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Original Research Article

Developing a Multicultural Education Competency Framework for Preschool Teachers in the Context of Educational Reform in Vietnam

Nguyen Thi Thuy[1]*, Nguyen Thi Thuy[2]

[1]Center for Child Research and Human Development, Vietnam Education Strategy and Policy institute
[2]Faculty of Information Technology, Quang Binh University, Vietnam

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Abstract: Amid educational reforms and increasing cultural diversity, developing preschool teachers' multicultural education competency is essential to ensuring equitable participation and learning opportunities for young children. Through a systematic literature review and synthesis of research on multicultural education, early childhood learning environments, and the integration of cultural dimensions into early childhood curricula, this paper proposes a multicultural education competency framework for preschool teachers comprising six core components: (1) awareness of and respect for cultural diversity; (2) knowledge of culture, language, family, and community; (3) designing and implementing culturally responsive educational activities; (4) fostering an inclusive and equitable educational environment; (5) collaborating with families and communities; and (6) professional reflection and continuous pedagogical improvement. The paper delineates the core content and observable behavioral indicators of each component, while outlining strategic orientations for competency development through pre-service teacher education, in-service training, and classroom practice. Because this framework was developed on a theoretical basis without expert consultation or empirical validation, further research is warranted to assess its contextual validity and applicability across diverse early childhood education settings.

Keywords: Multicultural Education, Competency Framework, Preschool Teachers, Ethnic Minority Children, Professional Development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational reform mandates the continuous enhancement of teachers' professional competencies toward accommodating learner diversity, grounding educational activities in children's lived realities, and securing developmental opportunities for every child. In early childhood education (ECE), this imperative must be conceptualized in relation to children's developmental characteristics, familial experiences, home languages, and sociocultural contexts. Rather than merely delivering prescribed curricula, early childhood educators must discern differences that fundamentally influence children's classroom engagement, thereby preventing cultural or linguistic discrepancies from turning into barriers to peer interaction and learning.

Vietnam is an ethnically pluralistic nation marked by rich diversity in languages, customs, indigenous knowledge systems, folk arts, and community lifestyles. In numerous locales, children from distinct ethnolinguistic backgrounds co-attend the same early childhood education settings. This multicultural reality offers valuable resources for designing experiential, communicative, and mutual learning activities. However, it concurrently demands that educators possess cultural awareness, communicative sensitivity, the capacity to select locally relevant educational content, and the pedagogical skill to orchestrate learning environments that align with the developmental needs of children and their local communities.

An empirical report by Nguyen Thi My Trinh *et al*., (2020) on integrating multicultural education into the national Early Childhood Education Curriculum across ethnic minority areas underscores that curriculum development must reflect local sociocultural specificities and be purposefully embedded into pedagogical goals, lesson planning, and daily instructional routines. Implemented across Lai Chau, Gia Lai, and Soc Trang provinces—regions representing distinct ethnocultural dynamics—the study delineated systematic integration

***Corresponding Author:** Nguyen Thi Thuy
Center for Child Research and Human Development, Vietnam Education Strategy and Policy institute

procedures, pedagogical methods, and field-tested instructional guidelines in Sin Ho District, Lai Chau Province (Nguyen Thi My Trinh *et al*., 2020).

At the institutional and environmental level, Nguyen Thi Thuy *et al*., (2017) examined the construction of multicultural educational environments for Hmong and Dao preschool children, arguing that material infrastructure alone fails to ensure a truly culturally respectful setting. Critical dimensions including instructional and communicative language, curriculum content, pedagogical strategies, interpersonal relationships, and home–school partnerships play decisive roles. Furthermore, the authors caution against environments unintentionally dominated by the mainstream culture when the identities, voices, and lived experiences of ethnic minority children are insufficiently acknowledged.

