

Exploring Preservice Teachers' Experiences of Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching in the ESL Classrooms

Faizah Idrus

Department of English Language and Literacy, Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Liyana Nabilah Ramli

Department of English Language and Literacy, Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Nurul Jannah Habib

Department of English Language and Literacy, Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Abstract—Teaching that is culturally responsive (CRT) goes well beyond mentioning students' native cultures or using examples of traditions and customs. This strategy might make students feel included, but it falls short of adding the required rigour to our teaching methods. Although the number of ESL students has increased, teacher preparation programmes sometimes are deprived of preparing incoming teachers to work with a variety of students. The researchers used qualitative methods to investigate how preservice English teachers perceived and engaged with instructional pedagogies that were intended to support their learning and apply to their current practicum experiences and teaching careers in this case study, which was specifically created to improve a pedagogical course on English language development. Data were gathered by observations and interviewing techniques, and they were then inductively examined. According to the results, preservice teachers were most interested in the course material when they were directly related to their prior teaching experiences, and they were least interested when those links were not made clear.

Index Terms—pre-service teachers, culturally responsive teaching, ESL, qualitative inquiry, multicultural classrooms

I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is the essence that makes up the society. The concept of culture is unique and complex because every society exhibits its own perceived cultures, unspoken and unconscious rules. Clothes, food, music, and language are considered as the most visible customs in society. Unspoken rules in courtesy and modesty are also a part of the culture in a society. The differences in values, beliefs, languages, customs, norms and arts are what constitute people in a society that bridge or bring them together as one. Central to the process of understanding what culture means, it is also crucial to understand the role of culture in education. Schools are a place where we can clearly notice the existence of culture. The wide range of students with various background, race, ethnicity, language and socioeconomic status makes culture and education interrelated.

In today's society, teaching is not just a job that only includes the responsibility of teaching. The responsibility of teaching requires more than just that, teachers are the ones that need to educate these students that are culturally diverse. Thus, this is where the idea of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is crucial to be implemented by teachers. It is not just a matter of planning lessons and using applicable instructional strategies in a classroom, but it is about inclusivity, delivering lessons and educating all students despite of their diverse backgrounds.

Malaysian school classrooms are known to be a culturally diverse classroom where students come from various cultural backgrounds such as Malay, Chinese, Indian and other ethnic groups (Omar et al., 2015). In fact, teachers have to be culturally competent, where they have to be aware and understand their students' cultures. Simultaneously, they have to expose cultural understanding to students through Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) strategies. However, some issues with classroom diversity such as language barriers, systematic discriminations and lack of representation may increase students' disengagement in the learning process. This is because some teachers, either in-service or pre-service teachers are not fully aware of the importance in implementing CRT in their classroom. Hence, it is crucial for all teachers to be equipped with the skills and multicultural competency to meet the needs of the students in the classroom (Rizan et al., 2014).

Thus, the main goal of the present study is to explore preservice teachers' perceptions of implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching strategies in ESL classroom. At the same time, it seeks to identify the challenges faced by the

preservice teachers while using CRT strategies. All secondary TESL majors at the selected institution were required to take a preservice teacher preparation course and in their fourth year go on to do a 16-month long practicum exercise, which is where we performed our qualitative study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)*

Villegas and Lucas (2007) have defined Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) as an inclusion of cultural references of the students' background in the classroom. In other words, CRT is a student-centered approach in education with a goal to ensure and acknowledge cultural aspects in a classroom especially in a multiethnic and multicultural society such as Malaysia. Krasnoff (2016) acknowledged that CRT helped to bridge students' home and community cultures – languages and life experiences in all aspects of learning. Indeed, the aforementioned home and community cultures influence their social interaction and learning process in the classroom. The ability to integrate CRT in Malaysian classroom is significant as it will provide a conducive learning environment for all students and promote success in learning equally regardless of their differences in terms of cultural background.

However, it is also important to note that, in order to effectively integrate CRT in classrooms, there are four essential components that need to be taken into consideration. The components are; i) Culturally Collaborative Teaching, ii) Culturally Responsive Feedback, iii) Culturally Responsive Modelling and iv) Culturally Instructional Scaffolding. To further understand these components, let us understand its function and effectiveness in implementing CRT in classrooms.

In the same vein, Gay (2000) maintained that Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is “using the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). In order to implement CRT, teachers particularly have to be the main multicultural agents to help their students who are culturally diverse to connect their home, community and school cultures respectively (Tengku Nor Rizan et al., 2014). With that being said, teachers have to construct their teaching pedagogy in terms of differentiated instruction, learning strategies, learning styles and assignments inclusively for all students, considering their differences (Frye et al., 2010).

Additionally, Villegas and Lucas (2002) pointed out six characteristics of culturally responsive teachers. Culturally responsive teachers should –

- i. be sociocultural conscious. Teachers have to make effort in exploring students' backgrounds – their race, ethnicity, language and social class in order to understand them. This is because, their differences could affect their attitude and thinking.
- ii. have affirming perspectives towards culturally diverse students. Regardless of students' differences, teachers must assert that all students have the opportunities to perform well at school, even they differ from dominant groups.
- iii. believe themselves as multicultural agents to bring some changes either in social or academic. Hence, teachers should eliminate biasness and discrimination to make schooling more responsive to all culturally diverse students.
- iv. understand students' knowledge construction process, in which students commonly use their background knowledge to perceive new knowledge and skills that they learn in classroom.
- v. have knowledge on students' home cultures.
- vi. infuse students' home cultures in designing instructions.

