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Cultural Diversity in the Chilean University Context: A Cross-Sectional Study of the Beliefs of Pre-Service Teachers and Teacher Educators

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore the beliefs of teacher educators (TE) and pre-service teachers (PST) regarding cultural diversity and its relationship with teaching-learning practices, to contribute to strengthening Initial Teacher Education (ITE) with an intercultural approach. A quantitative observational, descriptive, and cross-sectional pilot study was conducted using a survey administered to 230 PST and TE from 18 Chilean universities. The results showed that TE exhibited higher levels of negative beliefs ($d = 1.00$; $p < 0.001$) and less favorable educational practices to cultural diversity ($p = 0.012$). Although no statistically significant differences were observed in favorable educational practices, a trend toward higher scores was identified among PST. Regression models indicated that the teaching role was significantly associated with negative beliefs, whereas the other variables showed no significant associations. Overall, the findings suggest a dissociation between stated and structural beliefs regarding cultural diversity, which may influence the implementation of intercultural pedagogical practices in teacher education. They underscore the need to strengthen intercultural training—particularly among TE—through critical reflection to align beliefs and pedagogical practices, and to advance future research on the evolution of these beliefs and their impact on teaching practice.

Keywords: intercultural education; teacher training; beliefs; teaching practices; higher education

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1. Introduction

Cultural diversity has increased significantly over the past decade, both internationally (Markey et al., 2021; OIM, 2023; UNESCO, 2022) and nationally, with profound implications for educational communities at all levels (Sumonte et al., 2022). Higher education has not been exempted from this shift and requires careful curriculum planning to ensure equity in learning opportunities, promote intercultural integration, and support culturally responsive pedagogies (Lizasoain et al., 2026; Malau-Aduli et al., 2019; Markey et al., 2021).

The development of intercultural competence in the classroom is fundamental to fostering complex and diverse contextual knowledge about cultures (Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023; Markey et al., 2021). Intercultural education, understood as education for all (Peñalva & Leiva, 2019), represents a reform-oriented approach to educational practice that seeks to address the cultural diversity present in contemporary societies (González et al., 2021). This approach is constructed through valuing one's

own culture and developing a critical awareness of it, enabling individuals to overcome ethnocentrism and distance themselves from ethnocentric, xenophobic, and racist behaviors (Castillo & Miranda, 2018; Pedrero-García et al., 2017; Sumonte et al., 2022). This need is particularly relevant in the current context, characterized by globalization, human mobility, and the rapid technological advancement—factors that facilitate interaction and collaboration among students and professionals with heterogeneous cultural backgrounds (Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023; Markey et al., 2021).

In the Latin American context, interculturality has emerged as a post-indigenist discourse and as a tool aimed at reshaping the relationship between postcolonial states and Indigenous Peoples. This shift has materialized primarily in the development of educational programs—generally bilingual and focused on Indigenous populations (Dietz & Mateos, 2011; Quichimbo et al., 2024)—as is also the case in Chile. However, these initiatives tend to concentrate on educational levels that do not include higher education.

In Chile, the development of interculturality is not a recent phenomenon. It began with the recognition of the Indigenous languages and worldviews, which led to the establishment of Intercultural Bilingual Education in 1996 as part of the educational curriculum. However, this initiative has focused on elementary education and has been implemented in areas where at least 20% of the students belong to Indigenous Peoples (Aguayo et al., 2022; Chilean Ministry of Education [MINEDUC], 1996). Over the past decade, interculturality has become more firmly established as an educational approach in response to growing migration from different countries (Fernández, 2018). This demographic shift has created a diverse linguistic and cultural context and, consequently, has generated new educational needs and challenges that must be addressed (Alfaro-Contreras et al., 2025; Sumonte et al., 2022).

In this context, research on the social and cultural changes resulting from this phenomenon in higher education is scarce, particularly studies that examine TE and PST collectively. This gap aligns with prior research, which highlights that the incorporation of an intercultural approach in higher education remains largely unexplored (Karanikola et al., 2025; López & Hinojosa, 2015; Pavez-Soto et al., 2025). Although some progress has been made in this field, such research continues to be marginal, despite its importance for developing an epistemological understanding of university-level pedagogical practice. The development of the intercultural approach extends beyond mere preparation for labor market entry, as it involves the construction of harmonious educational communities in which individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact respectfully and collaboratively (Luo & Chan, 2022). This is particularly salient given that universities are privileged spaces for the development of meaningful learning from a deontological standpoint, as well as for the civic and human formation of future professionals as individuals embedded in a democratic and inclusive society (Cornejo, 2019).

