

Culturally responsive classrooms: African American male student perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the process of conducting and evaluating a medium-sized Midwestern school district of African American male third graders' academic achievement and their teachers using culturally relevant pedagogy. The evaluation was developed from a pre-test and post-test data analysis to a mixed-method sequential explanatory evaluation. Culturally relevant pedagogy is operationally defined as a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students' unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about their place in the cultural world. This study examined the unique contexts of literacy programs utilized by teachers in African American males' classrooms and other students of diverse backgrounds. The results demonstrated that African American males exhibited greater self-identification when employing culturally relevant pedagogy in a conducive and supportive learning environment. This series not only enabled teachers to diversify students' exposure to cultural literature but also increased the students' literacy scores for elementary readers by focusing on the reading and writing success of diverse students. This program targets key areas of reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and writing in kindergarten through second-grade students. In addition, this study also contributes to our understanding of the challenges that young African American males face in the academic classroom.

Keywords: *Academic performance, African American males, Culturally relevant pedagogy, Culturally responsive pedagogy, Educators, Literacy.*

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Highlights of this paper

- This paper examines culturally relevant pedagogy using culturally responsive literacy with young African American males and their teachers in the academic classroom.
- In addition, this study examines the teachers' sensitivity to using culturally responsive literacy and their willingness to participate in diverse learning methods.
- Students discovered greater interest and relevance in the learning material, which contributed to increased participation, a sense of belonging, and higher performance outcomes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers are faced with the opportunity and privilege of educating students of diverse backgrounds and cultures. Most teachers in the United States are Caucasian, while approximately 50% of students attending public schools are racially or ethnically diverse. These students are also increasingly more likely to come from backgrounds of low-income households (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). The educational achievement gap between white middle-class teachers and teachers of other ethnic groups raises questions about whether these teachers have the training needed to instruct students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Levine, 2006). Long (2017) mentioned the achievement gap is evidenced in students' grades, standardized test scores, and dropout rates. Likewise, the achievement gap is most often used to describe the troubling performance of schools in educating non-white students. Shultz, Neyhart, and Reck (1996) noted that white pre-service teachers are naïve and have stereotypical beliefs about inner-city children. These beliefs are brought into the classroom and often interfere with student learning.

Although meeting the academic and emotional needs of children can be a challenge, teachers are responsible for providing culturally responsive pedagogy. This is complicated because many pre-service teachers are not certain about their ability to teach African American males (Long, 2017). Researchers, Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) noted that teachers are exhibiting funds of knowledge when they perform these tasks. These researchers define Funds of Knowledge as skills and knowledge that have been historically and culturally developed to enable an individual to function within a given culture. The teachers are competent and knowledgeable, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge.

There is an abundance of literature that addresses the lack of preparation of teachers in culturally relevant pedagogy. Teacher educational programs, that lack an instructional emphasis on the cultural differences of students of diverse backgrounds, often hinder progress for African American students (Long, 2017). Available literature focuses on the rich language that attracts the reader's attention such as similes or connotations, urban teaching, and multicultural education by providing research in which teachers successfully engage African American males, in intermediate grades, in the literacy process (Long, 2017). Kirkland (2013) identified black literacy of African American males as a "social memory and cultural ideology" (p. 146-147). Kirkland noted that Black male literacy is sometimes disguised in a unidimensional manner given the position that we attempt to view all African American males through the same lens. Observing the literacy practices of teachers, who use culturally responsive pedagogy contrasted with ways in which African American males perceive culturally responsive pedagogy, will add to the literature. Also, local and state school districts and teacher educational preparation programs can receive relevant information essential to their instructional outcomes.

Tatum (2007) mentioned the literacy needs of adolescent African American males when he stated, "If we fail to address the literacy needs of these young men, we will have more destabilized communities and a weakening of democracy because of a lack of participation in this segment of society" (p. 40). However, he mentioned these young black males experience many problems that are associated with socioeconomic, survival in high-risk neighborhoods, scarcity or lack of male role models, and a lack of culturally competent pedagogy and directions along with being

negatively stereotyped in and out of school. Although these young black males are exposed to these types of factors there are some solutions to help achieve positive outcomes, for example, [Toldson \(2008\)](#) revealed that high-achieving Black male students are from families with adequate financial resources. Teachers can provide culturally responsive literacy that connects student experiences, appropriate reading materials and of interest to children, and be positive role models to these young black males. In addition, [Wright \(2019\)](#) states that instructors should include the “history and me” perspective within the social studies curriculum, which will allow these young black boys to have value and develop a healthy sense of self. On the other hand, [Morenoff and Lynch \(2004\)](#) mentioned that neighborhood affects local context that influences health and well-being of individuals, in a way that cannot be reduced to the properties. Therefore, students from low economic status backgrounds may face more negative circumstances, such as poor nutrition, insufficient housing, or lack of finances that affect their academic learning.

