the study also examined professional readiness items. The corresponding descriptive statistics for professional readiness are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for professional readiness items

Item Number	Item Description	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
7	Throughout my undergraduate education, my lecturers/professors raised awareness of cultural diversity in Türkiye.	3.54	1.08
10	I think that the compulsory courses I took throughout my undergraduate education have contributed to me in terms of sensitivity to cultural values.	3.67	1.02
11	I consider my undergraduate program adequate for raising awareness of cultural diversity in Türkiye.	3.25	1.08
14	Throughout my undergraduate education, I raised awareness of cultural diversity in Türkiye.	3.51	1.07
15	Throughout my undergraduate education, I gained knowledge about different cultures in Türkiye.	3.36	0.98
18	I’m aware that students’ cultural lives should be used as a tool to fulfill their learning objectives.	4.12	0.74
19	I consider the textbooks studied in undergraduate education courses adequate for involving knowledge about cultural diversity in Türkiye.	3.22	1.01
20	I think that the electives I took throughout my undergraduate education have contributed to me in terms of sensitivity to cultural values.	3.45	1.07
21	I raised awareness of cultural diversity thanks to my lecturers/professors who included their personal lives and experiences in our courses.	3.83	0.95

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

Table 2 shows generally moderate professional readiness, with most item means below 4; only item 18 reached 4.12. Overall means ranged from 3.22 to 4.12, with standard deviations between 0.74 and 1.08. Most items showed high variability ($SD \geq 1$), indicating differing views on professional preparedness, while items 15 ($SD = 0.98$) and 21 ($SD = 0.95$) reflected slightly greater agreement.

Item 18 (“I’m aware that students’ cultural lives should be used as a tool to fulfill their learning objectives.”) had the highest mean ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.74$), demonstrating strong consensus on the educational value of culture. Item 19 (“I consider the textbooks studied in undergraduate education courses adequate for involving knowledge about cultural diversity in Türkiye.”) had the lowest mean ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.01$), indicating perceived inadequacy in course materials. The greatest variability appeared in Items 11 and 7 ($SD = 1.08$), revealing disagreement about how well undergraduate programs addressed cultural diversity. While compulsory and elective courses were viewed as somewhat helpful (Items 10 and 20: $M = 3.67$ and 3.45), high SD values (~ 1.07) suggest inconsistent experiences. Item 14 ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.07$) showed moderate self-directed engagement with cultural diversity, though again with uneven levels of participation.

It is worth noting that item 7 (“my lecturers/professors raised awareness of cultural diversity”) differs conceptually from most other professional readiness items in that it captures institutional provision, what the program offered, rather than participants’ own readiness to teach. Its inclusion in the subscale should therefore be interpreted with this distinction in mind, as lower or more variable scores on this item may reflect perceptions of the program rather than gaps in personal competence.

Quantitative analysis of group differences

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences in personal, professional, and overall readiness across grade level, teaching experience, and upbringing. Results indicated no statistically significant difference in overall readiness between third-year ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.45$) and fourth-year students ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.50$), $t(74) = 0.12$, $p = .908$. Similarly, differences in professional readiness ($M = 3.61$ vs. 3.48), $t(74) = 0.80$, $p = .427$, and personal readiness ($M = 4.17$ vs. 4.25), $t(74) = -0.60$, $p = .551$, were not statistically significant. No statistically significant differences were found between participants with and without teaching experience in overall readiness ($M = 3.94$ vs. 3.91), $t(74) = 0.29$, $p = .775$, professional readiness ($M = 3.63$ vs. 3.48), $t(74) = 0.90$, $p = .369$, or personal readiness ($M = 4.18$ vs. 4.23), $t(74) = -0.44$, $p = .661$.

Participants with a multicultural family background ($n = 9$) reported higher mean scores in professional readiness ($M = 3.89$ vs. 3.50), $t(74) = -1.56$, $p = .123$, and personal readiness ($M = 4.48$ vs. 4.17), $t(74) = -1.63$, $p = .108$; neither difference reached statistical significance. The difference in overall readiness, however, was statistically significant, $t(74) = -2.09$, $p = .040$, with participants from multicultural family backgrounds reporting higher overall readiness ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.52$) than those without ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.45$). Given the small and unequal size of this subgroup ($n = 9$ vs. $n = 67$), this result should be interpreted with caution and warrants replication with a larger, more balanced sample before firmer conclusions are drawn.

