The Persistent Achievement Gap in Secondary School Students

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Abstract:

The persistent achievement gap in secondary school students, characterized by disparities in academic performance across racial, socioeconomic, and special educational needs lines, poses a significant challenge to contemporary education systems. This gap diminishes the effectiveness of secondary education by depriving students of equal educational experiences and opportunities. Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) emerges as a promising approach to narrow this gap by leveraging students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives as valuable educational resources. This paper delves into the theoretical underpinnings of CRT, its assumptions, constructs, causal relationships, and distinctions from traditional educational theories. Additionally, it evaluates a study on CRT's effectiveness, highlighting its strengths in promoting inclusivity, cultural awareness, and student-centred learning while addressing challenges such as resource constraints, response bias, and the need for longitudinal research designs. Suggestions for alternative research designs to overcome these limitations are also provided.

Keywords: Achievement gap, secondary education, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), , student-centered learning, educational disparities, , educational equity, Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT), qualitative research, quantitative research.

Introduction:

A problem most secondary education programs face is an acute and widening gap for most pupils concerning their race, socioeconomic standing, and special educational needs. This makes the disparity by reducing effectiveness in secondary education due to unequal education experiences and opportunities. The achievement gap in secondary education must be addressed once and for all so students can benefit equally in pursuing formal education opportunities. This assignment intends to examine the challenge mentioned earlier, and the Culturally Responsive Teaching theory and methodology will be implemented to narrow this gap. Thus providing equal opportunities for every student.

Theoretical Explanation: Culturally Responsive Teaching:

Culturally Responsive Teaching means utilizing students' conventions, traits, life experiences, and opinions as teaching resources to improve classroom education (Najarro,2023). In other

words, Culturally Responsive Teaching provides a way to a more equal and inclusive educational system by actively recognizing and valuing the cultural diversity of pupils.

Assumptions

Culturally Responsive Teaching is based on several underlying assumptions, interconnected concepts, and causes. It takes off from the presupposition that diverse cultures are integral to every classroom, as all students would have brought their own cultural experiences. It also recognizes the idea of cultural capital, realizing that the learners' backgrounds provide significant intellectual sources for their growth. According to this theory, education is inclusive, recognizing and appreciating all cultures (Najarro,2023). Moreover, it recognizes the existence of implicit bias in schools. It points to school staff and curricula as sources of unintentional perpetuation of such prejudice towards children belonging to certain social groups, ultimately resulting in achievement gaps (Najarro,2023).

Moreover, according to culturally responsive teaching, teachers should aim to become culturally competent, which entails gaining the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes necessary to interact with pupils from different cultural backgrounds (Burnham,2020). This calls for a sustained dedication to learning about diverse cultures and participating in self-reflection to recognize one's cultural prejudices. In addition, culturally responsive teaching assumes the interaction between socioeconomic and cultural diversity and the potential for additional difficulties for pupils (Baker & Baker, 2023). It is based on the premise that teachers should consider these considerations when developing a curriculum since some students may suffer obstacles related to their financial situation that impact their educational experiences.

Culturally responsive education is also based on the assumption that strong ties between the community and the school are crucial. Doing this acknowledges that families and the local community may significantly contribute to a student's education. Partnerships with regional groups, participation in cultural activities, and incorporating families in the educational process can all be part of this engagement (Gay,2018).

Lastly, culturally responsive teaching assumes that students have various learning preferences influenced by their cultural upbringings (Hood,2022). It promotes the idea that instructional design should take these variations into account. This entails providing several learning modalities, such as visual, aural, and kinesthetic, to match the needs of distinct learners.

Constructs:

There are critical elements within the constructs of Culturally Responsive Teaching. Educators must understand and respect the culture of others first. Cultural awareness is one of the fundamental tenets of culturally responsive teaching (Hood,2022). Therefore, educators must constantly work to be mindful of their pupils' cultural backgrounds. It includes a deeper grasp of the cultural norms, beliefs, and traditions that influence students' lives in addition to just detecting superficial differences. Teachers must be aware of the potential effects of these cultural influences on students' viewpoints, actions, and learning preferences (Hood,2022; Scott et al.,2014). Because of this insight, teachers can approach their pupils with respect for their cultural identities and a desire to have meaningful interactions with them.

