

Factors associated with teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms: the roles of emotional empowerment, adaptability, cultural empathy and inclusive practices

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine the factors influencing primary school teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms, focusing on emotional empowerment, adaptability, cultural empathy and inclusive practices.

Design/methodology/approach – A sample of 102 in-service teachers working with culturally diverse students participated. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses assessed the predictive value of these factors based on Bandura's social cognitive theory, controlling for gender and intercultural training.

Findings – Emotional empowerment, adaptability and inclusive practices were significantly linked to teacher self-efficacy, explaining over 50% of the variance. While cultural empathy showed a positive correlation, it was not significant. Female teachers and those who underwent intercultural training reported higher self-efficacy.

Practical implications – Results highlight the importance of emotional empowerment, adaptive strategies and inclusive practices in teacher training programs to boost confidence and effectiveness in diverse classrooms.

Originality/value – To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is among the first to identify the key factors enhancing teacher self-efficacy in multicultural settings, offering valuable guidance for professional development initiatives.

Keywords Teacher self-efficacy, Multicultural classrooms, Emotional empowerment, Cultural empathy, Adaptability, Inclusive practices, Educational equity



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1. Introduction

It is well known that student achievement is influenced to a great extent by their teachers' behavior in the classroom (e.g. [Stavropoulou et al., 2023, 2024](#)), in particular, by their effectiveness (e.g. [Stronge, 2018](#)). Effective teachers have been shown to improve students' academic performance as well as their long-term motivation and engagement in the learning process (e.g. [Stronge, 2018](#)). Therefore, the ability of the teacher to create instruction with a purpose, apply pedagogical strategies based on evidence and adjust to the needs of a variety of learners is the foundation for the relationship between teacher effectiveness and goal attainment ([Darling-Hammond, 2017](#)). Self-efficacy is fundamental in multicultural classrooms where educators have to teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds while also using inclusive teaching methods. The ability to promote intercultural understanding, inclusivity and equitable participation in this setting is another indicator of a teacher's effectiveness, as it guarantees that various cultural viewpoints are valued and effectively incorporated into the educational process ([Banks, 2015](#); [Gay, 2018](#)). According to [Marzano et al. \(2011\)](#), it is evident that reflective practice, continual professional development and the development of a classroom environment that is encouraging, culturally sensitive and encourages critical thinking and active learning are all hallmarks of exemplary teaching. Therefore, to ensure that education stays equitable, inclusive and responsive to the reality of modern schools, teacher effectiveness must include the capacity to address the complex learning dynamics of students from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Building on the crucial role that teacher efficacy plays in creating inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environments, it is equally critical to take into account the emotional, behavioral and instructional aspects of the academic process. Despite the acknowledged importance of teacher effectiveness and self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms, there remains a need to identify the specific factors that contribute to teachers' confidence in managing diverse learning environments. Understanding the predictors of self-efficacy is critical, as it informs the design of targeted professional development programs and interventions aimed at enhancing teachers' instructional competence, emotional responsiveness and ability to implement inclusive practices. Although prior research has examined individual aspects such as emotional intelligence, classroom management skills or cultural sensitivity, fewer studies have investigated how a combination of emotional, cognitive and behavioral factors jointly shape teachers' self-efficacy, particularly in contexts characterized by high cultural and linguistic diversity. Identifying these associated factors can provide actionable insights for both researchers and practitioners seeking to foster effective, equitable and culturally responsive teaching.

2. Theoretical framework: Factors that enhance teachers' self-efficacy

The present study is grounded in [Bandura \(1977\)](#)'s social cognitive theory, which conceptualizes human functioning as the product of reciprocal interactions among personal beliefs, behavioral patterns and environmental conditions. Within this framework, teachers' self-efficacy reflects their perceived capability to organize and execute the actions required to manage classroom demands effectively. Such beliefs influence instructional choices, persistence, emotional regulation and responsiveness to students' needs, ultimately shaping educational outcomes ([Bandura, 1977](#)). Building on this theoretical perspective, the present study examines four interrelated factors – emotional empowerment, adaptability, cultural empathy and inclusive practices – as constructs associated with teachers' perceived competence in multicultural educational settings.

2.1 Emotional empowerment

Emotional empowerment refers to the capacity to recognize, regulate and use emotions constructively in ways that foster confidence, resilience and intrinsic motivation (Goleman, 1995; Salovey and Mayer, 1990). In educational contexts, it encompasses both teachers' emotional self-regulation and their ability to cultivate emotionally supportive classroom environments. Such environments enhance students' well-being, engagement and academic functioning while simultaneously reinforcing teachers' own professional efficacy (Gay, 2002; Sleeter and Owuor, 2011; White and Kern, 2018).

