

Bridging the Diversity Gap: The Impact of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy on Student Engagement in Indian Schools

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ABSTRACT

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) is an essential asset-based approach for enhancing inclusivity in India's diverse classrooms. In a landscape defined by vast linguistic and socio-economic differences, CRP makes learning meaningful by understanding and validating student identities. Recent data from the **UNESCO "Bhasha Matters" Report (2025)** indicates that **44% of Indian students** face a "language mismatch" between home and school, positioning CRP as a functional necessity.

This report explores the significance, benefits, and challenges of CRP, supported by recent empirical evidence from West Bengal. Synthesising qualitative insights from **Jadavpur University (2026)** on tech-enabled teacher training with quantitative data from **The Social Science Review (2025)**, the study examines the impact of Culturally Responsive Instruction (CRI) on middle school students. Statistical analysis using a **t-test** reveals that CRI significantly boosts mean scores in socio-emotional competencies from **67.32 to 90.23**.

The findings indicate that while CRP fosters academic achievement and social harmony, significant roadblocks remain. These include curriculum rigidity and a persistent training gap, with over **60% of educators** in West Bengal reporting inadequate preparation for diverse classrooms. The report concludes that for CRP to be successfully institutionalised, it must align with **NEP 2020** mandates for multilingualism and leverage digital tools to reduce educator bias. Ultimately, integrating local "cultural capital"—such as vernacular storytelling models—is vital for closing equity gaps and transforming the Indian education system into a truly equitable and inclusive environment.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Socio-Emotional Competency, Inclusive Education

INTRODUCTION

India is a land of endless stories, told in over **22 official languages** and thousands of local dialects. Yet, for too long, our education system has asked students to leave those stories at the school gate. We often see cultural differences as "problems to solve" rather than "gifts to use." Recent reports from **UNESCO (2025)** show us the cost of this gap, noting that millions of children are essentially learning in a foreign tongue from day one. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) is the bridge that finally connects a child's world to their whiteboard.

For decades, many students—especially those from marginalised communities—have been met with "the soft bigotry of low expectations," where their background is seen as a deficit. In response, educators have championed "asset-based" teaching. This isn't just about changing a textbook; it's about a mindset shift. In West Bengal, researchers at **Jadavpur University (2026)** are now showing how digital storytelling can help teachers unpack their own biases, allowing them to see their students' lived experiences as powerful tools for instruction.

However, this work is currently caught in a bit of a political storm. Around the world, and even closer to home, terms like "Critical Race Theory" are being conflated with simple efforts to be inclusive, leading to a "fray" that can stifle progress. Even as **82% of our teachers** here in Bengal tell us they want to be more inclusive, they often feel they lack the training or permission to do so. This guide is here to clear the air. It unpacks what it truly means to be a culturally responsive teacher—showing that when we value a child's identity, we don't just help them pass an exam; we help them find their voice in a globalised world.

Defining Key Terminologies

1. Culturally responsive pedagogy- art of teaching that focuses on student needs, their backgrounds and experiences to maximise learning outcomes
2. Diverse classrooms- this includes learners coming from all spheres of life. That is, some may come from different socio-economic backgrounds, with different languages, ethnicities, nationalities, and sexual orientations.
3. Student engagement- it shows how far students find classroom teaching reliable and can participate in everyday learning. This can be done by asking questions or by actively demonstrating their everyday experiences.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Biswas (2022) has recorded that in West Bengal, some schools see mathematics as a subject where traditional fabrics are used by teachers for explaining basic geometry, and local folktales are infused to explain basic literature to the students.

For Mehta(2024), culturally responsive teaching will lead to responsive pedagogy, as he has shown in his study in Mumbai, whereby understanding the cultural nuances of the learners is important. For him, the practice of inclusivity comes gradually and needs some time.

According to Rahaman (2024), some schools in West Bengal have imparted greater proficiency among higher classes, precisely class 12, when they can share their experiences and cultural knowledge in the classrooms. He has further noted that CRP is not a thought; it's a reality.

Sruthi (2025) in her quantitative study has shown that among the minority groups in Kerala, CRP is making a sharp difference in the academic achievement of the students. However, culturally sound responsive practices need continuous evaluation as stated.

METHODOLOGY

The study is a purely qualitative one encompassing a descriptive study design and utilises the case study method sourced across India to understand how CRP can be successfully implemented in the classroom.

