

## OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD TEACHING CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXTS

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**Abstract:** *In an increasingly diverse educational landscape, teachers are required to develop intercultural competences that support inclusive and responsive classroom practices. This study investigates the opinions and attitudes of teachers and education professionals in Arad County (Romania) regarding teaching career development in intercultural contexts. A mixed-method design was employed, combining a structured questionnaire with open-ended questions administered to 45 participants (30 in-service and 15 pre-service teachers). Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, while qualitative data were coded thematically. Results indicate a strong recognition of the importance of intercultural competence (92% agreement) and a high level of interest in professional development opportunities (78%), contrasted by perceived gaps in institutional support (43%). Thematic analysis revealed motivations related to professional growth, but also structural barriers to sustained engagement in intercultural CPD. The findings highlight the need to embed intercultural competence systematically in teacher education programmes and to strengthen institutional frameworks that support continuous professional development.*

**Keywords:** *teaching career development; intercultural education; teacher attitudes; professional development; Arad County.*

### Introduction

Globalisation, migration, and mobility have transformed educational settings around the world, bringing increased cultural, linguistic, and educational diversity into classrooms (McClintock & Ku, 2024). Teachers are increasingly required not only to manage content and pedagogy, but also to navigate intercultural dimensions of teaching and learning. As such, career development for teachers must evolve to include competencies for working in intercultural contexts.

In Romania—and particularly in border-regions such as Arad County—the diversity of student populations and community contexts places additional demands on teacher development. Understanding how educators perceive and value their career development in intercultural contexts is vital for shaping effective teacher education and continuous professional development (CPD) programmes.

The aim of this article is to analyse opinions and attitudes toward teaching career development in intercultural contexts, focusing on a sample of teachers and education professionals in Arad County. The study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) What are the prevailing attitudes toward intercultural professional development among teachers?
- (2) What institutional supports are perceived as available or lacking?
- (3) What barriers do teachers identify in engaging with intercultural career development?

### **Theoretical Background**

Teaching career development refers to the ongoing processes through which teachers reflect on, extend, and refine their professional practice, often through training, collaboration, mentoring, mobility, and self-directed learning. In the context of intercultural education, this development includes cultivating intercultural competence—i.e., attitudes of openness, knowledge of cultural differences, and skills for effective intercultural engagement (Deardorff, 2006; Petrović, Radosavljević & Erdeš-Kavečan, 2024).

Research evidences that teacher professional development that explicitly targets intercultural competence can enhance teacher readiness to work in diverse classrooms (Hajisoteriou, 2019; Hajisoteriou & Angeli, 2018). For example, a review by Deardorff (2006) established a framework for identifying and assessing intercultural competence as an outcome of internationalisation efforts. Moreover, programmes oriented toward intercultural education show that attitudes, values, and reflection are key components (Gazioğlu & Güner, 2021).

However, many studies also point to barriers: limited institutional resources, absence of systemic CPD tied to intercultural competence, and a mismatch between teacher training and actual classroom diversity (Buchner, 2023; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In Europe, the European Commission and Joint Research Centre (European Commission) have emphasised the importance of intercultural and democratic competences for teachers, identifying enabling factors and barriers (JRC, 2023; Byram, 2021).

Thus, analysing teacher attitudes and institutional conditions in a specific regional context (Arad County) can contribute both to the local professional development discourse and to broader understandings of how career development in intercultural contexts is perceived. (Council of Europe, 2018; European Commission, 2020)

### **Methodology**

A mixed-method design was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative elements to capture attitudes, perceptions, and institutional contexts related to intercultural career development among teachers. Participants included 45 individuals: 30 in-service teachers from schools in Arad County and 15 pre-service teachers from Aurel Vlaicu University. The sample was obtained via convenience sampling and voluntary participation. The average age was 36 years; teaching experience ranged from 1 to 25 years; 80% were female.

A structured questionnaire was developed, including:

- 15 items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) assessing: (a) the perceived importance of intercultural competence for teaching; (b) attitudes toward participation in intercultural CPD; (c) perceived institutional support; (d) willingness to engage in intercultural professional development.
- Two open-ended questions soliciting reflections on barriers and motivations concerning intercultural professional development.

