

Examining culturally responsive inclusive education practices in mainstream schools in the United Arab Emirates: A preliminary study to trial an evidence-based framework

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The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has adopted ambitious policies and strategic plans to enable inclusive education in mainstream schools across the country. With the largest population of immigrant students of all countries and an ethnically diverse teaching workforce, there is a need to explore the extent to which teaching practices are not only inclusive but also reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of students with special educational needs in schools. This preliminary study trials the use of the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy (CRTSE) scale as a tool to benchmark culturally responsive teaching practices for students with special educational needs in the UAE and identify areas for development. Data were collected from 24 teachers through a survey and semi-structured group and individual interviews and analysed using descriptive statistics and a systematic qualitative analysis. The findings suggest that teachers are using culturally responsive teaching practices. Teachers report higher frequency in creating an enabling learning environment and developing positive relationships but lower frequency in practices that involve specific cultural knowledge such as knowing how to differentiate the curriculum, instruction and assessment and use a student's native language to meet the linguistic and learning needs of students. The interviews corroborated these findings and enabled vital contextual insights into the nature of cultural and linguistic diversity in mainstream classrooms in the UAE as well as specific examples from practice about how cultural and linguistic diversity intersects with special educational needs. Implications for practice and further research are considered.

Keywords: Inclusive education; UAE; culturally responsive practices; teacher self-efficacy

Introduction

In recent years, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has adopted ambitious policies and strategic plans to accelerate inclusive education and the creation of an inclusive society. The introduction of the National Policy for Empowering People of Determination (MOCD, 2017), accompanied the 2017-2021 Strategic Plan for the Rights of Children with Disabilities (SCMC, 2017) and the Ministry of Education (MOE) Strategic Plan and they seek to ensure ‘equal opportunities for all’ (MOE, 2017). A change in terminology from people with ‘disabilities’ or ‘special needs’ to people ‘of determination’ has been mandated. This change is a vital component in shifting attitudes away from special educational needs and disability (SEND) to people or students ‘of determination’ who are active agents in their lives rather than passive recipients of interventions and care. The terminology of ‘students of determination’ is adopted in this article. Alongside a move towards inclusive education, the UAE has a large and growing multi-ethnic expatriate population resulting from the oil industry and subsequent economic diversification. Indeed, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that the UAE has ‘the largest population of immigrant students of all countries assessed in PISA 2018’ (OECD, 2020: 7). The culmination of strategic plans for both education and the rights of children with disabilities offers an opportunity for a detailed examination of culturally responsive inclusive practice across the UAE to both benchmark progress and drive policy change and implementation. The detailed examination also responds to a need to gain insights into how global South countries are embracing inclusion because ‘inclusive education in the global South remains underexplored’ (Kamenopoulou, 2018b:1193). The research presented in this article reports findings from a preliminary study for this examination that trials the use of the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy (CRTSE) scale (Chu & Garcia, 2014) alongside qualitative group and individual interviews to capture whether teachers are using culturally responsive inclusive teaching practices with students of determination in mainstream schools in the UAE and, if they are, how they are using them. The examination is particularly important to determine whether inclusive education that has evolved quickly in this global South context is both culturally grounded and relevant as well as appropriate for culturally and linguistically diverse students. It also has the potential to inform culturally specific and culturally appropriate areas for training and development.

The educational context in the UAE

The education system in the UAE is culturally and linguistically diverse. The country was founded in 1971 bringing together seven Emirates – Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ajman, Sharjah, Ras al Khaimah, Fujairah and Umm al-Quwain. These Emirates comprise people from culturally and linguistically diverse tribal groups including a Bedouin-tribal group who live (or lived previously) in the desert and whose ancestors lived a largely nomadic existence, and those who identify as part of a coastal tribe depending on their geographic location (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2021). It is estimated that, of a population of just over 10 million, expatriates comprise 88.5%

of the total population (GMI, 2022). Consequently, a private education sector has grown offering an extensive range of curricula mostly in line with the country of origin of the expatriate population. For example, Kippels and Ridge (2019) noted that out of 194 private schools in the Emirate of Dubai, 17 different curricula were offered with students taught in the language of their home country. A small proportion of Emirati citizens attend private schools, approximately 16% (OECD, 2020). In contrast, the public education system comprises predominantly Emirati citizens with about 20% non-nationals who are distinguished in Arabic, English and Maths (Gallagher, 2019).

As the UAE's federal government has strengthened, the MOE has evolved greater oversight of public and private schools. This includes developing national policies for public schools and licensing, accrediting, inspecting, and providing guidance on areas such as inclusive education to private schools across the country. Each Emirate continues to have its own local government which can result in slight differences in policy and practice across the Emirates. These differences reflect competing priorities and demands of expatriate and Emirati populations.

