

Preparing future teachers for multicultural classrooms: the state of play in Australia

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Abstract

Purpose – The study aims to explore how multicultural education is understood in Australia, the extent to which initial teacher education (ITE) programmes prepare pre-service teachers (PSTs) with the necessary skills and knowledge and the perceived readiness of PSTs to engage with students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is based on a systematic review of studies on multicultural education in ITE programmes. It analyses the curricula, pedagogical methods and practical training provided to PSTs, examining the gaps in teacher preparedness, especially regarding non-English speaking backgrounds.

Findings – The review highlights the gaps in preparing teachers for multicultural classrooms in Australia. Despite the growing diversity in schools, multicultural education is unevenly integrated into curricula. Additionally, PSTs frequently reported insufficient practical training and low self-efficacy in managing diverse classroom environments with a high proportion of students from CALD backgrounds.

Research limitations/implications – Given that this review focuses explicitly on ITE programmes in Australia, it may have limited generalisability to other contexts. The study has implications for conceptualising and designing ITE programmes, as well as for the training and development of teacher educators who prepare future teachers.

Originality/value – This review offers an overview and takes stock of the research on multicultural education in Australia. In doing so, the authors identify the strengths and gaps in the existing teacher preparation programmes and offer evidence-based approaches and practical strategies to further the agenda of fostering inclusive classrooms for culturally diverse learners.

Keywords Multicultural education, Initial teacher education, Preservice teachers, Teacher preparedness, Australia, Cultural diversity, Inclusive education

Paper type Literature review



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Multicultural education in Australia

Australia's classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, with nearly 25% of students coming from a language background other than English ([Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022](#)). While this diversity enhances educational environments by fostering cross-cultural understanding and global perspectives, it also presents significant challenges for teachers who must navigate the complexities of multicultural instruction. Many educators feel unprepared to manage culturally diverse classrooms, with Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2019) reporting that only 26% of teachers globally consider themselves well-prepared for multicultural teaching. This lack of preparedness highlights gaps in both initial teacher education (ITE) and ongoing professional development (PD). [Forrest et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Nguyen and Williams \(2019\)](#) argue that Australian pre-service teachers (PSTs) often feel underprepared to work with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students, highlighting gaps in their training and readiness. Many PSTs report feeling under-equipped to address the linguistic and cultural needs of CALD students, particularly regarding differentiated instruction, language support strategies and culturally responsive teaching practices ([Forrest et al., 2016](#)). The [Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership \(AITSL\) \(2022\)](#) emphasises the importance of preparing teachers for diverse classrooms, yet research indicates that ITE programmes provide inconsistent coverage of multicultural education ([Bressler, 2011](#)). While some universities offer comprehensive units on intercultural competence, others provide only minimal training on teaching strategies for CALD students, leaving many graduates without the necessary skills to support diverse learners effectively ([Nguyen and Williams, 2019](#)).

Multicultural education gained traction in Australia in the late 1970s and early 1980s, influenced by the country's changing demographic landscape because of increased immigration from non-European countries ([Alcorso and Cope, 1986](#)). The introduction of the Racial Discrimination Act in 1975 and the establishment of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs in 1979 were pivotal in promoting multicultural policies. The National Policy on Languages in 1987 further emphasised the importance of linguistic diversity in education ([Grant and Portera, 2011](#)). The 1980s saw Australia pioneering its first multicultural education policies to incorporate multiculturalism in educational institutions ([Kaldor, 1981](#)). The policy recognised the varying cultural backgrounds of immigrant students and emphasised the need for school authorities to work towards providing them with equitable learning experiences [[Education Department \(ED\), 1983](#)]. The policy has been reviewed several times, the most recent being the Multicultural Framework Review launched by the Albanese Government in 2023. This review reinterprets Australia's approach to multiculturalism, focusing on enhancing the principles of multiculturalism to ensure they are relevant and adaptable over time.

As a whole school approach to teaching and learning that promotes understanding and respect for cultural diversity in the curriculum and among members of the school community, multicultural education aims to create equitable educational opportunities for students of all racial, ethnic and social-class groups through the use of their cultural references in all aspects of the educational process ([Phillion et al., 2005](#)). Grounded in social justice and equity, multicultural education is perceived as a strategy to reduce the academic achievement gap between white and ethnic minority students by fostering a sense of validation and affirmation for their cultural identities ([Bressler, 2011](#)).

