

# Pre-Service Teacher Multicultural Education in Russia: Problems and Responses

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## Abstract

**Background/Objectives:** This paper deals with the problem of pre-service teacher multicultural education in Russia. It focuses on the goals, content and real practice of multicultural education in teachers' training institutions. **Methods/Statistical Analysis:** Theoretical research was supported with empirical procedure. The survey sample consisted of 200 pre-service teachers. The authors used both quantitative and qualitative methods: Structured questionnaires to identify pre-service teachers' level of general, ethnic, social tolerance, and focused interviews with 8 respondents to investigate pre-service teachers' knowledge, views and attitudes. **Findings:** Analyzing in comparative perspective modern standards of university education, teacher training programs and curriculum, we found out that multicultural education in Russia is defined in the context of ethnic, language and religious diversity. Multicultural dimension is implemented primarily within the framework of additive approach. The authors argue that under current reforms extra-curricular activities are the main resource of effective pre-service teacher multicultural education. The empirical research highlights the need for a revision of pre-service teacher multicultural education. The results indicate lack of practical training, such as skills development courses, master classes, case study. Almost 1/3 of pre-service teachers, participating in the research, demonstrate lack of relevant skills and confidence in their ability to work in culturally diverse classroom. **Application/Improvements:** The results are of pedagogical interest, it can help university staff to comprehend the problems of multicultural education faced in Russia and to activate necessary changes.

**Keywords:** Multicultural Education, Multicultural Competence, Pre-Service Teacher

## 1. Introduction

Globalization, internationalization in the fields of economy, politics, science and culture, as well as growing migration are radically changing the image of the modern world. Personality development is occurring today in conditions of multiculturalism. The main goals of the higher education include the preparation of young people for professional work in a multicultural society. This issue is particularly acute for the higher teachers' training institutions.

Increasing cultural diversity poses many problems for the modern teacher: Teaching (what and how to teach in order to promote tolerance and social cohesion, how

to improve the academic performance of students under conditions of linguistic diversity, etc.), personal (how to overcome the teacher's own prejudices and stereotypes).

The problem of training and education in a culturally diverse environment is solved in many countries of the modern world in the framework of multicultural education.

The pioneers in this field can be considered the states historically formed as a result of voluntary mass immigration of people from other countries: Australia, Canada and the United States, where the multicultural education concepts have been developed and implemented since the 70's of the last century. The concepts are based on the multiculturalism ideology

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and policy that recognize the value of cultural pluralism, the relevance and importance of diversity and variety of cultures.

The development of multicultural education is an urgent issue for all regions and territories of the multiethnic, multicultural, multilingual Russian Federation.

Problems of education in a multicultural society are now the subject of numerous psychological and educational research studies. Multicultural education is presented as an essential component of general education, the priority tasks of which is the preparation of the younger generation for life in a multicultural society and providing representatives of different cultural groups with equal educational opportunities<sup>1-6</sup>. This entails the need for systemic school reform, suggests revising the content of general school education and teacher's pedagogical culture change.

In this regard, much attention is focused today on the problem of pre-service teacher training for the professional work in a multicultural society<sup>7-10</sup>. The researchers believe that the modern teacher must be competent in the field of social sciences (history, sociology, cultural, ethnic psychology, etc.), to have a positive attitude toward his own cultural group and other ones. An important requirement is a high level of pedagogical skills, including the ability to overcome prejudices and conflicts, to develop methods and techniques helping to improve academic achievement of students being representatives of different racial, ethnic, and social groups<sup>2</sup>.

In recent years, the western scientists conduct with increasing frequency qualitative research in the context of multicultural education, study the beliefs and perceptions of teachers about the role of multicultural education in the modern society, the problems faced by the teacher in culturally diverse classroom<sup>11,12</sup>.

There are no comprehensive studies of the problem of pre-service teachers' multicultural education in the Russian pedagogy. Attention is paid to specific aspects, such as multicultural education of future teachers in the process of foreign language learning<sup>13</sup>, multicultural education in the context of the pre-service history teacher training<sup>14</sup>, problem of the formation of a multicultural competence of the future teacher<sup>15</sup>, use of the potential of extracurricular activities in the process of multicultural education of students<sup>16,17</sup>.

