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# Nurturing multiculturalism in Iranian EFL teacher education: an in-depth scrutiny of experts' and teachers' perceptions

Esmaeel Ali Salimi<sup>1\*</sup> and Mostafa Rahimi Rad<sup>1</sup>

\*Correspondence:  
easalimi@atu.ac.ir

<sup>1</sup> Allameh Tabataba'i University,  
Tehran, Iran

## Abstract

Given that Iran is the host of a variety of cultures characterized with diverse languages, viewpoints, and customs, the empty place of multiculturalism in its ELT system is deeply felt. The present study sought to tackle multiculturalism in EFL teacher education in the context of Iran by exploring Iranian EFL experts' and teachers' perceptions. The participants of this study consisted of the two groups. The first group included 15 male and female multicultural education experts. The second group of the participants included of 60 (30 males and 30 females) Iranian EFL teachers. To collect the required data, a demographic information scale, two semi-structured interviews and an audio-reflective journal were used. Data analysis was done via qualitative thematic analysis by MAXQDA. As revealed by the results, several themes were extracted as the components of the multicultural EFL teacher education, as uncovered by the experts' views some of which include Eliminating Race-Related Inequalities, Eliminating Gender-Related Inequalities, and Eliminating Social Class-Related Inequalities. Moreover, the Necessary Communicative Skills, Positive Thinking, Difference Acceptance, and Multicultural Content, Various Evaluation Methods were found as some of the extracted EFL teachers' perceptions of multicultural EFL teacher education. The findings have some implications for different groups of stakeholders including EFL teachers, teacher educators and teacher education material developers who can take useful insights from the findings in teaching EFL, educating student-teachers and developing future curricula, respectively.

**Keywords:** Multicultural education, Pluralism, Perception, Teacher education

## Introduction

The field of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning has encountered a range of challenges, influenced by factors like the globalizing world (Zohrabi et al., 2019). This shift is underscored by the emergence of multicultural societies, where elements of multicultural education are becoming increasingly essential within their educational systems (Zohrabi et al., 2019). According to Stika (2012), societies are undergoing a paradigm shift, with multiculturalism taking center stage in educational systems as a means to foster diverse perspectives and knowledge. As emphasized by Nanggala

(2020), multicultural education plays a vital role in shaping societal ethics and mitigating horizontal conflicts among community members. Copeland and Tarver (2020) and Wulandari (2020) further assert that multicultural education serves as a conduit for the development of a rich tapestry of historical viewpoints.

Despite the strong argument presented by researchers in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) (e.g., Giselsbrecht, 2009; Parker, 2019; Sleeter, 2008; Stika, 2012; Zohrabi et al., 2019) advocating for the incorporation of multicultural language learning and teaching approaches in EFL education to meet the evolving needs, desires, and aspirations of learners in multicultural communities, it is evident that multiculturalism has not yet permeated the English Language Teaching (ELT) system in Iran, both in public and private sectors (Zohrabi et al., 2019). Despite these calls for change, the top-level authorities in ELT have yet to implement efficient measures that could pave the way for a transformation aimed at establishing a multicultural ELT system (Parker, 2019).

Given that Iran is home to a diverse array of cultures characterized by distinct languages, viewpoints, and customs, the absence of multiculturalism within its ELT system is acutely felt. This is particularly noteworthy when considering the global trend towards embracing multicultural education. Therefore, a critical prerequisite for the integration of multicultural education into EFL teaching and learning in Iran is the transformation and reorientation of the country's teacher education system towards multiculturalism (Zohrabi et al., 2019).

Teacher education reviews have consistently highlighted the positive outcomes associated with multicultural teacher education, offering convincing evidence that these systems outperform unitary ones (Sleeter, 2008). It has been argued that Teacher Preparation Programs (TPPs) should empower teachers to expand their social awareness, recognizing that personal worldviews are not universally applicable but shaped by individual life experiences influenced by factors such as social class, ethnicity, gender, and race. This approach equips teachers with the capacity and skills to act as catalysts for change and enables them to go beyond merely delivering content, facilitating students' growth and development. Consequently, TPPs should prepare teachers to adopt the constructivist principles of culturally-embedded teaching (Sleeter, 2008).

The absence of multicultural education in teacher education has problematic implications, as it promotes partial thinking and encourages teachers to rely on their personal frames of reference when assessing students, their family backgrounds, and communities. As the student population becomes increasingly diverse in terms of culture, race, ethnicity, and more, it is imperative that TPPs address multiculturalism and empower teachers to better serve all students (Enyew & Melesse, 2018).

