

FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION: STRENGTHENING TEACHERS' CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SKILLS IN MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Contemporary classrooms are increasingly multilingual and culturally diverse, presenting both opportunities and challenges for teachers. Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has emerged as a vital approach to promoting inclusive and equitable learning; however, many teachers struggle to translate awareness of cultural diversity into effective classroom practices. This study examines the transition from awareness to action in strengthening teachers' culturally responsive skills in multilingual classroom settings. Adopting a descriptive and analytical research design with a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 50 teachers using a structured questionnaire and qualitative inputs. The findings reveal that while most teachers possess basic to moderate awareness of CRT, practical implementation is constrained by limited professional training, insufficient reflective practice, and inconsistent institutional support. The study identifies key competencies required for effective culturally responsive teaching and highlights the critical role of continuous, practice-oriented professional development. The paper proposes a framework to strengthen culturally responsive teaching through skill development, reflection, and institutional support, contributing to improved equity and learning outcomes in multilingual classrooms.

keywords: Culturally Responsive Teaching, Multilingual Classrooms, Teacher Professional Development

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary classrooms are increasingly characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity due to globalization, migration, and inclusive education policies. Multilingual classrooms bring rich cultural capital but also pose pedagogical challenges for teachers who may not be adequately prepared to address diverse linguistic backgrounds, cultural identities, and learning needs. In this context, **Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)** has emerged as a vital pedagogical approach that recognizes students' cultural and linguistic resources as assets for learning rather than barriers.

Culturally responsive teaching goes beyond surface-level awareness of cultural differences; it requires teachers to translate cultural understanding into purposeful instructional practices, inclusive classroom interactions, and equitable assessment strategies. However, many teachers remain at the level of awareness without sufficient skills, confidence, or institutional support to implement CRT effectively. Professional development, reflective practice, and continuous skill enhancement play a crucial role in bridging this gap.

This study, titled “From Awareness to Action: Strengthening Teachers’ Culturally Responsive Skills in Multilingual Classrooms,” seeks to examine teachers’ current awareness, identify essential competencies, evaluate the effectiveness of professional development initiatives, and propose a practical framework to strengthen culturally responsive teaching practices in multilingual educational settings.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the growing emphasis on inclusive and equitable education, many teachers in multilingual classrooms struggle to translate culturally responsive ideals into effective classroom practices. While teachers may acknowledge the importance of respecting students’ cultural and linguistic diversity, there is often a lack of concrete strategies, pedagogical skills, and reflective practices necessary to support multilingual learners effectively.

Several challenges contribute to this issue, including limited exposure to culturally responsive pedagogy during pre-service training, inadequate professional development opportunities, curriculum constraints, and assessment systems that prioritize monolingual norms. As a result, multilingual learners may experience reduced participation, lower academic achievement, and diminished sense of belonging.

The problem addressed in this study is the gap between teachers’ awareness of culturally responsive teaching and their ability to implement it effectively in multilingual classrooms. Understanding this gap and identifying ways to strengthen teachers’ skills through targeted professional development and reflective practice is essential for improving learning outcomes and promoting educational equity.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To assess teachers’ current level of awareness and understanding of culturally responsive teaching in multilingual classroom settings.
- To identify the key skills and competencies required for effective culturally responsive practice in linguistically diverse classrooms.
- To evaluate the role of professional development programs in enhancing teachers’ culturally responsive teaching skills.
- To propose a framework for strengthening teachers’ cultural responsiveness through reflective practice and continuous skill upgrading.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous studies highlight that culturally responsive teaching positively influences students’ academic achievement, engagement, and socio-emotional development, particularly in multilingual classrooms. Research indicates that teachers’ cultural awareness alone is insufficient unless supported by pedagogical skills such as culturally relevant curriculum design, inclusive communication strategies, and differentiated instruction.

Several scholars emphasize the importance of **teacher beliefs and attitudes** in shaping culturally responsive practices. Teachers who value students’ home languages and cultural identities are more likely to create inclusive learning environments. Studies also point out that reflective practice enables teachers to critically examine their biases, instructional choices, and classroom interactions.

Professional development programs focused on multicultural education have been found to enhance teachers’ cultural competence when they are ongoing, practice-oriented, and reflective in nature. However, short-term workshops without follow-up support often fail to produce sustainable changes in classroom practice. Existing literature also underscores the role of school leadership and institutional support in fostering culturally responsive teaching.