These empirical insights collectively suggest that multicultural education cannot be reduced to superficial classroom additions such as folk songs, ethnic garments, festival exhibits, or cultural imagery. Instead, it must serve as an overarching philosophy underpinning content selection, communicative dynamics, physical and psychological classroom environments, and reciprocal family–community partnerships. Consistent with culturally responsive pedagogy, learners' lived experiences and cultural funds of knowledge must be systematically integrated into curricular choices, pedagogical practices, and classroom interactions (Gay, 2018). Simultaneously, multicultural education must critically address school and social conditions that reproduce or perpetuate disparities in educational opportunity, moving well beyond the mere celebration of cultural differences (Nieto & Bode, 2018). Educators must therefore continuously examine whether all children's backgrounds are genuinely represented, whether their voices are heard, and whether opportunities for meaningful participation are equitably safeguarded.

While previous scholarship in Vietnam has examined multicultural learning environments and the integration of ethnic cultural elements into preschool curricula, existing literature has not yet synthesized these disparate strands into an integrated competency framework anchored in teachers' concrete pedagogical decisions. The primary research gap addressed by this paper is not to assert the absolute absence of competency proposals, but rather to establish a coherent, conceptually grounded reference framework that links professional attitudes, cultural knowledge, activity design, environmental organization, community collaboration, and pedagogical reflection to guide teacher training and empirical inquiry. Accordingly, this paper synthesizes selected theoretical arguments and contextual evidence to propose a multicultural education competency framework for preschool teachers in Vietnam. It should be emphasized that this proposed framework represents a conceptual synthesis rather than an empirically tested scale or validated measurement model.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Methodological Approach

This study utilizes a theoretical research methodology grounded in critical literature analysis and conceptual synthesis. The principal objective is to elucidate key theoretical propositions, concepts, and operational demands surrounding multicultural early childhood education, and subsequently synthesize them to construct a coherent competency framework. The study did not conduct empirical surveys, qualitative interviews, or field trials; thus, the framework is presented as a theoretical model rather than empirical evidence of teacher competency levels or instructional efficacy.

The formulation of the framework is guided by three complementary conceptual pillars:

1. **Multicultural and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:** Emphasizing respect for diversity, educational equity, and the intentional reflection of diverse cultural experiences in early childhood settings.
2. **Contextual ECE Research in Vietnam:** Drawing on practical issues identified in domestic scholarship regarding learning environments, instructional language, curricular integration, and school–family–community partnerships.
3. **Professional Competency Models:** Conceptualizing competence as the dynamic mobilization of integrated knowledge, attitudes, and pedagogical skills in making concrete professional decisions.

These theoretical streams collectively inform the architecture of the framework, without implying that its six core components are mechanically derived from a single theoretical doctrine.

2.2. Data Sources and Selection

Within the scope of this study, literature was purposively selected based on its direct relevance to early childhood multicultural education, ethnolinguistically diverse classrooms, and teacher competency modeling. The primary textual corpus analyzed comprises core empirical and policy studies directly informing the framework, rather than an exhaustive or replicable systematic review.

- **Primary Source 1:** The study by Nguyen Thi Thuy *et al*., (2017) on constructing multicultural learning environments for Hmong and Dao ethnic minority preschoolers, providing empirical evidence on classroom environments, linguistic practices, pedagogical methods, and home–school collaboration.
- **Primary Source 2:** The ministerial-level research report by Nguyen Thi My Trinh *et al*.,

(2020), which focused on curricular content, implementation procedures, and pedagogical integration strategies within the national ECE curriculum in ethnic minority localities.

The literature was categorized, coded, and cross-analyzed across six substantive themes: (1) awareness and attitudes toward cultural diversity; (2) knowledge of culture, language, family, and community dynamics; (3) educational activity design and execution; (4) inclusive educational environments; (5) family and community engagement; and (6) critical self-reflection and professional development. Themes were identified based on their functional alignment with early childhood educators' professional decisions and practical requirements, ensuring that thematic recurrence was substantiated by practical occupational relevance.