Teacher preparation and professional learning experiences contribute to the development of emotionally empowering practices by equipping educators with attitudes and competencies necessary for working effectively in diverse classrooms (Sleeter and Owuor, 2011). Similarly, supportive learning environments that combine academic rigor with emotional affirmation have been shown to strengthen student outcomes and well-being (White and Kern, 2018). From a social cognitive perspective, emotional mastery experiences enhance efficacy beliefs, as individuals who perceive themselves as emotionally competent are more likely to trust their capacity to influence outcomes (Bandura, 1977).

Moreover, emotionally supportive classroom climates characterized by trust, encouragement and compassionate communication promote adaptive coping and sustained engagement (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Because self-efficacy is shaped partly by affective states and emotional regulation processes (Bandura, 1977), emotional empowerment may function as a foundational mechanism that reinforces teachers' confidence in navigating social and academic challenges in multicultural classrooms.

2.2 Adaptability

Adaptability refers to teachers' capacity to modify instructional strategies, classroom management approaches and interpersonal interactions in response to evolving student needs and contextual demands (Tomlinson, 2014). Closely aligned with differentiated instruction, adaptability involves adjustments in curriculum design, pedagogical methods and assessment practices to ensure equitable access and meaningful engagement for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Tomlinson, 2014).

In multicultural classrooms, flexible pedagogical approaches enable teachers to respond effectively to varied learning preferences, cultural experiences and socio-emotional needs. Professional experience has been shown to strengthen adaptability through reflective practice, problem-solving development and increased confidence in instructional decision-making (Gu and Day, 2013). From a social cognitive standpoint, successfully managing dynamic classroom conditions reinforces teachers' perceptions of competence, thereby strengthening self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977; Gu and Day, 2013). Teachers who perceive themselves as capable of adjusting to complex instructional demands are more likely to sustain confidence in their overall effectiveness.

2.3 Cultural empathy

Empathy is widely conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, affective and emotional components that enable individuals to understand and share others' perspectives and experiences (Jami, Walker, and Mansouri, 2024; Zhang and Noels, 2024). In intercultural contexts, this capacity is referred to as cultural empathy, emphasizing sensitivity to diverse cultural identities and lived experiences (Zhang and Noels, 2024). Cultural empathy facilitates mutual understanding and meaningful engagement in increasingly globalized societies (Tsang, Davis and Wong, 2025; Zhang and Noels, 2024), while reducing misunderstandings that may arise from cross-cultural interaction (Li, 2020).

Within multicultural classrooms, cultural empathy supports inclusive and socially responsive teaching by enabling educators to value students' cultural backgrounds, promote mutual respect and foster equitable participation (Rosepti, 2022; Stormont, Buranova and Antonova, 2022). It strengthens teacher–student relationships (Goroshit and Hen, 2016; Graziano *et al.*, 2024) and facilitates culturally responsive pedagogy that connects instruction to students' lived realities (Lin and Chung, 2024). Such practices have been associated with improved learning experiences and academic outcomes (Meyers *et al.*, 2019).

Empirical research indicates positive associations between empathy and teachers' self-efficacy, particularly in the context of culturally responsive teaching (Goroshit and Hen, 2014, 2016; Graziano *et al.*, 2024; Huang, 2023). Emotional self-efficacy appears to contribute positively to empathy levels (Goroshit and Hen, 2014), while higher empathy has been linked to increased confidence in managing inclusive educational settings (Graziano *et al.*, 2024). Although demographic variables such as gender have shown modest associations in some studies – with female teachers occasionally demonstrating stronger correlations between empathy and self-efficacy (Graziano *et al.*, 2024) – teaching experience and educational background have generally not been found to exert significant influence (Goroshit and Hen, 2014). Overall, cultural empathy can be conceptualized as an affective-cognitive mechanism associated with teachers' perceived competence in addressing cultural diversity and implementing inclusive practices.

2.4 Inclusive practices

Inclusive practices refer to pedagogical approaches that ensure equitable participation, belonging and learning opportunities for all students, particularly in culturally diverse contexts (Ainscow, 2020; Sanger, 2020). Rather than perceiving diversity as a challenge, inclusive education frames it as a resource that enriches classroom learning and promotes social cohesion.

