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Incorporating Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices in Mathematics

Education

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Abstract

Mathematics, often heralded as a universal language of logic and numbers, can unintentionally exclude students from diverse cultural backgrounds, resulting in feelings of alienation, disengagement, and academic underachievement. This article investigates the role of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in mathematics education as a means of bridging cultural divides and fostering inclusive, equitable learning environments. CRT acknowledges and values students' cultural identities, experiences, and knowledge systems, integrating them meaningfully into the formal mathematics curriculum. This pedagogical approach emphasizes cultural relevance, identity affirmation, and equity, ensuring that every student has an opportunity to succeed.

The theoretical underpinnings of CRT are rooted in the works of scholars such as Ladson-Billings and Moll et al., who challenge deficit perspectives and underscore the importance of leveraging students" funds of knowledge." CRT's tenets focus on making curriculum content culturally relevant, affirming students' identities, and dismantling inequitable power dynamics in education. In mathematics classrooms, this involves connecting mathematical concepts to students' lived experiences and cultural contexts, thereby fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of the subject. Practical strategies for implementing CRT in mathematics education are outlined, including leveraging students' cultural funds of knowledge designing culturally relevant word problems, and employing cooperative learning activities. Examples include integrating traditional art forms, indigenous architectural designs, and culturally significant practices to teach geometric and measurement concepts. Additionally, the use of technology and multicultural resources further enriches the learning experience by creating interactive and culturally resonant educational opportunities. The article also emphasizes fostering a growth mindset, encouraging students to view mathematical ability as a developable skill, and celebrating diverse problem-solving approaches. While CRT offers transformative potential, its implementation is not without challenges. Teachers may face obstacles such as time constraints, limited cultural knowledge, and the risk of perpetuating stereotypes. The article highlights the necessity of professional development, institutional support, and community engagement to overcome these barriers. Teachers must



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@2025 International Council for Education Research and Training 2025, Vol. 03, Issue 02, 186-198 ISSN: 2960-0006 DOI: https://doi.org/10.59231/edumania/9125 also strive for authenticity and avoid tokenistic representations of culture, ensuring that materials and activities are both meaningful and respectful. The benefits of CRT in mathematics are manifold. It enhances student engagement, fosters a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts, promotes academic achievement, and cultivates cultural competence. By validating students' cultural identities and connecting mathematics to their lived experiences, CRT empowers students to see themselves as capable mathematicians and active contributors to a multicultural society. Ultimately, CRT reimagines mathematics classrooms as inclusive spaces where diversity is celebrated, equity is prioritized, and all students are equipped to succeed. This approach not only enriches academic outcomes but also prepares students to thrive in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

Keywords: mathematics, culturally responsive teaching (CRT), inclusion, equity, cultural identities, funds of knowledge, curriculum, engagement, cultural relevance, cooperative learning, professional development, cultural competence.

Introduction

Mathematics, often perceived as a universal language of numbers and logic, can feel exclusionary for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Traditional pedagogical approaches may fail to acknowledge the wealth of mathematical knowledge and skills embedded within students' cultures. This can lead to feelings of alienation, disengagement, and ultimately, hinder academic achievement in mathematics [1].

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) offers a framework for creating inclusive and equitable mathematics classrooms. CRT emphasizes acknowledging and valuing students' cultural identities, experiences, and knowledge systems. By integrating CRT principles, educators can bridge the gap between students' cultural backgrounds and the formal mathematics curriculum, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the subject [2]. This article delves into the theoretical foundations of CRT and its practical applications in mathematics education. We discuss specific strategies to create culturally responsive learning environments, leverage students' cultural funds of knowledge, and promote a growth mindset in mathematics. By implementing these practices, educators can empower students from



@2025 International Council for Education Research and Training2025, Vol. 03, Issue 02, 186-198ISSN: 2960-0006DOI: https: https://doi.org/10.59231/edumania/9125diverse backgrounds to develop a positive self-concept as mathematicians and achieve successin mathematics.