"Tolerance" is one of the key Russian multicultural education concepts; it is defined as an active position which implies acceptance of the other people as they are; as a mental intention to understand without reversing one's opinion; as a respect for other people's positions in conjunction with readiness for mutual change in position as a result of intelligent and unprejudiced dialogue<sup>18,19</sup>. In the context of our subject, we emphasize the studies on the problem of formation of tolerance in students that are going to become teachers<sup>20,21</sup>.

Despite the fact that the need for multicultural education of future teachers is recognized and declared by Russian researchers, the study and analysis of actual practice is still neglected. There are no qualitative studies enabling to see the problems of multicultural education through the eyes of students and teachers of pedagogical universities.

## 2. Goals and Hypothesis

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the problems and prospects of multicultural education of future teachers in modern Russia; to compare trends common for the Western countries and substantiate the national Russian specifics. We believe that the implementation of multicultural education in the practice of higher education institutions is carried out using the additive approach, which hampers the efficient preparation of future teachers for professional work in a culturally diverse environment.

## 3. Methods

A set of theoretical and empirical methods was used in the course of the study. In the first stage of the study, the authors carried out an analysis of theoretical approaches to multicultural education, comparative analysis of the current regulatory and legal acts, federal state standards concerning the teaching, psychology and pedagogical education, curricula, programs and teaching materials on multicultural education. The second stage included an empirical study of readiness of modern future teachers for professional work in a culturally diverse classroom. The study involved 200 students from 4 universities of the three regions of the Russian Federation (Moscow, Vladimir Region, and Republic of Mordovia). During the empirical study, both quantitative and qualitative

methods were used. We used an original standardized questionnaire which allowed determining the sex and age of respondents, their level of education and specifics of training, as well as subjective estimates and positions regarding the studied issue. Diagnosis of the respondents' level of tolerance was carried out using the "Index of Tolerance" express questionnaire<sup>22</sup>, which included three scales: ethnic tolerance, social tolerance, tolerance as a personality trait (personal tolerance) and revealed the overall index of tolerance. The questionnaire contains 22 statements, the respondent is asked to evaluate each of which on a 6-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". For quantitative analysis the overall result is calculated without division into subscales. For qualitative analysis of the tolerance aspects, the division into subscales was used. The "ethnic tolerance" subscale reveals the person's attitude toward other ethnic groups, and his/her position in the field of intercultural communication. The "social tolerance" subscale allows to examine tolerance and intolerance manifestations in relation to various social groups, as well as to study the mindset of the individual in relation to certain social processes. The "tolerance as a trait of personality" subscale includes items that reveal personality traits, attitudes and beliefs, which largely determine the attitude of the person toward the world. Data processing and analysis was performed using SPSS package. In the process of empirical research, the authors also conducted 8 focused interviews clarifying and specifying the visions of the future teachers of the essence of multicultural education.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Document Analyses

In the first stage of the study, the authors carried out the analysis of normative legal documents, educational and teaching materials that reflect the content, forms and methods of multicultural education in modern Russian institutions of higher pedagogical education.

In the Russian pedagogical science, the ideas of multicultural education have been widely used since the 1990's. Sudden political, social and demographic changes in the country, the intensification of ethnic and cultural self-determination processes have actualized the search for concepts that could respond to the challenges of our time. In the Concept of Multicultural Education in

Higher Education Institutions of the Russian Federation<sup>23</sup> it is highlighted that "in the present conditions, we should talk not only about the international education as "means of formation and development of a sense of friendship between the peoples...", but also about the education of culture of interpersonal relations, taking into account peculiarities of the culture-bearers". In the present concept, the multicultural education is considered to be an important mechanism of introduction of young people their native, Russian and world culture. Among the main tasks: acquisition of knowledge about the cultural diversity of the world; formation of ideas about cultural differences as a source of social progress and self-improvement; reinforcement of respect for the student's own culture; development of intercultural interaction skills<sup>23</sup>.

The study showed that in the Russian pedagogical science, the multicultural education is considered in the context of ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of society, by contrast with the Western tradition, which also includes in problem field social, gender differences, differences in sexual orientation and special needs<sup>2,24</sup>.

Russia's joining the Bologna process has stimulated the reformation of the higher education system, including the system of teacher training. However, the key ideas of multicultural education being actively developed and implemented by individual researchers and experienced teacher have been only partially reflected in official documents: "Teacher training" and "Psychological and pedagogical education" Federal State Education Standards adopted in 2010-2011, and in new versions of these documents registered in 2016. For example, the "Teacher training" standard does not contain the concept of "multicultural education"; the competences necessary for the teacher training programs graduates include the ability to be tolerant when facing social, cultural and personal differences.

