

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Inclusive Education: A Systematic Review of Global Practices (2019–2024)

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Abstract: Culturally responsive pedagogy, formulated to respect students' cultural identities, has emerged as an important methodology in improving the quality of inclusive education. This research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how culturally responsive approaches have been learned in inclusive education, as well as identify effective and relevant practices in a global context. This study seeks to assess culturally responsive pedagogy in inclusive education through a systematic review, which allows researchers to take a broad look at the phenomenon through research focused on effective practices and has been implemented in different countries from 2019 to 2024 using Scopus Database as a basis. The method used in this study is a systematic review with PRISMA guidelines. The results show that most of the literature highlights the importance of culturally responsive inclusive educational pedagogy and that multi-stakeholder collaboration and collaboration are essential in its implementation in inclusive schools. It can be concluded that culturally responsive pedagogy connects students' backgrounds with educational experiences. Multi-stakeholder support and continuous reflection and adaptation are essential for effective educational practices in inclusive schools.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Global Inclusive Education, Inclusive School Practices, Multicultural Curriculum Integration, Teacher Professional Development

A. Introduction

Inclusive education is a significant method in the field of education, which aims to facilitate equitable access to learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their social, cultural, or physical and intellectual backgrounds. The actualization of inclusive education has emerged as an important part of realizing Sustainable Development in the 2030 Agenda, especially through the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4.0, which seek to ensure inclusive and equitable access to high-quality education for all (Maria & Gracia, 2020; Zhukova et al., 2022). The emergence of culturally responsive pedagogy, designed to respect and integrate students' cultural identities, is recognized as an important strategy in improving the quality of inclusive education. Culturally responsive pedagogy

includes the integration of curriculum content, contextual relevance, and the dynamics of student-teacher relationships (Te Ava, 2020). Within this framework, culturally responsive pedagogy is relevant because it serves to strengthen students' involvement in the learning process by providing a safe environment for the development of their identity.

Despite the significant potential that culturally responsive pedagogy has in shaping more inclusive educational practices, the challenges associated with its implementation vary widely across different country contexts. Effective educational practices should address the heterogeneous needs of students rather than adopting a uniform approach where students with special needs require an educational program that is specifically tailored to their instructional requirements (Evans et al., 2021). It is critical for educators to collaborate with policy makers to foster an educational environment that is more adaptable and responsive to student diversity through the application of diverse instructional methodologies (Strogilos et al., 2020). In this context, the relevance of culturally responsive pedagogy is emphasized because it has the capacity to increase learners' involvement during learning activities by creating a safe and conducive environment for their character development.

Studies in the Cook Islands show that the integration of culturally responsive pedagogy into the educational curriculum enhances the linkage of education to students' life experiences which significantly assists students in understanding the intrinsic value and essence of their cultural identity and has the potential to improve academic engagement and performance. (The Alcohol, 2020). As the increasing research on culturally responsive pedagogy continues to grow, a growing body of evidence supports the effectiveness of this approach in promoting better learning outcomes. Culturally responsive pedagogy emphasizes academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical awareness by integrating students' cultural context into the educational experience (Mutuota, 2023). However, despite a review of studies investigating culturally responsive pedagogy within the framework of inclusive education, there is no systematic review that comprehensively describes effective practices in different countries. It emphasizes the need for systematic research that aims to elucidate the extent to which culturally responsive pedagogy has been applied and identify effective practices in inclusive education in a variety of cultural contexts. The correlation between culturally responsive pedagogy and social-emotional intelligence in a study conducted in Eritrea was shown to foster an emotionally supportive classroom environment, actively engaging students from heterogeneous backgrounds (Zerai et al., 2023).. Culturally responsive pedagogy has a great influence not only on academic success but also on the moral development of students, especially regarding their socio-emotional dimensions. Within the framework of inclusive education, where the ultimate goal is to ensure equitable access to educational opportunities for all learners, the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy becomes even more important. Student-led learning approaches introduce

breadth and cultural expression, thereby enhancing pedagogical practices through critical feedback provided by students, which plays an important role in refining culturally responsive pedagogy (Nasri et al., 2023). Nonetheless, educators occupy an important position in the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. In the absence of adequate professional development and support, it is difficult for educators to design instructional techniques that are appropriate for the cultural diversity that exists in their classrooms. Targeted professional development initiatives for educators are essential for the effective integration of strategies that implement culturally responsive pedagogy, thereby connecting learners' cultural backgrounds with their educational experiences (Yilmaz, 2024).