The teacher education process represents a crucial opportunity to challenge, transform, and internalize teachers' beliefs regarding diversity in the classroom (Gay, 2013; González et al., 2021). Gay argues that beliefs shape essential elements for learning and professional development, including students' expectations, the construction of teacher identity, professional knowledge, classroom performance, and the ways teachers act, plan, and assess their teaching (López & Hinojosa, 2015). Similarly, Bandura (1982) maintains that beliefs mediate the relationship between knowledge and action, acting as filters that influence educational practices and interpersonal interactions. Consequently, studying beliefs is important because (i) they form the foundation for the exercise of citizenship, the promotion of human rights, and equality; (ii) beliefs may shape future educational practices, either by fostering positive attitudes toward diversity or by leading to stagnation at minimal levels that fail to acknowledge the complexity of educating in and for diversity;

and (iii) teachers, in general, are often unaware of their beliefs and how these influence their actions, which have been shaped by their own cultural and social backgrounds, prior experiences, and personal characteristics (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2016).

López and Hinojosa (2015) categorize participants' beliefs about cultural diversity into two profiles: those who view cultural diversity as a problem (resisters) and those who adopt a favorable stance (advocates). The former exhibit low cognitive complexity, a unifocal worldview, apathy toward students, ethical shortcomings in recognizing the moral imperative of multicultural education, and low self-efficacy, evidenced in a limited capacity to reflect on and revise their practices. In contrast, advocates exhibit high cognitive complexity, a multifocal worldview, empathy, ethical sensitivity to multicultural issues, and high self-efficacy (López & Hinojosa, 2015).

Despite advances in intercultural policies in Chile, empirical evidence that simultaneously examines the beliefs of TE and PST in higher education remains limited. This gap hinders an understanding of how such beliefs may influence the implementation of intercultural pedagogical practices within ITE; therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the beliefs of TE and PST regarding cultural diversity and their relationship to teaching-learning practices, to contribute to the strengthening of the ITE through an intercultural approach in the Chilean context.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Design

This study corresponds to a pilot investigation that forms part of a broader research project funded by the National Research and Development Agency (ANID, in Spanish), whose general objective is to analyze the implementation of intercultural and inclusive practices in teacher education programs within Chilean higher education, in alignment with the guidelines established by the MINEDUC. Within this framework, a quantitative, observational, descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted, in accordance with the STROBE guidelines for observational studies (Guzmán-Muñoz et al., 2025). This design enabled the examination of beliefs regarding cultural diversity in TE and PST at a single point in time, without manipulation of variables.

2.2. Participants

A non-probabilistic sampling based on inclusion criteria was employed, an approach commonly used in educational research when participants must meet specific characteristics related to the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Plano, 2018). In this case, the criteria pertained to PST and TE. A total of 230 participants collaborated in this pilot study, enrolled in teacher education programs across 18 Chilean universities, including public, state-subsidized private, and private institutions. Detailed demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Section 3.

The following inclusion criteria were considered: (a) PST enrolled in the fourth or fifth year of their training programs, as they had accumulated experience in teaching practice; (b) TE currently involved in teacher training programs; and (c) enrollment at universities accredited by the National Accreditation Commission[1] (CNA, in Spanish). Participants who were not engaged in teaching practice at the time of data collection or who did not complete the questionnaire in its entirety were excluded. Sample size was estimated a priori using statistical power analysis with the G*Power software (version number 3.1). Assuming a medium effect size ($d = 0.50$), a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, and a statistical power of 0.80, a minimum sample size of approximately 128 participants was required to detect group differences. The final sample exceeded this threshold, ensuring adequate statistical power for the proposed analyses.

2.3. Instrument

To assess beliefs related to cultural diversity, the Inventory of Future Teachers' Beliefs about Cultural Diversity questionnaire, developed by López and Hinojosa (2015), was administered. This instrument was designed to evaluate beliefs regarding cultural diversity in educational contexts at the higher education level. The original questionnaire comprised 79 items rated on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Therefore, higher scores indicate a greater level of agreement with the statements. For this study, 63 items were selected (Table 1), as they applied to both PST and TE and aligned with the study objectives.

