The Perceptions of Preservice Teachers on Culturally Responsive Teaching Through the Lens of Geneva Gay Framework

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand preservice teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching within a teacher preparation program, guided by Geneva Gay's Culturally Responsive Teaching Framework. The research questions examined the extent of preservice teachers' knowledge of cultural diversity, their ability to validate the cultural identities of diverse learners, and their implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the study allowed participants to express their views on their preparedness to be culturally responsive teachers based on their training. The study population consisted of full-time college students enrolled in a teacher preparation program, all of whom had some fieldwork experience. The findings indicated that teachers should establish culturally responsive learning environments that are inclusive and safe, which includes being aware of their biases and being culturally sensitive to diverse learners. Additionally, the study highlighted the need for teacher preparation programs to offer more inclusive teaching strategies and resources to ensure cultural sustainability as preservice teachers begin working with diverse student populations.

Keywords: culturally responsive teaching, full-time college students, inclusive.

INTRODUCTION

The demands for higher education institutions to adequately prepare preservice teachers for the workforce are steadily increasing (Acquah et al., 2020). In public education today, diversity efforts are increasingly expanding to ensure more ethnic curricula, recruitment of diverse faculty and staff, and a focus on creating more inclusive learning opportunities (Cells et al., 2023). Most school districts generally take a practical approach to consistently embrace diversity to support the academic success of all students. It can be incredibly challenging for preparation programs within higher education to supply preservice teachers with the skills needed to be successful (Gay, 2018). Academic success can be challenging for all students, regardless of gender, race, or socio-economic background. These obstacles are often more pronounced for students of color. As the population in schools becomes increasingly diverse, it is essential to explore new and creative strategies to support the academic success of students of color (Assari & Caldwell, 2018). Students of color may have different backgrounds, languages, dialects, experiences, and country of origin, which requires that they receive an education that meets their needs.

Racial and ethnic bias in education has a long history in the United States (White, 2021). Teachers contribute to these inequities because of a set of beliefs about teaching based on their prior experiences as students (Ladson-Billings, 2022). It is safe to believe that teacher preparation programs are essential in changing behaviors and beliefs. Studying preservice teacher beliefs, especially regarding students of color, is critical for teacher education reform. Many preservice teachers lack knowledge of diverse cultures, yet they enter classrooms expected to fully address the diverse learners' academic needs (Kinter-Duffy et al., 2019).

Preparing preservice teachers for culturally diverse classrooms has been essential for teacher education. Several accreditation boards have established mandates to ensure teacher programs embed various concepts into their curriculum (Chiu, 2017). The Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP) understand the importance of ensuring preservice teachers are adequately prepared to address the needs of all learners by training them to adhere to multiple viewpoints, deepen their understanding of diverse learners, and demonstrate respect for learners (Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019). However, effective communication and gaining awareness of their biases and ideas regarding race is critically important (Chiu, 2017). Several studies have indicated that many preservice teacher perceptions have been influenced by a lack of cultural knowledge and training on multicultural education (Chiu et al., 2017; Gay, 2018; Moore et al., 2021; Nganga, 2020).

Teacher preparation programs offer various approaches to educating preservice teachers for diverse students. Still, many must adequately prepare preservice teachers for the challenges they may face when providing a culturally responsive classroom. There are many methods that institutions employ to address diversity. Some examples include fully inclusive preparation program, while other institutions offer one-course requirements to assist preservice teachers in preparing for the diverse population of learners (Kennedy & Lopez, 2022).

Regardless of the approach used, preservice teachers must be ready to work with diverse learners (Banks, 2008; Bodur, 2016). Gorski & Parekh (2020) examined how college instructors taught multicultural education. Findings revealed college instructors who were more conservative in their approach to multicultural teaching strategies perceived their institutions to be more supportive of their work. Typical multicultural education addresses preparing teachers to celebrate diversity, but more conventional approaches to multicultural education fail to prepare instructors to understand and respond to ways inequity is embedded within schools (Gorski & Parekh, 2020). The primary goal of education is to assist students to effectively socialize with peers, even peers from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds. When teachers provide a safe place for students to learn from and about each other in meaningful ways, it has lasting, positive outcomes (Gay, 2000).

