

Research Paper

Nurturing Cultural Understanding: Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching in Higher Education

Rashmi Kumari Rajora^{1*}, Dr. Renu Yadav²

ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions must foster students to be comprehensive and culturally sensitive learning environments in order to meet the requirements of a progressively diverse group. The present study discovers the theoretical foundations and practical strategies for implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). Through an in-depth review of related literature, the researcher finds key principles of CRT, emphasizing its benefits in enhancing the engagement of students, academic achievement, and cultural capability while also addressing the significant challenges that hold back its effective implementation. The study identifies obstacles such as institutional resistance, insufficient faculty training, and the lack of culturally inclusive syllabuses. It also presents strategies that instructors and institutions can accept to create inclusive classrooms, incorporate diverse viewpoints into content of courses, and improve cultural awareness among faculty members and students of HEIs. The findings underscore the necessity for strong institutional commitment toward CRT, professional development initiatives among faculty, and policy reforms, are to be successful application of CRT in higher education institutes. The paper concludes by recommending further research on innovative pedagogical approaches and practical applications of CRT, directing to contribute to the continuing discourse on nurturing equity and inclusivity in academic surroundings.

Keywords: *Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), Inclusive Curriculum, Diversity, Cultural Competence, Pedagogy*

Institutions of higher education are dynamic in creating the social fabric because they nurture environments that value and identify the perspectives and experiences of diverse groups. In this regard, it become clearly visible that Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) holds importance in educational strategy to overcome the differences of cultures and promote inclusive learning environments. In order to improve the academic performance, CRT gives pupils, the tools that are necessary for the improvement or need to be succeeded in a multicultural society (Gay, 2018). consequently, it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of CRT in higher education institutes. The present study focuses on examining the theoretical foundations and useful strategies required for the successful application of CRT in institutes of higher education. To establish more inclusive and culturally capable

¹Research Scholar, Department of Teacher Education, Central University of Haryana, Mahendargarh

²Professor, Department of Teacher Education, Central University of Haryana, Mahendargarh

*Corresponding Author

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learning environments, one wants to understand how CRT may be integrated into curriculum, pedagogical strategies, and policies of institutions through a systematic analysis. The aim of teacher education programs (TEPs) is to equip teachers with the necessary skills that are necessary in order to work with students from a linguistic and culturally rich diverse backgrounds. TEPs are required by the demographic imperative to seek out preservice teachers from underrepresented groups. (Kondo, C. S. 2022). Despite ever since decades has passed, the idea of culturally informed pedagogies (such as reality pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, and culturally sustaining teaching) was first announced, comparatively few research have followed teachers into their classrooms. Following their completion of a graduate course on culturally responsive teaching, we carried out a fundamental case study of three math teachers in the field. (Morrison, S. A., Brown Thompson, C., & Glazier, J. 2022). In a multicultural education course, two pre-service teachers have modelled culturally responsive teaching (CRT). This qualitative case study looked at their learning experiences in that context. The researchers recognized the pre-service teachers' learning experiences concerning this observation, as well as any possible transformations they experienced, and they looked for evidence of pre-service teachers observing features of modelling in the course using the Constant Comparison Approach. As per the study, pre-service teachers appeared to benefit from the crucial justice-oriented, and professional course like (Teacher Education) that included modelling CRT behaviors and activities to extend and change their conceptual understanding of CRT, critically evaluate and reconstruct past knowledge, and make links between these experiences and their future teaching practices. (Acquah, E. O., & Szelei, N. 2020). Results, suggest that culturally responsive teaching plays a pivotal role in higher education online environments and is actualized differently through contextualization, understanding the association between culture and technology, centering a sociocultural presence, and decentring a mainstream culture. (Vincent-Layton, Kimberly, 2022)

Need and Significance

The increasing cultural diversity in higher education requires inclusive teaching-learning approaches that identify and respect students' diverse culture backgrounds. Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) promotes academic success, engagement of students, and cultural competence, preparing students for a globalized world. Regardless of its proven benefits, the adoption of CRT remains limited due to institutional inactivity, lack of professional development of human resources, and deeply rooted traditional pedagogical practices. The present study gives in-hand exposure to educationalists and policymakers to effectively implement CRT, ensuring equitable and meaningful learning experiences.

