

Review on Teachers' Multicultural Competence in China

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Abstract: In recent decades, researches on teacher's competence has shifted from a singular macro perspective to a systematic micro view. This article explores the multifaceted domain of teachers' competence in China by utilizing textual analysis. It critically analyzes the research content pertaining to the connotation, structural components, and empirical applications of teachers' multicultural abilities. It summarizes various definitions, structures, and empirical studies in the context of China and proposes some directions of future research.

Keywords: Multicultural competence; Multiculturalism; Teachers' competence

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1. Introduction

"Multicultural competence" first appeared as an academic terminology in transcultural nursing theory in the 1950s, proposed by Madeleine Leininger, a prominent American theorist in cross-cultural nursing. She advocated that nurses need to perceive their patients' different cultural backgrounds in order to guarantee the effectiveness of health care ^[1]. Since then, the theoretical framework scope of "multicultural competence" has evolved and broadened into various disciplinary fields. Currently, researches in China is related to diverse academic settings, such as psychological counseling, library and information science, as well as education. Shi contributed a theoretical framework of multicultural competence within a global context, distinguishing cultural meta-knowledge and specific cultural knowledge ^[2]. She also emphasized the observation and practical application of cultural understanding. Her multicultural competence model in a global context and its application in cross-cultural collaboration serve as a pivotal reference in the field of advances in psychological science. Xu, on the other hand, interpreted multiculturalism from the perspective of library and information science, advocating for an observational and affirmative approach among librarians ^[3].

Pedagogy is also one of the indispensable fields in the study of multicultural competence. Scholars have innovated the concepts of multicultural competence within a diverse cultural framework to establish more

rigorous standards for talent cultivation. Numerous nations, such as America, have taken the significance of cultivating multicultural proficiency as a pivotal aspect of higher education. In contrast, researches on teachers' multicultural competence in China relatively lag behind. A few scholars focused on a singular perspective on Chinese ethnic education. Therefore, it is necessary to review those researches and provide some implications on this topic.

2. Defining the conceptions

2.1. Teachers' competence

The Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th edition) defines "competence" as "the subjective prerequisite that enables one to proficiently execute a specific job or task." Different disciplines interpret the concept in different ways. For instance, general psychology defines competence as "a psychological attribute that directly influences the efficacy of activities and facilitates the successful accomplishment of tasks in practical settings." This serves as a fundamental framework for the conceptualization and development of teachers' competence. Researches on teacher's competence domestically or abroad have progressed from a long duration of theoretical development. Western scholars tend to situate teachers within the broader educational milieu, exploring them through the lenses of society, pedagogy, and students, which underscores the significance of educational knowledge and focuses intently on the needs of learners and society. In comparison, Chinese scholars primarily adopt a psychological perspective, characterizing teachers' competence as a specific "personal psychological trait" or "subjective prerequisite."

In 1993, Zheng and Li proposed that competence is a comprehensive and combined psychological characteristic or quality determining the implementation of educational and teaching activities ^[4]. It is a specific manifestation of competence, also referred to as educational competence. Lu and Hong also defined the concept similarly as personal psychological characteristics of teachers during teaching practices and activities ^[5]. Luo and Li pointed out that "competence is the dynamic force formed and developed in cognitive and practical activities based on people's physiological and psychological qualities" ^[6]. They have further elaborated that "teacher's competence pertains to the professional attributes possessed by individuals engaged in the teaching profession." Their conceptual frameworks primarily concentrate on teaching activities. However, Wang *et al.* have broadened the scope of the concept by bringing teacher education, teaching, and research activities into the horizon. They argued that teachers' competence should not only facilitate their professional growth but also align with professional demands and societal needs ^[7]. These definitions hold strong beliefs that teachers' competence is constituted by the indispensable subjective prerequisite as well as a comprehensive psychological attribute for the successful execution of educational endeavors. Furthermore, researches have broadened their focus from the role of educational activities into the professional and career advancement of teachers themselves.

Under the background of global educational reform, teachers are confronted with increasingly rigorous demands. Therefore, there has emerged a great deal of empirical research on teachers' competence as a crucial aspect of teacher professional development. Competence from both macro and micro levels comprises the overall structure of teachers' competence. From a macro perspective, teachers are expected to possess not only traditional teaching abilities but also learning and innovation abilities, communication and cooperation abilities, among others. Microscopically, the competence structure is primarily referred to teaching-related competencies. Besides, the cultivation and exertion of the competence are inextricably linked to the influence and driving

force of culture. One's great cultural competence can be seen from the adaptation process of internal cultural psychology under the influence of the external cultural environment. Therefore, multicultural competence is taken as indispensable in a complex multicultural environment.

