

Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices among Special Education Teachers of Mountain Province

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Abstract

This quantitative descriptive study investigated culturally responsive teaching practices, challenges, and perceived impacts on learning outcomes among special education teachers in Mountain Province. Purposive sampling was employed to select 27 special education teachers with a minimum of 3 years of experience in the field. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire comprising sections on culturally responsive teaching practices, challenges in implementation, and perceived impact on learning outcomes, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were utilized for data analysis. Findings revealed significant strides in incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into instruction, modifying approaches to accommodate diverse needs, and collaborating with families and communities. Challenges included insufficient training, shortages of culturally relevant resources, and difficulties balancing standardized curriculum demands with culturally responsive teaching. Despite obstacles, teachers perceived positive impacts on student engagement, academic achievement, and inclusivity. Ethical considerations prioritized participant protection and confidentiality. The study underscores the importance of ongoing professional development, resource allocation, and administrative support to enhance culturally responsive teaching practices and improve student outcomes in special education contexts.

Keywords: Culturally responsive teaching, Special education teachers, Learning outcomes, Challenges, Professional development

INTRODUCTION

Culturally responsive teaching is a comprehensive pedagogical approach that recognizes and celebrates the diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of students, aiming to create more inclusive, equitable, and empowering learning environments (Gay, 2018). At the heart of this practice is the acknowledgment and validation of students' cultural identities, which involves incorporating their cultural references, traditions, and ways of knowing into the curriculum and instructional materials, fostering a classroom climate that affirms their cultural identities, and developing caring and respectful relationships with students and their families that demonstrate genuine concern and respect for cultural and linguistic differences (Howard, 2021). Culturally responsive teaching also employs a variety of instructional strategies, from multimedia and visual aids to collaborative learning activities, that are aligned with different cultural learning styles and preferences, while also promoting critical thinking and

sociopolitical consciousness that empowers students to examine and challenge dominant cultural narratives and become agents of positive social change (Bonner et al., 2018). Importantly, this approach emphasizes the active involvement of families and communities, inviting them to share their knowledge, skills, and perspectives, and collaborating with them to design and implement culturally responsive educational programs that truly meet the needs of diverse student populations, including those with special needs.

Culturally responsive teaching has become increasingly important in the field of inclusive education, particularly for students with special needs (Cruz et al., 2020). When teaching approaches are aligned with the cultural backgrounds and lived experiences of students, it can lead to improved learning outcomes, stronger student engagement, and a greater sense of belonging in the classroom (Borrero et al., 2018). As researchers and practitioners have recognized the importance of incorporating students' cultural experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives into the teaching and learning process. This pedagogical approach has been implemented and studied in various countries around the world, yielding promising results.

In the United States, the concept of culturally responsive teaching has been widely advocated and researched. Scholars such as Villegas and Lucas (2002) have emphasized the need for teachers to develop cultural competence and recognize the assets that students from diverse backgrounds bring to the classroom. Studies have shown that culturally responsive teaching can lead to improved academic achievement, increased student engagement, and a stronger sense of cultural identity among minority and marginalized students (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Sleeter, 2012).

Similarly, in Canada, researchers have explored the integration of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the curriculum and teaching practices. Dion's (2009) work, for example, highlighted the importance of incorporating First Nations, Inuit, and Métis ways of knowing into the educational system to promote equity and inclusion.

Culturally responsive teaching has also gained traction in other parts of the world. In Australia, Santoro (2009) examined the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in diverse classroom settings. The study emphasized the need for teacher education programs to better prepare pre-service teachers to work with students from various cultural backgrounds. In the context of special education, the integration of culturally responsive approaches has become increasingly crucial, as students with special needs often come from diverse cultural backgrounds (Kozleski, 2010; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Studies in countries such as India (Kalyanpur, 2008), and South Africa (Engelbrecht et al., 2015) have highlighted the challenges and opportunities in implementing culturally responsive practices in special education settings.

The Indigenous people of Mt. Provinces, an indigenous ethnic group residing in the mountainous regions of the Philippines, have a rich cultural heritage that is deeply rooted in their ancestral land, traditions, and spiritual beliefs. Key aspects of the Indigenous people of Mt. Province culture include communal living, respect for elders, a strong connection to the land, animistic beliefs, and a reliance on oral tradition (Jones, 2002; Botangen et al., 2018). Special education teachers face challenges in adapting their teaching practices to the cultural norms and values of their students. The Indigenous people's culture places a strong emphasis on communal living, respect for elders, and a deep connection to the land and natural world. If teachers fail to recognize and integrate these cultural elements into their instruction, they may inadvertently create barriers to learning and engagement for Indigenous people of Mt. Province students with special needs.