Theoretical Foundations of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) emerged from the work of Ladson- Billings (1995) who challenged the deficit perspective that often frames students from marginalized backgrounds as lacking the necessary knowledge or skills to succeed in school [2]. CRT posits that all students bring valuable cultural resources and knowledge systems to the classroom. These resources, referred to as" funds of knowledge" by Moll et al. (1992), encompass the historically accumulated and socially transmitted knowledge, practices, and skills developed within specific cultural communities [3].

CRT rests on three core tenets:

Cultural Relevance: Curriculum content, instructional practices and classroom interactions should be relevant to students' cultural backgrounds and experiences [4]. This fosters connections between academic learning and their lived realities.

Affirming Identity: CRT acknowledges and values students' cultural identities and fosters a sense of belonging within the classroom community [5].

This creates a safe and supportive environment where students feel comfortable taking risks and engaging in the learning process.

Equity and Social Justice: CRT strives to create equitable learning opportunities for all students, dismantling power dynamics that may disadvantage students from marginalized backgrounds [6]. This ensures all students have the opportunity to develop their mathematical knowledge and skills.

Culturally Responsive Teaching in Mathematics Education

Implementing CRT in mathematics education requires a shift in perspective and pedagogical practices. Here are some specific strategies educators can employ:

Understanding Students' Cultural Funds of Knowledge:

Teachers can engage in pre-assessment activities to identify mathematical knowledge and skills embedded within students' cultural backgrounds. This could involve interviewing students and families, analyzing everyday activities, or examining traditional crafts and practices [7].

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Mathematical concepts can be introduced and explored through the lens of students' cultural backgrounds. For example, geometric concepts can be connected to traditional art forms or architectural designs, while measurement can be linked to practices like cooking or carpentry specific to their cultures [8].

Culturally Relevant Word Problems:

Traditional word problems often lack context and may not resonate with students' lived experiences. Developing word problems that connect mathematics to students' cultural practices, local contexts, or historical figures can foster deeper engagement [9].

Cooperative Learning and Collaborative Problem- Solving:

Cooperative learning activities that encourage students to work together leverage the strengths and diverse perspectives within the classroom. This fosters collaborative problem-solving skills and creates a sense of shared responsibility for learning [10].

Multicultural Mathematics Resources:

Incorporating culturally relevant manipulative, literature, and historical examples of mathematics within different cultures can broaden students' understanding of the subject and its global significance [11].

Technology Integration:

Technology can be a powerful tool for culturally responsive teaching. On- line simulations, interactive activities, and culturally relevant educational apps can engage students in the learning process and connect mathematical concepts to their cultural backgrounds [12].

Promoting a Growth Mindset in Mathematics

Culturally responsive teaching goes beyond simply incorporating cultural references. It also fosters a growth mindset in students, emphasizing the idea that intelligence and mathematical ability can be developed through effort and perseverance. This is particularly important for students who may hold negative stereotypes about their abilities in mathematics. Here are some strategies to promote a growth mindset:

Focus on Effort and Process:

Instead of solely praising students for getting the right answer, emphasize the effort, strategies, and problem-solving approaches they used. This highlights the value of hard work and



@2025 International Council for Education Research and Training2025, Vol. 03, Issue 02, 186-198ISSN: 2960-0006DOI: https: https://doi.org/10.59231/edumania/9125encourages students to view mistakes as learningopportunities [13].

Utilize Positive Feedback:

Provide specific and actionable feedback that focuses on progress and improvement. Phrases like "I can see you're trying a new strategy here" or "Let's explore why this approach didn't work this time" encourage students to persist in the face of challenges [14].

Model a Growth Mindset:

Teachers can model a growth mindset by openly acknowledging their own learning process and challenges. Sharing instances where they made mistakes or had to overcome difficulties demonstrates that learning is a continuous journey [15].

