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Preservice Elementary School Teacher's Preparedness for Culturally Responsive Teaching with Children of New Immigrants in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

It is vital to have a clear understanding of the preparedness of preservice teachers to implement culturally responsive teaching as it can contribute to teacher education programs in improving their curriculum for preparing teachers to meet the challenges of teaching in culturally diverse school settings. The purpose of this study was to investigate preservice elementary school teachers' preparedness for culturally responsive teaching in Taiwan and focused on their knowledge base of multicultural education, awareness of children of new immigrants in the class, and implementation of culturally responsive teaching in their student teaching. Data were collected through interviews from eight preservice elementary school teachers who had at least one child of new immigrants in their student teaching class. The findings showed that most preservice teachers lack systematic knowledge base in multicultural teaching, they often ignore the cultural diversity of students in the class, and they lack cultural responsiveness in their teaching. However, these teachers did have a positive attitude toward culturally responsive teaching and reflect several suggestions for improving their own competencies to teach in culturally diverse classrooms. The contribution of this study implies for the needs of teacher preparation programs to identify and enhance teaching in culturally responsive teaching competencies of future teachers.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Teaching, Children of New Immigrants, Taiwan, Elementary School, Preservice Teachers

INTRODUCTION

The number of transnational families in Taiwan has been increasing over the past few years as the number of immigrants by marriage has risen (Chen, 2003; Tsai & Huang, 2004; Lin & Liu, 2009; Wu, 2011). There were 571,798 foreign spouses as in April 2022 an increase of 53.5% from 372,478 in 2006, with female spouses at 90.6%; most are from Vietnam, then Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand (National Immigration Agency, 2022). Immigrants by marriage are changing Taiwan's demographic structure (Wu, 2011). Foreign spouses and their children will become Taiwan's fifth largest ethnic group (current ethnic groups comprise Minnan, Hakka, mainland Chinese who immigrated to Taiwan in 1947-49, and indigenous peoples) (Chen, 2003; Chang & Huang, 2007; Chen, 2008).

This changing demographic structure has turned Taiwan into a society of ethnic diversity and increased more diverse student populations in its schools. New immigrants bring opportunities for multicultural learning and signal the importance of multicultural education (Chen & Chen, 2007). According to the Department of Statistics, Ministry of Education (2021), during the academic year 2020-2021, 95.2% of all elementary schools hosted children of new immigrants and 7.2% of their students were children of new immigrants. This indicates that with the increase of ethnically diverse students in Taiwan, schools need to adapt and change in culturally responsive ways to meet all their needs. However, the ability of schools to meet the needs of ethnically diverse students depends to a great extent on the way teachers are prepared to create multiple learning environments that can use the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of these students to teach them more effectively (Gay, 2002a; Phuntsog, 2001).

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Gay (2002a) summarized many studies and indicated that if ethnically diverse students are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters, their academic achievement will be improved. Therefore, a culturally responsive pedagogy is a way to implement the concept of multicultural education in schools to help these students thrive and succeed in a culturally diverse society (Phuntsog, 2001). In a literature review of multicultural aspects of children of new immigrant in Taiwan, Yang, Hsiao, and Hsiao (2014) concluded that research studies that examined these aspects focused on the following categories: "educational needs, curriculum adjustments, curriculum reforms, educational issues and directions (e.g., educational policies for children of new immigrants), the present status of related issues (e.g., social education for mothers), and the analysis of the trend of development" (p. 289). Most of the individual studies investigate factors (e.g., family, curriculum, and school) that affect parents' guidance and children's academic achievements. There is a lack regarding preservice teachers' preparedness for culturally responsive teaching. Being closest to students, classroom teachers play such a significant role in improving the school success of ethnically diverse students. Therefore, it is vital to have a clear understanding of the preparedness of preservice teachers to implement culturally responsive teaching as it can contribute to teacher education programs in improving their curriculum for preparing teachers to meet the challenges of teaching in culturally diverse school settings. As such, this study investigated preservice elementary school teachers' preparedness for culturally responsive teaching and focused on their knowledge base of multicultural education, awareness of children of new immigrants in the class, and implementation of culturally responsive teaching in their student teaching.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Multicultural Education

