

Developing Multicultural Religious Competence in Teachers through Reflective Seminars in Nigeria

Ozokoye C Gift^{1,*}, Mustafa Farjani²

¹University of Nigeria, Enugu State, Nigeria

² University of Zawiya, Libya

Email: ozokoye.gift@unn.edu.ng¹, farjani@zu.edu.ly²

Received: 16/08/2025

Revised: 02/09/2025

Accepted: 18/09/2025



© 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY-SA) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>).

Abstract: *This study explores the impact of a reflective-based seminar in enhancing religious Multicultural competencies among pre-service teachers in Nigeria. The purpose of the research is to examine whether a seminar focused on religious identity and interfaith dialogue can improve pre-service teachers' Cultural Competence and beliefs about fostering religious harmony in educational settings. A total of 70 pre-service teachers from various teacher training institutions in Nigeria participated in the study. The participants were divided into an intervention group, which attended a reflective seminar, and a control group that received traditional diversity training. The research used both quantitative and qualitative methods, with the intervention group showing significant improvements in Cultural Competence, attitudes towards religious diversity, and awareness of stereotypes. Qualitative findings also revealed that participants gained greater self-awareness, developed strategies for promoting inclusivity, and reported challenges in implementing the learned strategies in real-world classroom settings. The study concludes that reflective-based seminars are effective in enhancing religious multicultural competence among future educators, providing a practical framework for integrating such training into teacher education programs in Nigeria. These seminars can play a crucial role in shaping inclusive learning environments by equipping teachers with the skills necessary to manage religious diversity in the classroom, and offer valuable policy recommendations for improving teacher preparation in diverse educational contexts*

Keywords: *Religious Multicultural, pre-service teachers, reflective approach, religious identity, interfaith dialogue*

Introduction

Religious Multicultural is crucial in fostering harmonious societies, especially in multi-religious countries like Nigeria. As a country with significant religious diversity, Nigeria faces challenges in promoting respect and understanding among its various religious groups, particularly in educational settings. The role of teachers in managing religious diversity is pivotal, as they are the primary agents in shaping students' attitudes toward religious coexistence. However, research indicates that many Nigerian teachers are inadequately prepared to address religious diversity, often lacking the necessary training to manage such issues in the classroom (Makhasane et al., 2023). This highlights the urgent need to reform teacher education

programs to better equip educators with the tools to foster Multicultural and inclusivity.

Despite the growing body of research on multicultural education, there remains a significant gap in studies that address the specific role of religious identity in teacher training programs in Nigeria (Njoku et al., 2024). Previous studies have explored the importance of diversity education and culturally responsive teaching (Irianto, 2024), but few have focused on how reflective-based teacher training programs, specifically designed to address religious identity and interfaith dialogue, can enhance religious Multicultural among teachers (Mohamad et al., 2025). These gaps in the literature underscore the need for more focused interventions that not only teach religious Multicultural but also help pre-service teachers develop the Cultural Competence and practical skills necessary for promoting religious harmony in their classrooms.

This study identifies a critical gap in the existing literature on teacher training, particularly in the context of religious diversity education. While many studies emphasize the importance of diversity education in general (e.g., Irianto, 2024; Makhasane et al., 2023), few have specifically examined the role of religious identity and interfaith dialogue within teacher training programs. Most research has focused on general cultural competence or has addressed religious diversity in isolation, without considering the intersection of religious identity and interfaith understanding in multicultural education. This study seeks to fill this gap by proposing a reflective-based seminar that integrates religious identity, religious pluralism, and interfaith dialogue as core components of teacher education.

Reflective practices have been shown to enhance teachers' self-awareness and ability to manage diversity (Civitillo et al., 2018), suggesting that such an approach could effectively address the unique challenges of religious diversity in Nigerian classrooms (Faul et al., 2007). Motivated by rising religious tensions in Nigeria, this research aims to equip educators with the confidence and tools necessary to promote peace and coexistence through inclusive practices. By integrating religious identity into teacher training, this study offers valuable insights into preparing pre-service teachers to address religious diversity in schools, an area that has received insufficient attention in existing teacher education programs (Onyeatoelu, 2021)

This study aims to evaluate the effect of a reflection-based seminar on enhancing religious multicultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, and the ability to manage religious diversity in the classroom among prospective teachers in Nigeria. The primary objectives of this research are to assess changes in pre-service teachers' cultural competence, beliefs about diversity, and their ability to implement interfaith dialogue in educational settings. Specifically, this study will evaluate whether the reflective seminar can improve teachers' self-awareness and strategies for fostering inclusivity in classrooms with diverse religious backgrounds. By focusing on these competencies, this research seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on improving teacher education in Nigeria, offering practical recommendations for integrating religious multicultural training into teacher preparation programs.

