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## **Pre-service Teachers' Awareness about Cultural Diversity in Educational Settings and their Readiness to Teach Culturally Diverse Students: The Case of Bahir Dar University**

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**Abstract:** Preparing pre-service-teachers to teach students from different cultural backgrounds has become an issue that concerns many researchers and educators. This article examines pre-service teachers' awareness about cultural diversity in educational settings and their readiness to teach culturally diverse students. Bahir Dar University was the research setting and teacher educators and students (pre-service teachers) of the faculty of education were taken as the research participants. The necessary data was generated using interview, questionnaire and document review. The result revealed that pre-service teachers were hardly aware of cultural diversity in educational settings. The professional education courses contained virtually negligible proportion of issues of cultural diversity and were inefficient in preparing pre-service teachers to teach culturally diverse students. It was also found that, for different reasons, pre-service teachers do not seem to be competent and ready to teach culturally diverse students. To alleviate such problems, multicultural education should be incorporated in the teacher education programs. Moreover, to prepare culturally responsive teachers who are competent to teach culturally diverse students, teacher education institutes should not merely focus on teaching about cultural diversity in educational setting but also they should advocate cultural diversity in their everyday activities.

**Key words:** pre-service teachers; cultural diversity; diverse student

### **Introduction**

One of the best ways that help a country to bring and maintain quality education is to have teachers who are highly qualified, competent and capable of teaching in diverse society. Teachers, wherever they are assigned or chose to teach, are expected to offer sufficient knowledge to

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their students. To be able to give sufficient knowledge, they should be competent in subject matter, teaching methodologies and assessment techniques. They also need to be able to create smooth relationship with their students and the community at large. It is also important for teachers to take into consideration differences in backgrounds among diverse students. In order to get these kinds of knowledge and skills, they need to be exposed to such issues in their pre-service or in-service trainings. For example, in order to teach culturally diverse students, teachers need to know the issues and strategies related to teaching culturally diverse students. In this case, teacher education institutes need to prepare courses and trainings that enable their students to be effective in teaching culturally diverse students. It is generally accepted that effective teaching depends on how well teachers know their students not only within the classroom but also beyond that (Gay, 2002; Howard, 1999 cited in Santoro, 2007). It is also clear that understanding the cultural diversity of students can promote the teaching-learning process.

According to a study conducted by a task force on teacher education at secondary school, teachers were found to be incompetent in many aspects (MOE, 2003). The major aspects identified in the study are:

- The professional competence of teachers is deficient;
- The content knowledge of teachers is unsatisfactory;
- The teaching skills and techniques are very basic;
- Teachers do not match up to the standards and expectations of their profession;
- There are failures in school management and administration including lack of knowledge of the ETP [Education and Training Policy] and proper implementation of the career structure;
- There is a mismatch between teacher education and school education;
- There is a lack of professionalism, and ethical values in Teacher Education programs;

- The quality of courses and methods of teaching are theoretical and teacher centered;
- The practicum receives inadequate emphasis and is inefficiently implemented at all levels of teacher education;
- Student assessment does not adequately identify difficulties and potential in order to enhance students' learning;
- Action research is given little or no attention at all levels of Teacher Education; and
- TEIs, schools and communities have insufficient links between them.

Even though teachers' competence in teaching culturally diverse students is not specifically criticized, it can be included under many sub-themes mentioned above. For example, deficiency in professional competence, low level of teaching skills and techniques, and poor relationship between schools and communities could be an indicator for teachers' lack of competence in teaching culturally diverse students. As a result of these competency problems, there emerged a need for a paradigm shift within Pre-service Teacher Education Program. Consequently, the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) documents set different competencies that teachers are expected to possess. These are competence in the subject and the content of teaching, communication and approaches to teaching and learning, classroom organization and management, assessment, values, attributes, ethics and abilities essential to professionalism (MOE, 2003). In order to be effective, there are a number of specific competencies listed under each major category which teachers are expected to fulfill. The TESO also aims at producing teachers who can provide education which is inclusive of all students.

Ethiopia is a multicultural country with different ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious groups who are not totally living in delimited territory - one life across the other's territory and cultural zone. Thus, cultural diversity is exhibited at every corner of the country. Education in such a country should, therefore, be multiculturalized. Teacher education institutes should offer culturally responsive training; teachers also need to be culturally responsive

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in order to address students from these diverse groups. Because of this, the shift in the paradigm mentioned above has to consider teachers' competence in teaching culturally diverse students.

