

Teaching English in Culturally Diverse Classrooms: Using the ARCS Model

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Abstract: *In an increasingly globalized world, educators face the challenge of teaching in classrooms that encompass a wide range of cultural backgrounds. This study explores the experiences, strategies, and challenges of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers working with culturally diverse students, highlighting the importance of intercultural competence and inclusive teaching methods. Utilizing qualitative data from interviews with four experienced ESL academics, the research examines how educators integrate cultural sensitivity into their classrooms and apply the ARCS Model—Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction—to maintain student engagement and foster a supportive learning environment. The findings reveal that successful teaching in multicultural settings goes beyond language instruction; it requires empathy, cultural awareness, and a flexible approach to address diverse learning styles and classroom dynamics. Despite challenges such as differing communication styles and cultural misunderstandings, educators use adaptive strategies, including group work, cultural presentations, and individual support, to create an atmosphere of respect and inclusivity. This study concludes with recommendations to enhance multicultural competence in ESL education, advocating for ongoing professional development and culturally relevant teaching practices. By embracing these strategies, ESL educators can empower students from varied backgrounds to achieve both linguistic proficiency and personal growth in a globalized educational landscape.*

Keywords: Culturally Diverse Classrooms, Intercultural Competence, English as a Second Language (ESL), ARCS Model, Cultural Sensitivity in Education, Inclusive Teaching Strategies

1. Introduction

In today's increasingly diverse classrooms, researchers have studied ways to make teaching and learning effective across different cultures. Key concepts they've explored include intercultural communication skills, cultural awareness, and sensitivity. The main idea is that teachers who work with multicultural students need to understand and appreciate the unique values and customs of each culture to create positive and responsive learning experiences (Carrasquillo, 1994). This study focuses on the experiences of four teachers, examining how they adapt their strategies to meet the needs of culturally diverse students. Without an understanding and acceptance of cultural differences, effective teaching in a multicultural setting is challenging (Carrasquillo, 1994). Educators who embrace cultural learning help their students achieve academic and language growth (Ruiters & Dang, 2005).

Along with language skills, language classes can foster positive attitudes toward other cultures. Byram (1990) highlights how such classes contribute to students' social growth by introducing them to different cultural perspectives. This has led researchers to shift from focusing solely on language skills to promoting intercultural communication. Aguilar (2001) suggests integrating multicultural topics into language classes, which are as essential as teaching grammar or pronunciation, as they can boost students' motivation to learn and connect with others. According to Carrasquillo (1994), such activities promote pride in students' heritage, a sense of connection through collaborative work, and confidence to face bias or discrimination.

Creating a supportive and respectful environment for students of all backgrounds is key to effective language learning. As Reynolds (2015) notes, "affective awareness" – being mindful of emotions – is vital because stress and anxiety can block language learning. Educators should focus on creating a safe space where students feel comfortable participating without fear of judgment or embarrassment. When students feel respected, they are more likely to be confident and engaged in learning.

In a welcoming, inclusive classroom, students can adjust more easily to new educational and cultural settings. Coelho (2004) outlines four stages of this adjustment: arrival, culture shock, recovery, and eventual adaptation. At first, students may feel excited, but this can soon give way to discomfort as they face communication barriers. As they build language and coping skills, they start to feel more at ease, make friends from other backgrounds, and, over time, integrate into their new environment, balancing the values of both their home and host cultures.

John Keller's ARCS model, which is often applied in e-learning, emphasizes the importance of keeping students motivated. ARCS stands for Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. It's crucial to grab students' attention and show the real-world importance of the content. Building confidence by helping students anticipate success and feel satisfied with their achievements keeps them motivated and engaged throughout their learning.

Objectives of this Study

- 1) a. To examine the academics' experiences in teaching culturally diverse classrooms.
b. To examine the academics' experiences in teaching culturally diverse classrooms.
- 2) To find out the extent to which teaching strategies the academics cater the needs of students of diverse culture based on ARCS Model.

Research Questions

- 1) a. What experiences do the academics have in teaching culturally diverse classrooms?
b. How do the academics elucidate their responsiveness towards students of diverse culture?
- 2) To what extent does the teaching strategies the academics cater the needs of students of diverse culture based on ARCS Model?