Most teachers in the UAE are not nationals with 36% of teachers in public schools being Emirati citizens compared with 0.3% in private schools (Gallagher, 2019). In 2018, of 1,219 schools in the UAE, 52% (639) were public and 48% (580) private. However, 793,295 students (73%) were taught in private schools compared with 287,725 (27%) in public schools (MOE, 2018). With the MOE and the Emirates School Establishment (ESE) overseeing education and teacher professional development in public and private schools across the country (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2022), any examination of inclusive education policy and practice needs to consider both sectors and consider the implications of culturally and linguistically diverse students within both sectors.

The development of inclusive education policies in the UAE

Improving access and quality of education in the UAE underpin policy developments in the country. These policy developments seek to address United Nations (UN) sustainable development goals and in particular goal 4.5 'to ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable including persons with disabilities' (UNESCO, 2016: 21). They have been accelerated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2016) and OECD initiatives (OECD, 2020).

The first law to be issued in the UAE to protect the rights of people with disabilities was Federal Law No 29 (MSA, 2006). This followed the UN adopting the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD, 2006). From an educational perspective, the Federal Law No 29 led to the provision of special classrooms for children with disabilities (Arif & Gaad, 2008). Greater practical steps by the UAE government to support the gradual inclusion of students of determination into mainstream classrooms came in 2010 with the launch of the

School for All initiative and the publication of general rules for special educational needs provision in public and private schools (MOE, 2010). The rules set out the roles and responsibilities of schools for enabling inclusive education and the wider governmental support available. The definition of inclusive education applied was ‘all students have the right to be educated to the extent possible with their age-appropriate peers who do not necessarily have disabilities in the general education setting of their neighbourhood school with support provided’ (MOE, 2010: 14). The *School for All* initiative was piloted initially in 110 public schools (Lewis & Shaheen, 2010) and it promoted five strands: 1) Staff training and development for schools including inclusion training for subject teachers and more specialist training for a dedicated special education teacher; 2) The modification of school structures such as the processes for assessment and referral to support student placement, the physical adaptation of the learning environment to enable student access, the development of individual education plans and a review of how these can be met through materials, teaching methods and assessment; 3) Access to support services including speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and educational psychologists; 4) The provision of assistive technology to support the different needs of students in schools; and 5) The encouragement of community awareness programmes including schools initiating greater engagement with parents and awareness campaigns about different aspects of inclusive education (Alborno, 2017; Alborno & Gaad, 2014). The most recent policy developments and strategic plans (MOCD, 2017; MOE, 2017) have intensified federal support for these strands and inclusive education more broadly. Researching whether and how these policy developments are embedding into practice with a culturally responsive lens has the potential to identify and/or refine culturally-appropriate approaches to strengthen quality inclusive education provision in the country.

Research about inclusive education in the UAE

Research focusing on teacher attitudes towards inclusive education in the UAE acknowledges the important role of culture in determining attitudes teachers may hold towards inclusive education and meeting the needs of students of determination (Dukmak, 2013; Gaad, 2004; Gaad & Khan, 2007). However, this role is rarely expanded upon and is noted as a limitation to studies (Dukmak, 2013). There is a need for closer scrutiny of the role of culture and language, particularly in relation to inclusive education practice.

The research on inclusive education practice in the UAE reveals that attitudes towards the concept of inclusion both by teachers and in the community are shifting and growing more positive (Alborno, 2017; Alborno & Gaad, 2014; Anati, 2012; Badr, 2019; Khaleel et al., 2021). This shift suggests that awareness raising and training as part of the *School for All* initiative are helping to move perspectives on disability away from a stigmatised medical model to one that has the potential to be enabled by society, in both public and private schools (Alborno, 2017; Alghazo & Gaad, 2004; Gaad, 2011). However, it was noted that relationships with families did vary depending on educational and cultural background with less involvement from

mothers who do not speak Arabic (Alborno, 2017). Practical challenges of inclusive education were also highlighted, particularly in terms of how to modify and adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of students of determination (Alborno & Gaad, 2014; Sheikh, 2018). These studies call for training that includes practical examples based on the UAE curriculum and culture (Alborno, 2017) but do not expand further on the interface between culture and inclusion. Given the cultural and linguistic diversity of teachers and students in UAE schools, these points suggest a need for wider interrogation of whether and how teachers take cultural and linguistic diversity into account in their inclusive teaching practice with students of determination to understand what practice is already in place and identify more precisely areas for training and development.

Cultural and linguistic diversity and inclusive education

Cultural and linguistic diversity can be explored in different ways. One way of thinking about it is by focusing on culturally responsive practice (CRP) which stems from multi-cultural education and is rooted in the belief that:

The best quality education for ethnically diverse students is as much *culturally responsive as it is developmentally appropriate*, which means using their cultural orientations, background experiences, and ethnic identities as conduits to facilitate their teaching and learning. (Gay, 2002:614, emphasis in original)