While existing literature has explored various facets of multiculturalism and multicultural education, it is evident that the specific context of teacher education in Iran has not been adequately probed. Notably, existing studies, such as those by Zohrabi et al. (2019) and Motamed et al. (2013), have examined multiculturalism in different educational settings but have not delved into the realm of teacher education within the Iranian context.

The rationale for this study emerges from the growing need to address multiculturalism in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) teacher education in Iran. While multiculturalism is increasingly recognized as a pivotal component in contemporary educational systems worldwide, its incorporation within the Iranian ELT teacher

education system has been relatively unexplored. Given Iran's diverse cultural landscape, the absence of multiculturalism in ELT teacher education is a notable gap that needs to be addressed. This study seeks to investigate the perceptions of Iranian EFL experts and teachers regarding multiculturalism within teacher education. By shedding light on their perspectives, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the potential challenges and opportunities associated with the integration of multiculturalism into ELT teacher education in Iran, ultimately advocating for more inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices. For the purpose of partial bridging of this gap, this study aimed at touching multiculturalism in EFL teacher education in the context of Iran by exploring Iranian EFL experts' and teachers' perceptions. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the components of the multicultural EFL teacher education, as uncovered by the experts' views?
2. What are the Iranian private and public sector EFL teachers' perceptions of the multicultural EFL teacher education?

## **Literature review**

### **Theoretical frameworks**

#### ***Multicultural education theory***

Multicultural education theory is a foundational aspect of this study, providing a theoretical framework that extends beyond the conventional boundaries of education. While there is broad consensus on its core principles and orientations, multicultural education encompasses a range of transformative changes related to teaching materials, assessment methods, and techniques that aim to establish a just educational system. Scholars within the realm of multicultural education emphasize that teachers play a pivotal role in instigating systemic change and in shaping students as agents of change themselves (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 2004).

According to Banks (1995), multicultural education comprises various dimensions, including content consistency, knowledge building, discrimination reduction, equity education, and the reinforcement of cultural aspects within the educational setting. To delve deeper into the facets of multicultural education:

- Multicultural education serves as a guiding philosophy, an educational reform movement, and a process that calls for educational institutions to actively oppose racism and hegemony. It underscores the importance of schools and classrooms working toward these goals (Banks, 1997).
- Embracing the diversity of cultures in both society and classrooms is a central tenet of multicultural education, as it seeks to foster inclusivity and cultural appreciation (Banks, 1997).
- It represents an anti-racist critical pedagogy-based approach to education, with a focus on promoting social justice for all students. This involves transcending the confines of the classroom and implementing plans, priorities, programs, and strategies aimed at empowering teachers to effect societal change (Nieto & Bode, 2008).

- Multicultural education is dedicated to instructing and nurturing all student groups, including those who are exceptional or from minority backgrounds. Teachers are given a high degree of agency, and multiculturalism plays a pivotal role in this educational approach (Sleeter & Grant, 1987).
- It also strives to support the educational success of all student groups, especially those who are traditionally marginalized within the educational system (Sleeter & Grant, 1987).
- The core principle is that all educational aspects should be tailored to meet the needs, preferences, and potentials of diverse cultural student groups, with the overarching goal of providing social justice and equal educational opportunities to all (Grant et al., 2004).

In summary, multicultural education is a comprehensive educational framework that encompasses a spectrum of dimensions, addressing everything from cultural inclusivity to social justice, and it plays a central role in shaping both educational systems and the teachers who drive change within them.

To Banks (2009), multicultural education dimensions can be used by educators in implementing educational transformations when attempting to run multicultural education. As put by Banks (2009), main dimensions of multicultural education are as follows: 1) content integration, (2) the process of knowledge construction, (3) decreasing prejudice, (4) pedagogy justice, and (5) empowering culture and social structure of educational system.

As put by Sleeter (2008), teacher education programs which are not oriented towards multiculturalism suffer from four main lines of problems:

1. Most of such programs are indifferent to the way racism influences educational settings or society broadly. They are unconscious of such matters as discrimination and racism and conceive racism as a problem related to interpersonal interactions.
2. Such teacher education programs have higher expectations for majority students than for minority ones and attribute minority students' underachievement to their personal characteristics and choices.
3. Another problem associated with such teacher education programs is fear, indifference, ignorance, and segregation from majority groups. As evidence to this, most of such programs do not take bother to allocate time to negotiate about different issues.
4. Last but not least, most of such teacher education programs are not justified towards accepting themselves as cultural beings. But they are of the belief that only majority students hold beliefs and worldviews.