The requirements to graduates of the "Psychological and pedagogical education" programs are more clearly defined and focused on professional work in the conditions of ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. In particular, the standard states that the graduate should be able to conduct professional work in a multicultural environment, taking into account the features of socio-cultural development situations<sup>25</sup>. It should be explained that the "Psychological and pedagogical education" students are trained for teaching activities at the level

of pre-school and primary education, as well as for socio-pedagogical and psycho-pedagogical activities in educational institutions and social institutions.

Formation of the necessary competencies occurs, first of all, in the course of educational activity of students.

“Multicultural education” as a separate subject is included as a mandatory one in the basic part of the professional cycle of the “Psychological and pedagogical education” federal standards. The main objective of this course is to form a system of ideas and concepts on the basics of multicultural education, to develop the students’ willingness to design the content of multicultural education and to creatively use the modern methods and technologies of multicultural education in the professional activity<sup>6</sup>. The study results show that the “Multicultural education” course is focused on the ethnic issues.<sup>6,26</sup> Textbook authors are referring to foreign, mostly American experience, demonstrating and proving the conceptual differences.

In particular, according to<sup>6</sup>, in each country the researchers are developing approaches to multicultural education depending on the prevailing traditions and socio-cultural factors. Thus, the issue of non-traditional sexual orientation in Russia is among the most sensitive matters and, in the opinion of teachers, it shall be introduced to students within the context of natural sciences, such as biology, medicine; the issues of education of children with disabilities are considered in the course of inclusive education. The fact that the multicultural education in the Russian pedagogical theory and practice is limited by the framework of national and ethnic culture, in our opinion, contributes to a better understanding of this phenomenon and a focused development of conceptual basis, methodologies and technologies.

Certain objectives of multicultural education are solved during the courses of study such as “Ethnic Psychology”, “Ethnic Pedagogy”, “Psychology of ethnic conflict” and “Intercultural communication”. These subjects are included in the variative part of different training curriculum, but the feasibility of their inclusion is determined by each institution independently.

In the process of studying the content of multicultural education in the Russian Federation, we focused our attention on the concept of<sup>27</sup> based on the understanding of the four basic approaches to multicultural curriculum

reform. Comparative analysis of the federal state standards, curriculum, educational programs allows making conclusion that multicultural pre-service teacher education at Russian higher educational institutions is carried out mainly in the context of an additive approach that provides for inclusion of separate courses and subjects in the educational plans and programs, but does not provide for revision and a fundamental change of the content of education, reforming the system as a whole.

## 4.2. Problems and Perspectives

The study showed that there are a number of urgent, but unresolved issues, among them is the problem of in-service training, the formation and development of multicultural competence of pedagogical university professors. Every professor, no matter what course he gives, is a bearer of a model of the professional behavior in a culturally diverse classroom. The role of the professor as a translator of cultural values and norms is crucial: As a person, the professor is a role model, he\she shows through personal example how to accept and appreciate a different opinion. When asked by one of pedagogical student: “What should I do if I have a new pupil in the class from a refugee family or speaking Russian badly?” not only must the “Multicultural education” professor be ready to respond, but other professors too. Within programs of additional vocational education, Russian universities are offering today courses, seminars and trainings which are aimed at forming and developing multicultural competence of the university staff, i.e., the integrative properties of the person, which allow to interact effectively with other cultures at all levels of intercultural communication in all area of cooperation. Regular in-service education is necessary for Russian university professors, but the choice of program remains at their discretion. As practice shows, multicultural education is not among the most popular courses.

Unfortunately, so far in Russia there have been no studies conducted that would allow drawing conclusions about the level of formation of the multicultural competence of professors of pedagogical education institutions, their mindsets and attitude to the problem.

Another urgent problem is the organization of teaching practice of students in classes with mixed ethnic composition, the development of a system of supervision

by experienced teachers, which would facilitate the acquisition by students of professional skills to work in a multicultural environment, develop their ability to make adjustments in the learning process in accordance with the pupils' characteristics and needs.

Multicultural education of future teachers cannot be limited to the scope of academic subjects. In Russian universities practice, there has been a wide experience accumulated of multicultural education implemented in extracurricular activities; in particular, the original models have been developed and successfully operate in the Stavropol State University, Orenburg State University and Udmurt State University<sup>28</sup>.

