

International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research
Vol. 23, No. 11, pp. 384-401, November 2024
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.23.11.20>
Received Aug 29, 2024; Revised Oct 22, 2024; Accepted Nov 18, 2024

Optimising Culturally Responsive Pedagogies in Multicultural English Second Language Classrooms

Nomasomi Hilda Matiso* 

Faculty of Education
Walter Sisulu University, South Africa

Abstract. In the era of globalisation, multilingual and multicultural classrooms are a common phenomenon, in which learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact in various social and academic settings. The objective of this paper was to explore ways by which culturally responsive pedagogies (CRPs), which acknowledge the linguistic diversity of English second language (ESL) learners and embrace their native languages by fostering a more inclusive, effective and culturally sensitive ESL classroom, can be strengthened. This inquiry was grounded on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and the multiliteracies framework, which emphasise the importance of exposing students to culturally rich contextually relevant materials and interactions. Thus, applying them to the classroom context will help understand how cultural and linguistic factors impact learning. An interpretive paradigm was used as the basis of this inquiry. A qualitative approach and a case study design were used to gather information from 16 conveniently chosen lecturers through semi-structured interviews. Through the adoption of a thematic analysis method, it was specified that the adoption of a variety of instructional strategies, such as peer collaboration, technology-assisted learning (TAL), differentiated instruction, and interactive approaches, could strengthen culturally responsive pedagogies. It was also found that the creation of inclusive and conducive learning environments results in students' increased motivation and engagement when they perceive that their native languages are used in the educational process. The author suggests that, to prepare students for a globalised environment in which English is the universal language, language education policies that respect the heritage of native language speakers are necessary.

Keywords: culturally responsive pedagogy; linguistic diversity; multiculturalism; multilingualism

*Corresponding author; Nomasomi Hilda Matiso, nmatiso@wsu.ac.za

1. Introduction

The objective of this paper was to explore ways by which CRPs, which acknowledge the linguistic diversity of ESL learners and embrace their native languages by fostering a more inclusive, effective and culturally sensitive ESL classroom, can be strengthened. The increasing diversity in schools across the nation has made it more important than ever for teachers to consider cultural differences intentionally. Studies have indicated that nowadays, the socio-cultural identities of minority students are still marginalised, while those of dominant cultures are reinforced (Kyriakidis et al., 2024). According to research, students of colour have long been underestimated academically by public school teachers as they perceived cultural differences as hindrances, rather than as opportunities for growth and learner achievement (Will & Najaro, 2022). Thus, with the realisation that learners' cultural traits and knowledge have a significant influence on the instructional practices used in the classroom, teachers have embarked on culturally-based pedagogies (Will & Najaro, 2022).

For many students at South African higher education institutions (HEIs), language remains a barrier to achievement (Bukhari et al., 2021; Grain et al., 2022; Mabena, 2021). Indigenous languages in South Africa have fundamentally been denied the formal space to function as academic and scientific languages, even though they are officially recognised as languages of learning and teaching (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2020). Additionally, according to a report by the DHET (2020), the potential of African languages to help students succeed and get entry into HEIs has not received much attention. Thus, the challenge facing South African HEIs is to ensure the creation of a multilingual environment where all official South African languages, especially those that have historically been marginalized, are given room to grow as languages of scholarship, research, and instruction.

The Department of Higher Education and Training (2020), whose aim is to combat the persistent underdevelopment and undervaluing of the historically marginalised indigenous languages, stipulates that conditions must be established for the growth and reinforcement of native languages as sources of knowledge in the various higher education fields, and as languages of meaningful academic discourse. Thus, the Language Policy for Higher Education Institutions (LPHE), under DHET (2020) *“provides guidelines for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of institutional language policies, with specific reference to universities through enhancing the status and roles of previously marginalised South African languages to foster institutional inclusivity as well as social cohesion”* (p. 1). Similarly, UNESCO (2020) posits that the Constitutional values of inclusivity, social cohesion and equity of access must always be indorsed in the implementation of language policies. Equity of access thus emphasises recognition of all the official languages as languages of learning and teaching in schools.

On the other hand, the Language in Education Policy (LieP, 1997) specifies that:
“The Department of Education recognises that our cultural diversity is a valuable national asset and hence is tasked, amongst other things, to

promote multilingualism, the development of the official languages, and respect of all languages used in the country.” (p. 2)

The South African Language in Education Policy (1997) emphasises the recognition of the indigenous languages and the respect of all languages. Subsequently, the Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions (LPHE, 2020) emphasises that English be utilised as a language of learning and teaching across South African HEIs. However, to guarantee academic achievement, essential support must be provided to students whose native language is not English. Furthermore, when students demonstrate proficiency in various languages other than English, such students should be cherished and encouraged to utilise those languages effectively (DBE, 2020). Recognition of the indigenous languages does not pose any threats to English as a lingua franca.

To meet the educational requirements of various student groups, a culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) has emerged as a crucial framework (Gay, 2018; Hebert, 2022). CRP emphasises the significance of acknowledging and merging students’ background experiences into the learning environment to promote active participation that yields effective results (Alameddine, 2021). With the goal of making education more relevant and successful for all students, it places a strong emphasis on incorporating students’ cultural backgrounds into the learning process (Caingcoy, 2023). CRP entails appreciating and respecting the diverse linguistic and cultural contributions that students make to multilingual and multicultural classrooms., which can improve instruction and encourage inclusivity.

Students, who see that their educators value and include them in their lessons, are more at ease and inclined to participate in the lessons being taught in their classrooms (Hebert, 2022). In this paper, the author argues for the adoption of intercultural education, and presents the best teaching practices suitable to be employed in multicultural and multilingual classrooms. Reminding oneself constantly that when they deal with people from diverse cultural origins, they are also interacting with different cultural worldviews, can be a challenge for instructors, students, and their parents. These exchanges have much to do with power relations and obscure networks of expectations, values, and meanings that are sometimes difficult to identify or understand.

