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CHALLENGES OF FUTURE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS' TRAINING TO WORK WITH CULTURAL AND LINGUISTICAL DIVERSITY IN THE CLASS IN THE USA

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Abstract. As the United States becomes increasingly diverse, the importance of adequately preparing future early childhood educators to work with cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom cannot be overstated. This article explores the pressing issues faced by educators in training to effectively navigate the complexities of diverse classrooms. With a focus on innovative methods and approaches, it investigates strategies to enhance the cultural competence and language proficiency of aspiring educators. By examining the current landscape of early childhood education and the challenges encountered in working with diverse student populations, this article sheds light on the urgent need for comprehensive preparation programs tailored to meet the demands of multicultural classrooms. Through a critical analysis of existing practices and proposed solutions, it aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the professional development of early childhood educators in the face of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Key words: cultural diversity, linguistical diversity, intercultural competence, multicultural classrooms, early childhood educators, professional training, preschool, cultural competence, professional development.

Introduction. In the United States, the landscape of early childhood education is evolving rapidly, reflecting the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity within classrooms. As classrooms become more diverse, educators are faced with the challenge of effectively preparing to work with students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This article delves into the challenges encountered by future early childhood educators as they navigate the complexities of cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom setting.

The preparation of early childhood educators plays a crucial role in ensuring the success and well-being of all students, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. However, as the demographic makeup of classrooms continues to shift, educators must adapt their approaches to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

This article aims to explore the specific challenges faced by future early childhood educators in the United States as they prepare to work with cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom. By examining these challenges in depth, we seek to shed light on the complexities of this important aspect of educator preparation and identify strategies to effectively address them. Through an analysis of current practices, research findings, and firsthand accounts, we will uncover the multifaceted nature of these challenges and propose innovative solutions to better equip future early childhood educators for success in diverse classroom environments. Ultimately, by addressing these challenges head-on, we can work towards creating more inclusive and equitable educational experiences for all students.

Main part. The aim of this study is to investigate the challenges faced by future early childhood educators in the United States regarding their training to work effectively with cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom environment.

There are such tasks of our research:

1. To identify the specific cultural and linguistic diversity prevalent in early childhood education settings in the USA.

2. To explore the existing methods and approaches used in the preparation of future early childhood educators.

3. To examine the challenges encountered by future educators in navigating cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom.

4. To analyze the impact of cultural and linguistic diversity on teaching and learning processes in early childhood education.

5. To investigate the effectiveness of current preparation programs in addressing the needs of diverse student populations.

6. To propose recommendations and strategies to enhance the preparation of future early childhood educators for working with cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom.

7. To reflect on the implications of the findings for policy, practice, and future research in the field of early childhood education.

Methods of research. The theoretical analysis of the addressed problem involved the application of general scientific methods such as analysis, synthesis, comparison, and generalization. These methods were instrumental in not only justifying the initial theoretical positions but also in elucidating the fundamental concepts under investigation. Furthermore, to provide a comprehensive understanding, specialized historical-pedagogical approaches were employed. The historical-retrospective method was utilized to trace the evolution of the concept of "intercultural competence", shedding light on its historical roots and development over time. Meanwhile, the historical-structural method was employed to systematically organize the historiography of the issue, offering insights into the various scholarly perspectives and discussions surrounding the topic. Additionally, the historical-comparative method facilitated a nuanced comparative analysis, allowing for a deeper exploration of the preparation of future educators for work in diverse preschool education settings. Through the synergistic application of these methodological approaches, this study aims to offer a thorough examination of the multifaceted dimensions of the problem at hand, contributing to a richer understanding of the complexities involved in preparing educators for intercultural contexts in early childhood education.

