

Examining Students' Intercultural Competence in a Teaching Methods Course

Christopher M. Estep
AFLS E111
Fayetteville, AR 72701
479-575-2037
estep@uark.edu

Catherine W. Shoulders
AFLS E111A
Fayetteville, AR 72701
479-575-2035
cshoulde@uark.edu

Jacquelyn D. Mosley
HOEC 0209
Fayetteville, AR 72701
479-575-4688
jwiersma@uark.edu

K. Jill Rucker
AFLS D05
Fayetteville, AR 72701
479-575-2035
kjrucker@uark.edu

Casandra K. Cox
AFLS D04
Fayetteville, AR 72701
479-575-2035
ccrumle@uark.edu

Brande M. Flack
ARKU 404
Fayetteville, AR 72701
479-575-5014
bmflack@uark.edu

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As classrooms become more diverse (Munniksma, Scheepers, Stark, & Tolsma, 2017), institutions of higher education must work to ensure graduates entering the teaching profession are capable of embracing the ethnic, racial and cultural expressions of students. The increasing diversity in schools provides unique opportunities and challenges for teachers (Schwarzenthal, Schachner, Juang, & van de Vijver, 2019). One way to help teachers overcome these challenges is to provide curriculum focusing on intercultural competence (Schwarzenthal et al., 2019). Intercultural competence is defined as an awareness of one's own cultural identity and the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures (Deardorff, 2011). In the context of teacher education, Gay (2018, p. 8) stressed that "...culture strongly influences how we think, believe, communicate, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we teach and learn." By understanding the current intercultural competence of future teachers, teacher educators can better adjust their educational programs to meet preservice teachers' needs regarding intercultural competence. Thus, an investigation into the intercultural competence of preservice agriculture teachers is warranted.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frameworks for this study included the Social Identity Wheel (University of Michigan, 2017) and the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1986). In the DMIS, individuals' lenses of cultural similarities and differences fall along a continuum from monocultural to intercultural worldviews. The continuum positions include: Denial, Polarization, Minimization, Acceptance and Adaptation. Denial reflects limited experience and capacity to understand and respond appropriately to cultural differences. Polarization espouses an "us vs. them" mindset either through Defense (seeing cultural differences as divisive and threatening to one's own culture) or Reversal (valuing other cultural practices while denigrating one's own culture group). Minimization highlights commonalities to the point of masking a deeper understanding of cultural differences, while Acceptance recognizes and appreciates patterns of cultural differences and commonalities. Lastly, Adaptation is when one can bridge diverse communities using an increased repertoire of cultural frameworks and practices in navigating cultural commonalities and differences. The Social Identity Wheel (University of Michigan, 2017) was used to organize various cultural identity categories by which individuals associate. These frameworks provided a foundation for the study whose purpose was to examine students' intercultural competence in an agricultural teaching methods course. Specific objectives for the study included:

1. Describe students' use of diversity in lesson planning in a teaching methods course, and
2. Examine the relationship among intercultural competence and students' use of diversity in lesson planning.

Methods

Students in an undergraduate teaching methods course at University of Arkansas ($N = 27$) were randomly assigned to a treatment or control group at the beginning of the Fall 2019 semester. Treatment group members ($n = 14$) were asked to complete the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a valid and reliable measure of intercultural competence (Hammer, 2011). The IDI is a 50-item instrument available online and provides individual scores of Developmental Orientation, which

indicates a participant's primary orientation toward cultural differences and commonalities. Scores can range from 55 to 145 and categories consisting of Denial (55-70), Polarization (71-85), Minimization (86-115), Acceptance (116-130), and Adaptation (131-145). Students in the treatment group also participated in a one-hour training on intercultural competence and were individually debriefed on their IDI results with IDI Qualified Administrators. The control group ($n = 13$) participated in an alternate training. All participants completed four microteachings, each accompanied by a detailed daily lesson plan, which asked them to describe three potential audience members. For all audience descriptions, we counted frequencies of students' inclusion of each of the eight primary identities included on the Social Identity Wheel (University of Michigan, 2017). These included race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, first language, disabilities, age, and religion. We concurred as a research team on all frequencies, yielding an inter-rater reliability score of 1.0. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and correlation were used to analyze data according to the objectives.

Results

The mean age of participants was 21.0 ($s = 2.32$), the majority were female (70.4%), and Caucasian (81.5%). The remainder of the participants' ethnicities were 11.1% American Indian, 3.7% Hispanic, and 3.7% two or more races. The average IDI score for the treatment group ($n = 14$) was 83.28 ($s = 12.37$). Regarding objective one, across four microteachings, the mean number of identity factors mentioned was 8.15 ($s = 5.75$) with a range of 0 to 17. Gender was the most mentioned identity area ($f = 124$) followed by age ($f = 68$). The least mentioned identity areas were race, ethnicity, sex, and religion ($f = 0$). Intercorrelations showed a moderate, positive relationship existed between number of identity mentions and IDI score ($r = .462$). Further, there was a moderate, positive correlation between number of mentions and being in the control group ($r = .474$), and a low, positive correlation between gender and IDI score ($r = .258$) and gender and number of identity mentions ($r = .276$).

Discussion

On average participants mentioned identity factors about two times per lesson, however, age and gender were mentioned far beyond other factors. Students in the treatment group scored in either the Polarization or Minimalization development orientation. Results showed that females scored higher and mentioned more identity factors. Further, the control group had high mentions of identity factors in lesson plans. The majority of participants were female, and made up a large portion of the control group, which could account for the group's high scores. According to prior research (Wiersma-Mosley, 2019), these students are similar to other college-aged students in regards to their intercultural competence. They mostly lack the experiences and identity development to be fully cognizant of cultural similarities and differences, which is necessary for increasing intercultural competence. Further development in intercultural competence is needed with students beyond a one-hour training. Additionally, immersion and service learning experiences allowing preservice teachers to work with diverse groups may help facilitate intercultural development.

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