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The influence of pre-service early childhood teachers' civic awareness on their ability to teach democratic citizenship education: The mediating role of multicultural beliefs

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the impact of pre-service early childhood teachers' civic awareness and multicultural beliefs on their ability to teach democratic citizenship education and to verify the mediating effect of multicultural beliefs in the relationship between civic awareness and the ability to teach democratic citizenship education. The subjects of the study were 226 pre-service early childhood teachers, and a survey was conducted. As a result of the study, first, the civic awareness of pre-service early childhood teachers influenced the ability to teach democratic citizenship education, and the influence of the sub-variables of civic awareness was in the order of rights awareness, responsibility, community awareness, and rational decision-making awareness. Second, the multicultural beliefs of pre-service early childhood teachers also affected the ability to teach democratic citizenship education, and multicultural understanding had the strongest influence among the sub-variables of multicultural beliefs. Thirdly, we found that multicultural beliefs partially mediated the relationship between civic awareness and the ability to teach democratic citizenship education. Additionally, the results highlight the importance of educational interventions targeting multicultural beliefs, as they partially mediate the relationship between civic awareness and the ability to teach democratic citizenship education.

Keywords: Civic awareness, Democratic citizenship education, Multicultural beliefs, Pre-service early childhood teacher's teaching ability

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, modern society is undergoing rapid changes due to the advancements in science and technology. These changes offer us convenience while also giving rise to various challenges. Adapting to such changes often causes a sense of incompatibility among members, leading to social tension and conflicts. The presence of a diverse range of social members, such as an increase in foreign workers or marriage migrants, further adds to potential sources of social tension [1]. While social conflicts can indeed contribute to societal progress, excessive conflicts hold the potential to endanger society. Therefore, it becomes crucial to cultivate the skills and qualities necessary to effectively navigate and resolve the complex array of conflicts, ultimately achieving social integration [2]. Democratic principles play a crucial role in understanding and overcoming conflicts arising from diversity in society [3]. Democratic citizenship education is vital in fostering mature

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citizens and achieving social integration and democracy [4-5].

Previous research in the field of early childhood education concerning democratic citizenship education has primarily concentrated on designing and implementing democratic citizenship education programs for young children [6-8], as well as exploring the process of fostering democratic citizenship and the meaning of civics of young children [9-10]. Conversely, there has been relatively limited investigation into early childhood teachers or pre-service early childhood teachers engaging in democratic citizenship education. Moreover, the subject matter of these investigations was restricted to probing the perceptions of these educators regarding democratic citizenship education [11-12]. These studies have put forth insights to consider when designing and implementing democratic citizenship education programs, gleaned from early childhood and pre-service teachers' perspectives. These insights encompass the significance of democratic citizenship education, educational content, methodologies, and requirements. However, a noticeable gap remains in research focused on the practical teaching competence required by in-field teachers and pre-service early childhood teachers for the effective execution of democratic citizenship education. Hence, such an aspect needs to be related to further studies.

Teaching democratic citizenship education proficiency entails early childhood teachers possessing the knowledge, competencies, and attitudes requisite for democratic citizenship education. This empowers them to foster qualities in infants that align with the principles of democratic citizenship [13]. Earlier investigations appraising the teaching competence of early childhood educators and pre-service teachers [14-15] indicate that teaching efficacy, dedication to professional development, educational attitudes, and tendencies influence teaching capability. From these findings, it can be inferred that the affective characteristics of educators significantly impact their capacity to teach democratic citizenship education effectively. In a related vein, studies reveal the nexus between democratic citizenship education and multicultural education [16] and the interrelationship between democratic citizenship education and multicultural competencies [17-18]. To support pre-service early childhood teachers in acquiring the teaching proficiencies pertinent to democratic citizenship education, it becomes imperative to scrutinize affective variables about such teaching abilities. Consequently, this study centers on pre-service early childhood teachers' civic awareness and multicultural beliefs.