Instead of a single cultural aspect, multicultural perspectives include differences in race, ethnicity, language, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and exceptionality (Lopez & Bursztyn, 2013). Multicultural education is a response to a multicultural society. It is implemented in the hope of recognizing the value of cultural diversity and respecting human rights through education in order to realize social justice and equitable opportunities for all (Banks, 1993; Nieto, 1996; Tang, Liu, & You, 2010). Multicultural education requires a change in teachers' attitudes (Banks, 2004) as teachers' beliefs will have an effect on their perceptions, judgments, and behaviors in classroom teaching (Cabello & Burstein, 1995; Gay, 2010; Harrington & Hathaway, 1995; Milner, 2010; Pajares, 1992), and, in turn, affecting students' learning opportunities (Milner, 2010). Numerous studies show that fair and equitable treatment to all students may not be the best way for minority ethnic groups (Park & Judd, 2005; Vorauer, Gagnon, & Sasaki, 2009; Wolsko et al., 2000). Milner (2007) pointed out that culture-blind teachers lack the required cultural knowledge necessary for pedagogical success in a multicultural environment.

As the new immigrant population increases, the Taiwanese government has been amending or drawing up policies relating to foreign spouses and their children, including population policies, daily living support services and language learning for new immigrants, and boosting education and success for children of new immigrants (Huang, 2011). However, as mentioned above, most of the individual studies emphasize factors affecting parent's guidance and children's academic achievement, and, therefore, compare the abilities of children of new immigrants to those of Taiwanese students with different kinds of scales. These studies have found that the capacity of both groups is similar, except for disparities in adaptability, learning conditions, and self-concept (Wang, 2003; Chiang, Chen, & Huang, 2004; Wu & Liu, 2004). For children of new immigrants, ethnic identity is an important part of self-concept (Erikson, 1968; Harter, 1999) and directly or indirectly affect their interpersonal relationships and social adaptability (Aboud, 1987; Phinney, Jacoby, & Silva, 2007; Poston, 1990). According to human ecology theory, Bronfenbrenner (1979) indicated that children from a family with parents from different cultures may receive more negative stress in establishing their self-identifications than ordinary children. Children of new immigrants in Taiwan are bi-ethnic individuals. While their fathers are from majority ethnic groups and their mothers are from minority ethnic groups, children of new immigrants often face the cultural inconsistencies or value conflicts of their parents (Fung & Liang, 2008). Therefore, the education of students with cultural diversity has become an important education issue in Taiwan.

Teachers are the key to multicultural education implementation (Wang, 2013). Banks (2004) also proposed that when multicultural education is only conceptualized as relevant to individual ethnic groups and cultural contents, some teachers may think that multicultural education can only be implemented in specific subjects such as social studies and the humanities. Banks (1998) thus suggested that multicultural education should be defined and understood in a broader sense for teachers to respond in an appropriate manner. As a fair and culturally sensitive way to teach, culturally responsive teaching has been advocated by many scholars and organizations (Gay, 2002b; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008; Siwatu, 2007).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is a way of implementing the concept of multicultural education in schools by recognizing, respecting and using students' languages, cultures, and life experiences as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments to enhance social, academic and cultural enrichment of all students (Gay, 2002a; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Nieto, 2000; Phuntsog, 2001). Gay (2000) argued that incoherence between a school culture and a family culture leads to diverse students being unable to handle new experiences at school with the pre-existing cognitive schema and produces difficulties in learning adaptation which is the key to the school learning failure of students from minority ethnic groups. Therefore, it is needed to use diverse students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning contents more relevant and effective for them so that they can learn more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2000). Irvine (2001) also believed that culturally responsive teaching is not only a teaching method for students from low-income families and minority ethnic groups but also an attitude for treating students and a tool for school reformation. It is suitable for all types of schools because it benefits all students (Bennett, 2007).

