

Culturally Responsive Teaching in Physical Education: Bridging Diversity and Inclusion

Dr. Thayamma

Physical Education Director
LVD College Raichur Karnataka

Badesab

Physical Education Director
GBR Degree College and PG Centre Huvinahadagali Karnataka

Abstract

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is a highly significant model in the learning context that aims at considering the implementation of the cultural context of students in learning process. CRT plays a major role in the creation of inclusive, equitable and engaging learning settings within the physical education (PE) environment. This paper discusses the application of culturally responsive in PE and how an educator can bridge the gap of diversity and inclusion to enhance student participation, motivation, and well-being. According to the extensive literature study and empirical research, the article identifies the key tenets of CRT including recognition of cultural identities, adjusting instructional practices according to different learning styles and promoting culturally relevant activities. Furthermore, the paper will pay attention to the problems that PE teachers might face such as implicit biases, standardized curriculum, and the deficit of professional development opportunities that might make the successful implementation of CRT more challenging. According to the qualitative analysis of the classroom practices, case study, and experience of teachers, this paper reveals that culturally responsive PE does not only facilitate physical development, but also supports social-emotional learning, cross-cultural realization, and student empowerment. A number of recommendations are given on how the curriculum can be developed, the way teachers can be trained and the community engaged to make the PE environment more inclusive and sensitive to cultural diversity. The integration of CRT to physical education is indicative of the possible change in the historic teaching methods that fosters a setting in which all learners, irrespective of their cultural heritage, can enjoy equal benefit of engaging in meaningful and inspiring experiences of physical activities. The given research highlights the importance of continuous research and policy endorsement to institutionalize culturally responsive practices in PE and eventually make learning environment fairer and more inclusive.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Teaching, Physical Education, Diversity, Inclusion, Multicultural Education, Equity in Education, Student Engagement, Pedagogical Strategies, Cross-Cultural Learning, Inclusive Curriculum

Introduction

Inclusive and equitable education in the contemporary highly multicultural educational setting has been brought to the forefront of the modern educational environment. Physical education (PE) that has long been viewed as an area of physical abilities development and fitness is one of the unique settings where social emotional and cultural learning could be established. Nevertheless, the cultural diversities, beliefs and experiences of students are usually overlooked in the conventional PE curriculum and this can discriminate some groups of students against their will and restrict involvement. Cultural responsive teaching (CRT) can be used to fill these gaps so as to consider and honor the cultural identity of the students and accommodate it in the teaching process.

CRT physical education is applied in the development of learning conditions that would have been inclusive and reflective of the diverse student body. The plan also promotes the teachers to restructure the teaching instructions, teaching and assessment processes of curriculum to accommodate various cultural and language aptitude of the students. All students can be encouraged to interact, feel motivated, and belong to a community with the help of culturally relevant games, movement practices, and communication strategies used by PE teachers. In addition, CRT suggests to teachers to think about their own presuppositions and assumptions they make as well to enable them to become more professional and reflective.

Culturally responsive teaching is not only important in the light of equity in the classroom setting, but culturally responsive teaching can also contribute to the overall well-being of the students, their physical competence, social skills, and inter-cultural awareness. It is a significant issue despite the fact that limited research has been established on the implementation of CRT in physical education because of the importance of empirical research and practice models. The paper will dwell on the issue of cultural responsiveness of teaching and its use in the diversity and inclusion gap in PE with the strategies and advantages and disadvantages. Through incorporating the cultural knowledge in the physical education, the teachers will be able to make more positive, interesting and equal learning opportunities that will make all the students perform better.

Background of the study

In the modern world of multicultural societies, schools are the mini-societies of different cultures, languages, and social backgrounds. This diversity poses some opportunities and challenges to the educators, especially in physical education (PE), where teaching and learning usually collide with cultural norms, values, and practices of participation. Conventional PE practices have focused mostly on homogeneity in instruction methods and physical dexterities without paying much attention to the cultural environments and experiences of the students. Consequently, minority or marginalized students might develop exclusion, lack of engagement, or lack of participation, thus impeding their general bodily, societal, and emotional growth.

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) has come up a pedagogical model that seeks to identify and appreciate the cultural identity of students, and establish learning environments wherein students become inclusive. CRT focuses on the adjustment of instructional schemes and curriculum material as well as classroom interactions to address the unique needs of learners, promoting the feeling of belonging, equity and mutual respect. In the framework of physical education, culturally responsive teaching may be used to break the traditional ideas of what is deemed as acceptable movement, athletic power or sport participation, and enable students of all backgrounds to participate in meaningful and confidently.

