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Preservice Teachers’ Multicultural Attitudes, Intercultural Sensitivity, and their Multicultural Teaching Efficacy

Abstract

This study examined early childhood preservice teachers’ multicultural teaching efficacy and its association with their multicultural attitudes and intercultural sensitivity. A total of 90 preservice teachers enrolled in an early childhood teacher education program in a state university in the Northeast U.S. were included in this study. The results showed that preservice teachers’ multicultural attitude and all five sub-constructs of intercultural sensitivity including overall cultural sensitivity were positively related with multicultural teaching efficacy. The results also showed that preservice teachers’ attitudes and beliefs are significant factors in early childhood preservice teachers’ multicultural teaching efficacy. This study discusses educational implications in ways of enhancing preservice teachers’ sense of multicultural teaching efficacy.

Keywords: multicultural teaching efficacy, multicultural attitudes, intercultural sensitivity, early childhood preservice teachers
Preservice Teachers’ Multicultural Attitudes, Intercultural Sensitivity, and their Multicultural Teaching Efficacy

Introduction

As multicultural classrooms become increasingly more common, it is necessary to boost the multicultural teaching efficacy of preservice teachers as early as possible (Taylor, Kumi-Yeboah, & Ringlaben, 2016). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) report, the public school student population has become increasingly diverse and the non-white student population will be approximately 54% of total enrollment in 2025 (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). Among diverse groups of ethnic/racial groups of students, Hispanic students are growing and projected to become 29% of public school student enrollment by 2025.

The rising multicultural makeup of public school classrooms supports the need to examine the multicultural component of preservice teacher education. Current literature explores teachers’ perceptions of diversity at the preservice level. Some research notes that while preservice teachers recognize the impact of multiculturalism on the classroom (Taylor et al., 2016), their preservice programs may not provide course exposure that will enhance cultural competence in the classroom (King & Butler, 2015). Understanding multicultural teaching efficacy may be done by examining associated factors such as multicultural attitudes and cultural sensitivity of preservice teachers.

It has been reported that preservice teachers are not consistently in tune with their multicultural values (Acquah & Commins, 2013) and so it can be inferred that they are also unaware of the influence that their specific personal values have in the classroom. Respectful interactions with those who are different from the self is a component of cultural sensitivity. Therefore, awareness of internal thoughts and perceptions may contribute to the manner in which
these responses occur. Awareness comes from exposure (Taylor et al., 2016) and reflection (Mitchell, 2009), which is best suited for teachers at the preservice level. Due to the increase in diversity among United States classrooms, it is imperative that early childhood teachers at the preservice level are provided with multicultural experiences, both in coursework and interpersonal classroom interactions, which enable them to feel more efficacious prior to beginning their teaching career.

Although the population of public school teachers has gradually become more diverse over time, teacher workforce in the United States is not as racially diverse as the population at large or the students. About 82% of public school teachers were White during 2011 - 2012 school year. Particularly in early childhood settings, White teachers have been continuously dominating racial population in the profession (Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002). Considering the complexities of early childhood education today, it is a big challenge for early childhood teacher preparation programs inevitably to train preservice teachers to enter the increasingly diverse classroom. Nevertheless, the impetus of focus on multicultural teaching efficacy in early childhood teacher preparation is socially mandated to meet diverse children’s needs and their families’ expectations. Multicultural teaching efficacy can be best enhanced through instructional beliefs and practices infused by teachers’ self-cultural awareness and valuation of diversity.

Despite the importance of teachers’ cultural awareness and attitudes pertaining to their efficacy in teaching diverse students, there has been a lack of attention to preservice teachers in teacher education programs, where they need to develop their skills and strategies to educate culturally diverse students in their classrooms. In fact, according to a recent study, a majority of white teachers from middle class lack confidence in their ability to provide a culturally enriching
classroom environment (King & Butler, 2015). Thus, this study aimed to examine preservice teachers’ cultural diversity awareness and multicultural attitudes and its association with their sense of multicultural efficacy in teaching their students. The specific study questions were as follows:

1) To what degree do early childhood preservice teachers understand intercultural sensitivity, multicultural attitudes, and multicultural teaching efficacy?

2) To what extent do early childhood preservice teachers’ intercultural sensitivity and multicultural attitudes associate with their sense of multicultural teaching efficacy?

3) How do early childhood preservice teachers’ intercultural sensitivity and multicultural attitudes predict preservice teachers’ sense of multicultural teaching efficacy?