Integrating students’ artistic distinctiveness and standpoints into the schooling practices is a crucial aspect of CRP, which goes beyond “good teaching” (Ladson-Billings, 2021a). Culturally responsive pedagogy seeks to enhance academic performance, encourage learners’ critical thinking, and support positive self-identity (Gay, 2018; Walia, 2022). The unfortunate truth is that children of migrant labourers or people of minority status are frequently advised that their language and culture are useless and that they should assimilate into the majority culture. They might even face prejudice. Children’s sense of self and their attitude toward themselves and their people are especially harmed by this.

Hameed (2022) articulated that mother-tongue-based education has become more widespread worldwide for pedagogical and linguistic reasons as well as for emancipatory and empowering linguistic human rights grounds. This demonstrates that the goal of multilingual education should be to educate students in a language that they can understand, as well as assisting minority and indigenous populations in learning the language of the majority.

UNESCO (2020) reiterates that cultural identity encompasses not only the inheritance of languages and lessons from one generation to the next, but also the collection of artifacts and monuments. Encouraging pupils to have intellectual conversations in the language they use at home promotes diversity of thought and honours cultural identity. "Mother tongue education fosters a sense of self-worth and cultural identity beyond academic benefits" (Sundararajan, 2024, p.6). Because speaking a language requires knowing the culture and becoming fully integrated into it, language serves as a medium for cultural exchange among community members (Parajuli, 2018). To achieve a focussed discussion, this study was steered by the following research question:

- How can a culturally responsive pedagogy, which acknowledges the linguistic diversity of ESL learners and embraces their native languages, be strengthened in multicultural classrooms?

2. Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of culturally responsive pedagogies which recognise the learners' native languages as languages of learning and teaching (Chang & Viesca, 2022; Gay, 2018; Goforth et al., 2024; Iwuanyamwu, 2023). These scholars argue that one of the most important aspects of teaching that promotes cultural responsiveness is engaging students' traditions, qualities, practices, and viewpoints to advance classroom instruction. Children of minority groups in the classroom benefit from this kind of instruction because it gives them a sense of belonging and relating with other students in the classroom, and in other academic environments, thereby endorsing student engagement and success (Gay, 2018). However, some studies have shown that CRP has not yet been effectively implemented in the institutions of learning owing to several factors (DHET, 2020; Gonzalez, 2022).

2.1 Advantages of Using a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy has many advantages. In numerous nations, CRP has proven successful in revitalizing endangered language groups. Students require positive attitudes to be reinforced, and a nurturing environment that facilitates comprehension. Liu et al. (2021) postulate that teaching a child in their mother tongue serves as a means of fostering a sense of value for their language and culture, which in turn forms a basis for advancing their education and development. Studies reveal that teaching that is sensitive to cultural differences can enhance students' motivation, engagement and academic performance (Chang & Viesca, 2022). CRP contributes to the construction of a welcoming environment in which students feel appreciated and recognized, which can boost their confidence and sense of self-worth. Additionally, CRP develops critical thinking skills in students by pushing them to confront and question social norms

and injustices, enabling them to become engaged and knowledgeable citizens (Paris & Alim, 2017).

There is a strong opinion that a particular set of people's beliefs, values, and attitudes, which are referred to as their culture, shape students' behaviour patterns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Gay (2018), school attainment can be enhanced by matching education to the cultural communication patterns of various ethnic groups since one's thoughts, writings, and speech reflect culture and have an impact on performance. Gay (2018) postulates that a culturally responsive pedagogy places a high value on students' intellectual development, which includes their capacity for problem solving. Additionally, it fosters an atmosphere in which students can become knowledgeable about at least one other culture while simultaneously affirming and appreciating their own culture. Additionally, it seeks to impart to students the skills necessary to recognize, evaluate, and resolve real-world issues, particularly those that give rise to injustices against marginalized communities in society.

2.2 The Role Played by Educators in Culturally Responsive Education

Gay (2018) describes the roles that educators must play to accomplish culturally responsive education. Gay claims that educators ought to be well-versed in cultural diversity. Teachers need to be aware of combining ethnic values, backgrounds, and inputs from other racial and ethnic groups into their lessons (Chang & Viesca, 2022). It is also essential to adopt courses that are suited for the culture of the diverse learners. Teachers ought to include a range of perspectives in their classes, and confirm that the descriptions on whiteboards and all classroom exhibits, embrace diversity. Additionally, instructors must contextualize problems considering students' gender, class, and ethnicity. Teachers should take into cognisance the learners' varied communication styles and align their instructional practices and interactions to accommodate all (Yotta, 2023). For example, many communities of English native language speakers use active, interactive communication. Thus, a teacher who is a non-native English speaker may erroneously judge a student as being rude in certain behaviours, as what is accepted in one culture might be regarded as taboo in another. Thus, adopting a culturally responsive pedagogy needs tolerance of other people's cultures, a degree of flexibility to change, and eagerness to learn from other cultures.

Teachers should draw connections between newly taught material and their students' prior knowledge and cultural experiences. Culturally responsive education is typified by a classroom that is well equipped with reading resources, including characters and imagery that embrace diversity, such as different age groups, gender, and cultures (Eden et al., 2024). This exposes students to expertise from all ethnic origins. This also raises awareness about some imbalances that result in the marginalisation of certain groups of people. Moreover, students consider a range of insights when deliberating about ancient and contemporary events, especially those of marginalized groups that are occasionally omitted in history. A critical consciousness component that gives students the freedom to question and examine social injustices is another essential component of culturally responsive education (Iwuanyamwu, 2023). Teachers should

encourage students to create connections between the core curriculum, their background knowledge and social involvements (Liu et al., 2021).