2.2. Teachers' multicultural competence (MCC)

Multicultural competence refers to the competence that individuals or groups should possess in complex cultural environments. Different groups have different processes for acquiring and using cultural abilities, and there are also differences in their internal mechanisms of action. Among them, teachers' multicultural competence is an exploration and practice of cultural diversity in the field of education. Wang divided teachers' multicultural competence into broad and narrow sub-notations: The former encompassed teachers' capacity to deliver tailored education to students from diverse cultural backgrounds, whereas the latter specifically pertained to their competence to implement multicultural education practices^[8]. Furthermore, she provided a comprehensive overview of multicultural competence research conducted in the United States, emphasizing the centrality of cultural perspectives in shaping teachers' multicultural competence^[9]. Additionally, multicultural competence holds profound implications and is intricately intertwined with the overall constellation of teachers' competence.

In China, scholars disagreed on the connotation of the term "teachers' multicultural competence." Different scholars often employ similar terminologies such as Teachers' Competence in a Multicultural Context, Teachers' Multicultural Education Competence, Teachers' Multicultural Quality, and Teachers' Multicultural Literacy, and so on. Wang and Liu also believed that Multicultural Education Competence is a superordinate concept of Multicultural Competence^[10]. This article will use the term Teachers' Multicultural Competence in the following part.

3. Previous research in China

Research on teachers' multicultural competence in China has gradually gained momentum in recent decades, though it remains less systematic compared to Western scholarship, particularly in the United States. Early studies predominantly focused on ethnic minority education, reflecting China's integrated multi-ethnic societal context. However, driven by globalization and domestic demographic shifts, scholars have increasingly expanded their scope to address broader multicultural dynamics in education. Chinese scholars have approached this area from various angles, focusing on definitions, frameworks, and applications within educational settings.

3.1. Definitions and conceptual dimensions

The research on teachers' multicultural competence in China has also led to the development of various classification theories that delineate the different dimensions of this competence. Based on the elements involved, **Table 1** below synthesizes several key definitions and theoretical dimensions to represent research in China.

Table 1. Definitions and conceptual dimensions of multicultural competence in China

Definition characters	Author	Dimensions	Interpretation
Singular factor	Zhang Xueqiang (2009)	Multicultural Character	MCC is defined primarily through the lens of multicultural character. This approach emphasizes the importance of cultural value orientation in education. Key components include understanding students' diverse cultural backgrounds, personalizing teaching and guidance, localizing knowledge in the development of teaching resources, and creating multicultural learning environments that facilitate interpersonal interactions ^[11] .
Dual factors	Meng Fanli Yu Haibo (2008)	MC Knowledge Structure (MCKS)	MCKS refers to (1) theoretical knowledge related to multicultural education; (2) important concepts related to multicultural education; (3) historical and cultural knowledge of ethnic groups; (4) pedagogical knowledge ^[12] .
		MC Teaching Ability	MCTA is defined as (1) Teachers' abilities to convey cultural characteristics to students to help students construct concepts and subjects; (2) individual instruction based on students' cultural contexts; (3) equal evaluation of students' learning process and efficacy; (4) interactive communication with their families and communities.
Tripolar factor	Tegus (2007)	MC Knowledge and Skills (MCKS)	MCKS refers to the cultural analysis of curriculum content.
		MC Attitudes and Values (MCAV)	MCAV refers to the possession of a multicultural education perspective, playing the role of a multicultural education curriculum teacher, and creating a multicultural education environment ^[13] .
		Process and Methods	Correct evaluation of one's own role in their own culture, and objectively viewing one's own culture.
	Wang Jian (2007)	Knowledge	Experience with students from different cultures, personal teaching philosophy and educational ideas, and expertise in professional areas ^[14] .
		Skills	Bilingual conversion skills; teaching experimental skills; skills in collaborating with students; skills in organizing student activities, etc.
		Personality	Patterns of personal temperament or thinking, formed by professional success.
	Jin Shumei (2009)	Knowledge	(1) Knowledge related to multicultural education (2) Knowledge about the characteristics, functions, and development processes of culture itself (3) Knowledge about the cultural foundations of schools, teaching, and subject matter knowledge (4) Knowledge of content, language, and the development and formation processes related to specific cultural groups ^[15] .
		Attitude, Affections	Constant reflection on one's teaching process and course content; treating the goals and principles of multiculturalism as fundamental teaching principles; respecting different behavioral patterns expressed due to cultural diversity.
		Behaviors	Namely, culturally sensitive teaching. Teachers are required to be aware of students' personalities, cultures, social forces, skills, and abilities, and consider how to teach and evaluate students based on their existing knowledge and experience. Appropriately applying courses and materials, and selecting teaching methods based on the specific requirements of students from different cultural groups and social strata.
	Wei Jun (2011)	Independent Personality	Accurate cognition of self-worth, accurate cognition of the value of others, enriching one's inner world and moral conscience ^[16] .
		Intellectual Emotions	Possessing humanistic feelings and a positive sense of social responsibility, caring about social life, having a conscience for moral ethics, and caring about the future of humanity.
		Capacity and Skills on Equal Transmission	Equally imparting the knowledge, skills, moral sentiments, and personal character cultivation possessed by teachers to the educated.

