

The Critical Multicultural Education Competencies of Preschool Teachers

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the perceptions of preschool teachers regarding critical multicultural education competencies. The study is based on “Critical Multicultural Education Competency Model”. The sample of this descriptive research consists of 120 teachers employed at 56 kindergartens and 24 independent nursery classes in the 2014-2015 academic year. The research data is obtained using the “Critical Multicultural Education Competency Scale” (CMECS), which was developed by the researcher. The scale development is carried out with 421 teachers employed in various positions and at different branches in the province of Istanbul. The construct validity is examined by applying exploratory factor analysis and it is found that the scale displays a four-factor structure. The scale, which consists of 42 items, is composed of four sub-dimensions, namely awareness, knowledge, skill and attitude, and the scale can be used as a one-dimensional structure as well. The eligibility of the Critical Multicultural Education Competency Scale (CMECS) for this study is analyzed by looking at the reliability with item analysis. An Alpha model is used for the reliability analysis of the items in the scale and of the sub-dimensions of the scale. As a result of the reliability analysis, which is applied to determine the suitability of the CMECS, it is found that the size of the reliability coefficients vary between 0.674 and 0.887. The reliability coefficient for the whole scale is calculated as .811. As a result of the research, it is determined that the preschool teachers find themselves adequate throughout the overall scale but only partially adequate in terms of knowledge and awareness. It is seen that the variables of gender, age, ethnicity and native language cause significant levels of differentiation in the perceptions of the teachers.

Keywords: critical multicultural education, critical race theory, critical theory, teacher competencies

1. Introduction

Early childhood care and education have become one of the most important issues in the field of politics as well as social sciences. Diverse actors from all over the world have increasingly begun to display a special interest in early childhood education and care to solve various social problems. This is because early childhood can be considered the most unique and valuable stage of human life cycle (Burger, 2013).

Although development and learning processes are universal in nature, the bringing up of a child, including preschool education, takes place in specific social and cultural contexts (Brooker & Woodhead, 2010a). A child’s development and learning are strongly associated with economic, social and structural inequalities that affect the capacity of the parents who take care of and are responsible for children and such factors are also shaped by cultural values (Brooker & Woodhead, 2010a).

Culture can be defined as behaviors, morals, values, ideas and norms that establish continuity in time and include distinctive features and iconic symbols of life from which praised competencies are transferred to society’s new members that guide and regulate daily life. Thus, with their deeply-ingrained and widely-accepted understanding of how each member of each society should feel, each culture is unique and assumes different characteristics from those of other cultures (Bornstein, 2015). The child’s family with the behavior of their culture, their ideas and beliefs plays a leading role in the socialization of the child in the early childhood years (Garbarino, 1992). Different cultures encompass different methods, beliefs and traditions of child rearing and they can uphold different values and attach varying degrees of importance to different skills and attitudes (New Zealand, Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 42).

Early childhood is also a special period when children start to form their identity and build a common understanding with regard to themselves and the environment. From birth, with an increasing awareness, every child begins to construct a unique personal and social identity that includes distinguishing features such as gender, ethnicity, age and status within the context of their society. Identity is the main factor of personality by which people learn to increasingly differentiate and master themselves in the world. Identity gives meaning and purpose to life and perspective to human efforts. Through identity, individuals consider themselves as, for example, belonging to a separate race, location, ethnicity, nationality, gender or culture (Nsamenang, 2008). While personal identity refers to children's subjective feelings with respect to their distinctiveness from others and their sense of uniqueness of individuality, social identity refers, on the other hand, to their similarities with others through identification with family and/or peer culture. Therefore, identity simultaneously covers two basic motives, namely the need to belong and the need to be unique (Shaffer, 1996, p. 80). Cultural identity is, on the other hand, the feeling of belonging that is experienced by a group of people (Nsamenang, 2008). According to Travarthen (1995), to belong to a culture, regardless of its content, is a basic need for people and a natural function of the human being from birth. Children continue to develop their own personal identity throughout their childhood through active and guided participation in the social life of their own society (Rogoff, 1990). In this context, everything they learn as they grow up does not constitute a universal content but rather a cultural curriculum (Rogoff, 1990).

Children construct their personal identity as well as gain culturally-valued knowledge, skills and behaviors through their family. However, the issue of identity, which does not take shape merely through their personal choices, frequently returns to remind them when they are in a different environment other than their own home culture. Identity is also the result of how other people define a child, how he or she is understood (or not) and is shown respect to (or not). In these ways, children's social experiences serve as a "mirror" for their identities (Vandenbroeck, 2001).