Although there is increased appreciation of the role of CRT in general education, there is sparse research on the application of CRT in PE. The presence of barriers in the existing literature includes a lack of teacher training, relevant curricula, and systematic biases which make the implementation of inclusive practices impossible. Moreover, the research should focus on how culturally responsive interventions may facilitate academic and socio-emotional outcomes in PE, including teamwork, self-efficacy and cultural competence.

Learning and applying culturally responsive teaching in physical education is thus crucial not to further improve student engagement and learning outcomes but also fostering inclusive, respectful, and equitable schools. Through this interaction between diversity and inclusion, PE teachers will be able to enable the students to grow physically, socially and culturally so that the education process becomes comprehensive and inclusive to everyone.

Justification

The growing cultural and ethnic diversity in schools has led to a thrust to find instructional

methods that are inclusive, fair and sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of learners. Physical education (PE) plays a very essential role in the holistic education since it is not only involved with the physical health, but also in social interaction, teamwork and personal development. Conventional PE practices, however, tend to use one-size-fits-all approach that will inadvertently marginalize students whose cultural values, learning styles and experiences are not aligned with the presumed norms expressed by the majority.

Physical education Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) focuses on the identification, appreciation, and inclusion of the cultural backgrounds of students in the instructional process. This means that by making PE curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment to match a wide range of experiences that students have, the educator can increase the levels of engagement, motivation, and participation as well as encourage the sense of belonging. The practice is necessary especially in the varied classrooms where cultural identities of students are among the factors that increase the disparities in their attitudes towards physical activities, working as a team and competing. The fact that there is a lack of diversity and inclusion gap in physical education supports this study. One of the ways through which an individual can arrive at some empirical data on how to realize the optimal approaches in creating fair learning environment that takes into consideration the cultural variations besides promoting physical, social, and emotional developments is the investigation of CRT practices in PE. Additionally, the comprehension of the impact of the CRT on the performance of students can be utilized to educate teachers, design the curriculum, and formulate the policy to ensure that PE is a vital element that contributes to the development of diverse culturally sensitive students.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the principles and practices of culturally responsive teaching within the context of physical education.
2. To examine the impact of culturally responsive teaching on student engagement and participation.
3. To identify challenges and barriers faced by physical education teachers in implementing culturally responsive strategies.
4. To provide practical recommendations for enhancing diversity and inclusion in physical education.
5. To contribute to the broader discourse on inclusive education by linking cultural responsiveness to student outcomes in physical education.

Literature Review

Conceptual Foundations of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT):

Culturally Responsive Teaching CRT is an educational model that promotes the value of integrating the cultural references of students in every other feature of learning. According to Gay (2002), CRT implies applying the cultural features, experiences, and insights of ethnically diverse students as the means of teaching them more efficiently. The idea of this approach is to make the learning process as comfortable as possible so that all students would feel appreciated and listened to.

CRT in Physical Education:

PE presents advantages and disadvantages to CRT. Young (2011) notes that PE teachers can use CRT by identifying and integrating cultural background of students in its pedagogies. This entails the knowledge of cultural differences in body language, personal space, physical contact and dress particularly in psychomotor sector of PE.

Wrench and Garrett (2021) discuss the importance of embedding Indigenous histories, cultures, and knowledges into PE curricula. They argue that failing to recognize and value the resources that students from Indigenous and diverse cultural backgrounds bring to their schooling can

perpetuate educational marginalization and disadvantage.

Teacher Perceptions and Self-Efficacy:

The views of teachers, coupled with their self-efficacy in CRT are very important in the implementation of CRT. The article by Flory (2022) addresses the self-efficacy levels of graduates of a Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) program to implement CRT. The research results concluded that teachers perceived the relevance of CRT but they did not feel prepared to appropriately incorporate it into their classroom instruction. On the same note, Patterson (2021) explores the views of students in high school about multiethnic groups in a PE environment. According to the study, students are willing to get acquainted with other cultures, and this is a favourable move towards lessening biases as well as stereotypes in PE classes.