2. Literature Review

Learning Motivation

The term "motivation" comes from the Latin verb "movere," which means "to move." It describes the reasons behind human actions, desires, and needs, or why people want to engage in or repeat certain behaviours (Elliot & Covington, 2001). Motivation generally involves two core elements: internal drive and external inducements. In learning, motivation is the driving

force that encourages students to engage in and prioritize their studies. This motivation reflects societal and educational expectations placed on students to learn and succeed.

Historically, Gardner and Lambert's 1970s idea of "instrumental" and "integrative" motivation was widely accepted. However, as globalization has evolved, there is now a greater emphasis on motivation as a dynamic process. Motivation has become essential in fields like language learning, where achieving fluency can be challenging without a strong internal drive (Mardid, 2002). Educational psychologists such as Brown (2007) and Dörnyei (2005) have studied motivation's role from various perspectives, identifying three main roles in learning: (1) generating a desire to learn, (2) clarifying goal orientation, and (3) sustaining learning behaviours. Each of these creates a cycle that helps learners engage deeply with their studies.

Models analysing learning motivation generally focus on students' cognitive characteristics, sometimes viewing motivation as a fixed trait. However, the ARCS model developed by Keller (1987, 2010) broadens this view. It emphasizes strategies, classroom applications, and academic responsibilities, creating a more holistic approach to understanding and enhancing student motivation.

Academics' Understanding of Multiculturalism

Research has explored how academics perceive multiculturalism and use strategies to create inclusive classrooms. Academics play a vital role in educating students of all backgrounds, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or religion, though biases may still exist (Gollnick & Chinn, 1991). Studies, such as Gay's (1994), show that instructors sometimes view their values and beliefs as standard, often unknowingly dismissing cultural and linguistic differences that shape students' experiences. Without understanding students' diverse backgrounds, classrooms can unintentionally become uncomfortable or alienating, affecting students' sense of belonging and academic performance (Winch-Dummet, 2005).

As Costa (1997) emphasizes, effective teaching in multicultural classrooms depends on the preparation and attitudes of academics. Pena (1997) found that many educators lack sufficient training in multicultural education, and even though academics recognize this, few prioritize such training (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Research by Fueyo and Bechtol (1999) noted that educators with negative views about minority students may overlook cultural assets such as bilingualism, which can affect instructional practices and assessments. Gorski (2000) and Nelson (2001) argue that effective multicultural education requires academics to regularly examine their biases to create equitable learning environments.

Theoretical Framework: John Keller's ARCS Model of Motivational Design

The ARCS model, created by John Keller in 1979, focuses on building and maintaining student motivation through four components: Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. This framework is particularly helpful in online education, where motivating students is often more challenging than in traditional classrooms.

- 1) Attention: To capture students' attention, educators can use strategies like surprising elements, engaging questions, or hands-on activities. Approaches such as using humor, storytelling, or varied methods like videos and discussions can help keep learners engaged.
- 2) Relevance: Making the material relevant to students' current and future lives enhances motivation. This can include connecting new content with prior knowledge, discussing its real-world applications, and allowing students choices in how they learn.

- 3) Confidence: To build confidence, students should feel capable of succeeding. Teachers can communicate clear goals, provide gradual challenges, and offer constructive feedback to foster a sense of achievement.
- 4) Satisfaction: Learning must feel rewarding, whether through practical application or positive feedback. This can come from intrinsic satisfaction, like personal enjoyment, or extrinsic rewards, such as recognition or praise.

Each ARCS component has detailed strategies, supporting educators in creating engaging and motivating experiences for students, particularly in multicultural and multilingual classrooms where motivation is often an added challenge. The evolving nature of the ARCS model makes it a valuable tool for enhancing student engagement in today's diverse educational environments.

3. Methodology

In this study, the researcher interviewed four respondents. Participant A is an English academic at Elec Language Centre and has been teaching international students for 2 years. Participant B is an English academic at UNITAR International University and has been teaching culturally diverse students (CDS) for 9 years. Meanwhile, Participant C is also an English academic at UniKL and has been teaching students of diverse culture for 3 years and Participant D is an English academic at IIUM and has the experience in teaching CDS for 31 years. The researcher decided to use a qualitative method in this study to obtain data and to answer research questions as well as to achieve the objectives. The qualitative method required us in-depth and further probing or questioning respondents' responses from the four ESL academics based on their experience in teaching culturally diverse classrooms using the ARCS Model. Two different states of selected universities were involved in this study that are in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. The researcher used a semi-structured interview to gather information and used purposive sampling method. Participant A, B, C, and D all have experiences in teaching culturally diverse students (CDS) for 2 years and above. Researchers contacted the participants via WhatsApp application or email to inform them of this study. Finally, the data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

In this study, the classroom emerges as a lively intersection of cultures, values, and language a place where learning English as a second language (ESL) becomes more than just acquiring linguistic skills; it becomes a journey of self-discovery and mutual respect. The participating educators, each bringing years of experience from culturally diverse classrooms, share their reflections on teaching, the strategies that work, and the unique dynamics of multicultural education.