Children's attitudes towards their own culture and other cultural groups begin to form in the early years of childhood (Robles de Melendez & Ostertag, 1997). In the pre-school period, children construct their personal identity in an active way by observing their similarities and differences with others (Cross, 1991). The research conducted on this subject shows the awareness of children about their family structure, socio-economic differences and social values, which are associated with these elements in the pre-school period (Tatum, 2003). The research by Targowska (2001) illustrates that children are aware of the attitudes shown towards them in the early stages of their life and that awareness affects their perceptions of themselves. "Race and culture can affect a child's view of society and their social development as they see themselves as outside or inside the dominant culture of the society in which they live" (Johnston & Nahmad-Williams, 2009, p. 227).

Also in recent years, the importance of learning in early childhood as the basis of development has begun to be approached from a more systematic point of view. It has begun to be assumed that the development of the organism is sensitive in a unique way or offers a better response to certain environmental factors in that the short periods of the life cycle are sensitive periods, which affect the development of behaviors and the acquisition of various competencies. It was suggested that certain competencies may not be acquired easily in the other periods located outside these periods (Shaffer, 1994).

In early childhood, positive and respectful multicultural environments are critical in classrooms and schools since awareness, self-identification, knowledge of dominant groups and biases start to be constructed and shaped in this period. The real learning takes place when the teacher realizes the needs of students and understands the difference between the needs of students from the dominant culture and those of students outside the dominant culture (Smith, 2009).

The awareness about ethnic and cultural diversity that has recently began to be experienced in Turkey leads many educators to be increasingly interested and involved in multicultural education. In spite of various researches and studies in this field, it is observed that there are yet not enough studies carried out on teacher competencies that take into account diversity. This study is based on "Critical Multicultural Education Competency Model" (Acar-Ciftci, 2016). The aim of this study is to determine the perceptions of preschool teachers regarding critical multicultural education competencies within the context of this model. This is the objective since it will be guiding in acknowledging the difference between the current situation and the targeted situation, closing the gap and identifying the priorities. Designed with this aim, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the critical multicultural education competency levels of preschool teachers?

2) Do the critical multicultural education competency levels of preschool teachers vary based on the variables of gender, ethnicity and native language?

1.1 The Critical Multicultural Education Competency Model

The Critical Multicultural Education Competency Model is based on the assumptions of Critical Multicultural Education Theory, Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory. Critical Theory aims to radically democratize education in order to strengthen democratic participation in terms of individual participation, citizenship and society, social justice and all fields of life and it constitutes the goal of progressive educators such as Dewey, Freire and Illich (Acar-Ciftci, 2014). In that regard, Critical Theory has both epistemological and political goals. This theory aims to uncover the power relations related to political institutions by divorcing itself from them and its ultimate goal is the acquisition of freedom (Griffiths, 2013). Critical Race Theory provides perspectives, methods and pedagogies for the efforts of education to identify and analyze in order to transform structural and cultural aspects so as to protect the position of racial groups that find themselves in a subjugated or disadvantaged position in and outside of the class (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Moreover, Critical Multicultural Education Theory provides a cultural framework and context as to how unequal power relations are maintained at a structural and institutional level in daily interactions (May & Sleeter, 2010). Critical multicultural education is a transformative pedagogical framework that brings diverse experiences and voices to the center of student discourse and empowers students to critique and challenge the social norms that continue to benefit some groups at the expense of others (Banks, 2006; Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; Ghosh, 2002; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; May & Sleeter, 2010; Solomon, 1996; Turner, 1994). Critical multicultural education supports educational programs, pedagogical measures, social relations, and democratic initiatives at schools (McLaren, 2003). The ultimate goal of critical multicultural education is to contribute to the transformation of society and to the application and maintenance of social justice and equality in society. This approach aims to create a stronger society that fulfills the needs and interest of all groups by drawing attention to the oppression and inequality found within the social structure of society (Sleeter & Grant, 1987). This requires that a link between learning and social life be created and that knowledge be directly adapted to and practiced in the daily lives of students (Sleeter & Grant, 1987). In such an approach, teachers are the agents of change that empower their students and support democratic values (Banks, 2004). In this context, according to the Critical Multicultural Education Competency Model, the competencies that teachers should possess are as follows: 1) cultural competency components: awareness, knowledge, attitude and skills; 2) cultural competency contexts: personal, professional, institutional and social; 3) cultural competency foci: sociocultural perspectives, student learning-teaching and transformation; each consists of three dimensions that comprise four subcomponents.