After summing up the views on cultural responsive teaching of many scholars, Siwatu (2007) pointed out that cultural responsive teaching includes the following four aspects: (a) facilitating teaching and learning with cultural knowledge, experience, prior knowledge, and personal learning preferences of students; (b) designing a classroom environment with cultural compatibility based on the cultural orientation of students; (c) providing multidimensional assessments to students; and (d) equipping students with the knowledge and skills to function in mainstream culture while maintaining their own cultural identity and native language. He proposed three ways to assist pre-service teachers on becoming culturally responsive teachers: (a) transforming their multicultural attitudes; (b) increasing their culturally diverse knowledge base; and (c) equipping them with the skills needed to effectively teach culturally diverse students (Siwatu, 2007). Gay (2002a) also pointed out the five elements for culturally responsive teaching: (a) developing a cultural diversity knowledge base; (b) designing culturally relevant curricula; (c) demonstrating cultural caring and building a learning community; (d) cross-cultural communication; and (e) cultural congruity in classroom teaching. Therefore, teachers should maintain a clear self-perception of the perspectives of students from different cultures (Davis, 2006) and eliminate their own stereotypes while implementing culturally responsive teaching in order to facilitate student learning so as to help them succeed.

Teacher Education in Taiwan

Under the influence of political factors, a centralized policy was established and implemented for teacher education after the Kuomintang arrived in Taiwan in 1947 (Peng, 2011). However, after the lift of martial law in 1987, a multi-channel teacher education model was gradually established (Chang & Ting, 2005; Peng, 2011). The Ministry of Education drew up a "Teacher Education Amendment Draft" and promulgated and implemented the "Teacher Education Act" in 1994 to bring about a major change in Taiwan's teacher education system (Chang & Ting, 2005). From then on, education of primary and secondary school teachers in Taiwan has been implemented by universities (e.g., normal colleges and universities and universities with teacher education departments or centers) rather than only by normal colleges and universities as before.

Educational courses for pre-service elementary teacher cover the following: (a) teaching subject courses (e.g., calculus, introduction to science, introduction to social science), (b) educational foundations courses (e.g., introduction to education, educational psychology), (c)educational method courses(e.g., classroom management, instructional measurement), (d) educational practice courses (e.g., teaching practicum, teaching material an methods for social studies), (e) elective courses (e.g., developmental psychology, multicultural education) (Ministry of Education, 2003). There are no required courses relating to multicultural education. In a study with class teachers of elementary school, Huang and Yeh (2014) found that 80% of teachers have never taken courses relating to multicultural education. Chen and Chen (2007) and Hsieh (2013) found that "hearsay" was the main source for elementary school teachers to understand the family culture of new immigrants, and stereotypes of specific ethnic groups still dominated their views on respective ethnic groups. Hsieh (2013) also found that the solutions adopted by elementary school teachers to resolve learning difficulties of children of new immigrants differs according to the teacher's own cultural perspectives, and elementary school teachers generally lack a multicultural perspective.

RESEARCH METHOD

According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006), by collecting data via interviews, interviewers can observe the reactions of interviewees to collect more data regarding their actual experiences and personal feelings. Yang, Hsiao, and Hsiao (2014) indicates that interviews can stimulate opinions, views, and attitudes towards the research questions in greater depth. Hence, this study collected data by means of interview.

Interviewees were preservice elementary school teachers. The elementary education system in Taiwan is divided into grades one to six, where grades one and two are referred to as the lower years, grades three and four are referred to as the intermediate years, and grades five and six are referred to as the upper years. For obtaining more representative data, the interviewees in this study included three preservice teachers from lower years, two from intermediate years, and three from upper years.

This study selected interviewees with reference to the following criteria: (a) having completed four years of university training; (b) having completed pre-service teacher education courses; (c) just having completed the half-year student teaching; (d) with at least one child of new immigrants in the class in their student teaching; and (e) no more two teachers from the same training institution. This study interviewed each participant with a semi-structured in-depth interview based on the interview outline on a one-to-one basis. Each interview lasted for about 60 to 90 minutes. Before the interview, all participants had the research questions that would be used to solicit their answers. In the interview, the researcher carefully listened to the interviewees' experiences and asked questions based on their answers to continuously clarify the implications of their talking points. All respondents agreed for the researcher to tape the entire interview and transcribe the contents into a transcript. In addition, they agreed to provide their student teaching journals for data source triangulation. After all data were verified with interviewees, data analysis began. The Berg's stage model of qualitative content analysis (Berg, 2004) was used to analyze and interpret data.

