

# An Analysis on the Benefits of Incorporating Cultural Relevance In Curriculum Development

Yi-Huang Shih

*Center of Teacher Education, Minghsin University of Science and Technology, Hsinchu, Taiwan*

---

**Abstract:** Education has often acted as a social microcosm that reflects the growing levels of religious and cultural diversity, with educators facing the daily task of responding pedagogically and interculturally to the challenges this evolving context brings. In order to assure high quality education in developing countries, curriculum development efforts are often initiated as part of international cooperation projects. Culture affects the educational context of the countries involved as well as the ways in which curriculum developers from different countries are used to working and behaving. Therefore, the influences of culture on curriculum development cannot be neglected. This article aims to analyze several significant benefits when teachers incorporate cultural relevance in curriculum development, and establish a foundation in the sociology of curriculum. The benefits are as follows: (1) promote students' cultural identity and self-esteem; (2) promote students' engagement and motivation in learning; (3) critical thinking and perspective-taking; (4) reducing students' stereo types and prejudice; (5) creates a meaningful connection between students' experiences and their education; (6) preparation for a diverse society.

**Keywords:** culture, cultural relevance, curriculum, sociology of curriculum

---

## 1. Introduction

What is worth teaching in school? Some believe that a reservoir of essential knowledge across disciplines should be taught to students. Some argue that teaching students how to learn should be integral to student learning, given the ever-increasing body of information and content in modern societies. Others stress the importance of competences or 21st skills (e.g., critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, etc.) as something that ought to be prioritized in school. The question leads us to a contested area, given that people have different values and opinions about the purpose of education. Nonetheless, a curriculum gives us hints to what skills and knowledge is seen as most important. A curriculum is a pedagogical infrastructure that guides what ought to be taught for student learning in school. However, the development of school curricula is often influenced by social factors. Especially, the influence of cultural factors on curriculum development (Lee, Hong & Wright, 2024; Shih, 2019, 2020, 2024a, 2024b; Shih & Wang, 2022; Wang & Shih, 2022, 2023; Wu, 2016).

In addition, to assure high quality education in developing countries, curriculum development efforts are often initiated as part of international cooperation projects. Culture affects the educational context of the countries involved as well as the ways in which curriculum developers from different countries are used to working and behaving. Therefore, the influences of culture on curriculum development cannot be neglected (Gervedink Nijhuis, 2019; Shih, 2020). This article aims to analyze several significant benefits when teachers incorporate cultural relevance in curriculum development, and establish a foundation in the sociology of curriculum.

## 2. Cultural Relevance

Cultural competence in education has emerged as a critical area of focus in contemporary educational discourse, aiming to create inclusive learning environments that celebrate diversity and promote equitable opportunities for all students. A curriculum that reflects the diverse cultures within a community fosters inclusivity and helps students connect learning with their own experiences. This relevance supports students' cultural identities and promotes a deeper understanding of different perspectives (Chima Abimbola Eden, Onyebuchi Nneamaka Chisom & Idowu Sulaimon Adeniyi, 2024; Shih, 2020). Cultural relevance has become an increasingly important topic in today's globalized world. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, cultural relevance is "the quality of being closely related to the culture of a particular time or place." In other words, cultural relevance is the ability to relate to and understand different cultures and communities. It involves recognizing and respecting the values, beliefs, and customs of other cultures and incorporating them into one's own life. Cultural relevance in education refers to the practice of designing curricula, teaching methods, and classroom environments that acknowledge, reflect, and celebrate the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of students. This approach aims to make learning more meaningful and engaging by connecting academic content to students' real-world contexts, fostering a sense of belonging and identity. Incorporating cultural knowledge and integrating local traditions, languages, histories, and values into the curriculum helps

students see their own culture reflected in what they are learning. This can enhance student engagement and pride in their heritage. Cultural relevance in the curriculum helps students connect their learning to their lives, making education more empowering by showing them how their knowledge can be applied to their communities and beyond (Brown, Boda, Lemmi, & Monroe, 2019; Chima Abimbola Eden, Onyebuchi Nneamaka Chisom & Idowu Sulaimon Adeniyi, 2024; Sharer, 2023; Shih, 2020).