This study is expected to provide significant insights for policymakers and educators seeking to improve teacher preparation and contribute to a more inclusive and tolerant education system in Nigeria. The findings of this research could inform the development of new training modules that focus on promoting religious Multicultural, helping educators create more inclusive learning environments (Makhasane et al., 2023; Njoku et al., 2024).

Method

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of how a reflective-based seminar influences pre-service teachers' competencies in religious Multicultural. The mixed-methods approach was chosen to triangulate findings, combining numerical data for statistical analysis with qualitative insights into participants' experiences and reflections.

A quasi-experimental design was employed, with a pre-test and post-test comparison of two groups: an intervention group that participated in the reflective-based seminar and a control group that underwent a standard diversity training seminar. This design was chosen to assess the causal impact of the seminar on the participants' Cultural Competence, attitudes toward religious diversity, and their ability to manage religious differences in classroom settings. The design was informed by Creswell & Plano Clark (2018)'s framework for mixed-methods research, ensuring that both quantitative and qualitative data were integrated effectively.

The study was conducted with 70 pre-service teachers from multiple teacher training institutions in Nigeria, selected using purposive sampling. The sample consisted of participants who had expressed an interest in enhancing their competence in managing religious diversity. The participants were divided into two groups, Intervention group: 35 pre-service teachers who participated in the reflective-based seminar. And Control group: 35 pre-service teachers who attended a standard diversity training seminar, which did not include reflective or experiential components.

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with an experimental group and a control group to assess the impact of the reflective-based seminar. The sample size of 70 pre-service teachers was determined based on a power analysis conducted prior to the study, ensuring sufficient statistical power for detecting differences between the groups (Field, 2018). Participants were selected using purposive sampling from multiple teacher training institutions in Nigeria, with the goal of including individuals who had expressed an interest in enhancing their competence in managing religious diversity. While participants were not randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups, efforts were made to ensure that the two groups were comparable at baseline in terms of their demographic characteristics and prior experience. A more detailed description of the participant selection process, including any matching procedures or criteria used to ensure representativeness, would further clarify the sample's suitability for the study's objectives

Data were collected using:

1. Cultural Competence Scale (Siwatu, 2007): An 8-item scale measuring confidence in managing religious and cultural diversity, rated on a 5-point Likert scale.
2. Beliefs about Religious Diversity in the Curriculum: A 6-item scale assessing beliefs about integrating religious diversity into the curriculum, also rated on a 5-point scale.
3. Reflective Journals: Intervention group participants answered two questions on how the seminar influenced their views and future teaching practices.
4. Semi-structured Interviews: 10 participants from each group were interviewed to explore their seminar experiences, challenges, and benefits.

Table 1. Quantitative Measurement

Measure	Dimensions	Number of Items	Reliability (α)
Cultural Competence	Confidence in managing religious and cultural diversity	8	0.84
Intercultural Sensitivity	Sensitivity to cultural and religious differences	6	0.79
Religious Identity and Pluralism	Embracing and respecting religious diversity in the classroom	7	0.82

The study followed a pre-test/post-test procedure to collect quantitative data, with measurements taken before the seminar (T1) and after the seminar (T2). The pre-test assessed the baseline Cultural Competence and beliefs about diversity of participants, while the post-test measured any changes after the seminar. The quantitative data was gathered through online surveys administered via a secure platform, ensuring that responses were stored in compliance with data protection regulations.

For the qualitative data, participants were asked to write reflective journals at the end of the seminar, responding to prompts that encouraged self-reflection on religious diversity and inclusion. The interviews were conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and participants were selected based on their willingness to share deeper insights about their seminar experiences.

Quantitative data from the Cultural Competence and beliefs about diversity scales were analyzed using ANCOVA with repeated measures (Field, 2018) to examine the differences between the intervention and control groups at T1 and T2, while controlling for baseline variables like gender and age. Descriptive statistics were first calculated for each group at both time points, followed by an inferential analysis to determine the significance of observed changes.

Qualitative data from the reflective journals and interviews were analyzed using directed content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022), which allowed for the identification of key themes related to participants' self-awareness, strategies for promoting inclusivity, and perceived challenges. The analysis process involved multiple rounds of coding, where initial themes were expanded and refined based on emerging patterns in the data. The Qualitative Themes Table summarizes the main themes derived from the qualitative data:

Table 2. Qualitative Themes

Main Theme	Sub-Themes
Cultural Competence	Awareness of personal bias
	Adapting teaching practices to cultural diversity
	Creating inclusive classroom environments
Intercultural Sensitivity	Sensitivity to cultural and religious differences
	Fostering respect for diverse religious beliefs
	Anxiety about addressing sensitive topics
Religious Identity and Pluralism	Balancing personal beliefs with religious pluralism
	Encouraging students to share their religious beliefs
	Navigating religious differences in the classroom
	Creating an inclusive space for religious pluralism

