



Teacher education is a deeply pedagogical process rooted in values, ethics, and the social purpose of schooling. Globally, it sits at the core of educational quality and fairness, as research in comparative and international education demonstrates: the training of teachers directly influences students' learning chances, social inclusion, and the democratic aims of schools. Teachers are not simply transmitters of curricula, but active professionals whose convictions, reflective skills, and ability to manage the complexities of classroom life give shape and substance to the educational experience itself.

The pedagogical dimension of teacher education frames teaching as a relational, context-aware, and ethically grounded profession rather than just a set of procedural skills. From a research perspective, this demands robust research methodologies that can critically examine the complex realities of schools and inform evidence-based policies. Equally important is the connection between theory and practice, which helps to bridge the persistent gap between universities and schools.

The contributions gathered in this volume reflect the richness and diversity of experiences showcased during the ATEE Spring Conference 2024, held at the University of Bergamo from May 29 to June 1, 2024. The volume presents 70 selected papers out of more than 300 presented by researchers representing over 40 countries.

This broad spectrum of studies highlights promising directions that can inspire renewed inquiry and concrete proposals aimed at improving contemporary educational systems.

FRANCESCO MAGNI is an Associate Professor of General and Social Pedagogy (PAED-01/A) at the Department of Human and Social Sciences, University of Bergamo, Italy. He is a member of the board and Deputy Director of CQIIA (Center for the Quality of Teaching, Didactic Innovation, and Learning). He is also a member of the ATEE - Association for Teacher Education in Europe.

NICOLE BIANQUIN is an Associate Professor of Didactics and Special Education (PAED-02/A) at the Department of Human and Social Sciences, University of the Aosta Valley, Aosta, Italy. She is a member of the ATEE - Association for Teacher Education in Europe.

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Teacher education research in Europe: trends, challenges, practices and perspectives

May 29th – June 1st, 2024
S. Agostino, Bergamo



Edited by Nicole Bianquin and Francesco Magni





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BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

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Challenges Ahead to Train Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teachers

Semih Kaygisiz, *National Defence University*, ssemihkaygisiz@gmail.com
Hanife Akar, *Middle East Technical University*, hanif@metu.edu.tr

Abstract

Training culturally and linguistically responsive teachers (CLRT) is a growing need in a time marked by rising populations of culturally diverse students. The training process is surrounded by many challenges and identifying those challenges as a starting point is pivotal. Drawing on the findings of a needs analysis of EFL teachers, this study is based on participatory research to explore the challenges in the Turkish teacher education context by organizing a panel discussion with six experts and practitioners. To collect data, a roundtable discussion is adopted that resembled a focus-group interview. Findings indicate training CLRT is a multi-layered issue surrounded by many factors, demanding layer-by-layer solutions at individual, institutional, and systemic levels, for which comprehensive reforms are needed.

Keywords: teacher education; culturally responsive teaching; participatory research; focus group; teaching habitus.

1. Introduction

Educators face significant challenges in addressing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (CLDS) (Migration Policy Institute, 2016), largely due to limitations in teacher education programs and broader educational frameworks (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Reports by international organizations like UNESCO (2019, 2020) consistently highlight the difficulties in implementing culturally responsive teaching (CRT) effectively across different contexts. Although multicultural education (Banks, 2015) and CRT (Gay, 2018) have gained importance in teacher education, their integration into educational practices often remains superficial (King & Butler, 2015, Morrison et al., 2022). It is often the result of introducing add-on courses or updating mission statements without making meaningful changes to the core curriculum (Martin & Dagostino-Kalniz, 2015). Furthermore, educational systems have responded to increasing classroom diversity by introducing supplementary courses or revising mission statements to include cultural responsiveness. However, these measures typically leave the core curriculum unchanged (Goodwin, 1997), which leads to a fragmented approach to CRT that fails to achieve desired outcomes.

Türkiye, known for its rich cultural diversity, faces similar challenges (Karsli-Calamak & Kilinc, 2021). The Turkish education system has taken steps to adopt strategies that emphasize cultural diversity in teaching in alignment with international standards set by the Council of Europe and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (MoNE, 2017b). The General Competencies of the Teaching Profession and the Türkiye Qualifications Framework mandate that teachers be sensitive to cultural and linguistic diversity and adapt their teaching methods accordingly (MoNE, 2017a). Despite these formal requirements, the implementation of CRT in Türkiye remains insufficient (Paksoy, 2017).