Diversity in public schools requires adequate training for preservice teachers to appreciate the importance of diverse learners' social-cultural and religious values and how cultural backgrounds influence academic success. The study by Taylor et al., (2016) found that most preservice teachers felt that a course and/or seminar on multicultural education played a significant role in them becoming culturally aware but felt additional training and inclusion in multicultural education in the school curriculum was needed. The study provided insight for teacher education, policy leaders, and curriculum and development planners who need to reform teacher preparation programs and multicultural education by making it an integral part

of teaching and learning at all levels in academia with a significant shift towards preservice teacher preparation.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK/LITERATURE REVIEW

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), developed by Geneva Gay (2000), is based on the idea that "culture" is essential for real learning to take place. This theory, "suggests that students cultural and social experiences should be used in structuring the educational process and culture is important for individuals to learn, realize, and interpret information" (Karatas, 2020, p.1).

This study framework utilized Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) developed by Geneva Gay (2000; 2018). Culturally Responsive Teaching is defined as using knowledge, background information, prior knowledge, and learning styles of diverse students to make learning more engaging and appropriate for them to be successful (Gay, 2000; 2018). Culturally responsive teaching by having several important traits include: (1) validating, (2) comprehensive and inclusive, (3) multidimensional, (4) empowering, (5) transformative, (6) emancipatory, (7) humanistic and (8) normative and ethical.

Traits	Descriptions of Traits
Validating	Affirms cultural differences asserting that a caring and supportive learning environment, student heritage, and acknowledgment of ethnically diverse communication styles of students.
Comprehensive and Inclusive	Improves academic achievement and helps students of color embrace identity and develop a sense of belonging and places high expectations on all learners and provide opportunities for learners to take ownership of their learning.
Multidimensional	Utilize various resources and teaching techniques to meet the needs of diverse learner and requires teachers to incorporate cultural knowledge, experiences, beliefs, and other teaching competencies while ensuring the curriculum and instruction provides accurate information to meet the needs of ethnic diversity.
Empowering	Allows students believe they can learn and should be motivated to be persistent in achieving their learning goals.
Transformative	Rejects traditional educational practices and focuses on respecting cultures and experiences while using various resources to promote teaching and learning and provides opportunities for students to practice tolerance for others in the classroom as well as throughout the school and in the community.
Emancipatory	Teaches students not to accept the traditional views of mainstream society but to apply new information generated by various ethnic groups to formulate new understandings and views, which allows them to become more involved in their learning.
Humanistic	Helps acquire knowledge about various ethnic groups so they can understand how they have contributed to the greater society.
Normative and Ethical	Explores the misconceptions of mainstream society's educational views that subscribe to the Eurocentric culture that the dominant group has power and privilege over ethnic groups.

The components are meant to "convert ideas into actions" (Gay, 2018). The components are described to be culturally responsive, and they serve to demonstrate care and building learning

communities, communicate effectively with ethnically diverse students, develop a cultural diversity curriculum, and examine students' learning styles. This study addressed only three of the four components including care, communication, and diverse curriculum.

The first component, *care*, is infused into all components of CRT. CRT focuses on ensuring teachers express positive attitudes and clear expectations, view students as human beings, and acknowledge the cognitive abilities of students of color specifically (Gay, 2000). The second component is *communication* and is a part of an individual's culture (Gay, 2000). Even if individuals speak the same language there are cultural differences that must be acknowledged. The third component is *diverse content*, which emphasizes that students of color are more successful when multicultural education is embedded within the curriculum (Gay, 2000; Gay, 2018). The curriculum should be revised to ensure diversity and inclusion meet all students' cultural diversity needs. The last component is *cultural related instructional strategies*; this aids teachers in utilizing learning styles and cultural identities for students of color to influence learning (Gay, 2000). Learning styles is the process used to gather and obtain information, not whether an individual learned the information provided.

