

Research Article

Social Studies Practice Teacher's Views on Culturally Responsive Teaching

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Abstract: This study aimed to describe the views of social studies practice teachers on culturally responsive pedagogy (CRT). A qualitative-descriptive research design was employed, utilizing a written interview guide to collect data from eight purposefully selected social studies practice teachers. Thematic analysis was employed in analyzing data, with Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Theory serving as the theoretical framework. The findings revealed five meaningful categories that encapsulated the views of social studies practice teachers on CRT. Firstly, in terms of academic success, CRT was viewed to foster a positive learning environment and employ relevant pedagogies. Secondly, regarding cultural competence, CRT was viewed to establish sensitivity towards diversity and promote healthy coexistence. Lastly, in relation to sociopolitical consciousness, CRT was viewed to encourage active citizenship. This study holds educators to benefit from the insights gained, as they provide guidance on creating a positive learning environment and developing strategies that cater to culturally diverse students.

Keywords: practice teachers; culturally responsive teaching; social studies

1. Introduction

Culturally-relevant teaching is beneficial in encouraging equitable excellence, empowering those who are frequently silenced, and ensuring that every child is seen (Samuels, 2018). Culturally-responsive teaching is a type of teaching which centers classroom instruction in multi-ethnic frames of reference (Gay, 2018). Understanding that education is not apolitical, teachers who engage in culturally responsive teaching raise students' critical consciousness, develop students' awareness of community problems, and give students opportunities to participate in decision-making (Byrd, 2016). Culturally-Responsive teaching requires students to develop a commitment to service as well as social justice ideals (Bassey, 2016). Thus, to sustain a democratic way of life, there is supposed to be a cultivation of appreciation for cultural diversity in a social studies classroom (National Council for the Social Studies, 2010).

Culturally-Responsive Teaching which considers students' cultural realities has a positive impact in improving the involvement of students on their learning and academic achievement (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Byrd, 2016; Wah & Nasri, 2019). Students' academic knowledge and skills are more meaningful, engaging, and easily learned when they reflect their lived experiences and frames of reference (Gay, 2002). It can be used in classrooms to implement a truly transformative social justice agenda because it engages all students' civic citizenship, keeps them alert, and empowers them to actively participate in the struggle for social change (Bassey, 2016). Neoliberal reform efforts including curriculum standardization and standardized testing increased the marginalization of culturally relevant pedagogy (Sleeter, 2012). Despite the gaps between the desire of teachers to teach in alignment with culturally sustaining pedagogy and their ability to do it due to curriculum restrictions, culturally sustaining teaching can serve as a framework to improve teaching and learning with practicing teachers (Thomas, 2021).

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Although there are enough studies conducted on the cultural responsiveness in education setting regarding its implication, impact, and effectivity in education and the society, there is still a limited study that covers both the practice teachers and the local setting. There are little research documenting models of Culturally Sustaining Teaching, particularly in social studies, that can help us understand what it can look like in practice (Martell & Stevens, 2019). Furthermore, Culturally Relevant Teaching in social studies can assist teachers in actualizing students' ideals of developing a sociopolitical consciousness about the potential and pitfalls of democracy (Akinyele, 2018). Culturally Relevant pedagogy recognizes the value of lived experience by marginalized groups in understanding and making meaning of the world (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Through interviews or narrative by the participants of the study, the researchers would be able to describe the views or perceptions of Social Studies Practice Teachers on Culturally Responsive Teaching. Specifically, this study sought to describe their views based on three criteria of Culturally-relevant pedagogy theory by Ladson-Billings: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. This study suggested that culturally-responsive teaching can produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive design to describe the views of social studies practice teachers on culturally-responsive teaching. The goal of qualitative descriptive studies is a comprehensive summarization, in everyday terms, of specific events experienced by individuals or groups of individuals (Lambert & Lambert, 2013). The study on culturally-responsive teaching is supported by the culturally-relevant pedagogy theory which is a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate, (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It has three criteria namely: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness.