Cultural sensitivity goes beyond cultural awareness, yet the two are closely related. Teachers must be sensitive to cultural differences and be aware of them (Scott et al.,2014). Respecting the various cultures present in the classroom requires being sensitive. It entails avoiding gestures, expressions, or conduct that could be interpreted as disrespectful or dismissive of a student's cultural heritage. Teachers should foster an atmosphere where students feel that their cultural identities are cherished and respected in addition to being acknowledged (Scott et al.,2014). Cultural sensitivity promotes the kind of rapport and trust necessary for teaching and learning to take place effectively.

Within culturally responsive teaching, curriculum adaptation is a valuable concept. It acknowledges that a student's experiences and points of view may

not always be represented by the required curriculum (Mensah,2021). Because of this, curricular modifications that incorporate many viewpoints and cultural references are welcomed. To do this, teachers must choose texts, teaching aids, and other resources that accurately reflect the cultural backgrounds of their pupils. By doing this, teachers help all students find the subject more relevant and exciting. This construct supports the premise that education should be improved by incorporating the variety of cultural information and experiences that students bring to the classroom (Gay,2018; Mensah,2021).

Regardless of a student's cultural or linguistic background, inclusive pedagogy involves adopting instructional practices that engage and empower all learners (Hernandez,2022). It entails creating an atmosphere conducive to learning where each student feels included and actively participates in the learning process. Diversified instruction, group projects, and peer teaching are examples of instructional strategies that may be used in inclusive pedagogy. It guarantees that all students have an equal chance to engage with the learning process, contribute, and achieve (Hernandez,2022). This idea fits well with the overarching objective of giving everyone access to a more just and equitable educational system.

One of the central tenets of culturally responsive teaching is the idea that learning should be oriented on the needs and cultural backgrounds of the individual students (Muñiz,2019). This method recognizes that students' cultural backgrounds have a variety of influences on their learning preferences, strengths, and learning styles. Teachers can use this information to create meaningful and pertinent lessons for each student. Self-directed learning, in which students actively participate in their education, set goals, and decide on their course of study, is another benefit of student-centred learning (Hernandez,2022; Muñiz,2019). It allows students to use their cultural backgrounds as advantages in their academic endeavours.

Causal Relationships:

Establishing causal links between these constructs is the goal of culturally responsive teaching. According to Gulati (2021), pupils from different

origins feel appreciated and respected when teachers are sympathetic to their cultures, which increases motivation and engagement. Modifying the curriculum and using inclusive pedagogy can close the achievement gap by ensuring all students can access valuable and timely instructional material. According to the hypothesis, learning experiences and outcomes are improved when instruction is tailored to students' cultural backgrounds and individual needs (Gulati, 2021).

Differences from Existing Traditional Educational Theories:

Culturally Responsive Teaching varies from traditional educational ideas, which frequently place a premium on uniform curricula and instructional strategies by recognizing the importance of different cultural perspectives in learning (Burnham,2020). The significance of fostering an inclusive and fair learning environment goes beyond simply emphasizing subject-matter knowledge. By addressing the core reasons for the achievement gap, such as implicit prejudice and unequal access to high-quality education, this theory adds to the body of previous theories (Thomas & Tripp, 2021). As such, the secondary education system can more effectively address the persistent achievement gap by actively recognizing and valuing the cultural variety of its pupils and implementing the culturally responsive teaching paradigm.

Evaluation of A Study On Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory:

Strengths:

The study by Rhodes (2017) on the theory of culturally responsive teaching has much relevance, which is one of its key advantages, especially when narrowing the achievement gap in diverse secondary schools (Bazini,2022). Students from different ethnic backgrounds frequently populate classes in today's increasingly multicultural and globalized society, each bringing their own experiences, viewpoints, and learning preferences. A one-size-fits-all approach to education is no longer viable, and culturally responsive teaching respects this variety (Hernandez,2022). This hypothesis directly addresses the root cause of the

success gap by customizing instruction to pupils' cultural backgrounds and individual requirements. No matter their cultural identities, it ensures that education is relevant to and approachable to all pupils, improving the chances of their success.

The emphasis on inclusivity in culturally responsive teaching is also a significant additional strength (Burnham,2020). This approach actively promotes inclusive instructional practices that foster a sense of community among all students in the classroom. Inclusivity effectively reduces the achievement gap because it guarantees that no student is left behind. Students are more inclined to participate in the learning process when they believe that their cultural identities are valued in addition to being acknowledged. This sense of acceptance and belonging increases students' motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. Culturally responsive teaching directly targets the psychological and emotional components of the success gap by promoting inclusivity (Burnham,2020).

