

Research Article

A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW ON PREPARING TEACHERS FOR DIVERSITY: NGO-TEI PARTNERSHIPS FOR MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to systematically explore the partnership between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and teacher education institutions (TEIs) in preparing teachers with multicultural competence. Through a qualitative synthesis of 12 selected articles, the study identifies multiple forms of partnership, including pre-service teachers' placements in NGOs, co-organized projects, co-planned curriculum, NGO mentorship programs, and policy advocacy collaborations. Key benefits inherent in these partnerships include enhanced knowledge and skill development, cultural relevance, professional support, and community engagement. However, significant challenges such as resistance from pre-service teachers, communication barriers, resource constraints, and socio-political factors persist. These findings underscore the importance of integrating NGO-TEI collaborations into teacher training programs to equip pre-service teachers with the necessary competencies to effectively navigate and respond to the complexities of diverse classrooms. Despite the challenges, NGO-TEI partnerships present a promising avenue for preparing pre-service teachers to effectively engage with the diverse classrooms of the 21st century.

Keywords: Teacher Preparation, Multicultural Competence, Systematic Review, NGO Partnerships

Introduction

In the context of an increasingly diverse era, there exists a vital need to guarantee an inclusive and equitable education for those who are marginalized due to factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, language, disability, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, health status, refugee or migrant status, or exposure to disaster and conflict, and so forth (UNESCO, 2015). To effectively tackle the escalating challenges stemming from culturally diverse classrooms, teachers must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and

attitudes necessary to meet the various needs of their students, fostering an inclusive and equitable educational environment for all learners (Gay, 2000). However, traditional teacher education has been criticized for insufficiently preparing teachers for multicultural settings (Harfitt & Chow, 2018; McDonald et al., 2011; McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Payne, 2019). For instance, Zeichner et al. (2014) argued that traditional university-based teacher education programs focus excessively on academic knowledge while overlooking significance of community-based learning. Further, Zeichner et al. (2016) criticized these programs for their undemocratic and hegemonic control over the generation and distribution of knowledge for teacher education. In addition, topics such as multiculturalism, culturally relative teaching, and social justice are often marginalized in traditional teacher training curriculum (McDonald et al., 2011). Consequently, there is an increasing call for collaborative approaches that integrate external expertise, particularly through partnerships with non-government organizations NGOs (Richmond, 2017; Zeichner et al., 2016; Zeichner, 2010).

NGOs play a crucial role in addressing educational gaps by bringing global research, resources, and professional development opportunities to teacher education. They facilitate cross-cultural understanding, critical thinking, and community engagement (Huak, 2020). Collaborative partnerships between NGOs and teacher education institutions (TEIs) provide pre-service teachers with contextual knowledge and hands-on experience in diverse educational settings to enhance their multicultural competence (Payne, 2019). Despite the potential benefits, limited research has systematically explored the nature, advantages, and challenges of these partnerships between NGOs and TEIs.

This study systematically reviews NGO-TEI partnerships to identify the forms, benefits, and challenges presented in preparing pre-service teachers to effectively teach in culturally diverse settings. By doing so, this study seeks to offer valuable insights into optimizing these partnerships for better cultivating teachers' multicultural competence.

Research Methodology

This systematic review was conducted by employing a structured approach to identify, select, and analyze relevant literature. The guiding questions for this review include 1) What are the forms of partnerships between NGOs and TEIs? 2) What are the opportunities and challenges inherent in these partnerships? A comprehensive search was performed across multiple academic databases, including Academia, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), Research Gate, SAGE Journals, and ScienceDirect. Key words and phrases used include: “NGO (CSO/ CBO) partnership in teacher education”, “NGO (CSO/ CBO) involvement in teacher education”, “the role of NGO (CSO/ CBO) in teacher education (OR education)”, “collaborations between NGO (CSO/ CBO) and teacher education (OR education)”, “contributions of NGOs (CSO/ CBO) to teacher education (OR education)”. Additional articles were identified through manual searches of reference lists in the retrieved studies. The search process was not restricted to year of publications in order to capture a full scope of existing research.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Only articles that were published in English or translated into English that had a clear focus on the collaboration between NGOs and teacher education were considered. There were no restrictions on the year of publication. The exclusion criteria were books, reports, letters, and other formats that were not submitted to rigorous or peer-reviewed journals. Papers that did not specifically mention NGO (or CSO/ CBO) and teacher education partnership were also excluded. The preliminary search for relevant studies yielded 85 articles, of which 13 duplicates were removed, leaving 72 unique records. According to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 42 articles were excluded after screening the titles and abstracts. Subsequently, the full texts of the 30 articles were reviewed, resulting in the exclusion of 18 articles that did not meet the eligibility. Consequently, 12 articles were included for analysis in this systematic review (Figure 1).

