

A STUDY ON ATTITUDE OF PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS TOWARDS CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

Culturally responsive pedagogy refers to curriculum inclusion and instructional practices that value diverse students' cultural, ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds and use these to promote academic achievement (Gay, 2002). Creating a culturally responsive classroom is all about creating an environment in which students of all cultures feel comfortable and ready to learn. Culturally responsive teachers are those teachers who will be culturally responsive in their classroom instruction to their diverse students, including, identifying students needs, communicating with students and parents, designing and implementing curricula and teaching, creating a caring and supportive settings and enrich students diverse cultures.

The investigator conducted the present investigation to study the attitude of prospective teachers towards culturally responsive teaching. The sample selected for the study consists of 50 prospective teachers from Kannur University Teacher Education Centre, Dharmasala, Kannur University. The statistical techniques used in the study were percentage analysis and t-test. The findings of the study reveal that majority of the prospective teachers are having medium or average attitude and there is significant difference in the attitude of Science and Arts prospective teachers towards culturally responsive teaching.

Key words: Culturally responsive pedagogy, Culturally responsive teachers, culturally responsive teaching

"The increasing diversity in our schools, the ongoing demographic changes across the nation and the movement towards globalization dictate that we develop a more in-depth understanding of culture if we want to bring about true understanding among diverse populations."

- Maria Wilson-Portuondo*

Culture is central to how all learning takes place (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive pedagogy is a student-centered approach to teaching that includes cultural references and recognizes the importance of students' cultural backgrounds and experiences in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 2000). The approach is meant to promote engagement, enrichment, and achievement of all students by embracing a wealth of diversity, identifying and nurturing students' cultural strengths, and validating students' lived experiences and their place in the world (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Culturally responsive pedagogy is characterized by teachers who are committed to cultural competence, establish high expectations, and position themselves as both facilitators and learners. "Culturally responsive teaching occurs when there is respect for the backgrounds and circumstances of students regardless of individual status and power, and when there is a design for learning that embraces the range of needs, interests, and orientations in a classroom" (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski 2009). Culturally responsive teaching is much more than simply recognizing the cultural background of your students.

Culturally responsive teaching is an approach that is student-focused. It identifies not only the differences between students but the unique strengths of each child to encourage their academic achievement and sense of belonging in the classroom. Research on culturally responsive teaching has shown that students are more engaged in learning and learn more effectively when the knowledge and skills taught are presented within the context of their own experiences and cultural frames of reference.

A culturally-responsive teacher is one that is aware of and addresses the students' cultural and ethnic needs as well as their social, emotional, and cognitive needs in order to obtain the students' cooperation. Culturally responsive teachers need to purposely respond to the needs of the many culturally and ethnically diverse students in their classrooms. Culturally responsive teaching includes implementing specifically student-oriented instructional processes as well as choosing and delivering ethnically and culturally relevant curricula. Culturally responsive teachers use effective communications and activities that reflect the students' values, cultures, and beliefs.

It is important to understand that one's thinking, behaving and being is determined by race, ethnicity, culture, language and social class. So, culturally responsive teachers have gained a lot of consciousness about their own socio-cultural identities and issues of inequalities that affect their students. Respecting and celebrating the cultural differences of their students from diverse backgrounds will enable culturally sensitive teachers to work successfully in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The limited components of multicultural education in teacher education programs' curriculum, learning materials, along with teacher education students' lack of pedagogical skills training and practical experiences in cultural diverse settings lead to a more fundamental problem: the growing cultural and racial mismatch between prospective teachers and their multicultural students. Researches show that many teachers from mainstream backgrounds with limited training of multicultural education view student diversity as an obstacle to overcome rather than as a valuable resource to build upon and that they hold low expectations for students of color. In response to the changing student population in schools, teacher education programs will need to reconsider the cultural responsiveness of established curriculum and courses, as well as develop a solid knowledge base of multicultural education and cultural diversity to better prepare teacher students to become qualified culturally responsive teachers.

Understanding diversity as it affects teaching and learning is important for teacher students who are preparing to teach in the future multicultural classrooms. Landson-Billings (2000) demonstrated that many in-service teachers who have been teaching a very long time are still struggle to teach in affirming and effective ways with multicultural students, due to a lack in the literature on the experiences of ethnic minority groups. As Villegas and Lucas (2002) proposed in their research, preparing teachers who are culturally responsive is an urgent issue in teacher education. According to their research, there are two important issues need to be addressed by teacher education programs: "First of all, everyone entering the teaching profession regardless of background must be prepared to teach a racially, ethnically, economically, and linguistically diverse student population. Second, teacher education programs must also find ways to increase the number of minority teachers".

In multicultural classrooms teachers need to know a great deal in order to enhance the academic learning of all students. They need solid knowledge of “subject matter and how to teach it to diverse learners; they need to understand how diverse students grow and learn and how culture and race influence their learning; they need to know about curriculum, pedagogy, classroom organization and assessment, as well as understand the broad purposes of schooling and how those purposes affect their work”. Building a culturally responsive knowledge base is important for preparing teachers for diversity. Culture plays a critical role in learning and teaching. This reality needs to be included in the design of foundation courses.