Besides the Black Males' economic condition and literacy needs, teacher preparation is very important, because personal and professional beliefs guide teachers. Although the quality of learning they foster in the classroom is influenced by their background, language, and experiences; teachers also have the unique opportunity to immerse themselves in the unique characteristics and the learning needs those students often display. The educational system has developed an unspoken framework for acceptable literacy and is often based on the dominant cultural way of doing and knowing ([Willis, 1995](#)). This study examined the perceptual effects of culturally responsive pedagogy on African American Male students' academic achievement and examined the perceptions of teachers' use of culturally responsive pedagogy. Using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy that allows these young black boys to see others who look like them in the texts will allow them to mirror themselves, their families, and communities and positively engage with the texts and other students in the classroom as noted by [Wright \(2019\)](#).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy focuses on the notion that every student is entitled to learn, and this can be achieved when teachers adapt classrooms with instructional resources that are relevant to African American Male students, and their lives. Several researchers [Ladson-Billings \(1994\)](#); [Irvine \(1990\)](#) and [Gay \(2000\)](#) refer to cultural relevance as teaching to the diverse needs of students using cultural artifacts, language, cognitive and linguistic contexts, along with ethnic references that are familiar to children of color. Similarly, [Gay \(2000\)](#) suggested that culturally responsive teachers, not only realize the importance of academic achievement, but also the need to maintain students' cultural identity and heritage. [Ladson-Billings \(1992\)](#) mentioned “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by utilizing cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes.” However, the conventional method, in which teachers meet the literacy needs of students, has worked well for some learners and teachers but not for others. Therefore, [Gay \(2000\)](#) a proponent of culturally responsive teaching, claimed that conventional paradigms for improving the achievement of students of color are doomed to fail, due to some negative orientations possessed by some teachers. In addition, researcher [Ladson-Billings \(2019\)](#) mentions that students should have the opportunity to explore problems that affect them rather than instructors creating their own programs in the classrooms. Although she discusses the three components of Culturally Relevant teaching, she further explains that “teachers should allow students to draw on their own environments, languages, histories, customs, and experiences to gain fluency and the ability to learn from other cultures.” In addition, [Levine \(2019\)](#) purport that it is the collective environmental factors (i.e., family, school, and community) that shape and influence their thoughts and behaviors. Even after 30 years, our black children are still under taught and so much of these children's time is spent

dealing with monitoring their bodies, for example, “sit here,” “keep your mouth close,” or “put your hands there” and very little time is spent teaching them to be intellectually prepared as mentioned by [Ladson-Billings \(2022\)](#).

Students bring a wealth of knowledge with them to the classroom. Therefore, when they discuss texts and have the support of their teachers, they will be more motivated to read and participate in the lesson ([Long, 2017](#)). Similarly, [Tatum \(2011\)](#) stated, “When literature-based curriculums are discussed in a caring, supportive, and cognitively challenging learning environment, these texts can provide students with the capital they need to survive in environments in which they were previously vulnerable.” In addition to literature-based curriculums, learning about how literacy is conceptualized by African American males historically can help shape literacy practices and increase African American male engagement in reading and writing ([Tatum & Gue, 2010](#)). Although [Tatum \(2011\)](#) explains how literature base curriculums can help young black males survive in certain situations; conversely, [Jeynes \(2024\)](#) mentioned that the educational process should consist of a solutions-based approach where children are challenged to use literacy and engage their life experiences to reach multiple conclusions while in pursuit of their academic objectives. Parental involvement is beneficial to students as it can assist with homework. In addition, it is beneficial to parents as they adjust their working schedules to increase their student’s academic outcomes ([Levine, 2019](#)).