Qualitative Data Results

The interviews addressed the second research question regarding pre-service English teachers’ views regarding teaching in multicultural contexts. Interview data were analyzed using a three-phase coding process, moving from descriptive codes to broader categories and final conceptual themes. Given the small number of interview participants ($n = 5$), this qualitative strand is best understood as exploratory: it is intended to surface candidate explanations and illustrative voices that complement the survey data, rather than to provide a representative account of pre-service teachers’ views as a whole.

The first coding cycle applied descriptive a priori codes derived from the study’s research questions, relevant theoretical frameworks, and existing scholarship on multicultural education, teacher preparedness, and language teaching. These codes were kept close to the data and tied to observable or directly reported phenomena in participants’ responses, rather than serving as interpretive categories. Table 3 below presents the a priori codes and their descriptions.

Table 3. First cycle of qualitative analysis: a priori codes and their descriptions

A Priori Code	Description
CULT_DEF	Definition of Cultural Diversity
PER_READ	Personal Readiness
MULTI_IMPACT	Impact of Multicultural Classrooms
FAM_CULT	Family Cultural Background
LANG_ENV	Language Environment in Family
PED_RES	Pedagogical Response to Diversity
PROF_FORM	Professional Formation (Training/Experience)
VAL_IMP	Importance of Students' Values
VAL_APP	Approaches to Diverse Students

In the first cycle of coding, a total of 9 codes were identified, including CULT_DEF (Definition of Cultural Diversity), MULTI_IMPACT (Impact of Multicultural Classrooms), and PER_READ (Personal Readiness). Each code targeted specific conceptual areas, such as participants' definitions of diversity, their classroom experiences, or their pedagogical strategies. Following the first cycle, the a priori codes were organized into broader pattern codes to identify relationships among categories. This level of coding helped consolidate overlapping or complementary codes into four thematic clusters:

Cognitive Conception: Included codes such as CULT_DEF, FAM_CULT (Family Culture), and LANG_ENV (Language Environment). These codes were grouped together because all three captured how participants mentally represented and made sense of cultural diversity: CULT_DEF reflected their conceptual definitions of diversity, while FAM_CULT and LANG_ENV revealed the personal and familial contexts through which those definitions were formed, indicating that participants' cognitive understanding of culture was grounded in lived, close-range experience rather than abstract knowledge.

Perceived Impact: Covered participants' insights into how diversity affects classroom dynamics, including both benefits and challenges.

Pedagogical Response: Focused on how participants planned to engage or support culturally diverse students through instructional strategies.

Professional Formation: Addressed the role of formal training and informal experience in shaping participants' multicultural teaching readiness.

In the final analytic cycle, the pattern codes were synthesized into four interpretive themes. These themes provided higher-order conceptual insights into participants' beliefs, perceptions, and readiness. The final coding cycle produced four key themes:

Understanding of diversity is personal and localized: Most participants defined diversity through family or regional experiences; 4 of 5 drew on hometown or family traditions. As Participant 3 noted, "For me, culture is what I learned at home and in my town... That's what diversity means personally." Other participants framed the same concept through different lenses: Participant 1 emphasized ethnic and national origin, describing diversity as "the native cultures of nations from different races," while Participant 4 framed it in moral terms, as the attribution of unique moral values by people from different parts of the world.

Diversity is both opportunity and challenge: Participants described multicultural classrooms as enriching but also noted communication and management difficulties. Participant 2 said, "It's wonderful... but sometimes it's hard to manage when language skills vary a lot." Participant 1 framed the challenge in more conditional terms, noting that students from different backgrounds are still "obliged to comply with [the country's] constitution and rules" and to act accordingly, while Participant 3 described concrete difficulties, differences in upbringing, vocabulary, and adherence to social etiquette, but ultimately characterized the experience as "a sweet and empowering process that leaves a lasting impact on both students and teachers."