With a view to these problems, a variety of approaches and pedagogical strategies have been employed by teacher educators to increase their own awareness of multiculturalism stance in teacher education. Among these strategies and approaches, holding multicultural courses, field-oriented immersion programs, teaching multicultural themes to pre-service teachers, teaching autobiography writing, encouraging cross-cultural exchange of letters, and debate- and negotiation-oriented teaching are worth noting (Naz et al., 2023).

In a general sense, independently planned multicultural courses have proved to be effective in reducing prejudice and bias in terms of race and ethnicity and raising consciousness of majority groups' experiences (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Negotiation-based teaching has also been indicated to be influential at removing prejudice and making students aware of and sensitive to race, discrimination, hegemony, ethnicity, and culture (Heinze, 2008). To move in this path, teacher educators have built experiential groups (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) which are characterized with emphasis on affections, negotiation and discussion, and preoccupation with present not past (Marbley, 2004). Field-oriented immersion programs have sought to increase teachers' awareness of the life state of majority and minority students, provide them with opportunities to communicate students of minority and majority groups and be in touch with all students, and provide the ground for students' examination of themselves as cultural beings (Nuby, 2010).

### ***Social justice approach to teacher education***

Another theory this study is theoretically built upon which is social justice approach to teacher education. In this approach, introduced by Giroux (1988), teaching is considered in its sociopolitical context of society and schooling. This approach aims to draw student-teachers' heed to the power hierarchy in educational settings globally and locally to train moral teachers as change agents who can transform social inequalities and build a more humane society. The concepts under emphasis in this approach are social reconstruction, cultural responsiveness, emancipatory pedagogy, critical reflective practice, critical pedagogy, and a socio-critical approach (Giroux, 1988). This approach seeks to educate teachers who accept different knowledge systems, question old forms of domination, and reflect constantly on the use or benefit of curricula for different groups of learners.

### ***Empirical studies***

Empirical studies on multiculturalism can be classified into three distinct categories. The first category encompasses studies that delve into the incorporation of multiculturalism in curricula and educational programs. For instance, Enyew and Melesse (2018) endeavored to examine the infusion of multiculturalism into the academic landscape of Ethiopian universities. They employed a researcher-designed questionnaire and conducted semi-structured interviews as their data collection methods. Data analysis involved the use of one-sample t-test and narrative analysis. The outcomes of their research led to the conclusion that multiculturalism has indeed found a place within educational programs.

Wei (2018) investigated the introduction of multiculturalism in curriculum changes since the early twenty-first century in China. It was observed that in response to rapid economic growth and the pressures associated with exam-oriented teaching, the government initiated a post-modernistic curriculum framework, extending beyond the confines of a modernistic curriculum. However, these shifts have been sluggish due to cultural inertia and the absence of micro-culture in the classroom, resulting in a disconnect between policy formulation and implementation practices. In the Iranian context, Zohrabi et al. (2019) aimed to design and validate a curriculum model based on pluralism for English Language Teaching (ELT) in high schools in Iran. Their research employed a mixed methods design and

involved curriculum experts as participants. The data analysis led to the development of a model with various components, which was subsequently validated by experts. While this study marks a commendable step towards the integration of pluralism as a key facet of multiculturalism within the ELT system of Iran, it remains limited in its focus, addressing just one aspect of multiculturalism in the context of ELT curriculum in high schools.

The second category of studies explores multiculturalism in relation to teachers and teacher education. In one such study, Parker (2019) investigated the significance of multicultural education for ELT and teacher education in post-secondary institutions. This study explored various dimensions of critical multicultural education as guiding principles for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in comprehending course content. The study recommended that stakeholders consider these elements as a foundation for rethinking their teaching principles and methods. In another study, Pourdavood and Yan (2020) examined how in-service teachers' perceptions of multicultural matters changed after being exposed to a diversity course. This study relied on classroom discussions, paper presentations, and field notes for data collection. The findings indicated that teachers believed that classroom discussions positively transformed their perceptions of multiculturalism. However, it is important to note that this study specifically addressed diversity instruction and not multicultural teacher education. Therefore, the present study differs from this research in terms of scope and objectives, as it focuses on a broader examination of the subject.

Similarly, Vassallo (2020) conducted a study akin to the one by Pourdavood and Yan (2020), investigating changes in teachers' conceptions of multiculturalism following their participation in a short course on multicultural education. The research compared teachers' understanding of multiculturalism before and after the course using reflective journals. The results suggested that the course led to an improved willingness among teachers to engage in self-reflection, resulting in a more positive conception of multiculturalism. While this study was more limited in terms of data collection tools compared to Pourdavood and Yan (2020), both studies approached multiculturalism from a general perspective. The present study distinguishes itself by employing a variety of research tools and addressing a wider range of objectives. Most importantly, the focus of the present study centers on multicultural teacher education, as opposed to multiculturalism in general.