While each trait of CRT must embody the four above mentioned components, CRT also maintains respect for the cultural background of all learners and a focus on learners' academic needs and interests. CRT shows that traditional (White-middle-class) curricula and pedagogies are dominant and do not serve the needs of students from diverse backgrounds (Garrett et al., 2021; Wlodkowki and Ginsberg1995). CRT acknowledges specific cultural identities and appreciates resources for learning; students of color feel more connected to their learning and have more desire to succeed and learn. Students enter the classrooms with lived experiences, and teachers also bring their identities. Therefore, teachers must incorporate instructions that understand that individuals bring with them many forms of knowledge and experiences while at the same time understanding that there is not one way to provide instruction, especially true for diverse learners (Flynn et al., 2017, cited by Doran, 2021).

The educator shortages represent a real challenge for schools, negatively affecting students of color, including individuals from rural areas, economically disadvantaged backgrounds, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Emphasizing diversity in classroom settings, a concept that has been suggested in an instructional approach, has been encouraged for years. The Grutter v. Bollinger (2003) Supreme ruling indicated that diversity in classroom settings enhances educational outcomes and equips students more effectively for a rapidly diversifying workforce. The courts found that race could be an admissions factor in higher education. This court ruling jumpstarted the use and implementation of multicultural education in all educational settings (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020). Subsequently, CRT emerged as an essential part of educator preparation programs, which provides future educators with strategies that increase inclusion and focus on the academic advancement of students by using culture as an instructional tool to scaffold learning for all learners (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020).

According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), higher education teacher preparation programs that require a course in multicultural education are not enough. In addition, faculty are not known for infusing diversity into their curriculum. An "infusion strategy" has been deemed as the best approach; this design infuses all facets of diversity into the program's curriculum; however,

there is no evidence to support how practical this approach is for long-term benefits because most teacher educators lack the skills themselves to adequately address diversity issues (Villigas & Lucas, 2002). Findings further indicated that preservice teachers must develop meaningful and caring relationships, which promote informed instructional practices when working with English Language Learners (Ramirez et al., N.D.). The researchers suggest that teacher preparation programs provide opportunities for preservice teachers to become more informed about culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and its impact on E.L.s, become immersed in coursework addressing issues facing E.L.s, and acknowledge the importance of language on education (Ramirez et al., N.D.).

Teacher discrimination also negatively affects academic performance (Assari & Caldwell, 2018). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2020), African American students made up 13.8% of the student population in 2018, with 17.9% of these students having a disability. The Department of Education (2021) indicated that Black students were more like to be identified with an intellectual disability or an emotional disturbance. In addition to teacher discrimination, student gender impacts success in the classroom. Black male students have the highest number of out-of-school suspensions than other ethnic groups. Akcaoglu and Kayis (2021) revealed that intercultural sensitivity is the cause of the relationship between preservice teacher multicultural attitudes and teacher sense of efficacy. One of the major challenges facing teacher preparation programs is to prepare teachers with a sufficient level of self-efficacy so they can meet the needs of diverse learners (Akcaoglu & Kayis 2021). There has also been research to support the importance of preservice teachers demonstrating cultural sensitivity. These findings also determined that depression and anxiety symptoms present in young Black adolescence can profoundly benefit from culturally sensitive approaches in the classroom (Behrhorst et al., 2022).

Research by Acquah et al. (2020) examined how modeling culturally responsive teaching strategies to preservice teachers fosters positive learning experiences and teaching strategies that will assist them in the future. This research asserted that effective modeling helps preservice teachers examine their thinking behind the methods presented and encourage self-reflection. This research drew on Ladson- Billings (2022), Gay (2000, 2018), and Villegas and Lucas' (2002) principles to incorporate diverse classroom strategies into an elective multicultural education course for teacher candidates.