Research in Türkiye reveals that educators generally acknowledge the importance of cultural values and display positive attitudes towards CRT. However, they frequently lack the practical skills and knowledge needed to implement these concepts effectively in the classroom (Kotluk & Kocakaya, 2019). This gap between awareness and practical application is largely attributed to deficiencies in teacher training programs (Zorba, 2020). Studies show that Turkish teachers often struggle with the realities of multicultural classrooms, which are exacerbated by inadequate preparation (Çalışkan, 2019). These challenges are further intensified by a lack of in-service training opportunities, leaving many teachers unprepared to meet the needs of CLDS (TEDMEM, 2019). This gap between policy and practice is further complicated by the systemic challenges within the educational framework, such as overcrowded classrooms, overloaded curricula, and a general emphasis on rote learning over critical and reflective teaching practices (Nayir & Saridas, 2020).

The need for CRT is particularly important in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Türkiye. The intricate relationship between language and culture, coupled with the role of English as a global lingua franca, makes it particularly important for EFL teachers to be culturally responsive (Kramsch, 2018). In multilingual contexts, the need for CRT is even greater, as teachers must navigate the intersections of language, culture, and education (Phan, 2008). However, research suggests that EFL teacher education programs in Türkiye have not fully embraced CRT (Çalışkan, 2019), which indicates a gap in the preparation of EFL teachers who can effectively manage these cultural complexities.

Several scholars have proposed models to address the deficiencies in current teacher education practices by advocating for a more systematic integration of CRT principles (Hernandez et al., 2013; Parkhouse et al., 2023; Skepple, 2011). While these models offer valuable insights into how CRT can be integrated into teacher education, there still remains significant gaps in the current research. Notably, they have been conducted in Western contexts, particularly in the United States, where the socio-political and cultural dynamics differ significantly from those in non-Western settings. This raises important questions about the applicability of these models in other educational contexts, such as in Türkiye, where the historical, cultural, and political factors shaping education are distinct. Additionally, there is a lack of research that thoroughly examines the specific challenges and barriers that teacher educators face when preparing teacher candidates for teaching in culturally diverse settings and teachers face when attempting to implement CRT in diverse educational systems. While some studies have touched on these barriers (Brown et al., 2022; Gay, 2015), they tend to approach

in a generalized manner, without delving into the unique systemic, institutional, and cultural factors that may hinder the preparation of culturally and linguistically responsive teachers (CLRT).

1.1 Aim statement

Despite the policy-level acknowledgement of CRT in Türkiye, translating these principles into practice remains limited. This study aims to explore and identify the key factors that hinder the effective training of CLRT in Türkiye, particularly within EFL teacher education programs. By delving into the challenges specific to the Turkish educational context, this research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on CRT by filling a critical gap in the existing literature, especially regarding the factors that inhibit the training of CLRT. This study is significant as it addresses this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the obstacles to implementing CRT in Türkiye's EFL teacher education programs. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform the development of more effective teacher education models that better meet the diverse needs of Turkish students. To this end, this study drew on CRT as its theoretical framework, which guided the study through the critical examination of its current status in Türkiye and worldwide, the development and finalization of the panel discussion questions, and the analysis and interpretation of the results. The primary research question guiding this study is:

1. What are the key factors that inhibit the training of culturally and linguistically responsive teachers in Türkiye, particularly within the context of English as a Foreign Language teacher education programs?

2. Method

To explore the challenges of training CLRT in Türkiye, the study employed a participatory research design within an EFL teacher education program at a state university located in mid-Anatolia, Türkiye. This research builds on the findings of the analysis of the CRT needs of EFL teachers. Drawing on the identified CRT needs of EFL teachers, this study involved a panel discussion in September 2023, which was structured as a focus-group interview, to delve deeper into the factors that account for these needs and the challenges of training CLRT in Türkiye. Purposive sampling was used to select ten information-rich experts with significant experience and expertise in multicultural education, teacher education, and active teaching experience in culturally diverse classrooms. Six experts participated, including specialists in Curriculum and Instruction, English Language Teaching, and an experienced EFL teacher who also served as an administrator.