As in inclusive education practice, CRP is about equity of education and involves teachers examining their own beliefs, values and behaviours that help or hinder the process of student learning; integrating cross-cultural materials into curriculum and instruction; designing culturally and linguistically relevant classroom environments and modifying instruction and assessment to meet the needs of diverse learning styles (Gay, 2002; Utley et al., 2011). CRP requires reflexivity by teachers to be able to integrate a student's cultural background with meeting their learning needs to strengthen relevance and bridge the home/school environment. It also means being able to distinguish between culturally based behaviours and a special educational need and use this information to make informed decisions about approaches to teaching and assessment. It is in the United States (US) where a focus on defining and measuring CRP came to the fore, and this is for three reasons. First, research from the US suggests that there are a disproportionate number of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experiencing academic failure and within special education or receiving special education services (Artiles et al., 2005; Sciuchetti, 2017). Secondly, research from this US context suggests teacher-based factors that negatively impact students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds include lack of diversity in the teaching force; self-efficacy, deficit-thinking and bias; and teacher preparation and training (Sciuchetti, 2017). Thirdly, there is an increasing body of research which suggests that teachers who successfully implement

CRP improve the academic progress and outcomes of their students (Bui & Fagan, 2013; Dee & Penner, 2017). Given the cultural and linguistic diversity in the UAE in both teacher and student populations; evidence of disproportionate representation of cultural and linguistic diversity receiving special educational support in other cultural contexts (including global South contexts) (Kalyanpur, 2020); and the growing evidence base for CRP in promoting inclusive education (Green & Stormont, 2018), this study seeks to examine CRP in UAE mainstream classrooms from teacher perspectives and consider how they accommodate students of determination from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Research about culturally responsive practices

CRP has been best explored using measures of teacher self-efficacy. These measures derive from Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy where self-efficacy involves an evaluation of one's own ability to successfully carry out a behaviour to produce an outcome (Chu & Garcia, 2021). Teachers who report self-efficacy in CRP regard CRP as best practice in promoting their students' learning. There is a growing body of research that suggests that students make greater academic progress when their teachers use CRP and incorporate the diversity of their students' cultural and linguistic background into their learning (Bui & Fagan, 2013; Dee & Penner, 2017). In the UAE, there is emerging research on teacher perceptions of cultural diversity in UAE classrooms. A qualitative research study involving group and individual interviews with nine teachers working in public and private schools in the UAE across school cycles (ages 4 to 18) found that teachers are aware of diversity within Emirati culture; diversity within language used by schools from Emirati dialects of Arabic to classical Arabic and English; diversity of race and ethnicity; and diversity as result of socio-economic status (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2021). These research findings are important in highlighting the complexity of cultural diversity in the UAE but also teachers' understanding of this complexity and importance of recognising such diversity at an individual student level. The most recent Teaching And Learning International Survey (TALIS) gives an initial insight into teacher perspectives on teaching in multicultural and multi-lingual classrooms in the UAE (OECD, 2020). Teachers in the UAE report higher self-efficacy around diversity related practices than teachers in other countries that participated in TALIS (OECD, 2022). Approximately 90% of the teachers felt they could cope with the challenges of a multi-cultural classroom; adapt their teaching to the cultural diversity of students; ensure students with and without a migrant background work together; raise awareness of cultural differences amongst students and reduce ethnic stereotyping amongst students. There is potential to build on this research by focusing on CRP and their specific use in relation to students of determination across public and private schools in the UAE.

This research will contribute to knowledge about the use of CRP in four ways. First, this research will add to understanding about how mainstream teachers from across primary and secondary sectors actually use CRP in their school. Existing studies with teachers have focused

on how confident mainstream teachers feel about CRP practices (Chu, 2022; Cruz et al., 2020) rather than how often they use them. Secondly, this research will enable consideration of whether there is a difference between actual use of CRP by this sample of mainstream teachers and confidence in use of CRP by teachers in mainstream settings (Cruz et al., 2020); trainee teachers (Siwatu, 2007, 2011), pre-school teachers (Chu, 2022) and teachers in special education settings (Chu & Garcia, 2014). Thirdly, this research will add to understanding about the CRP practices of mainstream teachers with students of determination where prior studies with mainstream teachers have considered their practices generally (Cruz et al., 2020). Fourthly, this research will give insight into the use of CRP in a different country context from prior studies which have taken place in the US (Chu & Garcia, 2014; Cruz et al., 2020; Siwatu, 2007, 2011) and Taiwan (Chu, 2022). This research will capture specific cultural nuances of CRP in the UAE as well as enable a perspective on whether strengths and weaknesses in CRP practices are consistent across country contexts. These insights are important not only for ascertaining whether there are differences in teacher self-efficacy in different country contexts but also for reflecting on the relevance and applicability of CRP in a global South context such as the UAE and its value in relation to inclusive education practice.