Readiness is framed through strategy and empathy: Participants highlighted inclusive strategies (visual aids, group work) and emphasized empathy; all five referenced it directly. As Participant 2 stated, "I try to put myself in their shoes... to help all students feel included." Participant 3 described a similarly relational, mentoring-oriented stance, explaining that teachers "should be helpful, provide important information... and act like mentors" so that culturally diverse students feel safe and supported. Participant 5 summarized the underlying disposition more simply: students from diverse backgrounds should be approached "with respect and love."

Teacher identity is shaped by exposure: Four participants cited experiential exposure, such as mentoring incoming exchange students, internships, or direct classroom contact, as more influential than coursework. Participant 3 explained that real awareness developed only after volunteering as a "Buddy Mentor" for exchange students at their university, reflecting, "I can say this was the number one factor and decision that changed my university life." Participant 4 echoed this pattern from a different angle, attributing their awareness of cultural difference to a teaching internship rather than to coursework: "It wasn't the courses I took, but [the] internship... while teaching in the classroom [that I developed] awareness of cultural differences."

Discussion

This study explored pre-service English teachers' perceived readiness for multicultural classrooms and found that participants generally report higher personal readiness than professional readiness. Independent-samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant differences in readiness by grade level or teaching experience, whereas participants from multicultural family backgrounds reported significantly higher overall readiness than their peers, $t(74) = -2.09, p = .040$. Given the small and unequal size of this subgroup, this finding should be interpreted cautiously and treated as preliminary.

As discussed in the introduction section, enhancing teacher preparation for diverse environments is essential in attaining broader educational objectives such as equity, social cohesion, and intercultural communication (Banks, 2009; Sirkeci et al., 2018). The relatively high overall readiness levels observed in this study in alignment with existing literature, emphasize the value of cultural awareness in teacher preparation (Banks, 2009; Gay, 2010). Specifically, the high personal readiness scores demonstrate that the participants of this study possess positive attitudes toward diversity, characterized by empathy and openness. Conversely, the lower professional readiness scores suggest that candidates anticipate real difficulties when applying culturally responsive strategies in actual classrooms. Because these interpretations rely primarily on descriptive statistics, they should be treated as perceived readiness rather than definitive assessments of competence.

When examining demographic variables, variations across grade levels were minimal. Third- and fourth-year students showed nearly identical scores in both personal and professional dimensions, with no meaningful patterns emerging from the data. Prior teaching experience was similarly minor, suggesting that casual or limited teaching exposure may not heavily influence a candidate's perceived readiness. The most noteworthy variation occurred in relation to the participants' upbringing. Candidates from multicultural family backgrounds reported higher readiness scores across all dimensions, reaching statistical significance for overall readiness, $t(74) = -2.09, p = .040$. Though the corresponding differences in individual subscales did not reach independent significance, the directional trend was consistent. However, because this subgroup was small and uneven ($n = 9$ versus $n = 67$), this finding must be approached with caution. While the findings suggest a genuine link between a multicultural upbringing and heightened readiness, they require replication with a larger, more balanced sample before broader conclusions can be drawn.

The qualitative findings generally support the quantitative ones, confirming that while candidates hold favorable views toward multicultural education, they worry about limited opportunities for practical application. Participants repeatedly emphasized a need for more experiential learning, field placements, and guided mentoring in diverse settings. These concerns are seen as reflections of wider systemic issues in current teacher education literature (Bayyurt, 2012; Durmuş & Korkmaz, 2023). As observed in this study, integrating qualitative data for interpretation helps explain the mechanisms behind the quantitative trends rather than just repeating them. For example, the qualitative data revealed that participants conceptualize cultural diversity through highly localized, familial experiences rather than formal university training. This offers a highly plausible explanation for the quantitative advantage seen in bicultural students, whose intercultural awareness was raised at home long before entering higher education. In a similar way, participants frequently noted that their professional identities were shaped by direct exposure such as working with incoming exchange students

through buddy mentoring programs, internships, and other forms of experiential contact, rather than standard coursework. This explains why the survey items evaluating undergraduate textbooks and mandatory courses received comparatively low marks. In other words, experiential contact, rather than traditional classroom instruction, emerges as the primary driver of professional efficacy in this sample, illustrating the clear interpretive value of this study's mixed-methods design.