After obtaining permission from the Human Subjects Ethics Committee and the participants' consent, the panellists were informed about the aim of the panel and provided with the state-of-the-art CRT and training CLRT in Türkiye and across the world. The panel discussion lasted four hours with one break time for refreshments and adopted a roundtable format to encourage dynamic interaction among participants. Structured around four key questions, the discussion aimed to keep the conversation focused on the research objectives. Each panellist was allocated five minutes to present their views, followed by open discussion. The session concluded with a summary by the first author, who also moderated the panel, highlighting the main ideas, common themes, and conclusions.

To ensure credibility and researcher agreement, two independent rapporteurs documented the discussion, and the transcripts were later cross-checked. An inductive content analysis was conducted under the supervision of two experts by following the recommendations of Guest et al. (2013). MAXQDA, an analytical tool for systematic qualitative data analysis, was utilized. The analysis was iterative, involving repeated readings of the transcripts, generation of codes, and identification of themes. The themes were refined after a second cycle of coding (Saldaña, 2013). The intercoder agreement was calculated at .81, which exceeds the threshold for high agreement (Krippendorff, 2004). Trustworthiness was ensured through prolonged engagement with data, triangulation of investigators and data sources, and an audit trail reviewed by external experts (Harding, 2019).

3. Findings

The analysis has identified three major factors inhibiting the training of CLRT in Türkiye: external factors, systemic factors, and personal factors. These factors are interrelated, creating an intricate relationship whereby external factors shape systemic and personal dimensions, resulting in a multifaceted set of challenges that complicate the preparation of CLRT. Table 1 illustrates these factors and the corresponding sub-factors derived through the content analysis of the data from the panel discussion.

Factors	Sub-factors
External	Political, Economic, and Humanitarian Crises Diminishing Reputation of Teaching Profession Feeling of Hopelessness Problems about the Wellbeing of Teachers
Systemic	Contextual Constraints Educational Frameworks Favoring Passiveness Narrow Definition of the Role of EFL Teachers Restrictive National Components Insufficient Training in CRT Practices
Personal	Deficit View of Diversity Reluctance towards Professional Development One Size Fits All Approaches Lack of Knowledge and Awareness

Table 1: Factors and sub-factors from the content analysis

External factors emerge from broader societal issues that extend beyond the educational context. These include political instability, economic pressures, and humanitarian crises, all intensified by the Covid-19 pandemic. Panellists strongly emphasized that these crises generate considerable stress and burnout among educators. For instance, panellists indicated that preservice teachers often feel overwhelmed due to the declining societal perception of teaching as a profession, resulting in a diminished sense of professional self-worth and motivation. As one expert highlighted "Teachers are continuously operating in survival mode, which severely limits their capacity to develop culturally responsive skills." These external issues require radical policy-level solutions, as institutional changes alone cannot sufficiently address such broad societal challenges.

Systemic factors include issues embedded within the educational structures and policies that directly constrain teachers' capacity to implement CRT. The panellists identified several constraints, such as overcrowding of classrooms, overloaded curricula, and inadequate teaching hours, all of which limit teachers' ability to apply culturally responsive pedagogical strategies effectively. The panellists also stressed the dominance of essentialist perspectives within the Turkish education system, favoring passive knowledge reproduction rather than active learning and reflective practice. For instance, teachers frequently face pressure to deliver prescribed curricula rigidly, which leaves little space for tailoring content to culturally diverse student needs. Another critical point raised was that inclusive education policies in Türkiye were narrowly defined, primarily focusing on students with special educational needs and thus excluding broader cultural responsiveness. Additionally, panellists noted that the training opportunities for both preservice and in-service teachers were limited. The lack of comprehensive and obligatory CRT-focused coursework, coupled with insufficient faculty diversity, exacerbates the gap between theoretical knowledge presented at universities and the realities teachers face in the classroom. As one panellist explained, "The multicultural education courses provided are often elective and superficial, rarely engaging preservice teachers deeply enough to significantly impact their teaching practices."