Result

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated for both the intervention group and the control group to examine the differences in Cultural Competence, beliefs about religious diversity, and Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism before and after the seminar. The purpose of this analysis was to understand the overall trends in each group and to identify potential differences in how the groups responded to the intervention.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Group	T1 (Mean \pm SD)	T2 (Mean \pm SD)
Cultural Competence	Intervention	3.84 \pm 0.52	4.30 \pm 0.47
	Control	3.88 \pm 0.54	3.95 \pm 0.50
Intercultural Sensitivity	Intervention	4.02 \pm 0.45	4.28 \pm 0.41
	Control	4.05 \pm 0.47	4.10 \pm 0.43
Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism	Intervention	3.62 \pm 0.64	4.00 \pm 0.58
	Control	3.68 \pm 0.62	3.72 \pm 0.60

The intervention group showed positive changes across all three measured variables. For Cultural Competence, the intervention group started with an average score of 3.84 \pm 0.52 at T1 and increased to 4.30 \pm 0.47 at T2, reflecting a clear improvement in their confidence in managing religious diversity in the classroom. This marked increase suggests that the reflective-based seminar had a substantial effect on their ability to engage in sensitive conversations about religious diversity.

Similarly, the Intercultural Sensitivity score for the intervention group increased from 4.02 \pm 0.45 at T1 to 4.28 \pm 0.41 at T2. This increase indicates a stronger belief among participants in the importance of incorporating religious diversity into teaching materials and curricula. These results suggest that the seminar helped pre-service teachers better understand the value of religious inclusivity in educational content.

For Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism, the intervention group demonstrated the most significant change, moving from 3.62 \pm 0.64 at T1 to 4.00 \pm 0.58 at T2. This improvement highlights the impact of the reflective seminar on participants' awareness of their biases and how these biases could affect their teaching practices. It also suggests that participants became more open to exploring their assumptions about religious diversity.

In contrast, the control group showed minimal changes in all three variables. For Cultural Competence, the control group's score slightly increased from 3.88 \pm 0.54 at T1 to 3.95 \pm 0.50 at T2. Similarly, Intercultural Sensitivity showed a marginal improvement from 4.05 \pm 0.47 at T1 to 4.10 \pm 0.43 at T2. Finally, Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism remained almost the same, with a slight increase from 3.68 \pm 0.62 at T1 to 3.72 \pm 0.60 at T2. These findings suggest that the control group, which participated in standard diversity training, did not experience the same level of growth in the areas of Cultural Competence, curriculum beliefs, and Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism as the intervention group.

ANCOVA Results

To assess the statistical significance of the differences observed between the intervention and control groups, ANCOVA with repeated measures was conducted. ANCOVA allows us to evaluate the mean differences between the two groups while controlling for potential confounding variables such as age, gender, and prior experience. The analysis focused on changes in Cultural Competence, beliefs about

diversity, and Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism from pre-test (T1) to post-test (T2).

Table 4. ANCOVA Table

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	p-value	Partial η^2
Cultural Competence						
Between Groups (Intervention vs. Control)	1.62	1	1.62	12.57	< 0.001	0.16
Error	8.09	68	0.12			
Intercultural Sensitivity						
Between Groups (Intervention vs. Control)	0.35	1	0.35	7.34	0.008	0.10
Error	3.20	68	0.05			
Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism						
Between Groups (Intervention vs. Control)	1.28	1	1.28	15.82	< 0.001	0.19
Error	5.64	68	0.08			

For Cultural Competence, ANCOVA revealed a statistically significant increase for the intervention group, with a large effect size ($F(1, 68) = 12.57$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.16$). The partial η^2 value of 0.16 indicates a large effect, suggesting that the reflective-based seminar had a substantial impact on the participants' confidence in discussing and managing religious diversity. This result supports the hypothesis that reflective learning can enhance teachers' Cultural Competence, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics such as religious diversity in the classroom.

In terms of Intercultural Sensitivity, ANCOVA showed that the intervention group had a significant improvement in their beliefs about the importance of incorporating religious diversity into teaching materials ($F(1, 68) = 7.34$, $p = 0.008$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.10$). The partial η^2 of 0.10 suggests a medium effect, indicating that the seminar had a meaningful impact on teachers' perspectives regarding the role of religious diversity in curriculum design. This finding aligns with previous research that emphasizes the importance of teacher training in fostering inclusive educational environments (Civitillo et al., 2018).

The Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism variable showed the largest effect. ANCOVA indicated a significant change from T1 to T2 for the intervention group ($F(1, 68) = 15.82$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.19$). The large effect size (partial $\eta^2 = 0.19$) suggests that the reflective-based seminar had a substantial impact on participants' awareness of their own stereotypes and biases concerning religious diversity. This finding supports the idea that reflection-based approaches, which encourage self-exploration and critical thinking, can lead to greater awareness of unconscious prejudices and foster more inclusive attitudes.