RESEARCH GAP

Although existing research acknowledges the significance of culturally responsive teaching in multilingual classrooms, several gaps remain. First, many studies focus primarily on teachers’ attitudes and awareness, with limited emphasis on the **transition from awareness to actionable classroom practices**. Second, there is insufficient empirical research examining how specific professional development initiatives contribute to sustained skill development in culturally responsive teaching.

Moreover, few studies propose **practical, context-specific frameworks** that integrate reflective practice, continuous professional learning, and skill upgrading for teachers working in multilingual environments. This study seeks to address these gaps by linking awareness, skill development, professional development, and reflective practice into a comprehensive framework aimed at strengthening teachers’ culturally responsive competencies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design using a mixed-methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' culturally responsive skills in multilingual classroom contexts. A cross-sectional design was employed to collect data from teachers at a single point in time. Quantitative data were gathered through a structured questionnaire designed to assess teachers' awareness, attitudes, and self-reported practices related to culturally responsive teaching. To complement this, qualitative data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions, which provided deeper insights into teachers' lived experiences, perceived challenges, and views on professional development. In addition, document analysis was conducted to review existing professional development programs and training materials related to multicultural and inclusive education.

The study was conducted among 50 school teachers working in multilingual classroom settings, selected using purposive sampling, with consideration given to factors such as school type, teaching experience, and subject specialization. Quantitative data were analyzed using percentage analysis, mean scores, and descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and key themes. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and the confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents throughout the research process.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected from 50 teachers working in multilingual classroom settings. The analysis is carried out in alignment with the research objectives using percentage analysis and descriptive interpretation.

Table 1: Gender-wise Distribution of Respondents

GENDER	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Male	18	36
Female	32	64
Total	50	100

The table indicates that a majority of the respondents (64%) are female teachers, reflecting the higher representation of women in the teaching profession.

Table 2: Teaching Experience of Respondents

EXPERIENCE	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Less Than 5 Years	12	24
6–10 Years	18	36
More Than 10 Years	20	40
Total	50	100

The data shows that 76% of the respondents have more than six years of teaching experience, suggesting that the opinions gathered are from experienced teachers familiar with classroom diversity.

Objective 1: Awareness of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Table 3: Familiarity with Culturally Responsive Teaching

LEVEL OF FAMILIARITY	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Very Familiar	14	28
Familiar	21	42
Neutral	9	18
Not Familiar	6	12
Total	50	100

The results reveal that 70% of teachers are either familiar or very familiar with culturally responsive teaching. However, a noticeable proportion (30%) demonstrate limited or no familiarity, indicating uneven awareness levels.

Objective 2: Skills Required for Culturally Responsive Teaching

Table 4: Key Skills Identified by Teachers

SKILL	PERCENTAGE
Cultural Awareness & Sensitivity	84

Effective Communication	78
Adaptability In Teaching Methods	72
Empathy Towards Students	68
Use Of Inclusive Materials	60
Reflective Practice	46

Cultural awareness and communication skills emerged as the most essential competencies. However, reflective practice received comparatively lower priority, indicating a need for professional emphasis on self-reflection.

Table 5: Confidence in Adapting Teaching Materials

CONFIDENCE LEVEL	PERCENTAGE
Very Confident	22
Confident	40
Neutral	20
Not Confident	18

While a majority (62%) feel confident in adapting teaching materials, a significant minority lack confidence, highlighting the need for targeted training support.

Objective 3: Role of Professional Development

Table 6: Participation in CRT Training

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE
Yes	48
No	52

More than half of the respondents have not attended any formal training related to culturally responsive teaching, revealing a major professional development gap.

Table 7: Effectiveness of Training Programs (Among Attendees)

EFFECTIVENESS	PERCENTAGE
Highly Effective	30
Somewhat Effective	50
Not Effective	20

Teachers who participated in training largely perceived it as effective, particularly when it involved practical and reflective components.

Table 8: Institutional Support for Cultural Reflection

FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Regularly	18
Occasionally	36
Rarely	28
Never	18

The findings indicate limited institutional support for reflective discussions on cultural diversity, which may hinder sustained implementation of culturally responsive practices.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. The study reveals that a majority of teachers possess a **basic to moderate level of awareness** regarding culturally responsive teaching; however, this awareness does not consistently translate into effective classroom practices in multilingual settings.
2. **Cultural awareness and effective communication skills** were identified as the most essential competencies required for teaching in linguistically diverse classrooms, indicating teachers' recognition of the importance of understanding students' cultural backgrounds.