Results. It is worth saying that we talk about the professional training of future early childhood educators in the meaning of developing their intercultural competence (sometimes it is also called "cultural competence", "cross-cultural competence") (Bondar, 2022: 25). The concept of "intercultural competence" has undergone evolution since 1989, prompted by research findings from a group of authors associated with Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. Within the framework of cultural competence, five significant components have been delineated: appreciation for diversity, capacity for cultural self-assessment, recognition of the developmental dynamics as a pivotal aspect of cultural interaction, acquisition of formal cultural knowledge, and the ability to deliver educational services amidst cultural diversity (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, Isaacs, Towards, 1989: 4). This evolution marks a pivotal moment in understanding the nuanced dynamics of cultural interaction and underscores the importance of various competencies in fostering effective intercultural engagement in educational contexts.

According to the Dimitrov's N. research, intercultural teaching competence refers to "the ability of instructors to interact with students in a way that supports the learning of students who are linguistically, culturally, socially or in other ways different from the instructor or from each other, across a very wide definition of perceived difference and group identity" (Dimitrov, Haque, 2016: 89).

To the opinion of Hammer M., intercultural competence is "...the capability to shift one's cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities" (Hammer, 2015: 483). Additionally, Perry L. and Southwell L. believe that intercultural competence is "the ability to effectively and appropriately interact in an intercultural situation or context" (Perry, Southwell, 2011: 453).

According to data from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, spanning the decade from 1979 to 1989, there was a notable surge in the population of children within the

United States hailing from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1993). This demographic shift was further underscored by a report issued by the Center for Social Policy Studies, which highlighted the conspicuous cultural diversity prevalent among children under the age of 6 who were born within the United States, distinguishing them from foreign-born individuals or immigrants (Bondar, 2021: 29).

This demographic transformation posed a significant challenge for the preschool education system, necessitating the creation of inclusive and supportive educational environments for children and families with diverse linguistic and cultural histories. Educators found themselves at the forefront, tasked with the responsibility of fostering positive and meaningful relationships with children from these varied backgrounds. In response to these evolving demographics, there arose a growing expectation for educators to possess the skills and abilities required to effectively navigate and embrace cultural diversity within the classroom setting.

According to the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), “diversity” is defined as the “differences among groups of people and individuals based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, language, exceptionalities, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic region in which they live” (NCATE, 2012).

Since the 1990s, the National Association for the Education of Young Children has been diligently addressing the challenges stemming from the increasingly diverse population of the United States. Among the strategies employed is ensuring that children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have equitable access to high-quality educational programs within early childhood education settings. It has been widely recognized that fostering the development of children's native languages does not impede their acquisition of English proficiency. Consequently, there has been a concerted effort to design early childhood education curricula that not only support the growth of children's native languages but also facilitate their English language learning journey (NCATE, 1995).

Moreover, educators are encouraged to embrace and celebrate the linguistic and cultural diversity present in their classrooms. This involves not only acknowledging and respecting the diverse linguistic backgrounds of children but also actively engaging with and involving their families in the educational process. By creating inclusive learning environments that honor and value each child's cultural heritage, educators can foster a sense of belonging and empowerment among their students.

Furthermore, it is imperative for educators to possess a deep understanding of the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the children under their care. This understanding serves as a foundational element in effectively supporting children's learning and development. Therefore, educational programs aimed at preparing future educators place significant emphasis on the cultivation of cultural competence. Through such programs, aspiring educators are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to appreciate and navigate the complexities of cultural and linguistic diversity in educational settings.

Detailed research and analyzing process give us an opportunity to define the challenges of future early childhood educators' preparation to work with cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom in the USA are multifaceted. Here are some of the key challenges:

1. Developing cultural sensitivity and competence is essential for educators to effectively understand and cater to the diverse cultural backgrounds of young children and their families. This involves acknowledging and valuing cultural differences, comprehending the influence of cultural factors on learning and development, and fostering inclusive learning environments that are culturally responsive.

2. Language barriers are often encountered by early childhood educators when working with children and families from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Educators need to possess strategies for supporting language development and communication in children who speak languages other than English, as well as for facilitating meaningful interactions with families who may not be proficient in English.

3. Establishing inclusive practices is imperative in early childhood education settings to ensure that all children and families feel welcomed and valued, irrespective of their cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Educators should aim to create environments where every child feels respected and supported in their learning and growth.