**Literature review**

Preservice teachers’ multicultural teaching efficacy can be best understood through the lens of Bandura’s (1977) social cognitive theory and Gay’s (2000) culturally responsive teaching pedagogy. This study was theoretically grounded in these two ideologies.

Multicultural teaching efficacy refers to beliefs about a teacher’s ability to effectively teach children from diverse cultural backgrounds in a general classroom setting. It is related to a teachers’ multicultural competence which is associated with awareness of his or her own cultural identity and biases as well as awareness of differences in learning and teaching strategies to work with culturally diverse students (Gay, 2002).

In order to understand how preservice teachers’ beliefs will be reflected on their teaching after the completion of teacher education program, it has been useful to examine preservice teachers’ attitudes to multicultural education and their cultural sensitivities (Rios, McDaniel, & Stowell, 1998; Sleeter, 2001). Preservice teachers’ beliefs in their capacity of learning and
teaching multiculturalism and culturally responsive teaching strategies respectively will make an effort to understand their teaching efficacy and to achieve optimal outcomes by overcoming difficulties (Bandura, 1977, 1997).

Preservice teachers benefit from multicultural training early in their career because it leads to a greater understanding of the cultural, socio-cultural, and religious values of students in the classroom (Taylor et al., 2016). Providing the opportunity for preservice teachers to gain multicultural awareness prior to beginning their career as a teacher will impact both intercultural sensitivity and multicultural teaching efficacy.

In a research study conducted by Acquah and Commins (2013), it was noted that many preservice teachers are unaware of their cultural values. Furthermore, many dominant cultures are often unaware of the extent of societal sexism and racism in their community. It is critical to address that being unaware of such areas is equally as unfavorable as being incompetent in the area. While expanding knowledge about multiculturalism and intercultural sensitivity, preservice teachers are learning to objectively view multiculturalism, recognizing what it means to be a part of a dominant culture versus a non dominant culture (Alismail, 2016). Most states in the United States require a multicultural component for teacher training for preservice teachers (King & Butler, 2015), however the extent of this component is not universal.

Alismail (2016) found that many schools have a large population of teachers who are female, white, and middle class. Recognizing the cultural gap between teachers and students provides a reason for the importance of understanding and addressing multiculturalism at the preservice level (Acquah & Commins, 2013). Additionally, many teachers allow their personal opinions to influence their professional opinions, which allow biases and stereotypes to slip into the classroom. Preservice teachers who lack an understanding of intercultural sensitivity risk
failing at creating a classroom environment that embraces multiculturalism. Institutions with teacher education programs can help their preservice teachers alter their views by increasing the number of multicultural courses required to graduate.

In a study of cultural responsiveness, Mitchell (2009) discussed the importance of self-reflection. This study showed that teachers who reflected on their own personal beliefs had increased empathy for students and individuals with cultural backgrounds different from their own. Recognizing the importance that self-reflection has on cultural responsiveness can be directly connected to intercultural sensitivity. Not only is it important to recognize cultural differences among students, it is also important to acknowledge and address them appropriately (Sezer & Kahraman, 2016), leading to both respect and positive multicultural attitudes. Although no specific study directly correlates to this, Sezer and Kahraman (2016) noted that “supporting personal qualifications of teacher candidates through different ways can have positive effects on intercultural sensitivity” (p. 2).

In one study, research looked at data from 14 public institutions that offered teaching education programs and the number of undergraduate courses that contained a multicultural component (King & Butler, 2015). Of the 14 institutions, only 4 institutions required undergraduate teaching students to have a multicultural component in at least 20% of their courses. Such a low percentage of courses in so few institutions raises concern for the preparedness of future educators.

A common theme in ideas on how to increase multicultural training for preservice teachers is both to increase the number of required multicultural courses needed to graduate and to include a multiculturalism component in all courses (Acquah & Commins, 2013; Alismail, 2016; King & Butler, 2015). If all institutions adopted a unified system in which preservice
teachers had more exposure to diverse populations, the attitudes and perceived success of intercultural sensitivity and incorporating multiculturalism into the classroom in a fluid manner would rise (King & Butler, 2015).