3. A significant proportion of teachers reported **limited confidence in adapting teaching materials** to suit diverse linguistic and cultural needs, highlighting a gap between theoretical understanding and practical application.
4. More than half of the respondents had **not participated in formal professional development programs** related to culturally responsive or inclusive teaching, suggesting inadequate training opportunities.
5. Teachers who had attended professional development programs perceived them as **moderately to highly effective**, particularly when the programs were practical, reflective, and experience-based.
6. The findings indicate that **reflective practice is underutilized**, despite its recognized importance in improving culturally responsive teaching skills.
7. Institutional support for culturally responsive practices, including opportunities for reflection and peer discussion, was found to be **irregular and insufficient** in many educational settings.
8. Overall, the study highlights a clear **gap between awareness and action**, emphasizing the need for continuous professional development, institutional support, and reflective practices to strengthen teachers' culturally responsive skills in multilingual classrooms.

SUGGESTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions and policy implications are proposed to strengthen teachers' culturally responsive skills in multilingual classroom settings.

Suggestions

1. Strengthening Pre-Service Teacher Education

Culturally responsive teaching should be integrated as a **core component of pre-service teacher education programs**. Teacher training curricula must move beyond theoretical awareness and focus on practical strategies, classroom simulations, and case-based learning related to multilingual and multicultural contexts.

2. Continuous and Practice-Oriented Professional Development

Educational institutions should organize **regular, sustained professional development programs** on culturally responsive and inclusive teaching. Workshops should be experiential in nature, enabling teachers to apply culturally responsive strategies, reflect on classroom experiences, and share best practices.

3. Promotion of Reflective Teaching Practices

Teachers should be encouraged to engage in **systematic reflective practices**, such as reflective journals, peer observation, and self-assessment, to critically examine their teaching methods, biases, and classroom interactions in multicultural settings.

4. Institutional Support and Collaborative Learning

Schools and colleges must foster a supportive environment by creating **professional learning communities** where teachers can discuss challenges, exchange ideas, and collaboratively develop culturally responsive instructional strategies.

5. Use of Inclusive Curriculum and Teaching Materials

Curriculum planners and teachers should ensure the inclusion of **culturally diverse examples, texts, and learning materials** that reflect students' linguistic and cultural identities, thereby promoting engagement and inclusivity.

6. Effective Use of Technology in Multilingual Classrooms

Digital tools and multilingual educational resources should be utilized to support diverse learners. Technology-enabled platforms can facilitate differentiated instruction and improve access to culturally relevant content.

Policy Implications

1. Policy Integration of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Educational policies should explicitly recognize culturally responsive teaching as a **key component of inclusive and equitable education**, particularly in linguistically diverse contexts.

2. Mandatory In-Service Training on Cultural Responsiveness

Policymakers should mandate **periodic in-service training programs** on culturally responsive pedagogy for teachers, ensuring uniform professional competency across institutions.

3. Institutional Accountability and Monitoring

Educational authorities should develop mechanisms to **monitor and evaluate the implementation** of culturally responsive practices in schools through inspections, self-assessment reports, and professional audits.

4. Leadership Development and Administrative Support

School leaders and administrators should be trained to support culturally responsive initiatives by providing resources, encouraging reflective practices, and promoting inclusive school cultures.

5. Alignment with National and Inclusive Education Policies

The implementation of culturally responsive teaching should be aligned with broader **national education policies** aimed at inclusion, equity, and diversity, ensuring consistency between policy goals and classroom practices.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the transition from awareness to action in strengthening teachers' culturally responsive skills within multilingual classroom contexts. The findings reveal that while teachers generally acknowledge the importance of culturally responsive teaching, their ability to implement such practices effectively remains limited. This gap is largely attributed to insufficient professional training, lack of continuous reflective practice, and inadequate institutional support. The study highlights that culturally responsive teaching requires more than surface-level cultural awareness; it demands purposeful pedagogical skills, inclusive instructional strategies, and an ongoing commitment to professional growth. Teachers who had access to structured and practice-oriented professional development demonstrated greater confidence and effectiveness in addressing linguistic and cultural diversity in their classrooms.

However, the inconsistent availability of such training underscores the need for systemic interventions. By integrating awareness, skill development, reflective practice, and institutional support into a coherent framework, this study emphasizes the importance of sustained professional learning in fostering culturally responsive teaching. Strengthening these dimensions can enhance student engagement, promote equity, and improve learning outcomes in multilingual educational settings. In conclusion, moving from awareness to action in culturally responsive teaching is both a pedagogical and policy imperative. Educational institutions and policymakers must collaborate to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared, supported, and empowered to meet the needs of diverse learners. Such efforts are essential for building inclusive classrooms that recognize cultural diversity as a valuable educational resource rather than a challenge.

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