



# Multicultural Competence of Elementary Teacher Education Students

Laila Fatmawati<sup>1\*</sup>, Kirana Prama Dewi<sup>2</sup>, Wuri Wuryandani<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1,2</sup> Elementary Education Department, Ahmad Dahlan University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Elementary Education Department, Yogyakarta State University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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## ABSTRAK

Kompetensi multikultural sangat penting bagi sebuah negara yang memiliki keragaman, seperti Indonesia. Pada tingkat individu, kompetensi multikultural membantu mahasiswa tampil sukses dalam masyarakat modern dan mencapai pengembangan pribadi ke tingkat yang lebih lengkap. Pada tingkat kolektif, orang yang memiliki kompetensi multikultural tinggi dapat bekerja sama untuk mengurangi konflik antar budaya dan membangun kemakmuran bagi seluruh umat manusia. Sebagai calon guru sekolah dasar, mahasiswa PGSD diharapkan memiliki kompetensi multikultural yang tinggi. Tujuan penelitian ini untuk mengukur kompetensi multikultural mahasiswa PGSD. Metode penelitian yang digunakan yaitu survey dengan menyebarkan angket pada 121 mahasiswa PGSD. Teknik analisis data yang digunakan yaitu statistik deskriptif. Dari hasil survey menunjukkan data 85 mahasiswa memiliki kemampuan kompetensi multikultural yang tergolong sangat tinggi, 34 mahasiswa memiliki kemampuan kompetensi multikultural yang tergolong tinggi, 1 mahasiswa memiliki kemampuan kompetensi multikultural yang tergolong sedang, dan 1 mahasiswa tergolong dalam kategori sangat rendah. Kompetensi Cultural Awareness sebesar 24.57%, indikator Understanding of own and others' cultures sebesar 22.52%, indikator Cultural Competence sebesar 24.89%. Indikator Cultural Encounter sebesar 28.02%. Disimpulkan bahwa mahasiswa PGSD sudah memiliki kompetensi

multikultural yang tinggi.

## ABSTRACT

Multicultural competence is essential for a country that has diversity, such as Indonesia. At the individual level, multicultural competence helps students appear successful in modern society and achieve personal development to a complete or collective level. People with high multicultural competence can work together to reduce intercultural conflict and build prosperity for all humanity. As elementary teacher candidates, elementary teacher education students are expected to have high multicultural competence. This study aimed to measure the multicultural competence of primary teacher education students. The research method used was a survey by a questionnaire distributed to teacher education students. The data analysis technique used is descriptive statistics. The survey results show that 85 students have very high multicultural competence, 34 students have high multicultural competence, one has medium multicultural competence, and one is very low. Cultural Awareness Competence is 24.57%; understanding of own and others' cultures indicator is 22.52%; Cultural Competence indicator is 24.89%. The Cultural Encounter indicator is 28.02%. It was concluded that elementary teacher education students already have high multicultural competence.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

An outstanding illustration of a multicultural nation is Indonesia. More than 700 ethnic languages are spoken by the 1.128 distinct ethnic groups that live on the archipelago's 17.508 islands. The country may have interethnic violence and intercultural clash without having a sufficient grasp of multiculturalism, as some scholars have suggested, as has happened in a few instances of inter-ethnic clashes among local ethnic groups (Kim & Choi, 2020; Liata & Fazal, 2021; Patras et al., 2022). Unresponsiveness to diversity may result in social turmoil rather than more concord. With the founding of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015, the need for additional elementary teachers who are sensitive to cultural differences is more apparent regionally. As a result, many nations have embraced the idea of "multicultural education" to give children from various cultural backgrounds a more proper and accommodating education. Consequently, in multiethnic Indonesia, educators need to be more multiculturally competent (Erdem, 2020; Solehuddin & Budiman, 2019). Learning this skill as a teacher helps future generations of kids from all ethnic backgrounds coexist peacefully. Furthermore, today's world has become more culturally diverse, and all human interactions, including education, must better

\*Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [lailafatmawati.2022@student.uny.ac.id](mailto:lailafatmawati.2022@student.uny.ac.id) (Laila Fatmawati)

accommodate social justice and equity. In the conditions of the 21st century, multiculturalism must be incorporated into classroom teaching as an effective learning strategy (Alfulaila et al., 2019; Childs, 2017). Education must promote culturally responsive teaching as the central pedagogy, with local curriculum policies developed based on cultural values (Rus'an & H. Hamzah, 2022; Syahrial et al., 2019; Verma, 2019). In this era, human resources must acquire new competencies utterly different from those currently available. Elementary school teacher education students must possess multicultural competence (Syahrial et al., 2021; Wijayanti & Indriyanti, 2017).

