The Role of Teachers' Cultural Competence in Enhancing Student Engagement in English Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English in a multicultural classroom requires teachers to have cultural competence in order to create an inclusive learning environment and encourage student engagement. This study aims to analyze the impact of teachers' cultural competence on student engagement in the English language learning process in culturally diverse EFL classrooms. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, examining not only the relationship between cultural competence and student participation but also the strategies implemented and challenges faced by teachers with cultural competence. Data collection was conducted through student questionnaires (pre-test and post-test) to measure engagement, semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers, and classroom observations. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The results of the study indicate that teachers' ability to incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process can significantly enhance students' motivation, activity, and learning outcomes. This study contributes to the development of inclusive teaching practices in language learning environments rich in cultural diversity.

Keywords: Cultural Competence; Student Engagement; Multicultural Classroom

INTRODUCTION

In today's era of globalization, classrooms are increasingly filled with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. In the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), this diversity presents both challenges and opportunities especially for educators to design inclusive and culturally responsive learning strategies. Cultural competence in education refers to the ability of teachers and educational institutions to understand, appreciate, and respond effectively to the diversity of students' cultural identities (Chima Abimbola Eden et al., 2024). This includes creating an inclusive learning environment where all students feel valued and have space to grow. The process of learning a second language or foreign language

requires not only the transmission of language forms but also an understanding of the target language's culture to interpret cross-cultural communication. Therefore, in English as a Second Language or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) instruction, it is important to provide cultural context and awareness to learners so they can develop proficiency in cross-cultural communication in the target language.

A teacher's ability to successfully engage students in the English language learning process is shaped by many factors, with cultural competence being one of the most important. In multicultural classrooms, students bring diverse cultural perspectives that influence their learning experiences. Appreciating and understanding these differences helps educators create an inclusive and supportive environment that encourages motivation and engagement. As noted by (Gay, 2018), culturally responsive teaching methods can foster an environment where students feel acknowledged, leading to increased enthusiasm and active participation in learning. Furthermore, (James A. Banks, 2020) emphasize that cultural competence fosters trust between students and teachers, which is essential for encouraging deeper engagement in the educational process. Students' cultural backgrounds are incorporated into the curriculum and teaching methods, thereby helping to increase their engagement and making English language learning more relevant and enjoyable.

Culturally responsive teachers know how to identify the multicultural strengths and weaknesses of curriculum design and teaching materials and make the necessary changes to improve their overall quality (Capper, 2022). In this case, teachers with cultural competence function not only as educators but also as facilitators who are able to bridge the various cultures that exist in the classroom. Cultural elements integrated into teaching enable teachers to understand not only language but also the social and cultural contexts involved. This enriches students' learning experiences and equips them with the tools needed to interact effectively in a global environment. However, in this context, many educators still lack understanding or training in culturally responsive teaching practices, especially in local contexts that, despite being ethnically homogeneous, still exhibit diverse values, expressions, and religions. For example, (Hidayati et al., 2024) revealed that some teachers in Kalimantan and Sumatra still view multicultural values as trivial, which indicates that there is a need for stronger policy enforcement.

Furthermore, previous research has tended to focus on primary education settings or regions rich in cultural diversity. Meanwhile, understanding of how English teachers' cultural competence impacts student engagement, particularly in rural areas such as in Indonesia, remains under-researched. This gap is reinforced by a study conducted (Hossain & Boonmoh, 2025), which shows that students from rural areas benefit greatly when knowledge about their local culture is incorporated into English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching materials. Therefore, additional research in the same context is urgently needed. Therefore, this study is important to address this gap by showing how teachers' cultural competence can help improve

student participation in the English learning process in culturally diverse EFL classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

(Chima Abimbola Eden et al., 2024) define cultural competence in education as the ability of teachers to recognize, understand, and accommodate cultural diversity in the school environment. Teachers with cultural competence play an important role in creating an inclusive learning environment, where every student feels accepted, valued, and motivated in the learning process. One effort that can be made is to apply teaching methods that are sensitive to cultural differences in the classroom. To achieve cultural competence, teachers need to develop cultural awareness, expand their knowledge of diversity, and build sensitivity to students' social norms and communication styles. With this understanding, teachers can create more meaningful and relevant learning experiences.