Taken all together, in this study, we considered preservice teachers’ intercultural sensitivity to be the preservice teachers’ ability to recognize those who are culturally different from themselves and to be respectful when interacting with them. In a related manner, multicultural attitudes are the ways in which diversity is recognized and accepted, and feelings about the extent to which multiculturalism should be incorporated into the classroom. As the literature explores various concepts related to intercultural sensitivity, multiculturalism, and diversity, it is apparent that increased exposure and opportunities for growth in these areas among preservice teachers leads to stronger multicultural teaching efficacy.

Method

Sample

This study included a total of 90 preservice teachers enrolled in an early childhood teacher education program in a state university in the U.S. Northeast. All participants were female and ranged in age from 19 to 29 years old \((M = 20.86, SD = 1.18)\). The racial and ethnic identity of the sample as reported by the participants was predominantly White (93.8%), with 6.2% of the sample reporting as Latino, Asian, Biracial, or Others. Approximately 90% of the participants were single.

Instrumentations

The Multicultural Efficacy Scale (MES). We used MES developed by Guyton and Wesche (2005) in order to examine early childhood preservice teachers’ sense of multicultural teaching efficacy. We modified the original survey question items and included 5 additional items to
gauge early childhood preservice teachers’ overall multicultural efficacy. The modified scale comprised four sub-constructs in a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree): 7 items in personal experience, 7 items about their attitude toward multicultural education, 20 items for multicultural efficacy, and 5 items about their multicultural beliefs. As argued by Ladson-Billings (1995) and other scholars (e.g., Grant & Secada, 1990; Sleeter & Grant, 1987) in multicultural education, all areas in MES should be equally considered in understanding of a teacher’s multicultural teaching efficacy. Thus, we used a total mean composite score of all items in four sub-constructs to present preservice teachers’ sense of multicultural efficacy. Higher scores on the measure represent a greater level of preservice teachers’ multicultural efficacy. We used mean composite scores in our analyses. The Cronbach’s value for the MES was $a = .95$, showing a high internal consistency.

**Intercultural Sensitivity.** We used Chen and Starosta (2000)’s intercultural communication competence scale to gauge our preservice teachers’ intercultural sensitivity. This scale comprised 5 sub-constructs in a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree): Interaction Engagement (7 items), Respect for Cultural Differences (6 items) Interaction Confidence (5 items), Interaction Enjoyment (3 items), and Interaction Attentiveness (3 items). The scale can help individuals distinguish how their culturally different counterparts vary in behaviors, perceptions, and feelings so that they may be conscious and respectful within their interaction (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Higher scores on the measure represent a greater level of preservice teachers’ intercultural sensitivity. We used mean composite scores in our analyses. The Cronbach’s value for the preservice teachers’ intercultural sensitivity was high ($a = .91$).

**Multicultural Attitudes.** Preservice teachers’ multicultural attitudes (awareness and sensitivity) were assessed using the modified version of Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey (TMAS)
MULTICULTURAL TEACHING EFFICACY

(Ponterotto, Baluch, Greig, & Rivera, 1998) for preservice teachers. Each participant responded to 20 statements utilizing a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item is “Teaching methods need to be adapted to meet the needs of a culturally diverse student group.” A high level of multicultural awareness means that he/she considers cultural diversity as an asset and deems his/her responsibilities to address multicultural issues in the curriculum planning and in the learning process (Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993). The Cronbach’s value for the preservice teachers’ multicultural attitudes was high (a = .86).

Data Analysis

Using SPSS 23, we employed descriptive statistics, Pearson’s correlation, and both linear and hierarchical regression analyses to answer the research questions. All key variables were standardized. In addition, we checked the violation of multicollinearity by examining tolerance and the variance inflation factor (VIF) using two collinearity diagnostic factors, an individual R-square value and a VIF.

Results

The results of descriptive statistics showed that on a 5-Likert scale, our preservice teachers showed a higher sense of multicultural teaching efficacy ($M = 3.71, SD = .53$). The descriptive statistics showed an average level of early childhood preservice teachers’ overall intercultural sensitivity and multicultural attitudes ($M = 3.93, SD = .51$; $M = 3.83, SD = .53$, respectively). Among intercultural sensitivity sub-constructs, our preservice teachers showed a high level of respect for cultural differences ($M = 4.28, SD = .71$) and interaction enjoyment ($M = 4.16, SD = .78$). More descriptive statistics are available in Table 1.
Table 1.