The current study

This preliminary study provides an initial examination into CRP with students of determination in the UAE by trialling the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy (CRTSE) scale (Chu & Garcia, 2014). The CRTSE scale was devised in the US and the researchers were cognisant that a scale devised in a global North country may not be sensitive to cultural nuances in a global South country. Hence, part of the purpose of the preliminary study was to ascertain how sensitive and useful the CRTSE scale is in a different country context, particularly a global South context. It was hoped that the CRTSE would add value in capturing the extent to which teachers culturally adapt their practices with students of determination in this culturally and linguistically diverse context as well as provide a framework for the group and individual interviews. The research sought to answer the following questions:

1. Is there evidence that teachers in the UAE are using CRP with their students of determination?
2. What are areas of strength and weakness in how teachers in the UAE are using CRP?
3. How useful is the CRTSE scale as a tool for benchmarking CRP and informing areas of development in inclusive education in the UAE?

Methods

This preliminary study was carried out within a pragmatic paradigm. It employed mixed methods with data collected through a survey and group and individual interviews, and then

analysed using descriptive statistics and a systematic qualitative analysis. The study forms part of a joint collaboration between UAE University and IOE, UCL’s Faculty of Education and Society to comprehensively examine inclusive education practices in the UAE. In the collaboration, UAE University has taken the lead on local knowledge and data collection which includes contextualising items, and the group and individual interview questions within the UAE educational landscape. IOE, UCL’s Faculty of Education and Society has taken the lead on data analysis and interpretation. This has enabled the team together to critically discuss and reflect on inclusive practice from both international and local perspectives. The study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Review Board at UAE University, Al Ain, UAE (ERS_2020_7233).

Participants

Participants included teachers from public and private mainstream schools within the Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. 24 participants took part in a survey and 14 went on to participate in group and individual interviews (see Tables 1 and 5). Participants were recruited through a teacher-training institute in the UAE. They were briefed about the research prior to participating in the survey and group and individual interviews and given assurance that their answers would be anonymised and not used for appraisal purposes. Demographic information collected established that most participants were female; half were currently teaching students of determination and only one third had received training in special educational needs in the past year.

Table 1: Demographic information of survey participants

Demographic information	Number
Gender	
Female	18
Male	6
Currently teaching students of determination	
No	12
Yes	12
Training in special needs in past year	
No	16
Yes	8

Measures

The Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy (CRTSE) scale (Chu & Garcia, 2014) was used to form an online survey and structure group and individual interviews. The CRTSE is a 20-item scale determining teachers' reflections on their self-efficacy in using CRP when working with students of determination coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It was based on an earlier validated scale (Siwatu, 2007) that was honed to focus on students with special educational needs and the roles and responsibilities of teachers of students with special educational needs. The new scale was piloted for internal validity and has been used with teachers in the US and Taiwan suggesting applicability in different cultural contexts (Chu, 2022; Chu & Garcia, 2014). For this study, items 2, 6, 10, 15 were modified to include Arabic, which is the medium of instruction in public schools in the UAE, while English as a second language is emphasised (See Table 2).

Table 2: The Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale (CRTSE)

<p>Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale</p> <p>I am able to ...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. modify instructional activities and materials to meet the developmental needs and learning interests of my students with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds2. design appropriate instruction that is matched to Arabic/English language learners' language proficiency and special needs3. create a learning environment that reflects the various backgrounds of my CLD students4. develop appropriate individual education plans for my students with disabilities who are from CLD backgrounds5. use my students' prior knowledge related to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds to help make learning meaningful6. use various types of assessment that is matched to Arabic/English language learners' language proficiency and special needs7. critically examine the curriculum to determine whether it appropriately represents CLD groups8. identify the differences between student behaviour/communication at home and student behaviour / communication at school9. use a variety of teaching methods to assist my students in learning the content10. communicate with students with disabilities who are Arabic/English Language Learners11. identify cultural differences when communicating with parents regarding their child's educational progress12. implement interventions that minimize the effects of cultural mismatch between home and school
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13. distinguish linguistic/cultural differences from learning difficulties for students with disabilities
14. create a caring, supportive, and warm learning environment for my students from CLD backgrounds
15. assist my students to be successful by supporting the native language of my students with disabilities who have limited Arabic/English proficiency.
16. structure parent-teacher conferences (e.g., IEP meetings) that are comfortable to allow CLD parents to participate
17. identify the ways standardized tests may be biased against students from diverse backgrounds
18. build positive relationships with CLD parents
19. help my students develop positive interactions with each other
20. obtain information about my students' preferred learning styles (e.g., cooperation or individual work)

Survey

An online survey was emailed to 24 participants. The survey consisted of demographic questions and statements from the CRTSE. The demographic questions asked participants to report their gender; whether they currently teach students of determination and whether they had received training in special educational needs in the past year. The statements from the CRTSE were designed to elicit information about teachers regarding the frequency of their use of CRP practices with students of determination. E.g. I am able to create a learning environment that reflects the various backgrounds of my CLD students. Participants were asked to respond using a four-part Likert scale of Never, Sometimes, Often, Always and an option of 'not applicable' was employed. Given the small size of the preliminary study, data were analysed descriptively across the scale to give an overview of how participants were responding across this scale and then by item to look at strengths and weaknesses (see Table 3). The internal consistency was tested using Cronbach's alpha and scored 0.99 demonstrating a high level of internal consistency. Items were grouped by mean scores into quartiles to examine general patterns in strengths and weaknesses in CRP within the sample (see Table 4).