Caingcoy (2023) conducted a systematic literature review study that emphasized the significance of acknowledging ethnic experiences, fostering relationships, customizing teaching, and fostering awareness of other people's cultures. The results of this study showed that while healthy relationships promote belonging and well-being, acknowledging students' histories improves academic achievement and engagement. In addition, Caingcoy (2023) contends that for better results, teachers should use strategies that foster recognition of their learners' wide-ranging needs. Students who are encouraged to be critical thinkers are more equipped to confront societal injustices and stereotypes. Sustained professional growth and assistance are necessary for successful learning (Caingcoy, 2023).

In education, a culturally responsive pedagogy, which honours a range of backgrounds, is essential to creating inclusive learning environments. Durante (2022) and Iwuanyamwu (2023) concur that providing teacher educators with the information and services required to support "pre-service and in-service educators" in their shift to culturally responsive practice, cannot be overstated. To implement CRP successfully in the classroom, teachers need to have the necessary tools for teaching and assessment (Franco et al., 2024). By implementing pedagogies that acknowledge learners' cultures, teachers can generate classroom environments that foster student empowerment, academic performance, and a feeling of community and respect for all (Chang & Viesca, 2022; Mansfield et al., 2021; Morrison et al., 2021). According to Banks (2016), curricula should incorporate cultural diversity and teach practices that promote inclusive classrooms where all students feel empowered.

Khalifa (2018) contends that educators can support student achievement by helping them understand and embrace community interests, as well as by humanizing them in the classroom. Teachers should assist learners to comprehend that varied cultural perspectives enable them to view the world from different perspectives, rather than elevating or demeaning other cultures (Ladson-Billings, 2021b). Education is the core of culturally responsive education and teaching of concern in classroom instruction that is centred around multi-ethnic cultural frames of reference (Gay, 2018). CRP is based on the premise that when academic knowledge and skills are contextualized within students' life experiences and frames of reference, they become more personally relevant, engaging, and comprehensible (Gay, 2018). Culturally responsive education also involves a more complete review of classroom norms and behaviour expectations. For example, speaking during someone else's speech demonstrates to certain students how involved and attentive they are to the discussion (Aronson & Laughter, 2018). However, for some cultures, interruption during someone else's speech is unacceptable; it is associated with impoliteness.

Cindi (2021) postulates that teachers should develop their multicultural awareness abilities to become more self-aware and more aware of others, as well as enhancing their interpersonal skills, and seeing linguistically challenged

students' learning from a different perspective. Providing teachers with a significant scope of how students' cultural, linguistic, and racial identities grow and how these constructions affect learning, supports the use of culturally responsive approaches (Goforth et al., 2024).

2.3 Factors Inhibiting Effective Implementation of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Although CRP has advantages, putting it into practice in multicultural classrooms can be difficult. The reluctance of educational institutions to adapt is one major obstacle. It is possible that some administrators and educators are hesitant to use new teaching strategies or are unaware of the significance of CRP. A DBE (2020) report indicated that the Language Policy Framework for Higher Institutions has limitations which hinder effective implementation by universities. Some of the limitations cited include the following:

“Lack of enforceable mechanisms built into the policy; lack of funding or incentives by government to support the implementation of the policy; as well as lack of clear directives within the policy on how multilingualism is to be realised within higher education institutions. Lack of alignment with the curriculum and language policy of the DBE was also cited as a major hurdle for the development and use of indigenous languages at university level.” (DBE, 2020, p.9)

Moreover, a dearth of culturally relevant teaching resources and resources may make it difficult for teachers to integrate CRP effectively into their classes (Iwuanyanwu, 2023). In a similar vein, Samuels' (2018) research revealed that instructors may lack the knowledge, materials, or resources necessary to support a varied, inclusive, and representative curriculum when they have restricted access to them or do not know where to obtain them.

Additionally, Samuels' (2018) study found that educators frequently discussed the pressures and limitations imposed by time and scarce resources. Teachers also noted that it could be time consuming to fit in learning opportunities for all demographics when time is already limited owing to demanding curricula and large class numbers, particularly when attempting to address the needs of a diverse classroom population (Whitlock & Marcellus, 2024). Participants, in Samuels's study also highlighted the difficulty of having a limited grasp of the assets and cultures of the students and communities they work with. This can lead to a potential disconnect and a lower chance of adopting this framework. In Samuels' (2018) study, participants raised concern about restricted exposure and contact with historically marginalised groups or persons of colour, especially white teachers. Teachers may view differences as inferior or less valued when they are unfamiliar with or have not experienced persons who are different from themselves (Samuels, 2018). In super-diverse settings, curriculum design for multilingual and multicultural classrooms is another troublesome topic. Despite some significant efforts by individuals, even in circumstances where a curriculum is in place, there is typically a substantial paucity of adequate materials. As a result, educators are unable to help each learner in their native tongue (Kyriakidis et al., 2024).

Gonzalez (2022) revealed that teachers' perceptions of students from cultures other than their own as less capable, bright, or devoid of encouragement or drive, is a serious concern in education. Teachers with deficit-based perspectives continued the practice of implicitly passing judgment on culturally and linguistically diverse pupils because they were unable to comprehend the cultures that differed from their own. Culturally and linguistically diverse students are perceived as "*empty little heads into which we will deposit coins of knowledge*", rather than as knowledge banks (Montemayor, 2010, p. 33). The false belief that children from minority backgrounds should adhere and succumb to the existing system of the majority reduces opportunities that minority students have for learning (Gonzalez, 2022).