Citizenship is defined as the act of "peacefully resolving conflicts through discussions within a democratic culture, acknowledging minority rights, respecting diversity, and embracing all members of society" [19]. In this context, civic awareness serves as a yardstick for assessing choices among diverse values and shapes individual conduct [20]. It can be inferred that civic awareness profoundly influences the capability of educators to impart democratic citizenship education. To illustrate, a teacher possessing a robust sense of citizenship will facilitate young children's involvement in decision-making processes that contribute to the collective welfare, all based on the principles of citizenship. In essence, educators' civic awareness guides methods of democratic citizenship education that endorse and practice values and attitudes intrinsic to democratic living. These may encompass community awareness, respect for others, recognition of rights, and rational decision-making, all aimed at nurturing young children into democratic citizens.

Multicultural beliefs pertain to the inclinations or ideas that educators hold regarding multiculturalism within the prevailing societal and educational context [21-22]. Early childhood teachers' beliefs influence how they perceive, interpret, and evaluate the educational domain, consequently shaping their decision-making and teaching conduct [23]. Similarly, in a related sphere, studies [24-25] indicated that the multicultural beliefs of early childhood teachers impact their thoughts and attitudes towards various classroom scenarios, thereby influencing the learning experiences of young children. Through this, it can be inferred that pre-service early childhood teachers' multicultural beliefs might affect their ability to teach democratic citizenship education.

When examining the correlation between the civic awareness and multicultural beliefs of pre-service early childhood teachers and their ability to teach democratic citizenship education, an additional important consideration is the interrelationship between their civic awareness and multicultural beliefs. Within the framework of democracy exists an educational orientation encompassing the political aspect and the inclusive diversity of a multicultural society [26]. This perspective is evident because elements connected to multicultural beliefs, such as human dignity, freedom, equality, justice, participation, and a rational attitude, are integral to democratic values [27]. Since civic awareness and multicultural beliefs are interdependent

foundations, democratic citizenship education, and multicultural education share a fundamental relationship concerning historical origins, societal contexts, educational objectives, instructional content, and methodologies [16]. Considering these points, it is foreseeable that pre-service early childhood teachers' multicultural beliefs might mediate the relationship between civic awareness and the ability to teach democratic citizenship education.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the impact of civic awareness and multicultural beliefs, using the ability to teach democratic citizenship education as a dependent variable. Moreover, it seeks to ascertain whether multicultural beliefs mediate the relationship between civic awareness and the capacity to teach democratic citizenship education. To accomplish this, the study has formulated the following research questions:

Research question 1. Do pre-service early childhood teachers' civic awareness and multicultural beliefs affect the ability to teach democratic citizenship education?

1-1. Does pre-service early childhood teachers' civic awareness affect the ability to teach democratic citizenship education?

1-2. Does pre-service early childhood teachers' the multicultural belief affect the ability to teach democratic citizenship education?

Research question 2. Do pre-service early childhood teachers' multicultural belief mediate the impact of pre-service early childhood teachers' civic awareness on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Subject of study

The study included 226 students from the department of early childhood education at various three-year universities in Seoul and Gyeonggi province. The participants' background information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' background information

Sortation		Number	Percentage (%)
Grade	First-grader	59	26.1
	Second-grader	85	37.6
	Third-grader	82	36.3
Whether taking courses related to multicultural education	Taken	134	59.3
	Not taken	92	40.7
Whether taking courses related to democratic citizenship education	Taken	158	69.9
	Not taken	68	30.1
Total		226	100.0

2.2 Research tools

2.2.1 Civic awareness measurement scale

The researchers modified the civic awareness measurement tool [28] to suit pre-service early childhood teachers, and the revised scale consisted of four subcategories: rights awareness, rational decision-making awareness, community awareness, and responsibility awareness.

2.2.2 Multicultural belief scale

The researchers modified the multicultural belief measurement tool [21]. The adapted scale comprised three subcategories: multicultural understanding, multicultural sensitivity, and multicultural education

operation.

2.2.3 Democratic citizenship education teaching ability scale

The researchers modified the global citizenship education competency scale [29] to measure democratic citizenship education teaching ability. The scale consisted of two subcategories: educational activity composition ability and educational activity performance ability.

All three scales utilized a Likert 5-point scale for question evaluation, where higher scores indicated higher levels of civic awareness, multicultural beliefs, and ability to teach democratic citizenship education. Three early childhood education experts verified the content validity of the revised questionnaire. Table 2 presents the sub-variables, number of questions, and reliability (Cronbach α) for each research tool.