2.2. Informants and Sampling

The informants of this study were eight (8) purposely chosen college students of a local university. They were selected through purposeful sampling technique to attain the objectives of this study. The inclusion of the informants was based upon these criteria: (a) a student of a local university, (b) a social studies practice teacher (c) have/had experienced engaging with different cultures, and (d) have/had taught culturally-diverse students. Table 1 displays the profile of the informants. The informants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Table 1. Profile of Informants

Social Studies Practice Teacher	Age	Gender	Address	Have/had engagement with diverse cultures
Ray	23	M	Capiz	Yes
Thea	22	F	Janiuay, Iloilo	Yes
Divine	22	F	Tigbauan, Iloilo	Yes
Bea	22	F	Iloilo	Yes
Arra	23	F	Antique	Yes
Joseph	23	M	Aklan	Yes
Marie	22	F	Antique	Yes
Joy	22	F	Barotac Nuevo	Yes

2.3. Instrument

A written interview guide was utilized for this study. The interview questions that were formulated revolved around the experiences of the informants in a culturally responsive classroom. The written interview guide was validated by three experts in qualitative research using Rubric for Expert Validation of Survey or Interview by Simon and White (2018). English language is the medium that was used by the researchers in formulating the question and the informants in crafting their responses.

2.4. Data collection

The following systematic steps were observed by the researchers in collecting the data: First, prior to data collection, the identified informants were contacted personally and through their social media and email accounts to brief them as informants of the study. Second, for efficiency and convenience, research instrument was administered using online platforms. A letter was sent to seek their approval regarding their participation in the study. The letter includes a brief background of the study, the conditions, and the interview question. Follow up questions were sent to the informants through the use of aforementioned modes of communication. If they agree, informants were given five days to answer the interview question that was sent. They were encouraged to send their answers via email, Messenger, or any online platforms of their choice. Lastly, the researchers downloaded and copied the informants' responses and compile them on a single file that will be then analyzed. With the help of waivers, written consent forms, and an authorized letter of information, informants' willing participation in this study was acquired. The researchers upheld complete confidentiality and anonymity throughout the data collection process.

2.5. Data analysis

After the informants provided their written responses, the researchers electronically copied the informants' written responses to the interview questions and compiled them on a single document for ease of use while evaluating the data. The data gathered underwent analysis, comparison, and interpretation using inductive content analysis which observed the process of abstraction to condense and classify data which enabled the researchers to answer research questions through concepts, categories, or themes (Kynğäs, 2020). Transcripts of the interview were organized to identify how Culturally Relevant Teaching promoted academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Codes were assigned to the informants' comments and phrases based on the recurring themes. The researchers then created categories based on the detected codes and informants' responses. Thus, meaningful categories emerged. The reliability of this study was ensured as the researchers observed methodical data gathering procedures and processes for this study likewise the responses of the informants were analyzed and interpreted. The findings of this research were strengthened by related literature and studies chosen rigorously and cited properly.

3. Results

The results of this study were organized based on the three (3) criteria of culturally-relevant pedagogy theory presented by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) namely (1) academic success, (2) cultural competence, and (3) sociopolitical consciousness. To describe the views of social studies preservice teachers on Culturally Responsive Teaching, five (5) meaningful categories emerged: (1) fostering a positive learning environment; (2) employing relevant pedagogies; (3) establishing sensitivity towards diversity; (4) promoting healthy coexistence; and, (5) encouraging active citizenship.

3.1. Academic Success

Culturally responsive teaching is viewed as a facilitator of academic success for all students. There were two categories that emerged which relate how culturally-responsive teaching promotes academic success of students, namely fosters a positive learning environment and employs relevant pedagogies.

3.1.1. Fosters a Positive Learning Environment

Culturally-responsive teaching is viewed as a vital aspect in fostering a positive learning environment. This is divided into two subcategories (1) promotes healthy exchange of ideas and (2) provides equal learning opportunities.

- **Promotes healthy exchange of ideas**

Culturally-responsive teaching creates an environment where students comfortably express their diverse viewpoints.

RAY: "Students openly share their own ideas, experiences, and customs in relation to the subject by using their own dialect enabling a more productive and in-depth learning of a subject matter."

BEA: "Sharing individual ideas, experiences, perspectives, and customs freely without discrimination or unnecessary dissension is a testament to being culturally responsive to teaching."

ARRA: “Students were given the freedom to speak and opportunity to voice their opinions, insights and/or ideas during the discussion or in a certain topic specifically on real-life social issues.”

JOSEPH: “It ensures that students’ voices will always be heard and applauded as it encourages them to share their perspectives on different matters in order to understand the lessons through different opinions.”

- ***Provides equal learning opportunities***

CRT is viewed as a means of ensuring that all students have equal access to benefits and resources without discrimination or barriers.