**Descriptive Statistics**

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<tr>
<th>Key Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
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<th>SD</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
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<td>88</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>-.36</td>
<td>-.19</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-.87</td>
<td>-.47</td>
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<td>.10</td>
<td>-.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISS: Interaction Enjoyment (a = .81)</td>
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<td>.78</td>
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<td>1.24</td>
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<td>3.72</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>-.64</td>
<td>.43</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.93</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>MES: Personal experience (a = .83)</td>
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<td>3.56</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>-.28</td>
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<td>MES: Attitudes (a = .59)</td>
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<td>.52</td>
<td>-.49</td>
<td>.88</td>
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<td>MES: Efficacy (a = .97)</td>
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<td>3.91</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>-.09</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.81</td>
<td>.68</td>
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<td>.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>MES TOTAL Multicultural Efficacy (a = .86)</td>
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<td>3.83</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.60</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Notes. ISS = Intercultural Sensitivity Scale; MES = Multicultural Efficacy Scale.*

Pearson’s correlation analysis was conducted to see how early childhood preservice teachers’ multicultural teaching efficacy was related to their multicultural attitudes and intercultural sensitivity. The results showed that preservice teachers’ multicultural attitude ($r = .60, p < .01$) and cultural sensitivity (Total ISS: $r = .63, p < .01$) were positively related with preservice teachers’ multicultural efficacy. Among intercultural sensitivity sub-constructs, interaction engagement ($r = .63, p < .01$) was most positively correlated to preservice teacher’s multicultural teaching efficacy (see Table 2).

In order to see the predictability of intercultural sensitivity and multicultural attitudes on preservice teachers’ multicultural teaching efficacy, multiple separate regression analyses were performed. First, we checked the predictability of preservice teachers’ multicultural attitudes on their multicultural efficacy. The result of the regression analysis showed that 36.5% of the preservice teachers’ multicultural teaching efficacy was explained by their multicultural attitudes ($F = 50.057, p < .001$) (see Table 3). Second, we performed a separate regression analysis to
### Table 2.

**Correlations among Key Variables**

<table>
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<th></th>
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<th>5</th>
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<th>9</th>
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<td>.65**</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.86**</td>
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<td>.49**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.69**</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>ISS: Respect for Cultural Differences</td>
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<td>.43**</td>
<td>.78**</td>
<td>.09**</td>
<td>.81**</td>
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<td>.36**</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
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<td>.54**</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.71**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
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<td>.63**</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>MES: Personal experience</td>
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<td>.39**</td>
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<td>.77**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>MES: Attitudes</td>
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<td>.41**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.78**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>MES: Efficacy</td>
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<td>.72**</td>
<td>.76**</td>
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<td>MES: Multicultural Beliefs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. ISS = Intercultural Sensitivity Scale; MES = Multicultural Efficacy Scale; TMAS = Teacher Multicultural Attitudes Survey.

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001 (2-tailed).*

### Table 3.

**Predictability of Preservice Teacher Multicultural Attitudes on Preservice Teachers’ Multicultural Efficacy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Tol</th>
<th>VIF</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preservice Teacher Multicultural Attitudes</td>
<td>.604</td>
<td>7.08***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>50.057***</td>
<td>.365</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Tol. = Tolerance; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor.

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.*
examine the predictabilities of intercultural sensitivity and multicultural attitudes on preservice teachers’ multicultural efficacy. The result showed that 44.4% of the preservice teachers’ multicultural teaching efficacy can be explained by their overall intercultural sensitivity ($F = 50.057, p < .001$). The result of a regression analysis with intercultural sensitivity showed that interaction engagement ($t = 2.99, p < .01$) among the sub-constructs was the only statistically significant variable in predicting their multicultural teaching efficacy (see Table 4).

Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Tol.</th>
<th>VIF</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1. Interaction Engagement</td>
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<td>2.99**</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>12.708***</td>
<td>.440</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Respect for Cultural Differences</td>
<td>.198</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>3.22</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Interaction Confidence</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>1.56</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Interaction Enjoyment</td>
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<td>-.92</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>2.66</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>5. Interaction Attentiveness</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>1.51</td>
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</table>

Note. Tol. = Tolerance; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Additionally, we performed a hierarchical regression by adding intercultural sensitivity factors followed by multicultural attitudes as predictors of preservice teachers’ multicultural teaching efficacy. At step one, intercultural sensitivity explained 43.9% of multicultural teaching efficacy ($F = 12.505, p < .001$) and when multicultural attitudes was added at step two, the predictability increased about 2.5%, explaining about 46.7% of the variability in multicultural teaching efficacy ($F = 11.375, p < .001$) (see Table 5).
Table 5.