Table 1. Questionnaire structure.

Block I. Theoretical Models		
Dimension 1	Approach to cultural diversity as a problem	3–6–9–11–12–13–14–15–17–29–49–57–59–61–63–64–65–66–68
Dimension 2	Positive approach to cultural diversity	1–2–4–5–8–10–16–20–24–47–52–55
Block II. Degree of Commitment to the Educational Practice		
Dimension 3	Educational practices favorable to cultural diversity	25–28–33–35–44–46–48–50–60–62–69–71–72–78
Dimension 4	Educational practices that are not favorable to cultural diversity	19–21–22–26–31–32–34–36–38–40–41–42–54–58–73–74–76–79

Source: Taken from López and Hinojosa (2015).

This instrument is divided into two blocks: the theoretical and practical blocks, each comprising two dimensions that assess beliefs and attitudes towards cultural diversity and its implementation in educational practice. The theoretical component comprises dimensions 1 and 2, and the practical one includes dimensions 3 and 4. Dimension 1 conceptualizes cultural diversity as a problem based on perceptions of superiority associated with the hegemonic culture and the prevalence of negative beliefs about students from cultures other than the host one. Dimension 2 highlights positive aspects, noting, for example, that cultural diversity enriches coexistence among citizens and attributes equal value to all individuals. Dimension 3 refers to the development of educational practices that promote and demonstrate sensitivity toward cultural diversity. In contrast, dimension 4 adopts a negative perspective, as it considers that educational practices do not promote cultural diversity, viewing it as a phenomenon restricted to specific sociodemographic contexts. As a summary, dimensions 1 and 4 have negative connotations, while dimensions 2 and 3 are more positive.

Some examples of the items are provided to facilitate a better understanding of the instrument:

Item 1: Cultural diversity enriches the coexistence among citizens.

Item 3: Being a full-fledged citizen should only be for people born in the country.

Item 22: The students' religious training is the responsibility of the school.

Item 48: Teacher trainers are qualified to provide preparation in cultural diversity.

Since the original instrument was developed in Spanish, there was no need to perform back-translation procedures. The questionnaire was reviewed to ensure its semantic and conceptual appropriateness for the Chilean educational context before its administration.

Construct validity was examined through exploratory factor analysis, employing the principal components extraction method with varimax rotation. Sampling adequacy was confirmed by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index (KMO > 0.84), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), supporting the appropriateness of the factor analysis. The internal consistency of the instrument was examined using Cronbach's alpha at the subscale level, taking into account the instrument's multidimensional structure. The reliability

coefficients were satisfactory for all dimensions: negative focus (α = 0.952), positive focus (α = 0.824), favorable practices (α = 0.934), and unfavorable practices (α = 0.894), indicating adequate internal consistency for each construct evaluated.

2.4. Procedure

The questionnaire was administered online together with the informed consent form, and this marks its first application in Chile. In general, recruitment was conducted through formal academic coordination channels, and participation was voluntary and anonymous. The study was conducted in five stages. First, authorization was requested from the deans' offices of the Faculties of Education at the participating universities to contact TE and fourth- and fifth-year student teachers, inform them about the study, and invite them to complete an online questionnaire. Upon receiving written authorization from the deans' offices, the faculty members responsible for each of the education programs were contacted. They were informed about the study and asked to support the distribution of the questionnaire among TE and PST interested in participating in the research by completing the questionnaire. In the third stage, the online questionnaire was distributed by TE to PST, who were invited to complete it during class time or at their convenience. Participants were also encouraged to share the questionnaire with their peers, following a snowball sampling strategy. Fourth, program coordinators encouraged TE to complete the questionnaire as well. Finally, data were collected between August and December 2025 from ITE programs at Chilean universities accredited by the CNA. All data were stored in a database managed by the principal investigator for subsequent analysis.

2.5. Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version number 27.0). First, descriptive analyses were conducted by calculating means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. Subsequently, data normality was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test, and the homogeneity of variances was examined using Levene's test. Before the inferential analyses, the psychometric properties of the instrument were evaluated. Construct validity was examined through exploratory factor analysis, and internal consistency was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each of the dimensions.