Fostering inclusivity and awareness of diversity in education is important for several reasons. First, it promotes equitable access to education that recognizes and meets the unique needs and experiences of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Second, an inclusive environment can improve students' academic achievement and social-emotional development by creating a supportive and culturally responsive learning atmosphere. Cultural competence in teaching encompasses several key dimensions that enable teachers to effectively meet the needs of diverse students. Teachers with high cultural competence not only recognize differences but also actively integrate students' cultural backgrounds into their pedagogy. This holistic understanding allows teachers to bridge the gap between home and school cultures and create a more equitable learning environment.

One approach that can be used to implement cultural competence in the classroom is a teaching strategy called culturally responsive teaching. According to (Gay, 2018), this approach integrates students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process, making learning more contextual, meaningful, and engaging. Through the selection of relevant materials and tailored strategies, teachers can build stronger relationships with students, motivate them, and positively impact learning outcomes. (Zaretta, 2015) also shows that culturally responsive pedagogical approaches support students' cognitive development by reducing affective barriers such as fear and anxiety, thereby enhancing their ability to absorb and retain information. As a result, students taught through this approach often demonstrate improved communication skills, stronger critical thinking, and greater confidence in expressing their ideas. Additionally, this teaching method fosters empathy and cultural awareness skills that are increasingly important in an interconnected global society. Therefore, integrating cultural elements into teaching not only enriches the

learning experience but also equips students with the competencies needed for academic and social success.

In English as a Second Language or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) learning, cultural competence is an important aspect of improving communication skills and language proficiency. Language and culture are inseparable. As explained by (Al-Obaydi, 2019), understanding the cultural context is essential to accurately grasping the meaning of language. Teachers who value cultural diversity are also more likely to encourage student engagement in learning. (Gay, 2018) also shows that culturally responsive teaching makes students feel valued and accepted, thereby increasing their motivation and participation in the learning process. Research shows that this approach not only increases student engagement but also has a positive impact on their academic achievement and personal development. Students who learn in a culturally responsive environment tend to achieve higher grades, demonstrate better communication skills, and have greater confidence in expressing their ideas (Zaretta, 2015). Additionally, this approach supports the development of critical thinking and empathy essential skills in a diverse and global society. For example, when faced with deadlines or light competition in the form of cultural debates, students become more active and enthusiastic. This strategy, when combined with a culturally sensitive teaching approach, can create a more engaging and meaningful learning experience.

Furthermore, in exploring the concept of culturally responsive teaching, it is also important to incorporate critical literacy as an integral part. Literacy is not merely the ability to read and write, but also a tool for social justice. Through the integration of cultural competence, responsive teaching strategies, student engagement, and critical literacy, this study aims to analyze the extent to which teachers' cultural competence influences overall student engagement and to identify concrete strategies that can be applied in multicultural EFL classrooms.

Teachers' Cultural Understanding and Student Engagement

This study focuses on two main aspects: teachers' ability to understand culture (as a determining factor) and students' engagement in learning (as a result). Both are closely connected in English language teaching, particularly in classrooms with diverse cultural backgrounds. Teachers' cultural understanding refers to their ability to recognize, interpret, and appreciate cultural differences among students. As explained by Chima Abimbola Eden et al. (2024), teachers with strong cultural awareness are essential in creating inclusive and open learning environments where students feel accepted, valued, and motivated. This competence includes understanding cultural diversity, social norms, and communication styles. Culturally competent teachers not only acknowledge cultural differences but also incorporate students' backgrounds into their teaching strategies, thereby reducing the gap between home and school cultures and promoting equity in the classroom.

One effective approach to developing this competence is through culturally responsive teaching (CRT). Gay (2018) emphasizes that CRT integrates students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process, making instruction more relevant, meaningful, and engaging. By selecting appropriate materials and strategies, teachers can strengthen their relationships with students, enhance enthusiasm, and improve learning outcomes. Zaretta (2015) adds that culturally responsive teaching can help reduce emotional barriers such as fear and anxiety, allowing students to absorb material more effectively. This approach has been shown to enhance students' communication skills, critical thinking, and confidence in expressing ideas, while also fostering empathy and cross-cultural awareness two essential skills in today's globalized society.

Cultural Context, Literacy, and Engagement in Language Learning

In English language learning, cultural understanding is fundamental because language and culture are inseparable. According to Al-Obaydi (2019), comprehension of cultural context is key to interpreting meaning accurately. Teachers who value cultural diversity tend to create more engaging lessons that reflect students' experiences and identities, leading to higher levels of participation and motivation. Student engagement involves behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement in learning activities. When students perceive that their culture is respected and represented in classroom content, their sense of belonging and willingness to participate increase significantly.