Teacher perceptions of cultural and linguistic responsive approach has also been studied through the lens of culturally responsive teaching on the premise that teacher belief systems directly impact cultural and linguistic practices (Lubin et al., 2020). This research concluded that teachers must develop systematic reflective approaches, such as being flexible in thinking about diversity, considering other perspectives, and actively incorporating cultural and linguistic practices. Additionally, Adams and Kacmarczyk (2023) studied preservice teacher preparedness to create lesson plans utilizing culturally responsive teaching and reading methods establishing several factors in creating the lesson plans that align with social justice and culturally responsive teaching strategies. This research posited that participants had some knowledge of culturally responsive teaching reading instruction but failed to explicitly connect reading instruction and societal issues and advocacy, which was acknowledged has been an ongoing challenge for preservice teachers. Participants also indicated that they needed help adequately explaining their reading selections despite their lesson plans having elements of

CRT. The findings are valuable to teacher educators as they attempt to guide and help preservice teachers align the core curriculum with the needs of diverse learners (Adams & Kacmarczyk, 2023).

Several studies have explored stereotypes and stereotype threats that affect the academic performance of students of color (Nganga et al., 2021). Research determined that stereotype threats and perceived discrimination in educational settings hinder students of color success, whereas perceived an equal treatment can threaten student sense of belonging (Baysu et al., 2016). When exposed to stereotypes in academic environments, stereotype threats significantly affect students academic performance and influence school belonging (Allen & Webber, 2019). This perception arose from mainstream society's avoidance of African American culture, which promotes low expectations and negative beliefs of African Americans and often hinders a positive relationship between teacher and student (Ladson-Billings, 2022). Preservice teachers with fixed beliefs showed greater biases towards their students and are more likely to encourage comparison among students; student motivational and achievement varied when students have contact with teachers with more fixed or incremental beliefs (Stephens et al., 2021).

A study was conducted analyzing teacher perceptions of their Latino students in a state that has seen a significant increase in the enrollment of Hispanic students. Study findings revealed that deficit thinking aligned with their students' perceptions can directly influence student expectations and instructions (Almager, 2018). Results revealed that teachers may want to sympathize with their students; ultimately, they blame the students for their predicament. Teachers' biases maintain barriers that impacted the planning and delivery of instruction to students. Teachers' lack of self-reflection caused them to remain overwhelmed and clueless about why students were not performing (Almager, 2018).

The connection between preservice teachers' attitudes on their preparedness and abilities to instruct students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds has also been analyzed. Findings yielded favorable results for preservice teachers who revealed confidence in their abilities and preparedness to instruct culturally and linguistically diverse students because the participants indicated exposure to Culturally Responsive Teaching. Results also emphasized the importance of multicultural education in teacher preparation programs. Despite the study results, most teachers often enter the classroom underprepared to address culturally and linguistically diverse students, which leads to deficit thinking, low expectations, and inadequate approaches to teaching and learning (Adegbola, 2022).

White teachers in diverse classroom settings enter with "dispositional and pedagogical roadblocks," which include deficit ideology, low academic expectations, and limited knowledge about culturally related materials (Logan et al., 2018; Davis & Museus, 2019). Students of color face challenges that White teachers do not encounter. Although numerous research studies have explored the concept of white privilege, differing opinions persist. Some recognize its existence but believe emphasizing it could contribute to greater societal division. Other argue that instead of focusing on white privilege, attention should shift towards promoting diversity and inclusion (Vaughan, 2019). Along these same lines, Ramsay-Jordan (2020) addressed the cultural mismatch among teachers and students. This study examined preservice White teachers' perceptions of their Black students race and culture and how those factors impacted

their teaching (Ramsay- Jordan, 2020). When cultural mismatch is present, it creates deficit thinking and produces unhealthy relationships between teachers and students. Teacher preparation programs must provide opportunities for teachers to examine the necessary competencies on how dominant views regarding race have a direct effect on their thinking and learn to embrace ethnically diverse students' cultures, which will aid in closing the cultural gaps that exist in educational settings (Ramsay-Jordan, 2020). When teachers' perceptions are realized, then the consequences for students of color can have harmful effects (Ladson-Billings (2022).