Group and individual interviews

Group and individual interviews were chosen as the preferred approach for interviews to stimulate discussion and enable a breadth of perspectives (Robson & McCartan, 2015). They would also allow for interrogation of differences in school processes and individual practices. The group and individual interviews used a semi-structured interview schedule to ensure consistency across interviews and facilitate analysis. Participants were asked about cultural and linguistic diversity in their school's student population and the cultural adaptations they make to their teaching practice. They were then asked to give specific examples from their own

practice to illustrate the influence of cultural and linguistic diversity on students of determination and adaptations they make as a result. There was scope for participants to expand on their experiences and perspectives. This provided an opportunity to add cultural context to the CRTSE but more importantly it enabled a much-needed deeper understanding of the everyday reality of inclusive education in the UAE specifically and the Arab world more broadly (Alkhateeb et al., 2016; Dukmak, 2013).

Participants for the group and individual interviews included 14 teachers from the Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai spanning the three school cycles (ages 4 to 18). Almost two thirds of teachers worked in private schools with one third coming from public schools. The sample reflected the ethnic diversity of the teaching workforce in the UAE with a small number coming from the UAE and the majority from the wider Middle East and the United Kingdom (UK).

Table 5: Demographic information of group and individual interview participants

Participant number	Country of origin	Type of school	Emirate
1	Jordan	Private	Dubai
2	Oman	Public	Abu Dhabi
3	Jordan	Private	Abu Dhabi
4	UAE	Public	Abu Dhabi
5	Egypt	Private	Dubai
6	UAE	Public	Abu Dhabi
7	UK	Private	Dubai
8	UK	Private	Dubai
9	UK	Private	Dubai
10	UK	Private	Dubai
11	India	Private	Dubai
12	Jordan	Public	Abu Dhabi
13	UK	Private	Dubai
14	Syria	Public	Abu Dhabi

The group and individual interviews were organised around participant availability. Seven group and individual interviews were carried out and, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, they were conducted online using Zoom. One group interview involved three participants; five involved two participants and one involved one participant. To reflect the main language of instruction in teacher training organisations and the schools of participating teachers, the researchers chose to lead the interviews in English. However, doctoral students who have worked extensively in schools in the UAE served as cultural and linguistic translators to support with English/Arabic cultural nuances. Each interview took between 60 and 90 minutes and the entire session was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The researchers used Glaser’s systematic approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to analyse the interview transcripts. First, the accuracy of the transcripts was checked by the research team. Secondly, each transcript was openly coded for key words or phrases. Thirdly, codes were collated under themes. Fourthly, the researchers reviewed the appropriateness of each theme and their supporting codes and quotes. Fifthly, the researchers synthesised the survey and interview data by reviewing the themes against both items in the CRTSE and the research questions. This process enabled the researchers to determine where the interviews provided a greater insight into and examples of CRP and where there were additional perspectives or gaps. The trustworthiness of the qualitative findings was strengthened through peer debriefing and triangulation of responses. Peer debriefing involved discussing key points and emerging themes both after each interview and once all the interview data had been analysed. Triangulation included corroborating data from different participants.

Findings

Data revealed that teachers are using CRP with students of determination (M=3.35; R=1.65-3) as shown in Table 4. Mean scores ranged from 2.74 to 3.68. Most item means were clustered above 3, with standard deviations ranging from 0.51 to 1.05. Upper and lower quartile items are displayed in Table 4.

Table 3: Descriptive results from the CRTSE

Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale	M	SD
I am able to ...		
1. modify instructional activities and materials to meet the developmental needs and learning interests of my students with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds	3.11	0.57
2. design appropriate instruction that is matched to Arabic/English language learners’ language proficiency and special needs	2.89	0.94
3. create a learning environment that reflects the various backgrounds of my CLD students	3.37	0.60
4. develop appropriate individual education plans for my students with disabilities who are from CLD backgrounds	3.32	0.58
5. use my students’ prior knowledge related to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds to help make learning meaningful	3.26	0.56
6. use various types of assessment that is matched to Arabic/English language learners’ language proficiency and special needs	3.00	0.67
7. critically examine the curriculum to determine whether it appropriately represents CLD groups	2.79	0.86

8. identify the differences between student behaviour/communication at home and student behaviour / communication at school	3.21	0.79
9. use a variety of teaching methods to assist my students in learning the content	3.58	0.61
10. communicate with students with disabilities who are Arabic/English Language Learners	3.26	0.93
11. identify cultural differences when communicating with parents regarding their child's educational progress	3.26	0.87
12. implement interventions that minimize the effects of cultural mismatch between home and school	3.11	0.94
13. distinguish linguistic/cultural differences from learning difficulties for students with disabilities	3.21	0.63
14. create a caring, supportive, and warm learning environment for my students from CLD backgrounds	3.68	0.58
15. assist my students to be successful by supporting the native language of my students with disabilities who have limited Arabic/English proficiency.	2.74	1.05
16. structure parent-teacher conferences (e.g., IEP meetings) that are comfortable to allow CLD parents to participate	3.05	1.03
17. identify the ways standardized tests may be biased against students from diverse backgrounds	3.32	0.67
18. build positive relationships with CLD parents	3.58	0.51
19. help my students develop positive interactions with each other	3.63	0.60
20. obtain information about my students' preferred learning styles (e.g., cooperation or individual work)	3.53	0.70