The interview guides were established according to the research goals and comprised the following four questions:

- (1) When taking the teacher education program (or teacher education courses), what courses related to multicultural education or multi-ethnic cultures had you taken?
- (2) Were you aware of ethnically diverse students in class?
- (3) When preparing a class, had you considered the content of teaching materials and the method of instruction for culturally diverse students in class?
- (4) What did you expect from teacher education programs or student teaching to help you understand more about culturally responsive teaching?

FINDINGS

Based on the results of analysis, the status of preservice teachers' understanding and implementation of culturally responsive teaching to children of new immigrants was described in the following four aspects: culturally diverse knowledge base, awareness of cultural diversity in the class, implementations of culturally responsive teaching, and suggestions for improving teacher preparation in culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally Diverse Knowledge Base

Regarding pre-service teachers' knowledge in multicultural teaching, only one interviewee took a multicultural education course as an elective; all the others learned it through the courses such as educational sociology, teacher-parent relations, and teaching materials and methods of social studies. Five interviewees heard about the term "culturally responsive teaching" for the first time when they prepared for the "teacher qualification examination".

I did take the multicultural education course. It was an elective course using the Chinese translation of Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Pedagogia do Oprimido) by Paulo Freire as the textbook. I think the meaning of culturally responsive teaching is to adopt different student background cultures into teaching. (Student teacher E)

As far as I can recall, multicultural education was not included in the teacher education program, while sociology of education course might have been something closer to it in my study! The professor inclined more to discuss the perspectives of feminism and care for underrepresented groups... But I don't remember much about them. So, it seems that they don't influence me much. (Student teacher B)

I didn't take any multicultural education course in the teacher education program. However, in the course of teaching materials and methods of social studies for elementary school, gender respect was mentioned. In the class, the professor discussed transgender people based on current events. (Student teacher C)

I didn't have courses related to culturally responsive teaching in the teacher education program. I read it when I prepared the teacher qualification examination. (Student G)

Awareness of Cultural Diversity in the Class

Regarding pre-service teachers' awareness of cultural diversity in the class, six interviewees knew that their classes had children of new immigrants. They became aware of cultural diversity in the class under the following circumstances: information from the mentor before the class, incidental finding during their teaching, and talk with parents. In general, they are not proactive to recognize children of new immigrants before the class. In addition, even though most interviewees know children of new immigrants in their class, they did not treat children of new immigrants differently because of the ethnic origin of their mothers, for the reason that they should treat them fairly to avoid labeling.

He was distinctive in the Native Language class because his mother is a foreign spouse. He speaks Mandarin with his father at home, so he was often absent from the Taiwanese class because he didn't want to speak Taiwanese. Only then did I realize that he is a child of new immigrants. (Student teacher B)

At the beginning of the class, my mentor told me about student backgrounds, therefore I knew that my class had children of new immigrants. (Student C)

Honestly, I didn't know if there were children of new immigrants in my class.... I asked the mentor because of this interview. Then I realized that there were two children of new immigrants in the class. It is hard to tell from their appearance...Although there were two children of new immigrants in the class, I did not treat them differently because of the ethnic origin of their mothers. I think we should treat them fairly to avoid labeling... (Student teacher D)

My mentor didn't tell me students' backgrounds. I knew that my class had a child of new immigrants by chatting with student's mother. (Student E)

There was one indigenous student and a child of new immigrants in my class... The child of new immigrants has good academic performance and conduct... However, I don't like to treat students differently because of their cultural background. This will label them. (Student teacher G)

Implementations of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Regarding pre-service teachers' implementation of culturally responsive teaching, only two interviewees indicated that they did consider cultural issues in their teaching, especially avoiding using derogative terms for different ethnic groups. Four of them indicated that because they were novice in teaching, they just followed textbook without considering other issues such as cultural responsiveness. In sum, six of them indicated that culturally responsive teaching may be better implemented in the specific courses such as Social Studies. Therefore, they didn't address cultural responsiveness in their teaching because their teaching subjects are not related to it.