In the context of Australian education, several studies and frameworks have highlighted the importance of integrating multicultural perspectives into teaching practices. [Forrest et al. \(2016\)](#) examined how multicultural education initiatives influence teachers' attitudes towards cultural diversity, revealing significant impacts on classroom practices. Similarly, [Nguyen and Williams \(2019\)](#) discussed the challenges within ITE programmes in preparing

teachers for culturally diverse classrooms. Moreover, the Victorian Curriculum's cross-curriculum priorities [Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), 2023] and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2018) explicitly outline expectations for educators to effectively engage with CALD students, emphasising the need for culturally responsive teaching strategies. To address these gaps, this study systematically reviews the literature to assess how effectively Australian ITE programmes equip PSTs with the necessary skills for multicultural teaching and suggests strategies for improvement. The review categorises existing research into four key areas: policy frameworks, curriculum content, practicum experiences and teacher preparedness.

Research objectives and questions

Understanding how ITE programmes prepare PSTs for diverse classrooms is critical for enhancing teacher training, policy implementation and student outcomes (Gordon, 2020). To address teacher competency in multicultural education, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2018) states that graduate teachers must "Demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds". (APST1.3) They must also be capable of "Identifying strategies to support inclusive student participation and engagement in classroom activities" (APST4.1). While this acknowledges the importance of equipping teachers to teach in multicultural classrooms, and ITE providers in Australia have invested significant resources to prepare PSTs, there remains a lack of understanding regarding how this preparation occurs and its effectiveness.

Given the ongoing increase in ethnic and cultural diversity within Australian classrooms, the readiness of prospective teachers to understand and engage with the various aspects of their students' cultures and ethnic backgrounds is crucial. While we may hope that the resources invested in preparing future teachers for multicultural classroom settings are sufficient, empirical evidence in this area remains limited. This paper aims to explore the effectiveness of ITE in preparing future instructors for multicultural classrooms, identify implementation gaps and suggest practical strategies to address these issues. To achieve this goal, the review is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1. How is teaching in multicultural classrooms conceptualised in Australia?
- RQ2. How have the ITE programmes prepared future teachers for Australia's multicultural classrooms?
- RQ3. How equipped do preservice teachers feel about their readiness to teach in a multicultural classroom?

Methodology

This review is guided by Moher *et al.*'s (2009) methodological framework and the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews. The initial search terms were identified based on our knowledge of the field. These initial search terms were tested on several search engines to see if they were sensitive enough to pick up relevant literature and studies already known to us. After a few adjustments and consultation with an education librarian, the terms were applied to various educational electronic databases: Web of Science, ProQuest, ERIC and Scopus. We then tested the search terms through several iterations to find the most sensitive combination in picking up known studies for each research question.

The search terms for RQ1 are as follow:
multicultural OR "cultural* divers*" OR "linguistic* divers*" OR cross-cultural OR intercultural* OR CALD*
AND
teach OR instruct* OR pedagog* OR curricul**
AND
school OR pupil* OR student* OR classroom**
AND
*Australia**
NOT
*Universit**

For Research questions 2 and 3, the search terms are as follows:
"teacher educat" OR "teacher train*" OR ITE OR "preservice teach*" OR "student teach*" OR "teacher candidate"*
AND
multicultural OR "cultural* divers*" OR "linguistic* divers*" OR cross-cultural OR intercultural OR CALD*
AND
*Australia**

The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles published in English. To ensure the context remained current and relevant, the search was limited to only results from 2011 onwards to align with the implementation of the new APST. All searches were concluded on 10 December 2024 (cross-checked on 18 March 2025). A total of 33 articles were identified for this review, of which 2 were found through manual search. [Figure 1](#) illustrates the screening and selection process.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria applied to the studies selected for review include studies that focus on empirical research or discussion papers published in peer-reviewed journals or books, specifically addressing ITE programmes in Australia’s higher education sector. Excluded articles consist of conference papers, dissertations, studies outside of Australia, vocational education settings and those published more than 20 years ago. Additionally, only studies discussing multicultural education or cultural responsiveness in teacher preparation are included to ensure relevance to the research focus.