[Ford, Moore III, and Milner \(2004\)](#) suggested that stereotypes about African American males stop instructors from viewing the strengths of African American males. Teachers may mistakenly view the behaviors of African American students as problem behaviors and racially inferior behaviors that can result in negative school experiences. Negative thinking influences their behavior and their expectations. For example, African American students are angry, resentful, or aggressive when they must follow the conventional ways of behaving in classroom settings, it’s very unlikely that teachers will recommend gifted and talented programs or other programs. On the other hand, the inclusion of culture as a part of teachers’ instructional practices gives hope for academic success for African American students’ cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles in a manner that makes learning more appropriate and effective.

According to [Ladson-Billings \(1992\)](#) culturally responsive pedagogy is predicated on three criteria. The first criterion mentioned, students must develop their academic skills and the way those skills are developed will vary, but all students need literacy as well as social and political skills to participate in democracy. Therefore, ‘culturally relevant teaching requires that teachers attend to their student’s academic needs not merely make the students “feel good.” The second criterion explains that students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence (p. 160). Culturally responsive pedagogy requires students to maintain cultural integrity and academic excellence. African American males run the risk of being shunned or labeled as “Acting White,” where African American students are shunned by their peers for demonstrating interest and succeeding academically ([Long, 2017](#)). [Ladson-Billings \(1992\)](#) describes the third criterion for culturally responsive pedagogy that students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo (p. 160). Schools should be preparing their students for active citizenship with the ability to critically examine society ([Long, 2017](#)).

2.2. Culturally Responsive Literacy and African American Male’s Cultural Knowledge

[Mallinson, Charity Hudley, Strickling, and Figa \(2011\)](#) argue that when students are provided with literacy-based curriculums that allow them to experience learning in a manner that reflects the home or family environment as well as standardized curriculums, students will develop their linguistic versatility. [Klingner et al. \(2005\)](#) explain that culturally responsive educational systems are grounded in the beliefs that all culturally and linguistically diverse students can excel in academic endeavors when their culture, language, heritage, and experiences are valued and used

to facilitate their learning and development. This is especially the case when they are provided access to high-quality teachers, programs, and resources.

The purpose of culturally responsive pedagogy in literacy instruction is to help children become literate in a more holistic manner. African American males who see themselves in the texts that they read are more likely to experience positive identity development earlier than African American males who do not have these experiences (Tatum, 2005). In addition to seeing themselves in the texts, African American males whose interest is sparked will be more stimulated to do their best in content areas for example, subjects like reading. Although, Ladson-Billings (1998) contends that the curriculum used in public elementary and secondary schools maintains a white predominant way known as storytelling, the researcher also contends that African Americans are muted and erased when they challenge dominant cultural authority and power; therefore, black students may feel like they are failures. However, storytelling is helpful to many economic people of color because it gives them a sense of power without diminishing their experiences. In addition to storytelling, African American students as mentioned by Tatum (2008) asserted that pedagogy practices needed to change “beyond a cognitive focus to include a social, cultural, political, or economic focus.” Researchers Ladson-Billings (1998) and Tatum (2005) suggested that the teacher’s approaches were the reason that students failed as opposed to labeling students negatively. These students need to learn how to create their own knowledge and then apply it to real-world situations to obtain a deeper understanding of the environment around them. To improve the education system for all students, we must address the learning environment in classrooms and schools; the skills of teachers and the quality of instruction provided to students; the specific learning and support strategies that are employed; and the support systems in place outside of the classroom (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Purpose of the Study

Given that the literature is replete with research that indicates that young African American males continue to face challenges when it comes to education and healthy identity development, especially during the early years of school and community engagement, literacy, and the classroom environment continue to be instrumental towards their development. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of literacy in the effective use of Culturally Responsive Literacy with young African American males.

3.2. Data Collection

Data was collected using a mixed-method Sequential Explanatory design which utilized a two-phase method of data collection. The first step is the quantitative phase which includes collecting and analyzing quantitative data. The second step is the qualitative phase which includes collecting and analyzing qualitative data (Creswell, 2014). This mixed-method design was utilized to examine the impact of 3rd-grade teachers’ perceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy and its use in classrooms with African American males. This method was used to illustrate in greater detail how African American young black males’ scores increased by using the Harcourt (2013) series that included Culturally Relevant Literacy that young black males could relate to in the texts.