Multicultural competence is an awareness of the diversity of students, culture, traditions, and cultural values adopted, as well as self-involvement in multicultural development in schools is essential for prospective elementary school teachers. In the current educational context, multicultural competence must constantly be developed, considering that Indonesia is a multicultural country that needs a teacher who follows the context of the life of a multicultural Indonesian society (Dewi, 2018; Solehuddin & Budiman, 2019; Tanjung et al., 2020). Therefore, the obligation of elementary school teacher education students to have multicultural competence is commonplace, considering their existence as agents of change. Elementary school teacher education students are responsible for shaping the nation's character and culture when they become elementary school teachers (Ramlan et al., 2023; Y. Yang et al., 2020).

Many studies have shown that higher education is crucial for integrating essential people skills, such as multicultural competence (Wang, 2022; Xu, 2000; R. Yang & Gao, 2020). With unparalleled human connectivity, multicultural competence is extra than a goal. As student populations become increasingly diverse, the need to prepare multiculturally competent teachers has become urgent (Smith, 2021; Zamroni et al., 2021). Through the results of literature reviews, observations, and interviews, this research aims to examine the multicultural competence of prospective elementary school teacher students is critical to understand how well the Department of elementary school teacher education deals with the 21st challenge. Studying this topic can provide helpful insights into the strengths and weaknesses of prospective elementary school teaching students in multicultural competence and assist in the (re)evaluation of learning adopted by various primary school teacher study programs.

In the previous literature, few studies were conducted to measure the multicultural competence of elementary teacher education students in Indonesia. However, most studies developed perceptions of multicultural competence for teachers (Kozhevnikova & Merkulova, 2020; Wang, 2022). Other previous studies highlight the contribution of multicultural competence development to the school experience (Erdem, 2020; Mariño et al., 2021; Melesse & Mekonnen, 2020). Much literature on multicultural training and pedagogy consist of growing intergroup communication to enhance intergroup relationships (Frantell et al., 2019; Wilcox et al., 2022). The increase of this literature has paralleled the improvement of multicultural competence ideas and research. Research promoting multicultural competency (such as multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills) has targeted graduate schooling or fitness provider delivery (Borge et al., 2022; Gregus et al., 2020; Wyant et al., 2020), receiving much less interest in undergraduate courses. Therefore, examining the multicultural competence of elementary school teacher education students as prospective elementary school teachers seems necessary.

Based on the explanation of the factors behind the importance of multicultural competence, educators need to enhance their awareness of different cultures and become more responsive to cultural diversity (King & Butler, 2015; Marosi et al., 2021). However, the value given to multicultural competence in teacher education programs needs to be revised. Multicultural competence is essential for a diverse country such as Indonesia. At the individual level, multicultural competence helps students appear successful in modern society and achieve personal development to a more level. At the collective level, people with high multicultural competence can work together to reduce intercultural conflict and build the prosperity of humanity (Barden et al., 2017; Wang, 2022). As elementary teacher candidates, elementary teacher education students are expected to have high multicultural competence. Thus, this study aims to measure multicultural competence was used to explore students' attitudes and beliefs about multicultural issues, increase their understanding of specific populations, and examine the impact of this awareness and knowledge on what and how they will teach. The indicators of multicultural competence in this study are cultural awareness; understanding of one's own culture and the culture of others; cultural competence; and cultural encounters.

## 2. METHOD

The type of research to be used in the study is a quantitative study using a method survey. The location of this research is elementary teacher education, Ahmad Dahlan University. The time of the research is March – April 2023. The population is the whole UAD PGSD students, counting 1280 students. In this study, the combination of sampling methods was used cluster random sampling. Determination of

the minimum number of samples taken refers to the formula from Gay and Diehl, which takes 10% of the existing population. The research sample in this study was a total of 121 students.