### **3. Several Significant Benefits**

Developing a deeper understanding of factors that influence learning and teaching in widening culturally diverse learning environments is necessary in proactively planning supports and pedagogical approaches that encourage integration, intercultural understanding and respect for cultural difference. When a curriculum is designed to reflect the diverse cultures within a community, it becomes a powerful tool for fostering inclusivity and promoting a sense of belonging among students (Kathleen Markey et al, 2023; Shih, 2020). This approach has several significant benefits when teachers incorporate cultural relevance in curriculum development.

#### **3.1 Promote Students' Cultural Identity and Self-Esteem**

Culture-based pedagogy has been positively related to students' socio-emotional well-being, civic engagement, school motivation and higher academic outcomes, particularly with culturally-diverse students is concerned. When students see their own cultures and traditions represented in the curriculum, it validates their experiences and identities. This recognition can boost their self-esteem and make them feel valued within the educational environment. It also encourages pride in their heritage and contributes to a stronger sense of self (Navin Kumar Singh & Mariella Espinoza-Herold, 2014; Shih, 2020, 2022; Wu, 2023).

#### **3.2 Promote Students' Engagement and Motivation in Learning**

A culturally relevant curriculum makes learning more engaging by connecting educational content to the students' lived experiences. When students can relate personally to what they are learning, they are more likely to be motivated and invested in their education. Promotion of cultural competence was associated with less awareness of racism, and critical consciousness socialization was related to lower feelings of belonging. Multicultural education theorists identify several approaches to integrating diversity into the classroom, and some of the approaches that emphasize respect and tolerance for all individuals may highlight the message that all people are equal to each other without acknowledging present-day racism and discrimination (Hung, 2013; Sleeter & Grant, 2011; Shih, 2022).

#### **3.3 Critical Thinking and Perspective-Taking**

Classroom pedagogies that foster global, international, and intercultural (GII) learning across academic disciplines have the potential to reach all matriculated students, preparing them for diversity in their immediate communities, the international reach of their professions, and their responsibilities as citizens in the world. Exposure to a variety of cultures and perspectives within the curriculum encourages students to think critically about the world around them. It helps them understand that there are multiple ways of seeing and interpreting the world, which fosters open-mindedness and empathy (Hung, 2010; Krebs, 2020; Shih, 2020).

#### **3.4 Reducing Students' Stereotypes and Prejudice**

Students acquire and inherit cultural values and rules by interacting with the surroundings they live in. The surroundings include both physical and psychological contexts, such as children's play and literature, which mirror the cultural image of childhood. It is also important to pay equal attention to both "education" and "care" in early childhood, something that traditionally varies across diverse curricula and cultures. In addition, many other factors may play a role in mediating or moderating the influences from culture to childhood, such as new media, religion, leisure activities, fairy tales, digital games, and curricula. All these factors are, directly or indirectly, influenced by culture. By including diverse cultural narratives and voices, a curriculum can challenge stereotypes and reduce prejudice. Students learn to appreciate the complexity and richness of different cultures, leading to greater respect for diversity (Fleer, 2017; Shih, 2020; Yang, Tesar & Li, 2022).

#### **3.5 Creates a Meaningful Connection Between Students' Experiences and Their Education**

Having positive and meaningful social connections is one of the basic psychological needs of students. The satisfaction of this need is directly related to students' engagement—a robust predictor of educational achievement. When students see their own cultures and traditions reflected in the curriculum, it creates a meaningful connection between their personal experiences and their education. This validation not only affirms their identity but also encourages a sense of belonging within the school community. It can have a profound impact on their self-esteem and motivation to learn, as they see that their heritage is respected and valued.

Additionally, it promotes cultural pride, which is key to developing a strong sense of self. By recognizing and celebrating cultural diversity, schools can foster a more inclusive environment that supports social cohesion and mutual respect among all students (Abacioglu, Epskamp, Fischer, et al, 2023; Shih, 2020, 2022).

### 3.6 Preparation for a Diverse Society

Education has often acted as a social microcosm that reflects the growing levels of religious and cultural diversity, with educators facing the daily task of responding pedagogically and interculturally to the challenges this evolving context brings. In addition, as societies become increasingly multicultural, it is essential for students to develop the skills and attitudes necessary to navigate and contribute positively to a diverse world. A curriculum that reflects cultural diversity equips students with the knowledge and empathy needed to interact with people from different backgrounds and to be active, informed global citizens (Elias & Mansouri, 2023; Shih, 2020).