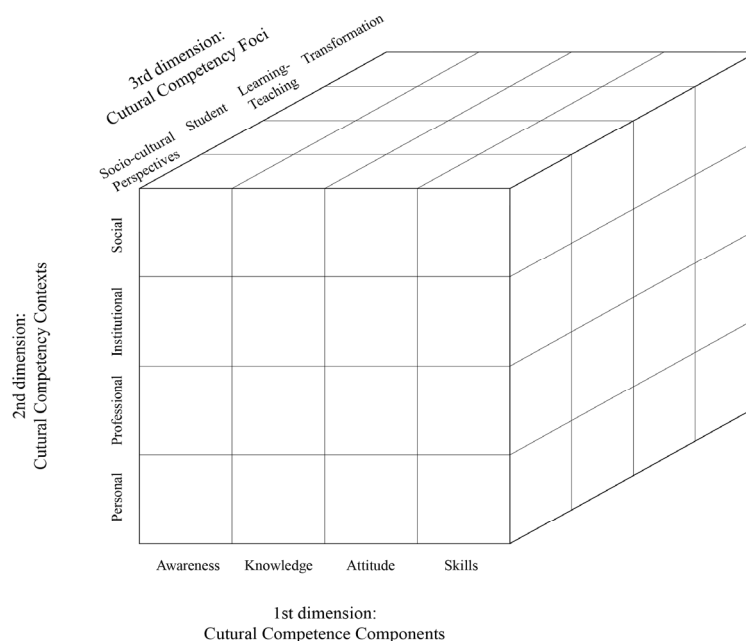


Figure 1. Dimensions of critical multicultural education competencies of teachers

1.1.1 Cultural Competency Components

The competencies of teachers were constructed as praxis theory (conscious actions/awareness in action) on education concepts (European Trade Union Committee for Education [ETUCE], 2008). Competencies in the education field contain a complex mix of attitudes, knowledge, skills, understandings and values which lead to effective actions in a certain situation (ETUCE, 2008). Cultural competency components in the Critical Multicultural Education Model are awareness, knowledge, attitudes and skills. According to the model, the components that are listed in these dimensions are interactive and interrelated. Therefore, the separation of these components is not possible.

The awareness component that is located in the first dimension of the model is based on Duval and Wicklund's "Self-Awareness Theory". According to the Self-Awareness Theory, human consciousness is bidirectional and can focus both on itself and the objects and situations which are located on the outer circumference. When it directs the attention onto itself, it becomes the "object" of evaluation. Since it is also a largely social structure, (Geller & Shaver, 1976; Mead, 1934), the attention that focuses on itself shows the same characteristics as the social assessment which is the most important process in interpersonal relationships. Most people are blind to their own cultural heritage. They tend to consider the practices of dominant cultural groups as "standard" and those of other groups as variations (Rogoff & Morelli, 1989). When people have conflicts with any standard, they attempt to change either the standards or their features (Silvia & Duval, 2001). This is the beginning of transformation.

Knowledge is another sub-dimension of the cultural competency components. Knowledge basically serves to facilitate actions. Any form of knowledge is contextual and it only makes sense within a certain perspective. According to Critical Theory, knowledge is a product of the socially and historically-defined people who hold power (Tierney, 1991). Knowledge reflects people's social status, cultural status and power status and it is based on the context of the "knowing person" and this knowledge is always defined and confirmed through one of such variables as gender or class (Banks, 1993; Tetreault, 1993). All children's rights, privileges and access to education depend on teachers having knowledge and their understanding of basic legal and political frameworks, rules and principles. The knowledge of teachers should correspond to different aspects of variety and new situations and teachers should be able to answer them. According to the critical theoretician Grioux (1983), educational programs dictate a certain set of assumptions and social practices with regard to how individuals or groups should relate to educational environments, and in a more broadly sense to society. These assumptions and practices reflect the dominant ideology of a particular time in a particular institution. Ideology, on the other hand, determines both implicit and explicit programs, especially the content of the program and strategies of instruction and assessment. Educational knowledge, which is learned from both formal and informal curriculum is, in fact, a selection and distribution of information from a much larger body of knowledge and therefore entails evaluative selections (Apple & King, 1983). As an evaluative selection, school knowledge must be considered as supporting a specific ideology (McLaren, 2003). In this context, the knowledge component requires from teachers to primarily have an awareness of education as a political event. Teachers also should be aware of the effects of their own cultural history and practice, and the attitudes, beliefs and feelings that are related to their own cultural history. This is because incorrect information acquired about culturally different groups is not a matter of free choice (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999; Sue, 2001). This misinformation is imposed through a process of social conditioning and people are taught to be afraid of and hate people who are different than themselves (Jones, 1997; Sue, 2001). Nobody in society is born prejudiced or biased or bigoted by their own free will (Dovidio, 1997; Sue, 1999, 2001). Impartiality and prejudices are generally expressed involuntarily at an unconscious level (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999; Sue, 2001). Therefore, teachers need to be aware of the conscious and unconscious assumptions, prejudices and impartialities of their cultural reference points. Another information that teachers need to have is the social impact that they have on students. Teachers exert both positive and negative impacts on the lives of their students in connection with self-esteem and their own sense of competency (Brooks, 2015). The attitudes and behaviors of teachers towards their students affect the learning of students and eventually shape the expectations of students about learning (Irvine, 1990; Pang & Sablan, 1998; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teachers also need to obtain required information on identity development. Identity, adopting a holistic approach, can be described as personal (uniqueness), group (the cultural values and beliefs that are shared with reference groups) and universal (the common characteristics of being human) (Sue, 2001). Identity is the main factor of personality which is increasingly learned by people to differentiate and direct themselves in the world. Identity gives meaning and purpose to life and perspective to human efforts. Through identity, individuals see themselves as, for example, belonging to a separate race, location, ethnicity, nationality, gender or culture (Woodhead, 2008). Positive identity is composed of those