Data collection occurred April–May 2025 via online and paper formats. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively (means, frequencies). Qualitative responses were coded thematically, with emergent themes identified through inductive coding.

Participation was voluntary, anonymity was assured, and participants provided informed consent. Ethical approval was secured from the university's ethics committee.

### **Results**

#### **Quantitative Findings**

- A strong majority ( $\approx 92\%$ ) agreed or strongly agreed that intercultural competence is an essential aspect of teaching in diverse contexts.

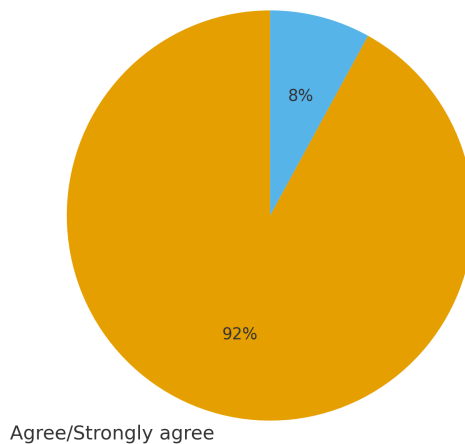


Fig. 1. Perceived importance of intercultural competence

- Approximately 78 % expressed interest in participating in professional development programmes focused on intercultural teaching.

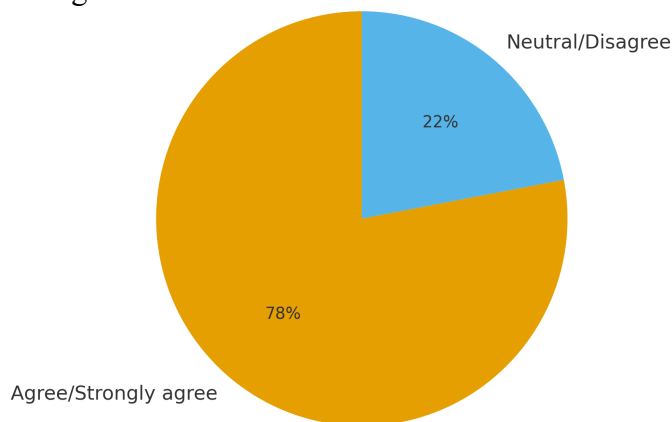


Fig. 2. Interest in intercultural CPD programmes

- Only about 43 % felt their institution currently provides adequate professional development opportunities oriented toward intercultural competence.

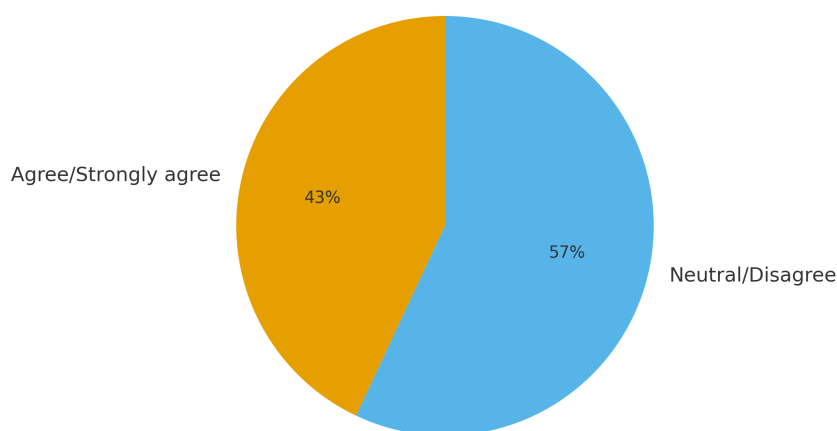


Fig. 3. Perceived institutional support for intercultural training

- Around 65 % believed that working in intercultural contexts positively influences their teaching practice and career development.