Critical literacy also plays an important role in deepening student engagement. Literacy, in this sense, goes beyond reading and writing—it involves developing awareness of social issues and justice. By combining teachers' cultural understanding, culturally responsive teaching, and critical literacy, students are encouraged to think reflectively, participate actively, and become more aware of their identities and social surroundings.

Integrating Culture, Pedagogy, and Technology

Teaching in culturally diverse English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms requires teachers to align instructional approaches with students' cultural backgrounds. Gay (2018) and Capper (2022) highlight that culturally responsive instruction not only creates a welcoming atmosphere but also improves student engagement and achievement. Vonti et al. (2025) further found that applying CRT in EFL classrooms strengthens the connection between lesson topics and students' cultural experiences, increasing participation and discussion quality.

In the digital era, technology has become a powerful means of supporting culturally responsive instruction. Wang (2022) found through TPACK analysis that integrating technology with cultural sensitivity can enhance both academic achievement and digital literacy. This is consistent with findings by Cahyono, Khotimah, and Batunan (2023), who observed that mobile technology offers

interactive and relevant learning experiences for students from diverse backgrounds. Likewise, Zhang and Liu (2022) found that educational videos, social media, and artificial intelligence can strengthen students' cognitive and emotional engagement when thoughtfully applied. Technology, therefore, is not merely a tool but a bridge connecting lesson content, students' cultural contexts, and their active participation.

Challenges and Theoretical Implications

Despite its proven benefits, many teachers still face challenges in implementing culturally responsive teaching. White et al. (2021) found that limited professional training and insufficient institutional support are major obstacles, while Wu et al. (2023) noted that many educators feel culturally unprepared due to the lack of CRT-based materials in teacher education programs. This gap between theory and practice highlights the need for stronger professional development and structural support. To address this issue, Nganga and Kambutu (2024) recommend community-based collaboration and continuous professional learning to enhance teachers' confidence in applying CRT. Policy-level support and administrative encouragement are also necessary to sustain these efforts. Overall, this study posits that teachers' cultural understanding—applied through culturally sensitive and reflective teaching—significantly influences student engagement in English language learning. Supported by recent research and theory, these findings contribute meaningfully to the advancement of inclusive and effective teaching practices in culturally diverse EFL classrooms.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study uses a mixed-method approach to explore the relationship between teachers' cultural competence and student engagement, as well as the strategies and challenges faced by culturally competent teachers in EFL classrooms. This study uses a mixed method that combines qualitative data (through interviews and observations) with quantitative data (questionnaires). This approach is used to determine whether there is a relationship between teachers' ability to understand and appreciate different cultures and how actively students engage in learning English. To explore the relationship between teachers' cultural competence and student engagement, as well as the strategies and challenges faced by culturally competent teachers in EFL classrooms.

This study will involve 60 students from two classes at SMA Negeri 1 Sebulu Ulu, Sebulu District, Kutai Kartanegara Regency. These students will be divided into two groups, namely the experimental group and the control group. To ensure an equal comparison between the control group and the experimental group, the students were selected from equivalent classes, namely grade XI. This selection

also considers their relatively similar English language proficiency, as evidenced by their previous English grades. Additionally, both groups are taught by the same teacher to ensure consistency in the teaching and learning process. A pre-test is administered to ensure both groups have balanced levels of participation and academic ability. SMA Negeri 1 Sebulu offers various interest-based programs designed to equip students with skills valued by the school.

Instrument and Procedure

The instruments used in this study consisted of questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations, all of which were designed to collect comprehensive information to answer the research questions raised. The first instrument was a questionnaire about student engagement created by the researcher and administered twice, namely before the implementation of the culturally responsive learning approach (pretest) and after the intervention took place (posttest). This questionnaire contains 10 multiple-choice questions aimed at assessing student engagement in English language learning in terms of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects, which are culturally inclusive.

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview conducted with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. This interview was conducted after the intervention session to gain deeper insights into the teachers' experiences during the implementation of culturally responsive learning. The interview guidelines were developed based on previous research conducted by (Niza, 2024) and (Muluk et al., 2021), which explored teacher interactions and teaching methods in multicultural EFL classroom environments. Topics discussed included teachers' understanding of cultural competence, teaching methods applied, and challenges faced in addressing diversity among students.