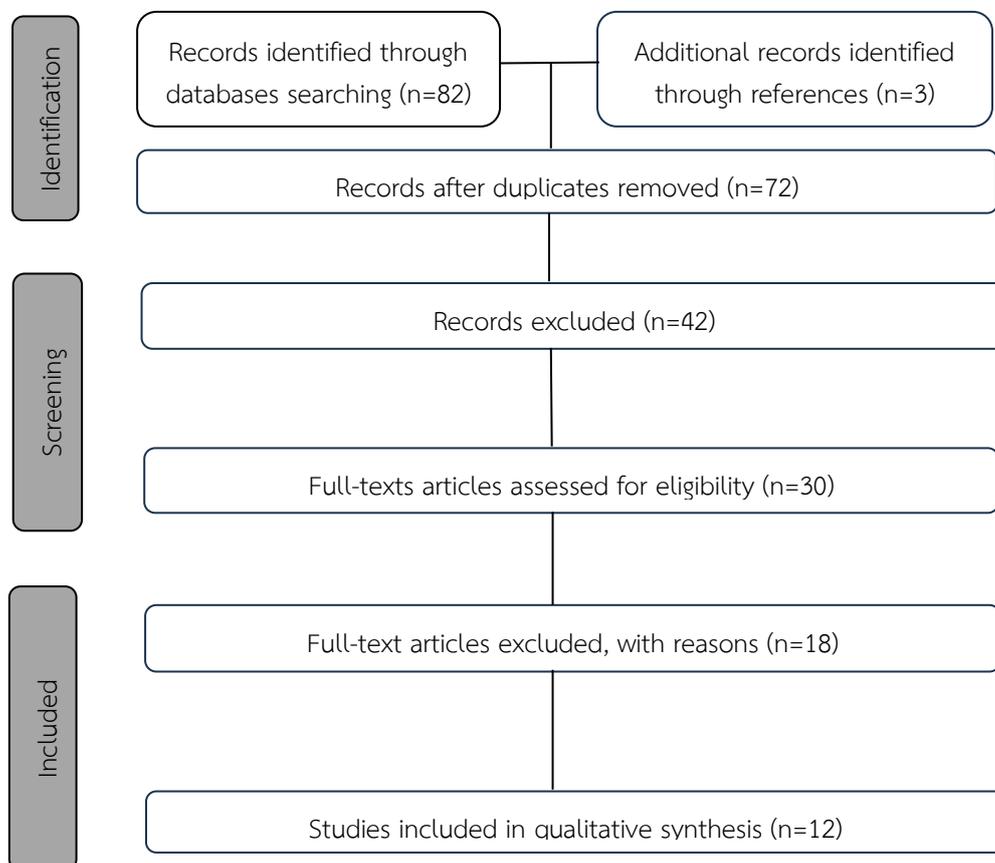


Figure 1 Data collection using PRISMA protocol

Thematic coding was employed during qualitative synthesis to categorize findings into key themes: forms of partnership, benefits, and challenges. The thematic analysis involved the following three stages (Thomas & Harden, 2008): 1) review the selected articles line-by-line to identify key concepts related to NGO-TEI collaborations. Meanwhile, recurring themes, such as “placement in NGOs”, “co-organizing projects”, were noted and assigned preliminary codes. 2) Organizing the initial codes into broader categories and

identifying relationships among them. 3) Refining the core themes by linking them to overarching research questions, ensuring that the identified themes provided a coherent narrative on the various forms, benefits, and challenges of NGO-TEI partnerships. A reliability check was performed by cross-referencing identified themes with existing literature to ensure consistency and validity.

Results

The Forms of Partnerships between NGOs and TEIs

The result of the analysis reveals that various forms of partnerships between NGOs and TEIs have been discussed across the selected studies (Table 1).