The data collection method uses a closed questionnaire; respondents only give a mark on one considered appropriate answer. As for the value given to answers that students in statements, i.e., have filled in, Very Suitable = 5; Appropriate = 4; Appropriate Enough = 3; Not Appropriate = 2; and Very Unsuitable = 1. Based on the analysis, using mean and standard calculations resulting in deviation categorization is show in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1. The Categories Competence Multicultural PGSD Students**

No	Categories	Ideal Score	Ideal Score Calculation Results
1.	Very Low	$X \leq (Mi - 1,5 SDi)$	25-51
2.	Low	$(Mi - 1,5 SDi) < X \leq (Mi - 0,5 SDi)$	51-67
3.	Moderate	$(Mi - 0,5 SDi) < X \leq (Mi + 0,5 SDi)$	67-83
4.	High	$(Mi + 0,5 SDi) < X \leq (Mi + 1,5 SDi)$	83-99
5.	Very High	$(Mi + 1,5 SDi) < X$	99-125

After getting the data, the step is to do a scoring to a questionnaire that has been given and recorded to competent multicultural students. After getting the data, the step is to examine with technical data analysis in descriptive statistics for a conclusion. This study uses descriptive statistical data analysis by presenting data through value, mean, percentage, and standard deviation.

Before done deployment, questionnaires, especially formerly questionnaire instrument trials, were carried out. The trial was conducted on 30 PGSD students. The trial is intended to know the validity and reliability of each questionnaire question item. If the value of  $r_{\text{count}} > r_{\text{table}}$  (0.355), then the data is said to be valid. Based on the results of the validity test obtained, 25 questions were valid, and five questions were not valid. Five questions are not valid and will be used in the research. Coefficient reliability was done using Cronbach Alpha with a value of 0.911 (very strong). [Table 2](#) served as the result of validating the multicultural competence questionnaire instrument.

**Table 2. Result of Validation of Multicultural Competence Questionnaire Instrument**

Aspect	No	Question Item	R Count	Validation
Cultural Awareness	1	I believe everyone has the same rights and obligations despite different religions, ethnicities, languages, and cultures.	0.265	invalid
	2	I have the freedom to practice the worship and customs of my culture.	0.442	valid
	3	I am free to treat others the same way even if they differ in religion, ethnicity, language, and culture.	0.309	invalid
	4	I expect others to respect my culture, religion, and language.	0.486	valid
	5	I can adjust to different environments and respect each other even if I do not feel comfortable.	0.401	valid
	6	I realized that I was living side by side with many people who certainly have differences in life.	0.439	valid
	7	I understand the interconnectedness of cultures so that there will be a sense of mutual need and be able to strengthen unity and integrity.	0.479	valid
	8	I must have a tolerant attitude to maintain and preserve cultural diversity.	0.614	valid
Understanding of own and Others' Cultures	9	My religion is better than other religions.	0.163	invalid
	10	My culture is better than other cultures.	0.221	invalid
	11	I feel that respect for others of different cultures is essential.	0.412	valid
	12	I feel the need to have the ability to understand other people's cultures by listening to and understanding different cultural perspectives.	0.539	valid
	13	My culture provides an understanding of other people's ethnic identity and how it affects their	0.606	valid

Aspect	No	Question Item	R Count	Validation
		identity development.		
Cultural Competence	14	I experienced how my cultural background affects my attitude toward managing problems during intercultural interactions.	0.677	valid
	15	I enjoy being in a group with people from different backgrounds because I can think from different perspectives and have various references.	0.614	valid
	16	Following other cultures does not mean that I forget my own culture, but following other cultures can make me understand the beauty of cultural diversity.	0.577	valid
	17	Despite having different religions, ethnicities, languages, and cultures, I make friends with everyone.	0.535	valid
	18	All people have the same right to practice their religion and culture.	0.469	valid
	19	I communicate with everyone regardless of religion, ethnicity, language, and culture.	0.515	valid
	20	I encourage my friends to respect others different in religion, ethnicity, language, and culture.	0.579	valid
	21	The campus is where people of different religions, ethnicities, and cultures can safely mix.	0.282	invalid
	22	My campus actively encourages students to mix with others from different religious, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds.	0.706	valid
	23	I do not differentiate attitudes toward individuals with cultural differences.	0.437	valid
Cultural Encounter	24	On campus, I learned how to appreciate and respect differences in religion, culture, language, and ethnicity.	0.644	valid
	25	Understand other individuals with feelings and thoughts from different cultures.	0.697	valid
	26	Understanding others from different cultures actively brings peace to our lives.	0.820	valid
	27	I enjoy communicating with people from different cultures.	0.662	valid
	28	I am confident I can interact with people of different religions, cultures, languages, and ethnicities.	0.763	valid
	29	I like to learn about other cultures and am interested in learning about them.	0.731	valid
	30	Honesty and sincerity in communication go a long way in building an empathetic atmosphere.	0.478	valid