Theme 1: The Cultural Dynamics of the Classroom

"The classroom is a tapestry," PA muses, "a blend of students from Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, each bringing something unique to the learning experience." For these educators, cultural diversity is a constant presence, enriching classroom dynamics with layers of complexity. PB, with nine years of experience teaching students from nations like Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Mongolia, describes the classroom as a place where educators must strive for openness. He notes, *"Respecting each student for who they are, without leaning toward stereotypes, is crucial in fostering a harmonious learning environment."*

In this setting, students not only learn English but also gain insights into each other's cultures, forging connections that transcend borders. Educators, by creating spaces where every student's cultural background is valued, help students feel seen and understood. This, as PB believes, transforms the classroom into a safe haven for open dialogue and respect.

Theme 2: Teaching Strategies Using the ARCS Model

Teaching in a multicultural classroom demands a strategy that keeps students engaged and motivated. The ARCS Model—focused on capturing Attention, ensuring Relevance, building Confidence, and delivering Satisfaction—is particularly effective for fostering a motivating environment. PA shares her approach, *"I like to create moments where students can bond, maybe through a class trip. It's amazing to see students from different cultures supporting each other in a new environment."*

This initiative, part of the ARCS "Attention" component, taps into the power of shared experience, making learning feel collaborative and interactive. PB emphasizes keeping discussions open, encouraging students to *"work out ideas that are culturally new to them."* This approach engages students' curiosity, allowing them to think critically and learn from one another's perspectives.

PD integrates a mix of group, pair, and individual work in her classes, believing that variety is key to keeping all students engaged. As she explains, *"The students love it when they can explore new platforms and resources—it's like opening new doors for them."* Such varied methods of interaction reflect the "Attention-variability" aspect of the ARCS Model, which helps sustain students' interest by making learning experiences dynamic and responsive.

Theme 3: Building Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity

A crucial element in teaching culturally diverse students is sensitivity to their unique backgrounds and identities. PD shares a powerful strategy: inviting students to present aspects of their heritage, from traditional foods to customs. She reflects, *"It's more than a language activity; it's a moment of pride for each student."* For many students, these presentations are not only educational but empowering, allowing them to share their cultural heritage with others, fostering a classroom environment built on mutual respect and curiosity.

Creating an emotionally safe atmosphere is also a priority for educators like PC, who says, *"I try to make students feel comfortable by understanding their backgrounds and by treating each of them with respect."* This approach, grounded in empathy, builds students' confidence and supports an inclusive environment where they can take risks without fear of judgment.

Theme 4: Overcoming Challenges in Culturally Diverse Classrooms

Every educator in this study faces challenges when teaching culturally diverse classrooms. For PA, managing diverse student behaviors is a constant balancing act: *"It's challenging to cater to students who are passive alongside those who are extremely vocal. The energy levels are so different."* Such contrasts can create tension, but PA uses activities that encourage students to work together, allowing them to see each other as allies rather than strangers.

Language can also be a barrier, especially when sensitive topics arise. PA notes, *"Sometimes students argue over beliefs or religion, and they fall back on their native languages."* These moments, while challenging, are opportunities for educators to guide students toward constructive dialogue, fostering an atmosphere where differences are acknowledged but handled with care.

PC finds that students sometimes struggle to adapt to Malaysian classroom norms, making it challenging to bridge differences in learning styles. PD shares similar sentiments, adding, *“I remind myself constantly to never assume anything. Each student has unique needs.”* This attentiveness to individual student challenges shows a deep commitment to understanding and adapting to the multicultural classroom landscape.

Theme 5: Insights and Recommendations for Future Educators

The educators in this study offer invaluable advice for future teachers venturing into culturally diverse classrooms. PA encourages new teachers to *“keep their minds and hearts open. When you genuinely care about your students, they trust you.”* Building relationships based on empathy not only boosts students’ confidence but also makes them more willing to participate actively in their learning journey.

