

CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN TEACHING AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

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ABSTRACT

Cultural competence in teaching enhances the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds by fostering an inclusive environment that values their cultural identities, leading to greater engagement and academic success. When teachers incorporate students' cultural perspectives into the curriculum, it strengthens students' sense of belonging and makes learning more meaningful. The objective of the study was to investigate the cultural competence in teaching and its effects on the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. Quantitative research survey design was used. The philosophical paradigm of this research was positivism. The population was Punjab University Quaz-e-Azam Campus district Lahore because it is the biggest university of South Asia, students' comes from different diverse backgrounds. Randomly 500 students were selected through simple random sampling technique. Questionnaires served as the research's instruments. The researcher developed questionnaire himself. Expert judgments and pilot testing revealed the questionnaire's validity and reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.871. Both inferential and descriptive statistics were applied. SPSS was used to analyze the data. The findings of the study revealed that there was highly significant effect of cultural competence in teaching on the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds.

Keywords: cultural competence, teaching, learning experiences, diverse backgrounds.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural competence in teaching is increasingly recognized as a pivotal factor in shaping meaningful and inclusive learning experiences for students from diverse backgrounds. Research consistently shows that when teachers are culturally competent, they are more effective in creating classrooms that

acknowledge and respect students' cultural identities, which leads to better educational outcomes and a more supportive learning environment (Gay, 2018). Cultural competence involves understanding, appreciating, and responding appropriately to the varied cultural

perspectives that students bring into the classroom. This ability goes beyond mere tolerance of diversity; it requires teachers to actively integrate students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and histories into the curriculum, thereby making learning more relevant and engaging (Ladson-Billings, 2009). By incorporating these aspects into the educational process, culturally competent teachers foster a sense of belonging and identity affirmation among students, enhancing their engagement, motivation, and academic performance (Banks, 2019). One of the primary ways cultural competence influences learning experiences is by reducing cultural misunderstandings and biases that may otherwise impede effective teaching. According to Howard (2010), students are more likely to feel valued and understood when teachers demonstrate an awareness of cultural dynamics and challenge stereotypes. For example, a teacher who is culturally competent will recognize the potential impact of a student's background on their learning style and communication preferences, allowing them to tailor their approach to better meet the student's needs. This sensitivity not only bridges cultural gaps but also helps in preventing the marginalization of minority students who may otherwise feel alienated by a curriculum that does not reflect their lived experiences (Gay, 2018). Furthermore, when students perceive that their teachers value their cultural backgrounds, they are more likely to trust and respect them, which promotes positive student-teacher relationships that are conducive to learning (Sleeter, 2011).

Moreover, culturally competent teaching enhances students' engagement by making learning more meaningful and relevant. Research indicates that students are more likely to engage with the material when it reflects aspects of their own lives and identities (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009). For example, incorporating culturally relevant examples and materials into lessons allows students to see their own cultures represented in the curriculum, which can increase their intrinsic motivation to learn. When teachers incorporate students' cultural references, such as language, history, and traditions, students are better able to relate to the content, thereby fostering a deeper understanding and connection to the material (Banks, 2019). This relevance is especially crucial for students from

marginalized backgrounds, who may otherwise struggle to find personal connections to traditional, Eurocentric curricula. As Banks (2019) notes, making learning relevant is an effective strategy for addressing achievement gaps, as it encourages students from all backgrounds to participate fully in the academic process.

The impact of cultural competence also extends to students' self-efficacy and academic confidence. Teachers who practice cultural competence often use teaching strategies that acknowledge diverse learning preferences and provide a range of ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge. For instance, culturally responsive assessments and varied instructional techniques allow students from diverse backgrounds to leverage their strengths, reducing anxiety and helping them feel more capable and prepared to succeed academically (Howard, 2010). This is supported by research on the role of self-efficacy in academic achievement, which indicates that students who believe in their abilities are more likely to persevere through challenges and engage in learning tasks (Bandura, 1997). By affirming students' identities and valuing diverse contributions, culturally competent teachers help students build confidence, which ultimately supports improved academic outcomes (Gay, 2018). Furthermore, cultural competence in teaching also plays a vital role in fostering critical thinking and cross-cultural understanding among students. In a culturally diverse classroom, students benefit from discussions and activities that expose them to multiple perspectives, which encourages them to think critically and develop empathy for others (Banks, 2019). Teachers who are culturally competent are able to facilitate these discussions thoughtfully, guiding students to question stereotypes, consider different viewpoints, and reflect on their own cultural biases. This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also prepares students for a multicultural world where they will need to interact and collaborate with individuals from various cultural backgrounds (Sleeter, 2011). Developing cross-cultural understanding in the classroom helps students become more open-minded and tolerant, which are essential skills for both personal and professional success in today's globalized society.