Furthermore, the reliability test of the questionnaire instrument was carried out. The results of the questionnaire test given to students were classified in the "very strong" category in the interval 0.80 - 1.000 with a value of 0.911. Based on the results of empirical validation and reliability tests, it is concluded that the questionnaire used is valid and reliable for determining the multicultural competence of PGSD students. Questionnaire competence Multicultural is given from student to student refers to aspects of multicultural competence in the form of Cultural Awareness, Understanding of own and Others' Cultures, Cultural Competence, and Cultural Encounters (Frisby, 2018; Zamroni et al., 2021). Grid of questionnaire competence multicultural is show in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Grid Questionnaire Competence Multicultural

No	Aspect	Question Number	Number of Question
1.	Cultural Awareness	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	6
2.	Understanding of own and Others' Cultures	7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	6
3.	Cultural Competence	13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18	6

4. Cultural Encounters	19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25	7
<b>Amount</b>		<b>25</b>

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### Result

Results of questionnaire data analysis of multicultural competence of elementary teacher education students are known that from the whole sample counting 121 students, there are 85 students own ability competence multicultural which is classified as very high, 34 students with own ability competence multicultural belonging height, one student with own ability competence multicultural belonging moderate, and one student belong in the very low category. The visualized is show in Figure 1.

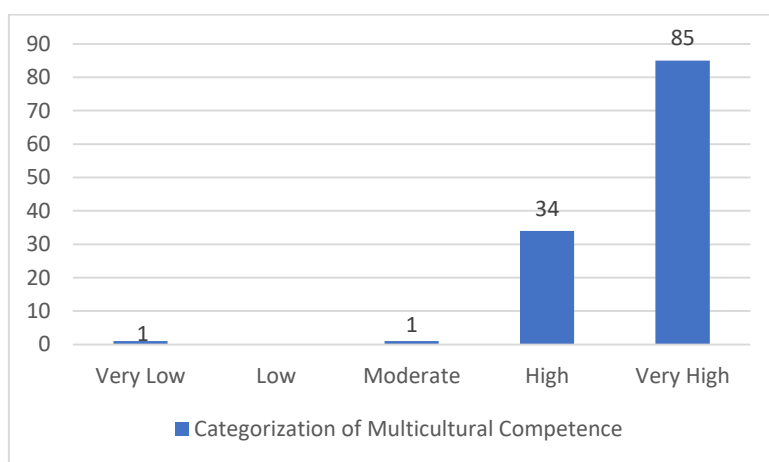


Figure 1. Categories Competence Multicultural Student

Ability competence is multicultural and covers several indicators for the score of each indicator. Base on Figure 1 show that score obtained from the Cultural Awareness indicator is 3108 or 24.57%; the indicator of Understanding of own and others' cultures of 2848 or 22.52%; the Cultural Competence indicator is 3148 or 24.89%; and the Cultural Encounter Indicator is 3544 or by 28.02%. Indicator score competence multicultural can be visualized in Figure 2.

