



DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF AN ONLINE TRAINING MODULE ON RACE, ETHNICITY AND CULTURE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTRUCTORS

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Abstract:

This paper presents the development and evaluation of an online training module titled “Race, Ethnicity, and Culture”, designed as part of the Erasmus+ project “JoinMe2 – Promoting Inclusive Education at Tertiary Level” (2020–2023). The module aims to enhance higher education instructors' cultural awareness and to support the implementation of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) practices in university classrooms. Using the ADDIE instructional design model, the module was developed through a structured, evidence-based process involving needs assessment, module design, content development, pilot testing with instructors from six European countries, and evaluation. Evaluation data from 30 participants indicated overall satisfaction with the module's structure and content, while some technical and content-related issues were also noted. Based on participants' feedback and suggestions, the module was revised, and refinements were made to improve it. The findings highlight the potential of the online training module to support professional development in diversity issues at a tertiary level.

Keywords: instructional design, evaluation, training module, race, ethnicity, culture, cultural awareness, culturally responsive teaching, higher education

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1. Introduction

In an increasingly diverse society, higher education institutions serve as unique environments to bring together students and staff from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. During the last decades, a wide range of educational programs and initiatives, such as Erasmus+, have promoted students' and staff's exchanges among universities for studies, training, or teaching, supporting thus the cooperation among individuals from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and among institutions from different geographical areas. In addition, recent increases in refugee and migrant flows have further enriched the diversity landscape of educational institutions (Brumen *et al.*, 2023; Chiou & Holz, 2023). In this context, cultural awareness - the ability to recognize, understand, and respect cultural diversity - is essential for higher education instructors who aspire to engage all students equitably in learning activities and teaching processes (Constantin *et al.*, 2015).

As university classrooms become increasingly diverse, university staff are called upon to adopt pedagogical practices and instructional approaches to adjust their teaching to the needs of the diverse student population, ensuring equal opportunities for all to participate in and benefit from the learning processes (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020; PeQueen, 2016). Understanding the cultural background of students and staff involved in learning and teaching processes can contribute to the promotion of learning (Woodley & Parra, 2019).

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT), guided by the principles of equity and inclusion, encourages educators to incorporate students' cultural knowledge and experiences into their teaching (Gay & Banks, 2010), while it can foster student engagement and academic performance (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020).

Despite growing awareness of the benefits of CRT, many higher education instructors do not adopt CRT practices (Bustamante *et al.*, 2009; Chiou *et al.*, 2023; Oruç-Ertürk & Yürekli, 2023) or have reported limited confidence in implementing culturally responsive practices in their classrooms (Lang *et al.*, 2023).

This paper presents the development and evaluation of an online training module, designed as part of the Erasmus+ project "JoinMe2 – Promoting Inclusive Education at Tertiary Level", to enhance higher education instructors' understanding of race, ethnicity, and culture, and to support the implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies. The goal is to help faculty staff cultivate inclusive learning environments where all students can thrive.

2. The "Joinme2" project

The project "Joinme2– Promoting Inclusive Education at Tertiary Level" (2020-2023) was funded by the Erasmus+ programme under Key Action 2. The project aimed to equip higher education (HE) instructors with the competencies needed to foster inclusive and equitable learning environments. By enhancing educators' awareness and understanding

of diversity, the project sought to create educational spaces where all students can thrive. One of the main objectives of the project was to develop training modules for higher education instructors focusing on the following diversity topics:

- 1) Disability,
- 2) Sexual orientation,
- 3) Sex, gender and identity, and
- 4) Race, ethnicity and culture.

The project consortium comprised institutions from six countries, including Belgium, Germany, Greece, Poland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The project addressed key dimensions of diversity, including ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, cultural background, and disability, ensuring a comprehensive and comparative exploration of inclusive educational strategies.

In this paper, we will present the development of an online training module focusing on race, ethnicity, and culture and will describe the stages it underwent for its finalisation.