Table 1 (Continued)

Definition characters	Author	Dimensions	Interpretation
	Wang Yanling (2013)	Attitude and Responsibility	Awareness of one's own culture, attitude towards student culture, attitude towards ethnic culture, and attitude towards social culture ^[17] .
		Knowledge and Understanding	China's ethnic education policies, history and culture of ethnic minorities, students and their development, cultural analysis of course content, and educational and teaching knowledge.
		Skills and Practice	Ethnic languages, Mandarin, and spoken language expression; creating a safe and inclusive classroom atmosphere, promoting equality in teaching, using culturally relevant teaching strategies, evaluating students' learning reasonably, and striving for parental support.
	Xue Zhengbin (2017)	Attitude and Responsibility	Attitude refers to people's evaluation and behavioral tendency towards things based on their own values ^[18] .
		Knowledge and Understanding	The knowledge domain is manifested in teachers' competence to conduct a multicultural analysis of course knowledge.
		Skills and Practice	Mainly manifested in the use of sensitive teaching strategies.
	Chen Yinhe (2021)	Awareness	Teachers' multicultural values ^[19] .
		Knowledge	Able to conduct a cultural analysis of course knowledge.
		Skills	Implement culturally sensitive teaching strategies.

The comprehension of teachers' multicultural competence among domestic scholars can be broadly categorized into three distinct types. Firstly, the single-element theory emphasizes the centrality of cultural value orientation as the core of this competence. While it posits requirements for multicultural capabilities from both educational and communication perspectives, it fails to explicitly articulate the external knowledge and skill dimensions. The second is the two-element theory, such as Meng and Yu dividing multicultural competence into two parts: knowledge structure and teaching competence, from the perspective of knowledge and skills. However, it only involves teaching aspects and does not mention communication aspects, and the interpretation of teachers' internal psychological state is insufficient. The third is the three-element theory, which combines the single-element theory and the two-element theory. Scholars believe that teachers' multicultural competence can be divided into three dimensions of knowledge, skills, and attitude (emotion), or three dimensions of knowledge, emotion, and behavior. Some scholars also believe that they can be divided into dimensions of personality, sentiment, and competence skills.

Through the above analysis, it can be seen that different scholars have their own characteristics in the interpretation of dimensions. Among them, the three-element theory, as the main division of teachers' multicultural education practice and professional development, should be the focus of attention. The knowledge and skills elements appear more frequently in the three-element theory. Knowledge is the basic element of teachers' multicultural competence, laying a solid foundation for the cultivation of their abilities. Skills are the key element of multicultural competence, which is the external manifestation of internal elements. At the same time, the three-element theory also recognizes the importance of emotional attitude elements, which is the internal guarantee element of multicultural competence and can fully exert the positive role of knowledge and skills in teaching activities.

3.2. Practical research

Through a review of the literature, research on teachers' multicultural competence in China exhibits a two-way construction trend of internationalization and localization. On one hand, scholars introduce and comment on multicultural experiences abroad, especially in the United States.

For example, Gou and Wang conducted a content analysis of multicultural education competence standards in teaching professional standards across the United States and at the state level, summing up that multicultural competence should include understanding the connotation of cultural differences, respecting student differences, viewing them as valuable curriculum resources, holding high expectations for all students, creating a safe and inclusive classroom vibe, adopting culturally appropriate teaching strategies, and striving to achieve fairness and justice in teaching ^[20]. Geng *et al.* used text analysis to analyze the professional standards of the top 10 preschool teachers in American education, distinguishing between three core indicators: respectful evaluation, appropriate evaluation, and collaborative evaluation, which provides insights for culturally responsive evaluation in preschool education in China ^[21].