Effect Size and Statistical Significance

The effect sizes for the ANCOVA results further illustrate the practical significance of the seminar. The Cultural Competence variable had a large effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.16$), indicating that the intervention significantly increased participants' confidence in managing religious diversity in their classrooms. The Intercultural Sensitivity

variable had a moderate effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.10$), suggesting that while the seminar had an impact on teachers' beliefs about diversity, there is room for further growth. Finally, Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism demonstrated the largest effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.19$), highlighting the powerful impact of reflective training on reducing unconscious biases and promoting self-awareness among future teachers.

Table 5. Bivariate Correlations for Study Variables (Pre- and Post-Test)

Variable	Time	1	2	3
Cultural Competence	T1	-	0,42**	0,37**
	T2	-	0,54**	0,50**
Intercultural Sensitivity	T1	0,42**	-	0,33**
	T2	0,54**	-	0,46**
Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism	T1	0,37**	0,33**	-
	T2	0,50**	0,46**	-

Notes: **p < 0,01

These findings underscore the effectiveness of reflective-based seminars in improving pre-service teachers' competencies in managing religious diversity. The large effect size for Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism also suggests that the seminar's focus on critical reflection and personal identity may be especially effective in addressing biases and encouraging more inclusive practices in the classroom. The significant results across all three measures—Cultural Competence, beliefs about diversity, and Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism—demonstrate the potential of this approach to create lasting changes in teachers' attitudes and practices.

Summary of Key Quantitative Findings

The quantitative analysis revealed that the reflective-based seminar had a significant impact on pre-service teachers' competencies in managing religious diversity. The intervention group showed substantial improvements in Cultural Competence, Intercultural Sensitivity, and Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism, with large effect sizes in all three areas. In contrast, the control group demonstrated only minimal changes in these variables, suggesting that the reflective approach used in the seminar was more effective than the traditional diversity training.

The results support the hypothesis that reflective-based training is an effective method for enhancing religious Multicultural competencies among pre-service teachers. By fostering self-reflection and critical thinking, such training can help educators develop the confidence and skills necessary to promote religious inclusivity in their classrooms. The findings also highlight the importance of addressing personal biases and stereotypes, which can have a profound impact on teaching practices and classroom dynamics.

Qualitative Findings

Cultural Competence: Developing Skills for Effective Engagement

The seminar significantly improved the cultural competence of many pre-service teachers. Teachers expressed that they felt more confident in adapting their teaching practices to be more inclusive of students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. One participant noted, "I've learned to adapt my lessons to make sure that all students are represented. I now consciously incorporate materials that reflect diverse religious traditions." This shift in mindset highlights an important aspect of the seminar, where teachers moved from uncertainty about engaging with religious diversity to developing strategies to effectively engage diverse student populations.

A number of participants also commented on how their teaching strategies evolved to better address the needs of students from different religious backgrounds. As one teacher shared, "Before the seminar, I didn't know how to address religious issues in the classroom, but now I feel more comfortable discussing religion and making space for students to share their beliefs." This shift indicates an increased willingness among teachers to incorporate discussions about religious and cultural diversity into their classrooms, moving beyond avoidance toward active engagement.

However, some teachers acknowledged that despite these positive changes, they still faced significant challenges. One teacher explained, "While I now recognize the importance of cultural competence, I still struggle with finding the right resources that reflect the diversity of my students' beliefs." This suggests that, while the seminar was effective in improving teachers' cultural awareness, there is still a gap in the availability of appropriate materials and resources to support culturally responsive teaching.

Furthermore, several teachers shared that, while their confidence in managing religious diversity increased, there remained a degree of uncertainty when approaching certain religious topics. One teacher reflected, "I still feel unsure about how to navigate discussions around sensitive religious practices. I need more guidance on how to handle these topics respectfully." This observation points to the need for further training in addressing complex religious and cultural topics sensitively.

Intercultural Sensitivity: Navigating Cultural and Religious Differences

The development of intercultural sensitivity was another prominent theme emerging from the reflections of pre-service teachers. Participants reported that they became more aware of the religious and cultural differences among their students, which significantly impacted their teaching practices. One teacher noted, "I now pay more attention to the different religious backgrounds of my students and how their beliefs shape their experiences in the classroom." This shows that teachers were becoming more attuned to the significance of students' cultural identities in their learning processes, which is critical for creating an inclusive classroom environment.

In addition to increased awareness, many teachers expressed that they had become more proactive in fostering respect for diverse beliefs. One teacher shared, "I'm now more intentional about encouraging students to learn about each other's religious practices. I want them to see that diversity is not a problem, but something that enriches our classroom." This shift in perspective demonstrates a key outcome of the seminar, as teachers began to view religious and cultural diversity as an asset to the classroom rather than a challenge.

However, while the seminar helped teachers become more sensitive to religious differences, some participants still expressed anxiety about discussing sensitive religious topics. One teacher explained, "Even though I feel more open to talking about religion in the classroom, I'm still anxious about making sure I don't offend anyone." This fear of causing offense suggests that while intercultural sensitivity was improved, teachers still faced challenges when it came to navigating difficult conversations about religion and cultural differences.