Table 1 Identified Forms of Partnerships between NGOs and TEIs

No	Author(s) and Year	Identified Forms of NGO-TEIs Partnership
1	Harfitt (2018)	Placing student teachers into local and regional NGOs.
2	Brakyo (2013)	Placing teacher candidates into CBOs.
3	Yogev and Michaeli (2011)	Placing student teachers into social organizations and take academic course in the university at the same time.
4	McDonald et al. (2011)	Placing pre-service teachers into CBOs.
5	Harfitt and Chow (2018)	Placing student teachers into local and regional NGOs.
6	Richmond (2017)	Placing pre-service teacher in CBOs.
7	Hauck (2020)	Providing resources and professional development; co-organizing projects;
8	Wolf et al. (2022)	Co-organizing projects and events; publishing teaching materials; organizing conferences, panels, and internships for student teachers.
9	Kieu and Singer (2017)	Providing research funding; reviewing curriculum; providing training and lectures.
10	Elkin et al. (2023)	Drafting educational policies.
11	Zeichner et al. (2016)	NGO members serve as mentors of pre-service teachers; Co-planning curriculum and coursework with faculty and instructors.
12	Bhargave and Jerome (2020)	Placing pre-service teachers into local organizations to participate in their meetings and public assembly meetings; training workshops; joint actions on campaigns; co-develop curriculum about citizenship education for local schools.

Among all identified forms, the most discussed is the NGO or CBO placements. A total of 7 articles emphasize the placements of pre-service teachers into NGOs or CBOs so that they can be familiar with social issues such as social inequality, poverty, and ethnic discrimination, enhancing their cultural sensitivity and awareness towards students of diverse backgrounds, and acquiring contextual knowledge essential for them to teach students from diverse backgrounds in the future (No 1, No 2, No 3, No 4, No 5, No 6, No 12). Apart from

placing pre-service teachers in NGOs, co-organizing projects, events, and conferences (No 7, No 8, No 12), co-planning and reviewing curriculum and course work (No 9, No 11, No 12), and inviting NGO member to serve as mentors or lecturers (No 9, No 11) are also significant forms discussed. Such forms of partnership have a great impact on enhancing pre-service teachers' knowledge and skills and helping them understand that students' cultural backgrounds can serve as valuable teaching resources. Other forms such as co-drafting educational policies (No 10), providing research funding and resources (No 7, No 8, No 9), and providing internships for pre-service teachers (No 8) are also mentioned respectively.

Advantages and Opportunities of Partnerships between NGOs and TEIs

According to the review, working with NGOs has benefited teacher education, especially in terms of fostering pre-service teachers' multicultural competency. The advantages and opportunities of the partnership are listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Advantages and opportunities of NGO-TEIs partnership

No	Author(s) and Year	Advantages and opportunities of NGO-TEIs partnership
1	Harfitt (2018)	Serving as role models and bringing diverse expertise to student teachers; providing contextual knowledge of students and community; enhancing student teachers' sensitivity and awareness towards students of diverse backgrounds.
2	Brakyo (2013)	Providing learning opportunities for pre-service teachers outside of university, equipping them with pedagogical knowledge and contextual knowledge of students' diverse cultures; expanding student teachers' literacy view and helping them develop more complex pedagogical and literacy theories.
3	Yogev and Michaeli (2011)	Deepen student teachers' social sensitivity and awareness towards social gaps, poverty, unemployment, and ethnic discrimination.
4	McDonald et al. (2011)	Providing TEIs with useful resources regarding their understandings of diversity and in-depth familiarity with regional contexts; giving pre-service teachers hands-on opportunities to gain knowledge about the diversity of students, families, and communities in ways that may assist in the creation of culturally responsive practices.
5	Harfitt and Chow (2018)	Not mentioned
6	Richmond (2017)	Providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to work with and learn from their students and the community; offering teacher education programs knowledge and expertise to support pre-service teachers' development.
7	Hauck (2020)	Providing essential resources, professional development, context, and practical experience for pre-service teachers to enhance their critical skills, knowledge, and dispositions for the increasingly diverse world.

No	Author(s) and Year	Advantages and opportunities of NGO-TEIs partnership
8	Wolf et al. (2022)	Addressing significant intercultural education themes: 1) serving as intermediaries between schools, teachers, students, and their families; 2) counselling; 3) provide professional assistance in translating, interpreting, and psychologists etc; 4) serving as a motivation source for teachers; 5) serving as co-partners in projects or event planning; 6) offering language courses to parents, students, and teaching staff; 7) offering extracurricular activities and informal education to students and their families; 8) serving as a facilitator of awareness-raising.
9	Kieu and Singer (2017)	Providing educators and pre-service teachers valuable opportunities to learn experiential pedagogical strategies that they can use in teaching; fostering pre-service teachers' sustainability-linked competencies; empowering students towards behavioral change.
10	Elkin et al. (2023)	Reforming and managing teacher professional development;
11	Zeichner et al. (2016)	Help teacher candidates understand that connections with students' families and community can serve as valuable assets in helping them support students' educational journey.
12	Bhargave and Jerome (2020)	Opportunity for student teachers to engage in policy-decision practice; Enhance student teachers' subject and pedagogical knowledge about citizenship education; Develop student teachers' competencies as active citizens.