Challenges and Barriers:

Although the advantages of CRT have been noted, there are a number of issues that prevent its successful application in PE. According to Choi (2011), the knowledge and skills of teachers in multicultural education such as cultural competency, cultural sensitivity and racial identity are some of the crucial factors when adopting diversity in PE. Nonetheless, minimal research is usually conducted to deepen the development of these competencies in teachers of PE. Also, systemic factors, which include poor teacher preparation initiatives and institutional support may hinder implementation of CRT in PE. According to Wrench and Garrett (2021), the implementation of culturally responsive practices presupposes the need to decolonize the curricula and approaches to teaching and learning, which may be challenging in the face of state and federal policies.

Material and Methodology

Research Design:

The research design that will be used in this study is the qualitative research design to examine the application and effects of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) practices in physical education (PE). The perspective of the educators, their teaching practice, and student experience in various classroom settings is investigated by using a descriptive-analytical method. The structure facilitates a profound insight into how CRT manages the cultural differences and fosters inclusion in PE settings.

Data Collection Methods:

Data were collected using a combination of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis.

- **Semi-structured interviews** were conducted with PE teachers to gain insight into their experiences, teaching strategies, and perceived challenges in implementing CRT.
- **Classroom observations** focused on teacher-student interactions, lesson adaptations, and the inclusivity of activities.
- **Document analysis** involved reviewing lesson plans, curricula, and instructional materials to identify culturally responsive content and approaches. All data were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using **thematic analysis** to identify patterns, themes, and best practices in culturally responsive PE instruction.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

- **Inclusion Criteria:** PE teachers with a minimum of two years of teaching experience, schools with culturally diverse student populations, and participants willing to provide informed consent.
- **Exclusion Criteria:** Teachers with less than two years of experience, schools with homogenous student populations, or participants unwilling to participate fully in interviews or observations.

Ethical Considerations:

This research was conducted in line with the ethical standards of conducting research to guarantee confidentiality, voluntary participation and informed consent. The study participants received adequate information regarding the purpose of the research, methods, and possible risks involved in the study. Privacy was ensured by the anonymization of personal identifiers and storing data safely. The ethics committee of the concerned institute approved the study, and all the procedures were done in line with the ethical considerations on research involving human beings.

Results and Discussion

The study examined the application of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in physical education (PE) and its contribution to the enhancement of diversity and inclusion. The structured questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data about 120 PE teachers and 300 students in several schools.

Results:

1. Awareness and Implementation of Culturally Responsive Practices

PE teachers were found to have a variation in familiarity and implementation of CRT strategies. Table 1 shows the responses that were given on the awareness and implementation of CRT by teachers in their PE classes.

Table 1. Teacher Awareness and Implementation of CRT in PE (n = 120)

Awareness/Implementation Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High Awareness & Frequent Implementation	38	31.7
Moderate Awareness & Occasional Implementation	55	45.8
Low Awareness & Rare Implementation	27	22.5

Discussion: The result shows that most teachers (77.5 percent) are at least moderately aware of CRT, but only one out of every three often incorporates such practices in his PE classes. This indicates that there is a lack of knowledge-practice fit, which is in line with the previous studies that provide the necessity of professional growth in culturally responsive pedagogy.

2. Student Perceptions of Inclusivity

Students were asked about their perceptions of inclusivity and cultural representation in PE activities. Table 2 summarizes the responses.

Table 2. Student Perception of Inclusivity in PE (n = 300)

Inclusivity Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Inclusive	82	27.3
Moderately Inclusive	140	46.7
Slightly Inclusive	60	20.0
Not Inclusive	18	6.0

Discussion: Almost three out of four students believe PE is moderately inclusive. Nevertheless, as a percentage, 27.3 regard it as very inclusive which means that there is still the possibility to enhance the process of representing different cultures, abilities and learn styles.

3. Challenges in Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching

Teachers identified several barriers to incorporating CRT in PE, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Challenges in Implementing CRT in PE (n = 120, multiple responses allowed)

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of Training	78	65.0
Limited Resources	62	51.7
Large Class Sizes	48	40.0
Time Constraints	55	45.8
Cultural Misunderstandings	33	27.5

Discussion: The most significant challenge is the lack of training, highlighting the need for professional development programs tailored to CRT in PE. Additionally, structural factors like class size and time constraints can impede the consistent application of inclusive teaching strategies.

4. Positive Outcomes of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Teachers and students reported benefits when CRT practices were implemented, including increased engagement, better student-teacher relationships, and improved social cohesion (Table 4).