The chi-square test (χ^2) was used to compare groups on categorical variables, while Student's *t*-test was used to compare mean differences between two independent groups. When the assumption of normality was not met, the nonparametric Mann–Whitney U test was applied. In addition, multiple linear regression models were developed to examine the associations between sociodemographic variables (gender, age, role, and type of university) and the dimensions of beliefs about cultural diversity. Results were reported using standardized beta coefficients (β), 95% confidence intervals, and *p*-values. For the regression analysis, the participants' roles were included as a dummy variable coded as follows: teacher educator (TE) = 0 and pre-service teacher (PST) = 1. Effect sizes were estimated using Cohen's d for mean comparisons and Cramer's V for associations between categorical variables. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was established.

3. Results

3.1. Sample Characteristics

As it was stated previously, the sample consisted of 230 participants. The descriptive characteristics are as follows: 63.5% (n = 146) were women, 33.9% (n = 78) were men, and 2.6% (n = 6) did not identify with any gender. Regarding their role, 78.7% (n = 181) were PST and 21.3% (n = 49) were TE. Participants were enrolled in teacher education programs across various disciplinary areas at 18 Chilean universities: 7 (38.9%) public universities, 6 (33.3%)

state-subsidized private universities, and 5 (27.8%) private universities. Among TE, 14.3% were aged 22–32 years, 36.7% were 33–43 years, 32.7% were 44–54 years, and 16.3% were over 55 years. Among PST, 48.1% were aged 18–22 years, 44.8% were 23–27 years, and 7.1% were over 28 years.

Table 2 presents the general characteristics of the sample according to the participants' roles. No significant differences were observed in the gender distribution between TE and PST ($\chi^2 = 2.77$; $p = 0.251$; Cramer's V = 0.11), indicating a homogeneous distribution across groups. In contrast, statistically significant differences were found with respect to the type of university ($\chi^2 = 94.39$; $p < 0.001$; V = 0.64), with a large effect size. Specifically, pre-service teachers were predominantly concentrated in private universities with state funding (96.7%), whereas teacher educators exhibited a more balanced distribution between public and private institutions.

Table 2. General characteristics of the sample.

		Total		Teacher Educator		Pre-Service Teacher		χ^2	p Value	Cramer's V
Sex	Man	78	33.9%	14	28.6%	64	35.4%	2.77	0.251	0.11
	Woman	146	63.5%	35	71.4%	111	61.3%	2 gl		
	Rather not to say	6	2.6%	0	0.0%	6	3.3%			
Type of University	Public	22	9.6%	17	34.7%	5	2.8%	94.39	0.001	0.64
	Private with state funding	195	84.8%	20	40.8%	175	96.7%	2 gl		
	Private	13	5.7%	12	24.5%	1	0.6%			
Pedagogy (discipline)	Physical Education	43	18.7%	3	6.1%	40	22.1%	65.28	0.001	0.53
	Special Education	35	15.2%	2	4.1%	33	18.2%	8 gl		
	International Languages	100	43.5%	21	42.9%	79	43.6%			
	Primary Education	35	15.2%	7	14.3%	28	15.5%			
	History	4	1.7%	3	6.1%	1	0.6%			
	Spanish Language	5	2.2%	5	10.2%	0	0.0%			
	Mathematics	4	1.7%	4	8.2%	0	0.0%			
	Early Childhood Education	3	1.3%	3	6.1%	0	0.0%			
	Arts	1	0.4%	1	2.0%	0	0.0%			
Training in intercultural education	A lot	17	7.4%	4	8.2%	13	7.2%	19.55	0.001	0.292
	Enough	48	20.9%	3	6.1%	45	24.9%	4 gl		
	Moderately	80	34.8%	14	28.6%	66	36.5%			
	Little	58	25.2%	15	30.6%	43	23.8%			
	Nothing	27	11.7%	13	26.5%	14	7.7%			
Training location	University	152	87.9%	22	71.0%	130	91.5%	24.22	0.001	0.374
	Teaching practice school	3	1.7%	1	3.2%	2	1.4%	4 gl		
	University and School	6	3.5%	0	0.0%	6	4.2%			
	Diploma program	10	5.8%	6	19.4%	4	2.8%			
	Self-training	2	1.2%	2	6.5%	0	0.0%			

Similarly, significant differences were found in the field of training ($\chi^2 = 65.28$; $p < 0.001$; V = 0.53), indicating a heterogeneous distribution across groups with a large effect size. Regarding training in intercultural education, significant differences were also observed ($\chi^2 = 19.55$; $p = 0.001$; Cramer's V = 0.292), corresponding to a moderate effect size and reflecting differing perceptions between TE and PST. In addition, statistically significant differences were identified in the location of training ($\chi^2 = 24.22$; $p < 0.001$; V = 0.374), with a moderate effect size, highlighting greater diversification in the training trajectories of TE.