2.3. Analytical Procedures and Framework Construction

The analytical and model-building process was executed in four sequential stages:

1. **Identification of Foundational Requirements:** Delineating foundational mandates regarding cultural diversity, equity, and child participation in early childhood education.
2. **Thematic Extraction:** Analyzing primary texts to extract core pedagogical competencies, contextual challenges, and classroom delivery conditions.
3. **Conceptual Categorization and Clustering:** Clustering findings into functional dimensions: orienting competencies (attitudes and awareness), foundational resources (knowledge), pedagogical execution competencies (activity design, environment building, community collaboration), and adaptive competencies (critical reflection and continuous improvement).
4. **Component Elaboration and Refinement:** Articulating core descriptors and observable behavioral indicators for each component while systematically addressing conceptual boundaries to minimize overlap.

This iterative process constitutes a conceptual synthesis; the resulting components and behavioral indicators provide a conceptual blueprint for curriculum development, professional training, and future empirical research, but have not yet been evaluated for psychometric properties, construct validity, reliability, or scoring rubrics.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Theoretical and Practical Foundations of Multicultural ECE Competency

3.1.1. Multicultural Education: Fostering Respect for Diversity and Ensuring Equity

Multicultural education in early childhood encompasses deliberate educational actions that guide children toward understanding cultural diversity, nurturing positive self-identities while respecting others, and accessing high-quality learning opportunities unrestricted by ethnicity, mother tongue, or socioeconomic background. In preschool classrooms, this orientation must permeate daily routines, teacher–child interactions, instructional materials, learning corner arrangements, and conflict resolution.

As articulated by Nguyen Thi My Trinh *et al*., (2020), multicultural education is inextricably linked to upholding children's rights, facilitating cross-cultural interaction, fostering learner confidence, and safeguarding cultural heritage. The core purpose transcends familiarizing children with superficial ethnic characteristics; it requires cultivating an inclusive educational climate where diverse identities are validated as assets.

For educators, this necessitates recognizing implicit assumptions and biases that may inadvertently influence instructional practices. Teachers must actively resist treating dominant sociocultural norms as universal benchmarks, avoid devaluing children's home languages or familial funds of knowledge, and refrain from reducing complex cultural heritage into rigid, stereotypical caricatures.

3.1.2. Grounding Multicultural Competency in Local Cultural Ecologies

Multicultural educational competency extends beyond static cognitive knowledge of ethnic customs and folklore. It fundamentally denotes an educator's ability to mobilize cultural insights to formulate instructional goals, design relevant content, orchestrate classroom experiences, and equitably assess children's engagement within specific local ecologies.

Nguyen Thi My Trinh *et al*., (2020) highlighted that multicultural integration must be embedded within the goals, instructional plans, and daily routines of the national ECE curriculum, rather than relegated to disjointed extracurricular events. Teachers are expected to harness cultural resources that align with curriculum standards, children's developmental milestones, and community conditions.

In classroom practice, educators can weave folktales, indigenous games, traditional music, artisanal crafts, natural raw materials, and everyday local practices into meaningful learning experiences. Nevertheless, pedagogical selections must be informed by respectful dialogues with families and community elders to prevent trivialization or decontextualization.

3.1.3. The Multicultural Learning Environment as an Indicator of Teacher Competency

Nguyen Thi Thuy *et al*., (2017) structured a multicultural educational environment across six interrelated pillars: educational policy, curriculum, pedagogical methodologies, classroom linguistic practices, human and material resources, and institutional interpersonal relations. This conceptualization clarifies that a genuine multicultural environment transcends decorative displays of ethnic artifacts, fundamentally encompassing how activities are organized and how individuals interact.

A classroom adorned with multicultural visual exhibits remains culturally non-responsive if children's native languages are discouraged, instructional content reflects solely the majority culture, or children are given no room to share their home experiences. Consequently, teacher competence must encompass both the design of inclusive physical spaces and the cultivation of an emotionally safe, equitable, and affirming psychosocial atmosphere.