Table 2. Sub-variables and number of questions by the research tool

Sub-variables		Number of questions	Cronbach α
Civic awareness	Rights awareness	7	.79
	Rational decision-making awareness	8	.75
	Community awareness	8	.73
	Responsibility awareness	8	.76
	Sum	31	.84
Multicultural beliefs	Multicultural understanding	7	.74
	Multicultural sensitivity	3	.77
	Multicultural education operation	10	.78
	Sum	20	.84
Ability to teach democratic citizenship education	Educational activity Composition ability	7	.79
	Educational activity Performance ability	6	.78
	Sum	13	.86

2.3 Data analysis

The data collected for this study were analyzed using the SPSS 21 program. Multiple regression was conducted to verify research question 1. To verify research problem 2, a hierarchical regression was performed based on the three-stage mediating effect model [30]. Additionally, the Sobel test was conducted to assess the statistical significance of the mediating effect.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1 The impact of pre-service early childhood teachers' civic awareness and multicultural beliefs on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education

3.1.1 The effect of civic awareness on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education

Multiple regression analysis examined the influence of pre-service early childhood teachers' civic awareness on their ability to teach democratic citizenship education. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The effect of civic awareness on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education

Independent variable	B	B	T	R ²	F
Rights awareness	.23	.36	6.53***	.31	25.48***
Rational decision-making	.04	.07	1.08*		

awareness			
Community awareness	.08	.14	1.92*
Responsibility awareness	.11	.18	2.67**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The multiple regression analysis revealed that the civic awareness of pre-service early childhood teachers significantly influenced their ability to teach democratic citizenship education ($f = 25.48$, $p < .001$), and the model's explanatory power was 31% ($r^2 = .31$). Among the sub-variables of civic awareness, a rights awareness ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$) had the most substantial impact on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education, followed by a responsibility awareness ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$), community awareness ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$), and rational decision-making awareness ($\beta = .07$, $p < .05$).

From these results, it is evident that the civic awareness of pre-service early childhood teachers plays a significant role in determining their ability to teach democratic citizenship education. Additionally, a higher rights awareness, responsibility awareness, community awareness, and rational decision-making awareness among the sub-variables of civic awareness corresponds to a higher ability to teach democratic citizenship education.

3.1.2 The effect of multicultural beliefs on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate how the multicultural beliefs of pre-service early childhood teachers influence their ability to teach democratic citizenship education. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The effect of multicultural beliefs on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education

Independent variable	B	B	T	R ²	F
Multicultural understanding	0.18	0.30	4.28***		
Multicultural sensitivity	0.00	0.01	0.09	.15	13.10***
Multicultural education operation	0.08	0.15	2.18*		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The multiple regression analysis showed that the multicultural beliefs of pre-service early childhood teachers significantly influenced their ability to teach democratic citizenship education ($f = 13.10$, $p < .001$), with the model explaining 15% of the variance ($r^2 = .15$). Among the sub-variables of multicultural beliefs, multicultural understanding ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$) had the most significant impact on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education. Additionally, the multicultural education operation ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$) was found to have an effect, while multicultural sensitivity had no significant impact.

From these findings, it can be concluded that the multicultural beliefs of pre-service early childhood teachers play a role in shaping their ability to teach democratic citizenship education. Furthermore, a higher level of multicultural understanding and effective multicultural education operation corresponds to a higher ability to teach democratic citizenship education.

3.2 The mediating effect of multicultural beliefs on the civic awareness of pre-service early childhood teachers and the ability to teach democratic citizenship education

A three-step model [30] was employed to examine whether multicultural beliefs act as mediators in the relationship between civic awareness and the ability to teach democratic citizenship education. Hierarchical

regression analysis was conducted to investigate the mediating effect of multicultural beliefs on the impact of pre-service early childhood teachers' civic awareness on their ability to teach democratic citizenship education. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The mediating effect of multicultural beliefs on civic awareness and the ability to teach democratic citizenship education

Stage	Independent variable	Dependent variable	B	T	R ²	F	Sobel Test(Z)
Step 1	Civic awareness	Multicultural beliefs	0.58	10.53***	.33	110.88***	
Step 2	Civic awareness	Ability to teach democratic citizenship education	0.51	8.96***	.26	80.32***	1.98*
Step 3	Civic awareness Multicultural beliefs	Ability to teach democratic citizenship education	0.43 0.13	6.20*** 2.33**	.27	41.34***	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

In step 1, whether the independent variable significantly predicted the mediating variable was examined. The regression analysis using civic awareness as the independent variable and multicultural beliefs as the dependent variable showed a statistically significant effect of civic awareness on multicultural beliefs ($\beta = .58$, $p < .001$), satisfying the first condition.