Despite the growing body of literature on culturally responsive pedagogy and inclusive education, a critical research gap exists in the current scholarship. While numerous studies have examined culturally responsive practices within specific national or regional contexts, there is a notable absence of a systematic, global synthesis that comprehensively analyzes effective culturally responsive pedagogy practices across diverse inclusive education settings worldwide. Existing reviews tend to focus on either culturally responsive pedagogy or inclusive education separately, without adequately bridging these two interconnected domains. Furthermore, the fragmented nature of current research makes it challenging for educators and policymakers to identify which practices are universally applicable and which require contextual adaptation. This lack of consolidated evidence limits the ability of educational stakeholders to develop informed, evidence-based strategies for implementing culturally responsive approaches in inclusive classrooms across different cultural and educational systems.

To address this gap, this systematic review is guided by the following research questions: 1) How has culturally responsive pedagogy in the context of inclusive education been studied and documented in the existing literature from 2019 to 2024? 2) What are the characteristics of inclusive education systems in various countries that have implemented culturally responsive approaches? 3) What effective practices have been identified for implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in inclusive school settings across different cultural contexts?

This study seeks to fill gaps in the scientific literature on culturally responsive pedagogy by conducting a systematic review of effective practices that have been used in various countries. This research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how culturally responsive pedagogy has been applied in the realm of inclusive education, as well as to identify effective and relevant practices within a global framework. Through this synthesis, it is hoped that this research will contribute to the advancement of a more inclusive paradigm of educational theory and practice, which can be applied in various cultural contexts.

In addition, the findings of this systematic review are expected to produce practical recommendations for policy makers, educators and researchers in the formulation of educational programs that respect and embrace the cultural diversity of students. By differentiating effective practices from different countries, this research has the potential to support pedagogical implementation strategies that respect and embrace the cultural diversity of students, culturally responsive according to the distinctive characteristics of each education system.

B. Methods

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) checklist statement (Moher et al., 2009) serves as an important framework for directing the implementation and documentation of systematic reviews. Initially, relevant articles were identified through an extensive search in the Scopus database. In addition, related research articles were identified using keywords: *culture*, *responsive pedagogy*, and *inclusive schools*, published from 2019 to April 2024, and compiled in English. Of the initial pool of 183 articles, 110 were excluded before the screening process, resulting in 77 articles that fit the set criteria. Furthermore, 36 articles were selected based on their titles and abstracts, followed by a feasibility assessment of the synthesis paper through a comprehensive review of the full text. In the end, 29 papers were deemed suitable for inclusion in the study.

The inclusion criteria described in this paper stipulate that the article must (1) discuss culturally responsive pedagogy in education, (2) relate to practice in inclusive education systems, (3) be published in the international journal Scopus, and (4) in English. In addition, qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and reviews articles are included to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its practice and implementation.

After synthesizing the data, the selected papers were analyzed and compiled into two tables prepared by the reviewers; one table aims to examine the different forms and systems of inclusive education in different countries, while the other seeks to investigate the practices and implementation of culturally responsive inclusive education in those countries, including the objectives, outcomes, and conclusions of each paper.

C. Results and Discussion

Results

The first objective of this systematic literature study is to explore how culturally responsive pedagogy in the context of inclusive education has been the subject of scientific inquiry and has been researched before. For the main focus of the research,

shown in Figure 1 below:

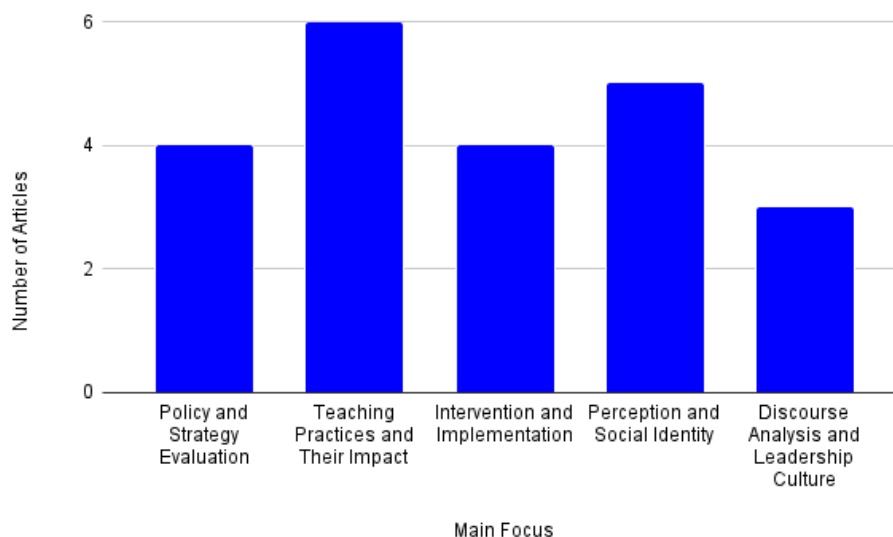


Figure 1. Main focus of the research

In Figure 1, it can be seen that the main focus of the research conducted in this study is centered on policy and strategy evaluation, teaching practices and their impacts, interventions and implementation, social perceptions and identities, discourse analysis and cultural leadership. One study that focuses primarily on instructional practices and their impact is a study that explores educators' perspectives on instructional strategies aimed at improving the inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse learners (CLDs) in secondary education institutions located in the province of Gauteng, South Africa. (Masunungure & Maguvhe, 2024).. Studies with a primary focus on policy evaluation and research strategies have also looked at the perspectives of educators from Saudi Arabia and Finland on inclusive education which aims to shed light on potential differences in these perspectives influenced by different cultural and educational frameworks, where these differences can significantly affect attitudes towards inclusive education thus influencing the development of effective educational policies and practices in environmental heterogeneous culture (Alnahdi et al., 2019).

Inclusive Education Systems in Various Countries

An analysis of culturally responsive inclusive education practices and implementation in different countries shows that the success of inclusive education depends not only on the provision of inclusive educational settings but also on the adjustment of curricula and policy frameworks to accommodate local cultural settings and needs. As evidenced by research conducted in South Africa, the Cook Islands, and Kenya, culturally responsive approaches play an important role in facilitating inclusive

education to meet the needs of all learners, especially learners with culturally diverse backgrounds or special needs (Masunungure & Maguvhe, 2024; Mutuota, 2023). The incorporation of cultural values, such as collaboration and reciprocity, in the curriculum has been shown to increase students' sense of belonging and active involvement in the educational process.

Support from education policies is an important aspect that supports the effective implementation of cultural inclusivity. In countries such as Finland and Portugal, government policies are crucial in promoting the establishment of a fair and inclusive education framework. For example, the Finnish government provides a regulatory structure that guarantees every child's right to a decent education, while in Portugal, the CAPE/PAC instrument is used to assess student engagement, thus ensuring meaningful inclusion for learners from diverse backgrounds (Sanches-Ferreira et al., 2023). The policy underscores the importance of a rights-based paradigm in inclusive education that values diversity and actively engages all students in the educational experience.

On a practical level, incorporating multicultural literature into the educational curriculum is a common practice in countries including Singapore and the United States. Educational texts and materials that contain diverse cultural values facilitate students' understanding of different perspectives and reduce cultural biases, as evidenced by research conducted in Singapore (Garces-Bacsal & Tupas, 2021). This pedagogical approach allows students to understand their own cultural reflections in educational materials, which then increases participation as well as motivation to participate in learning activities. In addition, the practice of adapting learning environments to accommodate special needs is an essential element of culturally responsive inclusive education. In Sweden and the United States, modifications of the educational environment for students with intellectual disabilities or sensory impairments facilitate their access to equitable educational opportunities. For example, alternative curricula in Sweden offer educational programs that align academic and social competencies to prevent the separation of students with special needs from mainstream education (Hanreddy & Östlund, 2020). Classroom adaptations that incorporate sensory design allow students with ADHD or other special needs to engage in a conducive learning environment tailored to their individual needs.

The involvement and support of local communities is also recognized as an important factor in the effectiveness of inclusive education, especially in resource-constrained countries such as the Pacific Islands and Canada. The community-based education model encourages community participation in the formation of a more inclusive educational atmosphere, where the community actively assists students and educators in inclusive educational practices. This suggests that communities can serve as a significant resource for schools, especially in remote areas or those with

inadequate educational resources (Sharma et al., 2019).