Goe et al. (2008) further elaborated that effective teachers go beyond simply imparting subject-matter knowledge and emphasising student achievement to include the following: 1) having high expectations for every student; 2) fostering classroom and school improvement; 3) utilising a variety of resources; and 4) cooperating with coworkers, administrators, parents, and other education specialists. Teachers must be sensitive to and responsive to the cultural backgrounds of their pupils if they are to positively contribute to their academic growth. Wah and Nasri (2019) claim that over the past 20 years, CRT has increasingly acquired popularity as a substitute for improving academic performance.

Furthermore, Ebersole et al. (2016) provided choices for teachers to consider when re-conceptualizing culture-based subjects to aid in both improving teaching practises and broadening viewpoints. They looked into a graduate-level course on ethnicity and education that had 18 educators who were currently enrolled in master's programmes in education. Their study was based on an examination of respondents' perceptions of the CRT throughout the course by the course instructors. The teaching plan, a post-course survey, an interview with the focus group, and a follow-up questionnaire were all used by the researchers to gather data after the course. The results suggested that instructors and educators should consider these three themes in order to re-conceptualize culture-based subjects: the actions taken are culturally sensitive.

Wah and Nasri (2019) discussed beneficial gains toward students' learning utilising culturally responsive pedagogy. The findings confirmed that culturally responsive teaching methods do have an impact on how engaged students are with their academic performance.

However, Love-Kelly (2020) showed that the time restrictions for the material scheduling and the variety of learning choices in the learning process are the issues that teachers have when using the CRIS methodology.

Hramiak on the other hand explored the potential for educators to transform their instruction into culturally adaptive instruction and found that all of the participants consistently modified their classes to be culturally responsive as they developed their teaching practises over the course of the year.

Based on these studies, it is possible to draw the conclusion that CRT can assist teachers improve their teaching practises, particularly when implementing curriculum, by helping them re-conceptualize their culture-based subjects. The literature also discusses how students view their instructors who utilise CRT in their instruction and CRT implementation in general, potential implementation difficulties, the justifications for teachers' views of CRT as a critical pedagogy, and the adaptation of CRT in a virtual setting.

B. Culturally Collaborative Teaching (CCT)

Culturally Collaborative Teaching (CCT) allows students to improve their literacy engagement and motivation by collectively organizing students learning into heterogenous groups based on their learning abilities (Callaway, 2017). In other words, students are able to discuss the topic with group members, share concept ideas and knowledge while completing the lesson as a whole group.

On top of that, this method also gives students the ability to have a better learning experience as they engage in a discussion that is content related and strategic based while relating with their own experiences or backgrounds. Notably, it can be seen that the elements of CCT are aligned with the goal of Culturally Responsive Teaching. Not only that, according to Bassey (2016), teachers' role in this method is seen as the students' monitor and facilitator in which teachers would guide students to review certain key concepts and ideas along with certain skills for students' understanding.

Hence, this method requires the joint of intellectual efforts such as individual accountability, positive independence, and strong interpersonal skills between students and teachers (Vaughn et al., 2011).

C. Culturally Responsive Feedback (CRF)

Culturally Responsive Feedback (CRF) is one of the essential components in implementing CRT effectively. This component can be implemented by teachers to increase students' responses and participation in CRT classrooms. As the name suggested, CRF is considered as responsive feedback when teachers give clear, critical, on-going and immediate feedback on the students' responses and participation in the classroom. CRF includes students' ideas, experiences, responses, and languages on the provided feedback while allowing them to construct new understanding of knowledge throughout the learning process (Gersten & Geva, 2003; McIntyre & Hulan, 2013).

Through this method, students are given opportunity for learning and showcasing their performance in the classroom that is supported and appreciated by the teachers in a manner that is close to their individuality and cultural preferences (Weinstein et al., 2003). Hence, this indicates that proper feedback provided by teachers is crucial in ensuring the success and effectiveness of culturally responsive environment in a classroom.

D. Culturally Responsive Modeling (CRM)

Culturally Responsive Modeling is a key element of effective learning. Modeling involves both teachers and students in the learning process. Modeling is used by teachers to exemplify concepts, ideas, discussions to students based on their backgrounds – cultural, language and experiences. It can be easily understood as a form of learning through observation by that includes students' backgrounds as context and example (Aceves & Orosco, 2014).

In addition, CRM effectively allows critical thinking among students, as they connect their conceptualization of the lesson with their background. Engaging and exposing them in the process of learning through conversations in modeling will validate students' heritages and background while demonstrating the importance of the learning task given (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999).

Thus, Jimenez and Gersten (1999) emphasized the importance of CRM that draws from students' cultures, languages and daily experiences shows its functionality in engaging as cognitive strategies.

E. Culturally Instructional Scaffolding (CIS)

Culturally Instructional Scaffolding (CIS) allow students to contribute in the lesson and task delivery. It is also one of the most important strategies in implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching effectively. The students' cultural and linguistic background will be the aspects that help them to promote a deeper understanding on a subject matter or a discussion. Teachers, for instance, will be focusing on the task difficulty along with using different approaches in probing questions during the lesson (Samuels, 2018). Asking different form of questions such as problem-based questions, open-ended questions, analytical questions while modeling an effective conversation using instructional materials as a support, such as visuals – maps and organizers, and providing appropriate wait and answer time are crucial to allow effective conversations on multiple perspectives are all part of scaffolding skills (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). Garza (2009) stated that during the teaching episodes of this strategy, it shows some positive impacts in facilitating students' success and self-esteem. This is due to the fact that teachers who use this strategy to implement CRT in the classroom welcome various form of discussions and open discourse along with showing genuine interest towards their students' success.