In step 2, whether the independent variable significantly affected the dependent variable was tested. The regression analysis with civic awareness as the independent variable and the ability to teach democratic citizenship education as the dependent variable revealed a significant impact of civic awareness on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education ($\beta = .51$, $p < .001$), meeting the second condition.

Finally, in step 3, both the independent and mediating variables were simultaneously entered to examine their combined effect on the dependent variable. Both civic awareness and multicultural beliefs significantly influenced the ability to teach democratic citizenship education. However, the impact of civic awareness on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education decreased when the mediating variable (multicultural beliefs) was included in the analysis (step 2: $\beta = .51$, step 3: $\beta = .43$). To test the statistical significance of this reduction in influence, an analysis using the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) was conducted, which showed a statistically significant difference ($z = 2.33$, $p < .05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that multicultural beliefs have a partial mediating effect in the relationship between civic awareness and the ability to teach democratic citizenship education.

4. DISCUSSION

Firstly, the civic awareness of pre-service early childhood teachers impacts their ability to teach democratic citizenship education. This implies that teachers who possess awareness centered around democratic values, such as recognizing diverse perspectives, embracing differences, and engaging in constructive discussions with community members, are better equipped to deliver democratic citizenship education. This study's results align with the research on teachers' perceptions of democratic citizenship education in Korea and Japan [31] and the research results that establish a connection between teachers' civic awareness and democratic citizenship education [17]. This underscores the importance of emphasizing civic awareness to enhance the teaching capabilities of future early childhood educators.

The contributions of distinct aspects of civic awareness to the ability to teach democratic citizenship education demonstrate a noteworthy impact, with the order being rights awareness, responsibility awareness, community awareness, and rational decision-making awareness. These findings correspond to research that civic awareness, such as participation, tolerance, political efficacy, conformity, and service, affects human dignity, public interest, understanding of various cultures, and rational decision-making [32]. The educational experiences that teachers provide to young children are fashioned and executed through the values

and attitudes they uphold [33]. Rights awareness, a sub-variable of civic awareness, involves recognizing the interests and experiences of others in addition to one's own. In global citizenship education, activities such as storytelling are commonly employed to promote rights awareness [34]. Through such interactions, children can understand the necessity of respecting their and others' rights and feelings. Therefore, aspects of civic awareness, including rights awareness, influence teaching methods and consequently impact a teacher's pedagogical proficiency. This study suggests that to enable pre-service early childhood teachers to become effective educators and to engage in teaching and learning activities that encompass civic awareness. Their education should include elements that reflect civic awareness.

Democratic citizenship education should be rooted in democratic principles and approaches such as justice and human rights awareness, transparent communication, rational conflict resolution, and understanding community members' interconnections. Previous studies have highlighted the limitations of traditional education, "the education which learning about citizenship," in addressing intricate and sensitive issues confronted by members of a democratic society within an educational context [35-36]. As democratic citizens can not be cultivated through non-democratic means, adjustments in the framework and implementation of democratic citizenship education are necessary. When administering democratic citizenship education to pre-service early childhood teachers, the effectiveness of their teaching can be enhanced through interactive and collaborative sessions, such as discussions grounded in civic awareness and project-based classes.