Some participants also mentioned that they needed further support in developing the skills required to address these sensitive topics effectively. One teacher mentioned, "It's one thing to be aware of diversity, but another thing to know how to discuss it in a way that is respectful and encourages understanding." This reflects a gap in

teachers' training, where additional support is needed to help them effectively manage discussions around sensitive issues in the classroom. Teachers felt that they would benefit from more practical strategies on how to facilitate these discussions confidently and constructively.

Another participant shared, "I think the biggest challenge is making sure that all students, regardless of their religious background, feel comfortable sharing their beliefs. I need more tools to make this happen." This indicates that intercultural sensitivity is a process that requires continual reflection and skill development, as teachers need ongoing support to ensure they are creating safe spaces for all students to express their cultural and religious identities.

Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism: Embracing and Respecting Diversity

The religious identity and religious pluralism theme emerged strongly in the reflections of the teachers. Many participants expressed that the seminar encouraged them to reflect on their own religious beliefs and how these influenced their approach to teaching religious diversity. One teacher shared, "I never realized how much my own religious identity shaped my approach to teaching. Now I see the importance of respecting and embracing the religious identities of my students." This reflection helped teachers become more mindful of their biases and prepared them to engage with students from diverse religious backgrounds in a more inclusive manner.

A recurring theme in the reflections was the desire to create an environment that embraces religious pluralism—the acknowledgment and respect for the coexistence of multiple religions. Many teachers expressed that they were now more willing to encourage students to share their religious beliefs and experiences. One teacher explained, "I feel more comfortable encouraging my students to talk about their religious beliefs. This has created an open environment where students feel respected, no matter what their faith is." This shift toward embracing pluralism is indicative of the success of the seminar in fostering a more inclusive classroom environment.

However, some teachers did express concerns about balancing their own religious identity while respecting the diverse beliefs of their students. One teacher noted, "I'm still trying to figure out how to balance my own beliefs while ensuring that I'm not imposing them on my students." This concern reflects the complexity of managing religious pluralism in the classroom and suggests that teachers need additional support in navigating this delicate balance.

Many teachers also mentioned that they struggled with neutrality in religious discussions, especially when students' beliefs conflicted with each other. One teacher reflected, "It's challenging to remain neutral when students share conflicting views about religion. I need guidance on how to handle these situations without alienating anyone." This highlights the need for more training on how to manage complex conversations around religious differences in a way that fosters respect and understanding.

Finally, despite these challenges, the majority of teachers expressed a strong desire to continue developing their skills in fostering religious pluralism in the classroom. As one teacher concluded, "I feel like this seminar gave me the tools to respect and appreciate my students' religious differences, but I want to keep learning how to apply these ideas more effectively in my teaching." This indicates a willingness among teachers to continue reflecting on their approach to religious diversity and striving for a more inclusive educational experience for all students.

Below is the Conceptual Diagram illustrating the interrelationships between the key themes identified in the Qualitative Findings. Cultural Competence is the foundation, affecting both Intercultural Sensitivity and Religious Identity & Pluralism. Teachers' ability to engage with students' religious backgrounds is rooted in their cultural competence, which then influences their sensitivity and willingness to embrace religious diversity. Intercultural Sensitivity emphasizes teachers' awareness of and responsiveness to cultural and religious differences, which supports religious pluralism in the classroom. Religious Identity & Pluralism reflects teachers' ability to understand and balance their personal religious identity with the need to respect and include students from diverse religious backgrounds.

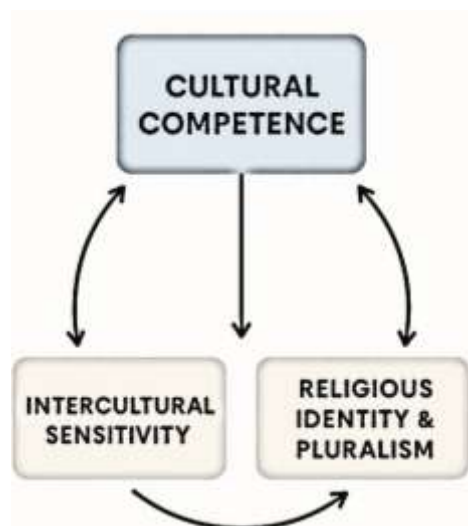


Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram of Qualitative Themes

The findings highlight significant improvements in teachers' cultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, and approach to religious pluralism following the seminar. Teachers reported becoming more confident in managing religious and cultural diversity in their classrooms, though challenges such as a lack of resources and anxiety about addressing sensitive topics remained. These results suggest that while the seminar had a positive impact, ongoing support is needed to help teachers further develop their skills and navigate complex religious discussions with greater ease.