F. Teachers' Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

There is a wide range of teachers' perceptions of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). Some teachers pointed out the importance of bridging the culture into the classroom (Frye et al., 2010). It is also worth noting that teachers can infuse the element of culture in the classroom by exploring and understanding the similarities and differences of each culture to produce culturally competent society (Ebersole et al., 2015). Fundamentally, teachers have to understand and well-informed about their students' differences. However, not all teachers are aware of their students' differences in which they are lacking of knowledge about their students' cultural background (Taylor et al., 2015). Consequently, this unfamiliarity could contribute to biased judgements and stereotyping of students' capabilities and attitudes (Valencia, 1997; Solorzano, 1997, as cited in James, 2004).

Additionally, teachers have to create responsive learning atmosphere to promote student engagement (Sanders et al., 2016). Archambault et al. (2009) found that CRT can increase student engagement in the classroom. Surprisingly, CRT helps minority groups to participate during teaching and learning process. Thus, minority groups will have equal chance in education, subsequently, it can create conducive learning atmosphere (Dreyfus, 2019).

Through CRT, teachers are able to bridge students' home and community cultures into the curricular in which they are able to appreciate their valuable heritages, customs, traditions and values (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2015). Having said that, students will feel the sense of belonging just because they are significantly connected with their own cultures or experiences. As a result, they will find the lessons more interesting and thus, they will be more likely to involve in the classroom (Byrd, 2016). Indeed, previous researchers found that students' involvement contributes to their success in academic (Okoye-Johnson, 2011; Love, 2015; Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

G. Strategies in Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

In the past decades, researchers have developed and highlighted strategies for the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). However, it is important to reiterate that teachers need to be culturally competent before an implementation of CRT could be successfully done. Gay (2002) also highlighted that novice teachers that does not have sufficient amount of cultural competence will result to difficulties in managing and implementing CRT in the classroom with diversity. To be able to do that, Sheets and Gay (1996) suggested that teachers need to have not only knowledge but also skills to understand students' backgrounds. This will allow the development of cross-cultural interaction to exist (as cited in Gay, 2002).

Hence, the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) falls upon teachers in creating an open and safe space for students to express and discuss multicultural issues in the classroom and allow them to engage in the process of thinking and learning (Kafele, 2013). It has been demonstrated that effective CRT implementation can be achieved if some of the aforementioned components are used in the process of teaching and learning. This is because, it will not just enhance teachers' teaching but increase students' engagement, participation and the feeling of inclusion in the classroom too, which are considered as important parts of the whole CRT concept.

H. Challenges in Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

Negotiating and discussing a complicated discourse can be challenging for novice teachers in wanting to implement culturally responsive teaching. The question is why and what are some other challenges that have to encounter? Navigating this question, we have come across a few researchers discussing on this matter. Teachers' responsibility is not just teaching and delivering knowledge, teachers act as multicultural agents and molders. Often times, common challenge in implementing culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in a classroom is the lack of knowledge and skills in managing and handling culturally responsive discussions and issues. The lack of cultural competence among teachers can be an issue in implementing CRT, especially if the classroom that has students from various unique backgrounds, it makes them feel unprepared (Tucker et al., 2005).

Weinstein et al. (2004) mentioned that teachers need to be aware of their individual prejudices, in order to prevent unwanted discriminatory practices against students. A prejudice or biases that are shown in CRT classroom by the teacher may cause the students to be less committed and motivated to be part of the CRT classroom implementation (Samuels, 2018).

Apart from lack of knowledge and individual prejudices, the practicality of implementing CRT can also be a challenge. As an example, handling potentially difficult and controversial topics in the classroom is very challenging. This is because the topics may lead to uncomfortable discussions, discomfort or sensitivity (Weinstein et al., 2004). This kind of issue can only be tackled if the teachers have a solid amount of knowledge on the navigated topic or they know how to probe questions in a manner where it will enhance and create open discussions amongst the students. Samuels (2018) acknowledged that some teachers would choose to avoid difficult discussions and complicated classroom discourse, due to lack of mastered skills in handling the situation.

On top of that, time restraint and limited resources in implementing CRT is one of the challenges. Teachers' time is already limited in normal classroom, implementing CRT with a limited amount of knowledge and sources can be overwhelming. Gay (2002) mentioned that, in implementing multicultural elements through the educational process reveals high percentage of time needs to be devoted in the teaching process, in providing examples, scenarios and demonstrating information, concepts, principles and ideas to align with multicultural instruction in the classroom.

Notably, when implementing CRT, the teachers need to strive and meet the needs of a diverse classroom, and to be able to do that, teachers need to put a lot of time, use interesting and suitable resources to achieve their CRT goals. The

mentioned challenges above are some that we managed to identify in the previous researches. However, there is much more to discover and learn on the challenges in implementing CRT.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The design of this research is generic qualitative inquiry. According to Merriam (2009), generic qualitative inquiry is defined as “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their world and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Interestingly, it allows the researchers to obtain the information from shared experience of the real phenomenon and worldview of people involved. Therefore, through this method, the researchers can gain a lot more understanding and insights on the preservice teachers’ experiences in implementing CRT from their interpretation or point of view.

B. Instruments

This study employs multimethod approaches, encompassing semi-structured interview and non-participant observation. The primary instrument for this study is a semi-structured interview method. It combines a pre-determined set of open-ended questions, where the researchers can further the discussion in order to explore more responses, instead of using straightforward question and answer format. The questions can be discarded and added during the interview as the interviewers apparently must not strictly follow the standardized set of questions. Additionally, non-participant observation is a complementary data collection procedure in support of triangulation. The aim of the observation is to observe the implementation of CRT in English lesson by these selected respondents, four preservice English teachers. Prior to the observation, the researchers provided lesson plans as tool to implement CRT. There were 8 observations (2 each) conducted for this study. Indeed, this non-participant observation would be a conduit for those voices or views through semi-structured interview.

