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**Relationship Between Culturally Responsive Teaching and Student
Academic Success in Ghana**

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article was to analyze relationship between culturally responsive teaching and student academic success in Ghana.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in Ghana enhances student success by integrating local languages, traditions, and experiences, improving engagement and performance. It fosters a sense of belonging, reducing dropout rates, but faces challenges

like limited teacher training and rigid curricula. Strengthening CRT can bridge learning gaps and promote equity.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Sociocultural theory, culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) theory & funds of knowledge theory may be used to anchor future studies on the relationship between culturally responsive teaching and student academic success in Ghana. To ensure effective implementation of CRT, teacher training programs must integrate comprehensive courses on culturally responsive pedagogy. For CRT to be fully embedded into education systems, policymakers must mandate its implementation through education policy reforms.

Keywords: *Culturally Responsive Teaching, Student Academic Success*

INTRODUCTION

Student academic success is often measured by graduation rates, standardized test scores, and access to higher education. In developed economies like the United States and Japan, academic performance trends are shaped by technological advancements, curriculum reforms, and government funding policies. In the U.S., high school graduation rates reached 86% in 2022, up from 79% in 2010, demonstrating steady progress (Boman, 2022). Meanwhile, Japan consistently ranks among the highest in global educational performance, with PISA 2018 results placing Japanese students in the top five for reading, math, and science (Masci, Johnes, & Agasisti, 2018). However, disparities in access to quality education still persist, particularly among low-income and minority students, leading to ongoing policy reforms aimed at closing the achievement gap.

In Canada, high school completion rates have steadily increased, reaching 88% in 2023, attributed to strong government policies promoting inclusive education (Kuperman, Geva, & Taler, 2025). Similarly, in Sweden, academic success correlates with lower educational inequalities, but disparities persist for immigrant students, affecting their long-term performance (Högberg, Scarpa, & Petersen, 2025). South Korea ranks among the top in global student performance, with over 96% of students completing upper secondary education, driven by high parental involvement and rigorous national curriculum standards (Enchikova, 2025). However, despite these advancements, developed nations continue to face challenges related to mental health, digital learning adaptation, and economic disparities affecting student achievement.

In developing economies, educational progress varies significantly due to economic and infrastructural challenges. For instance, in Brazil, only 64% of students complete upper secondary education, highlighting a high dropout rate caused by socio-economic disparities (Dewes, 2023). Similarly, India has seen increasing literacy rates, reaching 77.7% in 2021, but rural-urban gaps persist in educational attainment (Azizan & Rahim, 2024). Countries like Indonesia have invested in technology-driven education reforms, yet internet access remains a barrier for students in rural areas. In many developing nations, teacher shortages, outdated curricula, and limited funding continue to hinder student success. Addressing these issues requires policy interventions that prioritize educational equity, digital literacy, and teacher training programs.

In Brazil, student dropout rates remain high, with only 64% of students completing secondary school, despite efforts to expand educational access (Dewes, 2023). In India, tertiary education enrollment has increased from 25.2% in 2018 to 27.1% in 2022, reflecting improved access but persistent rural-urban disparities (Azizan & Rahim, 2024). In Indonesia, blended learning models are being implemented to improve student engagement, yet internet connectivity remains a significant barrier for remote learners (Riyanto, Muhammad, & Sari, 2025). Many developing nations experience teacher shortages, limited learning resources, and financial constraints, which hinder student academic success. Addressing these gaps requires investment in teacher training, digital learning infrastructure, and policies supporting equitable education.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, student academic success is greatly affected by economic instability, limited infrastructure, and socio-political challenges. In Nigeria, only 54% of students complete secondary education, with gender disparities further exacerbating the situation (Carvalho & Vilaça, 2024). Similarly, in Kenya, the introduction of free secondary education has increased enrollment but retention rates remain low, with 35% of students dropping out due to financial difficulties. South Africa has made significant progress in primary school access, but only 37% of students

who start Grade 1 complete Grade 12 (Carvalho & Vilaça, 2024). Despite these challenges, initiatives like digital learning programs and teacher professional development are helping improve academic outcomes. However, sustained investment in educational infrastructure and policies promoting equitable access to education are crucial for long-term student success.