Furthermore, Nguyen Thi Thuy *et al*., (2017) cautioned against subtle majority-culture hegemony, wherein the cultural assets, linguistic repertoires, and lived realities of Hmong and Dao children risk marginalization. This highlights that any evaluation of teacher competence must critically assess whether children's authentic voices and identities are visibly reflected in daily classroom life.

3.2. A Proposed Multicultural Education Competency Framework for Preschool Teachers

Synthesizing the theoretical principles and contextual evidence discussed, this study proposes a multicultural education competency framework for preschool teachers comprising six interdependent yet functionally distinct components:

1. Awareness and attitudes of respect for cultural diversity.
2. Knowledge of culture, language, family, and community dynamics.
3. Designing and implementing culturally responsive educational activities.
4. Fostering an inclusive and equitable educational environment.
5. Collaborating with families and communities.
6. Professional reflection and continuous pedagogical improvement.

These six dimensions capture the iterative professional journey: recognizing diversity, comprehending child contexts, transforming insights into pedagogical actions, engineering responsive physical and social environments, forging community alliances, and critically refining practice. Delineating these components provides conceptual clarity; it does not assume that they operate in isolation or develop along a rigid, linear trajectory.

3.2.1. Component 1: Awareness and Attitudes of Respect for Cultural Diversity

This component establishes the value orientation and mindset guiding how educators perceive, interpret, and respond to differences among children, families, and communities. It manifests in acknowledging variations in languages, customs, communication styles, child-rearing practices, and family structures without interpreting these differences as intrinsic deficits relative to a single dominant norm.

Respecting diversity does not imply uncritical acceptance of all community practices. Rather, teachers must navigate decisions through the lens of children's rights, psychological and physical safety, equity, and developmental goals, while remaining vigilant against imposing personal biases or majoritarian standards. This requires critical self-awareness regarding implicit biases that might distort behavioral evaluations or learning opportunities.

In daily practice, this disposition is mirrored in concrete instructional interactions: actively listening to all children, designing egalitarian tasks, encouraging participation across cultural groups, and constructively mediating peer misunderstandings. Educators must ensure that children are treated with dignity, feel safe to express themselves, and encounter no prejudice stemming from their linguistic or cultural backgrounds.

3.2.2. Component 2: Knowledge of Culture, Language, Family, and Community Dynamics

Teachers require contextual knowledge of children's cultural, linguistic, and familial realities to accurately assess their needs and learning repertoires. Key domains include: home and community languages; customs, traditions, and daily routines; folktales, traditional games, and folk arts; indigenous funds of knowledge; parental beliefs regarding child-rearing; and socioeconomic realities that shape children's daily lives.

Crucially, cultural knowledge must not be acquired as an immutable catalog of static group traits. Intra-group diversity remains substantial; families belonging to the same ethnic community frequently differ in language proficiency, adherence to customs, living conditions, and educational aspirations. Teachers must therefore refrain from stereotyping individual children based on generalized cultural archetypes. Contextual insights should be gathered through pluralistic inquiry, including valid scholarly literature, classroom observations, continuous parental dialogue, and consultations with community elders.

Linguistic knowledge is particularly decisive. Educators must understand children's home linguistic environments, their exposure to Vietnamese, and their bilingual communicative proficiency across varied contexts. Emergent Vietnamese language proficiency must never be conflated with cognitive impairment or

developmental delay. Teachers must validate children's existing linguistic funds and facilitate multi-modal avenues for comprehension, expression, and collaborative play.

3.2.3. Component 3: Designing and Implementing Culturally Responsive Educational Activities

This component reflects an educator's pedagogical capacity to translate cultural knowledge into instructional practice. Teachers must establish learning objectives, select content, adopt methodologies, and prepare instructional media that accommodate children's developmental milestones, prior experiences, native languages, and cultural horizons, in full alignment with national curriculum standards.