C. Respondents

The researchers conducted this research with four preservice English teachers from four different secondary schools in Klang Valley – SMK A SMK B, SMK C and SMK D. The semi-structured interview and non-participant observation are carried out with these four preservice English teachers to explore their experiences of implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in ESL classroom. Specifically, the researchers attempt to examine their perceptions of implementing CRT, their CRT strategies used to understand students’ diversity and its challenges through non-participant observation and interview sessions.

D. Sampling

This study employs purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, researchers select the respondents who have characteristics that meet the purpose of study. In this study, researchers are interested to explore preservice teachers’ experiences of implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in ESL classroom. Therefore, researchers purposely select four preservice English teachers who are implementing CRT in ESL classroom, using purposive sampling. Non-participant observation data that were coded were then merged and analysed together with data from the interviews. Thematic analysis was used.

IV. ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the aforementioned issues transpired because teachers were not fully aware of the importance in implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in their classroom. Therefore, for the purpose of developing this idea, the researchers had chosen the implementation of CRT in ESL classroom as the main stimulus, and the context was narrowed down to the preservice teachers’ perceptions. Also, the researchers attempted to explore CRT strategies used by preservice teachers to understand their students’ diversity and its challenges through non-participant observation and interview sessions.

Preservice Teachers’ Acceptance Towards CRT

Surprisingly, all four respondents reacted with immediate positive responses. It could be seen that these respondents preferred the CRT concept at the outset. Respondent 1 favoured CRT because she mentioned that CRT positively benefited her student learning. She added that CRT is best implemented to students that may have lack of interest towards learning the English language. From the interview, she expressed her satisfaction of using this approach. Having said that, she shared that she was assuredly satisfied in her implementation of CRT because her students were actively and experientially interested in this lesson. She continued by saying:

“I would totally recommend other teachers to implement CRT because I could see there are more positive erm... impacts of implementing it in the classroom especially for students that have trouble in speaking or not interested to learn” (R1, Line 201-205).

“Erm... from the start of my implementation of CRT in my class, I was very satisfied with the approach because, I could literally see my students become more active and more interested in the lesson...” (R1, Line 27-32).

Meanwhile, Respondent 2 mentioned, CRT helped students to gain more knowledge (R2, Line 97-99). This is because teachers could add other elements such as students' cultures, customs, beliefs and experiences into the lesson, instead of solely focusing on the formal or structural syllabus. Respondent 4 added, students could also relate and engage with the lesson when teachers bring their home cultures, norms, customs and experiences into the lesson (R4, Line 21-23). In doing so, the students felt connected to the lesson and subsequently, this contributed to fun and engaging learning atmosphere.

Respondent 3 displayed similar preference of implementing CRT. He acknowledged that it is the best idea to implement CRT in ESL classroom 'because we are living in a multicultural society' (R3, Line 83-87). Each ethnic and religion has its own uniqueness. Thus, through CRT, students can acknowledge and accept the differences exist in different ethnics and religions.

Preservice Teachers' Insights on the Effectiveness of Implementing CRT

The results of this study are aligned with the previous literature in which Archambault et al. (2009) found that CRT can increase student engagement in the classroom. Interestingly, it is reckoned that all four respondents, as preservice teachers, acknowledged that CRT could enhance students' engagement in the classroom.

"... through CRT I see my students' participation erm... it's more engaging and my students show interest in learning and it is not boring because everyone want to share what they know and it brings us together and connect us in some way" (R1, Line 113-118).

"So, erm... I can see that my students they are more engaging, they speak more" (R2, Line 132-133).

"I would say that their participation, when I implement CRT is very high compared to just reading and normal lessons" (R3, Line 149-150).

"If I teach them culture that is related to Malaysia erm... they seem to engage more than if I teach them culture that is outside Malaysia" (R4, Line 99-101).

From their responses, it is clear that CRT helps the respondents to create conducive classroom environment. They claimed that classroom environment is absolutely different, with and without the use of CRT approach. The students were engaged to the lesson well when the teachers connected their home culture, experience and lifestyle into the lesson. The results are parallel to the results of a study done by Byrd (2016), where he claimed that the students feel the sense of belonging just because they are significantly connected with their own cultures or experiences. As a result, they will find the lessons more interesting and thus, they will be more likely to involve in the classroom.

In addition, from the respondents' views on enjoyment, all four respondents did mention that their students enjoyed the lesson better when they bring the element of culture into classroom. Based on the responses obtained from the interview sessions, the researchers can deduce that the students enjoy the lesson as they gain knowledge in a fun way. Especially for ESL learners, they are more bound to enjoy the lesson when teachers keep the class interesting with exciting activities. Respondent 1 stated that her students enjoyed the lesson when she introduced new culture and celebration in English lesson (R1, Line 137-144). Introducing new culture and celebration can increase students' level of curiosity as they are excited to know more about other culture and celebration. Aside from that, Respondent 2 added, "Yes, they enjoyed it. Because there were discussions. They preferred it because there were discussions and they had the opportunity to share about something that they wanted to share" (R2, Line 126-128). Respondent 2 had worked hard to having the discussion during English lesson. Students seemed to be learning and enjoying the lesson as they had the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions during the discussion.

Impressively, Respondent 4 stated, "It was very fun, interesting and they were very participative and engaging" (R4, Line 92-93). Her statement was congruent with the results of the observations. The researchers were convinced that the teachers enjoyed the lesson too. She asked her students to independently search for the information about Pongal celebration on the Internet. Also, Respondent 3 mentioned, his students appeared to enjoy the lesson more when he asked them to independently explore other cultures on the Internet and share with the whole class (R3, Line 153-158). It is apparent that Respondent 3 and Respondent 4 had great ideas in making their classes livelier, fun and exciting, as opposed to the traditional chalk and talk.