Teacher preparation programs must assist teachers of color in transferring their knowledge of culture into teachable content (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020). Teacher education programs are crucial in supporting the retention of Black female teachers. However, these programs currently do not provide Black preservice teachers with the same level of preparation as their White counterparts (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020). Farinde-Wu et al., (2020) conducted a study on twelve Black teachers to determine their perceptions of their teacher preparation program; their findings indicated that their teacher preparation program did not fully prepare them for the teaching profession. Also, the participants noted that their respective programs impacted their teaching abilities and played a significant role in their desire to leave the teaching profession (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020). Most U.S. states require that preservice teachers have some working knowledge of teaching diverse learners; for many higher learning institutions consists of a single course (Kennedy & Lopez, 2022). Researchers sought to analyze the effectiveness of a single course in multicultural education (SCME) and to address the ongoing issue of how one course can develop and prepare primarily White preservice teachers to effectively teach students of color (Kennedy & Lopez, 2022). Findings aided in the development of a conceptual framework and course revisions to enhance the instructional focus that aligns to effectively develop preservice teachers' knowledge before addressing classroom pedagogy. An effective multicultural education curriculum should have a "transformational approach," one in which students view educational topics, concepts, and problems through several ethnic lenses that have a strong focus on social justice (Kennedy & Lopez, 2022). The overall conclusion determined that if a single course of study in multicultural education is available, then the course must encompass teaching and learning through a culturally responsive lens to ensure preservice teachers have the necessary knowledge, disposition, and belief to be successful (Kennedy & Lopez, 2022).

A study conducted with six teacher educators who assessed culturally responsive practices in their coursework showed that the comfort that teacher educators have with the subject matter and the more conventional interpretations of it that they then impart to their teacher candidates account for the teacher educator levels of confidence in incorporating ethnic and cultural diversity content into their curricula and in the way they deliver instruction (Menna, 2022). The study concluded that teacher educators must first wrestle with the ideas of race, racism, and power before asking teacher candidates to participate in anti-racist, community-based pedagogy followed by making a connection between these experiences and their work (Menna, 2022).

METHOD

This study examined preservice teacher perceptions of culturally responsive teaching within their preparation using the Geneva Gay Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory. The theory has

eight traits that describe culturally responsive teaching and provide components for implementing the theory. The researchers identified selected traits and components to understand the participant experiences better. Research has indicated that culturally responsive teaching can significantly enhance the academic success of students of color (Gay, 2000). Other studies have emphasized the responsibility of teacher preparation programs to adequately train and impart an understanding of cultural responsiveness to preservice teachers (Bassey, 2016; Christ & Sharma, 2018; Villegas & Lucus, 2002).

This study explored three research questions**;**
1. What are preservice teacher perceptions of having a strong knowledge base about cultural diversity at a historically black university?
2. What are preservice teacher perceptions of validating the cultural identities of diverse students at a historically black university?
3. What are preservice teacher perceptions of the implementation of culturally responsive teaching in a teacher preparation program at a historically black university?

Qualitative Methodology
A qualitative research methodology was employed in this study. This research approach was deemed appropriate and aimed to describe the lived experiences and perspectives of study participants. The study investigated the perceptions of preservice teachers perception of culturally responsive teaching in a teacher preparation program. There is limited evidence of qualitative research on the lived experiences of culturally responsive teaching of preservice teachers (Adegbola, 2022). Therefore, qualitative research was warranted. This qualitative research allowed the researchers to interpret findings and provide detailed and complete descriptions of the participants experience to become culturally responsive teachers.