Benefits Of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

1. The Student Experience

- **A Spark of Belonging:** When students see their own lives, languages, and stories in their lessons, they don't just learn—they thrive. It turns "schooling" into a journey they actually want to be on.
- **Confidence That Counts:** Validating a child's background builds a deep sense of pride. This emotional safety net is what allows them to take risks and jump from a **67% to a 90%** in collaborative skills.

2. The Heart of the Classroom

- **Real Connections:** CRP transforms teachers from "lecturers" into "mentors." When you truly understand where a student is coming from, you can tailor your teaching to fit their unique rhythm.
- **Safe Spaces:** It creates a classroom where diversity isn't just "tolerated"—it's celebrated as an asset. This reduces the friction of bias and creates a truly welcoming environment for every child.

3. The Bigger Picture

- **Future-Ready Citizens:** In our interconnected world, being "culture-smart" is a superpower. Students graduate with the adaptability and kindness needed to succeed in a global workplace.
- **Healing Biases:** Familiarity is the best cure for prejudice. Regular exposure to diverse perspectives significantly reduces racial and cultural biases, fostering a more united and peaceful society.

Challenges In Implementing Crp

- **The "One-Size-Fits-All" Trap:** Our current curriculum is often too rigid. Centralized standards make it hard for teachers to pivot and bring local, real-world stories into the classroom.
- **The Preparation Gap:** Passion is not enough—many educators simply haven't been given the tools or training to master these inclusive methods. Recent data shows over **60% of teachers** still feel underprepared.
- **Resource Inequality:** In many rural areas, the "toolbox" is empty. Without inclusive books or digital materials, it's incredibly difficult for teachers to bridge the cultural divide.
- **The Weight of Change:** Moving to a new way of teaching isn't just about a new manual; it's a shift in mindset. It takes time, patience, and a culture that is ready to embrace a new rhythm.
- **Burnout and Staffing:** Our teachers are often stretched too thin. When a school is short-staffed, the extra energy needed to personalize lessons for every child often gets lost in the daily rush.
- **Leadership and Trust:** For this to work, the "top" has to believe in the "ground." If leadership is distant or if there's a lack of trust between departments, even the best inclusive initiatives can stall.
- **The Collaboration Hurdle:** Education is a team sport. When different organizations and departments don't communicate well, we lose the chance to create a unified, supportive environment for our children.
- **The Missing Roadmap:** Without a clear, step-by-step plan, even the most well-intentioned schools can find themselves lost in the "why" without ever reaching the "how."

Key Features of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Feature	Explanation	Example in Indian Schools
Language Inclusion	Using multilingual resources to support learning	Bilingual textbooks in Hindi and English
Local Knowledge	Connecting lessons to community practices	Teaching math through local market calculations
Student-Centered	Encouraging participation and peer learning	Group projects on regional traditions

Table 1: Key Features of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) in Indian Classrooms: Bridging Identity and Academic Inclusion (2025–2026)