Besides enhancing students' engagement and enjoyment, the researchers found that CRT helped to instill good values. From the interview sessions, all four respondents emphasised the value of respecting others.

"... through this we can teach about values like erm respect, tolerance and understanding the differences between one culture and another through the discussions of differences on topic or issues erm..." (R1, Line 71-76).

"So... I think it is important for us to expose them to as many cultures as we could and make the students able to respect other people and other culture and their differences" (R3, Line 187-189).

Thus, based on the responses from Respondents 1 and 2, it can be deduced that learning culture through CRT can help students to respect other cultures, people and differences. Moreover, Respondent 3 mentioned that he observed that his students were aware and respect other cultures in class. Intriguingly, they exchanged the cultural information among themselves to better understand each other's cultures, beliefs and customs. For example, his Chinese students gave Mandarin oranges to their classmates who are Malay, Chinese and Indian. Simultaneously, their Malay and Indian friends wished them '*Gong Xi Fa Cai*' (Happy Chinese New Year) (R3, Line 164-169). Furthermore, Respondent 4 claimed, her Malay and Indian students always had conflict and misunderstanding. In order to solve this conflict, she constantly introduced culture through CRT approach in the lesson (R4, Line 127-129). Miraculously, the

implementation of CRT resulted in friendly and pleasant relationship in that it promotes mutual understanding between those two parties.

Students' Improvement When Implementing CRT in English Lesson

CRT can be seen as a platform to improve students' performance, particularly for ESL learners. Respondents 1, 2 and 3 claimed that CRT could enhance students' critical thinking skill. It was evidenced when they mentioned:

"I think in the way that they are able to express themselves and relate what they already knew with what their friends shared during the lesson or what the teacher erm... brought to the class for the lesson" (R1, Line 57-60).

"... they can explore other culture, and try to understand it from different perspective and be more respectful with their community believe. So, I think it will help with their thinking skill in terms of moral reasoning" (R2, Line 43-50).

"Yes... yes... yes... I always encourage them to think to think critically, it means when they exchange their ideas beliefs and culture it will make them realize that there are other people in this world..." (R3, Line 90-95).

From the aforementioned responses, it is clear that students used their faculty of thought when the teachers, introduced them to new cultures. They were able to relate new cultures with their own cultures and experiences in terms of norms, values and lifestyles. Concurrently, they used reasoning to acknowledge and understand the differences that exist in different cultures from different perspectives.

Respondent 3 added, CRT could also enhance students' creative thinking skill. He highlighted that exploring new cultures helped students to become creative or divergent thinkers (R3, Line 153-157). As mentioned, he asked his students to independently explore other cultures. In fact, throughout the process, students apparently used their visual reading and analytical mind to comprehend and analyse the obtained information.

Other than enhancing students' critical and creative thinking skills, CRT also could improve their speaking skills. They have seen to be more fluent and more active speakers when CRT was implemented. R1 mentioned:

"CRT helps students to be more fluent when they speak" (R1, Line 159-160).

"I feel and think that when we implement CRT it will help the students to become more active speaker so when students communicate with their friends and the teacher, we can help them that they are not shy anymore, they know that they can express opinions, views and we as teacher would respect their expression" (R3, Line 172-177).

"Ok in my class the students are mixed abilities, there are some improvements I can see in terms of how they interact with each other but after some time I can see their improvement in communication skills" (R4, Line 132-135).

From the responses above, all three respondents stated that their students have improved significantly in communication skills. For instance, Respondent 1 claimed that her students could speak fluently when she implemented CRT. Meanwhile, Respondent 3 and Respondent 4 have shown similar responses, in which they stated that the students attempted to interact with each other more when they implemented CRT in the classroom, compared to how they were before CRT.

Finally, from all the responses, it can be deduced that these students have been seen to improve their English language proficiency in speaking because they are comfortable talking and sharing about cultures. Certainly, the presence of culture into the context made them felt connected to the content discussed in the lesson delivered by their teachers.

Teaching Strategies

One of the teaching strategies used by preservice teachers is teacher as facilitator. The results of this research are aligned with what Bassey (2016) mentioned that teachers' role in CRT is seen as the students' monitor and facilitator, where the teacher would guide students to review certain key concepts and ideas along with certain skills for students' understanding. Based on the responses obtained, the preservice teachers agreed that teachers are supposed to be facilitators when implementing or integrating CRT in the classroom. Respondent 1 stated, "... as a teacher I am there to monitor what they are talking about, and if they tend to say something like racists or my hurt someone then I will interrupt them and advise them this is not right and good" (R1, Line 83-89).

Another example was added by Respondent 2, "... we can see that these students are using their critical thinking and creativity to come up with their ideas and then we as a teacher we act as a facilitator to facilitate them" (R2, Line 99-104). From the observations, the researchers observed that she would probe her students with questions related to the lesson to ensure her role as a facilitator rather than just spoon feed them with the information.

Apart from that, the preservice teachers were keen in ensuring that their classroom is student-centered. From the interview session, we found out that three respondents used student-centered method.

"I have once tried to ask them to prepare a question, each prepares one question erm... so during the discussion they can bring up the question so everyone will try to answer the question that they have prepared... so from these questions... by answering the questions it helped them erm..." (R1, Line 173-180).

"... I conducted a project where they needed to create the culture of a country of choice, and set lists of cultures for their countries for them to be able to understand what is culture and draw on their own practices...similar and differences. And then, when they presented their works, many were amazed and the class was kind of hilarious then..." (R2, Line 104-111).

"... I let my students discover what Halloween is, I asked them to find information about Halloween and mostly I would do flip classroom and find information about Halloween and how it integrates in cultures in the European countries" (R3, Line 129-135).