Iwuanyamwu (2023) explains that in a single classroom, it can be difficult to decide which language to use when there are students whose native tongues differ. Language gaps therefore have the potential to cause miscommunications and even turn into serious situations, therefore educators must make sure that no culture is regarded as better than any other (Ogunniyi, 2022). To address the difficulties that come with teaching in multicultural classrooms, educators should take an all-inclusive approach to learning, and show that they genuinely want to learn about each student's interests, hobbies, and cultural background to build rapport and trust. To make pupils feel valued, at ease, and motivated, teachers should also work to develop relationships with them that are founded on equity and understanding.

3. Theoretical Framework

This inquiry was based on Gay's (2018) CRP and the multiliteracies framework (Drewry et al., 2019). CRP highlights the importance of exposing learners to culturally rich contextually relevant materials and interactions. In multilingual and multicultural classrooms, this means presenting language in culturally authentic situations, helping students bridge the gap between their existing cultural knowledge and the cultural expectations embedded in the language. Students' cultural backgrounds are acknowledged and valued by educators in culturally responsive teaching. It emphasizes the need for literacy teaching to go beyond traditional print literacy to include cultural, linguistic, and technological competencies.

The multiliteracies framework, according to Drewry et al. (2019), aligns with culturally responsive pedagogy by recognizing the diversity of students' literacies (including digital and media literacy). It prepares students to communicate effectively in a variety of formats and cultural contexts. It focuses on multimodal communication skills which are vital for navigating the digital world. It further encourages students to engage with texts that reflect their cultural experiences, building communication skills across different contexts and mediums. Within multicultural and multilingual classrooms, this paradigm highlights how crucial it is to incorporate students' cultural experiences into the educational process. In these classrooms teachers should choose scenarios and examples for their lessons that speak to the students' varied cultural backgrounds (Eden et al., 2024). This

not only increases the significance of the learning process but also promotes cultural identity and a sense of belonging.

Regardless of socioeconomic background, colour, or gender, policies play a crucial role in shaping and evaluating the quality, suitability, and appropriateness of educational services provided to all students (Gonzalez, 2022). One gap the study points out is that, despite state calls to rethink education in settings that are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and religion, culturally responsive practices have not received the recognition or support they deserve to address the importance of culture in classrooms, schools, and students (DBE, 2020; Schettino et al., 2019). Programmes that aim to appreciate and encourage learning that is culturally and linguistically appropriate for everyone are therefore necessary. However, they are rarely routinely used or systemically executed (Gonzalez, 2022). If instruction in public schools is not culturally appropriate, it cannot and should not be regarded as high quality (Riehl, 2020). According to the DBE (2020), many educators are still unprepared to offer diverse pupils engaging learning opportunities that propel them toward high achievement and other favourable results. Thus, a culturally responsive pedagogy will have been achieved if learners are given the opportunity to be educated in their own languages, and if teachers receive training in the application of culturally responsive pedagogies.

4. Methodology

The term “research methodology” describes the methodical, scientific approach to conducting research, looking into issues, and gathering information and data for a certain goal (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It includes the methods and strategies for locating, gathering, analysing, and interpreting data to provide answers to research questions or resolve issues (Khan et al., 2023).

4.1 Interpretivism

Interpretivism is well-defined by the belief that reality is subjective, socially constructed, and multidimensional. This suggests that the only way we can understand someone else is by seeing through their lens of reality, which can be different from one’s own because of social or historic influences. Interpretive techniques rely on questioning and observation to identify or develop a rich and deep understanding of the subject under investigation.

4.2 Research Approach

In the social sciences and other related fields, a qualitative research methodology is a means of collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (Truman, 2023). This research methodology uses tools such as focus groups and interviews to explore and comprehend human behaviour, experiences, and opinions (Bhangu et al., 2023). The goal of qualitative approach is to offer comprehensive information and a greater comprehension of the subtleties and intricacies of the research topic (Lester, 2023). Bengtson (2016) claimed that a research design is a rigorous approach that the researcher modifies to deliver reputable, unbiased, and precise responses to inquiries. It is therefore regarded as a thorough blueprint for the entire study project (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This paper adopted a case study design, which enabled the researcher to interact with the participants

investigating the case under inquiry. Case studies allow the researcher to have a close interaction with the participants by probing deeper to obtain comprehensible answers for clarity.

4.3 Participant Selection

Participants for this inquiry were purposely selected from a South African institution of higher learning. Since South Africa is a multilingual country, participants were lecturers who teach in culturally diverse classrooms. Sixteen lecturers from different disciplines were selected. Six participants were Creative Arts and Culture lecturers, who speak isiXhosa and isiMpondo, which are varieties of the Nguni languages. Ten were language lecturers, that is, five English and five Xhosa lecturers. All five English lecturers spoke English as a second language, while the Xhosa lecturers were native speakers of isiXhosa.

4.4 Data Collection Instruments

Semi-structured interviews, which were audio-taped for reference during data analysis stage with the participants' consent, were administered. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to pose questions to participants with the aim of learning more about their opinions and beliefs regarding the adoption of a culturally responsive pedagogy (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). With the participants' agreement, interviews were audio-taped. Interviews were administered for a period of two weeks, with two participants per day. For validation of data collection instruments, a pilot study, which aimed at examining the feasibility of the semi-structured interviews, was conducted prior to the commencement of the main study.

4.5 Data Analysis

According to Braun et al. (2018), the process of classifying data and finding patterns (relationships) between categories is the main inductive step in qualitative data analysis. The researcher adhered to the six-step thematic analysis process proposed by Terry et al. (2017). These procedures consist of familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition and naming the themes (Cernasev & Axon, 2023).