In countries such as Japan, Australia, and Uganda, the provision of support for educators through training and professional development focused on culturally responsive pedagogy is also a significant determinant. Research shows that educators who are knowledgeable about inclusion and cultural strategies are generally better equipped to manage culturally diverse classrooms and meet diverse needs, as evidenced by research conducted in Uganda and Australia (Bannink et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2022). This training equips educators to formulate pedagogical approaches that respect diversity and modify their teaching methods to foster a more inclusive learning environment. However, on the contrary, certain countries continue to face challenges in implementing culturally responsive inclusive education as a result of limited resources and inadequate policy support. For example, in the Pacific Islands, limitations imposed by educational facilities and resources hinder the implementation of comprehensive cultural inclusion principles within the education framework (Sharma et al., 2019). This highlights that, in the absence of adequate financial support and infrastructure support, the comprehensive implementation of culturally responsive inclusive education remains problematic, regardless of existing commitments from educational institutions or communities. In summary, the realization of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in inclusive education requires a combined approach that includes curriculum adaptation, policy support, community engagement, and professional development for educators. Recent literature shows that an effective inclusive education system is one that takes into account the cultural and social needs of students, supported by policies that ensure sustainable inclusion. Through a context-based approach supported by all stakeholders, culturally responsive inclusive education can be actualized to build an equal and equitable learning environment across countries.

In general, the inclusive education systems observed in the various countries studied show that the effective implementation of inclusive education relies heavily on adaptation to a particular local cultural environment, providing policy support and preparing educators. Countries such as South Africa, Kenya, and the Cook Islands emphasize the importance of integrating local cultural values where culturally responsive pedagogy integrates curriculum content, context, and student-teacher relationships. (Mutuota, 2023; Alcohol, 2020; Page et al., 2022). Meanwhile, developed countries such as Finland and Portugal emphasize policy support in establishing a fair and equitable policy framework for inclusion and Inclusive education policies that emphasize participation beyond just access to education (Moberg et al., 2020). In addition, professional development focused on culturally responsive pedagogy has proven to be important in ensuring that inclusive approaches can be applied effectively, especially for learners with special needs and those with diverse cultural backgrounds. The challenges include insufficient resources, inadequate training, and negative perceptions of disability, which hinder the effectiveness of inclusive

education in certain countries.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Practices in Inclusive Schools

The discourse around the effective implementation of responsive pedagogy in inclusive education settings internationally makes it clear that local approaches and educator training are important elements in improving the quality of inclusive education. In South Africa, for example, research conducted by Masunungure & Maguvhe (2024) illustrates that professional development focused on cultural sensitivity is essential to accommodate learners' diverse ethnic backgrounds. Curriculum adjustments that incorporate local cultural values also contribute to fostering a more inclusive educational atmosphere and creating a sense of belonging among students. A comparable study conducted in Kenya (Mutuota, 2023) confirms that a curriculum rooted in local cultural contexts can strengthen the engagement of students with disabilities, thus reinforcing the importance of instilling local values in inclusive educational practices.

Recent scientific literature reinforces the need for teacher training in culturally responsive pedagogy. Sanders, O'Leary et al. (2020) reveal that workshops centered on culturally responsive teaching in STEM institutions increase educators' awareness of diversity and facilitate the adoption of more inclusive pedagogical strategies. These workshops have proven effective in increasing institutional understanding of diversity and in encouraging the formation of a more inclusive classroom environment for students from diverse backgrounds. This phenomenon is equally relevant in the Australian context, where professional development aimed at addressing social and cultural diversity is critical for educators teaching students from refugee backgrounds (Miller et al., 2022). Such training not only raises awareness of the importance of diversity but also equips educators with practical resources to foster an environment that values each learner.

The incorporation of multicultural literature has also shown effectiveness in fostering understanding and acceptance of diversity. In Singapore, Garces-Bacsal & Tupas (2021) found that multicultural literature reduces disparities among students and supports racial harmony in educational settings. Literary works include a wide range of narratives and characters representing different cultural backgrounds, thus helping students recognize and appreciate diversity. The study is in line with findings in the United States, which affirm that the use of multicultural literature creates an avenue for students to see their cultural reflections in the classroom and feel a deeper connection to the learning material. This shows that multicultural literature is an important instrument in the formation of an inclusive and culturally responsive educational environment.

In addition, the application of sensory-adaptive classroom design has emerged as a

prominent practice in facilitating the educational experience of students with special needs, including those diagnosed with ADHD. Empirical evidence from Sweden and the United States suggests that classrooms specifically configured to meet students' sensory needs have demonstrated the ability to increase the engagement rate of students with special needs (Hanreddy & Östlund, 2020; Du Preez, 2024). Such a design incorporates sensory elements that foster an environment where students can feel comfort and security while learning, thus allowing them to concentrate and actively participate in their educational activities. This practice underscores the importance of recognizing students' individual needs as an integral part of culturally responsive pedagogy, which not only respects cultural backgrounds but also recognizes the different needs inherent in each student.