From their responses, it could be seen that all three respondents taught their classroom in a manner where students are the center of the class. Further, during the observations, the researchers noticed that the students were given freedom to be part of the lesson and were engaged throughout the classes. This kind of space given by the preservice teachers is a good form of CRT approach. For instance, Respondent 1 gave the students the chance to create their own questions instead of them receiving questions from the teacher. Hence, in doing so, it gives the students space and time to be curious and be comfortable with their curiosity. Besides, the students were given time to discuss the questions created by them with their peers to get a better understanding of the lesson.

On the other hand, Respondent 2 used an approach that focused on students' level of critical thinking, instead of teaching culture in a lesson in a dry manner such as lecturing. She gave her students the autonomy to create their own sets of cultures and rules. In a way, we could see that the teacher allowed the students to create their own comprehension on the lesson, based on their creation and deduction. Meanwhile, Respondent 3 used a simpler flipped classroom method in making the class more student-centered by which he gave the students a task, where they had to do a simple search on Halloween celebration and shared their information gathered to the whole class.

Hence, CRT integration in the classroom is better when the teachers used these aforementioned strategies, in which it creates free space and time for students to enhance and share their knowledge.

Apart from the two mentioned strategies above; (teachers as facilitator and student-centered instruction), there is one other strategy used by the preservice teachers to enhance the process of implementing CRT in their classroom, which is learning within the context of culture. Students were given the opportunity to better understand the lesson delivered by learning within the context of culture. They said:

"Like I mentioned, erm... allow them to produce something on their own and then relate that with content that you want to deliver. Before this, I asked them to create their own traditional costumes, that will able to project themselves and relate it with content that we are learning (R2, Line 149-156).

"I try to talk to them about sensitive issues but they are not aware about it especially in Malaysia, they listen but they don't know about it and can't relate. So, I just share with them and explain to them to understand about the issues" (R4, Line 64-69).

Thus, based on the two responses above, it is clear that delivering the lesson within cultural context allowed students to better understand the lesson because they can relate to it with their real-life context. According to Respondent 2, she assigned her students with a project on creating traditional costumes based on their own preference and chosen cultural set of rules. On top of that, the students were asked to justify their choices of the design they have created. Therefore, we can see that the students could relate their assigned traditional cultural costume project with the content of the lesson delivered by the teacher. In a way, they were actually, creating the idea in understanding the concept of culture based on the tasks given.

Challenges in Implementing CRT

CRT can be seen as challenging in different aspects such as unfamiliarity on certain topics, lack of time needed to prepare CRT and students' low English proficiency.

Respondent 1, Respondent 2 and Respondent 4 claimed that implementing CRT as a preservice teacher is somehow challenging because of their unfamiliarity with the topic they are teaching with. As an example, Respondent 1 stated, "I think one of the challenges is erm... introducing things that I am also not familiar with maybe sometimes I have difficulty to pronounce certain word that is not in English for example a Pongal celebration, it is not an English word" (R1, Line 185-189). Meanwhile, Respondent 2 mentioned, "Teaching something that you are not familiar with.. emm... you need to get more knowledge on that first before introducing them to students so I think those are some of the challenges" (R2, Line 162-164). Both of the respondents claimed that, in order to ensure they know what they were delivering, they first need to study on the subject matter before teaching it due to their lack of knowledge and unfamiliarity of the subject taught. They also mentioned that using social media like Tik Tok, Instagram and others helped them connect to their students.

However, as for Respondent 4, the challenge in implementing CRT was when the students were not aware and unfamiliar with the lesson that she was teaching. She stated, her students did not know about other cultures from other countries. For example, they did not have any idea when she taught about Sherlock Holmes in the lesson (R4, Line 154-156). Hence, from these responses, it can be said that in order to ensure the smoothness of implementing CRT in the classroom, both teachers and students have to work together in exposing themselves to more topics that they are unfamiliar with. Consequently, both parties can learn and gain knowledge throughout the process of teaching and learning.

Moreover, lack of time in preparing the lesson is mentioned as one of the challenges in implementing CRT in the classroom by Respondent 2, "Erm... so.. the problems that I faced is when I have lack of time to prepare the lesson" (R2, Line 160-161). Hence, it is clear that implementing CRT is challenging because the amount of effort and time that needed to be invested by the teacher since the teacher also needed to ensure that she is familiar with the topic or lesson she was going to teach, making sure that students were given the right amount of time and space to discuss on the topic as it is supposed to be discussed. Finally, students' level of proficiency may be one of the challenges as it becomes an obstacle and it gets in the way of them to be able to completely comprehend the lesson discussed. Respondent 3 and Respondent 4:

"So, when I ask them, to share about their culture and beliefs it will be hard it will be hard for them because English is not their language" (R3, Line 128-130).

"Erm... there are a few challenges the first one would need to do a grammar translation method whereby when I speak to them in English, I need to translate in Malay" (R4, Line 149-151).

As mentioned by both respondents above, it shows that the teachers need to deliver the lesson using the language that is comprehensible. Thus, it enables them to carry out the intended lesson and discussion well. This can be seen as one of the challenges. Yet, in our perspective, that is the beauty of implementing CRT, to ensure that we know students' background and capability. Having said that, the lesson can be delivered according to their level of understanding and proficiency. Thus, we believe despite all the mentioned challenges of implementing CRT, it can be overcome by practice and time.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and building positive learning attitudes

Teaching that is culturally relevant has many facets. It can't be accomplished by adhering to a set of prescribed processes or how-tos, and it isn't primarily centred on curriculum materials or a single instructional strategy. However, you can make your classroom more culturally relevant by using the following strategies.