3.3. Trustworthiness

Triangulation, the researcher used teachers’ surveys, teacher and student interview data, and I-Ready vocabulary assessments to triangulate the data collected. The researcher used the data sources to support the analysis of the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy on African American males and their teachers. The examiner looked within the documents to substantiate the themes found in the data (Merriam, 2009).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Teachers

Nine out of 16 third-grade teachers volunteered to participate in the study. Eight of the nine teachers participated in the survey while all nine participated in audio-taped interviews. All the teacher participants were white and female, and all had taught for more than a year in the school district. Finally, all the teachers had master's degrees except for one teacher who had a Ph.D. in Education. The teachers all lived in the school district. In addition to the teachers, there were African American male students. The target population was comprised of 47 3rd-grade African American male students: ages 8 to 9 years old. All the student participants had attended in-district schools for at least one year. Student participants signed an assent form agreeing to the interview and the audio recording.

Their teachers administered and collected the pre-and post-test vocabulary of the students. The intervention used was [Harcourt \(2013\)](#) series. Quantitative data was collected to assess the effect of the Journey's basal series on the vocabulary of 3rd-grade African American males using an I-READY assessment. The vocabulary test was analyzed by the school district, and participating students' scores were given to me by the Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator. The pre-test was administered between August (20213) to October 2013, and the post-test was administered between March (2014) to May 2014. The school district wanted to determine if this new [Harcourt \(2013\)](#) would affect students' vocabulary scores since it was implemented for the first time. The [Harcourt \(2013\)](#) reading series is more structured and wanted to reflect a more culturally diverse curriculum as suggested by the Curriculum Coordinator. Students who use this basal series could connect with the stories and characters. The [Ready \(2013\)](#) test was used to assess students' vocabulary achievement. Teachers were administered a survey designed for the teachers [Harcourt \(2013\)](#) the 3rd grade African American male students to gather their perceptions of using the basal series during literacy instruction. Surveys were distributed to teachers at five elementary schools by their building administrators and returned to the researcher upon completion. The survey contained 20 questions. As stated above, eight teachers completed the survey. The researcher used quantitative research methods to collect and analyze teachers' survey responses. This was the first year that the [Harcourt \(2013\)](#) series was implemented in the school district and the previous years did not see culturally responsive pedagogy being used as part of the district's reading series.

4.2. Instrumentation

The study covered interviews and quantitative data from four areas:

- a. The teachers of third-grade African American young black males.
- b. How teachers responded to the surveys.
- c. How African American young males responded to the interview questions.
- d. African American young black males' literacy scores pre-and post-test scores.

4.3. Quantitative Data

The survey data was collected from the teachers prior to the interview process. The Surveys were completed and returned in a specified envelope to the principal's office. This proved to be an efficient means of data collection. The survey consisted of demographic information, overall views of the use of culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom, and perceived obstacles to improving culturally responsive pedagogy. Teacher participation was voluntary. After teachers filled out the surveys, they returned the surveys to the principal's office. The researcher was contacted by the principals to pick them up. In addition to the teachers' surveys, the [Ready \(2013\)](#) test was used to assess students' vocabulary achievement. The school district utilized the K-12 adaptive diagnostic to pinpoint

students' needs at the sub-skill level and provide ongoing progress monitoring to show whether students were on track to achieve the end-of-year targets.

Upon examination of the survey results, the results revealed that teachers felt that they did not have enough time to prepare for culturally related activities. All the teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that African American males had meaningful experiences in their classrooms, indicating that the teachers perceived themselves as incorporating culturally diverse activities in their lesson plans to support African American male students (See Table 1 Teachers' responses). In addition, the means were analyzed from high too low to show the relative importance of integrating cultural diversity in their classrooms (see Table 2 Teachers' mean).

The Teacher's responses. Third-grade African American male participants were examined. Participants had at least one year of continuous enrollment in this school district from the fall of 2013 to the spring of 2014. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software program was used to analyze the pre-and post-test vocabulary scores. In addition, African American males were tested using the Ready (2013) for pre-and post-test data. The results were a p-value of $0.000325 \leq \text{Alpha level}$ so the results are statistically significant, as post-test values are significantly higher than the pre-test results.

The difference in pre-and post-test means indicates student growth. The t-test results showed a significant difference between the pre-and post-test ($t = -.366$, $df = 45$, $p < .001$). Cohen's d was calculated to determine the effect size. The effect size was large (1.22). As a result, the data indicate that African American male students' vocabulary scores were higher after the post-test, which suggests that significant gains had been made (See Table 3).