In the third category of studies, the impact of multiculturalism on students has been the central theme. For instance, Beqiri and Sylaj (2021) investigated multiculturalism as a factor influencing students' socialization. They explored teachers' and students' perceptions through standardized questionnaires. The results revealed that multiculturalism had a positive impact on students' socialization. However, the researcher noted that there were challenges in the implementation of multiculturalism, which should not deter administrators. It's important to note that this study dealt with multiculturalism in a broad sense, while the present study specifically focuses on multiculturalism within teacher education. Additionally, the reliance solely on questionnaires in this study may raise questions about the validity of the findings.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants of this study consisted of the two groups. The first group included 15 (10 males and 5 females) male and female multicultural education experts. They were

university professors with Ph.D. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) with research and teaching experience and publications in multicultural education. They had supervised theses and dissertations and published papers on multicultural education. They were selected through snowball sampling to find the most appropriate persons for the purpose of this study (Ary et al., 2010). The amount of teaching experience of the experts was not important since the main criterion for the sampling was working experience and research interest in multicultural education. This group was interviewed at the outset of the study to identify the components of multicultural EFL teacher education.

The second group of the participants contained 60 (30 males and 30 females) Iranian EFL teachers. They were B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. holders in TEFL, English Language and Literature, and English Translation fields. They had teaching experience from 4 to 25 years in different public high schools and private language institutes of different provinces of Iran. They were selected through available sampling through virtual groups in social networks including WhatsApp and Telegram to reach a higher number of the participants. Their first language was Persian. This group was interviewed and asked to submit their audio- reflective journals to extract their perceptions of the multicultural EFL teacher education. To observe ethical issues, the consent of the participants was taken for participation in the study. Moreover, they were ensured about anonymity and confidentiality of their personal information. It is worth noting that the sample size of the two groups of the participants was determined based on data saturation. That is, with this sample size, no new thing was added to the results (Ary et al., 2010). Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants.

### Instruments

The following instruments were used for data collection in the present study:

#### *Semi-structured interviews*

This study benefited from two semi-structured interviews. The first interview aimed at identifying the components of a multicultural EFL teacher education, as uncovered by the experts' views. This interview consisted of five open-ended questions and conducted in English without any time constraint. Moreover, to make the interview more

**Table 1** Demographic information of the participants

Experts	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	10	66.66
Female	5	33.33
Work place		
Teachers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	30	50
Female	30	50
Work place		
Public high schools	30	50
Private language institutes	30	50

convenient, it was done in WhatsApp and Telegram applications. All the interviews were taken in the individual form by the researcher and transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

The interview was piloted in the same conditions with the main phase of the study, recruiting about 5 experts with the same demographic information with those experts who participated in the main phase of the study so that any potential problem or ambiguity in the interview questions could be identified and corrected.

The second semi-structured interview aimed at uncovering Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of multicultural EFL teacher education. This interview consisted of four open-ended questions. It was piloted and conducted in the same way mentioned for the previous interview.

It is worth noting that a demographic information scale was also developed and used before implementing the interviews to collect the information about the participants. The information covered in scale included the participants' major and academic level at the time of the study.

#### ***Audio-reflective journal***

To triangulate the data, following the interviews, the second group of the participants of the study (i.e., 30 males and 30 females Iranian EFL teachers) were asked to audio-record whatever comes to their mind regarding their feelings, attitudes, mental images, free associations and similar things on multicultural EFL teacher education in the context of Iran without any time limit. Audio-reflective journaling is a participatory research method to elicit individuals' perceptions in the form of creative expressions, self-reflection and participatory act (Ary et al., 2010). Then, they were asked to send the audio-recorded reflective journals to the researcher through social networks including WhatsApp and Telegram.

#### **Procedure and data analysis**

The data collection process began by identifying the components of multicultural teacher education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts in the field, and the resulting interview data was subjected to thematic analysis using MAXQDA. This thematic analysis aimed to discern the key elements of multicultural EFL teacher education.

The second phase involved the distribution of a demographic information scale to a group of participants consisting of 30 male and 30 female Iranian EFL teachers. These teachers had teaching experience in various public high schools and private language institutes across different provinces of Iran.