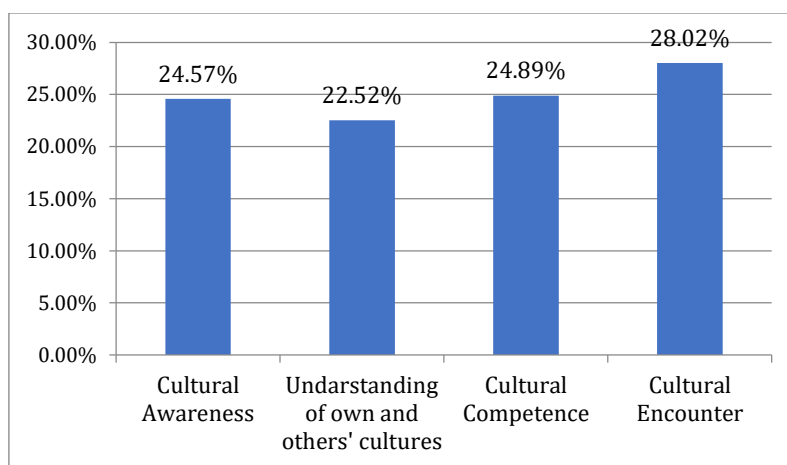


Figure 2. Capability Multicultural Competence

Base on Figure 2 data overview shows that the multicultural competence of UAD PGSD students is excellent. This study's results support previous research by comparing the multicultural competence of high school students in Indonesia and New Zealand. The research results on student exchanges in Germany and India show a clear improvement in multicultural competence between Year 1 and Year 2 before and after participating in the study abroad program. The improvements include the following aspects: the ability to interact with minority/personal cultures and interaction skills that transcend cultural boundaries and can function effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds. In addition, the research also showed an awareness of multicultural issues and discrimination among minorities, as



well as an awareness of differences in cultural groups' preferences in discussing intimate aspects of their lives. Participants also demonstrated an understanding of cultural labels that can result in discrimination against minorities and realized that attention to multicultural issues is essential. In addition, they also understood the impact and operation of entrenched racist concepts in society. They realized that some racial/ethnic minorities sometimes view the education/psychology profession as supporting the dominating white view (status and power).

## Discussion

Previous research shows that the multicultural competence of high school students in Indonesia is much higher than that of high school students in New Zealand through a survey conducted on counselors in California (Zamroni et al., 2021). The study's outcomes revealed that counselors assessed their ability to handle diverse cultures. However, these assessments were more strongly associated with their overall confidence in providing career counseling than external assessments of their reported multicultural counseling practices. The findings also emphasized the significance of training and practical experience in cultivating multicultural competence (Bravo et al., 2021).

In this study, participants also learned about acculturation models of various ethnic groups, including culture-specific models of interaction between races/ethnicities. Participants also became aware of the role of culture and racism in identity formation among minorities and recognized the barriers and benefits of cross-cultural interactions. They became more comfortable with different ethnicities and beliefs and aware of the barriers hindering minorities' access to education or mental health services. Thus, the results of this study suggest that study abroad program experiences can positively contribute to the development of students' multicultural competence, increase awareness of multicultural issues, and reduce stereotypes and prejudices that may exist in intercultural interactions (Harris et al., 2019; Melesse & Mekonnen, 2020).

In an era of increasing globalization progress, PGSD students must understand the importance of multicultural competence in preparation. As prospective teachers, checkers are integrated with other teacher competencies (Erdem, 2020; Melesse & Mekonnen, 2020). Competence multicultural refers to the ability individual or group to interact, communicate, and work effectively with people from backgrounds behind different cultures. Aspect multicultural competence includes awareness culture, knowledge culture, competence culture, and adaptation culture (Efianingrum et al., 2022; Y. Yang et al., 2020). Multicultural competence covers appropriate awareness, knowledge, and skills for different cultures and the ability to overcome possible challenges that arise in multicultural (Barden et al., 2017; Said Dođru & Demirbař, 2021; Wang, 2022). Multicultural competence is relevant in the context of a growing society diverse in a manner culture but also crucial in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment for students. Elementary teacher education students need to understand and develop multicultural competence to interact with students from backgrounds behind different cultures effectively. Multicultural competence not only impacts learning students but also on developing their personalities, attitudes, and value (Vatamaniuk et al., 2021; Wilcox et al., 2022).