NGOs offer valuable expertise and diverse knowledge that supplements traditional university and school partnerships. Pre-service teachers benefit from exposure to contextualized knowledge about children, issues about diversities and cultures, as well as students' learning, which helps them become more effective teachers in the future (No 1, No 5). In addition, partnerships with NGOs provide invaluable learning opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop more complex theories and pedagogical knowledge (No 2, No 12). Working with NGOs also facilitate pre-service teachers to better understand students' family and cultural backgrounds. This understanding will enable pre-service teachers to apply culturally relevant practices and develop a cultural sensitivity towards their students and social causes in the community (No 3, No 8). Besides, it empowers pre-service teachers to meaningfully engage with children and communities, repositioning families from barriers to valuable resources, fostering deeper relationships between teachers, students, and families, which in turn supports student success in education (No 4, No 11).

NGOs serve as valuable resources for teacher education programs by providing professional development, mentorship, and practical experiences for both educators and student teachers. They allow educators to talk about the shared challenges, gain knowledge of different educational systems, and improve the curriculum for global education (No 7). Additionally, they are at the forefront of public awareness-raising

campaigns, international mobility initiatives, data-driven decision making, grassroots communication, reforming and supervising teacher professional development (No 7, No 10, No12).

Overall, partnerships between NGOs and TEI programs provide many positive benefits, including enhanced knowledge and skills development, cultural relevance, professional support, community engagement, and reform in education practices. These collaborations contribute to the preparation of effective, culturally competent, and socially conscious teachers.

Challenges of Partnerships between NGOs and TEIs

Among the articles, only 5 of them discussed the challenges existing in the partnership between NGOs and TEIs (Table 3).

The first challenge is the resistance from pre-service teachers. Some staff and pre-service teachers perceive cooperation with NGOs or CBOs as unnecessary burdens due to pressure from standardized assessment and extra workloads, preferring traditional forms of teacher preparation within university lecture rooms and school classrooms (No1, No 5). Furthermore, there is a lack of exchange and communication between NGOs and teacher education. There is a lack of reciprocal communication, sharing of best practices, and opinion sharing between the two agents (No 2) thus hinders the updating of teacher training plans and the implementation of effective strategies.

Table 3 Challenges Identified in the Partnerships

No	Author(s) and Year	Challenges of the Partnership
1	Harfitt (2018)	Some pre-service teachers do not see the value of collaboration with NGOs and view it as an extra burden.
2	Wolf et al. (2022)	Issues with funding sustainability; outdated teacher training programs; a lack of coordination and support by relevant public agencies; lack of mutual communication, exchange of ideas and practices.
3	Kieu and Singer (2017)	Lack of capacity, such as organizational management skills, human resources, and inadequate funding and dependence on funding agencies; insufficient information-dissemination system; unfavourable political conditions (lack of government support and interest); problems related to a nation’s stage of social or economic development.
4	Zeichner et al. (2016)	Some TEIs don’t see the value of engaging community and families. Local CBOs’ pedagogical qualification is doubted to train teacher candidates.
5	Bhargave and Jerome (2020)	Limited capacity of TEIs to put student teachers in CBOs. Strong pressure for TEIs to comply with standardized assessment system. Resistance from staff due to extra workloads.

There are also constraints in NGOs' capacity as they often face limitations in organizational capacity, including insufficient organizational management skills, human resources, and funding (No 3). Dependency on external funding agencies exacerbates these challenges. Additionally, there is a shortage of effective information dissemination systems, impeding the flow of crucial information between NGOs, universities, and other stakeholders involved in teacher education programs.

Another significant challenge is the political and socioeconomic factors (No 3). The efficiency of NGO efforts in teacher education will be significantly hampered by unfavorable political conditions and difficulties relating to a country's stage of social or economic development. Inadequate coordination by public administration authorities and a lack of interest from local government entities contribute to the challenges faced by NGOs and universities in recruiting and training student teachers. Finally, there are value and perception issues (No 1, No 4). Some teacher educators and program representatives struggle to recognize the value of community participation in teacher education programs. There may be criticism towards community mentors, undermining their contributions and pedagogical skills.