If teacher education programs are serious about meeting the needs of students from culturally diverse background, it is necessary to admit students from different cultural background (Baker, 1997; Malin, 1999 cited in Campbell, 2000). In this regard, the cultural diversity of students attending schools and universities in Ethiopia is a reality. The admission policy of Bahir Dar University (BDU) is open to every individual regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, language, culture, etc. As long as the applicants fulfill the required academic qualification, their cultural background has nothing to do with their admission. The University has a pre-service teacher education program that contains diverse students. Graduates of the program are also placed across the country to teach culturally diverse students. In order to teach diversified students in the Ethiopian schools, pre-service teachers should be made aware of the existing diversity. Of course, having awareness is not an end by itself; the end is, in fact, a way to deal with how to teach culturally diverse students.

Thus, teacher education programs are expected to play a great role in preparing competent pre-service teachers who can effectively teach culturally diverse students. Research finding also indicates the need for cultural diversity in education for the following reasons the diverse nature of students, students' need to learn about other cultures, the need to eliminate prejudice in society and/or to increase understanding among different people, and to address the needs of each student (Barry & Lechner, 1995). Moreover, cultural diversity poses pedagogical and social challenges to future educators (Chisholm, 1994). Therefore, examining pre-service teachers' awareness about cultural diversity in educational settings and their readiness to teach culturally diverse students was the intent of this study. The study is expected to provide answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent are pre-service teachers aware of cultural diversity in educational settings?
2. Are pre-service teachers ready to teach culturally diverse students?
3. Do professional education courses adequately prepare pre-service teachers to teach culturally diverse students?

### **Related Literature**

Studies by Gay, 2002; 1997; Smith, 2000 and Spate, 2006 revealed that teaching culturally diverse students requires culturally responsive teaching, teacher education program and teachers.

### **Culturally Responsive Teacher Education Program**

Educators generally agree that effective teaching requires mastery of content knowledge and pedagogical skills. As Howard (1999) so aptly states, we can't teach what we don't know. This statement urges the need for teachers to have knowledge about their students and to learn about others. However, many research findings reveal that too many teachers are inadequately prepared to teach culturally diverse students (Gay, 2002).

Gay (1997, p. 174) claims, "Teacher education programs need to be multiculturalized." Culturally responsive teacher education programs teach how culturally different groups reflect cultural values and shape learning behaviors. They also teach how to modify classroom interactions to better accommodate students from diverse cultural backgrounds. A study conducted by Sleeter (2001) confirmed that those teachers who are well aware of and skilled in teaching in culturally diverse context throughout their preparation program are undoubtedly better than their counterparts who missed to learn those skills in their preparation program.

Research results also indicate that community-based cross-cultural immersion programs are effective in preparing teachers for culturally diverse students. Community-based cross-cultural immersion programs "...are those

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in which teacher education students actually live in communities that are culturally different from their own while they are learning to teach,” (Sleeter, 2001, p. 91). Therefore, the relationship between schools and community is a vital point in teaching culturally diverse students. Studies also confirm that communities’ involvement with their students’ school supports students’ achievement. (Haberman, 1998; Lynch, 1982). Hence, it is important to build cross-cultural relationships between parents and teachers in schools.

Developing effective skills for teaching ethnically diverse and culturally different classrooms requires that teachers understand the interactions among culture, ethnicity, socialization, teaching, and learning (Garcia, 1994; Hollins, King and Hayman, 1994; Spindler cited in Gay, 1997). “These ideas, along with learning theory principle of continuity, lead to some logical conclusions that support the need to multiculturalize teacher education programs,” (Gay, 1997, p. 174).

Teacher education institutions are, as argued above, places where pre-service teachers introduce themselves to issues of cultural diversity in education and get the light and ways that enable them to teach culturally diverse students. The current and emerging socio-cultural realities about teachers and students – teaching and learning – in Ethiopia underscore the importance of and the need for multicultural education in the teacher education programs.

### **Culturally Responsive Teachers**

Teachers in culturally diverse classrooms face many challenges in creating an appropriate classroom environment and high standards of instruction that foster the learning of all students. Background factors like gender, social class membership and prior experiences with diversity are some of the main factors that affect teachers’ attitudes and behavior to teach culturally diverse students (Garcia and Pugh, 1992 cited in Fritz, Kreutzer, MacPhee, and Oltjenbruns, 1994; Smith, 2000).