aspects of self-concept, self-esteem and self-belief which enable a child to feel a sense of both individuality and belonging in their social world to develop appropriate cultural competencies, knowledge and skills and to achieve emotional well-being (Brooker, 2008). The process of developing a sense of self is to establish a connection between the personal and social identity of the individual. Learning that their family or cultural group is stigmatized or discriminated causes a loss of self-confidence and feelings of worthlessness. They need additional support to prevent a loss of self-esteem and sense of worth (Swadener, 2008). Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to have knowledge concerning positive identity development. Attitude is described as a predisposition of emotional and behavioral responses with the understanding that is built by individuals in the stage of mental awareness and knowledge. Culturally-competent teachers have an attitude to properly acknowledge students from different backgrounds (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Research has shown that affirmative attitudes exert a positive effect on the learning of students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990; Nieto, 1996). Teachers who are respectful of cultural differences know that students who are not from the dominant culture are also talented but that they come with different ways of thinking, behavior and speaking than the ones present in the dominant culture (Delpit, 1995). Therefore, the attitude of teachers towards students should provide students with a sense of individuality and a feeling of belonging to their own social world. Positive identity development, which is a combination of self-esteem and self-respect and knowledge, skills, and gaining cultural competencies that provide for the emotional health of children, should be supported (Brooker, 2008).

Skill is another component in this dimension. Skill can be defined as the use of an appropriate intervention in order to carry out education incorporating a multicultural approach. The implementation of multicultural education requires teachers to examine their own values, knowledge, and teaching practices with regard to diversity to avoid a delivery of a biased type of education (Brown & Marchant, 2002). Teachers need to understand the multidimensional nature of the complexity and diversity of this knowledge and the relationship between personal identity and group identities. Creating a rich learning environment is possible by recognizing different aspects of diversity. It is closely associated with the teachers' ability to use a variety of learning approaches, methods and materials. Meticulous planning is required and ensures the participation of all students in a learning environment and guarantees the creation of a supportive classroom for all students (Barton, 1997). It is very important to provide a safe learning environment. It is required for the identification of specific problems which will be generated through uncomfortable, adverse and risky situations for certain cultural groups. The selection and regulation of teaching methods must take into account the diversity of students and must target every child. Teachers should be able to develop their own competencies concerning evaluation methods and be allowed to exercise freedom in the selection of present educational materials such as books, video and other media. Such an assessment approach allows teachers to determine where and how issues relating to diversity have been ignored and when it is necessary to choose more appropriate teaching methods of education. Assessment approaches should also be flexible enough to be able to respond to the diversity of the student population and thus a number of culturally sensitive approaches should therefore be used.

1.1.2 Cultural Competency Contexts

The cultural competency contexts, which constitute the second dimension of the model, encompass the areas in which these competencies should be developed and applied. It was envisaged that the cultural competencies, which will be developed by the teachers who employ a critical multicultural education approach, should be fostered at an institutional and societal level. At a personal level, cultural competency is required from teachers and it allows them to become aware of other cultural backgrounds and values than their own, and respect cultural differences and values. In terms of multiculturalism, self-awareness can be defined as forming an understanding of the effects of personal beliefs and values and of how they are influenced by cultural circumstances. Awareness is also related to the individual's awareness of his/her limitations in the specializations and competencies required by his/her profession, of his/her differences from people from other cultures and of his/her negative feelings towards people of other cultures. The capacity of being aware of interpersonal behavior and cultural view points and to have the ability of interpreting intercultural interaction are one of the important skills that teachers should possess (Chisholm, 1994). Furthermore, another issue that teachers should be aware of is related to the specializations and limitations of their situations. The professional context of cultural competency means a combination of attitudes, values, knowledge, understanding and skills to effectively target people from different cultures (Perso, 2012). In this sense, for effective teaching to take place, educators are required to acquire specialized knowledge of content and pedagogic skills (Brown, 2007). The goal of multicultural education is not only to create tolerance so as to allow for diversity, but also to change the structures which continue to permit intolerance, oppression and inequality to exist. The institutional level of

cultural competency in the model means to change power relations in order to minimize structural discriminations present in institutions. Teachers need to understand the aspects of institutional policies and practices that might obstruct multicultural development and how these might affect their subject. Teachers need to critically evaluate the role that schools play in generating and legitimizing this inequality (Acar-Ciftci & Gurol, 2015). Though schools claim to offer unbounded opportunities for social progress, they simultaneously maintain their structure to limit the social progress of those lower on the social scale (Labaree, 1997; Gay, 1994). Adopting this perspective, teachers accept that education is naturally a politically and ethically complex process. The goal of multicultural education to ensure social justice and equality is related firstly to a transformation of teachers and then to the transformation of schools, the educational system and society. Critical Theory defines education as a transformative activity, which constitutes the central anxiety and which enhances the conditions to bring about democracy and social justice (Tierney, 1991). Multicultural education, on the other hand, uses the transformation of itself and school as a metaphor and starting point. The justice at school might also mean justice and equality at the social level (Gorski, 2010).