Culturally responsive teaching connects curricular content with students' cultural experiences and supports democratic participation in pluralistic societies (Banks, 2005; Gay, 2018). Teachers' professional confidence and sustained development in culturally responsive pedagogy have been linked to improved instructional quality and responsiveness to student diversity (Comstock *et al.*, 2023). At the relational level, positive teacher–student interactions enhance motivation and engagement, particularly among minority and at-risk learners (Walker and Graham, 2021), whereas implicit biases may undermine equitable treatment and sustain disparities (Glock, 2016). Students' perceptions of inclusion – especially when their cultural identities are recognized – have been shown to strengthen engagement and academic self-concept (Byrd, 2016).

Empirical findings further demonstrate reciprocal associations between inclusive practices and self-efficacy. Inclusion-focused professional development programs significantly improve both implementation of inclusive strategies and teachers' perceived competence (Alsudairy, 2024; Colson *et al.*, 2021; Donath *et al.*, 2023). Positive attitudes toward inclusion are associated with stronger efficacy beliefs, and successful implementation of inclusive practices further reinforces self-efficacy (Savolainen *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, higher self-efficacy has been linked to greater use of differentiated and collaborative strategies (Omoró and Possi, 2024; Woodcock *et al.*, 2022). School culture and leadership also contribute to sustaining teachers' confidence in inclusive settings (Chow, 2024). Collectively, these findings highlight the dynamic and mutually reinforcing relationship between inclusive practice and teachers' perceived competence.

Building on the above theoretical considerations, teacher self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms is conceptualized here as a multidimensional construct associated with emotional

empowerment, adaptability, cultural empathy and inclusive practices. While prior research has examined these variables individually, fewer studies have explored their combined contributions within multicultural primary school contexts. The present study addresses this gap by investigating their associations, while also considering gender and intercultural education training as potential moderating factors influencing teachers' perceived competence and instructional approaches.

The international literature on teacher self-efficacy and multicultural education is largely dominated by Anglo-American contexts. Southern Europe presents a distinct migration and educational history, with specific challenges in minority inclusion. This study extends existing theory by investigating an underrepresented context, contributing to a more globally diverse understanding of multicultural teaching.

2.5 Purpose of the study

Drawing on theory and prior research on multicultural education, the present study tested the following hypotheses:

- H1. Teachers' emotional empowerment, cultural empathy, adaptability, inclusive practices and self-efficacy differ significantly according to demographic and professional characteristics (gender, religion, participation in intercultural training, type of classroom, years of teaching experience and level of education).
- H2. Emotional empowerment is positively associated with teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms.
- H3. Adaptability is positively associated with teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms.
- H4. Cultural empathy is positively associated with teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms.
- H5. Inclusive practices are positively associated with teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms.

The findings are expected to highlight the most influential factors shaping teacher self-efficacy, thereby informing professional development and support strategies in culturally diverse educational settings.

3. Method

3.1 Research design and instrument

This study used a quantitative research design, chosen for its ability to efficiently gather extensive data while maintaining respondent anonymity (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Because the study aims to examine the instructional practices of primary school teachers in multicultural settings in Xanthi – where a significant portion of students are part of the Muslim minority – a quantitative approach allowed for systematic measurement of teaching behaviors and learning strategies across a large group of participants.

The instrument included demographic and professional background items and four main dimensions reflecting key aspects in multicultural classrooms:

- (1) *Emotional empowerment* – items assessed teachers' efforts to foster students' confidence, motivation and emotional well-being, consistent with research highlighting the link between supportive teaching, emotional awareness and

teacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Goleman, 1995; Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Sleeter and Owuor, 2011; White and Kern, 2018).

- (2) *Adaptability* – this dimension measured teachers' capacity to adjust instructional strategies to meet diverse linguistic and cultural needs, reflecting flexibility in curriculum delivery and responsiveness to individual learner profiles (Bandura, 1977; Gu and Day, 2013; Tomlinson, 2014).
- (3) *Inclusive practices* – items captured the implementation of inclusive teaching methods, such as differentiated instruction, cooperative learning and attention to equity, aligning with frameworks on inclusive pedagogy and participation for all students (Florian, 2014; Slee, 2018).
- (4) *Cultural empathy* – this dimension evaluated teachers' awareness and sensitivity to students' cultural backgrounds, fostering respectful interactions and culturally responsive pedagogy (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2018).