Results

Conceptualising teaching in multicultural classrooms

The literature review indicates that teaching in multicultural classrooms in Australia is significantly shaped by the nation’s multicultural policy framework and socio-cultural diversity. This influence is evident in policies such as the Australian Curriculum’s cross-curriculum priorities, which include “Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia” and the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, integral to the country’s national and multicultural heritage (VCAA, 2023). Despite this systemic emphasis on multiculturalism, studies show a disconnect between policy intentions and classroom practice. [Forrest et al. \(2016\)](#) suggest that there is not always a reliable connection to classroom practice. Variations, such as the enactment of policies at the school level, contribute to internal differences in how these policies are implemented and experienced by students and teachers. This leads to inconsistent experiences at the school or classroom level.

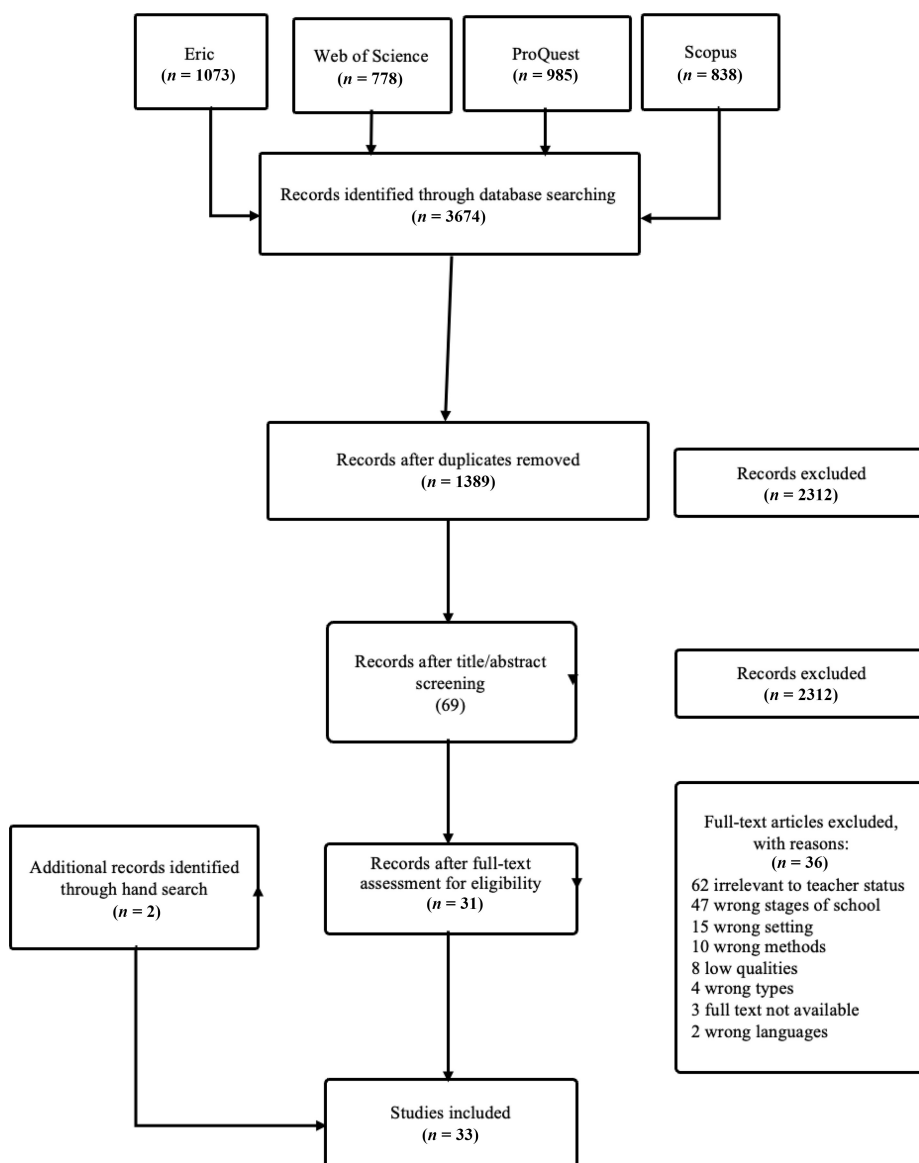


Figure 1. Selection and screen process
Source: Authors own work

Watkins *et al.* (2016) and Miller *et al.* (2016) have also reported inconsistencies in how schools implement multicultural education policies.