3.2. Beliefs on Cultural Diversity in ITE

To guarantee clarity in interpretation, it is important to note that dimensions 1 and 4 reflect deficit-oriented or negative beliefs about cultural diversity (i.e., higher scores indicate more negative perceptions and less inclusive practices), while dimensions 2 and 3 represent positive orientations (i.e., higher scores indicate more favorable beliefs and practices). The total score combines both types of dimensions and should therefore be interpreted with caution, as higher values do not unequivocally represent a more positive or more negative overall orientation.

The comparison between TE and PST revealed statistically significant differences across the dimensions of beliefs about cultural diversity (Table 3). In dimension 1, which relates to the perception of cultural diversity as a problem, the TE group reported significantly higher scores (M = 2.28; SD = 0.71) than the PST group (M = 1.61; SD = 0.66), corresponding to a relative difference of 41.95%. This difference was statistically significant (t = 6.23; $p < 0.001$) and exhibited a large effect size ($d = 1.00$). Given the nature of this dimension, this finding suggests that TE is more likely than PST to perceive cultural diversity as a problem, reflecting a more deficit-oriented perspective.

Table 3. Comparison of the dimensions of beliefs about cultural diversity between teacher educators and pre-service teachers.

	Total (n = 230)		**Teacher Educator (n = 49)**		**Pre-Service Teacher (n = 181)**		**Δ**	***t***	***p* Value**	***d***
Dimension 1	1.76	0.73	2.28	0.71	1.61	0.66	41.95%	6.23	0.000	1.00
Dimension 2	3.08	0.66	3.17	0.49	3.05	0.70	3.92%	1.37	0.172	0.18
Dimension 3	1.68	0.74	1.54	0.57	1.72	0.77	−10.16%	−1.74	0.085	−0.30
Dimension 4	1.95	0.57	2.10	0.44	1.90	0.60	10.44%	2.56	0.012	0.35
Total	2.12	0.49	2.27	0.38	2.07	0.51	9.92%	2.62	0.009	0.41

Similarly, dimension 4, educational practices that do not promote cultural diversity, significant differences were also observed ($t = 2.56$; $p = 0.012$), with higher scores among TE (M = 2.10; SD = 0.44) compared to PST (M = 1.90; SD = 0.60). This finding represents a relative difference of 10.44% and a small to moderate effect size ($d = 0.35$). Similarly, in Dimension 4 (educational practices that do not promote cultural diversity), TE also scored significantly higher (M = 2.10; SD = 0.44) compared to PST (M = 1.90; SD = 0.60), with a relative difference of 10.44%. This difference was statistically significant ($t = 2.56$; $p = 0.012$) and showed a small to moderate effect size ($d = 0.35$), indicating that TE showed a greater tendency toward less inclusive educational practices.

In contrast, no statistically significant differences were found in dimension 2, which reflects a positive approach to cultural diversity ($t = 1.37$; $p = 0.172$; $d = 0.18$). Both groups reported similarly high scores, suggesting a shared explicitly positive orientation toward cultural diversity at the declarative level. In dimension 3, educational practices favorable to cultural diversity, PST showed slightly higher scores (M = 1.72; SD = 0.77) compared to the TE (M = 1.54; SD = 0.57), corresponding to a relative difference of −10.16%. However, this difference did not reach statistical significance ($t = -1.74$; $p = 0.085$; $d = -0.30$), and therefore should be interpreted as a non-significant tendency rather than a substantive group difference.