The benefits of multicultural competence for elementary teacher education students are to help develop a deep understanding of diverse cultures in class. The students recognize and respect other students from different cultures, avoid prejudice or discrimination, and build positive relationships with all students. Competency multicultural also equips students with inclusive teaching strategies; when possible, they face more practical challenges. Integrate perspective culture in the curriculum, provide reflective teaching materials diversity cultures, and use approach-responsive teaching to need individuals (Borge et al., 2022; Mariño et al., 2021). Multicultural competent primary school teacher education students can serve as role models for their students. They can promote inclusiveness, respect cultural differences, and build harmonious intercultural relations in the classroom. In an increasingly connected global era, multicultural expertise is becoming an added value in work, the skill needed to function effectively in a pluralistic society (Bravo et al., 2021; Schmidt, 2022).

The many challenges faced do not mean there are no strategies for developing student multicultural competence. Various strategies to improve student competency include integrating special courses or modules on multiculturalism in the elementary school teacher education curriculum (Arphattananon, 2021; Chouari, 2017). The curriculum may include an understanding of cultural diversity, cross-cultural communication skills, inclusive teaching strategies, and an understanding of social justice. Education is essential in constructing multicultural education (Arifin, 2013; Banks, 2020). Elementary school teacher education students may be allowed to experience diverse field experiences, such as teaching in schools with students from different cultural backgrounds. Practical teaching in schools will help students master cross-cultural communication skills, face diversity challenges, and develop a deeper understanding of cultural diversity. Elementary school teacher education students can

interact with local communities with cultural diversity because diversity is challenging for prospective teachers (Pang et al., 2011; Wahyani et al., 2022). Learning can involve the community, such as inviting guest speakers from various cultural backgrounds, visiting places of worship, or participating in cultural festivals. Such learning will help students broaden their understanding of different cultures and values. Elementary school teacher education students are encouraged to read literature on multiculturalism, research, and relevant case studies to help students deepen their understanding of multicultural issues. In addition, students can raise awareness about good practices in teaching students with diverse cultural backgrounds (Arphattananon, 2021; Romano Galindo & Andriyanti, 2021).

Elementary school teacher education students are led to self-reflection about their cultural diversity and how this can affect their interactions with students. Furthermore, students can build self-awareness about personal attitudes and values to help them become more open and responsive to cultural diversity in the classroom (Barden et al., 2017; Maiese, 2019). Organizing special training and workshops for elementary school teacher education students can emphasize the development of multicultural competence. Simulating diversity situations, role-playing, group discussions, and case studies carry out training and workshops. These activities help students understand and overcome challenges related to cultural diversity. Digital resources can be used in learning to enrich students' understanding of cultural diversity and provide in-depth learning experiences (Alizadeh & Chavan, 2016; Kravets et al., 2021; Mamaeva et al., 2022).

The limitation of this study is that it only discusses one variable of multicultural competence. Many variables are relevant to multicultural competence, such as education level and learning experience, including study abroad or cultural exchange programs, which can affect a person's understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity. Another area for improvement is the duration of the study. It is possible to conduct longitudinal research to determine changes in competence over a long period. Another study showed that the growth rate of student perceptions of multicultural competence counseling increased during the program from orientation, practicum, to the internship (Gonzalez-Voller et al., 2020).

Research on multicultural competence has far-reaching implications and positive impacts on various aspects of life. The results of this research assist the development of inclusive education by integrating multicultural issues into the curriculum and creating a welcoming learning environment for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. In addition, this research increases awareness and understanding of cultural diversity in society, reduces stereotypes and prejudices, and improves individuals' intercultural skills in communicating and adapting to people from different cultural backgrounds. The implications of this research also include increased success in the workplace, multicultural leadership formation, intercultural conflict resolution, and its essential role in diplomacy and international relations. All of these contribute to building a more inclusive, just, and harmonious society, improving the quality of life for all its citizens.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on a survey on the multicultural competence of elementary school teacher education students at Ahmad Dahlan University, it can be concluded that students have very high multicultural competence. Multicultural competence for elementary school teacher education students must be addressed in an increasingly diverse educational context. Students need to understand the importance of developing a deep understanding of cultural diversity, cross-cultural communication skills, and inclusive teaching strategies. Multicultural competence benefits students and helps them face the challenges of diversity, preparing them for a multicultural world of work. The multicultural competence of elementary school teacher education students needs to be improved sustainably, so it requires a holistic and integrated approach. With various strategies to increase multicultural competence, students will be better prepared and competent in facing the challenges of cultural diversity in the classroom and become teachers who are inclusive and responsive to the needs of all students.

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