1.1.3 Cultural Competency Foci

The components of the socio-cultural perspective, the student, teacher and transformation constitute the third dimension of the model. To have a socio-cultural perspective means to approach policies in all fields, social relations and structures, institutional structures and practices, and education by putting culture at the very center of all practices. The people, who develop an awareness through the socio-cultural perspective, can use this awareness in professional, institutional and social fields. Self-awareness can be defined as forming an understanding of the effects of personal beliefs and values and how they are influenced by cultural circumstances from a socio-cultural point of view. Being aware of their own backgrounds/experiences and prejudices enables teachers to be more sensitive towards different groups and accept differences as well as helping them realize how these affect teacher-student relations, class management, education-teaching processes and evaluation. In this context, teachers should not only develop awareness for their own knowledge and skills but also explore how these impact students' learning activities. Teachers need metacognitive strategies to accomplish this (Chisholm, 1994; Cardelle-Elawar, 1992). The socio-cultural perspective is increasingly being used as a concept, which relocates culture to the center, in order to understand the learning and development of students (Rogoff, 1990). Critical Theory creates a framework for understanding how children are categorized by their race, class, gender and social limitations and also how to take action as an agency for self and social empowerment (McLaren, 2003). Teachers who possess a sociocultural awareness take responsibility to eliminate social inequalities. They are aware that there are no gaps in institutional structures or practices but rather these are consciously or unconsciously created and maintained by humans. Therefore, teachers need to develop their decision-making, social action, leadership and political activity skills as well as embrace a moral determination for human dignity and equality as much as merely enhance their knowledge on ethnic issues (Banks, 1991; Gay, 1994; NCSS, 1992). Hence, teachers need to have a clear vision regarding the goals of education and their own roles (Fullan, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The concept of transformation is a concept that is located at the center of Critical Theory. Fullan (1999) views teachers as agents of change. Villegas and Lucas (2002), on the other hand, think that it is a moral responsibility for teachers to be agents of change. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), teachers who view themselves as agents of change can understand how schools and society are interrelated. They believe that although education has the potential to eliminate inequalities at schools and transform society, unless there is an intervention in schools, schools tend to reproduce these inequalities by giving more status to the thinking, speaking and attitude styles of the dominant culture.

2. Method

2.1 Research Model, Population and Sample

In this research, quantitative research methods were designed according to the survey model. The population of the research consisted of 3,101 preschool teachers employed at 66 official independent kindergartens and 854 nursery classes in 25 districts, which are affiliated to the General Directorate of Basic Education, on the European side of the province of Istanbul during the 2014-2015 academic year. The sample of the research consisted of 178 voluntary teachers from 24 independent kindergartens and 56 nursery classes, which were selected using a cluster sampling method. On account of the 58 teachers out of 178 teachers who did not respond to a large portion of the personal information form and other teachers who did not respond the scale or invariably selected the same option as an answer or skipped the scale items, the statistical procedures were carried out with the data obtained from 120 participants.

2.2 Data Collection Tool(s)

Data were collected through a survey consisting of two parts in order to determine the perception of preschool teachers in regard to their critical multicultural education competencies. In the first part, there were five questions, which were developed by the researcher, regarding the gender, age, ethnicity, native language and the educational institution they graduated from of the participant preschool teachers. The “Critical Multicultural Education Competencies Scale” (CMECS), which consists of four sub-factors and 42 items and that is developed by Acar-Ciftci (2014), was used in the second part of the survey.

The suitability of the CMECS for this study was examined by looking at its reliability with an item analysis. The Alpha model was used for the reliability analysis of the items which are on the scale and in the sub-dimensions of the scale (Table 1). For the reliability analysis of the scale and the items in the sub-dimensions, adaptive values in relation with inter-item correlations were calculated using the Alpha model.

Table 1. Reliability table of sub-dimensions of critical multicultural education competency scale

Dimension/Scale	Number of Items	Safety Coefficient (α)
Dimension of Skill	19	0,887
Dimension of Knowledge	8	0,674
Dimension of Attitude	9	0,768
Dimension of Awareness	6	0,849
CMECS	42	0,811

As a result of the reliability analysis directed to determine the suitability of CMECS, it is found that the size of the reliability coefficients vary between 0.674 and 0.887. This result indicates that the reliability level of the scale and its sub-dimensions are adequate.