The third instrument is a classroom observation sheet, used to directly observe the learning process during the intervention. The focus of this observation is on the implementation of inclusive strategies by teachers and student participation in learning activities that have cultural elements. This observation guide was developed based on research conducted by (Astutik, I., & Indriani, 2021) which specifically examined interaction patterns and questioning techniques in English language teaching. Observations were conducted in a structured manner over several learning sessions to ensure that the data obtained was consistent and reliable regarding the dynamics within the classroom.

Data Analysis

This study uses a combination of quantitative analysis with SPSS and qualitative thematic analysis to provide an in-depth description of the data. The student engagement survey, which consists of Likert scale and multiple-choice items, will be assessed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics and inferential analysis to analyze objective patterns and correlations in student engagement levels. The

statistical analysis to be conducted includes descriptive statistics to show the level of student engagement before and after the assignment, and inferential analysis through a paired t-test to verify whether there is a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. A two-tailed distribution will be used because the averages of the same group at two different times will be compared.

During interviews and classroom observations, qualitative data will be examined through thematic analysis, which will reveal recurring themes, patterns, and narratives about teachers' cultural competence and how it affects student engagement. This involves data collection, qualitative response collection, and thematic analysis, particularly to explore qualitative findings further than quantitative findings. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach to finding, organizing, and providing insights into patterns (themes) in quantitative data. This process includes several stages: (1) Data transcription, (2) extensive reading and familiarization, (3) open coding, (4) grouping codes into themes, and (5) data interpretation are important procedures in this process that align with the skills of teachers and students. This is possible because the framework is adaptive, allowing researchers to find meaning in participants' experiences. The integration of these two methods provides triangulation that enhances the validity and credibility of the findings.

RESULT AND DISUSSION

Based on the interview results, it can be concluded that teachers have a good understanding of culture. As stated in the interview, "T1: The first thing to do is to understand the students' background and use intellectual material that is related to everyday life." From this statement, it is clear that teachers understand the aspects of cultural awareness and adaptation in teaching, which is one of the elements of a teacher's cultural competence. In this interview, the teacher also mentioned that they create an inclusive classroom environment, as stated in the interview: "T2: What I do is use active learning methods, where I connect my lesson materials to everyday life and conduct small group discussions, role-playing, and language games." The use of these methods encourages students to engage in learning.

This interview is also supported by the results of observations that have been conducted. Based on the teacher's observation sheet, which shows the use of understanding and cultural competence methods during classroom learning. This is evident from the observations conducted, such as the use of various types of questions to encourage student participation in learning, all students are given equal opportunities to speak and express their opinions in class discussions, the teacher demonstrates good cultural competence through actions in the classroom, and the teacher also discusses culture within the material being taught. Additionally, the teacher uses technology media appropriate to students' needs, creates a disciplined and supportive classroom environment for focused learning, and implements classroom management strategies that foster an inclusive atmosphere.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Posttest Control and Experimental Groups

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest Control	30	50	80	59.00	7.589
Posttest Control	30	60	90	70.67	6.915
Pretest Experimental	30	40	70	59.67	8.087
Posttest Experimental	30	70	90	76.33	7.649
Valid N (listwise)	30				

Based on the data presented, a comparison of learning outcomes between the control group and the experimental group (each consisting of 30 students) can be observed. In the control group, the average pretest score was recorded at 59.00 with a standard deviation of 7,589. After the learning process, the posttest score of this group increased to 70.67 with a standard deviation of 6,915. This increase indicates progress in student scores, although the increase is not too significant. Meanwhile, the experimental group showed more promising results. Their average pretest was 59.67 with a standard deviation of 8,087. The significant increase in posttest scores reached 76.33 with a standard deviation of 7,649. The greater difference in score increase in the experimental group shows that the use of learning methods applied to this group really has a significant positive impact on student learning outcomes. Thus, the learning method implemented in the experimental group is proven to be more effective in improving students' post-test results compared to the control group. This shows the great potential of the method applied in the experimental group for further learning development.