There was a lesson about the Amazon. At that time, students called indigenous peoples living along the river "barbarians".... I especially told students not to call indigenous peoples that term. (Student teacher B)

I never have doubts about the teaching material. We are novices and can only follow the textbook to teach. (Student teacher A)

In fact, I didn't know that my class had children of new immigrants. Therefore, I didn't pay attention to it when I prepared teaching. If I teach courses related to cultural topics, I would think about this issue, for example, teaching Chinese course. For arithmetic, we just teach them how to calculate. (Student teacher D)

My class was rather little difference in culturally diversity, therefore, I did pay more attention to students' socioeconomic status difference to make sure all students can understand what I taught. Multicultural education should have more connections with Social Studies. If I teach Arithmetic or Science, I don't think culturally responsive teaching is necessary. It would be difficult to use it to design teaching materials with these subjects. (Student teacher H)

Suggestions for Improving Teacher Preparation in Culturally Responsive Teaching

Regarding pre-service teachers' suggestions for improving teacher preparation in culturally responsive teaching, their suggestions included the following:

- offering multicultural education and cultural responsive teaching courses in teacher education programs;
- providing more real examples rather than only theoretical concepts in multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching courses;
- offering preservice teachers opportunities to develop culturally responsive teaching lessons at all teaching subject areas;
- •developing workshops for preservice teachers to understand different cultures of new immigrants;
- placing preservice teachers in culturally diverse school environments;
- Providing opportunities for preservice teachers to immerse in different cultural environments.

Multicultural education is needed for preservice teachers in teacher education programs... In addition, professors need to have real examples to share with us. (Student A)

In teaching materials and methods for subject areas courses, professors can provide opportunities for us to culturally diverse schools to practice. (Student B)

During our teaching practicum, we need to go to culturally diverse school setting. (Student D)

Before our internship, teacher education programs need to offer us workshops or lectures to understand different cultures and field experiences in different school settings to contact different backgrounds of students such as low socioeconomic status students and children of new immigrants. (Student H)

DISCUSSION

By means of in-depth interview, this study investigated pre-service teachers' understanding, implementation and reflection of multicultural teaching for children of new immigrants in their student teaching. Findings fall into the following three aspects. First, most preservice teachers lack systematic knowledge base in multicultural teaching. Second, they often ignore the cultural diversity of students in the class. Third, they lack cultural responsiveness in their teaching.

The first finding that most preservice teachers lack a systematic knowledge base in multicultural teaching is understandable, since multicultural education is not a required course in teacher education programs in Taiwan. Under this situation, students will only take those required courses and those elected courses that are interested to them. Although preservice teachers could learn knowledge and practice of multicultural teaching through several related courses, they might only learn the fragmentary knowledge of it. For example, most of preservice teachers believed that multicultural teaching is only suitable for teaching Social Study course. This finding is consistent with that of Banks' study (1998). Banks (1998) argued that content integration is only the first dimension of multicultural education, there are at least five dimensions of multicultural teaching as mentioned in the Review of Literature. This indicates that a systematic knowledge of multicultural education is an urgent need for preservice teachers to become a culturally responsive teacher.

The second finding indicates that most pre-service teachers are not proactive to recognize children of new immigrants in class and treat all students in the same way. Currently, most children of new immigrants in Taiwan are bi-ethnic, where fathers are from the majority ethnic group and mothers from minority ethnic groups (Fung & Liang, 2008). With no significant difference in appearance from mainstream students, it is possible if preservice teachers do not pay special attention to and their mentors do not inform them of student backgrounds. Especially, these teachers are a novice so that they might only focus on preparing lesson plans following the textbook without considering students' diverse backgrounds. However, ven though mentors had informed them of the student's cultural background, they still believed that they should treat all students in the same way. This indicated that most preservice teachers might not have a fully understanding of what multicultural teaching really means. Many studies show that equitable treatment of all students may not be the best way for students from minority ethnic groups (Park & Judd, 2005; Vorauer, Gagnon, & Sasaki, 2009; Wolsko et al., 2000). Most pre-service teachers in Taiwan are, therefore, apparently unresponsive to the cultural diversity of learners in the class. Again, pre-service teachers need to gain systematic knowledge of multicultural teaching and equip themselves with beliefs and relevant competencies for teaching culturally diverse students (Jenks, Lee, & Kanpol, 2001).