BEA: “Culturally responsive teaching in my opinion is to teach students equally and treating them fairly despite their diversity and differences in cultural background.”

ARRA: “It is an approach in teaching which provides students with equal and inclusive learning opportunities in response to individual differences.”

JOY: “Despite cultural differences, students were being treated fairly and with respect. Students were given the equal opportunity to learn and share what they have learned inside the class.”

JOSEPH: “As a social studies teacher, integrating a culturally responsive teaching strategy is proven to efficiently provide equal learning opportunities to students.”

3.1.2. Employs Relevant Pedagogies

CRT is viewed as the collection of instructional strategies that are meaningful and appropriate for the learners’ contexts. This is divided into two subcategories, namely contextualizes instruction and utilizes relevant instructional materials.

- ***Contextualizes instruction***

CRT is viewed as an educational approach that connects learning content and activities to real-world contexts and situations.

THEA: “I would conduct CRT during my discussion by giving local or contextualized examples that are commonly happening around. This way, students will be hooked while we are having discussion and they will be able to relate and give their own experience to the lesson.”

DIVINE: “By giving examples that are localized and contextualized students will be more eager to learn and participate in class.”

- ***Utilizes relevant instructional materials***

CRT is viewed as the selection and incorporation of materials that are directly related to the subject matter being taught.

THEA: “Creating materials that are relevant to everyday life is important for students to engage in class. It would allow them to relate it (mostly on their affective aspect) in their daily life and they see it as a practical way to learn a lesson (cognitive aspect).”

BEA: “I will also make sure that my methods in teaching, as well as my instructional materials, are suited to their (students’) needs.”

3.2. Cultural Competence

CRT is viewed as a pedagogy that emphasizes the development of cultural competence among teachers. There were two categories that emerged which relate how culturally-responsive teaching promotes cultural competence of students, namely, (1) establishes sensitivity towards diversity and (2) builds empathy and respect for different cultures.

3.2.1. Establishes Sensitivity towards Diversity

CRT is viewed as the process of developing an awareness, understanding, and appreciation for the various dimensions of diversity in society. This is divided into subcategories, namely, (1) fosters a sense of belongingness and respect and (2) builds empathy and respect for different cultures.

- ***Fosters a sense of belongingness and respect***

CRT is viewed as the creation of an environment or taking actions that promote a feeling of inclusion, connection, and value among students.

RAY: “As a would-be teacher, embracing students’ diversity in each of their own individual aspects primarily creates an atmosphere of belongingness and respect for each and every student inside the academic spaces.”

JOY: “Culturally Responsive Teaching creates a sense of belongingness and respect toward each student in their academic spaces.”

MARIE: “A culturally responsive class promotes respect, inclusion, contextualization, and connection.”

- ***Builds empathy for different cultures***

CRT is viewed as a way of encouraging students to see the world through the eyes of others and invokes a sense of empathy towards people who come from different cultural backgrounds.

BEA: “Integrating a culturally responsive teaching in social studies is important to help students understand different perspectives and help them develop an empathy toward others.”

MARIE: “This pedagogy can also help teachers to establish a learning environment where learners feel safe to express their cultural identity, encourage students to be proud of their distinctiveness, and build empathy among learners.”

3.2.2. *Fosters healthy coexistence*

CRT is viewed as the conditions where different individuals or groups can peacefully and harmoniously live together in mutual tolerance despite differences or conflicting beliefs. This is divided into two subcategories encourages collaboration and establishes harmonious classroom climate.

- ***Encourages collaboration***

CRT is viewed as an atmosphere that fosters and promotes teamwork, cooperation, and joint efforts among students.

ARRA: “As a Social Studies teacher, it is important to create an inclusive, free from biases, and safe learning environment in which students learn, grow, and can work independently and collaboratively.”

DIVINE: “In activities, it is important to encourage students to collaborate with their peers and discover more of their peers’ heritage or cultures.”

- ***Establishes harmonious classroom climate***

CRT is viewed as the creation of an environment in which students feel safe, respected, and supported, leading to positive social interactions and effective learning.

DIVINE: “I would integrate culturally responsive teaching in my social studies class by creating a conducive and welcoming learning environment that allows students to be more open and comfortable while learning the lesson.”

ARRA: “It is important to integrate a culturally responsive teaching in Social Studies so that we are able to establish a harmonious and positive classroom climate where students learn to understand and appreciate individual differences.”