5. Discussion and Findings

The objective of this paper was to explore ways by which culturally responsive pedagogies, which acknowledge the linguistic diversity of ESL learners and embrace their native languages by fostering a more inclusive, effective and culturally sensitive ESL classroom, can be strengthened. Themes that arose from data analysis included adopting a variety of instructional methodologies and creating an inclusive and supporting environment.

5.1 Theme 1: Adoption of a variety of instructional strategies

One of the major findings related to how a culturally responsive pedagogy could be reinforced in schools was the adoption of a variety of instructional strategies. This included peer collaboration, TAL, differentiated instruction, interactive approaches and cultural responsiveness. Gay (2018) contends that implementing CRP in multilingual and multicultural classrooms involves several strategies. Teachers must adopt culturally responsive teaching methods that include

culturally relevant curriculum content, diverse instructional materials, and inclusive classroom practices (UNESCO, 2020). For instance, using literature from various cultures can help students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and validate their cultural identities (Ogunniyi, 2022). Moreover, bilingual education programmes and dual-language immersion programmes are effective ways to support multilingual students, helping them achieve proficiency in both their native language and the language of instruction (Gay, 2018). Some participants mentioned that using varied teaching methods can be beneficial in multicultural classrooms:

“When dealing with heterogeneous groups, you need to adopt various modes of lesson delivery, and a variety of strategies, ranging from oral transmission, step-by-step approach, peer learning, team teaching, democratic style of facilitation, and technology-based learning models. I partner the learners with others from a different culture for mentoring.”
(Participant C)

The response above indicates that a variety of instructional strategies, including oral transmission, a step-by-step approach, peer learning, team teaching, a democratic style of facilitation, and technology-based learning models, are essential. Social and emotional development, genuine engagement, and critical thinking are all encouraged in a democratic classroom. Students feel empowered in a humanizing environment (Marschall, 2021). This is *“education as a practice of freedom”* (Specia & Osman, 2015, p. 1). Establishing a democratic classroom requires knowing how to set up our spaces, foster community, and offer students’ diverse opinions, thoughts, perspectives, and space (Marschall, 2021). Encouraging democratic living among students in a democratic classroom involves introducing them to concepts such as involvement, voice, inclusivity, and representation (Karlsen & Ohna, 2021).

To foster social connection, encourage student agency, and prepare students for being involved citizens, particularly, after the prolonged periods of distance learning, our classroom communities are more crucial than ever. Democratic classrooms are warm, inviting milieus where students enthusiastically exercise autonomous values, recognise their human rights, and take ownership of their actions as members of society and as individuals. Thus, our classrooms are one way we may create this atmosphere. Interaction with diverse cultures enables students to cultivate a worldview that is both internationally inclusive and empathic (Eden et al., 2024).

Including news sources in the classroom can help learners who do not have access to newspapers at home and inspire them to talk about societal issues (Marschall, 2021). This is in line with Richards and Rodgers (2017) who posit that multi-media texts should be used in ESL and English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom to facilitate communicative competence. Texts that provide information can give pupils factual knowledge to build arguments in class. Students’ comprehension of democratic concepts and principles can be enhanced by taking ownership of cooperation and the tone of conversations in small groups. Social activities are especially crucial for students in younger age groups. Students’ ability to test their own viewpoints in exchanges with others appears to be strengthened in an open

classroom setting. Some participants echoed that oral transmission can be fostered through storytelling:

“Have culturally inclusive topics. These include storytelling activities. Stories often depict complex social issues and emotional experiences. This helps them develop empathy and social understanding. This also promotes social bonds and a sense of belonging. This also creates cultural tolerance as learners listen to stories from other cultures.” (Participant F)

Integrating storytelling into schools’ curricula is a powerful way to promote and preserve cultural heritage while enhancing cognitive and social development in students (Schachtner, 2020). By valuing and incorporating the rich tapestry of stories from various cultures, educators can create a more inclusive and dynamic learning. Additionally, teachers can also promote peer learning during storytelling activities by allowing learners to tell stories from their own cultures to their peers. Through peer modelling, children pick up knowledge from one another. As students share their language abilities and cultural perspectives, group activities and teamwork can help with language acquisition and create a positive learning atmosphere (Sato & Ballinger, 2016).

5.2 Theme 2: Creation of an inclusive and supporting environment

Catering for culturally diverse learners involves creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment that respects and values the differences in students’ backgrounds, languages, and experiences. The world is fast becoming a global village, with multilingual and multicultural classrooms taking centre stage.

“I think you should first make them aware of globalisation, and that as people move across the globe, they migrate with their respective cultures. So, as a multicultural society, we need to respect and embrace other peoples’ cultures and beliefs, since no culture is superior to others. Then on cultural day, for example, students will be required to prepare their cultural dishes, dress according to their cultures, and perform cultural events. To broaden their knowledge, I think it will also help to make them research and present on their cultures.” (Participant G)

The participant’s response above indicates that recognition of other people’s cultures by allowing students to perform their cultural activities can create an inclusive and supporting environment. Cultural days at school provide platforms for incorporating learners’ languages. Incorporating learners’ native languages in ESL and EFL instruction can provide several advantages. It can promote cross-linguistic transfer, allowing learners to leverage their existing knowledge (Wang, 2023). Moreover, it fosters cultural inclusivity and helps maintain a positive self-identity among learners (Henry, 2023). Furthermore, where skills and knowledge from one language can positively impact the learning of another, the teacher should utilise that opportunity for the creation of an all-inclusive classroom that benefits all learners. Riehl (2020) emphasizes the importance of “interdependence” among languages, in which proficiency in the native language can facilitate the acquisition of a second language. Wang (2023) expands on this concept by introducing the notion of “multicompetence”, highlighting how learners’ linguistic repertoires can mutually reinforce each other. Teachers can establish significant links between the curriculum and students’ life experiences

by acknowledging and incorporating students' cultural perspectives into the instructional design (Ladson-Billings, 2021a). The sense of relevance and authenticity that is fostered by this congruence between instruction and students' cultural backgrounds improves student engagement and learning results (Ellerbrock et al., 2016).