The finding that experiential opportunities, such as mobility programs, internships, and direct contact with culturally diverse communities, appear to contribute more strongly to professional readiness than coursework alone carries direct implications for ELT program design in Türkiye. Programs might expand structured practicum placements in linguistically and culturally diverse schools, programs that pair pre-service teachers with international or exchange students and create short-term mobility opportunities earlier in the degree rather than reserving them for the final year. Curricular revisions could also embed reflective, practice-based assignments, such as guided observations in diverse classrooms or case-based microteaching (Allen & Eve, 1968), directly into existing coursework, rather than treating cultural responsiveness primarily as a topic covered through lecture-based instruction.

The discrepancy between high perceived openness and lower professional readiness can be interpreted by referring to Byram's (1997) classic distinction between intercultural attitudes and the much more demanding skills of interpreting, relating, and acting on cultural knowledge in real-time. In short, candidates have established an attitudinal foundation before their applied pedagogical skills. Deardorff's (2006) process model offers a relevant perspective too, wherein positive attitudes serve as a necessary starting point but do not automatically yield effective external behaviors or instructional outcomes. This discrepancy also validates a core critique within critical pedagogy: an awareness of educational inequity does not automatically transform classroom practice (Freire, 1970; Zeichner, 2009). While these teacher candidates are clearly passionate about equity, as revealed in both their survey answers and interviews, they still lack confidence when it comes to actually executing concrete teaching strategies in the classroom. They have concerns about the practical application of differentiated instruction and materials adaptation (Paris & Alim, 2017). It suggests that candidates have developed critical awareness without the structured opportunities to apply it in practice, highlighting the urgent need for practice-based components in teacher preparation.

Conclusion

This study investigated how pre-service English language teachers perceive their readiness to teach in multicultural classrooms, examining variations based on grade level, prior teaching experience, and personal upbringing. Taken together, both the quantitative and qualitative data reveal a clear pattern: while participants report high personal readiness for multicultural teaching, they feel significantly less prepared professionally. Rather than offering definitive claims, these exploratory findings provide evidence to support ongoing improvements in teacher education.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. Findings related to multicultural upbringing are limited by the small and unequal subgroup size ($n = 9$ vs. $n = 67$), which restricts the generalizability of this observation despite its statistical significance. Also, the study relies on self-reported data, which may reflect participants' perceptions rather than their actual classroom competencies, and self-report measures of this kind are also susceptible to social

desirability bias, particularly on a topic such as multicultural attitudes where participants may be inclined to present themselves favorably. Moreover, the study was conducted at a single public university, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other institutional or regional contexts. Furthermore, the qualitative strand, based on five interview participants, is best regarded as exploratory rather than representative; although the interviews offer valuable insight into how participants make sense of multicultural teaching, the small sample means that the resulting themes should not be extended beyond this group without further research. Relatedly, while inter-coder agreement on emerging themes was reached through discussion and consensus, additional trustworthiness strategies such as member checking or a formal audit trail were not employed, which represents a further limitation of the qualitative analysis. Finally, although the questionnaire demonstrated strong reliability in this sample, it was developed and validated within a single national context, and its applicability beyond Turkish teacher education programs has not been established. In sum, the findings of this study should be interpreted as descriptive and exploratory rather than confirmatory. While this study provides a useful cross-sectional overview of perceived readiness among Turkish pre-service English teachers, the data are correlational and do not establish direct causal links between demographic backgrounds and professional readiness levels.

Despite these limitations, the study highlights a consistent pattern: pre-service teachers feel more confident in their attitudes toward diversity than in their ability to implement culturally responsive teaching practices. This suggests a potential need for more practice-based and experiential components in teacher education programs to support the development of applied multicultural teaching skills. Future research should employ larger and more balanced samples to verify the significant association observed between multicultural upbringing and readiness. Future studies might also consider longitudinal or observational designs to examine how multicultural teaching competence develops over time. Such approaches would provide stronger evidence for understanding the relationship between teacher education experiences and readiness for culturally diverse classrooms.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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