Overall, these practices imply that the effectiveness of inclusive education depends substantially on strong policy support, comprehensive teacher training, curriculum modification and the incorporation of local cultural elements in learning methodologies. This research shows that culture-centered strategies, supported by strong policies, can result in an inclusive educational environment that not only celebrates diversity but is also equipped to break down barriers to learning. In a context characterized by real cultural diversity, the sustainable implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy will play an important role in building inclusive educational institutions that ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students. In addition, these strategies were identified to better understand how inclusive education can be effectively implemented with approaches that respect cultural diversity, engage communities, and create inclusive and relevant learning environments. Inclusive education strategies can be divided into several important aspects that cover various dimensions, including teacher training, curriculum, culture-based approaches and community collaboration as shown in Figure 2 below:

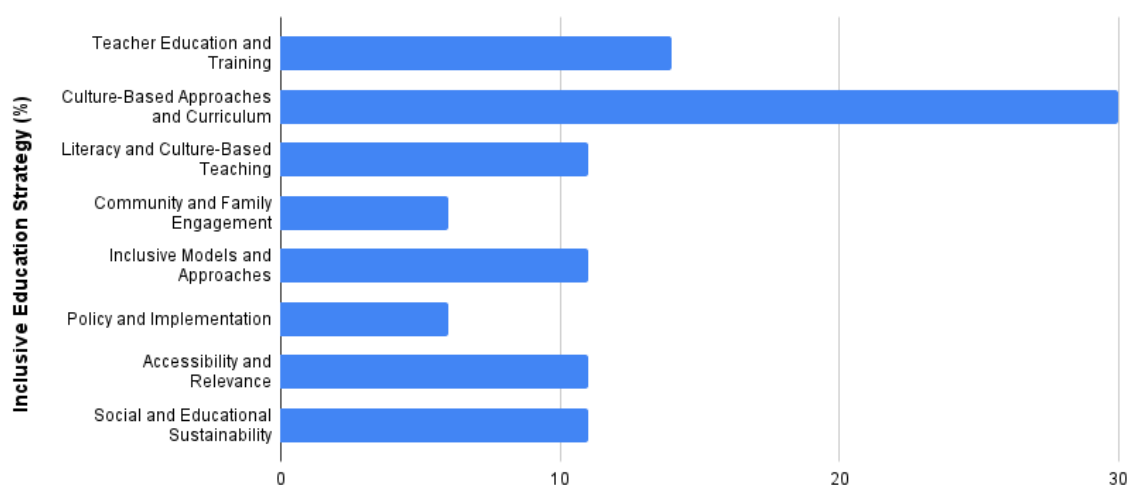


Figure 2. Inclusive Education Strategy Based on a Systematic Review Study

Figure 2 shows that based on the results of the research from the systematic review, it

was found that strategies through culture-based approaches and curricula resulted in an effective inclusive educational environment and valued diversity by 30% valued diversity. The next strategy is teacher education and training at 14%, followed by literacy and culture-based teaching, inclusive models and approaches, accessibility and relevance, and social sustainability and education at 10% each. The next strategy is community and family involvement and strategy through policies and implementation of 5%.

Effective practices for implementing culturally responsive pedagogy within inclusive education frameworks include teacher training, curriculum modifications that emphasize local cultural values, and policies that support and engage communities. In different countries, strategies such as the integration of multicultural literature, sensory responsive classroom design and workshop programs have been shown to increase understanding and acceptance of diversity. The findings show that the implementation of culturally responsive inclusive education is optimally successful when adapted to the local context, complemented by adequate training and policy support to foster an environment conducive to diversity.

Discussion

Inclusive education in various countries continues to undergo significant and dynamic developments, especially regarding the assessment of policies and strategies used for its implementation. A number of scientific studies show that inclusive policies created in response to the local context are more effective. For example, research conducted by Yilmaz et al. (2022) on the integration of refugee students in culturally heterogeneous settings shows that successful formulation of inclusive education policies requires adaptation to the different needs of specific groups. Similarly, Nasri et al (2023) support this approach, emphasizing the important role of the active involvement of all stakeholders in the policy development and implementation process. The review explains that ongoing policy assessments can generate valuable insights that aim to improve the effectiveness of inclusive policies.