On the other hand, multicultural scholars have been conducting localized research on foreign theories, actively drawing on theoretical achievements and successful experiences in Western multicultural education through comparative studies, while constructing a multicultural theoretical framework with Chinese characteristics. The localization of the theory of multicultural competence is reflected in the field of ethnic education in China, promoting the theoretical construction and practical process of ethnic education in our country. Among the documents surveyed in this study, there are 18 empirical studies involving teachers' multicultural competence in ethnic regions, as shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Empirical research statistics of teachers' multicultural competence in ethnic regions

Variables	Names	Frequency
Provinces	Sichuan	4
	Guizhou	3
	Xinjiang	3
	Jilin	3
	Yunnan	2
	Inner Mongolia	1
	Gansu	1
	Qinghai	1
Teaching stage	Universities	1
	Vocational school	1
	Primary and secondary	15
	Kindergarten	1

The majority of the studies focused on the southwestern ethnic regions of China, with teachers in the compulsory education stage being the main subjects of research, although some studies also involved university teachers and teachers of specific subjects. The literature covered both the overall dimensions of multicultural competence and individual dimensions such as multicultural awareness and multicultural attitude. There were also monographs discussing the multicultural competence of teachers in ethnic minority areas, such as Wang

Yanling's study on the multicultural competence of ethnic teachers in southwestern China and Xue Zhengbin's research on the multicultural qualities of teachers in Ningxia Province.

Furthermore, a limited number of scholars have conducted investigations on diverse cohorts of teachers, encompassing college English teachers, music teachers, and international Chinese teachers. Chinese scholars embarked on exploring multicultural education issues in the 1980s, with their empirical research primarily centering on the constructs of multicultural education, the integration of Western multicultural educational practices, and curriculum development within a multicultural framework. However, empirical research on teachers' multicultural competence was limited to some extent. On the other hand, existing research on teachers' multicultural competence has focused primarily on ethnic education and ethnic teachers, without reflecting the essence of teachers' educational and teaching competence in ethnic regions. There is a lack of multi-level research perspectives.

4. Conclusion and prospects

Research on teachers' multicultural competence abroad mainly starts from a cultural perspective, aiming to eliminate discriminatory biases, enhance the status of ethnic minorities, and achieve the expected goals of multicultural education. Compared with foreign research, domestic research on teachers' multicultural competence is still in its infancy and exhibits the following deficiencies: First, there is a preliminary definition, but a lack of a unified terminological definition. This can easily lead to confusion and blurred boundaries with concepts such as cultural competence and cross-cultural competence. Second, most scholars have followed American theories, mainly explaining teachers' multicultural competence from three levels: knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which shows that the theoretical research lacks local innovation. Third, from the perspective of the research object, domestic scholars have mainly focused on teachers in ethnic minority areas, while further exploration is needed for teachers' multicultural capabilities at different educational stages and in different subjects. Fourthly, empirical research has achieved some results, but there is a high degree of homogeneity, and the combination of theoretical analysis and specific issues also needs to be further strengthened. Applied research should be targeted at addressing problems, and the concept should provide practical explanations for real-world issues.

This study proposes some prospects as follows: First, we need to integrate the concept of competence and clarify the dimensional framework of it. Due to the complex and diverse nature of culture and teachers' competence, it is difficult to grasp the connotation and extension of teachers' multicultural competence. Therefore, it is necessary to deepen the theoretical exploration of teachers' multicultural competence as well as expand and improve the system of it. Second, we need to continuously integrate an international perspective with local research and grasp cutting-edge research directions. Some foreign scholars claim that we are now in the "post-multiculturalism" era. How to integrate with international standards, explore new local research methodologies and paradigms is also an issue that domestic scholars need to address. Third, we need to promote interdisciplinary integration and form new research growth points. Teachers' multicultural competence involves language and culture, and it is necessary to explore teachers' competence from the perspectives of disciplines such as education, sociology, and anthropology. Linking teachers' competence with teaching and communication, we should pay close attention to the current status of teachers' competence in a multicultural context. Fourth, we need to develop research tools and revise competence evaluation standards. Utilizing applied research in areas such as big data and AI, while adhering to the principles of improving teaching effectiveness

and student development, we should establish evaluation indicators for multicultural competence. This approach will facilitate the scientific and standardized assessment of teachers' competence, thereby optimizing the overall teaching workforce. Additionally, it is imperative to integrate the concept of multiculturalism into both student and teacher education, while exploring innovative multicultural training modalities. The escalating significance of student diversity underscores the centrality of multiculturalism in teachers' competency. Consequently, teachers' education must prioritize knowledge analysis, skill acquisition, and attitude cultivation. Furthermore, the principles of multicultural education ought to be seamlessly integrated into pre-service teacher training, induction education, and in-service teacher development programs.

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