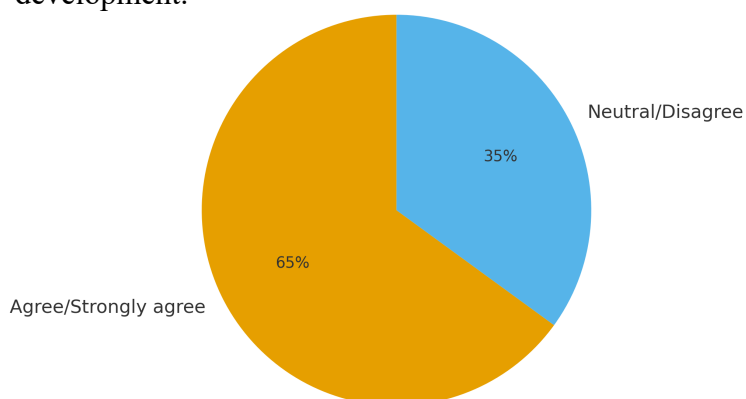


Fig. 4. Perceived positive impact of intercultural context on teaching

### Qualitative Insights

Three major thematic categories emerged:

- **Motivation and Growth:** Many participants noted that exposure to intercultural dynamics stimulated pedagogical reflection and fostered new strategies. For example: “Working with students from different cultural backgrounds has made me rethink how I plan lessons and engage them.”
- **Institutional Gaps and Support:** A frequent comment concerned the lack of tailored CPD and institutional commitment. One teacher noted: “Our school mentions intercultural diversity, but I don’t know of structured training focused on it.”

- **Cultural Sensitivity and Classroom Relationships:** Teachers emphasised the importance of understanding students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. A quote: "I want to feel confident in talking with parents from minority groups and understanding their expectations."

## Discussion

The findings demonstrate that teachers in Arad County hold positive attitudes toward career development in intercultural contexts, aligning with international research showing that attitude is a key component of intercultural competence (Gazioğlu & Güner, 2021; Petrović et al., 2024). The high level of interest in CPD indicates readiness among educators to engage in intercultural professional development.

However, the perceived lack of institutional support echoes prior studies which mention systemic barriers: resource constraints, insufficient CPD opportunities, and misalignment between training and classroom realities (Hajisoteriou, 2019; JRC, 2023). The qualitative data further highlight that while motivation is present, concrete institutional frameworks and continuous support are lacking—thus limiting the translation of positive attitudes into sustained professional growth.

For career development frameworks to be effective, they must integrate intercultural competence as a core dimension rather than an add-on. This implies that teacher training at universities (e.g., Aurel Vlaicu University) and CPD programmes must embed intercultural elements, include reflection, collaborative learning, mobility and community engagement. Embedding institutional policies that recognise, reward and support intercultural CPD is equally important.

## Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into teachers' attitudes and perceptions regarding intercultural career development, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small ( $N = 45$ ) and limited to a single county in Romania, which constrains the generalisability of the findings. Second, data were collected through self-reported questionnaires and open-ended questions, which may introduce response bias and rely on participants' willingness to reflect accurately on their experiences. Third, the study design was cross-sectional, capturing attitudes at one point in time, without exploring potential changes over time or in different educational contexts. Future research could address these limitations by employing larger, more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and

additional data collection methods such as interviews or classroom observations.

### Conclusion and Implications

This study in Arad County reveals a favourable disposition among teachers toward professional development focused on intercultural contexts; yet, systemic support remains insufficient. For sustained teacher career development in intercultural settings, the following are recommended:

1. **Integrate intercultural competence in initial teacher education:** University programmes should include modules on cultural diversity, inclusive pedagogy and reflective practice.
2. **Promote continuous professional development:** Schools and education authorities should offer regular, accessible CPD opportunities focused on intercultural teaching, including peer collaboration and international exchange.
3. **Foster institutional support and policy alignment:** Schools must embed intercultural development in institutional culture—allocating time, resources, and recognition for such training.
4. **Encourage reflective and collaborative professional learning communities:** Sharing best practices, peer mentoring and cross-school networks can strengthen teacher engagement in intercultural career development.

Future research might extend beyond attitudes to longitudinal tracking of career trajectories in intercultural contexts, or comparative studies across counties in Romania.

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