Personal factors involve individual teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and capacities, significantly shaping their responsiveness to cultural and linguistic diversity. A particularly problematic issue highlighted by panellists is the prevalent deficit perspective on diversity among educators. Instead of viewing CLDS as assets, some teachers perceive diversity as burdensome. Such attitudes undermine culturally responsive practice from the outset. The panel discussion also revealed misconceptions about student homogeneity among teachers, who often fail to recognize or accommodate the unique challenges faced by CLDS, such as living with extended families, exposure to drug abuse, forced labor, or domestic violence. Additionally, ineffective parent-school relationships were cited as significant personal barriers, with interactions typically reactive rather than proactive. Such ignorance creates a significant disconnect between teachers and students, diminishing trust and student engagement. Furthermore, misconceptions about teacher agency compound these issues. Many teachers perceive themselves as passive technicians strictly adhering to prescribed curricula rather than active and reflective practitioners capable of adapting their instruction. Consequently, they exhibit reluctance or dependence on explicit, step-by-step instructions, thus limiting their autonomy and adaptability. Lastly, panellists identified reluctance among teacher educators themselves to move beyond traditional comfort zones, which negatively impacts preservice teachers' preparedness.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings reveal a complex and interwoven set of challenges that hinder the effective training of CLRT in a mid-Anatolian EFL teacher education program in Türkiye. These obstacles, spanning external, systemic, and personal factors, do not exist in isolation but interact in a way that creates a nested structure of barriers. This intricate web of challenges suggests that the practices, beliefs, and attitudes of teachers are not solely the result of individual choices or isolated professional development efforts. Instead, they are deeply influenced by the broader educational environment and societal context in which they are situated. This interconnected and nested nature of the obstacles aligns with Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which refers to the deeply ingrained dispositions shaped by an individual's social and cultural context (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Given the evidence that teacher practices are shaped by this complex network of influences, the study proposes that CRT should be understood as a teaching habitus. This perspective emphasises that CRT is not just a set of skills or knowledge to be acquired but a way of being that is deeply embedded in the social and institutional contexts in which teachers operate. By viewing CRT through this framework, it becomes clear that reforms must extend beyond individual teacher training to encompass the broader societal and institutional contexts in which teaching occurs (Stunell, 2021). Therefore, the study argues that focusing solely on the development of individual teachers without addressing the broader systemic and institutional contexts can be ineffective. While individual development is crucial, it must be supported by a larger strategy that includes policy changes, institutional support, and ongoing professional development opportunities (Borko, 2004; Irvine, 2003) because an overreliance on individual efforts can lead to burnout and diminish the effectiveness of CRT implementation, particularly when teachers lack the necessary support structures (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Hence, a comprehensive approach is required that combines individual teacher development with systemic reforms.

The study also advocates for the systematic integration of CRT that is tailored to the country's unique cultural diversity throughout the teacher education curriculum in Türkiye (Polat & Kılıç, 2013). This approach requires a curriculum that not only provides teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge but also fosters a reflective practice that allows them to critically examine their own cultural assumptions and the broader societal influences on their teaching (Acquah & Szelei, 2020). Teacher education programs must also move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and instead cultivate teacher agency by empowering educators to become reflective practitioners (Acquah & Commins, 2017). This requires a shift from passive knowledge reproduction to active and experiential learning that provides teachers with the skills and confidence to adapt their teaching methods to

meet diverse student needs. Empowering teachers as reflective practitioners is essential for fostering a CRT habitus as it helps them navigate the complexities of multicultural classrooms effectively (Civitillo et al., 2019).

Another key implication is the necessity for comprehensive professional development opportunities for in-service teachers. These opportunities should address the specific challenges faced in multicultural classrooms and provide ongoing support to help educators implement CRT effectively (Gay, 2018). Additionally, promoting stronger school-parent relationships is crucial, with an emphasis on consistent, proactive engagement with culturally diverse families. This holistic approach ensures that teachers are supported not only in their professional development but also in their efforts to create inclusive and responsive learning environments.

Finally, this comprehensive, evidence-based approach to CRT has broader implications beyond Türkiye. By focusing on the development of a CRT habitus, it offers a blueprint for other nations struggling with similar challenges in their education systems. Integrating CRT principles in this way can lead to improved educational outcomes for CLDS, which contributes to global efforts to promote more equitable and inclusive educational environments. In essence, this study not only addresses the specific needs of the Turkish context but also provides insights that can inform teacher education practices worldwide and demonstrates the importance of both individual and systemic efforts in achieving meaningful educational reform.

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