Discussion

Cultural Competence: Challenges and Opportunities for Effective Teaching

The study's findings demonstrate that the seminar had a significant impact on pre-service teachers' cultural competence, enhancing their ability to adapt their teaching practices to be more inclusive of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. While the teachers reported increased confidence in engaging with students from different faiths and cultural backgrounds, they also highlighted significant challenges. One common issue raised was the lack of resources to support culturally responsive teaching. Despite the seminar's effectiveness in fostering an understanding of cultural diversity, teachers expressed that they still struggled to find appropriate materials and resources. This resonates with Miller, Williams, and Troutman (2023), who argue that while teacher training programs can improve cultural competence, the lack of adequate materials can hinder the effective implementation of diversity-sensitive teaching.

Additionally, while teachers became more proactive in adapting their teaching methods to be more inclusive, some participants voiced anxiety when addressing sensitive topics related to religion and culture. This concern about navigating religious topics reflects Dawson and Dana (2018)'s research, which suggests that teachers often face anxiety when confronting culturally sensitive issues, especially in multicultural classrooms. This anxiety can result in reluctance to discuss religious diversity, ultimately undermining the potential benefits of inclusive teaching.

This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the importance of culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2018) and Schon (1983) highlight that cultural competence goes beyond awareness, requiring teachers to adapt instructional strategies that reflect the cultural backgrounds of their students. However, as Zhang and Chan (2021) found, effective implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices depends not only on teachers' beliefs but also on institutional support. The study suggests that although the seminar was beneficial in raising awareness, systemic support is essential to bridge the gap between theory and practice in classrooms.

Moreover, Spencer and Harpalani (2020) stress that effective cultural competence can only be achieved if training programs are paired with long-term support and follow-up resources. This suggests that teacher training should be part of a continuous professional development model, integrating culturally responsive strategies within the curriculum and teacher practices.

Intercultural Sensitivity: Addressing the Gap Between Awareness and Practice

While teachers reported an improvement in intercultural sensitivity, especially in terms of recognizing and respecting cultural and religious differences, they also expressed a need for more comprehensive training on how to engage with these differences effectively. Many teachers described an increase in their awareness of students' diverse backgrounds, but a gap remains between awareness and action. Teachers felt more attuned to the diversity in their classrooms but were still unsure how to facilitate meaningful dialogue that respects religious pluralism. One teacher stated, "I'm more aware of my students' diverse beliefs, but I don't always know how to create open discussions about religion without making students uncomfortable." This sentiment reflects findings from Bennett (1993), who emphasized that awareness alone is insufficient without the skills to handle intercultural interactions effectively.

Zimmerman and Carter (2020) and Uibu and Tagamets (2022) further argue that intercultural sensitivity involves a shift from being aware of diversity to actually incorporating this awareness into classroom management and teaching strategies. However, teachers in this study reported hesitation to address sensitive religious topics, which mirrors the concerns raised by Peterson and Kruse (2019) about teachers' reluctance to engage with difficult cultural issues due to fear of misstepping or offending students.

Moreover, Miller et al. (2023) found that while teachers often gain an understanding of diversity during training, it's the practical application of this knowledge in the classroom that proves most challenging. Teachers need specific strategies for managing diversity in a classroom setting, which goes beyond theoretical understanding. This is consistent with the findings of Walker and Greene (2022), who argue that while teachers can develop sensitivity, a lack of practical tools often limits their ability to apply this sensitivity in everyday teaching practices.

As Wullenkord, Bosse, and Spurk (2021) and Brown, and Craven (2021), suggest, intercultural sensitivity should be seen as an ongoing process rather than a one-time training outcome. This requires sustained reflection, continuous professional

development, and institutional support to provide teachers with the necessary tools to engage meaningfully with diverse student populations. The data from this study indicate that reflective training is just the beginning, and further professional development is needed to equip teachers with the skills to translate sensitivity into practice.

Religious Identity and Religious Pluralism: Balancing Personal Beliefs with Teaching Practices

A critical theme that emerged in the qualitative analysis was the reflection on religious identity and how it impacts the way teachers engage with students from diverse religious backgrounds. Many teachers noted that the seminar encouraged them to reflect on their own religious beliefs and how these beliefs could influence their teaching. While the reflection was generally positive, some teachers expressed challenges in balancing their personal religious identity with the need to foster religious pluralism in the classroom. One teacher shared, “I struggle with balancing my own religious beliefs with the need to respect the beliefs of my students. I want to create an inclusive environment, but I also have my own values that I hold dear.”

This tension is a recurring challenge noted in the literature. Umaña-Taylor and Douglass (2017) and Bennett et al., (2015) discuss how teachers’ religious identities influence their interactions with students, and how navigating religious pluralism can be difficult for those whose beliefs conflict with those of their students. Zhou and Li (2022) also found that teachers often need guidance on how to manage religious diversity without imposing their own beliefs on students, and this study echoes those concerns.