Teachers who use pertinent examples and analogies from students' lives to introduce or clarify new concepts are described as culturally responsive teachers (Banks, 1995). According to Lucas and Villegas (2002, p. 20) culturally responsive teachers:

(a) are socioculturally conscious; (b) have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds; (c) see themselves as responsible for and capable of bringing about change to make schools more equitable; (d) understand how learners construct knowledge and are capable of promoting knowledge construction; (e) know about the lives of their students; and (f) design instruction that builds on what their students already know while stretching them beyond the familiar.

Since culturally relevant teaching requires that students maintain some cultural integrity as well as academic excellence (Gay, 2002), culturally responsive teachers should utilize students' culture as a vehicle for teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Research also indicates that students with different cultural norms are at risk if teachers have little knowledge, sensitivity or appreciation for diversity (McAllister and Irvine, 2000; Taylor, 1990). Teachers with little knowledge, sensitivity or those who have little space for diversity may perceive differences as problems and respond to students' diversity with negative attitude and low expectations (McAllister and Irvine, 2000). Studies also show that when teachers and students have little or no shared background, students' opportunities to learn valuable knowledge are at risk (Kleinfeld and Noordhoff, 1993). Because of this, teachers of multicultural school need to have the knowledge and skills of teaching culturally diverse students. According to Banks (1997), continuous cross-cultural awareness training, and integrating multicultural courses in the teacher preparation programs can help teachers to develop the skills needed to teach culturally diverse students.

Culturally responsive teachers work together with parents and the community (Dibernard, 1996). Teachers concerned with developing a culturally relevant and responsive classroom environment take time to gain the trust of parents and appreciate the insight that parents have to offer. Culturally aware teachers put great effort into getting to know their students and families. They understand that, by learning the cultural norms and values of the students, they will be better equipped to present knowledge in a meaningful way. Students also learn best when they believe that the teacher cares about them (Spates, 2006).

Though teachers cannot teach what they do not know (Howard, 1999), they should be willing and able to teach what they are not (Dibernard, 1996). Teaching what they are not refers to teaching students that are different from what the teacher is (e.g. teaching students who have different culture, language and religion from the teacher; teaching opposite sex; teaching people with disability when the teacher is “able”). In this regard multicultural education will be a powerful tool because it helps teachers to teach and treat all students regardless of their culture, religion, sex, ability, etc. (Banks, 1997).

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Gay (2002) describes culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them. It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups; it builds bridges between home and school experiences. Culturally responsive teaching teaches students to know and appreciate their own and each others' cultural heritages. It also incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills usually taught in schools. This shows that in culturally responsive teaching, pedagogical issues are as important as multicultural curriculum. Therefore, culturally responsive teaching recognizes respects and uses students' identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments. Culture is deeply



embedded in any teaching. Because of this, teaching culturally diverse students has to be multicultural (Gay, 2002; Smith, 2000).

### **Methodology**

This research followed a qualitative - case study research design. Bahir Dar University (BDU) was selected as the research setting mainly for two reasons. First, it is one of the oldest universities in Ethiopia that have ample experience in offering Teacher Education program. Second, it has an easy access to the researcher to conduct the study.

### **Data sources**

Teacher educators from the Department of Pedagogical Science and graduating class students from each department of the Faculty of Education were used as data sources. Teacher educators of pedagogical science department are offering professional education courses and are more responsible for producing culturally responsive teachers. This is why they were selected purposively. Graduating class students were selected because they had taken (some of them were taking) almost all the required professional education courses. Senior students are believed to be able to give better information than first and second year students. It should be noted that the Department of Civics and Ethical Education had no students who graduated in the academic year the data for this study was collected. This is why Department of Civics and Ethical Education had been excluded from the study.

### **Instruments**

Questionnaire, semi-structured interview and document review were used as data generation instruments. Both questionnaire and semi-structured interview were used to generate data from teacher educators and students. The document review was used to generate data from course syllabi and modules of professional education courses.

The questionnaire was adapted from Barry and Lechner (1995). It was given to an expert for scrutiny and suggestion. Based on the critique offered by an expert, some changes and revisions were made. Then, a pilot study was undertaken to check the suitability of the questionnaire. After that, the revised questionnaire was administered to the research participants. It was administered to teacher educators and students in their offices and classrooms respectively. Most of them returned the completed questionnaire within three days. The questions focus on three major issues: pre-service teachers' awareness about cultural diversity in education, their readiness to teach culturally diverse students, and the efficiency of professional education courses in preparing pre-service teachers to teach culturally diverse students. The same questionnaire was used to generate data from both data sources. Ten teacher educators and fifty students (ten from each department) participated in responding to the questionnaire.