One participant added that, in fostering an inclusive environment, students can be allowed to explain to the class the history of their cultural days, thus, creating a feeling of inclusion:

"I would create a culture of inclusion by celebrating and acknowledging different cultures in my classroom. We create strong relationships to avoid the isolation felt by individual learners. This can be done by identifying different cultures in the classroom, knowing the months and dates. Then allow students to showcase these in class and explain the history of each to the entire class. By doing so, students will feel the inclusion without feeling isolated." (Participant D)

To create the most all-encompassing learning atmosphere feasible for all students, educators should assess how culturally responsive their classrooms are and make deliberate adjustments. Another participant indicated that they create mixed groups and assign tasks to the learners to research certain topics. When the learners present their tasks in class, they use pictures to explain the meaning of words to the entire class:

"In Creative Arts and Culture, I give them tasks to go and research about their own cultures. In my classroom, I have cultural diversity, Zulus, Xhosas, Zimbabweans, Sothos, Vendas and Tswanas etc. The groups are mixed so that they share their cultures. When they present in groups, they use pictures and write their names in their languages. The students present their research in class. As a lecturer, I am a researcher and a learner. I have learnt that there are intercultural messages embedded in these dances. We learn about how different cultures perform the dances differently. We also learn to tolerate other cultures if they perform differently from others. I allow them to perform dances from their cultural groups." (Participant C)

The participant's response above shows that South African HEIs are characterised by culturally and linguistically diverse learners, including, Zulus, Xhosas, Zimbabweans, Vendas, and Tswanas. The participant's response also indicates that in Creative Arts classes, different groups perform dances from their cultures. This facilitates inclusion and tolerance from other cultures. The participant affirmed that as different cultures perform dances from their cultures, students learn from one another, as there are intercultural messages embedded in these performances.

Hebert (2022) outlines various factors that need to be considered by teachers to meet the needs of multilingual learners from diverse backgrounds. These include, among others, models and suitable assistance that will sufficiently create sufficient opportunities for language and subject matter learning to occur simultaneously (Iwuanyanwu, 2023). Furthermore, to engage every student as an

active participant, educators must figure out how to make learning interesting and accessible. Using effective techniques, such as visual aids, conversation structures, graphic organizers, and many more, is essential to creating an engaging learning environment for all students (Hebert, 2022). Additionally, as part of appropriate scaffolding in the classroom, educators should consider how to best support literacy development, involvement, and language transfer to English by utilizing students' native tongues (Ava, 2020; Matiso, 2023).

Most of the time, educators and administrators fail to represent diversity in their classrooms (DBE, 2020). This is because most teachers are bilingual, with English being a neutral language commonly used for communication, and as a language of learning and teaching in schools. Thus, there is a mismatch between learner and teacher demographics as teachers are not well versed in all the official languages. However, teachers should endeavour to create an inclusive and supporting environment for diverse learners in their classrooms.

6. Conclusion

This enquiry explored how a culturally responsive pedagogy can be reinforced in multilingual and multicultural classrooms. Data, which were gathered through semi-structured interviews and thematically analysed, indicated that the adoption of a variety of instructional strategies, and the creation of an inclusive and supporting environment for students can reinforce a culturally responsive pedagogy. In conclusion, in multilingual and multicultural classrooms, a culturally responsive pedagogy necessitates a comprehensive strategy that considers peer collaboration, technology-assisted learning, differentiated instruction, interactive approaches and cultural responsiveness. Teachers may build inclusive, dynamic learning environments that meet the different needs of their students by implementing these strategies. Cultural sensitivity is essential in classes with speakers of several languages. Instructors must use a variety of resources and examples that represent the students' cultural backgrounds. Teachers can assist students in making the connection between language acquisition and their personal experiences by modelling language usage in culturally appropriate circumstances.

7. Recommendations

The objective of this study was to determine how a culturally responsive pedagogy in which all learners can benefit in multilingual and multicultural classrooms can be strengthened. It is recommended that in multilingual classrooms, teachers should adopt various instructional practices to accommodate the diverse learners in their classrooms. Thus, a teacher should assume different roles. Richards and Rodgers (2017) postulate that a teacher is a needs analyst, a researcher, an organiser of situations, a co-communicator, and a life-long learner. To meet with the varied needs of their learners, teachers must receive professional development in catering for diverse learners. Also, curricula must be revamped to infuse the adoption of culturally responsive pedagogies that will benefit multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

Kim et al. (2019) postulate that effective teaching entails more than just imparting knowledge of the subject matter and concentrating on a single indicator of student progress. They found that the “essence” of good teaching involves cultural responsiveness. They advised educators to set extraordinary standards for every student and support their learning. To design and establish stimulating learning occasions, formatively monitor student progress, adjust instruction as necessary, and assess learning using a variety of sources of data, the author advises teachers to employ a variety of resources. In addition, it is imperative for educators to work in conjunction with other educators, administrators, parents, and education specialists to guarantee the academic achievement of all students, especially those who are at risk or have special needs.

