

International Student Teaching Outcomes in Pre-Service CTE Teachers

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Introduction/need for research

The increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of Career and Technical Education (CTE) classrooms highlights the need for preparation experiences that intentionally develop culturally and linguistically responsive teaching capacity. CTE emphasizes applied learning, industry alignment, and workforce readiness—areas shaped by global economic structures, emerging technologies, and cross-cultural professional practices (Smalley & Sands, 2018). As students enter industries influenced by globalization, migration, and international trade, CTE educators must be prepared to teach in multicultural environments and support globally relevant skills (Lane & Murphrey, 2020; Morley et al., 2019). Multilingual learners also represent a growing presence in U.S. classrooms, yet many teachers report feeling underprepared to support students whose first language is not English. International teaching experiences have been shown to increase empathy toward English learners and strengthen culturally responsive pedagogy when intentionally structured (Medina et al., 2015; Dressler et al., 2021; Freed et al., 2021; Moorhouse, 2022). Despite these documented benefits, international student teaching remains underexamined within CTE teacher preparation, where field-based learning is central to teacher identity and instructional development (Retallick & Miller, 2017). This study addresses this gap by quantitatively examining perceived gains in cultural awareness, culturally responsive teaching, and confidence in teaching multilingual learners among pre-service CTE teachers participating in an international student teaching program.

Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1997), which suggests that meaningful learning occurs when individuals encounter experiences that challenge prior assumptions and prompt critical reflection, resulting in lasting shifts in beliefs and practice. International student teaching can function as a “disorienting dilemma,” requiring adaptation to unfamiliar cultural, linguistic, and instructional contexts (Freed et al., 2021). Research indicates that immersive cross-cultural experiences foster intercultural competence, reflective practice, and culturally responsive pedagogy (Morley et al., 2019; Moorhouse, 2022; Dressler et al., 2021), including improved perceptions of English learners (Medina et al., 2015). Within CTE, where experiential learning is foundational (Retallick & Miller, 2017), international placements may intensify professional growth by situating teacher candidates in culturally diverse teaching environments. Guided by this framework, the study conceptualizes international student teaching as a reflective, immersive experience expected to strengthen cultural awareness, culturally responsive teaching capacity, and multilingual instructional confidence.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to quantitatively examine the impact of an international student teaching experience on pre-service CTE teachers’ cultural awareness, culturally responsive teaching capacity, and perceived ability to teach students whose first language is not English. A descriptive pretest–posttest design was used. Data were collected from 10 pre-service CTE teachers across three cohorts (2023–2025) participating in the Italian Student Teaching Program,

who completed an online Qualtrics survey before and after five weeks of student teaching in Italian CTE-based secondary schools. The survey included Likert-type items measuring perceived knowledge, pedagogical skill, and overall impact. Three outcome variables were analyzed: appreciation of other cultures, culturally responsive teaching, and confidence in teaching multilingual learners, measured on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and pre–post mean differences were examined, with Likert-type items treated as approximately continuous for calculating means; given small cohort sizes, analyses focused on descriptive trends.

Results/findings

Descriptive findings across three cohorts (2023–2025) indicate consistently high perceived gains in cultural awareness, culturally responsive teaching, and multilingual instructional confidence among pre-service CTE teachers participating in the Italian Student Teaching Program. Cultural awareness (“helped me appreciate other cultures”) was rated highly across all cohorts, with mean scores of 4.33 ($SD = .577$) in 2023, 5.00 ($SD = .000$) in 2024, and 4.60 ($SD = .894$) in 2025, reflecting sustained intercultural growth. Agreement that the experience made participants more culturally responsive teachers similarly increased from 4.33 ($SD = .577$) in 2023 to 4.50 ($SD = .707$) in 2024 and 5.00 ($SD = .000$) in 2025.

Multilingual learner preparedness demonstrated particularly notable gains. In 2023, perceived ability to help students develop language and literacy skills increased from 2.00 ($SD = 1.00$) pre-program to 4.00 ($SD = 1.00$) post-program, representing a two-point gain. In 2024 and 2025, participants reported very high growth in language-support instruction, including a mean of 5.00 in both helping students develop language and literacy skills (2024) and increased ability to teach students whose first language is not English (2025). Collectively, these results suggest that international student teaching provides a meaningful and consistent developmental experience in culturally responsive and multilingual teaching readiness.

Conclusions

Findings from this multi-cohort quantitative analysis suggest that participation in an international student teaching experience is associated with consistently high perceived gains in cultural awareness, culturally responsive teaching capacity, and confidence in teaching multilingual learners among pre-service CTE teachers. Across three cohorts, participants reported strong agreement that the experience enhanced their intercultural understanding and strengthened their ability to adapt instruction for linguistically diverse students.

These findings align with existing literature indicating that immersive international experiences can foster intercultural competence and professional growth in teacher preparation. Within the context of CTE—where workforce readiness and applied learning are central—international student teaching may serve as a promising model for preparing educators to teach in increasingly diverse and globally interconnected classrooms.

Although the findings are limited by small sample sizes and reliance on self-reported data, the results provide preliminary quantitative evidence supporting the integration of structured international placements into CTE teacher preparation programs. Future research should include larger samples, longitudinal follow-up, and additional measures of instructional practice to further examine the sustained impact of international student teaching experiences.

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