4.4. Qualitative Data

Research questions were designed using open-ended questions to avoid a yes or no response. Teachers were asked a variety of questions about their perceptions and use of culturally responsive pedagogy. Interviews were conducted purposefully keeping the study's objectives in mind. According to Patton (2002) the researcher should use words that make sense to the interviewee and words that reflect the respondent's world view will improve the quality of data obtained during the interviews. Interviews were conducted as a follow-up to the survey.

Table 1. Teachers' responses to culturally responsive pedagogy.

Question #	Research question	Mean score
Question 1	Culturally responsive pedagogy is needed for problem-solving.	4.25
Question 2	Cultural relevant pedagogy increases self-confidence in African American males.	4.25
Question 3	If teachers think that improving the use of culturally responsive pedagogy in classrooms is essential for the quality of life and the occupational skills of African American males.	4.38
Question 4	Improving the use of culturally responsive pedagogy in classrooms has not been established as a high priority in schools.	2.75
Question 5	Pre-service training of teachers does not emphasize culturally relevant pedagogy.	2.63
Question 6	It is important to integrate culturally relevant pedagogy into the reading curriculum.	4.63
Question 7	In general, teachers lack the knowledge of what constitutes culturally relevant pedagogy.	2.50
Question 8	There is no need to spend time integrating culturally responsive pedagogy into literacy lessons.	1.63
Question 9	In-service training programs do not focus on improving culturally responsive pedagogy.	3.38
Question 10	Academic Achievement tests focused more on general academic knowledge than culturally responsive literacy.	4.25
Question 11	Teachers do not have enough time to prepare activities for culturally responsive pedagogy.	2.25

Question #	Research question	Mean score
Question 12	Teachers find it difficult to assess culturally responsive pedagogy.	2.00
Question 13	Teachers should provide thinking activities that reflect diversity in their lesson plans.	4.00
Question 14	The basal reading series stresses facts and concepts.	3.13
Question 15	It is difficult to assess students' work using culturally responsive pedagogy.	2.13
Question 16	The classroom environment does not help students of diversity with culturally responsive pedagogy.	1.88
Question 17	Current literature used in African American males' classrooms lacks diversity in texts and topic choices.	2.00
Question 18	As an instructor, your lesson plans ensure that African American boys have meaningful experiences in your classroom	4.50
Question 19	As an instructor, you use activities to try and connect cultural diversity from home to school.	4.25
Question 20	Teachers in Midwest schools are trained to deal with African American males' motivation	2.50

Table 2. Teachers' means from high to low represent the importance of integrating cultural diversity into their classrooms.

Mean	Q6	Q19	Q8	Q16
High	4.67	4.63	1.67	1.88
Low	4.63	4.56	1.63	1.78

Table 3. Pre-and post-test of African American males' literacy scores.

Pre/Post-test	Mean	SD	No. of AA	T (Effect)	Df	Sig.	D
Pre	476.15	42.73	47	-	45	0.001	1.22
Post	501.70	42.61	47	-3.366	45	0.0001	1.22

According to Merriam (2009) participants were asked a variety of questions about their experiences, opinions, questions, and values about their feelings. In addition, several researchers Merriam (2009) and DeMarrais (2004) define an interview “as a process in which a researcher and the participants engage in a conversation focused on the research questions related to a research study.” Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes (See Table 4).

4.5. African American Males Interview

Nineteenth 3rd-grade African American males gained knowledge about the use of culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. Student participants were asked a series of open-ended questions to avoid yes or no responses. Student interviews lasted about 15 minutes each. The participants' participation was based on the return of parent consent forms. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to allow participants to respond more freely. Student interviews were conducted on different days and at various times. These dates and times were determined by the school district (See Table 4).

4.6. Interview Question Themes African American Male Responses

Six questions were developed and presented to these students after parents consented and students assented. Six open-ended interview questions were developed to gather the perceptions of 3rd-grade African American males' use of culturally responsive literacy in the classroom.