Student self-government organizations, professional student societies and clubs bringing together representatives of different cultures have significant educational potential. For example<sup>16</sup>, has proposed a productive idea of creating a linguistic club as the basis for multicultural education of students. Here is a striking example: The RUDN University International Cultural Center ("Interclub"), where there are student art groups and clubs, independent amateur teams of people from Latin America, Southeast Asia, Africa and Russia regions.

In modern society, the museum has a rich potential of multicultural education as it is playing a significant role in shaping the value system, the introduction of young people to the historical and cultural heritage, promoting tolerance. In addition to the active use of the resources of existing museums, the museums are created directly in the educational institution. A good example of this is the experience of RUDN University, where the RUDN History Museum (before 2010 it was called the Museum of Peoples' Culture) has been functioning for many years. Today, the RUDN History Museum is not only a collection of showpieces from different countries, reflecting the age-old customs and traditions of the material and spiritual culture of the peoples of the world, but also funds demonstrating the extent of scientific and educational activities of the university.

Academic supervision programs which are implemented in a number of internationally-oriented universities of the Russian Federation, have also a significant potential for the formation of a multicultural competence of future teachers and effective multicultural education. In particular, the experience of RUDN University is unique. Supervision there is an effective system of interaction between Russian senior students with

first-year students (primarily foreign-born), which allows to quickly solve a number of crucial tasks, such as helping underachievers, supporting international students in the process of adaptation to the new conditions, familiarizing them with the university life.

Supervision is first of all a volunteering based on the principles of voluntariness and unselfishness. At the same time, the mentoring student obtains a valuable social experience, develops social skills such as communication skills, experience of responsible interaction in a multicultural environment, leadership skills, discipline and initiative. Supervision program not only contributes to the solution of problems of foreign students' adaptation, but also contributes to the formation of multicultural competence of all process participants.

These examples are particular cases, the experience of certain universities. If we want to see a multicultural teacher in every school, every class, then the practice of such extracurricular activities in pedagogical universities and colleges should be wide-scale.

### 4.3 Empirical Research

In the second stage we conducted an empirical study the main objective of which was to determine how the future teachers' level of knowledge, skills and competences meet the challenges of the modern multicultural society; whether they feel confident being at the culturally diverse classroom entrance.

As mentioned above, the study involved 200 pedagogic students from 4 universities of three regions of the Russian Federation, of which 154 respondents were female and 46 were male, aged 19 to 24 years. All respondents were attendants of different Bachelor's degree programs, of 4th (82.2%) and 5th (17.8%) year of study.

About a third of respondents (35.1%) studied "Multicultural education" course at the university, 33.5% of respondents attended an "Ethnic Pedagogy" course, 29.7% attended the "Intercultural Communication" course and only 4.3% studied "Ethnic Psychology" course.

Because among the main requirements for future teachers graduating different Bachelor's degree programs a tolerant attitude to the social and cultural differences was stated, we conducted a diagnostics of the level of tolerance among the participants in the study (see description of methods of research). According to the results of the diagnostics, the average level of tolerance prevails (91%, 182 respondents), indicating that there is

a combination of tolerant and intolerant traits in future teachers. Only 1% of respondents (2 persons) showed a low level of tolerance, and 8% (16 persons) demonstrated a high level of tolerance (Figure 1).

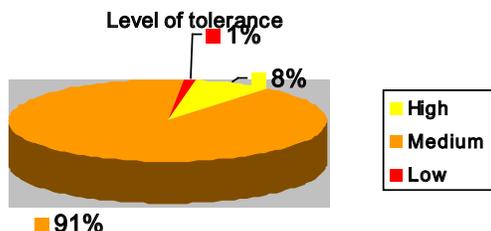


Figure 1. Level of tolerance.

Analysis of the results obtained on the subscales showed that the average level of respondents' ethnic and social tolerance prevails (Figures 2 and 3). But the interesting fact is that 13% of respondents demonstrated a high level of ethnic tolerance, and only 7% showed a high level of social tolerance.

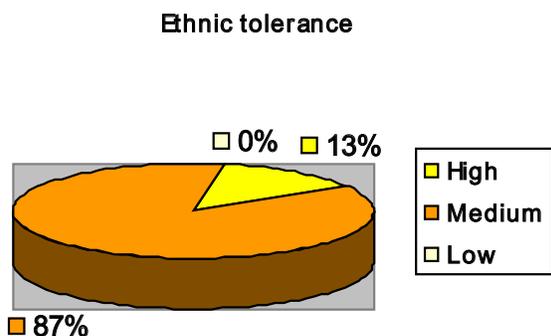


Figure 2. Level of ethnic tolerance.