Research Questions

1. What are the theoretical foundations of CRT, and how do they support inclusive pedagogy in higher education in terms of cultural responsiveness?
2. What strategies can teachers and institutions apply to integrate CRT into syllabuses and classroom practices?
3. What challenges do higher education institutions face in implementing CRT, and what could be potential solutions?

Research Objectives

1. To explore the principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).

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2. To find effective strategies for integrating CRT into syllabuses, pedagogical practices, and policies of Institutes.
3. To find out the challenges and barriers to implementing CRT in higher education and suggest possible solutions.

METHODOLOGY

The present study follows a qualitative approach, focusing on a systematic literature review to study the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The review of related literature involved analyzing existing research to provide a comprehensive understanding of CRT's application in diverse educational surroundings. The data was collected by examination of peer-reviewed articles and relevant materials i.e. books and doctoral thesis. for analyzing the data, thematic analysis was applied, allowing for the identification of key themes, challenges, and effective strategies for effective implementation of CRT. The continuous comparison method enabled the synthesis of findings, ensuring that understandings from other sources were compared and contrasted to enhance the study's wisdom and validity.

Theories for CRT

The groundwork for culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is placed by some basic theories that highlight the importance of integrating the backgrounds of pupils into the educational process. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory deals with the social connections that are important for cognitive development and theoretical inspirations. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is a social process, where children learn best when they participate in group tasks that are essential to their environment and culture.

Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT), as proposed by Ladson-Billings, is another fundamental principle of CRT. Three pillars support this framework namely Critical Consciousness, Cultural Competence, and Academic Accomplishment. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), education should support students' understanding and appreciation of both their own and other people's cultural identities in addition to directing academic achievement. It also encourages the growth of critical consciousness, which prepares students to identify and challenge social injustices.

Overall, these theories stress on how essential a teaching strategy that actively acknowledges and respects students' diverse cultural roots. The main aim of Culturally Responsive teaching is to create a welcoming and effective learning environment that recognizes and take advantage of on the unique cultural resources that students bring to the classroom through the incorporation of several theoretical attitudes.

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is a pedagogical approach that pursues to acknowledge and use each student's unique cultural background, experiences, and points of view to encourage an inclusive and fruitful learning environment. CRT, which appeared from the more general idea of multicultural education, and provide a strong emphasis on the value of recognizing and taking into account the several cultural references that students have in all areas of their education.

Given the enduring gaps in student success and the enrolment trends in schools of urban, culturally sensitive teaching must be given careful thought. Integrating ethnically diverse students' cultural heritages, experiences, and perspectives into educational programs and

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practices is significant, and this consideration should at minimum look at the case, why this arises, how to go about doing it, and the results that occur. An introduction of the urban school situation and the reasons culturally responsive teaching works fine there is given at the beginning. (Gay, G. 2013). A diversity gap among urban students in terms of race, culture, language, and prior knowledge. Teachers need to link their pedagogies with student diversity and think about how the disparities among their students impact learning. (Kieran, L., & Anderson, C. 2019).

Principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is an instructional approach that seeks to acknowledge and utilize each student's unique cultural background, experiences, and points of view in order to promote an inclusive and fruitful learning environment. CRT, which emerged from the more general idea of multicultural education, places a strong emphasis on its value of recognizing and taking into account the various cultural references that students have in all areas of their education. This educational framework is based on several important ideas.

Given the enduring gaps in student success and the enrolment trends in urban schools, culturally sensitive teaching must be given careful thought. Incorporating ethnically diverse students' cultural heritages, experiences, and perspectives into educational programs and practices is important, and this consideration should at minimum look at why this is the case, how to go about doing it, and the results that result. These concerns are covered in this conversation. An introduction of the urban school situation and the reasons culturally responsive teaching works well there is given at the outset. A synopsis of the main presumptions, characteristics, and guidelines of culturally responsive education follows below. (Gay, G. 2013). There is diversity gap growing among urban students in terms of race, culture, language, and prior knowledge. Teachers need to connect their pedagogies with student diversity and think about how the disparities among their students impact learning. (Kieran, L., & Anderson, C. 2019).