The five-point Likert scale was selected for its ability to accurately capture attitudinal subtleties, support quantitative analysis and suit social and educational research topics (Boone and Boone, 2012; Joshi *et al.*, 2015). This scale enabled participants to express their level of agreement or disagreement with statements about instructional methods and strategies for promoting learning. Additionally, the questionnaire was developed following established best practices in survey research, ensuring clarity, focus and ethical standards, including voluntary participation, informed consent and data protection (Mazhar, 2021).

3.2 Reliability

The internal consistency of each theoretically derived dimension was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The reliability indices were satisfactory for all subscales: emotional empowerment ($\alpha = 0.75$), adaptability ($\alpha = 0.75$), inclusive practices ($\alpha = 0.80$) and cultural empathy ($\alpha = 0.68$). All coefficients indicated adequate internal consistency of the constructs.

3.3 Participants

The sample included 102 in-service primary school teachers with culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, roughly half local Greek students and the rest Greek Muslim or migrant children (mainly from Eastern Europe). Most teachers were female, aged mainly 35–56, predominantly Christian (4.9% Muslim). All grades were represented, especially fifth and sixth, including special education units (Integration Classes, ZEP programs). All held a bachelor's, 46 had a master's degree, two hold a doctorate; nearly half had over 20 years of experience and 28 had 16–20 years of experience. Participation in intercultural education training was evenly split.

3.4 Data analysis

The survey was distributed online via professional teacher groups in Thrace over four months (Nov 2024–Feb 2025), with voluntary, anonymous participation and informed consent following ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018; Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Average completion time was 15 min. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, medians, SDs), Pearson correlations, independent *t*-tests and hierarchical multiple regression to examine relationships and the effects of variables on teaching practices and learning strategy promotion.

4. Results

The first research question focused on teachers' demographic characteristics, including gender, religion, years of teaching experience, level of education, type of classroom and participation in intercultural training, and their association with self-efficacy and other instructional support components (emotional empowerment, cultural empathy, adaptability and inclusive practices). Independent samples *t*-tests and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to examine potential differences across these demographic groups. More specifically, the results showed that statistically significant gender differences were found in emotional empowerment, with female teachers ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.47$) scoring higher than male teachers ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.49$), $t(100) = 2.068$, $p < 0.05$. Significant differences were also observed for adaptability, $t(100) = 2.220$, $p = 0.029 < 0.05$, with females ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.73$) demonstrating greater adaptability compared to males ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.62$). Regarding self-efficacy, female teachers reported higher levels ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.76$) than their male counterparts ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.68$), $t(100) = 1.950$, $p = 0.05$, indicating a trend toward greater pedagogical confidence among female educators, potentially associated with higher empathy, emotional regulation and prolonged experience in multicultural classrooms. Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to examine potential differences between Christian ($n = 97$) and Muslim ($n = 5$) teachers. While the degrees of freedom for this comparison were $df = 100$, it should be noted that the Muslim group was very small. Therefore, the results of this analysis should be interpreted with caution due to the limited sample size of one group, which may reduce the reliability and generalizability of the findings. Additionally, no statistically significant differences were found based on the type of classroom across any of the dependent variables. Teachers who had participated in intercultural training reported slightly higher self-efficacy ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.74$) than those without such training ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.70$), suggesting a modest positive effect of targeted professional development. One-way ANOVA were conducted to explore potential differences in the dependent variables based on years of teaching experience and level of education, but no statistically significant differences were detected.

To address the second research question, which examined the extent to which emotional empowerment, adaptability, cultural empathy and inclusive practices are associated with teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted. Before conducting this analysis, Pearson correlation analyses were performed to examine the relationships among the study variables, including emotional empowerment, cultural empathy, adaptability, self-efficacy and inclusive practices. Presenting these correlations provides a preliminary overview of the associations between associated factors and the outcome variable, ensuring that the independent variables are meaningfully related to self-efficacy and inclusive teaching behaviors. Additionally, these results help identify potential multicollinearity issues and justify the inclusion of each predictor in the subsequent regression models. So, Pearson correlation analyses (Table 1) revealed significant positive associations among all examined variables, indicating a strong interconnection between teachers' emotional, cognitive and behavioral components of instructional support. Teachers who reported higher emotional empowerment also exhibited greater cultural empathy, stronger self-efficacy, enhanced adaptability and more frequent implementation of inclusive practices. Specifically, emotional empowerment was strongly correlated with cultural empathy ($r = 0.676$, $p < 0.001$), self-efficacy ($r = 0.652$, $p < 0.001$), adaptability ($r = 0.559$, $p < 0.001$) and inclusive practices ($r = 0.566$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, cultural empathy was positively associated with self-efficacy ($r = 0.637$, $p < 0.001$), adaptability ($r = 0.676$, $p < 0.001$) and inclusive practices ($r = 0.560$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that teachers who demonstrate greater understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity