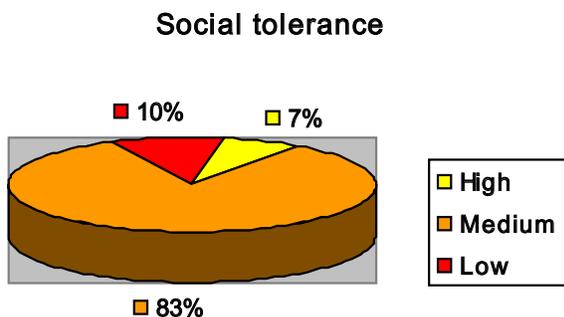


Figure 3. Level of social tolerance.

As shown in Figures 2, 3, there were no respondents with a low level of ethnic tolerance, whereas the low

level of social tolerance was demonstrated by 10% of respondents.

There were no statistically significant differences detected in terms of age, sex, year of study. There was no difference between the students who attended and did not attend special courses.

Respondents also were asked to rate their level of readiness to work in a culturally diverse classroom. 38% of respondents rated their level of training as insufficient for dealing with ethnically mixed groups of students, 7% of respondents believed that they were not ready to work in such an environment. They expressed doubt with regard to their abilities to organize intercultural interaction, to carry out socio-cultural adaptation of children from migrant families, to take into account culturally determined cognitive styles of pupils when planning the educational process and evaluating their achievements.

Despite the fact that the Russian pedagogical science did not include the differences in sexual orientation in the range of problems of multicultural education, we have included a point of readiness to work with same-sex families in our original questionnaire. Comparative analysis results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the analysis of readiness to work in the multiethnic classroom and with same-sex families

Are you ready to.....	Ready	Not Quite Ready	Not Ready	No Answer
work in multiethnic classroom	55%	38%	7%	0%
work with gay and lesbian families	23%	24%	48%	5%

The results obtained in the course of the survey were confirmed and concretized by means of focused interviews. The study involved 8 students, 4 girls and 4 boys aged 21-22 years. All respondents recognized the importance of multicultural education, the need for professional training for working in a culturally diverse classroom. The special courses attendants (4 interviewees studied "Multicultural education" and "Ethnic Pedagogy" and one interviewee studied "Intercultural Communication") demonstrated a clear understanding of the nature and objectives of multicultural education, the problems faced by the modern teacher in a culturally diverse classroom. However, all interviewees showed an insufficient level of multicultural education technologies

mastering. When students were asked to offer solutions to a case study typical for the modern multicultural Russian school, it caused certain difficulties. Only 2 of the 8 student offered acceptable options and explained their decision. In general, all interviewees mentioned that there was an insufficient number of such forms of work at the university as master classes, trainings, case studies, which would contribute to the formation of the necessary skills, including the ability to make decisions in a problem situation, to use all available resources, both personal and society ones.

We believe that it is advisable to continue research using a larger sample and a larger number of Russian regions.

## 5. Conclusion

In the Russian pedagogical theory and practice, the multicultural education is considered mainly in the context of ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of modern society, which contributes to a better understanding of this phenomenon and to a focused development of conceptual frameworks, methods and technologies.

Multicultural education of future teachers is aimed at preparing them for a responsible and productive professional teaching activity in a multiethnic, multi-confessional, multilingual educational environment.

Despite the fact that the necessity of formation of the future teacher's multicultural competence is reflected in the fundamental document regulating the content of teacher education, and this necessity is evident for the professionals, there is still a number of pressing problems remained unresolved.

The methodological component of multicultural education in higher educational institutions has been underdeveloped: students acquire mainly theoretical knowledge, but the mastering the effective techniques and technologies, mechanisms for the implementation of multicultural education, tracking of the results is an exception rather than a wide-scale practice.

An urgent problem is the in-service education and formation of the multicultural competence in the pedagogical higher educational institutions teaching staff.

Possibility of effective implementation of multicultural education of future teachers is determined by the complex of socio-cultural, economic, political and pedagogical factors. The content of education is regulated by state

standards, formal requirements for educational programs and curricula that are not always provide conditions for a full realization of the ideas of multicultural education.

In this regard, it is necessary to use the potential of extracurricular activities, to create of conditions for the formation of students' skills of pedagogical work in a culturally diverse environment through a system of extracurricular activities, research projects and mentoring.

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