Table 4: Upper and lower quartile responses of the CRTSE

<p><i>Upper quartile</i></p> <p>14. create a caring, supportive, and warm learning environment for my students from CLD backgrounds</p> <p>19. help my students develop positive interactions with each other</p> <p>9. use a variety of teaching methods to assist my students in learning the content</p> <p>18. build positive relationships with CLD parents</p> <p><i>Lower quartile</i></p> <p>6. use various types of assessment that is matched to Arabic/English language learners' language proficiency and special needs</p>

2. design appropriate instruction that is matched to Arabic/English language learners' language proficiency and special needs
7. critically examine the curriculum to determine whether it appropriately represents CLD groups
15. assist my students to be successful by supporting the native language of my students with disabilities who have limited Arabic/English proficiency.

The items with the highest mean scores were in areas that focused on creating an enabling learning environment and developing positive relationships. Teachers' highest rating related to their perceived ability to create a caring, supporting and warm learning environment for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds ($M = 3.68$; $SD = 0.58$) and helping students develop positive interactions with each other ($M = 3.63$; $SD = 0.60$). Additionally, building positive relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse parents ($M = 3.58$; $SD = 0.51$) and using a variety of teaching methods to assist students in learning the content ($M = 3.58$; $SD = 0.61$) scored highly.

The group and individual interviews reflected teacher awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity in their schools.

I haven't personally experienced any prejudices, on that basis, in fact, I find our teachers to be very supporting and understanding of cultural variation and being very sensitive to it. (P11)

Cultural and linguistic diversity expressed itself differently in public schools compared with private schools with teachers from public schools referring to the need for cultural sensitivity in relation to different tribes whereas teachers in private schools acknowledged catering for '*children from all over the world*' (P1). This finding reflects awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity within the Emirati population and the need for teachers to have sensitivity to tribal affiliations.

Across both sectors, there was a positive response to the Government's mandate to change the terminology to individuals 'of determination'. This was regarded as a particularly important move, not so much for themselves as teachers, but for the wider culture and society as it has '*shed more light about the abilities*' (P3), '*they're not children who can't do things; it's more children who do things differently*' (P7) and is '*more meaningful ... giving them power*' (P4) and showing that they can be '*productive people in the future*' (P14). Teachers recognised the importance of good relationships with parents in meeting students' needs and noted that they '*can only make the needed impact when we get the parents on board*' (P9). However, some teachers raised the challenge of not sharing the native language of parents which could result in a practical issue of not being able to communicate effectively with parents about their child's needs:

Like if their parents are from another country and they don't know English or only have broken Arabic, it can be very hard to talk about the specific needs of a student. (P6)

It also potentially opened the door to cultural insensitivities. Teachers tried to overcome these challenges by drawing on staff who share or speak the language of the child in question:

When there are parents here who do not speak the same language, the teachers are very supportive, and they bring in another teacher who speaks the language so that the communication is made more effective. (P11)

The lowest mean score related directly to this point with teachers reporting least frequency in assisting students to be successful by supporting the native language of students with disabilities who have limited Arabic/English proficiency ($M = 2.74$; $SD = 1.05$). Other low scoring areas related to critically examining the curriculum for appropriateness ($M = 2.79$; $SD = 0.86$), designing appropriate instruction ($M = 2.89$; $SD = 0.94$) and using various types of assessment ($M = 3.00$; $SD = 0.67$) to meet the linguistic and learning needs of students of determination from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

English/Arabic language proficiency of the student and levels of cultural understanding on the part of the teacher add complexity to the challenge of modifying and adapting the curriculum and assessment to the needs of students of determination. This point was developed in the group and individual interviews. With the curriculum being delivered in either English or Arabic, it was sometimes challenging to ascertain whether students had learning difficulties or language difficulties and it is not uncommon for students to be placed in special classes to catch up on language while teachers tried to understand the root of the difficulty:

You know ... it's accelerated because of English being an additional language. So first, we try to figure out which one of it that is. We speak to parents to see how the child is in speaking the native language ... so we make sure that we are you know, cutting out what it is not. (P11)

However, teachers were cognisant of the need for teachers to be 'culturally aware' (P13) and this may include having some cultural orientation so that they know what is and is not appropriate in different cultures:

We have some western teachers and when they come to the way to teach the students, they needed some introduction orientation to know the culture of the students, how to deal with them, what is appropriate, what is inappropriate when they talk to them. (P12)

Discussion

Is there evidence that teachers in the UAE are using CRP with their students of determination?