The semi-structured interview was developed based on the research questions. The interview was made on a one-to-one basis with five teacher educators and ten students (one from each department) who were chosen using available sampling technique. The purpose of the interview was to generate detailed information about the three major issues of the research to elaborate further the data gained through the questionnaire.

The document review was used to see the efficiency of professional education courses in preparing competent pre-service teachers to teach culturally diverse students. While reviewing the documents, emphasis was given to the objectives and contents of professional education courses so as to see how much emphasis is given to issues related to cultural diversity in relation to teaching and learning.

## **Data Analysis**

The data generated from sources using interview, questionnaire and document review were coded, thematically categorized and analyzed. The themes were drawn from the research questions, some competencies listed in the TESO document, and the generated data. In order to check and keep the validity of the study, information among data sources and instruments was triangulated. All descriptions were written in narrative form to provide a holistic picture in relation to pre-service teachers' awareness about cultural diversity in educational settings and the teachers' readiness to teach culturally diverse students.

## **Result**

### ***The Efficiency of Professional Education Courses***

The data obtained both from teacher educator and student questionnaire confirmed that the professional education courses hardly contain issues about cultural diversity and are inefficient to prepare pre-service teachers to teach culturally diverse students. One of the teacher educators asserted that:

...to be frank, professional courses are not efficient in preparing our students for culturally diverse classroom. ...the objectives and descriptions of professional education courses have nothing about cultural diversity. We prepare modules based on these objectives and descriptions. That is why these courses lack contents about cultural diversity. So, teacher educators should not be blamed for its inefficiency.

In the questionnaire, students were asked to mention courses in which they had learnt about cultural diversity in education. In response, many students mentioned 'Civic and Ethical Education', which is not a professional education course.

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Some teacher educators stated there are some professional education courses (Curriculum Studies, Educational Psychology, Special Needs Education, and General Methods of Teaching) that discuss cultural diversity and/or multicultural education. However, the data obtained from the review of the related document did not confirm this.

From the data obtained using document review, especially in the course 'Curriculum Studies', there are sub-units like "Society and Culture as Foundation of Curriculum" and "Multicultural Curricula". The former sub-unit is about how society and culture influence and shape curriculum designing, and the latter is about designing and evaluating a certain curriculum from a multicultural point of view. Their objectives are to teach students about the need for designing curricula that respond to the basic demands of different cultures, and to enable pre-service teachers to evaluate curriculum at a specific level by considering criteria related to the basic demands of the different subcultures. These contents aim at helping pre-service teachers in designing and evaluating curricula prepared for culturally diverse learners rather than preparing pre-service teachers for the actual diverse classroom teaching. But in reality, secondary school teachers rarely design or evaluate the curricula. They are expected only to implement the curricula designed and developed by experts at upper levels of the education system. Therefore, the basic thing that pre-service teachers need to get should focus on how to implement a certain curriculum in a way that suits culturally diverse classroom settings. Thus, the contents of the Curriculum Studies course should have focused on introducing tools that pre-service teachers can use to make curriculum materials suitable for diverse students. Besides this, a single unit may not provide enough opportunity that can bring the intended change and make pre-service teachers competent to teach culturally diverse students.

In the other professional education courses mentioned above by teacher educators, the document review did not show existence of contents directly related with cultural diversity or multicultural education that are relevant to

create awareness about cultural diversity in educational settings and make pre-service teachers ready to teach culturally diverse students.

### ***Pre-service Teachers' Awareness about Cultural Diversity in Educational Settings***

The data generated from students questionnaire indicated that the cultural diversity/multicultural related contents included in the Curriculum Studies courses are inefficient to make students aware of cultural diversity though their teachers (teacher educators) believe the other way round. Students argue that they are not that much aware of the relationship between culture, education and the role of cultural diversity in educational settings.

A study by Zeichner, et al. (1998) revealed that knowledge about culture is one tool that educators may make use of when devising solutions for difficulties in educating diverse students. However, in this study, all students argued that they had never been taught about cultural issues and their role in education. According to some students, teacher educators did not take students' cultural background as a resource and search for different methods that are appropriate for culturally different students.