However, teachers in this study reported that the seminar provided them with the tools to be more inclusive and respectful of diverse religious perspectives. As one teacher noted, “I now understand how to create a classroom where all students, regardless of their religion, feel respected and heard.” This shift reflects the growing recognition of religious pluralism as an essential component of inclusive education, as argued by Banks (2015) and Nieto (2010). The seminar helped teachers move from a position of discomfort toward embracing diversity in all its forms, creating a more inclusive classroom for students of different religious backgrounds.

Despite the progress, teachers still expressed concerns about maintaining neutrality in religious discussions. Miller et al. (2023) point out that neutrality is an essential aspect of managing religious diversity, yet teachers often feel conflicted between respecting students’ beliefs and conveying their own perspectives. This is further confirmed by Peterson and Kruse (2019), who argue that even when teachers are well-meaning, their personal beliefs can influence classroom dynamics and the way they manage religious discussions.

This study’s findings suggest that while teachers have the desire to create an inclusive environment, ongoing support and further training are essential to help them navigate the complexities of religious pluralism in the classroom. Spencer and Harpalani (2020) emphasize that for inclusive teaching to be successful, teachers must be equipped with both the skills and confidence to address religious diversity, particularly in ways that encourage respect without compromising their own beliefs.

Limitations and Considerations

Despite the valuable insights this study provides, several limitations should be noted. First, the use of purposive sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings. Participants were selected based on their expressed interest in improving their ability to manage religious diversity, which could introduce selection bias. As such, the

sample may not fully represent the broader population of pre-service teachers, potentially affecting the external validity of the study's results.

Second, the quasi-experimental design, which involved no random assignment of participants to groups, presents potential challenges in interpreting the findings. Without randomization, it is possible that unmeasured variables or pre-existing differences between the groups could have influenced the outcomes, reducing the ability to make definitive causal claims. The lack of a fully randomized design might also raise concerns about the internal validity of the results, especially when comparing the effects of the intervention against a control group.

Finally, the reliance on self-reported data, including responses from the Cultural Competence Scale, reflective journals, and interviews, introduces the potential for response bias. Participants may have provided socially desirable answers, especially regarding sensitive topics such as religious diversity and inclusivity. Additionally, the absence of long-term follow-up data means that the sustainability of the observed improvements in cultural competence and intercultural sensitivity is unclear. Future studies should consider these limitations and incorporate random sampling, more objective measures, and follow-up assessments to enhance the robustness and applicability of the findings.

Conclusion

This study explored the impact of a reflective seminar on pre-service teachers' understanding and management of religious and cultural diversity in the classroom. The findings indicate that the seminar significantly improved participants' cultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, and engagement with religious pluralism. Teachers reported increased confidence in managing religious diversity, a heightened awareness of cultural differences, and a greater willingness to create inclusive environments for students from diverse religious backgrounds. However, challenges remained, particularly regarding resource availability, anxiety about addressing sensitive topics, and the need for continued support and training to ensure that these reflective practices are effectively applied in classroom settings.

The study underscores the importance of reflective practices in teacher education, suggesting that such seminars can play a crucial role in preparing teachers for the complexities of a multicultural and multi-religious classroom. Yet, it also highlights the need for ongoing professional development to address gaps in resource provision, institutional support, and practical strategies for handling sensitive topics such as religious diversity. For future teacher training programs, it is recommended that they integrate continuous reflective practices, provide teachers with adequate resources, and include structured guidance on addressing diversity-related issues with confidence and respect. Despite the valuable insights, limitations such as purposive sampling, the quasi-experimental design, reliance on self-reported data, and lack of long-term follow-up should be considered when interpreting the findings. Future teacher training programs should integrate continuous reflective practices, provide adequate resources, and include structured guidance on addressing diversity-related issues with confidence and respect, while future research should address these limitations for more robust conclusions.

References

- [1] Aronson, B., & Laughter, J. (2016). The theory and practice of culturally relevant education: A synthesis of research across content areas. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(1), 163–206.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315582066>
- [2] Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.
- [3] Banks, J. A. (2015). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching*. Routledge.
- [4] Bennett, S. V., Gunn, A., & Morton, M. (2015). Four diverse educators chronicle challenges in a Christian-centered society. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(5), 636–656.
<https://consensus.app/papers/four-diverse-educators-chronicle-challenges-in-a-bennett-gunn/d09364fda5035fccbce7372618638f5d>
- [5] Brown, M., & Craven, M. (2021). The effects of inclusive education training on pre-service teachers. *Educational Studies*, 57(3), 389–405.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2021.1900954>
- [6] Byrd, C. M. (2016). Does culturally relevant teaching work? An examination from student perspectives. *SAGE Open*, 6(3), 1–10.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016660744>
- [7] Civitillo, S., Juang, L. P., & Schachner, M. K. (2018). Challenging beliefs about cultural diversity in education: A synthesis of studies on teacher training programs. *Frontiers in Education*, 3(49), 1–13.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00049>
- [8] Civitillo, S., Juang, L. P., & Schachner, M. K. (2018). Challenging beliefs about cultural diversity in education: A synthesis of studies on teacher training programs. *Frontiers in Education*, 3(49), 1–13.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00049>
- [9] Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- [10] Dawson, K., & Dana, N. (2018). Teacher reflection and cultural competence: A case study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 75, 45–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.05.014>
- [11] Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Buchner, A., & Lang, A.-G. (2007). Statistical power analyses using G*Power 3.1: Tests for correlation and regression analyses. *Behavior Research Methods*, 41(4), 1149–1160.
<https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03193146>
- [12] Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- [13] Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- [14] Irianto, P. (2024). Civic education on acts of intolerance in one of the vocational