3. Development of the online Training Module “Race, Ethnicity, and Culture”

The development of the online training module titled “Race, Ethnicity, and Culture” within the framework of the “Joinme2” project was a deliberate and structured team process. The development process underwent multiple steps to ensure that the module was evidence-based, well-designed, pedagogically sound, and aligned with the intended learning outcomes (Hamza, 2012).

For the design and development of the training module, we followed the ADDIE model (Branch, 2009). The ADDIE model is a structured approach used to design effective training and educational programs, which stands for Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. The process begins by identifying the targeted population’s needs, then moves through designing and developing appropriate content, delivering the training, and finally evaluating its effectiveness.

Below, we will outline the sequential phases involved in the module’s development process.

3.1 1st phase: Analysis - Needs assessment

The first stage involved conducting a needs assessment to identify the specific training needs related to cultural awareness and ethnic background within the higher education instructors as the target audience. This involved a) collecting data through articles and existing educational materials to understand the current situation and gaps across partner countries, and b) the cross-national study which was conducted in 2021 in the framework of the “Joinme2” project on a representative sample of 126 higher education instructors across four of the country partners: Belgium, Greece, Poland, and Turkey (Kasaboğlu & Berti Baran, 2023). For Turkey, results revealed that, although most of the instructors reported adequate cultural awareness and a positive stance toward the

diverse ethnic backgrounds of their students, students reported that their instructors are not much concerned about their ethnic backgrounds and that learning activities related to cultural awareness need to be improved (Oruç-Ertürk & Yürekli, 2023). In Poland, students reported in general positive stances of their instructors toward the diverse ethnic backgrounds of students as well as cultural awareness, while there was still room for improvements (Aleksandrovich & Gierczynska-Kolas, 2023). In Flanders, instructors also showed good cultural awareness, whereas most of them did not provide opportunities for activities related to cultural awareness (Peterson *et al.*, 2023). Similarly, in Greece, most higher education instructors exhibited positive stances toward cultural and ethnic diversity in their classrooms. Nevertheless, there was a small percentage of instructors with prejudices toward diverse ethnic groups or who were not able to adjust their teaching considering the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds in their multicultural classes (Chiou *et al.*, 2023).

3.2 2nd phase: Module design

Based on the needs assessment, the goals of this module were to raise awareness of diversity issues related to race, ethnicity and culture among higher education instructors across Europe. Taking into account the needs assessment, we set the desired learning outcomes, outlined as follows.

3.2.1 Learning outcomes

Upon the completion of the training module “Race, ethnicity and culture”, the higher education instructors will be able to:

- Define the concepts of culture, cultural awareness, race, and ethnicity,
- Recognise the value of equality, equity and diversity in education,
- Introduce into their work the ideas of culture-centred classroom.

At this step, we designed the training module's structure and determined how relevant content would be integrated into different units to enable learners to progress through the material in a logical and engaging manner.

3.3 3rd phase: Development of the module

Extensive research was undertaken to gather relevant information on race, ethnicity, and culture. This included a review of academic literature, case studies, and best practices in the field. The content focused on topics related to race, ethnicity (Anselme & Hands, 2012; Crea, 2015; Pereira, 2020), and culture (Derman-Sparks, 1993), such as cultural competence, racism and different types of racism (Grosfoguel, 2016), cultural awareness in education (Byram *et al.*, 1995; Constantin *et al.*, 2015) and culturally responsive teaching (Brumen *et al.*, 2023; Chiou & Holz, 2023; Taylor & Sidhu, 2011; Tsiaousi & Chiou, 2024).

The module comprised three basic units, including:

- a) culture and cultural awareness,
- b) race, ethnicity, and racism, and
- c) culturally responsive teaching.

During this phase, a variety of learning activities, quizzes, and multimedia elements were found or developed to enhance the learning experience of the targeted audience. These materials are visually appealing, accessible, and aligned with the goals of the module. They include visual aids, real-life examples, videos, podcasts, and interactive exercises to promote understanding and engagement.