## 4. Conclusions

As societies become increasingly multicultural, it is essential for students to develop the skills and attitudes necessary to navigate and contribute positively to a diverse world. A curriculum that reflects cultural diversity equips students with the knowledge and empathy needed to interact with people from different backgrounds and to be active, informed global citizens (Shih, 2020). “Cultural relevance” refers to the practice of making educational content and teaching methods meaningful and applicable to students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and identities. A culturally relevant curriculum aims to: (1) reflect students' lives: incorporating students' cultures, traditions, and values into the learning environment helps them feel recognized and understood; (2) promote engagement: by relating the material to students' personal experiences, cultural relevance enhances motivation and connection to the subject matter; (3) foster critical thinking: encourages students to analyze their cultural context and broader societal issues, such as inequality or discrimination; (4) build self-esteem and identity: it validates students' identities, boosting their confidence and pride in their heritage; (5) encourage social justice: a culturally relevant approach often addresses power dynamics, racism, and historical injustices, promoting equity and inclusion (Hung, 2007; Sharer, 2023; Shih, 2020, 2022). This article aims to analyze several significant benefits when teachers incorporate cultural relevance in curriculum development, and establish a foundation in the sociology of curriculum. The benefits are as follows: (1) promote students' cultural identity and self-esteem; (2) promote students' engagement and motivation in learning; (3) critical thinking and perspective-taking; (4) reducing students' stereotypes and prejudice; (5) creates a meaningful connection between students' experiences and their education; (6) preparation for a diverse society. By making cultural relevance a core aspect of curriculum development, educators can create an environment where all students feel included, respected, and empowered to learn. And furthermore, they can fulfill their civic responsibilities in the future, and develop a harmonious society.

## References

- [1]. Abacioglu, C.S., Epskamp, S., Fischer, A.H. et al. (2023). Effects of multicultural education on student engagement in low- and high-concentration classrooms: the mediating role of student relationships. *Learning Environ Res*, 26, 951–975. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-023-09462-0>
- [2]. Berends, Mark. (2015). Sociology and school choice: What we know after two decades of charter schools. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41(1), 159–80.
- [3]. Brown, B. A., Boda, P., Lemmi, C., & Monroe, X. (2019). Moving culturally relevant pedagogy from theory to practice: Exploring teachers' application of culturally relevant education in science and mathematics. *Urban Education*, 54(6), 775-803.
- [4]. Byrd, R. M. (2016). Does culturally relevant teaching work? An examination from student perspectives. *SAGE Open*, 6(3), 1–10. DOI: 10.1177/2158244016660744
- [5]. Chima Abimbola Eden, Onyebuchi Nneamaka Chisom, & Idowu Sulaimon Adeniyi (2024). Cultural competence in education: Strategies for fostering inclusivity and diversity awareness. *International Journal of Applied Research in Social Sciences*, 6(3), 383-392. DOI: 10.51594/ijarss.v6i3.895
- [6]. Elias, A., & Mansouri, F. (2023). Towards a critical transformative approach to inclusive intercultural education. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 18(1), 4–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2023.2211568>
- [7]. Fleer M. (2017). Digital role-play: The changing conditions of children's play in preschool settings. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 24(1), 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2016.1247456>
- [8]. Gervedink Nijhuis, C. (2019). Culturally Sensitive Curriculum Development. In: Pieters, J., Voogt, J., Pareja Roblin, N. (eds) Collaborative Curriculum Design for Sustainable Innovation and Teacher Learning. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20062-6\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20062-6_5)