The integration of local cultural elements can be achieved across diverse curriculum domains:

- **Exploration and Discovery:** Utilizing indigenous flora, local crafts, traditional occupations, and community routines as authentic inquiry topics.
- **Language and Literacy Development:** Introducing local narratives, bilingual storytelling, customary nomenclature, and family accounts.
- **Aesthetics and Creative Arts:** Engaging children with locally available natural media, traditional patterns, and community folk performances.

Crucially, incorporating token elements (such as occasional costumes or holiday songs) does not make an activity culturally responsive. The defining benchmark is whether the pedagogical design enables children to articulate prior knowledge, share home experiences, appreciate peer differences, and co-construct understanding. Educators must consciously avoid stereotyping cultural content or restricting it to intermittent celebratory events, weaving cultural relevance organically into daily routines. Furthermore, when utilizing indigenous practices, prior consultations with families and community leaders ensure authentic and respectful representation.

3.2.4. Component 4: Fostering an Inclusive and Equitable Educational Environment

This component encompasses the organization of physical spaces and the cultivation of an affirming psychosocial climate wherein every child experiences safety, equity, and active membership. Physically, teachers must thoughtfully curate and display culturally inclusive learning media, books, imagery, and play props that accurately reflect ethnolinguistic diversity without reinforcing caricatures.

Psychosocially, teachers are responsible for establishing a warm, respectful, and safe classroom atmosphere. This is mediated through affirming teacher–child dialogues, equitable classroom norms, collaborative learning arrangements, restorative conflict resolution, and the active encouragement of peer empathy. Educators must remain attuned to marginalized children who may remain quiet, face communication hurdles, or lack opportunities to participate due to linguistic differences.

The presence of diverse physical materials is an insufficient indicator of quality; the decisive factor is how systematically these materials are activated during daily classroom interactions. Ongoing observation of peer play, material usage, and affective reactions enables teachers to identify and dismantle subtle structural barriers to inclusion.

3.2.5. Component 5: Collaborating with Families and Communities

Families and communities are primary partners in multicultural education, serving as authentic custodians of language, traditions, and community wisdom. Competence in this domain involves establishing bidirectional, respectful partnerships that honor varied parental perspectives on child-rearing while mobilizing community involvement in early learning.

Teachers should proactively engage parents to gain insights into children's domestic linguistic practices, habits, and specific learning needs. Communication must transcend unidirectional institutional reporting, creating communicative platforms where caregivers voice concerns and co-shape educational decisions. Modalities include reciprocal home–school exchanges, parent meetings, localized learning corners, family storytelling visits, and joint cultural projects.

To ensure equitable family engagement, teachers must employ accessible communication modes attuned to parental literacy levels, language repertoires, and work schedules. When language barriers exist, visual cues, bilingual liaisons, or simplified communication strategies should be utilized. Family engagement should remain voluntary, avoiding excessive burdens or unrealistic expectations. Furthermore, teachers must handle family-shared cultural information with ethical discretion, respecting personal privacy and avoiding unwarranted generalizations.

3.2.6. Component 6: Professional Reflection and Continuous Pedagogical Improvement

Because multicultural classrooms are dynamic and evolving, educators must regularly examine, evaluate, and calibrate their pedagogical choices. This component centers on recognizing strengths and shortcomings in instructional decisions, interrogating implicit biases, and utilizing pedagogical feedback to modify practice.

Reflection can be facilitated through analytical reviews of lesson plans, systematic observation logs,

assessments of child engagement, peer debriefing, and parental feedback. Guiding reflective inquiries include:

- *Does the instructional content authentically reflect children's diverse funds of knowledge?*
- *Are participation and expressive opportunities equitably distributed across all children?*
- *Does the instructional language bridge or hinder comprehension?*
- *Which children remain disengaged, and what pedagogical modifications can mitigate communicative exclusion?*

Reflective outcomes must directly inform actionable pedagogical modifications, such as adapting grouping formats, supplementing tangible resources, recalibrating communication styles, or initiating targeted family conversations. Beyond classroom self-reflection, teachers must actively pursue continuous professional development through professional learning communities (PLCs), lesson studies, collaborative action research, and sustained community engagement.