One of the students described it as: *"Let alone believing in the equality of cultures and taking students culture as a resource for their teaching, most teachers do not know where we came from and who we are. What they knew is our names and sex."* Some students also blamed their teachers for not being culturally sensitive. According to them, there were some teacher educators who used some ethnic groups to exemplify bad experiences and backwardness. Many students doubted whether their teachers themselves are aware of the role of culture and cultural diversity in educational settings.

Some teacher educators believed that their students are aware of cultural diversity. One of them, who believes students are aware of cultural diversity to some extent, stated, *"After they take the course 'Curriculum Studies' that contains issues related to cultural diversity, I believe they have the*

*knowledge and awareness about cultural diversity.*” However, according to most teacher educators, students were not aware of cultural diversity in educational settings because they did not learn about it. One of the teacher educators explained,

I teach what is written in the course curricula. The course content that I offer has nothing to say about cultural diversity. But I know some of the references I gave to students talk about that. The problem is, nowadays students are highly dependent on lectures and modules. They do not read what has been written in other reference materials.

This might be one reason but from students’ point of view, the reference books they were given focus only on the contents described in the course outline. Hence the provision of a reference material that talks about cultural diversity without incorporating the issues in the course content will not help students learn about cultural diversity.

### ***Pre-service Teachers’ Readiness to Teach Culturally Diverse Students***

The data obtained from teacher educator questionnaire showed that many of the teacher educators believed that their students were not ready to teach culturally diverse students. Even those who claim that their students are aware of cultural diversity in educational settings believe that the awareness does not result in readiness to teach culturally diverse students. One teacher educator said, “I believe our students are aware of cultural diversity in educational settings. But I am not sure whether they have sufficient knowledge to teach culturally diverse students.”

The data obtained through the interview made with teacher educators also reveals that the teacher educators are not delivering appropriate knowledge that enables their students to be competent enough to teach culturally diverse students. They reported that both the theoretical and practical parts of professional education courses were not that much helpful in fostering

diversity education. In this regard, students confirmed that except encouraging female students' participation, their teachers were not good enough in bringing methods and strategies that are really helpful for them. They also stated that their teachers did not teach them what they would really experience after they graduate and join the work environment, especially how to solve problems which potentially arise while teaching culturally diverse students. One of the students said:

I really appreciate the way our teachers teach us. I also appreciate their effort to make us competent teachers. But we had never been taught how to teach culturally diverse students. And this may not be our teachers' problem. If there are no such objectives in the course syllabus, they are not expected to teach what is not there and what is not prepared for us.

This might save the teachers educators from the blame of failing to do their job but it should also be noted that the competence and readiness of pre-service teachers to teach culturally diverse students should not be at risk.

Students also confirmed that they have learnt about classroom management, but it is not about managing culturally diverse classroom. They are not sure whether they can manage culturally diverse classroom. In relation to this, one of the teacher educators said, "*...if our students know what classroom management is, hopefully they will develop the skill of managing culturally diverse classroom on their job.*" This may be true, but as long as they train pre-service teachers who will teach culturally diverse students, they should also teach them theories and skills that will help the trainees to develop culturally responsive classroom management skill.

In general, the generated data can show that pre-service teachers did not seem competent and ready enough to teach culturally diverse students. The course objectives and contents, the way teacher educators teach and manage diverse students did not sufficiently address issues of cultural diversity.

## **Discussion**

The TESO document urges preparation of secondary school teachers who are competent in different knowledge and skills mentioned earlier in this paper. Researchers such as Banks (1993) and Gay (1997) confirmed that teachers do not become fully competent unless they are aware of cultural diversity in education and have an ability to teach culturally diverse students. The result of this study shows that pre-service teachers were not adequately aware of cultural diversity in educational settings, are unprepared and not ready to respond to issues of cultural diversity in education. The basic reasons are: the professional education courses have little concern about the issues of cultural diversity in educational settings, and teacher educators were not efficient in introducing the issues in their own teaching. The relationship between these findings and some of the expected teacher competencies stated in the TESO document are discussed below.

### **Competence in the Subject and Teaching Strategies**

Teachers should be competent in the content of the subjects they teach. They should also be skillful in how to deliver different contents to different kinds of learners. The examples teachers use in their lessons, the teaching materials they use to support lessons, etc. should take the diverse learners into consideration. To do so, teachers need to be aware of the value of being sensitive to cultural diversity and of the use of variety of strategies to fulfill the demands of different groups of learners. This kind of awareness and practical response can be gained if teachers get necessary knowledge and skills in their pre-service or in-service trainings in teacher education programs.