Core Principles of CRT

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) tries to create a friendly and productive learning environment. The basic principles are follows. Teachers who want to support academic achievement and cultural competency in a diverse student must follow these values.

- **Cultural Competence:** This principle highlights how significant it is for teachers to gain detailed knowledge and respect for many cultures. Gaining cultural competency enables educators to more effectively recognize and value the cultural origins and experiences of their students, thereby improving the learning process. (Gay, 2018).
- **Inclusive Curriculum:** A key component of CRT is generating course material that represents a range of perspectives. An inclusive curriculum makes sure that the subjects pupils study has representations from their own cultures, which can increase interest and nurture a feeling of community. It exposes all students to a broader variety of perspectives, promoting a more systematic comprehension of the world.
- **Critical Reflection:** Fundamental to CRT is the encouragement of teachers to consider their cultural biases and assumptions. Critical reflection requires ongoing self-evaluation as well as a readiness to oppose one's own biases. By recognizing and reducing any biases in their teaching methods, this strategy supports educators in creating a more equal learning environment.

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- **Student-Centered Pedagogy:** The way of integrating students cultural backgrounds into the learning process are the foundation of CRT. This method recognizes the influence that students' cultural identities and life experiences have on how they learn. Teachers who use student-centered pedagogical techniques can provide more engaging and meaningful learning experiences that involve students on a personal level. (Gay, 2018).
- **High Expectations and Academic Achievement:** One of the fundamental beliefs in CRT is that all students, regardless of their cultural or socioeconomic background, are capable of high academic achievement. Teachers must have high morale and expectations in order to provide the necessary assistance for students to meet them. Teachers should set high academic standards/requirements for all students and to communicate these standards clearly.

They should also provide scaffolding, differentiated instruction, and formative assessments to help students achieve those standards. High expectations are also maintained by creating an atmosphere of belief, where teacher believes in students potential.

In order to be inclusive, democratic, and representative of the various cultural settings seen in classrooms, these fundamental principles work together to guide the implementation of culturally responsive teaching in education system.

Benefits of CRT

The usage of culturally responsive teaching (CRT), act as an important factor on both teachers and students, can be very helpful to higher education institutes. Various research studies shows that CRT improves the academic achievement of children. CRT raises the relatability and engagement of the curriculum by integrating the cultural backgrounds of the pupils, which can improve understanding and retention of the topic. By supporting students in making links between new and Prior cultural information, this method encourages deeper learning and academic success.

CRT increases participation among students. Students are more likely to actively participate in class when they observe that the curriculum reflects their cultures and that their experiences and perspectives are recognized. A positive attitude toward learning, improved attendance, and more motivation can result from this all improved engagement. CRT helps students become more culturally competent. Students who are exposed to a variety of perspectives and cultural material are better able to understand and value other cultures. Cultural competency is vital for living in a diverse society because it decreases bias, promotes empathy, and prepares pupils to task well in a variety of surroundings. Studies show that CRT can close achievement differences. By attending to the particular demands and difficulties that students should face, different backgrounds encounter, CRT helps level the playing ground and gives every student an equal chance to succeed. This strategy can create a more equal educational environment by having a considerable influence on understated and disadvantaged student groups (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Students from diverse groups might feel like they fit in and that is because of CRT. When students faiths in the institution supports and acknowledges their cultural identities are more likely to feel greeted and inspired in the academic community. A sense of belonging can increase students' academic perseverance and overall well-being, increasing retention and graduation grades.

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There are several advantages of using culturally responsive teaching in higher education institutes. These advantages include better academic results, higher levels of student participation, increased cultural competence, fewer achievement gaps, and a greater feeling of community for all students.

The approach must be tailored to the unique attributes and requirements of each of these environments, taking into account the social dynamics as well as the ethnic, cultural, racial, immigration, economic, and linguistic demographics of the students. It presents opportunities as well as problems for particular teaching approaches. We talk about the nature and reasons behind these invites and difficulties, are to be offered with some recommendations, how they must to and can be handled. They are examined using four pillars of reasoning and practice that are fundamental to teaching that is culturally sensitive. (Gay, G. 2015).