3.3. *Sociopolitical Consciousness*

CRT is viewed as a mechanism of instilling knowledge regarding the complexities of the social and political world and taking action to create a more inclusive society. There was one category that emerged which relates how culturally-responsive teaching promotes sociopolitical consciousness of students, namely (1) encourages civic engagement.

3.3.1. *Encourages real world learning*

CRT is viewed as a way of encouraging students so that they can have educational experiences that occur in genuine, practical, and meaningful contexts outside of the traditional classroom environment. This is divided into two subcategories namely (1) promotes civic engagement and participation and (2) transcends the classroom.

- ***Promotes civic engagement and participation***

CRT is viewed as the means of encouraging students to participate in their communities by taking an active role in shaping and influencing public affairs.

ARRA: “CRT creates opportunities for students to develop critical consciousness of everything around, not just inside the four walls of the classroom but in his own community/society.”

RAY: “It is also a subject that lays the groundwork for pupils to develop into better global citizens who see beyond themselves and work actively to improve society and its nations.”

- ***Trancends the classroom***

CRT is viewed as going beyond traditional classroom-based education and exploring alternative learning experiences and environments to embrace innovative approaches that enhance learning.

RAY: “Students can see themselves reflected not only in the curriculum but also as a part of the wider community in the social studies classroom.”

DIVINE: “Integrating culturally responsive teaching in social studies allows students to have extensive knowledge of the diversities not just in the classroom but in the community. With this, students can also improve their higher-order thinking skills, allowing them to learn social studies effectively.”

MARIE: “Culturally responsive teaching is integrated in social studies through interview, site-visit, and reaching out to locals.”

JOSEPH: “It is also a class that is not limited inside the binded papers of books and walls of the classrooms but it allows students to explore, observe, and learn in actual context which enable them to fully grasp the concept in cognitive, psychomotor, and affective aspects of learning.”