Many teachers find it challenging to translate multicultural education into everyday practice because of a lack of resources, PD and institutional support (Trent, 2015; Kaltakci-Gurel, 2023).

Teachers may be expected to act as agents of social change; however, if they are not provided with the necessary resources or training, such policy expectations become unsupported. While the policy emphasises the imperative for teachers to foster cultural cohesion in their classrooms, there is a significant gap between policy and practice, leaving teachers often unassisted in their efforts to promote cultural cohesion and equity within the school (Kaltakci-Gurel, 2023). Many schools, particularly those in lower socioeconomic areas, encounter difficulties in implementing multicultural education initiatives due to insufficient personnel and funding (Forrest *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, teachers frequently report inadequate training in culturally responsive teaching strategies during both pre-service and in-service education, which limits their ability to effectively support diverse student populations (Gordon, 2020). Another barrier is the lack of culturally inclusive teaching materials, as educators struggle to find classroom resources that reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students (Nguyen and Williams, 2019). Moreover, inconsistent institutional and leadership support can obstruct the implementation of multicultural education, with some teachers feeling unsupported by school policies and administration in their efforts to adopt culturally responsive pedagogy (Watkins *et al.*, 2016).

Variability in initial teacher education programmes

The structure and content of ITE programmes vary widely across Australian universities. Some institutions offer comprehensive courses on intercultural competence, while others provide only brief modules on multicultural education (Nguyen and Williams, 2019). This inconsistency results in PSTs entering the workforce with differing levels of preparedness. The diversity in programme construction leaves PSTs with disparate levels of readiness, many feeling under-supported and unprepared to work in increasingly multicultural environments.

In terms of ITE programmes, Forrest *et al.* (2017) reported that ITE programmes that combined reflective practices, mentorship and specific intercultural experiences are more effective in preparing PSTs for diverse classrooms. PSTs trained in these strategies were more likely to develop the cultural competencies needed to run classrooms with a culturally diverse population. Such protocols were not consistently in place among ITE providers, leaving a significant lag in training. Additionally, Gleeson and Davison (2019) highlight the necessity for more systematic training in educating English-as-an-additional-language (EAL) students. Specifically, PSTs reported that they had never received training with linguistically diverse students and were therefore the least prepared to meet the educational demands of EAL learners. PSTs frequently described generalised teaching methods that addressed language barriers.

Preparing future teachers to teach in multicultural classrooms

An important finding in this review is the impact of teaching placements on PSTs' readiness to teach in diverse settings. There is considerable variation among teaching placements in how well they prepare PSTs for multicultural classrooms. While some universities offer comprehensive placements, including units on intercultural competence and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), others provide only minimal exposure to these essential concepts (Nguyen and Williams, 2019; Moloney and Oguro, 2015). Consequently, many PSTs feel unprepared to teach in diverse classrooms, often lacking confidence in their ability to support CALD students (Rowan *et al.*, 2017). Without adequate training in CRP, teachers may struggle to create inclusive learning environments that cater to the needs of all students, potentially reinforcing educational inequalities.

Practicum placements are critical in developing PSTs' competence and confidence in working with diverse student populations. Premier and Parr (2019) argue that these

experiences should provide opportunities for direct engagement with multicultural classrooms, as hands-on exposure is essential for developing CRP practices. However, not all PSTs have access to teaching placements in diverse schools, and those who do not often feel less prepared to implement CRP effectively (Tour and Barnes, 2022). This inconsistency in practicum experiences can lead to disparities in PSTs' ability to adapt their teaching to CALD students. To address this, ITE programmes should ensure that all PSTs have equitable access to teaching placements in culturally diverse schools, supported by mentorship and targeted training in CRP. Strengthening these opportunities can help bridge the gap between theory and practice, equipping future teachers with the skills needed to foster inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Practicum placements in initial teacher education

Practicum placements are regarded as a crucial aspect of ITE programmes, with Premier and Parr (2019) highlighting that PSTs learn valuable lessons from managing multicultural classrooms during these placements. Our review suggests that experiences in diverse environments, particularly on campuses with a significant CALD student population, are essential for developing the skills and confidence needed to implement CRP.