3.4 4th phase: Implementation – The pilot testing

To evaluate the effectiveness of the training module, a structured and rigorous pilot testing phase was conducted between April and May 2023, prior to the module's official launch. The training module was tested with a targeted group of higher education instructors from partner countries. Participants were recruited through university networks and contacts provided by project partners.

An invitation for registration in the module was distributed to a total of 60 higher education instructors, 10 from each of the project's partner countries: Belgium, Germany, Greece, Poland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The invitation included information about the "Joinme2" project, the training module, and the objectives of the pilot phase. Access to the training module was given via personal passwords. Participation in the pilot testing was voluntary.

Thirty university instructors registered for and completed the module "Race, Ethnicity and Culture" training module. Participants were affiliated with partner institutions including KU Leuven (Belgium), University of Bremen (Germany), Pomeranian University in Słupsk (Poland), Izmir University of Economics (Turkey), and the University of the Aegean (Greece).

Feedback on the training module was gathered through a structured survey designed to assess its content, structure and effectiveness. The questionnaire comprised seven close-ended questions on a five-point Likert scale: four items rated from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good), two items rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and one item rated from 1 (in no case) to 5 (absolutely). At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were invited to explain the reasons for recommending or not recommending the training module, as well as to provide comments or suggestions.

Based on the feedback received, appropriate revisions and improvements would be implemented to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the training module.

3.5 5th phase: Evaluation

Responses were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to identify trends in participants' perceptions of the module's content, structure, and its impact on their teaching. The results are presented in Table 1.

Participants were asked to rate various aspects of the module. A cumulative 56.7% rated the content of the module positively, ranging from "good" to "very good". In contrast, 6.6% assessed the content as "poor" or "very poor", while 36.7% maintained a neutral stance.

In terms of structure, 63.4% of participants rated it positively, ranging from “good” to “very good”, 20% rated it as “poor” or “very poor”, and 16.7% expressed a neutral opinion.

In reference to their learning outcome, a cumulative 43.3% rated it positively (from “good” to “very good”), 20% rated it negatively (from “poor” to “very poor”), and 36.7% maintained neutral.

When asked whether they had increased their knowledge about race, ethnicity, and culture at the end of the module, 50% agreed, 26.7% disagreed to varying degrees, and 23.3% expressed no clear opinion. Out of the participants, a cumulative 40% strongly agreed or agreed that they felt more confident to reduce barriers and discrimination related to race, ethnicity, and culture in their teachings at the end of the module, 30% expressed no clear opinion, while 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

In the question, “*How would you overall rate this module?*”, a cumulative 46.6% of the participants rated it positively, 10% rated it negatively at varying degrees, and 43.3% maintained a neutral stance.

Finally, participants were asked whether they would recommend the module to colleagues. Almost half of them (46.7%) were positive in recommending this module to their colleague (“nearly absolutely” to “absolutely”), while a cumulative 20% indicated they would not recommend it.

Table 1: Evaluation of the training module

How would you rate the content of the module?				
1 – very poor	2	3	4	5 – very good
3,3%	3,3%	36,7%	26,7%	30%
How would you rate the structure of this module?				
1 – very poor	2	3	4	5 – very good
6,7%	13,3%	16,7%	26,7%	36,7%
How do you rate your learning outcome?				
1 – very poor	2	3	4	5 – very good
6,7%	13,3%	36,7%	20%	23,3%
I have increased my knowledge about race, ethnicity, and culture				
1 – strongly disagree	2	3	4	5 – strongly agree
10%	16,7%	23,3%	23,3%	26,7%
After the training, I feel more confident to reduce barriers and discrimination related to race, ethnicity, and culture in my teachings				
1 – strongly disagree	2	3	4	5 – strongly agree
10%	20%	30%	16,7%	23,3%
How would you overall rate this module?				
1 – very poor	2	3	4	5 – very good
6,7%	3,3%	43,3%	13,3%	33,3%