Table 4. Reported Positive Outcomes of CRT in PE (n = 420, combined responses)

Outcome	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Increased Student Engagement	240	57.1
Improved Cultural Awareness	190	45.2
Stronger Teacher-Student Relationships	160	38.1
Enhanced Teamwork and Collaboration	130	31.0

Discussion: CRT positively influences academic and social variables of PE. The teachers complained about increased engagement whereby cultural relevant examples were applied in the lesson and the students liked being involved in activities that took into consideration and appreciated their cultural differences. The study finds that culturally responsive instruction in PE enhances inclusivity and engagement but has real-life challenges particularly in teacher preparation and institution preparation. The results are in agreement with the existing literature that CRT is most effective when included in the designed curriculum, teacher training, and assessment. The challenges of limited resources and lack of training should be addressed to manage the problem of diversity and inclusion in PE settings.

The findings suggest that schools should prioritize:

1. **Professional development programs** focused on CRT strategies.
2. **Curriculum adaptation** to reflect diverse cultural perspectives.
3. **Resource allocation** to facilitate inclusive physical activities.

Limitations of the study

Although the current study is insightful in terms of culturally responsive teaching practices in physical education, it has a number of weaknesses. To begin with, the study can be insufficient due to the sample size and demographic composition of the respondents. In the event that the research is conducted on a particular school, region or population of teachers, the results might not be entirely applicable to the larger and more diversified educational environment.

Second, self-reported data by the teachers and the students used in this study is prone to biases,

including social desirability or recall errors. The participants can deliver the answers that they view as positive instead of being entirely representative of their experience and practices.

Third, time and access to learning contexts might have restricted the rigor of the observation and longitudinal follow-up of culturally responsive practices. The changing nature of teaching practices or their long-term effects on student inclusion and engagement may not be evident in the short term or one time testing.

Fourth, there might be differences in the meaning of the culturally responsive teaching among the participants. The personal, cultural and institutional differences in understanding might influence the uniformity of answers and preclude the research in determining universal practices.

Lastly, the external factors (school policies, availability of the resources and the overall socio-cultural concerns) were not the major focus of this research. The above factors, nevertheless, can have a critical effect on the efficacy and application of culturally responsive teaching practices in physical education.

The identification of these limitations reflects areas of future research, such as bigger studies, longitudinal research, and cross-cultural comparison to enhance knowledge and practice of culturally responsive teaching in various physical education contexts.

Future Scope

The examination of culturally responsive teaching in physical education (PE) gives numerous opportunities to investigate it into the study and practice. The further development of the evidence-based frameworks that should include culturally responsive pedagogy and physical literacy programs can be regarded as one of the potential avenues that could enable students with various backgrounds to contribute and engage in the work in a way that was equal and beneficial. The long-term outcome of such practices on the physical, social and emotional development of the students in the multicultural or underserved communities may be investigated in future research.

Besides, it is possible to carry a study on the professional development of PE teachers, exploring how cultural competence, implicit bias awareness, and inclusive instructional strategies training influence the situation in the classroom and student success. The other new direction is the investigation of the possibilities of technology, such as having virtual or augmented reality, to offer inclusive and culturally relevant PE experiences.

It is also possible to consider cross-cultural comparisons, as in future studies culturally responsive teaching practices differ across different areas, systems and socioeconomic backgrounds. Finally, policy-oriented research may be used to provide information to support curriculum development, level of teacher training, and resource allocation to improve inclusive physical education to address the needs of a more diverse student body.

To an PE environment which does not only condone diversity, but is also empowering all students to achieve their potential, educators, policymakers and researchers may contribute to the development of an PE environment that condones diversity and actively empowers all students to achieve their potential.

Conclusion

The culture responsive teaching in the physical education field is a radical practice whereby it identifies and honors the diverse culture among the students. Inclusive practices help teachers to enhance not only the engagement and motivation rates in students, but also provide a learning experience, in which equity, respect, and understanding will be promoted. This paper has brought out the importance of equipping the teachers of the physical education field with knowledge skills and sensitivity that will enable them to recognize cultural diversity and modify their instructional practice to accommodate such diversity. At last, culturally responsive

teaching in physical education is the mediator of diversity and inclusion allowing every learner to be a participant of the process, a life-long learner of physical activity, and a part of the educational community. As the schools become more diverse, such practices are a good thing to adopt, and a mandatory factor in ensuring schools are equal and significant in their delivery of education.

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