- [9]. Hung, R. (2007). Is ecological sustainability consonant or dissonant with human rights? Identifying theoretical issues in peace education. *Journal of Peace Education*, 4(1), 39–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400200601171255>
- [10]. Hung, R. (2010). In Search of Affective Citizenship: From the Pragmatist-Phenomenological Perspective. *Policy Futures in Education*, 8(5), 488–498. <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2010.8.5.488>
- [11]. Hung, R. (2013). Educational hospitality and trust in teacher–student relationships: A Derridian visiting. *Stud Philos Educ*, 32, 87–99. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-012-9326-3>
- [12]. Jennings, Jennifer L. (2010). School choice or schools’ choice? Managing in an era of accountability. *Sociology of Education*, 83(3), 227–47.
- [13]. Kathleen Markey, Margaret M. Graham, Dympna Tuohy, Jane McCarthy, Claire O’Donnell, Therese Hennessy, Anne Fahy & Brid O’ Brien (2023). Navigating learning and teaching in expanding culturally diverse higher education settings. *Higher Education Pedagogies*, 8 (1), 2165527, DOI: 10.1080/23752696.2023.2165527
- [14]. Krebs, K. C. (2020). Global, international, and intercultural learning in university classrooms across the disciplines. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 15(1), 36–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499920901947>
- [15]. Lee, M., Hong, W. P., & Wright, E. (2024). *Curriculum: Understanding curriculum from a sociological perspective*. <https://researchprofiles.canberra.edu.au/en/publications/curriculum-understanding-curriculum-from-a-sociological-perspective>
- [16]. Navin Kumar Singh, & Mariella Espinoza-Herold (2014) Culture-based education: Lessons from indigenous education in the U.S. and Southeast Asia. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, 5(1), 7–39, DOI: 10.1080/26390043.2014.12067773
- [17]. Sharer, H. (2023). What is cultural relevance? Exploring its impact, examples and role in society. <https://www.lihpao.com/what-is-cultural-relevance/>
- [18]. Shih, Y. H. (2019). An Examination of the Functions of a General Education Art Curriculum in Universities. *Policy Futures in Education*, 17(3), 306–317. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210318811012>
- [19]. Shih, Y. H. (2020). Learning content of ‘multiculturalism’ for children in Taiwan’s elementary schools. *Policy Futures in Education*, 18(8), 1044–1057. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210320911251>
- [20]. Shih, Y. H. (2022). Designing culturally responsive education strategies to cultivate young children’s cultural identities: A case study of the development of a preschool local culture curriculum. *Children*, 9, 1789. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children9121789>
- [21]. Shih, Y. H. (2024a). Curriculum aesthetics: Definition, importance, foundation, themes and application. *International Journal of Latest Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 7(8), 58–63.
- [22]. Shih, Y. H. (2024b). Children’s learning for sustainability in social studies education: A case study from Taiwanese elementary school. *Frontiers in Education*. 9: 1353420. doi: 10.3389/educ.2024.1353420
- [23]. Shih, Y. H., & Wang, R. J. (2022). Incorporating gender issues into the classroom: Study on the teaching of gender-related courses in the general curriculum of Taiwan’s universities. *Policy Futures in Education*, 20(1), 44–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14782103211009641>
- [24]. Sleeter, C. E., & Grant, C. A. (2011). Making choices for multicultural education: Five approaches to race, class and gender (6th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.
- [25]. Wang, R. J., & Shih, Y. H. (2022) Improving the quality of teacher education for sustainable development of Taiwan’s education system: A systematic review on the research issues of teacher education after the implementation of 12-year national basic education. *Front. Psychol.* 13:921839. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.921839
- [26]. Wang, R. J. & Shih, Y. H. (2023) what are universities pursuing? A review of the Quacquarelli Symonds world university rankings of Taiwanese universities (2021–2023). *Front. Educ.* 8:1185817. doi: 10.3389/educ.2023.1185817
- [27]. Wu, C.C. (2016). The examination of multilevel relations on classroom goals and achievement goals. *Journal of Education & Psychology*, 39 (1), 29–58. DOI:10.3966/102498852016033901002
- [28]. Wu, C.C. (2023). The effects of Chinese parenting belief on preschoolers’ temperament and secure attachment. *Children*, 10, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children10010009>
- [29]. Wu, C. C. (2024). The effects of Hakka bilingual programs on learning interests for kindergarteners. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 27(8), 1142–1152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2024.2345709>
- [30]. Yang, W., Tesar, M., & Li, H. (2022). Childhood, Curriculum, and Culture in Diverse Contexts. *ECNU Review of Education*, 5(2), 209–218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20965311221092039>