Table 1. Pearson correlations among emotional empowerment, cultural empathy, self-efficacy, adaptability and inclusive practices

Variable	Emotional empowerment	Cultural empathy	Self-efficacy	Adaptability	Inclusive practices
Emotional empowerment	–				
Cultural empathy		0.676**	0.652***	0.559***	0.566***
Self-efficacy		–	0.637**	0.676***	0.560***
Adaptability			–	0.615***	0.600***
Inclusive practices				–	0.421**
–					
Note(s): * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$					
Source(s): Authors' own work					

are more likely to engage in flexible and inclusive pedagogical behaviors. Self-efficacy was also positively correlated with adaptability ($r = 0.615$, $p < 0.001$) and inclusive practices ($r = 0.600$, $p = 0.001$), reflecting the alignment between teachers' confidence in their instructional abilities and their commitment to equitable learning opportunities. Importantly, adaptability showed a moderate but significant correlation with inclusive practices ($r = 0.421$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting that instructional flexibility serves as a critical behavioral mechanism through which teachers translate their beliefs and empathy into inclusive classroom actions. Among all relationships, the highest correlations involving inclusive practices were observed with self-efficacy ($r = 0.600$) and emotional empowerment ($r = 0.566^*$), indicating that both confidence and emotional responsiveness are key drivers of inclusive teaching behaviors.

These preliminary analyses provide a descriptive overview of the associations between associated factors and the outcome variable, highlighting which instructional support components are meaningfully related to self-efficacy. The significant positive correlations observed among these variables support their inclusion in the subsequent regression models and help justify the theoretical rationale for testing their unique and combined contributions to teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms. It should be noted, however, that while correlations indicate the strength and direction of bivariate relationships, they do not establish causality or the unique predictive effect of each variable, which will be addressed in the hierarchical regression analyses.

Also, before conducting the hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the underlying assumptions were tested to ensure the validity of the model. Examination of histograms, normal P–P plots and scatterplots indicated that the assumptions of normality and linearity were met. The residuals were independent, as evidenced by the Durbin–Watson statistic (1.98), which falls within the acceptable range (1.5–2.5). The assumption of homoscedasticity was confirmed through visual inspection of residual plots, which showed no systematic patterns. Tests for multicollinearity revealed tolerance values between 0.42 and 0.89 and variance inflation factor (VIF) values below 3.0, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern. Overall, all assumptions for hierarchical multiple regression were adequately satisfied.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive value of emotional empowerment, adaptability, inclusive practices and cultural empathy on teachers' self-efficacy. Among the associated factors (Table 2), emotional empowerment was significant ($b = 0.265$, $t = 2.781$, $p < 0.01$), as were adaptability ($b = 0.269$, $t = 2.995$, $p < 0.01$) and inclusive practices ($b = 0.265$, $t = 3.165$, $p < 0.01$). In contrast, cultural

Table 2. Hierarchical multiple regression associated factors with teachers' self-efficacy (emotional empowerment, adaptability, inclusive practices and cultural empathy)

Associated factors with self-efficacy	B	SE B	β	t	p
Emotional empowerment	0.265	0.095	0.262	2.781	< 0.01
Adaptability	0.269	0.090	0.274	2.995	< 0.01
Inclusive practices	0.265	0.084	0.288	3.165	< 0.01
Cultural empathy	0.128	0.106	0.115	1.204	0.231

Note(s): B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE B = standard error of B; β = standardized regression coefficient; p -values are two-tailed. Associated factors were entered simultaneously in Step 1 of the hierarchical regression model

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 3. Hierarchical multiple regression – a model for teachers’ self-efficacy

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	<i>F</i> (4, 97)	<i>p</i>
Full model	0.749	0.561	0.544	–	33.284	< 0.001

Note(s): *R*² = proportion of variance explained; adjusted *R*² = variance explained adjusted for the number of associated factors; *F* = overall model significance; *p*-values indicate significance levels (***p* < 0.01)
Source(s): Authors’ own work

empathy, although positively correlated with self-efficacy in preliminary analyses, did not emerge as a significant predictor in the regression model (*b* = 0.128, *t* = 1.204, *p* = 0.231).