2.3 Data Analysis

All the data obtained from the preschool teachers were subjected to analysis with SPSS 18.0 (Statistical Program for Social Sciences). Before proceeding to any statistical process with data, it was checked whether the data contained any errors and whether the data were within the limits of the research, which was set by the goal of the research. The following statistical analyses were conducted with the research data: a creation of a summary of the demographic characteristics of the preschool teachers who constituted the sample and a calculation of the frequency (N) and percentage (%) of variables (Table 1). A calculation of the Average scores (\bar{x}) and standard deviation value (sd) of the preschool teachers regarding the CMECS and its sub-dimensions was also made. Since the normality distribution assumption turned out to be false, a non-parametric Mann-Whitney test was conducted in order to discover whether the perceptions of the preschool teachers regarding the CMECS and its sub-dimensions differentiated to a meaningful degree or not depending on their gender, age, ethnicity and native languages. A U-unbound (independent) samples t-test was conducted in order to determine whether the perceptions of the preschool teachers regarding the CMECS and its sub-dimensions differentiated or not depending on their gender, age, ethnicity and native languages. The variables of age, ethnic origin, and native language (independent variable) in the demographic characteristics of preschool teachers were grouped again before the analysis. The level of significance was accepted as .05 in all statistical calculations. When the significance value was found to be smaller than .05 ($p < .05$), the difference and correlations between groups of independent variants (categories) were approved as “meaningful” and the results were evaluated accordingly.

3. Results

In this part, teachers' perceptions regarding the CMECS were examined in terms of both general and various variables and the results are presented as follows:

3.1 The Results Regarding the Critical Multicultural Education Competencies of Preschool Teachers

The descriptive statistics that demonstrate the competency level of preschool teachers both generally and in terms of sub-dimensions are summarized below in Table 2.

Table 2. The descriptive statistics regarding the points provided on the Critical Multicultural Education Competencies Scale and its sub-dimensions by preschool teachers

Dimension/Scale	N	Minimum	Maximum	\bar{X}	Sd
Dimension of Skill	120	1	5	3,70	0,50
Dimension of Knowledge	120	2	5	3,12	0,57
Dimension of Attitude	120	2	5	3,76	0,51
Dimension of Awareness	120	2	4	3,25	0,44
CMECS	120	2	4	3,46	0,31

\bar{x} : Arithmetic mean, Sd: Standard deviation.

When the mean points (\bar{x}) were evaluated regarding the points which were given on the Critical Multicultural Education Competencies Scale and its sub-dimensions by preschool teachers, the following score interval was taken into consideration.

Option	Score interval
Strongly disagree	1,00-1,80
Disagree	1,81-2,60
Partly Agree	2,61-3,40
Agree	3,41-4,20
Strongly agree	4,21-5,00

When the calculated mean points were examined regarding the sub-dimensions of the critical multicultural education competencies of teachers, it could be seen that the teachers did not deem themselves sufficient in terms of knowledge and awareness. In terms of sub-dimensions, the preschool teachers found themselves the least sufficient in terms of knowledge (\bar{x} Knowledge = 3,12 \pm 0,56). This result was followed by the awareness dimension of the critical multicultural education competencies (\bar{x} Awareness = 3,25 \pm 0,44). The mean points of the teachers regarding these two sub-dimensions were at the "Partly Agree" level. On the other hand, preschool teachers found themselves quite sufficient in terms of skill and attitude sub-dimensions (\bar{x} Skill = 3,70 \pm 0,50) and (\bar{x} Attitude = 3,76 \pm 0,52). The mean points of the teachers regarding these two sub-dimensions were at the "Agree" level. The overall mean points of the teachers regarding the critical multicultural education competencies scale were calculated as: \bar{x} . The Critical Multicultural Education Competencies Scale = 3,46 \pm 0,30. This result indicated that the participant preschool teachers found themselves adequate/sufficient/positive in terms of the critical multicultural education competencies.

3.2 The Results for the Comparison of Critical Multicultural Education Competency Levels of Preschool Teachers According to the Gender Variable

Table 3. (N = 120) The Mann-Whitney test that was performed to determine whether the points of the teachers regarding the critical multicultural education competencies scale and its sub-dimensions differed according to the gender variable or not

Dimension/Scale	Gender	n	Mean Rank	Total Rank	Mann-Whitney U	
					Z	p
Dimension of Skill	Female	111	59,82	6640,50	0,75	0,454
	Male	9	68,83	619,50		
Dimension of Knowledge	Female	111	60,14	6675,50	0,40	0,689
	Male	9	64,94	584,50		
Dimension of Attitude	Female	111	59,83	6641,00	0,74	0,457
	Male	9	68,78	619,00		
Dimension of Awareness	Female	111	57,95	6432,50	2,84	0,004*
	Male	9	91,94	827,50		
CMECS	Female	111	58,63	6508,00	2,07	0,039*
	Male	9	83,56	752,00		

* The Difference is significant at $p < .05$ level.