Celebrate Diverse Solutions:

Encourage students to explore different approaches to solving problems. High- lighting the value of multiple perspectives demonstrates the richness and flexibility of mathematical thinking [16].

Challenges and Considerations

Implementing culturally responsive teaching practices requires ongoing reflection and adaptation. Here are some challenges and considerations for educators:

Teacher Knowledge and Expertise

Incorporating culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in mathematics requires teachers to have a deep understanding of both their subject and the cultural contexts of their students. However, many educators face challenges due to limited training or awareness of diverse cultural frameworks. Effective CRT involves integrating cultural knowledge into the curriculum in meaningful ways, which demands ongoing professional development. For example, a teacher unfamiliar with indigenous number systems or cultural patterns may struggle to connect these to mathematical concepts. Additionally, educators must avoid tokenism or superficial connections that may diminish the value of students' cultural heritage. A lack of expertise can lead to unintentional misrepresentation or the perpetuation of stereotypes. Addressing this challenge requires schools and institutions to provide robust support through workshops, resources, and mentorship opportunities. Building a knowledge base that includes diverse mathematical traditions and pedagogical strategies empowers teachers to create inclusive and effective learning experiences for all students. Teachers need



@2025 International Council for Education Research and Training2025, Vol. 03, Issue 02, 186-198ISSN: 2960-0006DOI: https: https://doi.org/10.59231/edumania/9125to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to understand students' cultural backgroundsand integrate culturally relevant activities into their instruction [17].

Time Constraints:

Time constraints pose a significant challenge to implementing culturally responsive teaching practices in mathematics. Teachers often operate within rigid curricula and standardized testing schedules, leaving little room for the exploration of culturally relevant materials. Planning lessons that integrate students' cultural backgrounds requires additional time for research, preparation, and adaptation, which may not be feasible for educators juggling multiple responsibilities. For instance, designing culturally responsive math problems that reflect local contexts or traditions demands careful thought and alignment with learning standards. Furthermore, the fast-paced nature of school schedules limits opportunities for deep, reflective discussions on how cultural influences shape mathematical understanding. Addressing this issue requires systemic changes, such as providing teachers with pre-designed culturally relevant resources or allocating professional development days for lesson planning. Schools can also encourage collaboration among educators to share strategies and lesson plans. By acknowledging and addressing time constraints, institutions can create a more supportive environment for culturally responsive teaching. Creating culturally responsive learning experiences requires careful planning and time investment. Balancing this with covering curriculum content can be challenging [18].

Authenticity and Stereotypes:

Ensuring authenticity while avoiding stereotypes is a critical consideration in culturally responsive teaching. Teachers must represent cultures accurately and respectfully, without resorting to oversimplified or clichéd examples. For instance, while incorporating cultural art patterns into geometry lessons can be enriching, it becomes problematic if these examples are portrayed without proper context or reduced to mere aesthetic details. Authentic CRT requires a deep understanding of the complexities and nuances within each culture. Teachers must avoid generalizing or assuming that all students from a particular background share the same experiences or knowledge. For example, not all students from Latin American communities will relate to the same cultural practices or historical narratives. This challenge highlights the importance of collaboration with families, cultural experts, and community leaders to



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ensure that materials are representative and meaningful. By engaging in continuous learning and reflection, educators can navigate cultural sensitivities and create lessons that honor diversity without reinforcing stereotypes. It's crucial to avoid tokenism or superficial representations of cultures. Activities and resources should be authentic and avoid perpetuating stereotypes [19].