On the other hand, when teachers make a concerted effort to understand and incorporate cultural practices and perspectives into their teaching, it can have a transformative effect. Students may feel more seen, valued, and empowered, leading to improved academic performance, better social-emotional well-being, and a stronger sense of cultural identity. This, in turn, can contribute to the overall inclusivity and effectiveness of the special education program.

However, implementing culturally responsive teaching in inclusive settings is not without its challenges. Teachers may lack the necessary training, resources, or support to effectively integrate cultural elements into their instruction. They may also encounter resistance from the broader educational system, which may prioritize standardized testing and curriculum over more culturally-tailored approaches.

Given the unique cultural context of the Indigenous people of Mt. Provinces and the importance of culturally responsive teaching in special education, this study aims to explore the extent to which special education teachers in the Mountain Province are incorporating indigenous people cultural elements and practices into their teaching methods. By understanding the current state of culturally responsive teaching in this context, the study can inform the development of more inclusive and effective special education practices that empower Indigenous people of Mt. Province students with special needs. In the context of students with special needs, culturally responsive teaching is crucial. These students often come from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and their unique needs and strengths may not be adequately addressed by traditional, one-size-fits-all instructional methods. By incorporating culturally relevant content, instructional strategies, and classroom environments, teachers can better support the academic, social, and emotional development of students with special needs.

This study specifically examined the culturally responsive teaching practices employed by special education teachers in Mountain Province, the challenges they face in implementing these practices, and the perceived impact of culturally responsive teaching on student learning outcomes. The study sought to investigate the specific strategies and approaches the teachers utilize to incorporate the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of their students, as well as the barriers and obstacles they encounter in adapting their instruction to align with the cultural norms, values, and learning preferences of their diverse student populations. Additionally, the study aimed to understand the perceived impact that culturally responsive teaching practices have on the learning outcomes of students in Mountain Province, including improvements in academic achievement, increased student engagement and motivation, and a stronger sense of cultural identity and pride among the learners, providing valuable insights to guide educators and policymakers in creating more inclusive and equitable educational experiences.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research method to investigate the culturally responsive teaching practices, challenges, and perceived impacts on learning outcomes among special education teachers in Mountain Province.

Participants

The participants of the study were selected through purposive sampling. Twenty-seven (27) teachers who are handling learners with disabilities from various schools in Mountain Province were invited to participate in the study. Only teachers who had at least 3 years of experience in special education and were currently employed in the division were included in the sample.

Data Collection

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to the participating special education teachers. The questionnaire comprised three main sections: Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices: This section assessed the specific strategies and approaches the teachers employed to integrate the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of their students into the teaching and learning process. Challenges in Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching: This section explored the barriers and obstacles the teachers faced in adapting their instruction to align with the cultural norms, values, and learning preferences of their diverse student populations. Perceived Impact on Learning Outcomes: This section focused on the teachers' perceptions of the impact that culturally responsive teaching had on student academic achievement, engagement, motivation, and cultural identity. The questionnaire utilized a 5-point multiple-choice Likert-scale.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. This allowed the researchers to identify the most commonly employed culturally responsive teaching practices, the key challenges faced by the teachers, and the perceived impact on student learning outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

The study prioritized the protection and well-being of the participants. All participants were provided with a detailed informed consent form, ensuring they fully understood the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. The researchers also maintained strict confidentiality and privacy, storing the collected data securely and accessible only to the research team. Additionally, the researchers were mindful of minimizing any potential risks to the participants, such as emotional or psychological impacts from discussing challenges in the classroom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1

Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices of Special Education Teachers of Mountain Province

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
I incorporate my students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into the curriculum and instructional materials.	4.76	Strongly Agree
I use teaching strategies that are aligned with the learning preferences and styles of my diverse student population.	4.33	Agree
I actively seek to understand and validate the cultural identities and values of my students.	4.55	Strongly Agree
I create opportunities for my students to share their cultural knowledge and traditions with the class.	3.80	Agree
I modify my instructional approach to accommodate the unique needs and strengths of my students from diverse cultural backgrounds.	4.63	Strongly Agree
I encourage my students to critically examine and challenge any biases or stereotypes present in the curriculum or classroom	3.33	Neutral

discussions.		
I collaborate with my students' families and communities to better understand and integrate their cultural perspectives into my teaching.	4.67	Strongly Agree
General Weighted Mean	4.30	Agree