As a result of the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test (Table 3) that was performed to determine whether the gender of the preschool teachers had an effect on the level of their critical multicultural education competencies generally and sub-dimensionally, it was seen that the gender of the teachers caused a significant differentiation in their level of perception in terms of the sub-dimension of awareness and the critical multicultural education competency scale as a whole.

3.3 The Results for the Comparison of the Critical Multicultural Education Competency Levels of Preschool Teachers According to the Ethnicity Variable

Table 4. (N = 120) The Mann-Whitney test which was performed to determine whether the points of the teachers regarding the critical multicultural education competencies scale and its sub-dimensions differed according to the ethnicity variable

Dimension/Scale	Ethnicity	n	Mean Rank	Total Rank	Mann-Whitney U	
					Z	p
Dimension of Skill	Turk	102	59,73	6092,50	0,58	0,563
	Other	18	64,86	1167,50		
Dimension of Knowledge	Turk	102	58,25	5942,00	2,09	0,037*
	Other	18	73,22	1318,00		
Dimension of Attitude	Turk	102	59,37	6056,00	0,85	0,397
	Other	18	66,89	1204,00		
Dimension of Awareness	Turk	102	58,01	5917,50	2,08	0,036*
	Other	18	74,58	1342,50		
CMECS	Turk	102	58,45	5961,50	2,04	0,042*
	Other	18	72,14	1298,50		

* The Difference is significant at $p < .05$ level.

The results of the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test (Table 4) that was performed to determine whether the ethnicity of the preschool teachers had an effect on their level of critical multicultural education competencies generally and sub-dimensionally are given above in Table 4. According to this test, the points of the Turkish

teachers and other teachers regarding the dimension of knowledge were different and the difference was in favor of the teachers from other ethnic backgrounds. When the mean rank points of the groups were examined, it was seen that the mean points of preschool teachers who had different ethnic backgrounds, regarding the dimension of knowledge, were higher than those of the Turkish preschool teachers in terms of the critical multicultural education competencies. The perception level of the Turkish teachers and the others, regarding the dimension of awareness, were different and the difference was also in favor of the teachers who had other ethnic backgrounds. When the mean rank points of the groups were examined, it was seen that the awareness level of the preschool teachers, who had different ethnic backgrounds, was higher than the that of the Turkish teachers in terms of the critical multicultural education competencies. Finally, it was found that the critical multicultural education competency levels of the Turkish teachers and others were different in general and it was also found that the difference was again in favor of the teachers who had different ethnic backgrounds. When the mean rank points of the groups were examined, it was seen that the critical multicultural education competency level of the preschool teachers who had different ethnic backgrounds was higher than that of the Turkish preschool teachers.

3.4 The Results for the Comparison of the Critical Multicultural Education Competency Levels of Preschool Teachers According to the Native Language Variable

Table 5. (N = 120) The Mann-Whitney test that was performed to determine whether the points of the teachers regarding the critical multicultural education competencies scale and its sub-dimensions differed according to the native language variable

Dimension/Scale	Native Language	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	Mann-Whitney U	
					Z	p
Dimension of Skill	Turkish	114	59,61	6796,00	1,22	0,223
	Other	6	77,33	464,00		
Dimension of Knowledge	Turkish	114	58,18	6633,00	3,19	0,001*
	Other	6	104,50	627,00		
Dimension of Attitude	Turkish	114	58,90	6715,00	2,20	0,028*
	Other	6	90,83	545,00		
Dimension of Awareness	Turkish	114	57,96	6607,50	3,52	0,000**
	Other	6	108,75	652,50		
CMECS	Turkish	114	57,76	6585,00	3,76	0,000**
	Other	6	112,50	675,00		

** The difference is significant at $p < .001$ and *difference $p < .05$ level.

According to the results of the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test (Table 5) that was performed to determine whether the native language of the preschool teachers had an effect on the level of their critical multicultural education competencies generally and sub-dimensionally, it was seen that the native language of the teachers caused differentiation in terms of the sub-dimensions of knowledge, attitude, awareness and the critical multicultural education competencies in general. The points of the native Turkish speaker teachers and teachers who were not native Turkish speakers, regarding the dimension of knowledge, were different and the difference was in favor of the teachers who were not native Turkish speakers. When the mean rank points of the groups were examined, it was seen that the mean points of preschool teachers who were not native Turkish speakers, regarding the dimension of knowledge, were different than those of the native Turkish speaker preschool teachers in terms of the critical multicultural education competencies and the difference was in favor of the teachers who had different native languages. The points of the native Turkish speaker teachers and the other teachers who were not native Turkish speakers, regarding the dimension of attitude, were different and the difference was again in favor of the teachers who were not native Turkish speakers. When the mean rank points of the groups were examined, it was seen that the mean points of preschool teachers who were not native Turkish speakers, regarding the dimensions of attitude, were higher than those of the native Turkish speaker preschool teachers in terms of the critical multicultural education competencies. The perception levels of the native Turkish speaker teachers and the other teachers who were not native Turkish speakers, regarding the dimension of