Discussion

This systematic review spans studies from 2011 to 2023, reflecting 12 years of evolving research on NGO-TEI partnerships in teacher education. The findings highlight the transformative potential of these partnerships in addressing the multifaceted demands of 21st-century education. By integrating contextualized knowledge, diverse perspectives, and real-world experiences, such collaborations significantly enrich teacher preparation programs. These efforts not only enhance pre-service teachers' knowledge and skills but also foster cultural competence, empathy, and social consciousness, preparing them to effectively engage with diverse and dynamic student populations.

Beyond strengthening teacher preparation, NGO-TEI partnerships offer significant benefits for professional growth, mentorship, and community engagement. Educators gain exposure to alternative pedagogies, innovative practices, and localized challenges, while pre-service teachers benefit from experiential learning that bridges theoretical concepts with practical applications. NGOs, as catalysts for social justice, also contribute by influencing policy reforms, providing critical data for informed decision-making, and championing equity-focused educational practices.

However, despite these advantages, the scarcity of research in this field reflects a broader concern regarding the underutilized potential of NGO-TEI collaborations. As Cochran-Smith (2003) points out, teacher preparation is heavily influenced by governmental and non-governmental regulations, which are shaped by broader ideological orientations, social contexts, and political agendas. These regulations play a critical role in legitimizing specific approaches to multicultural education. Yet, the influence of NGOs within this regulatory framework remains underexplored, particularly in how they navigate and address these complex dynamics.

Previous studies, such as Zeichner et al. (2016), highlight systemic resistance within TEIs to community-based learning approaches. Wolf et al. (2022) suggest that hesitancy to establish NGO networks may stem from

challenges such as limited communication, organizational constraints, and resistance to integrating community perspectives into mainstream teacher education. This review adds to the discourse by identifying political, socioeconomic, and perceptual barriers as significant hurdles. For instance, some TEI stakeholders undervalue NGO collaborations, viewing them as supplementary rather than essential to teacher preparation.

Overcoming these challenges necessitates a paradigm and mindset shift within TEIs and teachers to embrace the benefits of experiential and community-based pedagogies. Engaging with NGOs allows pre-service teachers to develop real-world skills that cannot be cultivated in traditional classroom settings. Strengthening institutional support for NGO collaborations can further enhance teacher readiness, ensuring that future teachers are well-equipped to foster inclusive and culturally responsive environment. Additionally, policymakers should consider integrating NGO partnerships into teacher education frameworks, developing long-term sustainability through formalized agreements and dedicated funding systems. Moreover, creating platforms for knowledge sharing between NGOs and TEIs can also promote best practices, facilitating a more seamless integration of community-based learning into teacher education programs.

Future research should focus on actionable strategies to address these barriers, including exploring successful case studies of NGO-TEI collaborations across diverse cultural and educational contexts. By doing so, stakeholders can gain practical insights to inform the design and implementation of inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive teacher education programs.

Conclusion

Partnerships between NGOs and teacher education institutions (TEIs) present a transformative opportunity to enhance teacher preparation and promote inclusive education in the 21st century. By leveraging the expertise, resources, and community networks of NGOs, TEIs can better equip pre-service teachers with the cultural competence and practical skills needed to navigate the complexities of diverse classrooms. These collaborations bridge theoretical frameworks and real-world application, fostering teachers who are both culturally responsive and socially conscious.

Despite persistent challenges such as resistance to community-based approaches, communication gaps, resource constraints, and socio-political barriers, the benefits of these partnerships far outweigh the obstacles. To unlock their full potential, multi-stakeholder dialogues among NGOs, TEIs, government agencies, and community representatives must be fostered to co-design policies and best practices that enhance teacher education for diversity. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation frameworks should be implemented to assess the effectiveness of NGO-TEI partnerships, ensuring continuous improvement and adaptation to evolving education needs.

Looking ahead, strengthening NGO-TEI partnerships is essential for advancing the shared vision of equitable and inclusive education for all learners. Achieving this goal will require innovative approaches, sustained collaboration, and a collective effort to align the priorities of NGOs and TEIs. By narrowing the gap

between theory and practice, these partnerships have the power to redefine teacher education and create a more inclusive and responsive educational landscape.

Limitations

Despite a comprehensive search strategy, this systematic review has limitations. Constraints within the selected databases and variations in indexing practices may have resulted in the omission of relevant studies. Additionally, the scarcity of research on NGO-TEI partnerships limits the depth of analysis and generalizability of findings, highlighting the need for further studies in diverse cultural and educational contexts.

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