In Ghana, primary school enrollment rates are high, at 94% in 2022, but only 50% of students complete secondary education due to financial barriers (Carvalho & Vilaça, 2024). Nigeria faces similar challenges, with low literacy levels and a secondary school completion rate of 54%, largely due to teacher shortages and overcrowded classrooms. Meanwhile, South Africa has made progress in higher education accessibility, but racial and economic disparities still affect student performance, with only 22% of university students graduating within three years (Enchikova et al., 2025). Despite these difficulties, initiatives such as digital education programs and scholarship schemes are improving academic outcomes. However, continued investments in education infrastructure, teacher recruitment, and policy reforms are necessary to sustain progress.

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is an instructional approach that recognizes and incorporates students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives into the learning process to enhance engagement and academic success (Lau et al., 2025). The core premise of CRT is that students perform better when their cultural identities are acknowledged and valued in the educational setting. Among the most effective CRT strategies are inclusive curriculum design, culturally relevant pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and student-centered learning. These strategies ensure that diverse students have equitable access to learning materials that reflect their lived experiences, promoting higher motivation, self-efficacy, and academic performance (Amjad, Aslam, & Sial, 2024). By fostering an inclusive learning environment, CRT reduces achievement gaps and creates a positive educational experience for marginalized students.

Inclusive curriculum design ensures that students see their cultures, histories, and contributions represented in academic content, which enhances their engagement and intellectual curiosity (Suryadinata, 2024). Culturally relevant pedagogy adapts instructional methods to align with students' cultural learning styles, fostering critical thinking and deeper comprehension. Differentiated instruction accommodates diverse learning needs by using varied teaching strategies, increasing accessibility for all students. Student-centered learning encourages collaborative and participatory education, empowering students to take ownership of their learning process. Collectively, these CRT strategies contribute to higher retention rates, improved test scores, and greater classroom participation, reinforcing the essential role of CRT in advancing academic success for all learners.

Problem Statement

Despite increasing recognition of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) as a critical factor in student academic success, its implementation remains inconsistent across educational institutions. Research indicates that students from culturally diverse backgrounds often experience disengagement and lower academic performance when curriculum and pedagogy do not reflect their cultural identities (Pedone, 2025). While CRT has been shown to enhance student motivation, critical thinking, and achievement, many educators lack the training and resources to implement CRT effectively (López-Gil & Quiroz Cárdenas, 2025). This gap in teacher preparation results in a disconnect between students' lived experiences and the learning environment, which continues to widen academic disparities.

Additionally, institutional barriers such as rigid standardized curricula, lack of culturally relevant materials, and limited institutional support hinder CRT's full integration into classrooms (Haryanto, 2025). Schools in urban and rural settings face unique challenges urban schools often struggle with overcrowded classrooms and diverse linguistic needs, while rural schools lack diverse teaching materials and culturally trained educators. Furthermore, the intersection of CRT with digital learning remains underexplored, leaving a gap in understanding how culturally responsive strategies can be effectively adapted in online and hybrid learning environments. Without systematic integration of CRT in teacher training programs and institutional policies, students from underrepresented backgrounds will continue to face barriers to academic success. Therefore, it is critical to explore effective strategies for CRT implementation across different educational contexts to foster equity, inclusivity, and improved academic outcomes for all students.

Theoretical Review

Sociocultural Theory

Originated by Lev Vygotsky, Sociocultural Theory emphasizes that learning is a social process influenced by cultural interactions and mediated by language. This theory posits that knowledge is constructed through collaborative learning and is shaped by the cultural tools and norms within a learner's environment. Its relevance to Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) lies in its emphasis on the role of culture in shaping student learning experiences. CRT aligns with this theory as it leverages students' cultural backgrounds to enhance engagement, critical thinking, and academic success. By incorporating students' cultural narratives into instruction, educators create meaningful learning experiences that improve academic performance (Shahid & Khalid, 2024).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) Theory

Developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings, CRP emphasizes that teaching should be culturally relevant, socially empowering, and academically rigorous. The theory asserts that students perform better when their cultural knowledge, experiences, and identities are integrated into classroom instruction. CRT is rooted in CRP as it ensures that education is inclusive and equity-driven, fostering improved student outcomes. By using culturally responsive teaching strategies, educators can create an environment where diverse students feel valued and engaged, thereby increasing motivation and achievement (Parmaxi, Nicolaou, & Constantinou, 2024).