Family and Community Engagement:

Family and community engagement is a cornerstone of culturally responsive teaching, but fostering meaningful connections presents challenges. Many families may feel disconnected from the school system due to language barriers, cultural differences, or previous negative experiences. Building trust and collaboration requires intentional effort from educators to create inclusive and welcoming spaces. In mathematics, involving families can include activities like hosting culturally relevant math nights, where parents and students collaborate on problem-solving tasks rooted in community practices. However, logistical barriers, such as work schedules or transportation issues, may hinder participation. Educators must also recognize and value diverse family structures and cultural norms, ensuring that engagement efforts are sensitive and inclusive. Collaborating with community leaders and cultural organizations can bridge gaps and provide additional support. Effective family and community engagement strengthens the connection between home and school, enriching the learning experience and ensuring that students feel their cultural identities are respected and celebrated. Building partnerships with families and communities is essential for understanding students' cultural backgrounds and creating a truly inclusive learning environment [20].

Benefits of Culturally Responsive Teaching in Mathematics

By embracing culturally responsive teaching practices, educators can cultivate a multitude of benefits for students:

Increased Engagement and Motivation:

Culturally responsive teaching in mathematics fosters greater engagement and motivation by connecting mathematical concepts to students' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds. When teachers incorporate cultural contexts, stories, or practices into their lessons, students can see the relevance of mathematics in their daily lives, making it more meaningful and engaging. For instance, using culturally significant examples, such as traditional patterns in



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quilting or architecture, allows students to relate abstract concepts to tangible realities. This relevance helps build intrinsic motivation, as students are more likely to take an active interest in learning when they see its application in their own cultural and community contexts. Additionally, culturally responsive teaching empowers students by validating their cultural identity, creating a sense of belonging in the classroom. This inclusively reduces feelings of alienation and promotes a positive learning atmosphere where students feel encouraged to participate actively. When mathematics becomes accessible and relatable, students develop curiosity and enthusiasm, driving sustained academic engagement.

Students feel a sense of connection to the learning process when their cultural backgrounds are acknowledged and valued, leading to increased engagement and motivation [21].

Deeper Understanding of Mathematics:

Culturally responsive teaching deepens students' understanding of mathematics by presenting concepts in ways that align with diverse cultural practices and ways of thinking. By tapping into students' cultural frameworks, teachers introduce multiple perspectives on mathematical ideas, enriching comprehension. For example, integrating indigenous knowledge systems, such as the use of geometric patterns in Native American beadwork or African fractal designs, highlights mathematical principles like symmetry and recursion. These real-world examples make abstract concepts more concrete, fostering deeper connections. Moreover, this approach encourages students to explore mathematics as a universal language with culturally specific expressions, rather than as an isolated academic discipline. Through collaborative discussions and problem-solving activities that honor diverse approaches, students learn to appreciate and respect different methods of reasoning. This holistic engagement ensures that mathematical learning is not just procedural but conceptual, promoting critical thinking and long-term retention. By grounding mathematics in cultural relevance, educators can bridge gaps in understanding and foster genuine interest. Connecting mathematical concepts to students' cultural experiences can foster a deeper understanding and appreciation for the subject [22]. Positive Self-Concept and Identity:

Culturally responsive teaching in mathematics enhances students' self-concept and identity by affirming the value of their cultural backgrounds in academic settings. When students see their heritage and experiences reflected in the curriculum, they feel validated and



@2025 International Council for Education Research and Training ISSN: 2960-0006 empowered fostering a positive self-image M 2025, Vol. 03, Issue 02, 186-198 DOI: https: https://doi.org/10.59231/edumania/9125

empowered, fostering a positive self-image. Mathematics is often perceived as a neutral or impersonal subject, but integrating cultural references can shift this perception. For instance, highlighting contributions of mathematicians from underrepresented groups showcases diversity in the field, inspiring students to see themselves as capable mathematicians. By incorporating culturally relevant problems and contexts, educators help students feel connected to the material, rein- forcing their belief in their own abilities. This approach not only nurtures confidence but also combats stereotypes about who can excel in mathematics. As students experience success in a culturally responsive classroom, their sense of identity is strengthened, and they begin to view themselves as active participants in the world of mathematics.