4. Cultivating strong partnerships with families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds is fundamental for promoting children's learning and development. Educators must devise effective strategies for engaging families in their children's education, utilizing communication methods that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

5. Continuous professional development is vital for early childhood educators to enhance their skills and competencies in addressing cultural and linguistic diversity. Access to training, resources, and support is necessary for educators to continually refine their practice and effectively meet the needs of all children and families under their care.

To sum it up, addressing the complexities of cultural and linguistic diversity in early childhood education demands a proactive and comprehensive approach that prioritizes cultural responsiveness, inclusivity, and ongoing professional development among educators.

At every level of government in the United States efforts have been made to tackle the challenge of enhancing the quality of early care and education. This endeavor involves improving the caliber of the teaching workforce through enhancements in both pre-service and in-service teacher training. However, this process has encountered hurdles. Unlike the elementary and secondary public education system, the early care and education continuum in the U.S. encompasses a diverse array of programs. These programs vary in terms of duration, ranging from part-day to full-school-day and full-work-day programs, and operate under various auspices including educational, social welfare, and commercial entities. Moreover, they are funded and administered in a multitude of ways across both public and private sectors. The focus of these programs can also vary, with some emphasizing the “care” aspect of early care and education, while others prioritize the “education” component, and some striving to strike a balance between the two (Eun Kyeong Cho, Leslie, 2008).

The intercultural competence framework comprises three categories of intercultural competencies:

1. Foundational competencies involve an instructor’s understanding of their own perspective and capacity to address diversity.

2. Facilitation competencies concentrate on the instructor’s skill in fostering a supportive, inclusive learning atmosphere and fostering discussion within the class.

3. Curriculum design competencies entail the instructor’s proficiency in enriching the curriculum with diverse viewpoints by selecting content, designing learning activities and assessments, and setting an example (Dimitrov, Haque, 2016: 440).

At the heart of the intercultural competence’s model lies the instructor's recognition of their own cultural position within the classroom environment and their ability to stimulate students to reflect on their own roles and influence in society.

The intercultural competence’s model serves as a reflective instrument for instructors, enabling them to:

- Acknowledge instances where they already demonstrate intercultural competence in their teaching practices;

- Identify areas where further skill development may be necessary;

- Explore novel facilitation techniques to incorporate into their teaching methodologies.

This model can be utilized as a framework for ongoing professional development in teaching. Alternatively, instructors may opt to concentrate on one or two new areas each year as part of their efforts to improve their teaching effectiveness (Dimitrov, Haque, 2016: 440).

There are four key attributes of teacher training programs aimed at enhancing multicultural awareness, beliefs, and attitudes among pre-service teachers: 1) fostering a classroom environment con-

ducive to collaborative learning; 2) demonstrating constructivist and culturally-responsive teaching methods through instructor modeling; 3) providing field experiences to deepen understanding of diverse student populations; and 4) offering opportunities for reflective practice. While case studies and survey research have underscored the significance of these attributes, they have not empirically validated the correlation between these attributes and enhancements in pre-service teachers' awareness of or perspectives on diversity (Motoko, 2011: 662).

Furthermore, during their field experiences, future early childhood educators (or pre-service teachers) are expected to immerse themselves in diverse environments where they have the opportunity to interact with students, parents, and community members from various ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, abilities, and other dimensions of diversity. These interactions serve as valuable learning opportunities, allowing pre-service teachers to gain firsthand experience in navigating the complexities of diversity within educational settings. Guided by mentors or supervisors, pre-service teachers are encouraged to reflect on these experiences and integrate them with their academic coursework. This integration facilitates a deeper understanding of multicultural education principles and promotes the development of culturally responsive teaching practices.

To further enhance their multicultural responsiveness, pre-service teachers should be actively encouraged to engage in self-reflection throughout their teacher education journey. This process of introspection can be facilitated through a variety of pedagogical strategies, such as engaging in discussions centered around authentic classroom scenarios, analyzing case studies, or critically examining instructional videos depicting diverse classroom dynamics. Additionally, involvement in action research projects and collaborative classroom initiatives provides pre-service teachers with opportunities to explore issues of diversity in depth and reflect on their own beliefs and teaching approaches (Motoko, 2011: 667).