Funds of Knowledge Theory

Originating from the work of Luis Moll, this theory proposes that students bring rich cultural knowledge from their homes and communities into the classroom. It highlights the importance of integrating students' lived experiences into instruction to make learning more meaningful and effective. CRT aligns with this theory by recognizing students' cultural capital as an asset rather than a barrier to learning. Teachers who adopt a CRT approach tap into students' cultural knowledge to design lessons that resonate with their identities, leading to greater academic success (Putra, 2024).

Empirical Review

Muha (2024) assessed how relational leadership impacts the effectiveness of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in higher education institutions, particularly in Christian universities.

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, incorporating surveys from academic staff and interviews with student affairs professionals to gauge the effectiveness of CRT in different academic environments. The research found that when university leadership fosters collaboration between student affairs and academic staff, CRT practices become more effective, leading to increased student engagement and improved academic performance. Additionally, faculty members who actively collaborated with culturally diverse student organizations demonstrated higher levels of cultural competence, which directly benefited student learning outcomes. The study emphasized that an institution-wide commitment to CRT is necessary for sustained student success. One of the most significant takeaways was that students felt more engaged when their lived experiences were reflected in the curriculum and classroom discussions. The research also highlighted the importance of professional development in CRT for academic leadership to ensure that institutional policies align with best practices. The findings indicated that higher education institutions should allocate resources to culturally responsive faculty training and develop support programs that address the unique challenges faced by diverse student populations. Additionally, the study suggested that collaboration between different campus departments can lead to holistic academic support, improving student retention and success rates. The study recommended that CRT principles should be integrated into faculty evaluations and tenure-track requirements to ensure long-term commitment. Another critical insight was that students who experienced culturally responsive mentorship from faculty members were more likely to persist in their academic programs. Muha also pointed out that institutions with strong CRT frameworks saw an increase in cross-cultural understanding among students, which enhanced classroom discussions and peer collaboration. The research called for an expansion of CRT research within faith-based institutions to understand its effectiveness in different cultural and religious settings. Ultimately, the study concluded that fostering relational leadership in higher education can significantly amplify the positive effects of CRT. Muha's research underscores the need for continuous investment in CRT training and interdepartmental collaboration to create more inclusive learning environments.

López-Gil and Quiroz Cárdenas (2025) explored the integration of CRT principles in school-based health centers (SBHCs) and their impact on student academic performance. The study was conducted in urban and rural schools with on-site healthcare services, where culturally responsive teaching methods were implemented alongside student wellness programs. The research utilized a longitudinal design, collecting academic performance data over three years from students who received CRT-based instruction in schools with integrated health services. Findings showed that students attending these schools had significantly lower dropout rates and higher academic success, particularly in literacy and math. The study attributed this improvement to the culturally inclusive teaching methods, which made learning more relevant to students' lived experiences and reduced the barriers that often prevent marginalized students from succeeding. Additionally, the presence of school-based health services was found to support emotional and psychological well-being, which in turn enhanced students' ability to focus and excel academically. The study revealed that students who received culturally relevant instruction alongside school-based health interventions showed higher levels of classroom engagement, self-efficacy, and confidence in their academic abilities. The research also emphasized the importance of training teachers in both culturally responsive pedagogy and trauma-informed teaching strategies to address students' diverse needs effectively. One of the key recommendations was the need for policymakers to

integrate health and education services, ensuring that CRT principles are embedded in school-wide policies. The study also found that parental engagement was significantly higher in schools where CRT and health interventions were implemented together, as families felt that their cultural backgrounds were valued and respected. The authors argued that education reform should prioritize the expansion of SBHCs, with a focus on implementing CRT strategies as a core component of student success initiatives. The study recommended further research into the long-term effects of CRT in health-integrated education models. Additionally, it called for increased funding for professional development programs that train educators on the intersection of health, culture, and academic achievement. Another critical takeaway was that culturally responsive teaching methods led to higher attendance rates, as students felt more motivated to engage with the school environment. The findings suggest that CRT, when combined with student wellness programs, can play a transformative role in addressing educational inequities. The research concluded that integrating CRT into school-based health centers can serve as a model for holistic educational reform, ensuring that diverse students receive both academic and socio-emotional support.