Yet, despite pledges of fairness, not all PSTs have access to a wide array of placements. Gleeson and Davison (2019) point out that PSTs in rural or underrepresented communities are not properly exposed to multicultural classrooms. These PSTs are often less prepared than their multicultural and urban counterparts to work in multicultural classrooms. The persistence of training gaps contributes to readiness gaps and, in turn, can lead to lower PSTs' confidence in addressing the unique challenges of multicultural teaching.

In contrast, PSTs who spent time in more diverse schools were found to be better prepared and more competent to work in multicultural classrooms (Stahl *et al.*, 2020). PSTs who completed these practicum programmes, Jafar (2015) reported, were more likely to incorporate students' cultural identities into their lessons, build on students' cultural competency and foster students' feelings of belonging in class, school and society. The benefit is that real-world exposure to diversity plays a crucial role in enabling PSTs to apply what they have learned in the classroom (Walkington, 2015).

Challenges in teacher preparation for multicultural education

This literature review highlights a significant inadequacy in the current PD programmes for teachers, particularly in equipping them with intercultural skills. Cultural awareness and sensitivity are essential for understanding diverse perspectives, values and traditions (Gay, 2010), while CRP strategies ensure that students' backgrounds are integrated into learning experiences (Banks and Banks, 1995). Additionally, language support skills help educators assist EAL students through inclusive classroom practices (Gleeson and Davison, 2019), and recognising bias through self-reflection enables teachers to identify and address implicit biases (Beutel, 2018). However, many teachers struggle to keep up with the evolving diversity of their classrooms and do not pursue adequate PD (Abacioglu *et al.*, 2022; Lillemyr *et al.*, 2011; Gordon, 2020). To address these gaps, further formal education, such as postgraduate studies or certifications in multicultural education or EAL teaching, can enhance teachers' expertise (Nguyen and Williams, 2019). Professional learning in language education equips teachers with strategies to support multilingual learners (Rowan *et al.*, 2017), while cultural awareness training through workshops or government initiatives helps them better understand the needs of minority students (AITSL, 2018). Additionally, informal training opportunities, such as intercultural experiences and mentorship, foster deeper engagement with diverse school communities (Premier and Parr, 2019). Strengthening these

PD pathways is essential for equipping teachers with the necessary skills to support diverse classrooms effectively.

The review also addresses structural issues with ITE programmes, including the inconsistency in incorporating multicultural education (Gilmour *et al.*, 2018). This lack of a shared framework means that some PSTs are not adequately prepared to respond to classroom culture (Nguyen and Williams, 2019). Furthermore, professional learning is crucial as Australia's student population continues to diversify. However, Gordon (2020) notes that professional learning opportunities, especially in rural communities, are sporadic and limit teachers' ability to develop their intercultural competencies and provide multicultural lessons effectively.

Perception of readiness to teach in multicultural classrooms

PSTs' readiness to teach in multicultural classrooms is shaped by both their formal education and practicum experiences. Empirical studies indicate that many PSTs feel unprepared to teach in CALD classrooms, with their experiences in classes and practice with CALD students being significant barriers (Miller, 2011). Furthermore, Rowan *et al.* (2017) found that PSTs without targeted training in intercultural competence were more likely to feel apprehensive about teaching in classrooms with diverse student populations.

Indeed, as Gordon (2020) notes, PSTs perceived themselves as ready for diverse classrooms only if they had received explicit training in teaching strategies targeted at specific multicultural student groups. Those PSTs who did receive training in preparation for teaching multicultural classrooms reported greater confidence in their ability to work in culturally diverse environments. Nevertheless, the review shows that among PSTs with positive placements, many still expressed a lack of confidence in their abilities to engage with students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, noting that more training was necessary (Sleeter and Grant, 2009).