8. References

- Alameddine, N. (2021). Supporting Muslim students through culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies. *Canadian Social Studies*, 52(2), 22–38. <https://doi.org/10.29173/css20>
- Aronson, B., & Laughter, J. (2018). The theory and practice of culturally relevant education: Expanding the conversation to include gender and sexuality equity. *Gender and Education*, 32(2), 262–279. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2018.1496231>
- Ava, A.T. (2020). Culturally responsive pedagogy for sustainable quality education in the Cook Islands setting. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 25, 31–41. <https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v25i0.714>
- Banks, J. A. (2016). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching*. Routledge.
- Bengston, D. N. (2016). The futures wheel: A method for exploring the implications of social-ecological change. *Society & Natural Resources*, 29(3), 374–379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2015.1054980>
- Bhangu, S., Provost, F., & Caduff, C. (2023). Introduction to qualitative research methods - Part 1. *Perspectives in Clinical Research*, 14(1), 39–42. https://doi.org/10.4103/picr.picr_252_22
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., & Terry, G. (2018). Thematic analysis. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in health social sciences* (pp. 1–18). Singapore: Springer Singapore. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2779-6_103-1.
- Bukhari, S.U.Z., Kalthono, I.A., Lashari, A.A., Soomro, I.A., Baltool, S. & Amur, A. (2023). The Communication Barriers and Their Impacts On The Academic Performance Of Graduate Students. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 7(5), 605-612
- Caingcoy, M. E. (2023). Culturally responsive pedagogy: A systematic overview. *Diversitas Journal*, 8(4), 3203–3212. <https://doi.org/10.48017/dj.v8i4.2780>
- Cernacev, A., & Axon, D. R. (2023). Research and scholarly methods: Thematic analysis. *Journal of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy*, 6(7), 751–755. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jac5.1817>
- Chang, W. C., & Viesca, K. M. (2022). Preparing teachers for culturally responsive/relevant pedagogy (CRP): A critical review of research. *Teachers College Record*, 124(2), 197–224. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681221086676>
- Cindi, L. (2021). *Incorporating African indigenous knowledge systems into the Basic Education curriculum: Experiences from two schools in the Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces, South Africa*. [Master’s dissertation]. University of Free State, Bloemfontein.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.

- Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). (2020). *The Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions*. Department of Higher Education and Training. Pretoria. <http://www.dhet.gov.za>. Available from www.gpwonline.co.za
- Department of Education. (1997). *Language in Education Policy*. Department of Education. Pretoria.
<https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/LanguageEducationPolicy1997>.
- Drewry, R. J., Cumming-Potvin, W. M., & Maor, D. (2019). New approaches to literacy problems: Multiliteracies and inclusive pedagogies. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(11). <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2019v44.n11.4>
- Durante, K. (2022). *Culturally responsive pedagogy in pre-service teacher preparation programs* [Doctoral dissertation]. St. John's University.
- Eden, C. A., Chisom, O. N., & Adeniyi, I. S. (2024). Cultural competence in education: Strategies for fostering inclusivity and diversity awareness. *International Journal of Applied Research in Social Sciences*, 6(3), 383–392.
<https://doi.org/10.51594/ijarss.v6i3.895>
- Ellerbrock, C. R., Cruz, B. C., Vásquez, A., & Howes, E. V. (2016). Preparing culturally responsive teachers: Effective practices in teacher education. *Action in Teacher Education*, 38(3), 226–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2016.1194780>
- Franco, M. P., Bottiani, J. H., & Bradshaw, C. P. (2024). Assessing teachers' culturally responsive classroom practice in PK–12 schools: A systematic review of teacher-, student-, and observer-report measures. *Review of Educational Research*, 94(5), 743–798. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543231208720>
- Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). Teachers' College Press.
- Goforth, A. N., Nichols, L. M., Sun, J., Violante, A. E., Brooke, E., Kusumaningsih, S., Howlett, R., Hogenson, D., & Graham, N. (2024). Cultural adaptation of an educator social-emotional learning program to support indigenous students. *School Psychology Review*, 53(4), 365–381.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2022.2144091>
- Gonzales, M. (2022). *Using culturally responsive teaching and funds of knowledge to engage culturally and linguistically diverse students in authentic learning* [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Texas at El Paso.
https://scholarworks.utep.edu/open_etd/3682
- Grain, H., M., J., S., Al-gburi, G., Suleiman, O., W., Alghazali, T., Kadhim, A., J., Hassan, A., Y., Dawood, I., I. (2022). Impact of English Language Proficiency, Multilingualism and Perceived Language Difficulties on International Student's Academic Performance in Iraq. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(2), 160-170. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.911550>
- Hameed, A. (2022). Mother, mother tongue, and language endangerment process: An exploratory study. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12(4), 726–735. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1204.13>
- Hebert, M. (2022). Effective reading strategies for multilingual learners in the mainstream classroom. *School of Education and Leadership Student Capstone Projects*, 794. https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_cp/794
- Henry, A. (2023). Multilingualism and persistence in multiple language learning. *The Modern Language Journal*, 107(1), 183–201. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12826>
- Iwuanyamwu, P. N. (2023). Preparing teachers for culturally responsive education. *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 22(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.10520/ejc-linga_v22_n1_a2
- Karlsen, A.M.F. & Ohna, S.E. (2021). Pupils' voices in teachers' collaborative professional learning in Lesson Study. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 110, 2021,101877. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2021.101877>