Culturally responsive practices affirm students' cultural identities and promote a positive selfconcept as learners of mathematics [23].

Equity and Social Justice:

Culturally responsive teaching promotes equity and social justice by challenging traditional biases and fostering inclusive practices in mathematics education. Historically, mathematics has often been taught in ways that privilege dominant cultural norms while marginalizing others. By recognizing and valuing diverse cultural contributions to mathematics, educators disrupt these inequities, ensuring that all students have a fair opportunity to succeed. For instance, teaching about the mathematical innovations of non- Western cultures, such as the Arabic numeral system or Mayan calendars, challenges Eurocentric narratives and broadens students' understanding of mathematical history. Additionally, culturally responsive teaching empowers students to use mathematics as a tool to analyze and address social justice issues in their communities. This approach encourages critical thinking and advocacy, helping students see themselves as agents of change. By fostering a classroom environment that respects and celebrates diversity, educators create a more equitable learning space that supports all students in achieving their full potential.

CRT helps dismantle power dynamics that disadvantage students from marginalized backgrounds, leading to a more equitable and inclusive learning environment [24].

Improved Academic Achievement:

Culturally responsive teaching directly contributes to improved academic achievement by



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making mathematics more accessible and relevant to diverse learners. When students encounter material that reflects their cultural contexts, they are more likely to engage deeply and persist in their learning. This approach addresses barriers to learning, such as feelings of alienation or cultural disconnect, by building on students' prior knowledge and experiences. For example, using familiar cultural practices or local community issues as the basis for mathematical problems can enhance comprehension and retention. Research shows that students perform better academically when they feel represented and included in the curriculum. Culturally responsive teaching also emphasizes differentiated instruction, recognizing that students have varied learning styles and cultural perspectives. By valuing these differences, teachers create opportunities for all students to excel. The result is not only higher test scores but also the development of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a positive attitude toward learning.

Enhanced Cultural Competence:

Culturally responsive teaching in mathematics enhances cultural competence for both students and teachers, fostering mutual respect and understanding. By integrating diverse cultural perspectives, educators expose students to the richness of global mathematical traditions, helping them appreciate the interconnectedness of cultures. For instance, exploring mathematical patterns in Islamic art or the counting systems of Pacific Island cultures broadens students' worldview and encourages cross-cultural appreciation. This approach also helps students develop the ability to work collaboratively with peers from different backgrounds, a crucial skill in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. For teachers, culturally responsive practices involve continuous learning about their students' cultural identities and adapting their instruction accordingly. This commitment to inclusivity not only enhances teaching effectiveness but also models empathy and respect. By cultivating cultural competence, mathematics classrooms become spaces where diversity is celebrated, and students are prepared to navigate and contribute to a multicultural society with confidence and understanding.

Conclusion

Culturally responsive teaching offers a powerful framework for transforming mathematics classrooms into vibrant and inclusive learning spaces. By acknowledging students' cultural



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funds of knowledge, integrating culturally relevant content and activities, and promoting a growth mindset, educators can empower students from diverse backgrounds to thrive in mathematics. This shift in pedagogy fosters not only academic success but also a sense of belonging and appreciation for the beauty and power of mathematics. As Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasizes," Culturally responsive teaching is not about adding something on; it's about changing the way we think about teaching mathematics" [25]. By embracing this transformative approach, mathematics education can become a space where all students can develop their mathematical identities, solve problems with confidence, and reach their full potential.

Students and parents reported that culturally relevant mathematics education made learning more meaningful and engaging. The integration of indigenous knowledge into the curriculum improved student interest and comprehension. [26]

The research not only validated the efficacy of these creative pedagogical approaches but also offered valuable perspectives on their pragmatic application. The consistency observed in the outcomes of the hypothesis testing the literature review and the qualitative research highlights the effectiveness of these strategies in improving minority ethnic student's educational outcomes in mathematics in higher education. [27]

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