Tables 4 and 5 present the multiple linear regression models developed to examine the associations between sociodemographic variables and the dimensions of beliefs about cultural diversity. The model corresponding to dimension 1, perception of cultural diversity as a problem, was statistically significant (F = 10.23; $p < 0.001$), accounting for 15.4% of

the variance (R^2 = 0.154; adjusted R^2 = 0.139). In this model, the participants' role was significantly associated with scores on dimension 1 (β = −0.323; p = 0.038). Given the coding scheme (TE = 0; PST = 1), the negative coefficient indicates that PST scored lower than TE, reflecting higher levels of negative beliefs among TE. No statistically significant associations were observed for the remaining variables ($p > 0.05$).

Table 4. Multiple linear regression models for the dimensions of beliefs about cultural diversity and total scores.

Variable	Dimension 1 β	*p*	Dimension 2 β	*p*	Dimension 3 β	*p*	Dimension 4 β	*p*	Total β	*p*
Teacher's role	−0.323	0.038	0.097	0.560	0.112	0.507	−0.123	0.460	−0.082	0.621
Sex	0.044	0.471	0.128	0.052	0.020	0.760	0.019	0.774	0.072	0.272
Age	0.055	0.726	0.175	0.294	0.013	0.938	0.010	0.953	0.087	0.602
Type of university	−0.078	0.214	−0.079	0.240	−0.022	0.747	−0.114	0.090	−0.096	0.148

Table 5. Adjusted models.

Model	R^2	R^2 Adjusted	F	*p*
Dimension 1	0.154	0.139	10.23	<0.001
Dimension 2	0.033	0.016	1.92	0.108
Dimension 3	0.010	−0.007	0.586	0.673
Dimension 4	0.033	0.016	1.93	0.106
Total	0.045	0.028	2.65	0.034

In contrast, the regression models for dimensions 2, 3, and 4 were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$) and showed low explanatory power, with adjusted R^2 values ranging from −0.007 to 0.016. These findings indicate that the sociodemographic variables included do not explain the variance in these dimensions. Regarding the total score, the regression model was statistically significant (F = 2.65; p = 0.034); however, its explanatory power was low (adjusted R^2 = 0.028). Overall, the results indicate that the insights of cultural diversity as a problem are the dimension associated with participants' role, while the rest of the dimensions are not corroborated by the sociodemographic variable included in the model.

4. Discussion

Exclusionary beliefs and behaviors are inconsistent with a model of cultural diversity that should characterize the ITE (González-Gil et al., 2016). In this context, teachers' personal and professional characteristics play a central role in pedagogical practice, positioning them as active mediators in the teaching-learning process (Sandoval et al., 2021). Education in intercultural contexts requires that teachers, both during their university training and throughout their professional practice, recognize that teaching is inherently linked to diverse perspectives, worldviews, and paradigms (Dietz, 2009; González et al., 2021; Martínez-Rojas & Mondaca-Rojas, 2023). Consequently, teacher education represents a major challenge for universities, as they are responsible for fostering these competencies and perspectives in PST (Fierro-Silva et al., 2022). In this context, the present study aimed to explore the beliefs of TE and PST regarding cultural diversity and their relationship with teaching and learning practices, to contribute to the strengthening of ITE through an intercultural approach in the Chilean context.

The results demonstrate that, although both TE and PST report positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, TE exhibit higher levels of negative beliefs and non-inclusive educational practices. This finding reflects a markedly more negative orientation toward cultural diversity among TE, who tend to perceive it as a problem present in the classroom (dimension 1: +41.95%, d = 1.00). This result aligns with previous research, which reveals that some teachers do not conceptualize diversity as part of their professional

competencies, but rather framed as a specific problem to be addressed by specialists (Carrasco & Coronel, 2017).

There is a discrepancy between explicitly stated positive beliefs and structurally embedded negative beliefs, with the latter being the only dimensions explained by the teacher's role. Studies find weak correlations between teachers' implicit and explicit beliefs, suggesting a discrepancy between what teachers consciously endorse and their underlying cognitive associations (Meij et al., 2025). This finding suggests that deeper attitudes toward cultural diversity are less dependent on individual characteristics and more strongly shaped by factors associated with institutional positioning within the educational system (Carballo et al., 2026; Malau-Aduli et al., 2019). This is consistent with the findings of Gallagher and Scrivner (2024), who establish that beliefs about diversity are related to what happens in the school setting, policies, assessment processes, and the conditions of the institution where one works (Hassan, 2025). The development of a participatory educational curriculum that incorporates the perspectives of all members of the academic community would promote substantive transformations and help ensure their sustainability over time (Acar-Ciftci, 2019; Domínguez et al., 2020; González et al., 2021).