Key Parameters of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

1. Teaching techniques
2. Cultural consciousness
3. Activities related to students

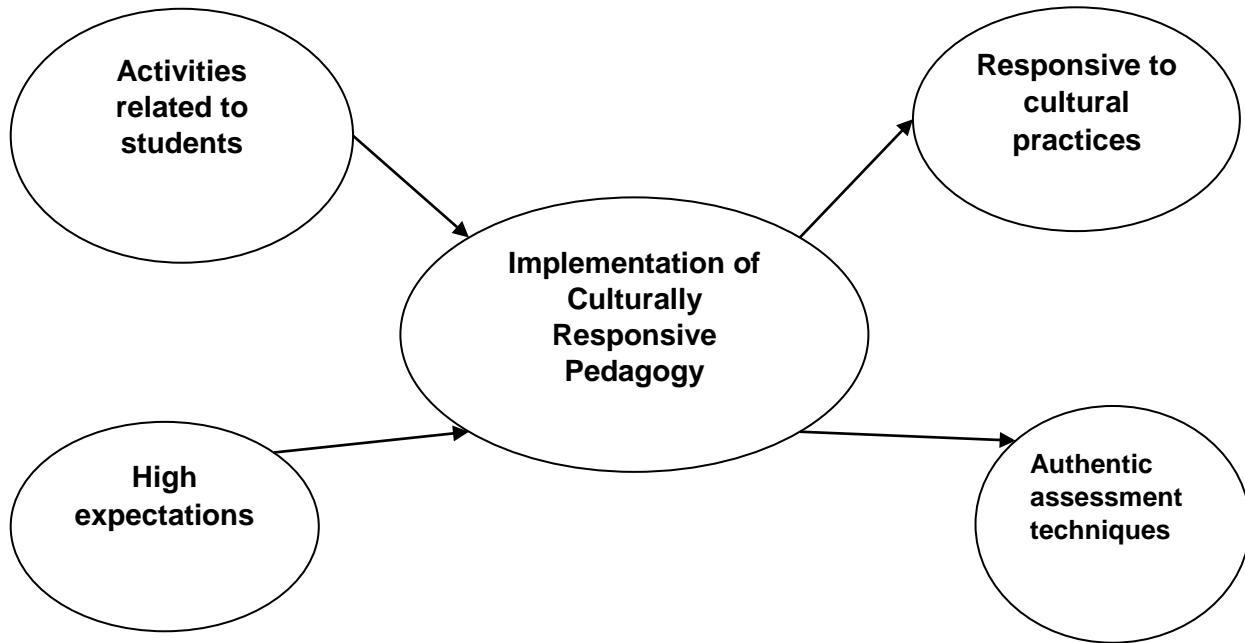


Figure 1: Areas included while implementing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Case Studies Across India

A Tale of Two Classrooms: Cultural Roots and Digital Bridges

When we bring a child’s world into the school, the transformation is more than academic—it’s a restoration of dignity. We see this unfolding in two powerful ways across India.

The Kerala Narrative: Folk Tales as Literacy Tools

In a government school in Kerala, educators realized that teaching English through foreign contexts was creating a "wall" between the student and the subject. They made a bold shift: **integrating local folk tales** into the English curriculum.

Instead of reading about unfamiliar landscapes, students analysed the hero’s journey within their own ancestral stories. The results were profound:

- **Reading with Heart:** Comprehension scores soared because the students already understood the cultural "soul" of the story.
- **The "One in Five" Shift:** Today, in these classrooms, **every 5th child** has moved from being a passive listener to an active participant, proudly embracing their heritage.
- **Cultural Ambassadors:** The ripple effect is massive—**every 2nd child** in the program now acts as a "culture bearer," sharing local traditions through school programs and community events.

The Bengal Digital Bridge (Recent Data, 2025–2026)

Fast forward to the present day in **West Bengal**, where the mission has gone digital. Building on the "folk tale" model, recent research from **Jadavpur University (2026)** has shown how technology can scale this empathy.

- **The Digital Storytelling Experiment:** Teachers in regions like Rajarhat and Birbhum are using digital platforms to help students create their own "living textbooks." By recording oral histories from their elders and turning them into digital presentations, the classroom becomes a bridge between generations.
- **The Statistical Leap:** This isn't just about "feeling good." According to **The Social Science Review (2025)**, when classrooms in Bengal shifted to this responsive model, the "Collaborative Competency" of students—their ability to work together across differences—jumped from a struggling **67.32** to a **thriving 90.23**.

The Core Insight

Whether it is a centuries-old oral tradition in the South or a high-tech project in the East, the lesson is the same: **When a child sees their identity reflected in their education, they don't just learn a subject—they find their voice.** These case studies prove that by valuing "cultural capital," we can close the equity gap and turn every classroom into a sanctuary of belonging.

CONCLUSION

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is more than just a teaching method; it is a promise that no child has to leave their identity at the school gate. As we've seen from the vibrant folk-tale classrooms in Kerala to the tech-forward research at **Jadavpur University (2026)**, when we bridge the gap between a student's home and their desk, the "magic" of learning truly happens.

The evidence is clear: when we value a child's "cultural capital," their collaborative and emotional skills can soar from a struggling **67% to a thriving 90%** (**The Social Science Review, 2025**). However, for this transformation to reach every corner of India—from the busy streets of Rajarhat to the quietest rural villages—we must address the very human hurdles that remain. With **60% of our teachers** still calling for better training, and **44% of our children** facing a daily "language mismatch" (**UNESCO, 2025**), the mission ahead is urgent.

By modernizing our teacher training, easing the rigidity of our curricula, and inviting the community into the classroom, we can ensure that Indian education finally reflects the country's immense cultural richness. Ultimately, CRP is about turning our diversity from a "challenge to manage" into our greatest "strength to celebrate," creating an equitable future where every student feels they truly belong.

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