Furthermore, the multicultural beliefs held by pre-service early childhood teachers substantially impact their ability to teach democratic citizenship education. This signifies that these beliefs influence educators' capacity to internalize democratic principles [3]. These principles encompass understanding differences, embracing diversity, and effectively resolving conflicts within a diverse societal framework. The findings of this study align with the outcomes of research [18] that emphasized the correlation between pre-service early childhood teachers' democratic citizenship and their proficiency in multicultural education. Moreover, a previous study [37] investigated factors affecting multicultural beliefs. It indicated that early childhood teachers who had undergone extensive multicultural training and workshops and possessed substantial knowledge about multicultural issues in their regions held stronger multicultural beliefs. Another study [38] demonstrated that early childhood teachers' multicultural beliefs directly impact their effectiveness in delivering multicultural education, revealing that higher levels of multicultural beliefs were associated with greater efficacy in teaching multicultural subjects. Given the combined results of these prior studies, this study suggests that by establishing a multicultural education environment for pre-service early childhood teachers and offering opportunities for multicultural learning and development, these individuals will actively strive to honor diversity and harmoniously promote community values.

The different components of multicultural beliefs, ranked in order of significance—multicultural understanding and multicultural education operation—positively influence the ability to teach democratic citizenship education. These findings support the previous study [39] that enhancing the understanding of human rights and fundamental freedoms—values shared between citizenship education and multicultural education—is essential. Conversely, this study revealed that the multicultural sensitivity of pre-service early childhood teachers did not directly impact their ability to teach democratic citizenship education. When considering the studies [40-41] that identified a higher level of multicultural beliefs among the sub-factors of pre-service early childhood teachers' beliefs, there seems to be a consistency in their levels of multicultural beliefs. Nonetheless, since psychological foundations, such as multicultural beliefs, significantly influence the ability to teach democratic citizenship education, pre-service early childhood teachers should strive to elevate their levels of all aspects of multicultural beliefs harmoniously.

Thirdly, the multicultural beliefs of pre-service early childhood teachers play a partial mediating role in the connection between civic awareness and the ability to teach democratic citizenship education. This implies that the direct impact of pre-service early childhood teachers' civic awareness on their ability to teach democratic citizenship education is enhanced when mediated by their multicultural beliefs. In other words, predicting the proficiency of teaching democratic citizenship education is more accurate when civic awareness and multicultural beliefs are considered together in the context of pre-service early childhood teachers. The findings concerning the mediating effect of multicultural beliefs highlight the necessity of boosting the

efficacy of teaching democratic citizenship education about citizenship through educational interventions focused on nurturing multicultural beliefs.

Democratic citizenship education for pre-service early childhood teachers predominantly occurs through early childhood social education courses in universities dedicated to training early childhood educators. The content of democratic citizenship education in these courses primarily centers on activities facilitating young children's exploration and application of democratic values. This includes establishing and adhering to rules and public order, comprehending rights and responsibilities, making decisions, and participating in discussions [42-43]. Additionally, democratic citizenship education addresses certain interconnected subjects, such as personality education and human rights education, through cross-curricular learning themes. Multicultural education for pre-service early childhood teachers is partially integrated into subjects such as early childhood social education or early childhood childcare program development and evaluation. These subjects focus on guiding young children to develop multicultural values and attitudes through culture, diversity, and values [5].

Moreover, multicultural education for pre-service early childhood teachers is also delivered through comparative approaches and curricular elements such as special lectures, workshops, and field trips. Democratic citizenship education and multicultural education, as administered in the training of early childhood teachers, are treated mainly as separate educational topics aimed at enhancing teaching proficiency. The significance of teachers' civic awareness in democratic citizenship education can not be disregarded, and the influence of multicultural beliefs on the psychological foundation of civic awareness is equally important. Consequently, an early childhood teacher training program that efficiently enhances democratic citizenship education proficiency can be expected by strengthening elements related to civic awareness within the educational content and methods while simultaneously integrating sub-elements of multicultural beliefs.

5. CONCLUSION

This study revealed not only the direct effect of civic awareness and multicultural beliefs on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education but also the indirect effect of civic awareness on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education through multicultural beliefs. This is significant in that it has improved the understanding of the variables affecting the teaching ability of early childhood teachers in the absence of few studies verifying the effect of civic awareness on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education and the effect of multicultural beliefs on the ability to teach democratic citizenship education. The results of this study imply that the ability to teach democratic citizenship education can be improved if multicultural beliefs are promoted in consideration of civic awareness in the pre-service early childhood teacher training curriculum. Based on the results of this study, it will be a more practical study if a democratic citizenship curriculum for pre-service early childhood teachers is developed and operated and its effectiveness is verified.

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