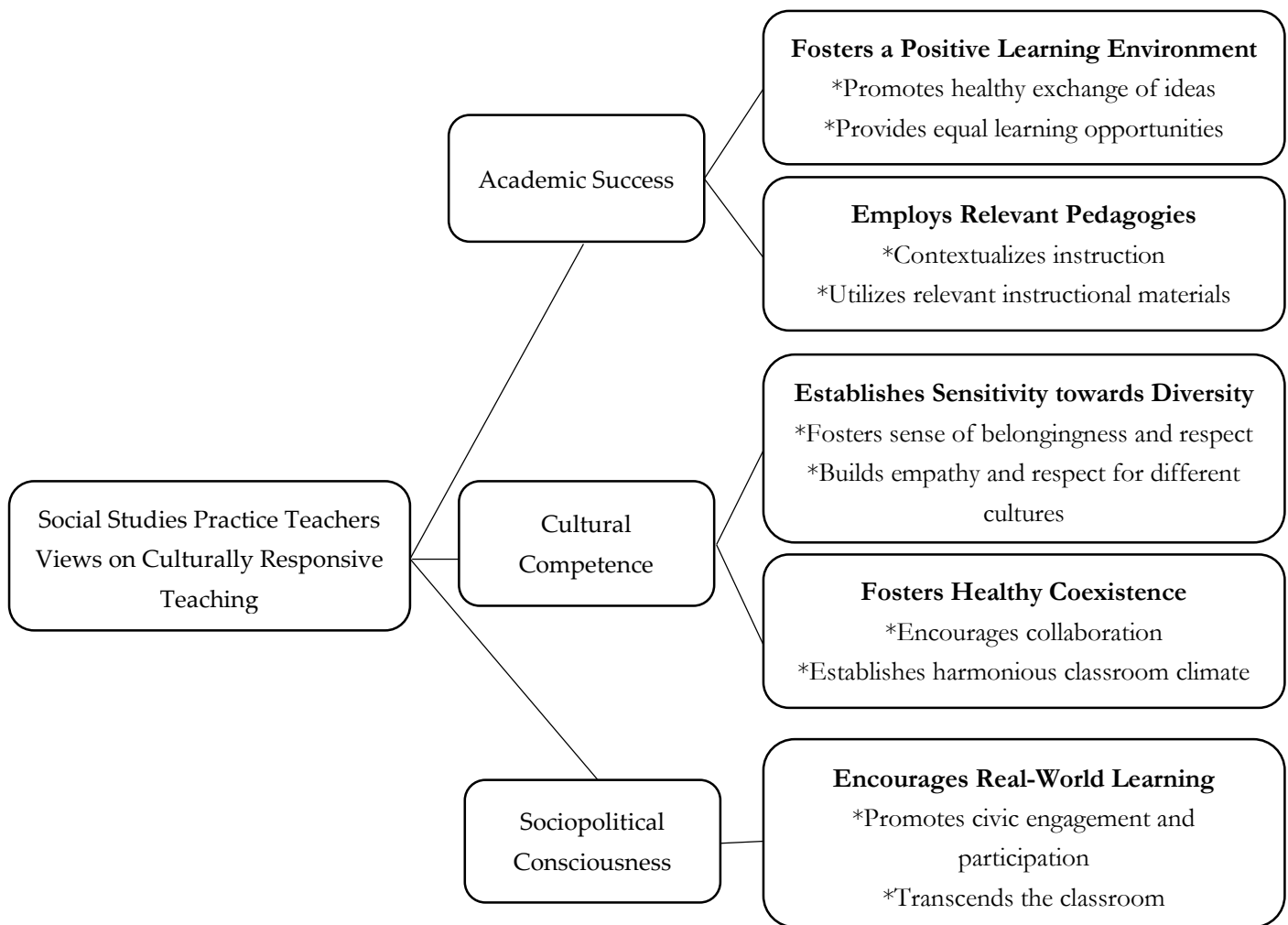


Figure 1. Demonstration of meaningful categories of the study

4. Discussion

This study describes the views Social Studies Practice Teachers on Culturally Responsive Teaching. Three significant themes emerged based on the criteria of Culturally-Relevant Pedagogy Theory by Ladson-Billings such as academic success, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness.

In the 1970s, culturally-responsive teaching was emphasized and was extended into supporting struggling students’ cultural identities, aiming for academic success, and advancing educational equity (Frerie, 2005). In the late 1990s, the concept of “culturally relevant pedagogy” was introduced (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In 2000, the book “Culturally–Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice” explored the concept and implementation of culturally-responsive teaching in the field of education (Gay, 2002). Teaching that is culturally responsive only happens when culture is naturally included into the curriculum, instructional and assessment strategies, and classroom management (Skepple, 2015).

Ladson-Billings (1995) identified CRT theory as suitable for higher education, equipping learners for diverse work environments and grooming them as global workers and leaders. One of the views on culturally-responsive teaching emphasizes academic success through fostering a healthy learning environment. A positive environment where diverse students feel trusted and respected is fostered through CRT (Colbert, 2010). This is supported by Ford and Kea's (2017) idea that culturally responsive teachers help students construct knowledge by leveraging their personal and cultural strengths. They create inclusive classroom environments where every student feels empowered, valued, and included. Similarly, Vavrus (2008) revealed that CRT strives to promote inclusive and inviting classroom and school cultures in order to develop culturally relevant approaches to improving academic goals for all students.

Additionally, the view that CRT is vital for fostering a positive learning environment correlates with the view that CRT is a way of promoting a healthy exchange of ideas. Dialogue and rich, meaningful conversations in learning is one of the best strategies for employing CRT (Samuels, 2018). Along with this is the view that CRT is an approach which provides students with equal and inclusive learning opportunities. A democratic goal of CRT is to end inequality which is experienced by low status students so as to close the achievement gap for these students (Vavrus, 2008). The teacher has the central role in providing an educational approach that gives equal opportunities for diverse students (Hunter, 2015).

As per interview, CRT is also viewed as an approach which employs relevant pedagogies to meet the needs of the learners. Teachers are expected to develop culturally responsive instruction in response to students' differences (Muniz, 2019). This implies the contextualization of instruction and utilization of relevant instructional materials in which the students can easily relate to. Teachers should empower all students through their teaching content and pedagogical practices (Egbo, 2018). Teaching material and teaching resources are helpful for teachers, as they show teachers appropriate ways of positively engaging with cultural diversity (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2020). Culturally relevant practices, like differentiated instruction and storytelling, enhance diverse students' learning through increased engagement and stronger cultural connection (Marosi, Avraamidou, & Galani, 2021). Students are more engaged and feel more a part of their schools when teachers try to relate lessons to their interests and utilize real-world examples (Byrd, 2016).