Foundation courses, which teach conceptual knowledge, and principles, could afford valuable multicultural guidelines for teachers to improve their practices (Foster et al., 2006). Since culture is central to student learning, teachers must become knowledgeable about their students’ distinctive cultural backgrounds so they can effectively translate that knowledge into more appropriate instruction and curriculums (Gay, 2000).

In order to successfully teach students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, culturally responsive teaching, as an equitable and culturally sensitive instruction practice, has been advocated by many scholars and organizations. If teachers can understand students’ backgrounds and teach in a culturally responsive way, several critical educational problems might be alleviated, such as low academic achievement and the disproportionate representation in special education. That is, implementing culturally responsive teaching does not only improve academic achievement of diverse students, but also benefit all students. So, As a teacher in today’s multicultural world, fostering culturally responsive teaching practices is becoming more and more necessary to successfully create a learning environment that is engaging and accessible to a broader range of students.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyse the levels of attitude of prospective teachers towards culturally responsive teaching
- To compare the attitude of Science and Arts prospective teachers towards culturally responsive teaching

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

- There is no significant difference in the attitude of Science and Arts prospective teachers towards culturally responsive teaching

METHODOLOGY

Normative Survey Method was used for conducting the present study. The sample comprised of 50 prospective teachers from Kannur University Teacher Education Centre, Dharmasala, Kannur University. An attitude scale towards culturally responsive teaching was prepared by the investigators. The attitude scale consists of 18 statements. The statistical techniques used in the study were percentage analysis and t-test.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Level of attitude of prospective teachers towards culturally responsive Teaching

Sl.No.	Grades of Scores	Level of Attitude	No. of Teachers	Percentage
1	Above M+S.D	High	8	16
2	Between M+S.D & M-S.D	Medium	31	62
3	Below M- S.D	Low	11	22
	Total		50	100

It is evident from the Table 1 that only 16% of the prospective teachers are having high attitude towards culturally responsive teaching. The level of attitude was found medium among the majority of prospective teachers (62%). 22% of the prospective teachers have exhibits a low level of attitude.

Table 2: Comparison of attitude of Science and Arts prospective teachers towards culturally responsive teaching

Sl. No	Category	Sample Size	Mean of scores	S.D	't' value	Significance
1	Science	28	47.5	2.33		0.05 level
2	Arts	22	48.86	2.27	2.12	

The results show that the 't' value obtained is found to be significant at 0.05 level. It means that there is significant difference in the attitude of Science and Arts prospective teachers towards culturally responsive teaching. Hence the hypothesis, there is no significant difference in the attitude of Science and Arts prospective teachers towards culturally responsive teaching was rejected.

CONCLUSION

The preparation and education for diversity must begin with teachers' themselves. Teachers need to be taught and trained to value, affirm, and maximize the rich cultural heritage their multicultural backgrounds students bring to classrooms In this regard, prospective teachers must be educated to differentiate curriculum, instruction, interaction, and assessment to accommodate differences in minority students' learning at schools. Ultimately, as Vavrus (2002) suggested that teacher education programs play a crucial role in determining teachers' attitudes toward diversity and the accommodation of that diversity within their teaching to minority students. Accordingly, teacher education programs need to design the curriculum and materials which could build cross-culturally sensitive and responsive knowledge base to prepare their students.

An important mission of teacher education is improving teacher candidates' professional content knowledge and teaching strategies, as well as promoting educational excellence and equity. One of the major aims of teacher education should be to assist teachers to develop the attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to become thoughtful and approachable for every student in the multicultural academic environment.

To achieve this goal, appropriate and comprehensive training to foster positive teaching attitudes towards diversity, build culturally responsive knowledge base, and situate teaching practice training in cultural context will become the central concern for accommodating teacher education programs to enhance teacher education students' capacities and abilities to teach in cultural and linguistic diverse classrooms.

Educational equity refers to "the principles of fairness and justice in allocating resources, opportunities, treatment, and success for every student. Educational equity programs promote the real possibility of equality of educational results for each student and between diverse groups of students. This educational equity can be achieved through developing a culturally responsive teaching society with positive attitude towards culturally responsive class and culturally responsive teaching. Developing a knowledge base with culturally responsive perspectives could assist teachers and teacher education students in developing their cultural understandings and awareness, reducing cultural deficit thinking towards minority students, improving their cultural competences to use knowledge about culture to strengthen the teaching-learning connections and outcomes, crossing multiple cultural barriers, as well as connecting schools and communities. So, tomorrow's teachers and university faculties will need to be well prepared to effectively and appropriately deal with issues of race, culture, ethnicity, and language. The teacher preparation programs need to be more responsive to the needs of this growing segment of the student population (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The problem of lacking of multicultural perspectives and materials in teacher education programs will continue to challenge current teacher education programs, and teaching practice of educating teacher education students to teach their future diverse students effectively.

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