To enhance the participants' understanding of multicultural (teacher) education, they were provided with two virtual 60-min briefing sessions on WhatsApp. During these sessions, the researcher explained the fundamental components of multicultural (teacher) education, supplemented by relevant materials. For instance, participants were guided to recognize that, instead of relying on a single teaching method and a limited set of teaching strategies, teachers should employ diverse teaching methods and strategies. Additionally, it was emphasized that a combination of both quantitative and qualitative

evaluation methods and procedures should be used, as opposed to relying solely on one type of evaluation procedure. These examples were offered to provide a clearer understanding for interested readers.

Subsequently, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the participants to elicit their perceptions of multicultural EFL teacher education.

To triangulate the data collected through the interviews, participants were asked to create audio recordings in which they freely expressed their feelings, attitudes, mental images, and any related thoughts regarding multicultural EFL teacher education in the Iranian context. These audio-recorded reflective journals were then sent to the researcher through social networks, including WhatsApp and Telegram.

The data analysis process was conducted using qualitative thematic analysis through MAXQDA software. In an effort to ensure the reliability and credibility of the data, the researcher employed low-inference descriptors, which involved quoting directly from the participants. Additionally, member checking was employed to verify the accuracy of interpretations by comparing them with the participants' own perspectives and statements. This process helped enhance the trustworthiness of the data.

## Results

With regard to the first research question *What are the components of the multicultural EFL teacher education, as uncovered by the experts' views?*, the qualitative thematic analysis led to the identification of the following components:

### 1. Eliminating race-related inequalities

According to this component, multicultural EFL teacher education should train teachers to eliminate racial inequalities among students. This is evident in the following quotations:

*Multicultural teacher education should prepare EFL teachers to remove racial discrimination. Teachers should try to regard students of all races equal and treat them fairly. Race of students should not be the reason for discrimination. All students are equal. (Participant 4)*

*EFL teachers are to be trained to consider students of different races equal. They should not discriminate between different races. This is at the heart of multiculturalism. Racial background of students should not change teachers' orientation toward students. If teachers learn this, they can move in the path of multicultural education more conveniently. (Participant 1)*

### 2. Eliminating gender-related inequalities

According to this component, multicultural EFL teacher education should make teachers prepared to eliminate gender inequalities among students. The following quotations show this:

*EFL teachers should be taught to attempt to eliminate gender inequality. Teachers should encourage justice between male and female students. Teachers are to be*

*trained not to pay huge attention to gender as a determinant factor in their teaching. They should treat both male and female students the same. (Participant 6)*

*Multicultural teacher education must seek the mission of generating gender equality at least in educational settings. EFL teachers should make their best to achieve this through possible means. (Participant 10)*

### 3. Eliminating social class-related inequalities

By this component, it is meant that multicultural EFL teacher education should prepare teachers to eliminate inequalities related to social class among students. The following quotations support this:

*To be multicultural, teacher education programs should work on teachers to challenge inequalities existing among learners because of their social class. EFL teachers should assume all students the same, regardless of their social class. (Participant 12)*

*Teacher education courses should aim at preparing English teachers to avoid unfairness rooted in students' social class differences. EFL teachers should be informed of the equal rights of all social classes. (Participant 8)*

### 4. Eliminating language-related inequalities

According to this component, multicultural EFL teacher education should target teachers' elimination of inequalities that are imposed due to the mother tongue of students. This is confirmed by the following quotations:

*Multicultural education convinces teachers to take a neutral stance towards students with different first languages. Speaking in a specific language should not make any student distinguished from the other ones. (Participant 7)*

*Teacher education based on multiculturalism should put a place for language indiscrimination. I want to say that teachers should be informed that students' L1 should not lead to any discrimination. All languages are equally respected. (Participant 5)*

### 5. Eliminating ability-related inequalities

According to this component, multicultural EFL teacher education should educate teachers to remove inequalities among students that have been formed as a result of some students' particular abilities in different areas. This can be understood from the following quotations:

*EFL teachers must be trained to be respectful to all students. All students are there to be provided with teacher respect equally. That a student is talented in some respect is not a justification to behave him or her differently in comparison to other students. (Participant 11)*

*Teacher training should instruct teachers to equally pay attention to all students. Paying more attention to students whose abilities are higher than their peers is*

*not congruent with multicultural education. Students' ability is not a yardstick for receiving more attention and care from teachers. (Participant 14)*

#### 6. Eliminating culture-related inequalities

According to this component, multicultural EFL teacher education should seek to help teachers eliminate inequalities related to culture among students. This is documented by the following quotations:

*Teacher training programs must give appropriate instructions to teachers on how they can make their best to neglect cultural differences. Teachers should be instructed to avoid prejudice towards some cultures and against some other cultures. (Participant 15)*

*EFL teachers need training on challenging cultural bias. They are required to be taught on the disadvantages of cultural discrimination. Students' cultural background should not be taken as a gate or block for being privileged or deprived from educational opportunities. (Participant 3)*

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of the components.