The findings from Table 1 underscore the significant strides that special education teachers in Mountain Province have made in adopting culturally responsive teaching practices. The high levels of agreement in incorporating students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into the curriculum and instructional materials (M=4.76) reflect a deep commitment to ensuring that the educational content resonates with and is relevant to the students' lived experiences. This practice is crucial, as it validates students' identities and fosters a sense of belonging in the classroom. As noted by Hammond (2015), culturally responsive teaching creates a learning environment that respects and values students' cultural references, which is essential for their academic engagement and success.

By actively seeking to understand and validate the cultural identities and values of their students (M=4.55), these teachers demonstrate an appreciation for diversity that is essential for creating an inclusive learning environment. This approach aligns with Villegas and Lucas (2002), who emphasize the importance of teachers being culturally competent and responsive to the cultural backgrounds of their students to enhance their learning experiences.

Furthermore, the practice of modifying instructional approaches to accommodate the unique needs and strengths of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (M=4.63) shows a proactive stance in addressing educational equity. This adaptability is a core aspect of culturally responsive teaching, as it acknowledges that traditional pedagogical methods may not be effective for all students. By tailoring their teaching strategies, the teachers ensure that all students have an equitable opportunity to succeed academically. According to Nieto (2010), differentiated instruction that takes into account students' cultural backgrounds is crucial for meeting the diverse needs of learners in a multicultural classroom.

Collaboration with students' families and communities to integrate their cultural perspectives into teaching (M=4.67) highlights the teachers' recognition of the critical role that family and community play in the educational process. Engaging with these stakeholders not only enriches the curriculum but also builds a supportive network around the students, enhancing their educational experience and outcomes. Epstein (2011) emphasizes the importance of family and community involvement in education, noting that such partnerships are key to student success.

The teachers' agreement on using teaching strategies aligned with the learning preferences and styles of their diverse student population (M=4.33) further underscores their commitment to personalized education. These strategies likely contribute to more effective learning and better student engagement, as they respect and respond to the varied ways in which students process information. Tomlinson (2014) highlights that understanding and responding to students' learning preferences is a critical component of differentiated instruction, which is essential for fostering an inclusive classroom environment.

However, the findings also indicate areas where improvement is needed. For instance, the creation of opportunities for students to share their cultural knowledge and traditions with the class (M=3.80) is crucial but not yet fully realized. Such opportunities can enrich the classroom environment and provide students with a platform to express their identities and learn from each other. According to Banks (2015), integrating students' cultural knowledge into the curriculum not only validates their experiences but also promotes cultural understanding and respect among peers.

More critically, the neutral level of agreement regarding encouraging students to critically examine and challenge biases or stereotypes present in the curriculum or classroom discussions (M=3.33) points to a significant gap. This aspect of culturally responsive teaching is vital for developing students' critical thinking skills and their ability to navigate and challenge societal biases. The low mean score suggests that while teachers are incorporating cultural content, they may not be sufficiently addressing the critical dimensions of this content. Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that culturally responsive teaching must go beyond content integration to include the development of students' critical consciousness.

To address this gap, ongoing professional development and support for teachers are essential. Professional development programs can focus on strategies for integrating critical examination of biases and stereotypes into everyday teaching practices. Additionally, such programs can provide teachers with the tools and confidence needed to facilitate difficult conversations about race, culture, and bias in the classroom. Sleeter (2011) suggests that sustained professional development is crucial for helping teachers develop the skills and knowledge needed to implement culturally responsive teaching practices effectively.

The general weighted mean of 4.30 indicates that while special education teachers in Mountain Province often engage in culturally responsive teaching practices, there is still considerable room for growth. This aligns with the broader literature on culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes the need for continuous learning and adaptation (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The findings suggest that while the foundational elements of culturally responsive teaching are in place, there is a need for a deeper integration of critical perspectives and practices.

Overall, the study highlights the progress made by special education teachers in Mountain Province in embracing culturally responsive teaching, while also pointing to areas where further development is needed. By focusing on these areas, teachers can better support the academic success and positive identity development of their students, ultimately contributing to more equitable and inclusive educational outcomes (Bottiani et al., 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). Through continued professional development and a commitment to cultural responsiveness, educators can create more inclusive and effective learning environments for all students.