Table 4. Teacher preliminary themes teachers' perception of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Interview question	Themes	Teachers' responses
Question 1:	Culturally responsive literacy to teachers	Diversity in the culture of the students; Students experience all cultures; The basal reader is diverse; different types of literacy; Literacy means the same thing to every student
Question 2:	Comfort level teaching Culturally Responsive Literacy	Very comfortable teaching African American males; Treat all equally; Hit every race and current lifestyle; Expose children to different cultures naturally; Very comfortable; Comfortable; like teaching other cultures
Question 3:	Flexibility using Culturally Responsive Literacy	Freedom to pull in more resources; Connect and compare the world; Can expand on what teachers are doing; Flexible to expand; Relate it to their culture; Very flexible; incorporates other resources; not flexible tells you what to teach (Scripted)
Question 4:	Integrate students' cultural perspectives	Religion teaches tolerance; acceptance and awareness; call upon their background; Is Open to all cultures; Bring new perspective; Inclusion; Very important to expose and build upon; They need to feel important; Feel a part of the classroom
Question 5:	Students of color see themselves in literacy	Seeing someone that looks like them is important; Relate literature to them for them to be successful; Relate literature to their own personality; Read stories they can relate to; People who look like them; Relate stories
Question 6:	Building on AA academic knowledge	Use literacy to relate to what they know, need, and want; relate to prior knowledge; Connect what children know to what they need to know; Things that pique their interest; Favorite sports; Motivated and excited about present literature
Question 7:	Collaborate with AA families	Team effort: Need relationships for the child to grow; Want better relationships with families; Kids are kids no difference; Discussing topics; Have them discuss CRL with families, call parents
Question 8:	Importance of culturally responsive literacy AA male learning	Vocabulary is weak; Needs continuous exposure; Grow up and change culture; Children hear it, see it, and won't remember it; Very important; Cooperate, groups
Question 9:	Challenges of culturally responsive literacy reader	Journeys have everything; Writing proves to be challenging; Journeys were overwhelming; Students struggle with it; No challenges; Love journey; Important black history month; A lot of information to sift through
Question 10:	Reading strategies	Make personal connections; extensive vocabulary; Teachers are co-learners; Teachers learn through teaching; Create an environment that does not conflict with anyone; Talk about backgrounds; Lots of questions and answers
Question 11:	Students of color are free to express themselves	Students don't see one dominating culture; The classroom is warm and caring find time for what AA students want; Let them choose how they respond to a story; Students get books of their choice; Allow for discussion; Expose them to as much as possible;

The researcher interviewed 19 study participants one by one in designated areas assigned by their teachers or the principals in the school district. The responses were audiotaped, and field notes were written during the interviews. Field notes were typed and organized by the researcher and by their corresponding school and classrooms.

A document analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted to search for related themes. The data was analyzed by listening to the audio recording of the student’s responses (See Table 5).

5. FINDINGS

The pre-test scores were on the curriculum that did not include the new basal reading series that incorporated certain aspects of diversity. In addition to teachers’ instructional responses, teachers’ surveys were analyzed, and the means were discussed and analyzed. Overall, the data from teachers’ responses described the perception of the use of culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms. Data was gathered through interviews with 3rd-grade teachers and African American male students regarding their perceptions of the use of culturally responsive pedagogy. The researcher discussed themes discovered in the interview data and presented a summary of the findings. These themes described what participants perceived to be relevant to their classroom experiences using culturally responsive literacy. In addition, to African American male interviews, nine teachers’ perceptions of the use of culturally responsive literacy use in their classrooms were evaluated. The value of incorporating diverse cultural perspectives and practices in their teaching; challenges when teaching outside of their cultures; and important considerations when working with students of color were also viewed.

Table 5. African American males’ preliminary themes.