This is the first study to look at CRP with students of determination in the UAE and one of the first to look at CRP in a culturally diverse context in the global South. Findings from this study suggest that these participant teachers from the UAE are aware of cultural and linguistic diversity in their schools both within the Emirati population and the expatriate population. To some extent, this finding may be expected given the culturally and linguistically diverse teaching force and student body. However, the cross-cultural diversity did not preclude an understanding of cultural diversity within the Emirati population. This is particularly important and reinforces findings from an earlier study which highlighted the need to challenge the conception of homogeneity in UAE schools (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2021). The findings suggest that teachers in this sample are using CRP with their students of determination. Variations in responses suggest areas of strength and weakness.

What are areas of strength and weakness in how teachers in the UAE are using CRP?

The use of the CRTSE revealed strengths and weaknesses in how teachers are using CRP and the group and individual interviews provided specific contextual nuances. Findings from the descriptive statistics revealed the highest mean scores in areas that involved creating an enabling environment, building positive relationships, and using a variety of teaching methods to assist students in learning the content. This is encouraging because it is widely acknowledged that positive relationships between teachers and students; teachers and parents; and students and peers are important features of both inclusive education and CRP (Booth et al., 2002; Florian & Spratt, 2013; Gay, 2002; Pinto et al., 2019). These higher scoring items are consistent with research from the US with trainee teachers and mainstream teachers suggesting that perhaps these are more straightforward aspects of CRP that are crucial to any good teaching practice around the world (Chu & Garcia, 2021; Cruz et al., 2020; Siwatu, 2011). The consistency in higher scoring items also suggests correlation between reports of teacher confidence in practice and their actual practice. It is clear from the group and individual interviews, however, that teachers need to find ways to bridge cultural and language barriers with parents so that student needs can be fully understood enabling strategies to meet them that are culturally relevant and can be reinforced at home as well as at school.

The lowest mean scores related to items that involved specific cultural and linguistic knowledge such as assisting students to be successful by supporting the native language of students of determination and critically examining the curriculum, designing instruction and using various types of assessment to ensure they are culturally appropriate and appropriate to the linguistic and learning needs of students. The item about native language and expansion on this point in the interviews suggests teachers can sometimes confuse a student's second

language ability and learning ability. This confusion is not uncommon (Case & Taylor, 2005; Kalyanpur, 2020; Mukhopadhyay & Sriprakash, 2011) but the implications can be serious because a child can ‘get labelled because they perform at a lower level than students who come to school knowing English, not because they have a disability’ (Kalyanpur, 2020:302) and therefore not receive relevant support to meet their needs. It is important for teachers to be given strategies, including support with native language communication and communication with parents, to mitigate this issue. In fact, in another study in the UAE (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2021: 11) there are teachers who claim that ‘non-Emirati parents were responsible for the inability of the non-Arabic speaking students to adjust to the curriculum, or their being labelled as a student with special needs’.

Points suggesting less frequency in modifying the curriculum, instruction and assessment reflect prior research on inclusive education in the UAE (Alborno, 2017; Alborno & Gaad, 2014; Anati, 2012; Badr, 2019). These patterns are concerning because these are key features that enable typical learners to achieve in the classroom so a lack of improvement may be widening the achievement gap for students of determination, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. However, these areas are also consistent with research from the US with trainee teachers (Siwatu, 2011) and mainstream teachers (Chu & Garcia, 2021; Cruz et al., 2020) suggesting these aspects of CRP are more difficult skills in which to gain competence and need targeted training and development. Siwatu (2011) suggests that the approach is consistent with Bandura’s theorising on self-efficacy and factors that may influence its formation (Bandura, 1997). Within this theory, competence is most effectively achieved through opportunities for teachers to observe competent teachers using these practices; to reflect on observations; and then to practise using the new skills in order to embed them into their own practice. For training to be effective in the UAE, it needs to use practical examples from the country that reflects the country’s cultural and linguistic diversity in different school contexts as well as the curriculum and assessment in place. This means that teachers need to understand both ‘within culture’ diversity as well as ‘cultural diversity’ and critically reflect on the implications this can have for teaching students of determination. Meaningful training and development may involve having the opportunity both to learn vicariously through observation of teachers in culturally different school contexts and then to master those skills through practice and reflection on that practice. This is important to develop ‘critical consciousness’ (Ladson-Billings, 1995:162). If this approach is adopted, it may enable teachers to see more readily what CRP practices can look like and how they can incorporate them into their own practice and develop them.

How useful is the CRTSE scale as a tool for benchmarking culturally responsive teaching practices and informing areas of development in inclusive education in the UAE?