Table 2
Challenges in Employing Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices Experienced by Special Education Teachers of Mountain Province

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
I lack sufficient training and professional development opportunities to effectively implement culturally responsive teaching practices.	4.29	Agree
There is a shortage of culturally relevant instructional materials and resources available in my school.	4.12	Agree
The school administration and leadership do not provide adequate support and guidance for adopting culturally responsive approaches.	4.09	Agree
I struggle to balance the demands of the standardized curriculum	3.96	Agree

with the need for culturally responsive teaching.		
My students' diverse cultural backgrounds and learning needs make it challenging to differentiate instruction effectively.	4.29	Agree
Engaging families and communities in the culturally responsive teaching process is difficult due to communication and cultural barriers.	3.46	Neutral
I have limited knowledge and understanding of the cultures, traditions, and lived experiences of my students.	2.30	Disagree
General Weighted Mean	3.79	Agree

The findings from Table 2 present a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by special education teachers in Mountain Province when employing culturally responsive teaching practices. The high mean score for lack of sufficient training and professional development opportunities (M=4.29) underscores a critical need for ongoing education and support for teachers in this area. This finding is consistent with research by Bottiani et al. (2018), which emphasizes the importance of sustained professional development in equipping teachers with the skills necessary to implement culturally responsive pedagogy effectively.

The shortage of culturally relevant instructional materials and resources (M=4.12) is another significant barrier. This aligns with Gay's (2018) assertion that access to appropriate materials is essential for the successful integration of culturally responsive practices. Without these resources, teachers are limited in their ability to provide an education that reflects and respects the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students. The lack of support and guidance from school administration and leadership (M=4.09) further compounds these challenges. Khalifa et al. (2016) highlight the crucial role of school leaders in fostering an environment conducive to culturally responsive teaching. Administrative support is vital for creating policies and allocating resources that facilitate these practices.

Balancing the demands of the standardized curriculum with culturally responsive teaching (M=3.96) is a common struggle among educators. The tension between adhering to standardized testing requirements and implementing a curriculum that honors students' cultural identities is well-documented (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This challenge is exacerbated in special education settings, where individualized education plans (IEPs) must also be considered. The teachers' agreement on the difficulty of differentiating instruction to meet the diverse cultural and learning needs of their students (M=4.29) reflects the complexity of this task. Differentiated instruction is a cornerstone of culturally responsive teaching, but it requires significant time, resources, and training to execute effectively (Tomlinson, 2014).

Engaging families and communities in the culturally responsive teaching process is also reported as challenging due to communication and cultural barriers (M=3.46). This finding aligns with Epstein's (2011) research, which underscores the importance of family and community involvement in education. Effective communication strategies and cultural competence are essential for bridging these gaps and fostering collaborative relationships.

Interestingly, the teachers disagree that they have limited knowledge and understanding of the cultures, traditions, and lived experiences of their students (M=2.30). This suggests that the teachers possess a relatively strong awareness of their students' cultural backgrounds. However, this knowledge alone is not sufficient to overcome the systemic and institutional barriers they face. Sleeter (2011) argues that while

cultural knowledge is critical, it must be paired with institutional support and appropriate resources to be effectively translated into practice.

The general weighted mean of 3.79 indicates that special education teachers in Mountain Province generally agree with the challenges they experience in employing culturally responsive teaching practices. This aligns with the broader literature on the barriers faced by educators in implementing such practices, particularly in underserved and marginalized communities (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Boon & Reinink, 2019).

These findings highlight several key areas for intervention. First, comprehensive professional development programs are needed to enhance teachers' skills and confidence in employing culturally responsive teaching strategies. Such programs should be ongoing and context-specific, addressing the unique needs of special education teachers in Mountain Province. Second, there is a need for increased access to culturally relevant instructional materials and resources. This could involve the development of new materials that reflect the cultural diversity of the student population or the adaptation of existing resources. Third, strong administrative support is essential for fostering an environment that supports culturally responsive teaching. This includes policy changes, resource allocation, and the creation of a supportive school culture. Finally, strategies for engaging families and communities must be developed and implemented to overcome communication and cultural barriers, thereby fostering a more inclusive educational environment.