Table 2. Independent Sample T-Test

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
						Significance				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Oucomes Student	Equal variances assumed	4.259	.044	-3.010	58	.002	.004	-5.667	1.883	-9.435	-1.898
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.010	57.420	.002	.004	-5.667	1.883	-9.436	-1.897

Based on the table showing the results of the Independent Samples T-Test, it can be seen that there is a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group. The significance value obtained is 0.004 (p < 0.05), clearly indicating that this difference did not occur by chance. More specifically, the average posttest score in the experimental group was significantly higher at 76.33, compared to the control group, which only reached 70.67. This average difference of -5.667 indicates that the teaching method applied to the experimental group had a positive impact. This shows that the implementation of teacher cultural competency-based teaching is very important and can directly have a positive impact on increasing student engagement in English language learning in the classroom. This approach successfully created a more effective learning environment and encouraged active student participation. This shows that teaching that applies teacher cultural competence is very important and can directly have a

positive impact on increasing student engagement in English language learning in the classroom. This teaching method successfully created a better learning environment and encouraged students to participate more actively.

Practically speaking, the results of the interviews also show that there are several strategies used by English teachers to increase student engagement in a culturally responsive approach. One strategy used is to link students' cultural backgrounds to the learning material. According to English teachers, linking learning material to students' daily lives and local cultural values can help them relate directly to the learning and make the material more relevant. For example, when teachers explain concepts in English by giving examples from local traditions or the behavior of the surrounding community. This strategy will help to directly connect students' experiences with the learning material so that learning becomes more meaningful and relevant. When linked to data from interviews, these results are consistent with the approach described by teachers particularly how cultural content helps students feel more connected. For example, T1 stated: "When I explain vocabulary related to food, I can ask them to describe traditional foods from their region in English this makes them feel proud and curious."

Teachers also explained how they adapted their teaching techniques to suit students' English abilities. T2 said: "For students who lack confidence, I simplify the questions and group them with more proficient classmates during tasks." Observations supported this differentiation strategy when a student who was usually passive began to take an active part in group tasks. In addition, the use of technology such as videos, online quizzes, and AI is considered an important tool. Teachers utilize YouTube videos about traditional ceremonies or social norms, followed by brief group discussions in English. Observation notes also indicate that "students appear more engaged and focused when viewing culturally familiar visuals."

However, implementation still faces some challenges. Teachers expressed concerns about infrastructure: "In this building, we only have one projector, so I have to compete with other teachers," explained T2. Internet instability is an additional issue. Furthermore, "Some students still view English as irrelevant to their daily lives, so we must continue to find ways to make it relevant," added T1. Student confidence is also a barrier. As one teacher noted: "They hesitate to speak in English, but when we connect it to their daily activities or cultural traditions, they try harder," said T3. An observer noted that during the "Describe Your Home" activity, participation increased when students were allowed to explain traditional architecture in their regions.

In addition, teachers also emphasize the use of active learning methods, such as group discussions, educational games, and project-based learning. As mentioned in the interviews, teachers note that we will know our teaching methods are effective when we hold group discussions. This method is very effective in encouraging student participation, especially when the material being taught is related to the

students' culture. In this context, teachers also adapt the delivery of lesson material to accommodate students' varying levels of English proficiency, for example by asking simple questions and providing support to students who are less confident in speaking English. In a multicultural classroom, it is important for teachers to be sensitive to differences in learning styles, backgrounds, and religious values among students. In interviews, teachers also emphasized the importance of applying interactive teaching methods and exploring students' cultures to achieve curriculum goals. However, teachers also noted that students have similar backgrounds, so there are no significant cultural perspectives. Despite this, teachers strive to create an inclusive classroom atmosphere and establish classroom rules that respect and value differences. Therefore, this combination of qualitative and quantitative findings suggests that teachers' cultural competence, when applied intentionally, can enhance engagement and learning outcomes. The most effective strategies identified include: integrating cultural content, differentiating teaching methods, using relevant technology, building emotional connections, and creating inclusive classroom norms.

This study reveals how the implementation of culturally sensitive teaching practices can have a positive impact on student engagement in English as a foreign language classes. These findings not only acknowledge the importance of cultural competence, but also explain how it works in teaching practice. For example, teachers in the experimental group used strategies that linked the material to students' personal experiences and created a friendly classroom atmosphere. These strategies not only enhance harmony in the classroom but also actively encourage student participation, particularly in group discussions, roles, and tasks tailored to the cultural context. This approach aligns with the ideas of (Chima Abimbola Eden et al., 2024), who suggest that culturally sensitive teachers create a supportive learning environment where students feel valued and motivated to contribute.