Barriers to Implementation

Despite its many benefits, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in higher education institutions might faces the more significant challenges. It is imperative to understand and tackle these obstacles to successfully incorporate CRT into academic situations. The uphill challenges is a lack of institutional support. CRT needs the support and dedication of educational institutions at the highest levels to be applied successfully. This support is frequently insufficient because educational institutions frequently place a higher priority on orthodox teaching strategies and curricula that do not fairly represent the variety of their student group. It can be difficult and insufficient to integrate CRT without support of institution.

The implementation of CRT is hampered by educators' lack of professional development. A large number of teachers may lack the expertise that is required for successful integration of culturally sensitive approaches into their teaching-learning process and classroom settings. There are frequently few chances for professional development focused on CRT, and teachers might not get the continuous supervision and assistance that is required to build cultural competency and successfully implement CRT principles. One major obstacle in academic situations is an unwillingness to change. Institutions of higher education may have long-standing customs and procedures that can be hostile to novel ideas. Teaching staff and admin staff could be uncertain about changing curricula, pedagogical strategies, and procedures of evaluation; this is especially correct if they don't know much about CRT or don't think it works. Lack of knowledge, a fear of the unknown, or an unwillingness to learn from well-established pedagogical models can all be the causes of this resistance.

It is the combined responsibility of all parties involved in the education system to address these difficulties. Institutional leaders need to encourage CRT and provide funding to help put it into practice. It is vital to construct complete and ongoing professional development programs that provide teachers with the necessary skills and expertise in this regard. Cultivating a culture of transparency and adaptability is essential. This requires having meaningful conversations with teachers, administrators, and students regarding the significance of CRT and developing a common vision for inclusive education (Sleeter, 2012).

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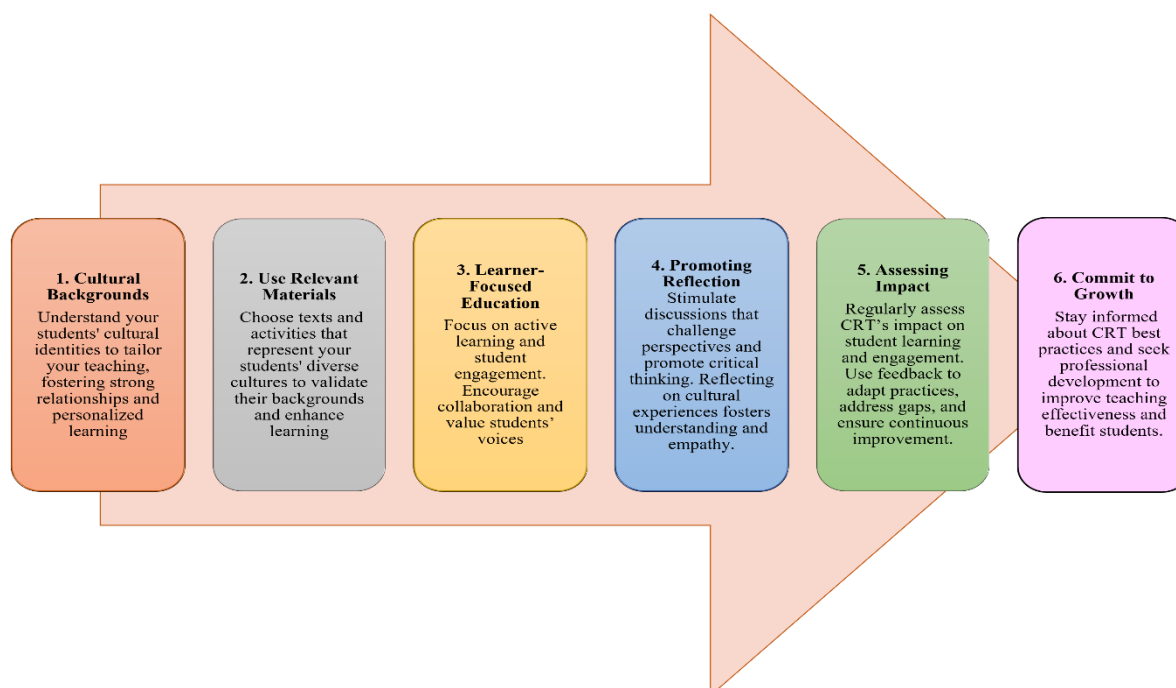


Figure 1: Steps for Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching

While difficulties such as a lack of institutional support, insufficient professional development, and unwillingness to change obstruct the adoption of culturally responsive teaching in higher education settings, overcoming these problems is essential for achieving the full potential of CRT. Educational institutions may overcome these challenges and establish more inclusive, fair, and culturally sensitive learning environments by working together and demonstrating a strong commitment to these goals.