The third finding that most preservice teachers did lack cultural responsiveness to children of new immigrants in their teaching indicates that due to no enough knowledge of multicultural teaching and experience with culturally diverse students they are not well prepared to teach in culturally diverse classrooms. One of the

possible explanations for preservice teachers to lack cultural responsiveness to children of new immigrants in their teaching is that most preservice teachers come from the major ethnic group and a place with a fairly non-diverse population. In addition, except no knowledge base in multicultural education, most preservice teachers have no opportunities to face culturally diverse students in their field experience or teaching practicum during their studies in teacher education programs. Especially, preservice teachers often implement their teaching practicum in the university affiliation school, where most students are from rather higher socioeconomic status. According to Lampe (1994), increasing the field experience of working with students from minority ethnic groups for pre-service teachers or arranging speeches by ethnicity experts in the teacher education program can help future teachers to improve their multicultural mindset. This can be supported by one of the interviewees in this study. She had field experience in a rural school and indicated that she did consider more about the life experiences and needs of learners while selecting teaching materials and designing classroom activities in her student teaching.

Finally, the in-depth interviews of this study also opened up a reflection path for interviewees. All interviewees found that their multicultural education views are limited to "respect" and "endurance", they do not understand and have basic knowledge of different cultures, not to mention have a better review if cultural hegemony exists in teaching materials. This suggests that "reflective thinking" can help pre-service teachers clarify their attitudes and reflections towards cultural diversity to enable them to practice multicultural teaching. Fortunately, although most interviewees did not take courses relating to multicultural education in their teacher education programs, they are positive towards multicultural teaching. All respondents believe that pre-service teachers should be equipped with prior knowledge of multicultural teaching. Those suggestions provided by preservice teachers are a flection of their teaching experience with children of new immigrants. Therefore, these suggestions need to be included in teacher education programs to improve their multicultural mindset for working with cultural diverse classrooms.

Sample representation is a limitation in the current research. The sample consisted of eight preservice teachers from seven teacher education programs in southern Taiwan. The research findings may not be applicable to all teacher education organizations and all pre-service teachers across Taiwan. In addition, the interviewees in the current research were from the major ethnic group, it is unclear how the current findings might vary in a more ethnically diverse sample. Despite these two limitations, this study has several implications for teacher education programs. First, teacher education programs might require students to take courses related to multicultural education. And these courses might need to include at least five dimensions of multicultural education as indicated by Banks (1998). Second, a course including cultural differences among all ethnic groups in Taiwan might be needed for preservice teachers to prepare teaching materials and methods for these diverse students. Third, those courses related to teaching materials and methods for subject areas might need to offer students experience to develop lesson plans which could match the needs of students with varied backgrounds. Finally, during field experience or teaching practicum, teacher education programs might need to offer a more ethnically diverse class for students to observe or practice.

CONCLUSIONS

Due to globalization, people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds have interacted with each other much more often than before. This increases the acceptance of marriage of people from different national origins. That is, culturally responsive teaching in schools is important for multicultural students. As only one of the parents of most children of new immigrants is a foreign spouse, the influence of the parent's foreign culture might not be addressed. For example, as only the mother of most children of new immigrants is a foreign spouse in Taiwan, the influence of the mother's foreign culture is neglected in the family. As a result, teachers often ignore the cultural background of children of new immigrants and fail to respond to it in their teaching. Furthermore, as pre-service teachers rarely take courses relating to multicultural education in their teacher education programs, they seldom notice the needs of children of new immigrants. This phenomenon was reflected in the current study. Therefore, teacher education programs worldwide might need to make more effort to enhance culturally responsive teaching competencies for future teachers that would help global understanding and for all students to know how to communicate effectively and respect the beliefs of other cultures.

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