Consequently, the results establish a conception grounded in a problematizing approach to diversity, rather than in its recognition as a pedagogical resource for democratic and inclusive educational contexts. In general, the deficit model attributes difficulties to learners or their backgrounds, ignoring the systemic or contextual factors that might be contributing to them (Lichtenstein, 2018). This type of approach reinforces inequalities and stigmatizes culturally diverse students, rather than recognizing their strengths. The significant disparities observed in this dimension reflect not only statistical differences, but also underlying structural challenges that must be addressed within the ITE to meet professional standards and the needs of diverse educational communities; as Rowan et al. (2021) point out, teacher education frames diversity as a challenge or problem rather than as a transformative pedagogical opportunity, and rarely focuses on teaching for diversity (Yip & Ji, 2024).

Initial training in interculturality constitutes a specialized and complex field that has developed from an interdisciplinary perspective. Over time, this approach has oscillated between being integrated transversally across curricula and being explicitly incorporated into certain courses designed to foster intercultural competence (Figueredo-Canosa et al., 2020; Mondaca & Sánchez, 2018; Pareja et al., 2020). In Chile, teacher education curricula include some courses or class content addressing diversity and interculturality within pedagogy programs; however, these contents generally do not function as a cross-cutting axis throughout the curriculum (Fernández, 2018; Garay et al., 2023; Venegas, 2013). Consequently, such initiatives tend to remain isolated and do not enable a progressive pathway toward the systematic development of intercultural competencies.

In the Spanish context, for example, research has shown that intercultural training has a limited impact in higher education due to its lack of integration across the curriculum (Senyshyn, 2018), which is similar to the lack of training in interculturality reported by university faculty members in Australia (Yang, 2018). In Chile, a study conducted with physical education teachers concluded that although universities provide theoretical tools, they offer insufficient preparation in intercultural competencies to address cultural diversity in a practical manner (Fuentes-Vilugrón et al., 2023).

These results are consistent with those reported by Figueredo-Canosa et al. (2020) in a study carried out with in-service teachers and by Alfaro-Contreras et al. (2025) with PST, both of which highlight that during their training, learning about cultural diversity tends to be promoted at a theoretical level, with limited emphasis on its practical application in addressing classroom diversity. Along these lines, Cernadas et al. (2026) go further

by arguing that improving teachers' preparedness to respond to cultural heterogeneity requires not only strengthening theoretical, methodological, and organizational resources but also fostering teachers' capacity to recognize their own diversity, reflect on how it is expressed in their teaching practices, and critically revise their underlying beliefs.

These findings reinforce the pattern of differences previously identified between TE and PST. Specifically, as pointed out in dimensions 1 and 4, the responses of the TE can be interpreted as reflecting more assimilationist beliefs that tend to problematize cultural diversity, in contrast to the more inclusive orientation observed among the PST. The latter group expressed significantly more favorable attitudes toward cultural diversity, along with a greater willingness to understand and implement educational practices oriented toward diversity in the classroom. This divergence confirms the existence of distinct interpretive frameworks associated with each role and further allows for a deeper examination of the structural nature of educational practices that may contribute to the reproduction of cultural inequalities.

The professional development of PST in teaching practices that address interculturality represents a crucial strategy for countering assimilationist curricular approaches, which often generate feelings of apathy and insecurity among students and, consequently, exacerbate inequalities in educational opportunities (Cabrera-Vázquez et al., 2022). This perspective is aligned with the distinctions drawn by Krainer and Chaves (2021) between functional and critical understandings of interculturality. In the functional approach, minority cultures are incorporated into a homogeneous framework aligned with the hegemonic culture, thereby reproducing relations of assimilation and subordination. In contrast, the critical approach conceptualizes interculturality as a reflective and transformative process that articulates global and local dimensions and seeks to challenge established cultural and epistemological hierarchies (Tapia, 2016). From this standpoint, the critical approach emerges as the most appropriate framework for teacher education.