Encourage the use of students' past knowledge. Asking pupils what they already know about a certain idea and relating it to the lesson you're introducing are two ways to do this. Before starting a story about a character adjusting to life in, for instance,

Make learning relevant. Encourage students to make connections to their own experiences or the present period while discussing a text or primary source that is from or is about a different time, place, or culture. Consider posing queries like, "What do you believe Anne Frank would say if she were here today?"

Make connections. Culturally sensitive instruction must establish personal connections with students. Relationship-building techniques include finding out about students' hobbies, likes, dislikes, families, and aspirations. Also, don't forget to introduce yourself. The strongest bonds between people are those that are based on openness and trust.

Discuss current political and social concerns. Encourage students to talk about and learn about current events that are relevant to them, such as immigration, neighbourhood police interactions, environmental issues, women's rights, and racial relations. Instead of telling students what to think, the objective is to teach them how to become informed and participate in civil discourse.

Engage the cultural capital of the students. Look for opportunities for students to put their knowledge, abilities, and personal strengths to work in the classroom. Give pupils the chance to respond to literature in many ways and to support one another in doing so. Allowing students to utilise languages other than English and, when possible (and without putting them on the spot), allowing them to share vocabulary, incorporate culture of the day. Make connections between the course material and the students' favourite music, movies, and other media. Some students find it easy to capture their interest and relate to their interests by using video games, fashion, or sports.

We frequently observe an improvement in the level of effort and participation among children in classrooms that practise culturally responsive education. The most significant development is how much students learn. Our ultimate objective is to establish cultural democracies in our classrooms where children regularly meet with people from a variety of origins, perspectives, and worldviews and where each student is appreciated, valued, and glad to be a part of.

V. CONCLUSION

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is not a new approach, it has been used, implemented and integrated by teachers in classrooms as one of the teaching approaches. However, some teachers might not know that they have had eventually been implementing CRT, due to their unfamiliarity of the CRT's theoretical aspects. Hence, that may lead to an ineffectiveness of implementing CRT in the classroom.

Furthermore, researchers have discovered that the preservice teachers have incorporated CRT indirectly in their teaching, so it is definitely not something new for them. Meanwhile, the respondents have similar perceptions towards the implementation of CRT in ESL classroom and they believed that CRT is an effective approach in English teaching. There are some CRT strategies used by preservice teachers to understand their students' diversity and its challenges that can be highlighted in this research.

When the teachers employed digital tools, games, and group presentations to convey course information, students were reported being the most engaged and exhibited the most engaged behaviours. In-service teachers' ability to communicate their evolving understandings of culturally responsive teaching and what it means to react with sensitivity to teenagers' language use in all of its forms was especially aided by class discussions centred around familiar things such as Instagram, TikTok etc.

It is important to note that, the basic principles of implementing the suggested Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) activities in the classroom are through proper guided steps that were highlighted in the discussion. This was confirmed by Idrus (2014) who said teachers need to upgrade their knowledge by reading about the cultures of others. There are a few things that the teachers have taken into consideration in the process of creating the activities for this topic. Here are three basic elements that they have focused on, which are; i) difficulty of the activities, ii) appropriateness of the activities and iii) clarity of the activities. Taking the difficulty of the activities into consideration is important in designing good comprehensible Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) activities. Not only that, they focused on trying

to make the activities as appropriate as possible in order to ensure it is fit for culturally responsive classrooms. Clarity of the activities is also crucial in designing the materials of the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) activities especially in the process of executing steps of the chosen activities. Activities carried are also focused on learner-centredness along with the focus of cultural elements. Thus, other considerations that might be appropriate in planning any future activities that include cultural element would be learners' background, time and place.

Due to the varying backgrounds of the students in ESL classroom, it is believed that Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) strategies can be implemented to understand students' diversity. These findings are also essential to the researchers who want to give more exposure to in-service and preservice teachers on the importance of CRT. Also, it is important for all teachers to be aware of the elements of CRT inclusivity and its challenges to ensure that education is equally covered and taught.