Both research and wisdom validate the assertion that teachers teach as they were taught. That is why graduates of teacher education programs frequently mimic or imitate the instruction or interactional styles of their teacher educators (Zeichner, et al 1998). Consequently, pre-service teachers who graduate from Bahir Dar University may imitate interactional



styles of their teachers. However, as this study revealed, the teacher educators were not capable of making the trainees ready to teach culturally diverse students. If graduates imitate their educators, the result could be dangerous. Thus, in order to immerse themselves in an effective teaching pool and prepare their students for culturally diverse classroom, teacher educators need to take cultural diversity issues into consideration and improve their own pedagogy.

### **Competence in Communication and Approaches to Teaching and Learning**

Subject matter knowledge by itself is not a sufficient prerequisite to teach effectively. Teaching and learning in classroom is a communicative process. How teachers and students communicate with each other and how students communicate with their peers affects the teaching learning process (Bloome and Puro, 1987). This could be serious when the classroom is diverse (whether the diversity is ethnic, language, religion, etc). Therefore, teachers and students should be careful about language, ethnicity, religion, gender, physical ability, etc while they communicate with each other (Bloome and Puro, 1987). Moreover, teacher-student relationship is pivotal to the teaching and learning experience. For culturally diverse students, this relationship takes on an even greater sense of urgency since educators are major gatekeepers in the system. In such a relationship, teachers become the “ultimate” educators who guide, enlighten, and challenge students to enable them to achieve their highest potential. Therefore, the need for pre-service teachers’ competence in communication of culturally sensitive classroom is unquestionable.

However, as pointed out earlier in this paper, there are some teacher educators who mentioned some ethnic groups for backwardness. In addition, one student said, “...*last year, I remember there was a teacher who told us that he was bored with calling names of some of his students...*” These kinds of students’ experiences tell us that something should be done to have a smooth classroom teaching-learning process. This absolutely requires

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teacher educators' competence in diversity-sensitive classroom communication. Pre-service teachers, therefore, need to become effective cross-cultural communicators. It helps them to create a classroom environment that encourages good interpersonal relationship (Chisholm, 1994).

### **Competence in Classroom Management**

In culturally diverse classrooms, a lack of multicultural competence can aggravate the difficulties that novice teachers have with classroom management. Definitions and expectations of appropriate behavior are culturally influenced, and conflicts may occur when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds. In such cases, according to Curran, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Weinstein (2004), teachers should be competent in Culturally Relevant Classroom Management (CRCM). They describe that CRCM includes five essential components: "(a) recognition of one's own ethnocentrism; (b) knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds; (c) understanding of the broader social, economic, and political context; (d) ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies; and (e) commitment to building caring classrooms" (p. 25).

Researchers like Gay (2002) and Ladson-Billings (1995) have called for culturally responsive or culturally sensitive pedagogy, which primarily focuses on curriculum content and teaching strategies. Yet, according to Curran, et al (2004), classroom management has also a powerful influence on students' achievement. Thus, like curriculum and teaching strategies, classroom management strategy should also be culturally responsive and pre-service teachers should learn about CRCM. Since diverse classroom requires different approaches to classroom management, teaching the skills that enable pre-service teachers to examine the kinds of cultural misbehaviors and conflicts that are likely to arise in culturally diverse classroom is the best way to help pre-service teachers to become multiculturally competent. It is not fair to assume that pre-service teachers will develop culturally responsive classroom management skill on the job.

Instead, teacher education programs must infuse multicultural issues throughout the pre-service curriculum and incorporate issues of cultural diversity into courses that deal with classroom management.

### **Competence in Areas Related to the School and the Community**

In order to make the teaching-learning process effective, teachers must have adequate knowledge about diverse cultures, ability and willingness to construct positive relationship with students and parents. According to Carlson (1976), to construct positive relationship between school and community and make students beneficiaries, teachers are expected to know their students and participate in the life of the student and the community.