A significant goal of culturally responsive teaching is to increase educators' sensitivity to and awareness of other cultures. Another critical aspect of the theory's strength is the way it confronts potential causes of prejudice and discrimination in the classroom. By promoting cultural awareness among educators, we can help them better understand their implicit biases and prejudices (Thomas & Tripp, 2021). In order to provide a fair and equitable learning environment, this self-awareness is crucial. Education professionals are less likely to promote bias through their teaching methods when they are more aware of their students' cultural backgrounds (Burnham,2020; Thomas & Tripp, 2021). Thus, pupils are judged and treated according to their skills and potential rather than their cultural backgrounds, creating a more equitable and inclusive educational environment.

Nevertheless, Student-centered learning is encouraged by the philosophy of culturally responsive teaching, a crucial strength (Burnham,2020). The idea of student-centred learning recognizes the variety of learning preferences and styles students have, which are impacted by their cultural origins. According to this notion, education may be made more successful and relevant by considering the requirements of individual students and their cultural backgrounds. Students are more likely to succeed academically when actively involved in learning and when education is tailored to their skills and weaknesses (Thomas & Tripp, 2021). By ensuring that students have access to the resources and support they need to succeed academically, customization addresses the underlying reasons for the achievement gap.

Weaknesses:

According to Rhodes (2017), a significant obstacle to the successful use of culturally responsive teaching is the need for more resources and training. It is essential to understand that while the theory has much potential, its successful implementation in the classroom depends on adequately trained teachers. Due to inadequate training in modifying their teaching methods to accommodate different cultural backgrounds, some teachers may need help implementing these principles (Hernandez,2022).

The Rhodes Study's dependence on instructors' self-reported surveys poses a flaw because it could add response bias to the research conclusions (Rhodes, 2017). Self-reporting may not wholly reflect the realities of the classroom because personal viewpoints and prejudices influence it. Teachers could accidentally give responses that they think are expected, potentially skewing the findings (Rhodes, 2017). As a result, it may be difficult to determine with certainty if the theory is effective at narrowing the achievement gap because the precision and reliability of the data collected may be questioned.

The study's relatively brief timeframe is another notable flaw. It may be challenging to evaluate the long-term effect of culturally responsive teaching on narrowing the achievement gap due to the length of the study. It frequently takes time for educational interventions and teaching method improvements to have noticeable outcomes. The study may have missed the longer-lasting, transformative benefits of the theory on students' academic performance because it needed more time (Rhodes, 2017). A

more extended investigation would offer a more thorough grasp of the theory's potential for long-lasting effects (Greenfield,2016).

Sources of Bias and Confounding Variables:

One of the significant sources of bias for this model is response bias (Jaber, 2022). Since data collection heavily relied on self-reported surveys from teachers, it is possible that participants provided responses that they believed were expected, potentially biased the results. In addition, varying levels of training and commitment to Culturally Responsive Teaching among educators or teachers can introduce a potential bias in the study's outcomes (Jaber, 2022).

Alternative Research Designs:

A researcher can conduct a longitudinal study over several years to track the effect of Culturally Responsive Teaching on decreasing the achievement gap over time, allowing for more thorough and definitive findings (Beck,2020). This will reinforce the theory and its empirical backing. Additionally, to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of the idea, one can combine qualitative data (interviews, classroom observations) with quantitative data (test results, attendance records) (Gcu,2022). Finally, a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) may be used, in which classrooms or schools are randomly assigned to either get training in culturally responsive teaching or stick with conventional methods of instruction. This design can aid in minimizing biases at the teacher level (Gcu,2022).

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the persistent achievement gap in secondary education is a critical issue that must be addressed comprehensively and effectively to ensure that all students have equal opportunities for academic success. Culturally Responsive Teaching offers a promising theoretical framework to narrow this gap by recognizing the importance of diverse cultural perspectives and creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment. This paper has examined the theoretical explanation, assumptions, constructs, causal relationships, and differences from traditional educational theories related to

Culturally Responsive Teaching. Alternative study designs, such as longitudinal studies, mixed-method approaches, and Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs), can strengthen the empirical support for Culturally Responsive Teaching. These approaches minimize potential sources of bias and enable a more thorough analysis of the theory's performance.

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