REFERENCES

- [1] Aceves, T. C., & Orosco, M. J. (2014). Culturally Responsive Teaching. *University of Florida, Collaboration for Effective Educator, Development, Accountability and Reform Centre*. Retrieved December 22, 2022, from <http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/tools/innovation-configurations>
- [2] Alsaleh, N. J. (2020). Teaching Critical Thinking Skills: Literature Review. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology-TOJET*, 19(1), 21-39.
- [3] Archambault, I., Janosz, M., Fallu, J., & Pagani, L. (2009). Student engagement and its relationship with early high school dropout. *Journal of Adolescents*, 32, 651-670.
- [4] Bassey, M. O. (2016). Culturally Responsive Teaching: Implications for Educational Justice. *Educational Sciences*, 6(4), 35-46. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci6040035>
- [5] Behi, R., & Nolan, M. (2014). Ethical issues in research. *British Journal of Nursing*, 4(12). <https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.1995.4.12.712>
- [6] Byrd, C. M. (2016). Does culturally relevant teaching work? An examination from student perspectives. *SAGE Open*, 6(3), 1-10.
- [7] Callaway, R. F. (2017). A correlational study of teacher efficacy and culturally responsive teaching techniques in a southeastern urban school district. *Journal of Organizational & Educational Leadership*, 2(3). Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/joel/vol2/iss2/3>
- [8] Dreyfus, W. (2019). *Teacher perceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom* (Doctoral thesis, College of Professional Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts).
- [9] Ebersole, M., Kanahle-Mossman, H., & Kawakimi, A. (2015). Culturally responsive teaching: Examining teachers' understandings and perspectives. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 4(2), 97-103.
- [10] Frye, B., Button, L., Kelly, C., & Button, G. (2010). Preservice teachers' self-perceptions and attitudes toward culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Praxis in Multicultural Education*, 5(10), 6-22.
- [11] Garza, R. (2009). Latino and white high school students' perceptions of caring behaviors: Are we culturally responsive to our students? *Urban Education*, 44(3), 297-321. doi:10.1177/0042085908318714
- [12] Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-116.
- [13] Gersten, R., & Geva, E. (2003). Teaching reading to early language learners. *Educational Leadership*, 60, 44-49.
- [14] Idrus, F. (2014). Initiating Culturally Responsive Teaching for Identity Construction in the Malaysian Classrooms. *English Language Teaching*, 7, 53-63.
- [15] James, J. L. (2004). *Teachers' attitudes and perceptions of multicultural and diversity awareness in elementary schools* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Tennessee, Knoxville).
- [16] Jimenez, R. T., & Gersten, R. (1999). Lessons and dilemmas derived from the literacy instruction of two Latina/o teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 36(2), 265-301. doi:10.3102/00028312036002265
- [17] Kafele, B. (2013). *Closing the attitude gap: How to fire up your students to strive for success*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- [18] Kahu, E., & Nelson, K. (2018). Student engagement in the educational interface: Understanding the mechanisms of student success. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37(1), 58-71.
- [19] Krasnoff, B. (2016). *Culturally responsive teaching: A guide to evidence-based practices for teaching all students equitably*. Portland, Oregon.
- [20] Love, B. (2015). What is hip-hop-based education doing in nice fields such as early childhood and elementary education? *Urban Education*, 50(1), 106-131.
- [21] McIntyre, E., & Hulan, N. (2013). Research-based, culturally responsive reading practice in elementary classrooms: A year-long study. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 52(1), 28-51. doi:10.1080/19388071.2012.737409
- [22] Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- [23] Mertens, D. (2015). *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods* (4th ed., p. 332). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- [24] Okoye-Johnson, O. (2011). Does multicultural education improve students' racial attitudes? Implications for closing the achievement gap. *Journal of Black Studies*, 42(8), 1252-1274.
- [25] Omar, N., Noh, M. A. C., Hamzah, M. I., & Majid, L. A. (2015). Multicultural education practice in Malaysia. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 174, 1941-1948.
- [26] Pitsoe, V., & Letseka, M. (2015). Re-engineering teaching practice through reflexive practice and culturally relevant pedagogy framework. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 10(1), 154-169.
- [27] Samuels, A. J. (2018). Exploring Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Teachers' Perspectives on Fostering Equitable and Inclusive Classrooms. *SRATE Journal*, 27(1), 22-30. <https://doi.org/https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1166706>
- [28] Sanders, L., Rodrigues, L., & Li, K. (2016). Enhanced student engagement and culturally responsive pedagogy. *SHAW*, 36(2), 272-289.

- [29] Saunders, W. M., & Goldenberg, C. (1999). Effects of instructional conversations and literature logs on limited and fluent English proficient students' story comprehension and thematic understanding. *Elementary School Journal*, 99(4), 277-301.
- [30] Taylor, R., Kumi-Yeboah, A., & Ringlaben, R. P. (2015). Pre-service teachers' perceptions towards multicultural education and teaching of culturally and linguistically diverse learners. *International Journal for Innovation Education and Research*, 3(9), 75-87.
- [31] Tengku Nor Rizan Tengku Mohamad Maasum, Nooreiny Maarof & Manisah Mohd Ali. (2015). Addressing learner diversity by culturally responsive pedagogy. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1, 138-150.
- [32] Tucker, C. M., Porter, T., Reinke, W. M., Herman, K. C., Ivery, P. D., Mack, C. E., & Jackson, E. S. (2005). Promoting Teacher Efficacy for Working With Diverse Students. *Preventing School Failure*, 50(1), 29-34. <https://doi.org/10.3200/PSFL.50.1.29-34>
- [33] Vaughn, S., Klingner, J. K., Swanson, E. A., Boardman, A. G., Roberts, G., Mohammed, S. S., & Stillman-Spisak, S. J. (2011). Efficacy of collaborative strategic reading with middle school students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48, 938-964. doi:10.3102/0002831211410305
- [34] Villegas, A. A., & Lucas, T. (2002). Preparing culturally responsive teachers: Rethinking the curriculum. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(20), 20-32.
- [35] Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2007). The culturally responsive teacher. *Educational Leadership*, 64(6), 28- 33.
- [36] Weinstein, C. S., Curran, M., & Tomlinson-Clarke, S. (2003). Culturally responsive classroom management: Awareness into action. *Theory into Practice*, 42(4), 269-276.
- [37] Weinstein, C. S., Tomlinson-Clarke, S., & Curran, M. (2004). Toward a conception of culturally responsive classroom management. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(1), 25-38.



Faizah Idrus's academic qualifications are as below:

1. Phd in Education from The University of Nottingham UK
2. MA Professional Studies in Education from The University of Leicester, UK
3. BA (Hons) TESOL from Leeds University, UK
4. Diploma in ESL from University Malaya, Malaysia
5. Certificate in Teaching in ESL from Malay Women's Teachers College, Melaka

She currently works at the Department of Language and Literacy, Faculty of Education, The International Islamic University Malaysia. Her interests include but not confined to English Language Teaching, Research on Culture, Identity, Community and Inter and Intra Cultural Communication, and issues in Teacher Education.



Liyana Nabilah Ramli obtained her Bachelor in TESL and Masters in TESL from Faculty of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She is now a teacher at one of the secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.



Nurul Jannah Habib obtained her Bachelor in TESL and Masters in TESL from Faculty of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She is now a teacher at one of the secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.