Davies et al. (2013) and Hong (2015) report that teachers who have been trained to address diversity will be highly willing to incorporate teaching strategies, learning activities, and methodological adaptations into their curricula to benefit all students. Conversely, those who lack such preparation tend to be more reluctant to implement pedagogical changes. It is particularly noteworthy that, despite the negative stance scored among TE, a high percentage of the PST (91.5%) reported having acquired cultural diversity skills during their university education. These results are consistent with previous research studies that have documented generally favorable attitudes toward cultural diversity among PST across different disciplinary areas (Leiva-Olivencia, 2017; López & Hinojosa, 2012).

As noted by Markey et al. (2021), such positive valuation must be evident and explicit in mission statements, strategic plans, institutional policies, and curriculum design. In this sense, higher education institutions are called upon to make a clear organizational commitment to valuing cultural diversity and inclusion (Chen et al., 2018). As Pareja et al. (2020) argue, interculturality functions as a guiding principle of democratic education, fostering meaningful relationships among individuals.

The growing openness observed among TE toward understanding and implementing inclusive practices underscores the importance of positioning cultural diversity as a structural pillar of educational work, rather than as an exception or an optional area of specialization. This articulation between beliefs, practices, and teacher education aligns with contemporary perspectives on interculturality, equity, and social justice, which conceptualize attention to cultural diversity as an ethical and political responsibility inherent to educational systems operating in culturally diverse contexts (Gay, 2018; Karanikola et al., 2025).

While cultural diversity is an inherent feature of global societal growth, greater emphasis must be given to addressing specific educational needs. In this regard, the attention

given to cultural diversity by teachers and in teacher training is a pressing issue that has strained public education policies over the past decade, leading to horizontal and vertical structural changes designed to address social and cultural diversity, which is in a state of constant flux, as noted by Alfaro-Contreras et al. (2025).

Regarding the study's limitations, the use of non-probability sampling, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of TE and PST in Chile, and the reliance on self-report instruments may have introduced social desirability bias, potentially influencing how participants expressed their beliefs. The uneven distribution of participants across different types of institutions, particularly in the case of PST, may have introduced residual confounding effects and partially influenced the differences attributed to the participants' roles. However, the study presents notable strengths in terms of originality within the contingencies of a globalized society. It is among the first to jointly examine the beliefs of TE and PST within the Chilean context, and to do so by incorporating multivariate analyses and effect size estimates, thereby enhancing the robustness of the findings and strengthening the interpretation of the results. For further research in this field, it is suggested to take into account the distribution between TE and PST to strengthen the precision of the estimates.

Overall, the findings indicate that exclusionary beliefs and practices in ITE reflect structural frameworks rather than solely individual factors, thereby positioning institutional leadership as a key driver of sustainable change. The divergence between TE and PST highlights the need for curricular and institutional transformations that embed interculturality as a transversal principle within teacher education programs, in alignment with the demands of professional preparation in culturally diverse and globalized contexts. From a practical perspective, these results underscore the urgency of strengthening the professional development of TE through critical and reflective training processes that support the deconstruction of beliefs, facilitate the co-construction of inclusive practices, and promote leadership in pedagogical innovation. Consequently, curricular reform and teacher development emerge as interdependent dimensions essential to consolidating ITE committed to equity, social justice, and democratic education.

5. Conclusions

The study revealed that although both TE and PST report positive beliefs regarding cultural diversity, TE exhibit significantly higher levels of negative beliefs and less supportive educational practices. These findings point to a discrepancy between expressed beliefs and structural beliefs, which may ultimately affect the implementation of intercultural teaching practices within ITE.

Furthermore, although no statistically significant differences were observed in educational practices that promote cultural diversity, a trend toward higher scores among PST was identified. This trend may indicate a greater willingness among PST to implement inclusive practices compared to TE. From this perspective, the results highlight the need to strengthen the ITE's training processes in intercultural education, especially for those occupying training roles, by promoting critical reflection to bridge the path between beliefs and inclusive educational practices.

Finally, the importance of developing longitudinal research is emphasized in order to understand the evolution of these beliefs and their impact on teaching practice.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

TE	Teacher Educator(s)
PST	Pre-service Teacher(s)
ITE	Initial Teacher Education

Note

[1] The National Accreditation Commission, a public and autonomous body under the Chilean Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) oversees and certifies that teacher education programs comply with the dimensions, criteria, and standards established in the programs, in accordance with the definitions and guidelines of Law No. 20,129 (MINEDUC, 2022).

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