As illustrated in the Table 2, the themes have been recurrent in the quotations of more than 66.66% of the interviewees.

Concerning the second research question *What are the Iranian private and public sector EFL teachers' perceptions of the multicultural EFL teacher education?*, the following themes were extracted:

#### 1. Teaching teachers the necessary communicative skills

According to this theme, multicultural EFL teacher education should teach teachers the required communicative skills. The following quotations show this:

*EFL teachers should be competent in communicative skills. This should be highly emphasized in teacher education. If teachers are not strong in communicative abilities, they cannot behave in a fair manner with all the students. (Participant 3)*

*Education of teachers should be oriented towards empowering them in communication skills. EFL teachers should pass social skills courses that revolve around building good relations with students. (Participant 7)*

**Table 2** The frequency and percentage of the components

Component	Eliminating race-related inequalities	Eliminating gender-related inequalities	Eliminating social class-related inequalities	Eliminating language-related inequalities	Eliminating ability-related inequalities	Eliminating culture-related inequalities
Frequency	13	13	11	11	10	14
Percentage	86.66	86.66	73.33	73.33	66.66	93.33

## 2. Teaching teachers to generate positive thinking

According to this theme, multicultural EFL teacher education should teach teachers to generate positive thinking in students. Evidence of this is the following quotations:

*During teacher education periods, EFL teachers should learn that they should encourage positive thinking among students. In this way, students learn to respect themselves and others. Teachers need to be trained to make students positive thinkers. (Participant 36)*

*Teacher preparation founded on multicultural guidelines should put positive thinking training on top of its work. Teachers should be made aware of the miracle of positive thinking in English language classes. Emotions talk louder than reason. (Participant 14)*

## 3. Teaching teachers to encourage difference acceptance

According to this theme, multicultural EFL teacher education should teach teachers to encourage students to accept differences existing between themselves and other people. To support this, the following quotations can be mentioned:

*Teacher education authorities should plan programs in which teachers are prepared to teach students prefer differences rather than sameness and differences. Students should be made conscious that differences are not threats but they are opportunities for peaceful co-existence. (Participant 28)*

*Teacher education in the light of multicultural education means making teachers equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to teach students welcome the existing differences among each other. They should know that differences make the ground for more interaction. (Participant 2)*

## 4. Teaching teachers to use multicultural content

According to this theme, multicultural EFL teacher education should teach teachers to inject multicultural content into educational materials. This is shown by the following quotations:

*In multicultural teacher education, teachers are provided with strategies of using multicultural content in teaching English. Teacher educators must present samples of multicultural materials to teachers so that they learn how to use them in their classes. (Participant 27)*

*Motivating teachers to take advantage of multicultural issues in the content of materials should be taken into account in teacher education units. This can be done through different means including textual and multimedia materials. (Participant 33)*

#### 5. Teaching teachers to use various evaluation methods

According to this theme, multicultural EFL teacher education should teach teachers to use different types of assessment methods. The following quotations support this:

*Teachers should evaluate students' learning in different ways. Just using a specific evaluation method does not make teaching effective. Different evaluation methods are recommended to be used by teachers to make sure that students' knowledge is appropriately evaluated. (Participant 8)*

*An English teacher who seeks effectiveness of teaching does not delimit evaluation of students to traditional procedures. He or she is well aware that fair assessment involves employment of different techniques. (Participant 13)*

#### 6. Teaching teachers to build a fair classroom

According to this theme, multicultural EFL teacher education should teach teachers to turn classroom into a fair place in different aspects. The following quotations confirm this:

*Implementing fairness in different dimensions of teaching is a characteristic of multicultural teaching. EFL teacher should be taught by educators to be fair in teaching students, supporting them, evaluating and scoring their exams and so on. Teachers should also be fair in expecting learning outcomes from students. (Participant 19)*

*Justice enactment is a sign of teaching based on multiculturalism. Teachers must be trained to be persons who act fairly in their profession. They must recognize the right of students to be treated fairly. This should be seriously dealt with in teacher education courses. (Participant 5)*

#### 7. Teaching teachers to consider all languages the same

According to this theme, multicultural EFL teacher education should teach teachers to put bias for or against a language aside. The following quotations corroborate this:

*Teacher training courses should make teachers free from shackles of treating one language as the dominant language. EFL teachers should be so open-minded that consider all languages as equally important. This should also be conveyed by teachers to students. (Participant 50)*

*Teachers should be warned against language bias. Teacher education approaches should be strong enough to prevent teachers from selecting one language as the best language. Although they are teachers of English, but it does not mean that English is the best language. (Participant 42)*

#### 8. Teaching teachers to teach self-reflection and critical thinking

According to this theme, multicultural EFL teacher education should teach teachers to train students on thinking about their own selves and critical thinking. The following quotations highlight this:

*In teacher education periods, it is suggested that EFL teachers are provided with strategies to teach learners critical thinking and self-thinking. Multicultural training is well-adapted to critical thinking. (Participant 53)*

*EFL Teacher education should be concerned with criticality teaching and enlightenment. Teachers should learn to teach criticality to students. They should learn to teach students how to question or challenge the status quo. (Participant 59)*

#### 9. Teaching teachers to teach tolerance and peace

According to this theme, multicultural EFL teacher education should teach teachers to teach tolerance and peace to students. The following quotations highlight this:

*Multicultural teacher education should empower teachers to go beyond mere instructional materials and teach tolerance in the classroom. Students should be taught to be tolerant of others' views and attitudes. (Participant 1)*

*Programs of preparation of teachers should put teaching peace and healthy co-existence on the top of their work when educating teachers. Teachers should inevitably prepare students for living in the society with people of different cultures and backgrounds. (Participant 18)*

#### 10. Teaching teachers to teach social relations

According to this theme, multicultural EFL teacher education should teach teachers to teach students social relations. The following quotations show this:

*Teaching social relations to students is a main responsibility of EFL teachers according to multicultural education. This should be observed meticulously in teacher education programs. In fact, teachers should be trained to teach social life in their profession. (Participant 10)*

*Using multiculturalism in teacher education means teaching pre-service teachers on teaching social relations and its importance in EFL teaching. Multicultural teaching is tightly tied to the role of social communication competence in personal and social growth and development. (Participant 60)*

#### 11. Teaching teachers to teach about democracy

According to this theme, multicultural EFL teacher education should teach teachers to train students on thinking about their own selves and critical thinking. The following quotations highlight this:

*English teacher education should be turned into places for preparing teachers to teach democratic issues when teaching English. Promotion of democracy in EFL*

**Table 3** The frequency and percentage of the extracted themes

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Teaching teachers the necessary communicative skills	53	88.33
Teaching teachers to generate positive thinking	48	80
Teaching teachers to encourage difference acceptance	55	91.66
Teaching teachers to use multicultural content	58	96.66
Teaching teachers to use various evaluation methods	50	83.33
Teaching teachers to build a fair classroom	49	81.66
Teaching teachers to consider all languages the same	51	85
Teaching teachers to teach self-reflection and critical thinking	49	81.66
Teaching teachers to teach tolerance and peace	44	73.33
Teaching teachers to teach social relations	55	91.66
Teaching teachers to teach about democracy	43	71.66

*classes is not less important than English teaching. To do this, students' voices should be taken into consideration in different classroom procedures. (Participant 57)*

*Teacher education should target generating democracy literacy among teachers to be conveyed to students by them. It can be taught to be implemented by teachers through different means such as paying attention to the wants and needs of students in selecting instructional materials. This goal, if seriously sought, can lead to basic changes in the system with many advantages. (Participant 4)*

Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of the extracted themes.

As indicated in the Table 3, the themes have been prevalent in the quotations of more than 71.66% of the interviewees.

## Discussion

The present study aimed to address two research questions. Concerning the first research question, which inquired about the components of multicultural EFL teacher education as perceived by experts, the findings extracted from interviews revealed the following components: the elimination of race-related inequalities, gender-related inequalities, social class-related inequalities, language-related inequalities, ability-related inequalities, and culture-related inequalities. It is noteworthy that while there was limited existing literature exploring experts' perspectives on the components of multicultural EFL teacher education, the study's findings align with previous research by Zohrabi et al., (2019), which stressed the importance of racial equity and gender nondiscrimination in multicultural English Language Teaching (ELT). Additionally, the results resonate with the UNESCO's emphasis on social anti-discrimination and cultural equity in ELT programs. Notably, the unique addition of ability-related equity underscores the study's original contribution.