*Predictability of Multicultural Attitudes and Intercultural Sensitivity on Preservice Teachers’ Multicultural Efficacy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Tol</th>
<th>VIF</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R²(Δ)</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Interaction Engagement</td>
<td>.275</td>
<td>1.911</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>11.375***</td>
<td>.463(.025)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Respect for Cultural Differences</td>
<td>.153</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>3.22</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interaction Confidence</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>1.56</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interaction Enjoyment</td>
<td>-.077</td>
<td>-.86</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>2.66</td>
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<td>Interaction Attentiveness</td>
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<td>Multicultural Attitudes</td>
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<td>1.911</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>1.18</td>
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*Note. Tol. = Tolerance; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor; Δ = change in R².*

*p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine early childhood preservice teachers’ multicultural teaching efficacy and its association with their multicultural attitudes and intercultural sensitivity. Results showed that a total of 90 preservice teachers who participated in this study have moderately high levels of sense of multicultural teaching efficacy, multicultural attitudes, and intercultural sensitivity. One of the optimistic findings was that our preservice teachers showed a high level of respect for cultural differences among intercultural sensitivity subconstruct. This study performed regression analyses to see how preservice teacher cultural sensitivity and their multicultural attitude explain their multicultural teaching efficacy.

Pearson’s correlation analysis showed significant relationships between multicultural attitudes and multicultural teaching efficacy as well as between intercultural sensitivity and
multicultural teaching efficacy. Preservice teachers’ total multicultural attitudes and all five sub-constructs of intercultural sensitivity including overall cultural sensitivity were positively related with preservice teachers’ multicultural efficacy. As seen in the research, it is conceivable that preservice teachers who are exposed to multicultural learning experiences have the opportunity to expand their appreciation for cultural values that differ from their own and are open to learning about multiculturalism (Taylor et al., 2016). As early childhood teachers’ openness to learn about multiculturalism is positively connected to their multicultural teaching efficacy, early childhood program instructors should encourage preservice teachers to engage in the rich discussions of topics and issues pertaining to multiculturalism in the classroom. Gradually, preservice teachers will develop professional opinions which will be free from biases and stereotypes regarding cultural and racial differences in learning and teaching. Doing so at a preservice level increases the ability for preservice teachers to later begin their teaching career with a high confidence in multicultural teaching settings.

The results of multiple regression analyses also make it evident that preservice teachers’ attitudes and beliefs are crucial factors that impact their sense of multicultural teaching efficacy. Intercultural sensitivity is both the ability to recognize those who are different while having the ability to interact with those who are different than the self in a respectful manner. The second component of the definition, being able to interact with others who are different from the self, is an important factor, especially in a classroom setting. In a teaching position, the ability to put knowledge into practice is how teachers will support their diverse learners. Acknowledging and addressing differences among students is important (Sezer & Kahramna, 2016) as it creates a sense of respect and understanding for who the student is as an individual. Addressing the third research question, this study shows that multicultural attitudes and four of the five sub-constructs
in intercultural sensitivity scale (excluding Interaction Enjoyment, which is a negative predictor) are positive predictors of preservice teachers’ multicultural teaching efficacy. Even though it’s not statistically significant, it is very interesting to notice that preservice teacher’s interaction enjoyment explains the variations in their multicultural teaching efficacy negatively. This result may be related to the contemporary teachers’ responsibilities in the present culturally and racially diverse classroom. Regardless of their personalities or personal preferences in cultural activities and applications in their teaching, teachers are committed to inclusion of multiculturalism in the classroom. Teachers who have lower scores of interaction enjoyment may feel inclined to put forth a more conscious effort to be culturally sensitive in their teaching.

While learning about multiculturalism, preservice teachers are learning to view multiculturalism objectively (Alismail, 2016). At a preservice level, this allows preservice teachers to explore new perspectives and reflect upon their own personal beliefs. Mitchell (2009) notes the importance of reflection as it contributes to empathy for students. Course content that encourages interactions with individuals from diverse backgrounds contributes to intercultural sensitivity which, as seen in the regression analyses, positively influences multicultural teaching efficacy. Being not sensitive to the issues pertaining to educational inequality due to racial and ethnic differences would weaken preservice teachers’ confidence and capacity to teach culturally diverse students in the current U.S. early childhood classroom.
References