This study suggests that teachers are using CRP and the CRTSE tool enables teachers to report the frequency with which they use specific CRP. This reporting allows item-by-item reflection

which can facilitate ‘fine-tuning efforts’ (Siwatu, 2007:1097). Along with contextual information provided through the group and individual interviews, specific areas of CRP can be identified for improvement through training and development which has the potential to enhance teachers’ use of CRP and as a result, to increase learning opportunities for all students. Indeed, the extant literature suggests that teacher exposure to training and experience of CRP increases their efficacy in using it (Whitaker & Valtierra, 2018). Demographic data from this study suggests limited exposure to continual professional development in special education with only one third of participants reporting attending training in the past year. Although there is scope to explore specifically the extent and nature of CRP training in pre-service and continual professional development training in the UAE, this study suggests the need to deliver culturally specific training on CRP, particularly in relation to students of determination. This is important because inconsistent access to learning about CRP can leave teachers feeling unprepared (Fiedler et al., 2008; Griner & Stewart, 2013) and studies that have used the CRTSE suggest higher self-efficacy following access to good quality training (Chu & Garcia, 2014).

This preliminary study shows the utility in using the CRTSE in a different cultural context from where it was devised and suggests that teachers in that context can engage with it as a scale and to stimulate group and individual interviews. The study shows the potential of using the scale as a benchmarking tool that can be used again to assess both the effectiveness of future teacher training professional development efforts (Debnam et al., 2015) and, in time, the impact on students in terms of their experience, outcomes and achievement.

The CRTSE is a tool devised in the US and there are general concerns about the universal applicability of global North concepts and tools to the global South as well as specific concerns about the UAE borrowing from the global reform movement rather than devising its own policies for educational development (Matsumoto, 2019). These concerns echo comparable concerns about discourse on inclusive education continuing ‘to be fabricated in the global North and transferred to the global South, with little or no alertness to context or culture’ (Grech, 2014:130). However, given the cultural diversity in the UAE and the UAE’s clear commitment to inclusive education, this tool has value precisely because it is alert to context and culture. The tool grounds inclusive education to the cultural context to ensure teaching approaches are appropriate for culturally and linguistically diverse students in that context. As such, the tool accompanied with group and individual interviews has the potential to help interrogate cultural responsiveness and enable future directions ‘to take into account the unique cultural realities and needs of the country’ (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2022: 55) as part of a global future. Indeed, this tool has highlighted the need for teachers to use the native language of their students and to use CRP to ensure the relevance of their practice for students they teach. Reflecting on this point in professional development may help UAE to accommodate ‘the progressive and traditional aspects of its citizenry’ (Matsumoto, 2019: 20).

Limitations

It is recognised that this is a preliminary study with a small sample of 24 survey participants of which 14 took part in more detailed group and individual interviews. As a result, the findings may not be representative of the broader population of teachers in the UAE. The small sample limits closer interrogation of differences demography may have on CRP. In a country with such a culturally and linguistically diverse teaching force, it will be important in the main study to interrogate whether there are correlations between teachers of different backgrounds and CRP (Siwatu, 2007). This will not only enable targeted training but also ascertain whether correlations seen in other parts of the world are mirrored in the UAE. For example, whether in the UAE context there is also a positive correlation between linguistically diverse teachers and CRP self-efficacy as has been found in previous studies (Chu & Garcia, 2014).

Demographic information has also raised questions that require more refined analysis in the larger study about differences in CRP between public and private schools and the prevalence and scope of training. These will need to be explored more fully to understand them and draw out implications.

The researchers are aware that the language of the data collection measures was English and, although interpreters took part in the group and individual interviews and enabled segues into Arabic, it is unclear whether an Arabic option for the survey and interview may have enabled more authentic responses from participants for whom English is a second language.

The group and individual interviews provided a valuable insight into the nature of cultural and linguistic diversity in UAE schools and gave context-specific illustrations of CRP and particular nuances about cultural sensitivities. There was scope in the interviews to interrogate more closely the meaning and importance of CRP for teachers in terms of driving inclusive practice, and the interaction between culturally and linguistically diverse students and students of determination. Focusing discussion around items on the scale and asking participants to provide examples based on these items may have provided greater specificity into where teachers feel they need to develop their learning in CRP.

Conclusion

This is the first study from the UAE to interrogate CRP with students of determination and it responds to Gay's call that 'more research is needed about different groups of students and domains for learning both within and among nations' (Gay, 2015: 136). The study provides valuable evidence that teachers are aware of the dynamics of cultural and linguistic diversity in their classrooms, seek to create an enabling environment, develop positive relationships, and use a variety of teaching approaches to support students of determination in their learning. However, the study reveals that teachers need more practical, culturally relevant support to

help them differentiate the curriculum, instruction and assessment to meet the linguistic and learning needs of students of determination. The study suggests the wider value of using an evidence-based scale to benchmark CRP with students of determination and shows that it can help to identify specific areas for training and development. It also highlights the value of using the scale alongside group and individual interviews. The interviews capture ‘subtle contextual differences and characteristics’ (Kamenopoulou, 2018a: 135) about the role of culture and language in enabling inclusive practice that the scale cannot capture. It is these insights that are essential in ensuring training and development of inclusive education is culturally engaged, relevant and sustainable.

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