Therefore, based on the findings of this study, it can be postulated that multicultural teacher education encompasses more than just teaching teachers literacy skills. It addresses cultural, social, and linguistic issues and goes beyond the traditional boundaries of education, connecting society, economics, ethics, ethnicity, gender, language, and other factors that may affect students and their future. Multicultural teacher education should be anti-racist and gender-indifferent, preparing teachers to offer fair treatment

to all students, irrespective of their gender and race. It materializes when teachers are taught to treat students of any language and socio-cultural background equally, providing equal opportunities for students with different abilities.

Regarding the second research question, which explored the perceptions of Iranian private and public sector EFL teachers on multicultural EFL teacher education, several main themes emerged. These included the development of necessary communicative skills, fostering positive thinking, promoting diversity acceptance, integrating multicultural content, using various evaluation methods, creating a fair classroom environment, treating all languages equally, encouraging self-reflection and critical thinking, promoting tolerance and peace, nurturing positive social relations, and emphasizing democracy. These themes are in alignment with previous research that advocated for democratic views in English Language Teaching (ELT) to ensure educational programs are free from hegemony in dimensions such as language, religion, race, culture, and ethnicity. This inclusivity leads to fairness, critical thinking, equality of educational opportunities, and the removal of hegemony and the promotion of democratic education.

Furthermore, these extracted themes are consistent with prior research that emphasized the importance of multicultural issues in instructional materials to make students aware of the fundamentals of multicultural education. It is evident that the perceptions revealed in this study revolve around three core constructs: diversity acceptance, multicultural attitudes and behaviors, and equity education. These three pillars are fundamental to the successful implementation of multicultural education, whether in teacher education, EFL teaching across various levels and contexts, or curriculum development.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of recognizing the key role of diversity acceptance, multicultural attitudes and behaviors, and equity education in the realm of multicultural teacher education. Without these pillars, multicultural education remains at the conceptual level. Multicultural education is undoubtedly easier in theory than in practice, and it demands specific skills, knowledge, and abilities for effective implementation. Teacher education programs should equip educators with the necessary tools to teach with a multicultural orientation. Ultimately, the adaptation of teacher education to multicultural education principles holds the promise of achieving remarkable educational outcomes associated with equity education and social justice.

## **Conclusions and implications**

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the critical components of multicultural EFL teacher education. The first key conclusion drawn from the study is that multicultural EFL teacher education should actively work towards eliminating a spectrum of inequalities, including those related to race, gender, social class, language, abilities, and cultural background. It is imperative that this form of education remains unwavering in its commitment to eliminating any form of discrimination stemming from differences or diversity in these dimensions among learners.

A second conclusion that emerges from the study underscores the incompatibility of multicultural teacher education with any form of discrimination based on the characteristics mentioned above. It emphasizes that discrimination in any aspect of education must be eradicated for a genuinely inclusive and multicultural educational environment

to thrive. The third conclusion is that EFL teachers should be equipped and trained in the utilization of multicultural education components within their teaching practices. This training should be an integral part of teacher education courses, both in pre-service and in-service contexts, to ensure that EFL teachers can effectively implement these principles in their classrooms.

The fourth significant conclusion is that EFL teachers need to be trained in a range of competencies and attributes, including necessary communicative skills, positive thinking, difference acceptance, integration of multicultural content, diverse evaluation methods, creating fair classroom environments, recognizing the equality of all languages, fostering self-reflection and critical thinking, promoting tolerance and peace, encouraging positive social relations, and emphasizing democracy. These attributes and skills are fundamental for injecting the fundamentals of multiculturalism into EFL teacher education.

These findings have important implications for various stakeholders, including EFL teachers, teacher educators, and teacher education material developers. EFL teachers can apply the themes and principles uncovered in this study to enhance their teaching practices. Teacher educators can incorporate these results into their training programs, ensuring that multicultural education components are an integral part of teacher education. Teacher education material developers can use these findings to create instructional materials that align with the principles of multicultural teacher education.

While this study contributes valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Future research can further enhance the validity of these findings by expanding the sample size and triangulating data through open-ended questionnaires or narratives. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of EFL students would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the connection between multiculturalism and teacher education.

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MRR drafted the manuscript. EAS confirmed the manuscript. MRR collected the data. MRR and EAS analyzed the data. MRR and EAS read the manuscript and agreed with the publication.

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#### **Availability of data and materials**

The authors declare that the data would be available at the editors' request from the corresponding author.

#### **Declarations**

##### **Ethics approval and consent to participate**

The authors declare that all authors filled in the consent form and willingly participated in the study. The ethical committee of Allameh Tabataba'i confirmed that this study was conducted based on the guidelines and principles of this institute. The written informed consent from all participants was taken.

##### **Competing interests**

The authors declare no competing interests.

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