Despite the benefits, achieving cultural competence in teaching is challenging and requires a conscious commitment to professional development. Many teachers, especially those who have limited exposure to diverse communities, may hold unconscious biases or lack familiarity with the cultural experiences of their students (Howard, 2010). Professional development programs that focus on cultural awareness, sensitivity training, and inclusive pedagogy are therefore essential for helping educators develop the skills needed to work effectively in diverse classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In addition to training, teachers benefit from opportunities to reflect on their own cultural identities and biases, as self-awareness is a critical component of cultural competence. Without such reflection, even well-intentioned teachers may inadvertently reinforce cultural stereotypes or fail to recognize the diverse needs of their students (Gay, 2018). In summary, cultural competence is a crucial aspect of effective teaching that significantly enhances the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. By understanding and integrating students' cultural identities into the curriculum, culturally competent teachers foster a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that promotes engagement, motivation, and academic success. Moreover, cultural competence helps students build self-confidence, encourages critical thinking, and prepares them for the demands of a multicultural society. As the student population continues to become more diverse, the need for cultural competence in teaching will only grow, making it essential for educators to develop the skills and mindset needed to serve all students equitably. Through intentional efforts to build

cultural competence, teachers can help create a more inclusive and equitable educational system that acknowledges and values the unique contributions of each student (Banks, 2019; Gay, 2018; Howard, 2010).

Objectives

- To identify the level of cultural competence in teaching and learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds.
- To analyze the effect of cultural competence in teaching on the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds.
- To find out the relationship between cultural competence in teaching and the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds.

Methodology

Quantitative research survey design was used. The philosophical paradigm of this research was positivism. The population was Punjab University Quaz-e-Azam Campus district Lahore because it is the biggest university of South Asia, students' comes from different diverse backgrounds. Randomly 500 students were selected through simple random sampling technique. Questionnaires served as the research's instruments. The researcher developed questionnaire himself. Expert judgments and pilot testing revealed the questionnaire's validity and reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.871. Both inferential and descriptive statistics were applied. SPSS was used to analyze the data.

Data analysis

Cultural competence in teaching

Table 1: Item wise analysis

Items	N	M	S.D.
I actively seek to understand the cultural backgrounds and experiences of my students.	500	1.43	.689
I collaborate with families and communities to support culturally relevant teaching and learning experiences.	500	1.61	.640
I am aware of the cultural dynamics that can influence student behavior and classroom interactions.	500	1.66	.702
I participate in professional development opportunities focused on cultural competence and diversity in education.	500	1.58	.627

I regularly reflect on my own cultural biases and how they may affect my teaching.	500	1.57	.656
I encourage students to share their cultural experiences and perspectives during class discussions.	500	1.63	.693
I create a classroom environment that respects and values cultural diversity.	500	1.64	.691
I adapt my teaching strategies to meet the diverse learning needs of students from various cultural backgrounds.	500	1.61	.654
I am comfortable discussing cultural differences and addressing cultural issues in the classroom.	500	1.60	.702
I incorporate diverse cultural perspectives and materials into my curriculum and lesson plans.	500	1.68	.711

The above table illustrates the sample description on the basis of mean and standard deviation. According to the respondents' responses, I actively seek to understand the cultural backgrounds and experiences of my students (M=1.43; SD=0.68), I collaborate with families and communities to support culturally relevant teaching and learning experiences (M=1.61; SD=0.64), I am aware of the cultural dynamics that can influence student behavior and classroom interactions (M=1.66; SD=0.70), I participate in professional development opportunities focused on cultural competence and diversity in education (M=1.58; SD=0.62), I regularly reflect on my own cultural biases and how they may affect my teaching (M=1.57; SD=0.65), I

encourage students to share their cultural experiences and perspectives during class discussions (M=1.63; SD=0.69), I create a classroom environment that respects and values cultural diversity (M=1.64; SD=0.69), I adapt my teaching strategies to meet the diverse learning needs of students from various cultural backgrounds (M=1.61; SD=0.65), I am comfortable discussing cultural differences and addressing cultural issues in the classroom (M=1.60; SD=0.70), and I incorporate diverse cultural perspectives and materials into my curriculum and lesson plans (M=1.68; SD=0.71). Overall, respondents' responses reflected toward the level of agreement.

Learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds

Table 2: Item wise analysis

Items	N	M	S.D.
I feel that my cultural background is respected and valued in the classroom.	500	1.73	.572
I feel that the school promotes inclusivity and equity in academic opportunities for all students.	500	1.82	.569
My learning experiences are enriched by collaboration with classmates from diverse backgrounds.	500	1.72	.598
I feel that my peers are open-minded and accepting of differences in cultural backgrounds.	500	1.76	.689
I have access to support services (e.g., counseling, tutoring) that cater to my specific cultural or linguistic needs.	500	1.70	.546
The resources and materials used in my classes reflect the diversity of our student population.	500	1.71	.525
I feel comfortable discussing my identity and experiences with my teachers.	500	1.79	.606
I believe that my school provides a welcoming environment for students from various backgrounds.	500	1.70	.590
I have opportunities to share my cultural experiences with my classmates.	500	1.78	.635