On the other hand, PSTs who participated in supplementary PD programmes or experiences designed to enhance their intercultural competence reported a greater sense of readiness. Beutel (2018) noted that targeted training incorporating elements such as reflective practice and mentorship boosted PSTs' confidence in their ability to teach in diverse classrooms. Similarly, Vass (2017) indicated that PSTs who engaged in intentional intercultural PD were better equipped to identify areas of bias and address those biases in teaching, which is crucial for fostering a welcoming learning environment for all students.

Discussion

The findings from this systematic review highlight several critical issues in preparing teachers for multicultural classrooms in Australia. While multicultural education is well established in Australian educational policies, a notable disparity exists between these policies and their actual implementation. This gap emphasises the need for a more consistent and effective integration of multicultural education across all ITE programmes.

Gap between policy and practice

Although Australia's multicultural education policy is well-established – particularly through the Australian Curriculum and its cross-curriculum priorities – a significant disconnect remains between policy and practice (Watkins *et al.*, 2016; Miller *et al.*, 2016). Banks and Banks (1995) argue that this gap is widespread across the country, where many schools lack the necessary teacher capacity and funding to effectively implement multicultural education. This marginalisation is also evident in ITE programmes (Yip and Ji, 2024). Understanding the

reasons why multicultural education has been overlooked and identifying ways to align policy with classroom realities should be a key focus of future research.

Forrest *et al.* (2016) observe that while teachers are increasingly expected to promote equity and cultural understanding, many feel ill-prepared due to insufficient training and a lack of resources. Implementation often depends on available resources, the degree of administrative support and school leadership's commitment to multicultural values (Gordon, 2020). Despite the strong theoretical foundations underpinning multicultural education, practical challenges persist in translating these ideals into everyday classroom practice (Buchori and Dobinson, 2015).

This marginalisation also reinforces a divide between majority and minority groups within classrooms. PSTs who often come from majority backgrounds may have limited experience working with CALD students (Yip and Ji, 2024). This issue is particularly salient in ITE programmes, where universities enrol international students and graduate cohorts that may lack meaningful exposure to minority classroom contexts (DomNwachukwu, 2010). Even among minority PSTs, additional linguistic and cultural differences can create further barriers to effective communication in the classroom. As such, more research is needed to explore the nature of these barriers and how they affect teaching and learning (Howard, 2010).

Importance of experiential learning and practicum placements

Despite Australia having embraced multicultural education in its educational discourse since the 1980s, with policies such as the Australian Curriculum's cross-curriculum priorities specifically addressing CALD, there remains a disconnection between the proposal and the lived reality of teachers in the field (Watkins *et al.*, 2016). This literature review indicates that even with these policies in place, many PSTs enter the classroom feeling unprepared for a culturally diverse context. One possible explanation for this disconnection is that while ITE programmes need to formalise approaches to bridge policy and practice, the effectiveness of such efforts also depends on the commitment of recipient schools (Rowan *et al.*, 2017). Even if ITE's PSTs receive quality training in their universities, they may feel discouraged if the schools where they are placed do not actively support multicultural education (Yip and Ji, 2024).

The Albanese Government's (2023) Multicultural Framework Review is a commendable recent policy development aimed at reshaping Australia's multicultural policies to better align with contemporary circumstances. These policy efforts will be strengthened by coherent implementation strategies in teacher education programmes. Without such alignment, policies aimed at advancing equity and inclusion risk becoming more symbolic than effective in their outcomes (Forrest *et al.*, 2016).

The disconnection between theory and practices in this section indicates that policy assumes it is sufficient for teachers to learn about diversity only theoretically (Watkins *et al.*, 2016). This analysis reveals that teachers need experiential, mixed-practice work to integrate theory and practice effectively. Our current structures undervalue the importance of experience, placing excessive reliance on policy rather than practice. Practicum experience limits teachers' ability to apply theory, making experience increasingly vital for teacher education programmes (Lunn Brownlee *et al.*, 2019).

Role of ongoing professional development

Its analysis highlights one major obstacle to how PSTs are effectively trained to work in multicultural classrooms: variation in institutional resources and priorities. While some universities can fully integrate intercultural awareness into programmes, others face constraints on the extent of the training offered (Banks and Banks, 1995; Rowan *et al.*, 2017). As a result, PSTs

receive various levels of preparation, not because ITE programmes are underprepared, but because of external conditions like resource provision and institutional commitment. Such diversity results in heterogeneous readiness throughout the profession, which may hamper efforts to create more inclusive learning environments for students who do not speak English (Abacioglu *et al.*, 2022; Nguyen and Williams, 2019). Consequently, PSTs might not have the capacity to build truly inclusive classrooms, even if they tried.