Interviews with teachers revealed the strategic use of active learning methods such as group discussions and language games tailored to students' backgrounds. Such an approach makes the subject matter more relevant and engaging, reinforcing (Gay, 2018) argument that culturally responsive pedagogy can enhance sustained enthusiasm and participation. Not only does this method increase motivation, but it also strengthens the social-emotional connection between students and the subject matter, which is crucial for long-term memory and deeper learning (Howard, T. C., & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017) However, although group-based activities can be beneficial for many students, they also present challenges for those who are shy or have limited abilities, who often need classmates who demonstrate greater verbal engagement. This emphasizes the importance of additional support or approaches to boost confidence alongside active learning methods.

Another dimension that emerged in this study is the careful use of digital technology. Teachers reported using artificial intelligence tools and multimedia resources as supplements to learning, particularly in explaining subject matter and introducing culture. However, they also emphasized the importance of oversight to

ensure the ethical and effective use of these tools. This is supported by (Wang, 2022), who indicates that technology used in a culturally responsive context can strengthen students' digital literacy and increase engagement in diverse classrooms. Similar findings were reported by (Zhang, X., & Liu, 2022), who showed that the use of culturally relevant multimedia can enhance the emotional and cognitive engagement of students learning English as a foreign language.

However, teachers still face many challenges. Research conducted by (Zulaeha & Riyanti, 2024) shows that EFL teachers in remote areas experience infrastructure limitations (such as long distances from schools and a lack of IT facilities) and low student self-confidence for example, "lack of confidence" makes students reluctant to speak English. Previously, (Order & Skills, 2022) also noted that, in addition to insufficient facilities, the low HOTS skills of teachers and the passive nature of students are major obstacles in the teaching and learning process in the classroom. The results of this study indicate that without strong institutional support and teacher capacity building programs, even the most promising approaches may face challenges in terms of sustainability or further development.

More importantly, this research outlines why cultural competence is so important: it enables teachers to reduce the mismatch between students' identities and the classroom environment. Cultural integration in pedagogy directly supports the three dimensions of engagement identified by (Fredricks et al., 2004) behavioral (e.g., participation), emotional (e.g., sense of belonging), and cognitive (e.g., focus and investment in learning). Teachers not only understand culture; they also apply it in tasks, language support, and classroom interactions that respect students' backgrounds. Therefore, this research not only shows that good cultural competence is important, but also explains specific teaching methods that enhance student participation. These include: connecting material to context, using technology appropriately, encouraging reflective learning, and reducing emotional barriers such as anxiety and feelings of alienation. These findings are supported by recent studies highlighting the role of CRT in making learning more personally relevant and socially empowering.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to understand how teachers' cultural competence contributes to increasing student engagement in English language learning, particularly in multicultural classrooms. In this context, teachers are not only responsible for delivering content but also act as facilitators who can create an inclusive learning environment, value diversity, and build positive relationships with students from various cultural backgrounds. Through a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods, this study examines how teachers' cultural competence plays a role in enhancing student engagement in English language learning in multicultural classrooms. The results of the quantitative analysis from the pretest and posttest questionnaires show that after teachers used a culturally responsive learning approach, student engagement increased. This is also evidenced

by the results of interviews and observations, which show that students feel valued, comfortable, and more actively involved in the learning process.

This study shows that teachers' cultural competence significantly contributes to increasing students' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement. Culturally aware teachers can adapt classroom materials, methods, and interactions to suit the diverse backgrounds and needs of students. This creates a more inclusive, supportive, and meaningful learning environment for all students. Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers' cultural competence is very important for increasing student engagement in English language learning in multicultural classrooms. To make learning more inclusive and relevant to the diverse needs of students, a learning environment built with cultural awareness has been proven to encourage students to be more active, comfortable, and successful. Therefore, it is highly recommended that education authorities create policies to support teacher training in cultural competence.

Therefore, it is highly recommended that education authorities and teacher training institutions incorporate cultural competence into professional development programs and teacher education curricula. This includes organizing ongoing workshops, simulations of real-life learning environments, and mentoring programs that provide teachers with practical tactics for building an inclusive learning environment. In this way, policymakers and institutions can ensure that teachers are better prepared to address the increasingly diverse needs of their classrooms.

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