Interview question	Themes	AA male student responses
Question 1a:	Reading present	Read different things; Chapter books; Mini pictures; Can learn from stories; Likes when teachers read to them; I’m in the book; Black people; climb mountains and build tents; Reading books now, Journey books, smaller books, words are bigger, people look like us-black and white, Chinese people, every story gets harder; Stories we can learn about, black people, black and light-skinned people, feel like I’m in the book; More pictures, read better
Question 1b:	Feelings about reading	Feel good (4); Happy (3); Nervous (2); Little excited (2); Sad; Cool pics, not many pics
Question 2:	Reade difference	More information; Saw more pictures; saw more serious pictures; saw different colors of people; people climbing mountains; Harder than last year, people climbing mountains, Clifford the dog, magnets middle connect; Some black and some white people (2)
Question 3:	Classroom reading time	Free time, reading or writing and dancing, spelling letters and moving to them, reading spelling words, talking, getting up to change books, read along or with a partner; Helped me learn; learn more from informational books; the classroom is quiet; figure out big words; Free time, read or write and dance, spell letters and move to it, read spelling words, talking, get up to change books, read along or with a partner; Quiet (2), teacher helps, bad kids go to the back of the room, read quietly to myself, read a Goosebump book; Quiet, follow words with a finger
Question 4:	Teacher help	Follow teacher’s directions; Word pronunciation; Helps with words when stuck; Correct students; sounds 55 out words; Prompts to words; Helps with hard words, tell us what to do, helps sound out words, find a letter I know, and points out each letter, sounds out letters; Helps with my questions
Question 5:	Feelings about school	Happy; helps you get a job when you grow up; important to learn math, reading, and science; Feel great about school; Happy, fun (5), Awesome (3), excited, free to learn, special classes-P.E., and music great, fun, happy, like to learn, free recess; Pretty good
Question 6:	Books AA male-like	Picture books; Chapter books; Comics like spiderman; Batman; motorcycles; And race cars; Animal (2), 39 clues, Diary of Wimpy kid (2) Captain underpants, fiction and nonfiction; Picture books; chapter books; Comics like; Chapter books, Judy Moody, Spongebob, superman, Karate, Charlotte Webb, Chapter books, sad books spiderman; Batman; Motorcycles; And race cars; Clifford, fiction, chapter books

This study explored the perceptions of instructors who teach young African American (AA), male students, using a Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and African American males’ perceptions of the use of CRP in their classrooms.

The students described how the [Harcourt \(2013\)](#) contained diversity in the passages they read; their witnessed account of people of color in the pictures who looked like them; students read about new and unusual places that they had never visited (i.e., such as Mt. Everest). The students shared some of their favorite genres and characters regarding the stories they read. They found the basal series to be more informational; the series contained chapters whereas the previous series did not; pictures were in color rather than black and white, and the series contained pictures of animals that they had not seen in real life. The series incorporated topics of interest to the students, and the use of discussion helped them engage with the literature in meaningful ways. For example, children read about families from China, consume rice at mealtimes, and engage in discussions about the similarities of their routines regarding chores and schoolwork. In addition, nine teachers were very vocal regarding the use of culturally responsive pedagogy. Some teachers recognized that the culturally responsive pedagogy required greater efforts to get to know their students and student needs as this is often a precursor to providing students with a more comprehensive learning environment. Many teacher responses often bordered on the defensive side; for example, teachers' use of the word "all" was repeatedly stressed, indicating a color-blind or post-racial assumption and limited knowledge of the premises that undergird culturally responsive pedagogy. Teaching strategies shown to be effective include student choices, discussions, making connections, and cooperative grouping. The teachers made a good-faith effort to expose students to different experiences through stories from different backgrounds, which encouraged students' interest in reading.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the importance of this study was to address how young African American male students and their teachers perceive the use of culturally responsive pedagogy. Throughout the researcher's conversations with students and teachers, the goal was to uncover how both students and teachers perceived literacy utilization in the classroom and perceived by the participants throughout the study. Student participants' perceptions of the reading series were positive, and they gave examples of how seeing people who looked like them helped them to see themselves in the texts.

The teachers embraced the notion of a culturally responsive pedagogy but encountered difficulty adopting a culturally responsive stance; some teachers defended an ideology of color blindness where they refused to "allow one race to dominate classroom discussions." They explained multiple ways they attempted to introduce ethnicity and culture in their classrooms; however, there was little evidence of consciously incorporating students' linguistic and cultural heritage beyond the basal into their classroom practices. This study recommends that teachers could better serve students by developing a deeper understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and how to use it with the students. Overall, this study reflects that while teachers have good intentions This is an ongoing concern that exists today for African American male students and other students of diverse backgrounds and is a lack of culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms in consort with an increasingly prevalent perception regarding African American male capabilities and behaviors. Many of our students possess literature in their homes and schools, but not all students read literature that is culturally relevant to them or even consider their funds of knowledge. The challenge for our educational system is to leverage the learning of culturally relevant pedagogy for students of diverse backgrounds while making their learning relevant and personalizing learning experiences to mirror their cultures and lives.

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