What is missing is the delivery of ongoing PD for intercultural competence training. Based on policy alone, this is an inadequate way to acknowledge that PD can and does help educators develop more teacher capacity (Rowan *et al.*, 2017). This demonstrates a shortcoming of static, policy-driven solutions that do not consider the fluidity of classroom diversity. This variation in PD content emphasises the importance of embedding ongoing skill development into pedagogical approaches, because teachers without regular PD lack access to the latest practices for multicultural classrooms (Paris and Alim, 2017).

Teacher attitudes and self-efficacy

Teacher attitudes and efficacy also contribute to the effectiveness of teaching in multicultural contexts. Yang and Montgomery (2011) explain that PSTs with positive attitudes towards multiculturalism and a commitment to social justice in the classroom are more likely to be effective in teaching in diverse settings. On the other hand, those who have had less exposure to diversity or who hold biased views are less likely to feel confident in their ability to manage diverse classrooms (Moloney and Oguro, 2015). Reflective practices, mentorship and guided dialogues during teacher training can help PSTs critically engage with their cultural assumptions and biases, positioning them to teach more equitably and effectively (Beutel, 2018; Turner, 2013).

Compared with previous literature, one theoretical gap is the lack of attention to teacher attitudes and self-efficacy. Despite their focus on curriculum and policy, the existing models do not offer guidance for the emotional and psychological aspects of interacting with culturally diverse students (Sherwood, 1981). Teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy are crucial to their practice, yet they are not given much emphasis in the policy frameworks. There is a need for more focus on developing reflective practices and mentorship that can build confidence and address biases, such as thinking of teacher readiness as an indicator of both knowledge and emotional readiness (Yang and Montgomery, 2011). Also, more studies must be conducted to identify what factors would contribute to the increase of self-efficacy of PSTs in teaching multicultural classrooms.

Implications

This analysis provides significant implications for educational policy, teacher education programmes and schools, highlighting the necessity for collaboration across various sectors. The variety of methods for delivering multicultural education mirrors the broader difficulties related to resource distribution and institutional priorities. Additionally, current teachers can benefit from continuous PD to improve or sustain their intercultural competence. Moreover, collaboration among schools, policymakers and ITE providers is essential for establishing shared frameworks, aligning policies with classroom practices and providing joint PD opportunities. Ongoing evaluations of the effectiveness of multicultural education can guide necessary modifications based on the insights of teachers and students.

It is teacher educators who bridge policy and practice, model CRT and teach future teachers the skills they need in a variety of environments. Although more research would be helpful, Australian universities already have PD programmes that increase the intercultural competence of teacher educators. This, in turn, prepares potential teachers for multicultural

teaching contexts. Second, the wider community, both parents and neighbourhood organisations, are critical to multicultural education. They help to ensure that multicultural education does not just take the form of policy debate; rather, it becomes an embodied, lived reality in Australian schools.

Future directions

First, research should go beyond ITE and examine how various stakeholders and PD initiatives contribute to equipping PSTs with the skills needed for intercultural competence in today's multicultural classrooms. The traditional approaches to multicultural education may no longer suffice for the complexities of modern classrooms. Second, longitudinal studies should track PSTs from their initial training through the early stages of their careers to evaluate how effectively ITE prepares them for diverse classrooms. Finally, future research should explore additional factors, such as evolving societal expectations, changing student demographics and shifts in the role of schools, all of which influence the trajectory of multicultural education.

Conclusion

The Australian story of conceptualising multicultural education is positive, and a strong emphasis on equity, social justice and cultural inclusivity is evident. What has emerged from this review is that significant challenges remain in preparing future teachers for the culturally diverse classrooms of Australia. The disconnect between the conceptualisation and implementation of multicultural education in schools is evident, and the mandates for teachers have not necessarily translated into consistent policy and practice across all schools. While some ITE programmes have high-quality multicultural education training and practicum components, many PSTs still report a lack of readiness to teach in culturally diverse classrooms.

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