- Khalifa, M. (2018). *Culturally responsive school leadership*. Harvard Education Press.
- Khan, J.A., Raman, A.M., Sambamoorthy, N. & Prashanth, K. (2023). *Research Methodology (Methods, Approaches, and Techniques)*. San International Scientific Publications. ISBN: 978-81-965552-8-3 Doi:10.59646/rmmethods/040
- Kim, S., Raza, M., & Seidman, E. (2019). Improving 21st-century teaching skills: The key to effective 21st-century learners. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 14(1), 99–117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499919829214>
- Kyriakidis, K., Koikas, E., & Elbahwashy, H. (2024). *Overcoming teaching challenges in multicultural and multilingual classrooms* [Conference session]. 15th International Conference on Society and Information Technologies (ICSIT 2024) (pp. 47–53). <https://doi.org/10.54808/ICSIT2024.01.47>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2021a). I'm here for the hard re-set: Post-pandemic pedagogy to preserve our culture. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 54(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2020.1863883>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2021b). Three decades of culturally relevant, responsive, & sustaining pedagogy: What lies ahead? *The Educational Forum*, 85(4), 351–354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2021.1957632>
- Lester, J. N. (2023). Introduction to special issue: Qualitative research methodologies and methods for theory building in human resource development. *Human Resource Development Review*, 22(1), 7–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15344843221146871>
- Liu, J., Gill, E., & Li, S. (2021). Revisiting cultural competence. *The Clinical Teacher*, 18(2), 191–197. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tct.13269>
- Mabena, N., Mokgosi, P. N., & Ramapela, S. S. (2021). Factors contributing to poor learner performance in mathematics: A case of selected schools in Mpumalanga province, South Africa. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 79(3), 451–466. <https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/21.79.451>
- Mansfield, E. D., Milner, H. V., & Rudra, N. (2021). The globalization backlash: Exploring new perspectives. *Comparative Political Studies*, 54(13), 2267–2285. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140211024286>
- Marschall, C. (2021, July 27). *Classroom management. The power of a democratic classroom: A look at how to set up a classroom that promotes shared responsibilities so that students are engaged in their community.* <https://www.edutopia.org>article>power>-democratic-classrooms>
- Matiso, N. H. (2023). Social transformation in English first additional language teaching and learning classrooms: A multilingual pedagogy. *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)*, 4(13), 1516–1526. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.202341310>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Montemayor, A. (2010). The lens for viewing the full dimensions of families. In M. Robledo Montecel, & C. L. Goodman (Eds.), *Courage to connect: A quality school action framework* (pp. 30–35). Intercultural Development Research Association.
- Morrison, S. A., Thompson, C. B., & Glazier, J. (2022). Culturally responsive teacher education: Do we practice what we preach? *Teachers and Teaching*, 28(1), 26–50. <https://doi.10.1080/13540602.2021.2017273>
- Ogunniyi, M. B. (2022). Implementing a socio-culturally relevant science curriculum: The South African experience. In M. M. Atwater (Ed.), *Handbook of research on multicultural science education* (pp. 819–837). Springer <https://doi.org/10.10007/978-3-030-83122>
- Parajuli, N. B. (2018). *Cultural Heritage and Community Engagement: Exploring Participatory Approaches in Nepal* (Master's thesis, Western Sydney University (Australia)).

- Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2017). Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world. *The Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 11(1), 35–37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2232a/jlt.v11i1.4987>
- Richards, J.C., and Rodgers, T.S. (2017) *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Riehl, C. M. (2020). Multiliteracy in heritage language speakers: The interdependence of L1 and L2, and extra-linguistic factors. *Heritage Language Journal*, 17(3), 377–408. <https://doi.org/10.46538/hlj.17.3.4>
- Samuels, A. J. (2018). Exploring culturally responsive pedagogy: Teachers' perspectives on fostering equitable and inclusive classrooms. *SRATE Journal*, 27(1), 22–30. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1166706.pdf>
- Sato, M., & Ballinger, S. (2016). *Peer interaction and second language learning: Pedagogical potential and research agenda*. John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/llt.45>
- Schachtner, C. (2020). Storytelling as a cultural practice and life form. In C. Schachtner (Ed.), *The narrative subject: Storytelling in the age of the Internet*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51189-0_2
- Schettino, I., Radvary, K., & Wells, A. S. (2019). Culturally responsive education under ESSA: A state-by-state snapshot. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 10(2), 27–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721719879151>
- Specia, A., & Osman, A. A. (2015). Education as a practice of freedom: Reflections on bell hooks. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(17), 195–199. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1079754.pdf>
- Strydom, A., & Bezuidenhout, R. (2014). *Qualitative data collection*. In F. du-Plooy-Cilliers, C. Davis, & R. Bezuidenhout (Eds.), *Research matters*. Juta & Company.
- Sundararajan, G. (2024). *Why mother tongue education holds the key to unlocking every child's potential: The transformative role of learning in children's native language*. [www.unicef.org/india/stories/why-mother-tongue-education-holds-key-unlocking-to-every-child's-potential](http://www.unicef.org/india/stories/why-mother-tongue-education-holds-key-unlocking-to-every-child-s-potential)
- Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (2nd edn) (pp. 17–37). London: Sage
- Truman, S. E. (2023). Undisciplined: Research-creation and what it may offer (traditional) qualitative research method. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 29(1), 95–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221098380>
- UNESCO. (2020). Policy brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond. *UNESCO*. <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-education-during-covid-19-and-beyond>
- Walia, N. (2022). Promoting ethics and morality in education for equality, diversity and inclusivity. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Cases (JMC)*, 2(01), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.55529/jmc.21.1.9>
- Wang, B. (2023). On the pivotal role of cultural translation in the exchanges and mutual learning between civilizations. *Comparative Literature: East & West*, 7(2), 166–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25723618.2023.2269336>
- Whitlock, L. A., & Marcellus, T. G. (2024). Evaluating the effectiveness of reflective teaching practices in cultivating awareness in teacher education. *Research and Advances in Education*, 3(7), 1–10.
- Will, M., & Najarro, I. (2022, April 18). What is culturally responsive teaching? *EducationWeek*. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/culturally-responsive-teaching-culturally-responsive-pedagogy/2022/04>
- Yotta, E. G. (2023). Accommodating students' learning styles differences in English language classroom. *Heliyon*, 9(6), e17497. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e17497>