- high schools in Jayapura, Papua. *Humaniora*, 15(2), 12433. <https://doi.org/10.21512/humaniora.v15i2.12433>
- [15] Johnson, A., & Smith, L. (2020). Exploring multicultural education in diverse classrooms: A synthesis of effective practices. *Journal of Multicultural Education*, 14(2), 123–138. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-2020-0023>
- [16] Kuckartz, U., & Rädiker, S. (2022). Analyzing qualitative data with MAXQDA: Text, audio, and video. Springer Nature.
- [17] Makhasane, S. D., Onaolapo, A. A., & Onaolapo, D. G. (2023). Addressing religious crises in Nigerian secondary schools: Parents' and teachers' perceptions of hijabs in Christian-named government schools. *Education Sciences*, 13(7), 688. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13070688>
- [18] Miller, E., Williams, J., & Troutman, J. (2023). Preparing teachers for multicultural classrooms: A review of intervention effectiveness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 74(2), 127–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224871221100888>
- [19] Mohamad, M. Z., Ab Latif, M. N. H., & Rozali, M. H. (2025). Integrating Said Nursi's spiritual and educational perspectives into contemporary multicultural education systems. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 15(7). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v15-i7/26009>
- [20] Nasution, S. (2021). Multicultural education and religious tolerance in Indonesia: A systematic review. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 12(4), 195–215.
- [21] Njoku, N. C., Eluu, P. E., Ndidiamaka, A. M., Nwafor, J. N., Ogueri, E. O., Nwajioha, P. N., & Aleke, C. O. (2024). Human rights promotion in the south east Nigeria: The influence of Christian religious education. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 21(1), 2699. <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.21.1.2699>
- [22] O. Jawoniyi, A. (2010). Rethinking the religious education curricula in Nigerian schools. *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 22(2), 50586. <https://doi.org/10.4314/jsr.v22i2.50586>
- [23] Obiagu, A., & Nwaubani, O. (2020). The challenges of teaching for human rights in Nigeria: Knowledge, pedagogy, and activism. *Human Rights Education Review*, 21(1), 3804. <https://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.3804>
- [24] Onyeatoelu, O. A. (2021). Investing in human resources as a platform for national security in Nigeria: The role of social studies education. *UJAH Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 21(4), 10. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v21i4.10>
- [25] Ottuh, P. O. O., & Ihwighwu, J. O. (2023). Religious education's relevance in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. *Khazanah Pendidikan Islam*, 5(1), 25119. <https://doi.org/10.15575/kp.v5i1.25119>

-
- [26] Peterson, C. A., & Kruse, J. (2019). Creating inclusive classrooms through teacher training. *Educational Leadership*, 77(4), 42–47.
- [27] Schon, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
- [28] Siwatu, K. O. (2007). Preservice teachers' culturally responsive teaching Cultural Competence and outcome expectancy beliefs. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(7), 1086–1101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.07.011>
- [29] Spencer, M. B., & Harpalani, V. (2020). Culturally attuned teaching practices: A roadmap for inclusion. *Developmental Psychology*, 56(6), 1012–1025. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000964>
- [30] Taylor, R., Wilson, K., & Watts, M. (2020). The impact of reflective practices on teacher education. *Education Research Review*, 29, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2020.100343>
- [31] Uibu, K., & Tagamets, E. (2022). Promoting teachers' intercultural competences for teaching in the diverse classroom. In *Education and New Developments 2022 – Volume 2*. <https://doi.org/10.36315/2022v2end038>
- [32] Walker, T., & Greene, K. (2022). Inclusive pedagogies in teacher preparation programs. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 112, 103620. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103620>
- [33] Wullenkord, M. C., Bosse, H., & Spurk, D. (2021). Reflective practices in multicultural education: A longitudinal study. *Educational Psychology*, 41(5), 321–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2021.1908465>
- [34] Zhang, Y., & Chan, W. (2021). Multicultural awareness and teaching efficacy among pre-service teachers. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 23(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v23i1.2411>
- [35] Zhou, X., & Li, J. (2022). Teacher training and diversity: Building inclusive learning environments. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 50(4), 567–583. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2022.2029895>
- [36] Zimmerman, H., & Carter, R. (2020). The role of teacher identity in multicultural classrooms. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 60, 101842. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101842>