3.3. Structural Interrelations across the Competency Framework

The six proposed competencies operate as an interdependent, dynamic system wherein each component performs an indispensable professional function:

- **Component 1 (Attitudes & Awareness)** provides the overarching philosophical compass and ethical disposition toward diversity.
- **Component 2 (Contextual Knowledge)** furnishes the cognitive and empirical foundation regarding children's linguistic and communal environments.
- **Components 3, 4, and 5 (Pedagogical Action)** translate awareness and knowledge into concrete instructional actions: designing culturally responsive curricula (Comp. 3), engineering equitable physical/psychosocial learning spaces (Comp. 4), and forging reciprocal community partnerships (Comp. 5).
- **Component 6 (Reflective Practice)** functions as the iterative evaluative mechanism that continually refines, harmonizes, and upgrades all other dimensions.

Rather than proceeding along a rigid linear progression, these competencies interact cyclically:

Contextual Exploration (Comp. 2)⟶Pedagogical Design & Implementation (Comp. 3 & 4)⟶Observation & CommunityDialogue (Comp. 5)⟶Reflective Adjustment (Comp. 6 & 1)

For example, when a teacher identifies a cluster of children disengaging during group read-alouds, the resolution requires concurrent mobilization across multiple competencies: re-examining teacher assumptions (Comp. 1), investigating children's home language levels (Comp. 2), modifying visual aids and grouping structures (Comp. 3 & 4), consulting caregivers (Comp. 5), and evaluating pedagogical efficacy (Comp. 6).

3.4. Strategic Orientations for Developing Multicultural ECE Competencies

To translate this conceptual framework into actionable practice, three strategic pathways are outlined:

3.4.1. Curricular Integration in Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

Preschool teacher education institutions must embed multicultural perspectives across foundational and methodology coursework, including child development, early childhood curriculum, subject-specific methods, and school–family partnerships. Coursework must extend beyond folkloric overviews of ethnic minorities to encompass systemic analyses of how culture and language mediate early cognition, social development, and classroom agency.

Preservice education should blend theoretical foundations with clinical simulations, case analyses, integrated lesson design, authentic material production, and simulated parent conferences. Preparing prospective teachers to navigate real-world dilemma cases—such as supporting emergent bilingual learners or managing peer cultural misunderstandings—equips them with practical diagnostic and instructional decision-making skills.

3.4.2. Enhancing Ongoing In-Service Professional Development

In-service teacher professional development must be sustained, context-embedded, and tailored to local classroom needs. Isolated, one-off training workshops seldom yield sustainable shifts in instructional practice without ongoing instructional coaching, collaborative reflection, and collegial exchange.

At the school level, institutions should cultivate Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) focused on theme-based lesson studies, classroom observations, cross-classroom material development, and shared pedagogical inquiries. In ethnolinguistically diverse locales, teachers should be systematically supported in assembling localized cultural resource banks and collaboratively troubleshooting language mediation hurdles. Administrative leadership must allocate designated scheduling, professional mentorship, and material resources to nurture instructional experimentation. Reference manuals from national projects (e.g., Project B2018-VKG-01) serve as valuable practical resources when contextualized to local educational realities.

3.4.3. Experiential Community Immersion and Teacher Action Research

Educators should be afforded structured opportunities to learn directly from local communities through ethnographic observations, home visits, participation in community cultural life, and consultations with community leaders. Direct field experiences help transform broad cultural abstractions into nuanced understanding of familial diversity within shared communities.