Table 3
Perceived Impact of Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices on the Learning Outcomes

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Culturally responsive teaching practices have improved my students' academic achievement.	4.16	Agree
The use of culturally relevant content and materials has increased my students' engagement and motivation in learning.	4.67	Strongly Agree
Incorporating students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into the curriculum has led to a deeper understanding of the subject matter.	4.23	Agree
Culturally responsive teaching has helped close the achievement gap between my culturally diverse students and their peers.	4.06	Agree
Students are more likely to apply the knowledge and skills they learn in my culturally responsive classroom to real-world situations.	4.29	Agree
The implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices has improved my students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills.	4.27	Agree
Culturally responsive teaching has contributed to a more positive and inclusive learning environment for all students.	4.72	Strongly Agree
General Weighted Mean	3.34	Agree

The findings from Table 3 provide a compelling case for the positive impact of culturally responsive teaching practices on student learning outcomes. The special education teachers in Mountain Province overwhelmingly agree that these practices have had a transformative effect on their classrooms.

One of the most striking findings is the teachers' strong agreement that culturally relevant content and materials have increased student engagement and motivation ($M=4.67$). This aligns with recent research indicating that culturally responsive pedagogy can cultivate a sense of belonging and investment in learning among culturally diverse students (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Byrd, 2016). By validating and incorporating students' cultural identities and experiences into the curriculum, teachers can foster deeper connections to the subject matter and a greater desire to learn.

The teachers' strong agreement that culturally responsive teaching has contributed to a more positive and inclusive learning environment ($M=4.72$) is also noteworthy. This reflects the critical role that culturally responsive practices play in promoting equity and social justice in education (Khalifa et al., 2016; Milner, 2017). By creating classrooms where all students feel valued and respected, teachers can dismantle the systemic barriers that have historically marginalized culturally diverse learners.

Additionally, the teachers' agreement that culturally responsive teaching has improved students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills ($M=4.27$) is significant. This finding echoes recent research demonstrating that culturally responsive pedagogy can cultivate higher-order cognitive abilities by encouraging students to engage with content from multiple perspectives and apply their learning to real-world contexts (Aceves & Orosco, 2014; Xu, 2019).

The teachers' agreement that culturally responsive practices have improved academic achievement ($M=4.16$) and helped close achievement gaps ($M=4.06$) is particularly encouraging. These outcomes are consistent with a growing body of evidence suggesting that culturally responsive teaching can have a positive impact on student performance, particularly for marginalized populations (Bottiani et al., 2018; Kohli et al., 2017).

Overall, the findings from Table 3 underscore the transformative potential of culturally responsive teaching practices. By validating students' cultural identities, fostering inclusive learning environments, and promoting the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, these practices appear to be making a tangible difference in the lives of the special education students in Mountain Province. As educators and researchers continue to explore the complexities of culturally responsive pedagogy, these results offer a promising glimpse into its far-reaching benefits.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study collectively paints a comprehensive picture of the landscape of culturally responsive teaching practices, challenges, and their perceived impacts on student learning outcomes among special education teachers in Mountain Province. The results highlight the significant strides made by educators in embracing culturally responsive pedagogy, as evidenced by their strong commitment to incorporating students' cultural backgrounds, modifying instructional approaches, and collaborating with families and communities. However, the study also sheds light on the existing challenges, such as the lack of sufficient training, shortages of culturally relevant resources, and difficulties in balancing standardized curriculum demands with the need for culturally responsive teaching. Despite these obstacles, the perceived positive impact of culturally responsive practices on student engagement, academic achievement, and the creation of inclusive learning environments is encouraging.

Moving forward, it is imperative for educational institutions and policymakers to prioritize comprehensive professional development programs tailored to the unique needs of special education teachers in Mountain Province. These programs should focus on equipping educators with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to effectively implement culturally responsive teaching practices. Additionally, efforts should be made to address resource gaps by investing in the development and dissemination of culturally relevant instructional materials and resources. School administrators must play a pivotal role in providing strong leadership and support to foster an environment conducive to culturally responsive teaching. This includes advocating for policy changes, allocating resources, and creating a culture of inclusivity and collaboration within schools.

Furthermore, ongoing research and evaluation are essential to continually assess the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching practices and identify areas for improvement. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, educators can better meet the diverse needs of their students and create more equitable and inclusive educational environments. Through concerted efforts and collective commitment, we can work towards realizing the full potential of culturally responsive pedagogy in enhancing student learning outcomes and promoting social justice in education.

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