My teachers make an effort to incorporate diverse perspectives into the curriculum. 500 1.71 .638

The above table illustrates the sample description on the basis of mean and standard deviation. According to the respondents' responses, I feel that my cultural background is respected and valued in the classroom (M=1.73; SD=0.57), I feel that the school promotes inclusivity and equity in academic opportunities for all students (M=1.82; SD=0.56), my learning experiences are enriched by collaboration with classmates from diverse backgrounds (M=1.72; SD=0.59), I feel that my peers are open-minded and accepting of differences in cultural backgrounds (M=1.76; SD=0.68), I have access to support services (e.g., counseling, tutoring) that cater to my specific cultural or linguistic needs (M=1.70; SD=0.54), The resources

and materials used in my classes reflect the diversity of our student population (M=1.71; SD=0.52), I feel comfortable discussing my identity and experiences with my teachers (M=1.79; SD=0.60), I believe that my school provides a welcoming environment for students from various backgrounds (M=1.70; SD=0.59), I have opportunities to share my cultural experiences with my classmates (M=1.78; SD=0.63), and My teachers make an effort to incorporate diverse perspectives into the curriculum (M=1.71; SD=0.63). Overall, respondents' responses reflected toward the level of agreement.

Table 3: Effect of cultural competence in teaching on the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Cultural competence in teaching	.000	.058	.851	30.171	.000
	1.008	.033			

The above table illustrates the effect of cultural competence in teaching on the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. The B-value 0.851, t-value 30.171, and p-value 0.000 which

shows that there was highly significant effect of cultural competence in teaching on the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds.

Table 4: Relationship between cultural competence in teaching and the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds

		Cultural competence in teaching	Learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds
Cultural competence in teaching	Pearson Correlation	1	.836**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	500	500
Learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds	Pearson Correlation	.836**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	500	500

The above table illustrates the relationship between cultural competence in teaching and the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. The Pearson correlation value 0.836 shows that there was strongly highly positive relationship between cultural competence in teaching and the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds.

Discussion

The level of cultural competence among teachers significantly influences the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. When educators demonstrate a high degree of cultural awareness and sensitivity, they create inclusive classrooms that acknowledge and celebrate students' cultural identities, which promotes engagement and

enhances academic success (Gay, 2018; Howard, 2010). Culturally competent teaching allows students to see their own experiences reflected in the curriculum, making learning more relevant and motivating. This approach helps reduce achievement gaps by validating the diverse knowledge and skills that students bring to the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Sleeter, 2011; Banks, 2019).

Cultural competence in teaching significantly enriches the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds by creating an inclusive classroom atmosphere that respects and integrates their cultural perspectives. Teachers who employ culturally responsive teaching strategies make learning more relevant, which fosters engagement and supports academic achievement by acknowledging students' cultural identities (Paris, 2012; Nieto, 2010). Such practices help students feel valued and connected to the curriculum, enhancing their motivation and sense of belonging within the classroom (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Au, 2009). In contrast, a lack of cultural competence can result in students feeling disconnected or marginalized, which may lead to lower engagement and academic performance. Teachers who overlook the cultural backgrounds of their students may inadvertently reinforce stereotypes or employ one-size-fits-all strategies that do not cater to diverse learning needs (Hammond, 2015; Sleeter, 2008). To address this, professional development aimed at increasing teachers' cultural awareness is essential for building educational environments that empower all students to succeed academically and socially (Paris & Alim, 2017; Irvine, 2003; Au, 2009).

Cultural competence in teaching is closely linked to the quality of learning experiences for students from diverse backgrounds. Educators who are culturally competent adapt their instructional methods to acknowledge and integrate students' cultural contexts, which enhances students' engagement and fosters a sense of belonging (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). This inclusive approach encourages students to see their cultural identities reflected in the classroom, supporting their motivation and facilitating deeper connections to the material (Hollins, 2008; Banks, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2004). Without cultural competence, teachers may inadvertently create

environments that overlook or marginalize students' cultural experiences, leading to reduced engagement and feelings of alienation. This disconnect can result in academic disparities, as students may struggle to relate to the curriculum or feel less valued in the educational setting (Nieto & Bode, 2012; Sleeter, 2012; Au, 2012). Therefore, equipping teachers with cultural competence training is essential to ensure that all students have equitable access to meaningful and supportive learning experiences (Delpit, 2006).

Conclusion

- In conclusion, cultural competence in teaching plays a crucial role in enhancing the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. When teachers embrace and integrate students' cultural identities within the classroom, it fosters a sense of belonging, improves engagement, and supports academic success. Conversely, a lack of cultural competence can lead to misunderstandings, feelings of exclusion, and disparities in educational outcomes. Research shows that culturally responsive teaching not only empowers students but also promotes critical thinking and cross-cultural understanding, preparing them for a diverse society. Thus, providing teachers with training in cultural competence is essential for creating equitable, inclusive, and effective educational environments. This commitment benefits both students and educators, enriching the overall learning experience.

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