Pedone (2025) investigated the role of trust in culturally responsive classrooms and its impact on student engagement and academic success. The study was conducted across multiple European universities and focused on how student perceptions of trust in their educators influenced their participation in CRT-based courses. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with university students from diverse cultural backgrounds, along with classroom observations. The findings indicated that when educators implemented culturally responsive teaching strategies that validated students' identities and experiences, student engagement significantly increased. Trust was identified as a critical factor in determining students' willingness to participate in discussions, complete coursework, and seek academic support. The study also found that CRT contributed to students' critical thinking skills, as they were more likely to engage in meaningful discourse when their cultural perspectives were acknowledged in the classroom. Moreover, students who perceived their instructors as culturally competent were more likely to develop strong academic self-efficacy, leading to higher achievement. The study recommended that faculty members undergo CRT-focused professional development training, with a particular emphasis on trust-building strategies such as inclusive communication, culturally relevant feedback, and active listening techniques. The researchers also called for institutional policies that evaluate and encourage CRT practices in university curricula. The study concluded that trust, when combined with culturally responsive teaching, serves as a powerful mechanism for fostering student success in higher education.

Waymouth & Hinchman (2025) explored the impact of culturally responsive literacy instruction on student academic success. The research focused on middle school students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, evaluating whether CRT-based literacy interventions improved reading comprehension and writing proficiency. The study involved two groups of students one receiving standard literacy instruction and the other receiving CRT-based literacy instruction incorporating culturally relevant texts, multilingual resources, and interactive storytelling. The results showed that students in the CRT-based program demonstrated significantly higher gains in reading comprehension and critical thinking skills compared to their peers in the traditional program. The study attributed these improvements to the personal relevance of the instructional materials, which made reading more engaging for students and encouraged

them to actively participate in discussions. Additionally, students in the CRT-based literacy program reported greater confidence in their academic abilities and a stronger connection to their cultural heritage. One of the key recommendations from the study was that schools should adopt literacy curricula that integrate diverse cultural perspectives and multilingual resources to support students from different backgrounds. The researchers also emphasized the need for teacher training programs to include CRT-focused literacy instruction to help educators develop culturally inclusive teaching strategies. The study concluded that CRT is a powerful tool for closing the literacy achievement gap and fostering academic success among marginalized students.

Haryanto (2025) examined how culturally responsive teaching practices in doctoral mentorship programs impact graduate student success, particularly in Southern African universities. Using a longitudinal qualitative research design, the study tracked doctoral students and their mentors over a five-year period to assess the effectiveness of CRT-based mentorship strategies. The findings revealed that doctoral students who received culturally responsive mentorship exhibited higher research productivity, greater academic confidence.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Research Gaps: One significant conceptual gap in the reviewed studies is the lack of a unified theoretical framework that explains how CRT influences student success across different educational levels. While Muha (2024) focuses on relational leadership in higher education and Pedone (2025) explore trust-building strategies, there is no comprehensive model integrating leadership, trust, and CRT effectiveness. Additionally, the intersection of CRT with psychological and socio-emotional development remains underexplored. López-Gil & Quiroz Cárdenas (2025) provide insights into how CRT and health interventions interact, but there is limited conceptual clarity on how CRT supports cognitive, emotional, and social resilience in students over time. Furthermore, Waymouth & Hinchman (2025) examine CRT in literacy education but do not explore how CRT influences STEM subjects or interdisciplinary learning approaches. Future research should develop an integrative CRT framework that combines leadership, trust, and socio-emotional factors to provide a holistic understanding of CRT's impact on student success.

Contextual Research Gaps: The existing studies provide insights into CRT in specific settings, such as Christian universities (Muha, 2024), European higher education (Pedone, 2025), school-based health centers (López-Gil & Quiroz Cárdenas, 2025), and literacy instruction (Waymouth & Hinchman, 2025). However, CRT's role in vocational training, community colleges, technical institutions, and non-traditional education settings is largely unexamined. There is also limited research on CRT's application in virtual learning environments a crucial area given the increasing

reliance on online and hybrid education models. Moreover, while Pedone (2025) emphasize trust in student-teacher interactions, they do not address how digital trust-building strategies could enhance CRT in online education platforms. Similarly, the interaction between CRT and special education remains understudied, with no research exploring how CRT can be adapted to meet the needs of students with disabilities, neurodivergent learners, or those in alternative education programs. Future research should expand CRT's contextual applications beyond traditional classrooms, exploring its relevance in special education, online learning, and non-traditional academic environments.