Another view of CRT emphasizes the promotion of cultural competence through establishing sensitivity towards diversity of learners. Culturally competent teachers foster courteous, welcoming environments in the classroom that encourage children to value and comprehend the cultures of their peers (Byrd, 2016). Teachers must adjust their teaching methods to accommodate the growing cultural diversity among students (Hunter, 2015). Along with sensitivity towards diversity is the need for respect and empathy. An important element in engaging students in the lesson was respecting their cultures in the classroom (Dreyfus, 2019). Teachers' ability to empathize is critical for navigating classroom diversity (Abacioglu, Volman, & Fischer, 2020).

CRT views pedagogy as an interactive process that prioritizes student engagement to combat passivity and places them at the heart of teaching and learning (Vavrus, 2008). The view that CRT helps foster healthy coexistence among students has also emerged from the interview. CRT is considered essential to answer the educational needs that arise due to the coexistence between differing groups of students (Meléndez-Luces; Couto-Cantero, 2021). Healthy coexistence correlates with collaboration and harmonious classroom climate. Collaborative learning among diverse student groups strengthens relationships, increases cultural awareness, and fosters acceptance of differences (Colbert, 2010). As to a harmonious classroom climate, it was found that in certain situations, exposing students to culturally different individuals resulted in positive intergroup relations, while in other cases, attitudes and interactions stayed the same or even deteriorated (Cotton, 1993).

Developing sociopolitical consciousness is one of the advantages of integrating culturally-responsive teaching in the learning process and it has been one way of viewing CRT. An excellent teacher facilitates student action to address real-world problems from a variety of perspectives related to the discipline that improve their community and/or world (Muniz, 2019). However, it has been found that teachers need more opportunities to engage in critical discussion to challenge the injustices and inequalities of the status quo (Ebersole, Kanahale-Mossman, Kawakami, 2015). Culturally-responsive and communicative teaching help foster critical thinking and social awareness to underlie the implications for students' experiential learning in the multicultural classroom (Berlian & Huda, 2022).

CRT is viewed as a way of encouraging real-world learning. Engaging students through real-life examples and connecting to their interests fosters greater classroom involvement and school connection (Byrd, 2016). Real-world learning correlates with both civic engagement and learning that transcends the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching in classrooms achieves social justice by activating civic citizenship, engaging students, and fostering active participation in social change (Bassey, 2016). Culturally relevant teachers also build bridges by bringing the outside world into the classroom and directing students to community service-learning opportunities (Byrd, 2016).

One of the goals of multicultural education is to promote improved intercultural relations. In some settings, bringing students into task-related and social contact with those who are culturally different from themselves led to positive intergroup relations. In other settings, attitudes and interactions have remained unchanged or even worsened. Thus, doing culturally responsive activities alone or in isolation was not as desirable, but having a culturally responsive perspective or purpose along with the culturally responsive activity held greater value (Ebersole, Kanahale-Mossman, Kawakami, 2015).

Since research has established a connection between culturally competent educators and positive outcomes for students, in attempt to encourage equitable excellence, give voice to those who are frequently silenced, and ensure no child is made invisible; educators must be prepared and equipped with tools to create and facilitate environments that embrace cultural responsiveness (Samuels, 2018).

The findings support the notion that culturally responsive pedagogy can produce students who excel academically, display cultural competence, and develop students who comprehend and critique the existing social order. This current study has numerous limitations that should be noted and maybe solved in future studies. First, a qualitative-descriptive design was used in this study to describe the perspectives of social studies practice teachers on culturally responsive teaching, which is only limited to a comprehensive summarization, in everyday terms, of specific events experienced by individuals or groups of individuals. Second, the number of informants (eight) may be insufficient to represent the entire student population and generalize the findings. However, quantitative findings that are supplemented by qualitative findings could provide a broader perspective and a more comprehensive knowledge of Culturally Responsive Teaching. Finally, the study relied on written-interview surveys, which are susceptible to self-report bias. Despite these limitations, this study gathered information about Culturally Responsive Teaching through the eyes of Social Studies Practice Teachers, which can be useful in informing and encouraging future scholars in related fields.

5. Conclusions

Culturally responsive teaching plays a key role in the lives of student teachers because it helps them develop the competencies needed to meet the needs of diverse learners, fosters inclusive learning environments, and promotes social justice in education. Student teachers can positively impact their students' lives and contribute to a more equitable and respectful society by incorporating culturally responsive practices into their teaching approach. As student teachers prepare to enter the teaching profession, they must be prepared to work effectively with diverse student populations.

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