According to Banks (1998), cited in Armento, Causey and Thomas (2000) the important goal of teacher education programs should be to prepare pre-service teachers who are able to acquire the knowledge, skills, and perspectives needed to become insiders within the communities in which they teach. Thus, pre-service teachers should be skillful in the way they approach different communities. They should serve as a bridge between the school and the community. Teacher education programs should take this point into consideration. When we look at Bahir Dar University pre-service teachers, they are assigned to different schools for their different practicum courses. In these courses, according to TESO, students are expected to visit schools to practice basic teaching skills and teaching actual classrooms, and to identify potential problems for their action research project. None of these courses invite them to approach the community surrounding the school. As a result, pre-service teachers are placed in actual teaching environments without developing the skills of creating a good relationship with communities.

From the above discussions, we can understand that even to attain the competence needed by the TESO and meet the intended objectives pre-service teachers should be made aware of cultural diversity in educational settings. They also need to be well-prepared to teach culturally diverse

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students. As there is no one best teaching method that fits diverse learners, there may be no definitive answer to the fundamental question: “what do pre-service teachers need to become effective teachers?” However, there is a professional area of knowledge and skill that should permeate all pre-service education programs: that is multicultural education (Chisholm, 1994). Research also revealed that “teacher education program that is not multicultural cannot be quality teacher education program” (Zeichner et al, 1998).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study shows that the professional education courses did not include adequate multicultural related contents. The multicultural related chapter in the Curriculum Studies course also focuses on providing highlight about multicultural considerations in curriculum design and review, but this is not actually the task of secondary school teachers who solely implement curriculum materials developed by experts at a national level. As a result of this, it does not focus on developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge about cultural diversity and strategies needed to teach culturally diverse students. Therefore, the professional education courses were found to be weak in helping pre-service teachers develop relevant awareness and skill to handle cultural diversity and become competent to teach culturally diverse students.

Several studies in recent years concluded that pre-service teachers are not being prepared to deal with challenges of diverse classroom (Barry and Lechner, 1995). This study also revealed that pre-service teachers of Bahir Dar University were not being prepared to teach culturally diverse students. The teacher education program gave very little attention to the issues of cultural diversity in education.

Based on the findings, thus, the following recommendations are made:

- Teacher education institutes need to search for possible ways to better prepare pre-service teachers for culturally responsive teaching. Hence,

first and foremost, teacher education programs themselves should be culturally responsive so that pre-service teachers can experience the methods of considering cultural diversity in educational settings. This might help the pre-service teacher develop their knowledge, skills, and competence of culturally responsive teaching.

- Teacher education institutes need to provide trainings to their staff (teacher educators) on issues of multicultural education in general and teaching culturally diverse students in particular.
- Ethiopia is a multicultural country in which most schools serve students from diverse cultural backgrounds. This implies that a course on multicultural education needs to be included in the teacher education curriculum. This will make teacher education programs effective in creating learning opportunities and culturally relevant pedagogy that can make pre-service teachers culturally responsive. It will also be good to make pre-service teachers recognize and accept differences in people and understand that they are part of the larger world. Curriculum designers should also be continuously influenced to consider variety of multicultural education related issues in designing and reviewing curriculum. Research (Chisholm, 1994) reveals that the integration of multicultural education within pre-service program prepares pre-service teachers for effective teaching in diverse classrooms.

However, simply adding a multicultural course into a teacher education program may not bring the intended change. Evidence from research reveals that isolated attention to multicultural education only as a course by certain departments does not adequately prepare pre-service teachers to teach culturally diverse students (Ahliquest, 1991; Gomez, 1991; Grant & Koskella, 1986, Ladson-Billings cited in Zeichner et al, 1998). Rather, an infusion of multicultural philosophy, practice, and content across all pre-service program (Grant, 1983; Sims, 1983 & Dottin, 1984 cited in Chisholm, 1994), and a well-articulated program with attention to diversity issues over several semesters offers the best hope for moving pre-service teachers toward greater cultural sensitivity and knowledge, strength and

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effectiveness to teach culturally diverse students (Grant & Secada, 1990; McDiarmid & Price, 1993; Pohan cited in Armento, et al 2000). In addition, since the institutional context shapes student experiences and program possibilities, multicultural education will not be valued without a strong commitment at an institutional level. This commitment should explicitly be spelled out in the institution's mission statement, policies, strategic plans and daily procedures.

- In short, to prepare culturally responsive teachers who are competent to teach culturally diverse students, teacher education program should not merely teach pre-service teachers about cultural diversity in educational settings. It should also strive to be an institution that advocates cultural diversity in every aspect of its daily activities.

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