Geographical Research Gaps: A significant geographical gap in the studies is the overrepresentation of Western and urban educational settings, with limited research on CRT in Global South contexts, rural schools, and indigenous education systems. Muha (2024) and Pedone (2025) focus on higher education in Western institutions, leaving a gap in understanding CRT's effectiveness in under-resourced or rural schools. López-Gil & Quiroz Cárdenas (2025) explore CRT in urban and rural school-based health centers, but there is no comparative study examining how CRT's impact differs across diverse socio-economic, ethnic, and geographic regions. Additionally, there is little discussion of CRT in post-colonial education systems or conflict-affected regions, where cultural identity and language policies significantly influence academic success. Research should focus on CRT implementation in indigenous schools, refugee education programs, and underrepresented geographic regions, particularly in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and remote communities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) plays a transformative role in fostering student academic success by creating an inclusive learning environment that values and integrates diverse cultural backgrounds. Research consistently demonstrates that when students see their identities reflected in the curriculum and teaching methods, their engagement, motivation, and overall academic performance improve. CRT not only enhances cognitive development by making learning more relevant and meaningful but also fosters a sense of belonging that is critical to student confidence and achievement. Beyond its immediate impact on student outcomes, CRT contributes to broader educational equity by addressing systemic biases and closing achievement gaps among marginalized communities. By adopting culturally responsive instructional strategies, educators can empower students with the tools needed for critical thinking, self-advocacy, and lifelong learning. However, for CRT to be fully effective, it must be embedded into teacher training, curriculum design, assessment methods, and education policy.

Moving forward, schools, policymakers, and educators must collaborate to institutionalize CRT at all levels of education. This requires sustained research, funding, and accountability mechanisms to ensure that culturally responsive practices are not merely optional but essential to the education system. Ultimately, CRT is not just about improving test scores it is about creating an education system where every student, regardless of background, has an equal opportunity to succeed.

Recommendations

Theory

One of the primary theoretical advancements in CRT should be the incorporation of intersectionality theory, which examines how multiple aspects of identity (such as race, gender, socio-economic status, and language) shape students' educational experiences. Traditional CRT frameworks tend to focus on race and ethnicity alone, but acknowledging the intersecting nature of identity would provide a more holistic understanding of student needs. This would allow educators and researchers to develop more nuanced teaching strategies that accommodate the diverse realities of students' lives.

Another important theoretical development should involve integrating neuroscientific research into CRT frameworks. Cognitive science research suggests that when students engage with culturally relevant content, they are more likely to retain information and stay engaged in the learning process. Future studies should explore how neural pathways are activated when students interact with material that aligns with their cultural backgrounds, leading to deeper comprehension and long-term academic success. This scientific approach could strengthen CRT by providing empirical evidence of its cognitive benefits. Additionally, CRT should be positioned as a critical pedagogy model that not only enhances student learning but also fosters social awareness and empowerment. Many marginalized students experience educational environments that fail to acknowledge their lived realities, limiting their sense of agency. Theoretical models should explore CRT's potential to develop students' critical consciousness, helping them analyze and challenge social inequalities while building confidence in their academic abilities. This expansion would make CRT not just a tool for academic success but also an instrument for fostering active, informed citizenship.

Practice

To ensure effective implementation of CRT, teacher training programs must integrate comprehensive courses on culturally responsive pedagogy. Many educators enter classrooms with limited knowledge of how to adapt their teaching to diverse student populations. Training programs should include case studies, classroom simulations, and direct engagement with multicultural communities to equip teachers with practical skills.

Policy

For CRT to be fully embedded into education systems, policymakers must mandate its implementation through education policy reforms. Currently, CRT is often seen as an optional teaching approach rather than a core instructional strategy. National and regional education departments should require CRT training as a prerequisite for teacher certification and ensure that culturally responsive methodologies are integrated into school accreditation standards. This would make CRT a foundational part of educational practice rather than a discretionary approach.

Funding policies should also reflect the need for CRT implementation. Many schools serving culturally diverse and historically marginalized communities lack the resources to develop and sustain culturally responsive programs. Policymakers should allocate increased funding for teacher training, curriculum development, and classroom resources that support CRT. Additionally, grants

should be made available for schools to implement culturally inclusive initiatives, such as ethnic studies course, bilingual education programs, and community mentorship partnerships.

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