PB adds that *“being open to new ideas is essential.”* For him, cultural diversity in the classroom is an opportunity for both students and teachers to broaden their perspectives, making each day in the classroom a learning experience for everyone involved. PC advises, *“Always be prepared. When you know your material and your students, they sense your confidence, and it makes a world of difference.”*

PD’s advice, *“enjoy teaching and never stop discovering new methods,”* captures the spirit of lifelong learning. Her words emphasize that teaching in culturally diverse classrooms requires continuous adaptation, a willingness to learn, and a passion for connecting with students from all walks of life.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the experiences, challenges, and strategies of English language educators in culturally diverse classrooms, with a focus on understanding how intercultural sensitivity and responsive teaching can enhance students’ learning experiences. Each educator, teaching in varied multicultural settings, emphasizes that fostering an inclusive, culturally aware environment is essential for effective language learning. By leveraging the ARCS Model—emphasizing Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction—teachers creatively engage students from different cultural backgrounds, helping them feel valued and motivated to participate actively in the classroom. The findings reveal that successful teaching in a multicultural classroom extends beyond language instruction; it requires a deep understanding of students’ cultural identities and an empathetic approach that respects diverse perspectives. Educators use varied strategies, such as facilitating student presentations on cultural heritage, integrating group activities, and creating safe spaces for expression, to build trust and openness. However, challenges remain, particularly in balancing different learning styles, addressing sensitive topics, and managing classroom dynamics influenced by cultural differences. Ultimately, this study underscores the transformative potential of culturally inclusive teaching in ESL education. It shows that educators who embrace diversity not only improve language proficiency but also prepare students to navigate and appreciate a multicultural world.

Recommendations

The findings from this study highlight that teaching in culturally diverse classrooms is a unique challenge that requires educators to adopt sensitive and inclusive approaches. In light of the insights gathered, several recommendations can help ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers navigate the complexities of multicultural education while fostering an environment that values and uplifts every student. Firstly, developing cultural awareness and sensitivity is

crucial. Educators who actively learn about their students' backgrounds and traditions are better equipped to connect with them on a meaningful level. This can be achieved by integrating activities like cultural presentations, which allow students to share their heritage with peers. Such initiatives not only promote cultural pride but also help create a sense of unity and respect within the classroom. Additionally, training programs on cultural sensitivity would benefit ESL teachers, enabling them to recognize and address any biases they may unconsciously bring into the classroom. This foundational understanding is essential for creating an inclusive learning space where all students feel respected.

The ARCS Model, encompassing Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction is another powerful tool recommended for use in culturally diverse settings. By implementing varied teaching methods and culturally relevant materials, educators can sustain students' engagement and motivation. Activities that resonate with students' personal experiences and cultural identities help make learning feel relevant to their lives, thereby bridging the gap between classroom content and the real world. Moreover, teachers can foster confidence by providing students with opportunities for success and satisfaction, which, in turn, builds a more engaged and proactive classroom environment. Creating an emotionally safe and inclusive atmosphere is equally vital. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds may face unique anxieties and pressures, especially if they are adjusting to a new educational system. Teachers are encouraged to treat all students equally and to cultivate an environment that invites open, respectful dialogue. By making students feel secure and valued, educators lay the groundwork for genuine participation and expression. Individual support, such as one-on-one consultations, can further assist students who may struggle to adapt, providing them with tailored guidance and reassurance.

Recognizing and adapting to the diverse learning styles present in a multicultural classroom is another essential practice. Students from different cultural backgrounds often bring distinct communication styles, attitudes, and classroom behaviors, all of which can influence their learning experiences. Teachers who remain flexible in their methods—using mixed group work, personal feedback, and differentiated instruction—are better able to accommodate these variations. Such adaptability not only aids students in achieving academic success but also promotes a sense of inclusion and understanding among classmates. Lastly, a commitment to lifelong learning and openness is essential for educators working in diverse classrooms. Teaching in these settings is an ongoing journey, and educators who embrace curiosity and flexibility can enhance their effectiveness. Schools and educational institutions should support this continual growth by providing resources, training sessions, and platforms for teachers to share experiences and best practices. When teachers approach multicultural education with a mindset of discovery, they not only enrich their students' learning but also grow as educators and individuals.

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