awareness, were also different and the difference was again in favor of the teachers who were not native Turkish speakers. According to the mean rank points, the awareness level of the preschool teachers who were not native Turkish speakers was higher than that of the native Turkish speaker teachers in terms of critical multicultural education competencies. It was found that the critical multicultural education competency level of the native Turkish speaker teachers and the teachers who were not native Turkish speakers was different in general and it was also found that the difference was again in favor of the teachers who were not native Turkish speakers. According to the mean rank points, the critical multicultural education competency level of the teachers who were not native Turkish speaker was higher than that of the native Turkish speaker teachers.

4. Discussion

The results of the study revealed that although the preschool teachers participating in the study perceived themselves as adequate in terms of the critical multicultural education competencies in the overall scale, they perceived themselves as partially adequate in terms of the knowledge and awareness components of the critical multicultural education competencies by considering themselves less adequate for the knowledge component. Another result was that the awareness level of the male teachers in the study were higher than that of the female teachers.

According to critical multicultural educators, “knowledge never speaks for itself, but rather is constantly mediated through the ideological and cultural experiences that students bring to the classroom” (Giroux, 1988, p. 100). Educational scholars argue that only by encouraging dominant cultures to “examine, acknowledge, and unlearn their own privilege” (Giroux & McLaren, 1989, p. 108) can one raise the awareness of dominant cultures about the oppression and discrimination against groups or individuals outside dominant cultures. While designing curricula, teachers may not be able to control teaching due to their unawareness about their own privilege and prejudices. Since teachers, in their education, are taught that all children are homogenous and must to be treated equally, they may not know how to work with children that are outside the dominant culture. In addition, a majority of the students in their class, parents, colleagues and administrators are also parts of the dominant culture. This situation prevents teachers from taking individual responsibilities by overcoming the socio-psychological obstacles in situations involving discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes both at schools and in society.

Furthermore, in curricula, the dominance of traditional conservative technocratic models (Apple, 1996; Cherryholmes, 1988; Freire, 1985; Giroux, 1983; Leistyna, 2002) that standardize depersonalized methods frequently used to educate students, teacher applications, and curricula and that conceptualizes learning and teaching as unrelated and scientific attempts constitutes a barrier in the actualization of multicultural education applications by teachers.

According to a number of critical educators, what the dominant common educational programs employ are the methods that mostly spell two phenomena in curricula and teaching practices: standardization and regulation. Furthermore, with a limited understanding, learning and teaching are conceptualized as scientific and separate efforts by these programs. “As such, the role of teacher who is ‘trained’ instead of actively educated is reduced to that of a passive an efficient distributor of information” (Leistyna, 2002).

Equality is the cornerstone of a modern and democratic society. Equality and justice are coexisting concepts that complement each other. In contemporary democracies, it is accepted that the most important instrument to achieve a just society is through the provision of equal educational opportunities (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004). Equality in education means ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to reach their educational potential or to at least acquire basic skills regardless of factors pertaining to their personal and social background such as gender, ethnicity or social environment in which the family lives (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2012). Thus, in order to make cognitive learning easier for them in addition to the social and emotional development of children from different cultures, employing learning activities that are consistent with the child’s culture is necessary as well as implementing an “uneven” educational approach which offers a “fair” implementation (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This is because “equality” and “justice” are not concepts that can be used interchangeably (Banks, 1995). Research has revealed that children from different social circles have unequal knowledge and skills when they start school (Burger, 2010). Therefore, it is very important to regulate preschool care and education programs in order to create a positive self-perception on the part of students as well as to eliminate such inequalities.

Teachers must foster a critical consciousness in order to allow students to “critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162). “The

awareness of one's own assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes is a first step to be able to positively interact and learn from others. In this process lies the essence of intercultural learning" (Martins, 2008, p. 203).

McLaren (2003) puts forward a notion of critical multiculturalism and calls for a restructuring of the social order through a radical approach to schooling. With this in mind, it is necessary for an educational framework informed by transformative knowledge to facilitate critical multicultural awareness for future teachers (Sleeter, 2000).

Leistyna (2002) advocates that critical multiculturalism is an important praxis for teachers and students to develop theoretical frameworks that historically and socially situate the deeply embedded roots of racism, discrimination, violence, and disempowerment. Education for diversity is a transformative education and as such is closely related to the concepts of equity, access and social justice (Nieto, 2000).

In this regard, what needs to be done in order to transform the existing education system and create the culture of diversity is to implement practices that (a) challenge inequality and promote access to an equal education, (b) raise the achievement of all students and provide them with an equitable and high-quality education, and (c) give them the opportunity to become critical and productive members of a democratic society (Nieto, 2010).

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