Furthermore, classroom action research represents a potent vehicle for sustained professional growth. Through iterative cycles of diagnosing pedagogical bottlenecks, planning interventions, implementing modifications, observing child responses, and evaluating outcomes, teachers directly bridge research and classroom practice. While insights from localized action research are context-specific, this systematic inquiry methodology instills autonomous problem-solving and responsive pedagogical agility.

3.4.4. Structural Resource Allocation and Institutional Home–Community Linkages

Educational authorities and school leaders must provide systemic support, including access to regional cultural literature, open-ended educational materials, native-language linguistic aides, and formalized channels for parent–school engagement. Meaningful resource construction does not require exorbitant expenditure; locally sourced natural media, indigenous artifacts, and community narratives represent authentic, cost-effective learning resources. Administrators must also protect teachers' collaborative planning time, preventing the entire burden of multicultural adaptation from resting exclusively on individual teachers.

3.4.5. Developing Self-Assessment Instruments and Developmental Evaluation Rubrics

The proposed framework can be operationalized into formative self-assessment rubrics, empowering educators to evaluate instructional strengths, identify professional learning needs, and establish self-directed development targets. Formative assessment should integrate multiple streams of qualitative evidence: integrated lesson plans, observational documentation, reflective journals, peer feedback, and family inputs.

Evaluation must prioritize instructional enhancement over administrative compliance or competitive teacher ranking. Because children's growth is mediated by complex ecological variables, developmental rubrics should holistically gauge implementation processes, classroom climate, and stakeholder feedback rather than isolated student outputs. Broad implementation of such instruments should invariably be preceded by thorough pilot testing and contextual calibration.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Contributions of the Proposed Competency Framework

The principal contribution of this study lies in formulating a six-component conceptual reference framework that explicitly bridges the broader imperatives of multicultural education with early childhood educators' concrete occupational practices. This architecture expands the pedagogical discourse beyond the superficial integration of folk customs, ethnic festivals, or material artifacts by concurrently addressing professional attitudes, contextual knowledge, instructional design, classroom ecology, home–community partnerships, and critical reflection. However, this contribution should be understood primarily as a conceptual systematization and theoretical proposal; this paper does not demonstrate the empirical validity, reliability, or instructional efficacy of the framework in practical settings.

Furthermore, the proposed framework establishes a vital nexus between two interrelated ecological levels: individual teacher competency and institutional educational conditions. An educator may harbor positive dispositions toward diversity yet struggle in practice due to instructional resource deficits, constrained professional development time, or a lack of home-language mediation support. Conversely, an institution may feature an abundance of diverse physical materials yet fail to foster an equitable psychosocial climate if daily interactions and peer dynamics subtly marginalize certain children. Therefore, cultivating teacher competencies must proceed in tandem with upgrading classroom environments and reinforcing institutional support mechanisms.

4.2. Implications for Early Childhood Education in Vietnam

The empirical insights documented by Nguyen Thi Thuy *et al*., (2017) and Nguyen Thi My Trinh *et al*., (2020) demonstrate that creating multicultural environments and integrating local cultural content must be intricately calibrated to local community specificities. Complex operational challenges concerning instructional language, curriculum materials, pedagogical methods, and familial engagement cannot be resolved through a standardized, one-size-fits-all approach across all preschools.

The proposed competency framework can assist teacher training institutions in delineating curricular priorities for professional development, guide preschools in designing targeted workplace-based training, and provide a conceptual blueprint for competency assessment research. Nonetheless, behavioral indicators must remain contextually adaptable: institutions situated in mountainous or ethnically diverse areas may need to prioritize bilingual scaffolding, indigenous funds of knowledge, and community elder engagement. Conversely, urban early childhood centers may need to

address inter-regional migration, varied family socioeconomic backgrounds, and complex social experiences.