Strategies for Implementing CRT

A complete strategy is needed in culturally responsive teaching (CRT), which includes acknowledging students' cultural backgrounds, integrating diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum, and creating an inclusive environment. Teachers should begin by connecting with students and their families to learn about their cultural settings, which will aid them to select culturally relevant resources and illustrations for teaching. Teaching approaches should be modified to match students' cultural experiences, such as cooperative learning tactics that emphasize group achievement. Professional development focused on cultural competence can support instructors in identifying and addressing their biases, allowing them to provide equitable support to all pupils. CRT increases student engagement and achievement by providing diverse and respectful surroundings, resulting in a more equal educational experience.

Institutional Strategies for Implementing CRT

Higher education institutions play a key role in inculcating in nurturing the inclusive learning environments that reflect the cultural diversity in students. To effectively implement Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), institutions must accept strategic approaches that discourse policy frameworks, faculty development, and hiring practices.

- **Policy Development:** Policy development is necessary for nurturing inclusiveness and diversity within institutions by establishing guidelines that guarantee equitable opportunities and fair treatment for all individuals. The evaluating process involves

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present challenges, consulting stakeholders, and addressing key areas such as non-discrimination, accessibility, sensitivity of culture, and equal representation. Effective policies include clear implementation strategy, monitoring, and enforcement procedures, with regular evaluations to adapt to social changes. By implanting inclusivity into institutional frameworks, organizations can create a culture of respect, equity, and mutual understanding, ultimately enhancing individual well-being and overall productivity.

- **Professional Development:** Professional development is very important for teachers to enhance cultural capability and effectively engage the wide range of student populations. Through training programs, workshops, and educational resources, teachers gain insights into different cultural backgrounds, values, and perceptions. These initiatives focus on culturally responsive teaching, bias awareness, inclusive curriculum design, and effective communication. Continuous learning opportunities, such as peer discussions and research-based resources, help teachers stay updated on best practices. By prioritizing diversity-focused professional development, institutions permit teachers to create inclusive learning environments, reduce cultural misunderstandings, and foster a more effective and harmonious educational experience.
- **Diverse Hiring Practices:** Diverse hiring practices are key to adopting an inclusive and equitable workplace in educational institutions. These practices involve recruiting, selecting, and retaining a workforce that reflects various cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Strategies such as inclusive job postings, blind resume screenings, and structured interviews ensure equal opportunities based on merit. Outreach to underrepresented groups, along with mentorship programs and leadership opportunities, further supports workplace diversity. Regular evaluations of hiring and retention policies help maintain progress toward a representative workforce. Embracing diversity in hiring enhances perspectives, innovation, and overall institutional success.

Classroom Strategies for Implementing CRT

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) needs thoughtful and intentional strategies at the classroom level to ensure that every single student should feel valued and included. Teachers must incorporate diverse perspectives, accept teaching methods that acknowledge students' cultural backgrounds, and engage with communities to create significant learning experiences.

- **Designing Curriculum:** Inclusive curriculum design includes diverse perspectives and experiences to support equity and engagement. It highlights contributions from understated groups and incorporates diverse cultural, historical, and social backgrounds. This approach uses diverse pedagogies and assessments to put up different learning styles and encourages critical thinking and discussions on social issues. It focuses on creating an equitable learning environment where all children feel represented and empowered. For Example, in a history class, the curriculum includes perceptions from different cultures, such as Indigenous histories and the contributions of African civilizations, allowing students to engage themselves with a broader range of ideas and perspectives.
- **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:** Culturally relevant pedagogy includes teaching strategies that respect students' cultural backgrounds, making learning more appealing and effective. It adapts content and methods to reflect diverse identities,

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including cultural experiences and contributions from marginalized groups. Teachers adjust their techniques to accommodate different learning styles, creating an inclusive and respectful environment. This approach nurtures cultural identity, critical thinking, and academic success, promoting a more inclusive classroom. For Example, a literature teacher includes works by authors from several cultural backgrounds, ensuring students from different cultural groups can connect with the material and see their own identities reflected in the curriculum.