During field experiences, ongoing discussions with mentor teachers, supervisors, and peers offer pre-service teachers a platform to evaluate and refine their perspectives and instructional strategies in response to the diverse needs of their students. Maintaining a reflective journal enables pre-service teachers to document their experiences, challenges, and growth, while receiving constructive feedback from mentors and supervisors facilitates continuous professional development. These intentional practices not only foster a culture of self-awareness and critical reflection but also empower pre-service teachers to develop positive attitudes and inclusive practices that embrace diversity in educational settings.

To conclude, navigating the challenges of cultural and linguistic diversity in early childhood education demands a multifaceted approach. Educators must strive to develop cultural sensitivity and competence, overcome language barriers, foster inclusive practices, engage families effectively, and continuously pursue professional development. By prioritizing these aspects, early childhood educators can create supportive and inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of children and families. Ultimately, investing in the preparation of educators to address cultural and linguistic diversity is crucial for promoting equity, fostering positive outcomes for all children, and building stronger communities in the United States.

Discussion. The need to train aspiring educators to engage in intercultural interactions in the United States is widely recognized as significant in the context of our increasingly globalized world. Scholars approach this matter from various perspectives:

- exploring the essence of “intercultural competence” and “diversity” concepts;
- examining the demographic landscape in the United States to understand the origins and inception of teaching cultural competence to students during their professional training;
- reviewing prior research to identify the challenges encountered during the preparation of future educators for diversity in classroom settings;
- delineating effective strategies that foster the development of cultural competence among prospective educators in early childhood education institutions during their professional preparation.

Moreover, Ukraine, like many other countries, faces the challenges of globalization and cultural diversity. The preparation of future educators to work with children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the conditions of contemporary society is particularly important. The increasing number of foreign language groups and intercultural communities in Ukrainian cities and villages underscores the need to adapt educational programs and methodologies for effective work with diverse student groups. Therefore, the professional preparation of future educators in Ukraine requires attention to issues of intercultural education and the development of cultural competence.

In the Professional Standard “Preschool Educator” specified General Competencies (Section 4), which a preschool educator should possess. Among all competencies, cultural competence is also mentioned: “Ability to show respect and value Ukrainian national culture, respect diversity and multiculturalism in society; ability to express national cultural identity, creative self-expression” (Pro zatverdzhennia profesiinoho standartu “Vykhovatel zakladu doshkilnoi osvity”, 2021). The thing for discussion is the opportunity and importance of introduction expanded additional courses that can improve awareness in the term of cultural and linguistic diversity to the process of professional preparation of early childhood educators in Ukraine.

Conclusion. Addressing the challenges of training future early childhood educators to effectively work with cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms across the USA requires multifaceted strategies and ongoing commitment. It is imperative that educators develop cultural sensitivity, competence, and awareness to understand and support the diverse needs of children and families. Additionally, overcoming language barriers and fostering inclusive practices are crucial steps toward creating supportive learning environments for all children, regardless of their cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, building strong partnerships with families and providing continuous professional development opportunities are essential for enhancing educators' skills and competencies in this regard.

Moreover, it is essential to recognize the evolving demographic landscape of the United States, where diversity continues to shape the early childhood education landscape. As such, educators must remain adaptable and responsive to the changing needs of their students and communities. Additionally, collaborative efforts involving policymakers, educators, families, and community stakeholders are essential for fostering a more inclusive and culturally responsive educational system.

Furthermore, leveraging innovative teaching approaches, incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum, and promoting intercultural dialogue are integral aspects of preparing future early childhood educators for the complexities of working with diverse student populations. By embracing diversity as a strength and weaving it into the fabric of early childhood education, educators can create more equitable and inclusive learning environments where all children can thrive.

In conclusion, while the challenges of training future early childhood educators to work with cultural and linguistic diversity are significant, they also present opportunities for growth and innovation. By addressing these challenges head-on and implementing comprehensive strategies, we can ensure that early childhood education remains a beacon of diversity, equity, and excellence in the United States.

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