In addition to policy assessments, pedagogical practices that are responsive to cultural diversity have been shown to improve academic and social outcomes for students in inclusive classrooms. Wright et.al. (2023) found that targeted training for educators in the implementation of inclusive teaching practices can foster a more supportive educational atmosphere. Harper et.al. (2021) further supports this conclusion, suggesting that culturally responsive teaching strategies not only improve academic outcomes but also enrich social dynamics within the classroom. These findings underscore the practice of inclusive education approaches in fostering a more equitable educational environment, where all students are given an equal opportunity to succeed.

Instead, inclusive education intervention and implementation emphasize the formulation of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) along with additional strategies designed to meet the specific needs of students. Bannink et.al. (2023) shows that parental involvement in IEP development significantly affects students' academic engagement. In addition, research conducted by Callus et al. (2023) related to the incorporation of cultural and identity issues in the educational curriculum shows that comprehensive interventions can increase students' sense of acceptance. From this point of view, it becomes clear that the effective implementation of inclusive education essentially depends on collaboration between educators, parents and education stakeholders, in this case schools.

Another important aspect of inclusive education has to do with the perception and social identity of students with special needs. Harper et.al. (2021) observed that students from minority backgrounds often face obstacles in building a positive self-identity due to stigma and stereotypes. In this context, the social identity of students in inclusive educational institutions is greatly influenced by cultural acceptance and the norms set and applicable in the school environment. Thompson et.al. (2022) affirms that strong peer acceptance and social support in the school environment play an important role in strengthening students' confidence, especially those from minority groups. These findings shed light on the need to foster an inclusive school environment that nurtures the positive identity of all students.

Discourse analysis and cultural leadership are also very important in the field of inclusive education, especially in shaping public perception of students with special needs. Descent et.al. (2022), using a Foucaultian perspective, highlights how prevailing discourses around disability and inclusion remain significantly shaped by special education paradigms. Adam and Barratt-Pugh (2020) emphasize the importance of culturally responsive leadership at the principal's administrative level to support a more inclusive school environment. Principals who exercise cultural leadership can facilitate a paradigm shift toward diversity acceptance. This review argues that inclusive leadership is essential in building an education system that values and respects differences.

Overall, this literature review highlights that inclusive education is a complex approach that requires collaboration and adaptation in many aspects. Not only are policies and practices playing an important role, but also changes people's perceptions and perspectives on diversity. The results show that the success of inclusive education depends on a shared commitment to building an equitable educational environment where all students are seen as equal, regardless of their background or condition. This fundamental paradigm shift will push inclusive education to be more than just policy implementation; It will be an integral part of a fair and comprehensive education system.

D. Conclusions

This systematic review reveals that culturally responsive pedagogy serves as a fundamental approach for creating equitable and effective inclusive education systems across diverse global contexts. The key findings demonstrate that successful implementation of culturally responsive inclusive education depends on four interconnected components: curriculum adaptations that integrate local cultural values and indigenous knowledge, comprehensive professional development programs that equip educators with cultural sensitivity and inclusive teaching strategies, supportive policy frameworks that prioritize participation beyond mere access, and active engagement of families and communities in educational processes. The analysis of twenty-nine studies from multiple countries shows that culture-based approaches and curriculum modifications account for the most effective strategies, followed by teacher training initiatives, literacy-based teaching methods, and inclusive educational models. These findings carry significant practical implications for educational stakeholders worldwide. Policymakers should prioritize the development of flexible educational policies that allow for contextual adaptation while maintaining core inclusive principles. School administrators need to invest in sustained professional development opportunities that build teachers' capacity to recognize and respond to cultural diversity in their classrooms. Educators must actively incorporate students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and experiences into their teaching practices and learning materials. Furthermore, schools should establish meaningful partnerships with local communities to create culturally relevant and supportive learning environments. However, significant challenges persist, particularly in resource-limited settings where inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and limited access to training opportunities hinder comprehensive implementation. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies examining the long-term impacts of culturally responsive pedagogy on student outcomes across academic, social, and emotional dimensions. Additionally, researchers should investigate cost-effective implementation models suitable for developing countries and explore the role of technology in facilitating culturally responsive practices in diverse educational settings. Comparative studies examining the transferability of specific practices across different cultural contexts would also provide valuable insights for global educational development.

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