Would you recommend this module to your colleagues?				
1 – in no case	2	3	4	5 – absolutely
10%	10%	33,3%	10%	36,7%

In relation to the previous question, participants were asked to provide reasons for recommending or not recommending this module. Content analysis revealed three main reasons: structure, content, and methods. Regarding the structure, one participant mentioned, *“Well-structured module”*. In terms of content, one participant referred to activities, *“there are activities to reflect*, another pointed that the module includes *“clarifying definitions”*, and a third one mentioned, *“(it) gives insights for practical implications”*. Another participant referred to the instructional methods, *“interactive approach”*. Participants also noted the learning outcomes. One higher education instructor mentioned that *“cultural differences become very clear after the lesson”*, another that *“(it) promotes culturally responsive teaching”*, and a third one that it *“sensitises instructors to the issue of race, ethnicity and culture”*.

Some respondents indicated possible reasons for not recommending the module, which primarily related to technical issues and aspects of content. In reference to the technical issues, one participant referred to the voice of speaking, *“the voice is not heard well, (is) not very friendly”*, another said that *“the sound is bad”*, while a third one noted that *“there are very long URLs that are not clickable”*. Regarding the content, a respondent expressed the opinion that *“there are not many pictures”*, and another added that *“some images have no explanation”*.

Finally, respondents also provided constructive suggestions for the improvement of the module. For example, one participant suggested, *“Less theory and more practical information on how to deal with cultural diversity and how to combat racism in the classroom”*, another asked to *“collect the film and article links at the end of the module”*, a third one noted that *“culture definitions and graphics should be explained and classified”*, while a fourth respondent suggested to *“improve sound and voice”*.

As the findings suggest, more than half of the higher education instructors who participated in the pilot testing phase found the structure and the content satisfying in general. Almost half indicated that they would recommend the module to others. While participants found many positive aspects in the training module, such as clear learning outcomes, interesting content and interactive methods, and others, there were also some participants who raised some concerns. These included technical issues such as poor sound quality and inactive or overly long URLs, as well as content-related issues like the absence of explanation in some visuals or insufficient visuals.

4. Improvement of the module and future directions

The evaluation analysis provided researchers with valuable feedback on the clarity, function, and effectiveness of the *“Race, ethnicity, and culture”* training module. All comments were re-read very carefully by the authors, who listened to the module both

individually and as a team, discussing potential refinements. The revision process included the following changes:

- Ensuring all URLs are active and functional,
- Re-generating the voiceover,
- Improving sound quality and eliminating background noise,
- Adding missing explanations to visuals,
- Expanding content on culture and culturally responsive teaching,
- Enriching the practical sections of the module.

The training module is freely accessible online on the Joinme2 website (<https://joinme2.org/resources/modules/race-ethnicity-and-culture>) for all academics, researchers, practitioners and other people interested in diversity issues with a focus on race, ethnicity and culture. Although it has been primarily designed for raising academicians' awareness of diversity issues in their classes, we believe that it can also be of high interest among people who wish to learn about diversity in education. The module has been designed and organised in alignment with good e-learning practices.

The findings of this study offer implications for higher education institutions for fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion and providing opportunities for the professional development of faculty staff. The training module offers an opportunity for enhancing instructors' awareness to create inclusive learning environments. Future research should explore the long-term effects of the module on both instructors and student outcomes, using a larger and more diverse sample.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the development and evaluation of the training module presented highlights the potential of an online training module for the professional development of higher education instructors. This module aims to equip instructors with essential competencies for addressing race, ethnicity, and culture in diverse classrooms and promote inclusive educational practices. As higher education continues to evolve, such initiatives are essential to ensure that all staff have equal access and opportunities to enriching educational experiences that promote inclusive education at the tertiary level. However, institutional support for promoting such initiatives is crucial.

Conflict of Interest Statement

This study was part of the KA2 Erasmus+ Project entitled "JoinMe2 – Promoting Inclusive Education at Tertiary Level" (<https://joinme2.org/>)

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