Crucially, multicultural education must not be conflated with the mere introduction of ethnic minority cultures. Rather, it must encompass the complete spectrum of child diversity within the classroom community, cultivating avenues for peer exchange and ensuring that no single ethnocultural group is positioned as the default norm. Integrating cultural dimensions must fundamentally serve the overarching objectives of mutual understanding, reciprocal respect, equity, and children's substantive classroom participation.

4.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several methodological and conceptual limitations warrant consideration when interpreting these findings:

1. **Literature Scope:** The framework was constructed through the analysis and synthesis of literature purposively selected based on topic relevance, rather than via a formal systematic literature review adhering to fully documented search, screening, and methodological quality appraisal protocols.
2. **Absence of Field Consultation:** The study lacks primary empirical data gathered directly through consultations with preschool teachers, administrators, early childhood experts, or families; consequently, the contextual validity, clarity, and practical feasibility of the framework remain empirically unverified.
3. **Contextual Specificity of Evidence:** The two primary domestic empirical studies informing this paper were conducted within specific localities, ethnic communities, and time periods, which limits immediate generalizability across the entirety of Vietnam's diverse early childhood education landscape.
4. **Lack of Proficiency Calibration:** The six components and associated indicators remain exploratory and conceptual, without validated proficiency levels, measurement weightings, or developmental stage benchmarks aligned with teachers' career trajectories.

To address these limitations, future inquiries should conduct rigorous Delphi consultations or expert panels comprising early childhood specialists, cultural sociologists, school administrators, and practitioners to refine the clarity, content validity, and exhaustiveness of the framework. Subsequent multi-site empirical investigations—combining quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and systematic classroom observations—are necessary to delineate context-responsive behavioral indicators across varied educational settings. Building upon such empirical evidence, researchers can operationalize the components into concrete rubric items, conducting psychometric pilot testing to verify content validity, construct validity, and internal consistency prior to broad-scale diagnostic adoption.

Another vital research trajectory involves designing, implementing, and evaluating in-service professional development interventions grounded in this framework. Longitudinal intervention studies could track changes in teachers' classroom practices, including lesson planning, material adaptation, communicative scaffolding, and the equitable distribution of participation opportunities. Future research must also examine the mediating roles of institutional climate, local resources, and parent–school collaboration, thereby clarifying not only teacher competency expectations but also the structural support systems required across Vietnam's early childhood education landscape.

5. CONCLUSION

Multicultural education represents an indispensable strategic imperative for safeguarding educational equity, affirming diversity, and elevating the quality of early childhood education amid Vietnam's comprehensive educational reforms. Prior empirical scholarship on developing multicultural environments and embedding cultural dimensions into early childhood curricula within ethnic minority regions demonstrates the necessity of simultaneously addressing curriculum content, pedagogical methodologies, linguistic scaffolding, classroom climate, and home–community partnerships.

Synthesizing core theoretical and empirical literature, this paper proposes a multicultural education competency framework for preschool teachers structured across six interdependent components:

1. Awareness and attitudes of respect for cultural diversity;
2. Knowledge of culture, language, family, and community dynamics;
3. Designing and implementing culturally responsive educational activities;
4. Fostering an inclusive and equitable educational environment;
5. Collaborating with families and communities; and
6. Professional reflection and continuous pedagogical improvement.

While each component serves a distinct professional function, they operate synergistically to capture the multi-faceted process whereby educators conceptualize, execute, and calibrate instruction in culturally diverse classrooms.

The primary contribution of this paper is the conceptual systematization of multicultural educational imperatives into an integrated competency structure anchored in the professional realities of early childhood educators, thereby providing an actionable reference model for initial teacher education, in-service

professional development, and future empirical inquiry. Nevertheless, because this framework remains a theoretical formulation awaiting empirical verification, systematic expert consultation, indicator refinement, and multi-context field testing are essential next steps. Ultimately, advancing teachers' multicultural competencies must be supported by adequate structural resources, collegial working environments, and robust institutional support mechanisms, rather than placing the entire professional responsibility solely upon individual educators.

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