- **Community Engagement:** Community engagement in education nurtures collaboration between schools and local communities to link learning with practical contexts. This approach includes partnerships like guest lectures, field trips, and service-learning projects, enabling students to apply their knowledge practically. It helps students understand how their learning affects their communities and bridges the gap between home and school. Teachers can also adjust their practices to be more culturally relevant. Community engagement creates an inclusive, dynamic educational environment for all students. For Example, a high school history class associates with a local museum for a field trip, where students can experience live moments about the community's history from experts, applying classroom knowledge to real-life contexts.

Findings

The findings of the study are as follows:

1. CRT enhances student engagement, academic performance, and cultural competence.
2. Effective CRT strategies include integrating diverse perspectives in curricula, fostering inclusive classroom environments, and providing cultural competency training for faculty.
3. Major challenges include a lack of institutional commitment, inadequate professional development, and resistance to pedagogical change.
4. Institutions with strong leadership support and ongoing faculty training have successfully implemented CRT, leading to improved student outcomes and classroom inclusivity.

Educational Implications

1. **Curriculum Reform:** Curriculum reform seeks to nurture inclusiveness and equity by incorporating diverse cultural perspectives and histories, challenging Eurocentric views, and incorporating content from marginalized groups.
2. **Faculty Development:** Regular training programs on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) should be established to provide educators with the important skills required to effectively address the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students. These programs should focus on both the theoretical foundations and practical applications of CRT, enabling teachers to create inclusive classrooms that provide the unique requirements of all learners.
3. **Institutional Policies:** Universities should develop and implement policies that encourage diversity and inclusion, making Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) an essential part of their educational framework. These policies should ensure that CRT principles are rooted across syllabuses, faculty development, and institutional practices, developing an environment where diversity is actively celebrated and all children are supported in their academic journey.

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- 4. Engagement of Students:** Students should be encouraged to participate in discussions on cultural diversity and inclusion helps make a more equitable learning environment. By engaging in these discussions, students can inculcate diverse perspectives, challenge biases, and contribute to a classroom culture that values respect and inclusivity for all.

CONCLUSION

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) can be an important educational framework that enhances inclusiveness, equity, and academic success in higher education. The present study has constituted that CRT fosters the diverse students from cultural backgrounds feel valued and supported, ultimately improving engagement, academic performance, and cultural competence. By incorporating CRT into courses, pedagogical practices, and institutional policies, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can bridge cultural gaps and promote meaningful learning experiences for all pupils of Higher Education.

Despite its advantages, the study highlights several challenges to CRT implementation, including institutional inactivity, limited professional development opportunities for teachers, and conflict with pedagogical change. Overcoming these challenges needs a collective effort from policymakers, administrators, and teachers. Institutions that have successfully implemented CRT frequently exhibit strong leadership support, well-structured faculty development programs (FDPs), and a commitment to diversity and inclusion. These factors contribute to creating an equitable academic environment where every student from all backgrounds can thrive.

To ensure effective implementation, educational institutions must prioritize CRT through reform in curriculum, faculty development, and institutional policies that help diversity and inclusion. Encouraging student participation in discussions on cultural diversity further supports the impact of CRT. As higher education continues to serve an increasingly diverse student population, the adoption of CRT is not just a pedagogical choice but a requirement for fostering a globally competent and socially just educational system.

Longitudinal studies should be prioritized in future research to evaluate the long-term benefits of CRT on students' academic outcomes, including academic achievement, engagement, and cultural competency. These investigations can offer insightful information about the long-term impacts of CRT and help shape best practices for its application. Novel techniques to faculty professional development must be explored. This involves developing syllabuses that provide possibilities for lifelong learning as well as practical methods for integrating CRT into regular teaching processes. Boosting inclusivity and equity in higher education needs culturally responsive teaching. Educational institutions can ensure that CRT becomes a central component of their teaching approach by addressing current obstacles and making a commitment to continuous research and professional development.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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