All associated factors were entered simultaneously in Step 1 of the model. The overall model (Table 3) was statistically significant, *F*(4, 97) = 33.284, *p* < 0.001, explaining 56.1% of the variance in teachers’ self-efficacy (*R*² = 0.561, Adjusted *R*² = 0.544). Examination of individual associated factors revealed that emotional empowerment (β = 0.262, *t* = 2.781, *p* < 0.01), adaptability (β = 0.274, *t* = 2.995, *p* < 0.01) and inclusive practices (β = 0.288, *t* = 3.165, *p* < 0.01) were significant positive associated factors of self-efficacy. In contrast, cultural empathy did not emerge as a significant predictor (β = 0.115, *t* = 1.204, *p* = 0.231). These results indicate that teachers’ confidence in their instructional abilities is strongly associated with their emotional responsiveness, flexibility and inclusive teaching behaviors, while the unique contribution of cultural empathy, beyond these factors, was not significant in this sample.

5. Discussion

Teachers’ self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms is primarily driven by emotional empowerment, instructional adaptability and inclusive practices, with cultural empathy operating through these behavioral and affective supports. These three competencies collectively explained over half the variance in self-efficacy, consistent with Bandura’s (1977) social cognitive theory, where mastery experiences, social persuasion and affective states strengthen perceived capabilities. Cultural empathy appears to operate through emotional empowerment and adaptability, reflecting shared variance and conceptual overlap among these socio-emotional competencies. High student cultural and linguistic diversity (CLD), as in Thrace’s schools with substantial Muslim minority representation, amplifies instructional challenges, offering critical mastery experiences that enhance self-efficacy, while years of experience alone are insufficient (Choi and Mao, 2021; Min *et al.*, 2022). Low-diversity contexts correspond with lower self-efficacy and higher stress (Geerlings *et al.*, 2018; Tatar and Horenczyk, 2003). Professional development in multicultural education, particularly with autonomy, further strengthens teacher confidence (Choi and Mao, 2021).

Emotionally supportive, adaptive and inclusive practices benefit students by fostering safety, engagement, resilience and learning (Cummins, 2000; Fredrickson, 2001; Gay, 2002; Nieto, 1999; White and Kern, 2018) and enhance teachers’ innovative behaviors, problem-solving, cognitive flexibility and well-being, reinforcing self-efficacy (Jiang and Tong, 2025; Lucas *et al.*, 2008; Peterson and Jensen, 2025; Sleeter and Owuor, 2011). Differentiated instruction principles support adaptability, allowing response to diverse student needs (Tomlinson, 2014). Experienced teachers manage diversity effectively, though younger teachers may show more innovative approaches (Day and Gu, 2009; OECD, 2019). Female teachers, overrepresented in the sample, show higher empathy and sensitivity to diversity

(OECD, 2019; European Commission, 2013). Intercultural education training correlates positively with self-efficacy, highlighting professional development's role in competence and empathy (Choi and Mao, 2021; OECD, 2019).

Overall, self-efficacy in multicultural education is multidimensional, integrating emotional, relational and adaptive competencies that mutually reinforce each other to enhance confidence and instructional effectiveness. Findings underscore the importance of teacher education programs emphasizing emotional intelligence, differentiated pedagogy and inclusive practices. Specifically, emotional empowerment training can include SEL-based workshops, reflective practice groups, emotional regulation training and peer supervision models, providing concrete ways to enhance teachers' competencies and self-efficacy. The area of Thrace offers insights for multicultural teaching, with implications for educational equity and social justice. Limitations include geographic scope, self-reported data and cross-sectional design. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs, classroom observations, student outcomes and cross-regional comparisons, while exploring school support, leadership and community engagement to better understand effective multicultural education.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that primary school teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms is driven by emotional empowerment, adaptability and inclusive practices, with cultural empathy influencing indirectly. Contextual factors such as gender and intercultural education training further shape confidence, highlighting the need for teacher education and professional development that cultivate emotional, relational and adaptive competencies to enhance instructional quality, equity and inclusive school cultures.

Ethics statement

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant national and institutional research ethics guidelines.

Declaration of interest statement

No declaration of interest statement.

A usage statement

The authors declare that no part of this manuscript was generated by AI tools. AI-assisted tools were used solely for language editing and improving the clarity and grammar of the authors' own writing. The AI tool used was ChatGPT, GPT-5-mini.

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