Site Selection
The site selected for this study was a public university. The College of Education and Human Development incorporates components of culturally responsive teaching throughout the teacher education program. The institution is a top-ranked HBCU. The institution also provides various undergraduate and graduate-level programs throughout the college.

Sample Selection
The study sample consisted of 10 preservice teachers in a teacher preparation program. A purposeful sampling method was utilized. Purposeful sampling involves identifying participants who can contribute and provide detailed information to offer insight into the research study (Kalu, 2019). Purposeful sampling allowed the researchers to provide credibility to the sample. Potential participants for the research study were identified through the Director of Teacher Quality from the College of Education. The investigators emailed participants a research interest form. The research interest letter outlined inclusion criteria as follows: (a) enrolled full-time, (b) education major, and (c) some fieldwork experience. The research interest letter also provided participants with a link to an Excel spreadsheet. Participants acknowledged their interest in the research study and provided the researchers with their email addresses. Potential participants were identified to indicate whether they met the criteria for the study who indicated their interest and met study criteria were selected to participate in the study.

Data Collection

After obtaining IRB approval, the researchers coordinated with the Director of Teacher Quality and the Associate Dean of Education to discuss the study, data collection procedures, and ethical considerations. The researchers began the recruitment process. Those participants who were willing to participate in the study were emailed an official consent letter. The consent letter indicated the rights of participants and consent to participate in the study. The consent letter also stated that the participants could withdraw from participation at any given time or refuse to respond to any interview question.

The researchers conducted a 60-90-minute in-depth, open-ended interviews through Zoom. In-depth interviews were conducted because this approach shed light on the individual perspectives and experiences (Seidman, 2019). An interview guide served to direct the interviews and answer research questions. The researchers maintained a journal, allowing the researchers to record thoughts and observations related to the research questions. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Each interview was carefully documented to include the date and time of the interviews. The recordings and transcribed information were verbatim. Data was adequately stored in a secure locked cabinet to ensure the confidentiality of each participant.

Data Analysis

The researchers reviewed the journal notes and interview transcriptions to obtain a general understanding of the data. The researchers transcribed the interviews and scanned notes. Data was inputted into an Excel document to assist with analysis. Data was sorted and arranged based on the information. The interviews were transcribed, ensuring accuracy. After the preparation phase, the data was coded. Coding involves organizing data into sections and assigning a word or phrase to each section to facilitate analysis (Saldana, 2013). During the initial coding phase, the data was thoroughly analyzed by examining each line of the transcripts that developed broader categories. The process continued through the second cycle coding phase, allowing the researchers to analyze the data and identify the most significant codes to create additional categories (Saldana, 2013).

The researchers utilized the developed codes to generate themes by analyzing the data for recurring patterns (Marshall et al., 2022). In addition, the researchers used a qualitative analysis tool, to assist in the coding process in identifying themes. Qualitative software provides complex visualization and data analysis, which helps generate themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researchers ensured the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings through member-checking, where participants were provided with a summary of the findings to verify their accuracy (Crewell & Creswell, 2018).

Description of Participants

Study participants were undergraduate students who were actively enrolled in college-level courses within the College of Education and Human Development. A sample size of 10 participants was used in the study. Participants ranged from 20 to 22 years of age. Ninety percent were female, and ten percent were male. Seventy percent were Elementary Education majors, while 30 percent were Music Education, English Education, and Social Science Education majors. Below is a detailed description of the selected participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the study participants.

Table 1: Participants Demographic Information

Name	Age	Major	Class
Candice	22	Elementary Education	Senior
Freda	22	Elementary Education	Senior
Debbie	22	Elementary Education	Senior
Kim	21	English Education	Junior
Meeka	20	Elementary Education	Junior
Kisha	21	Music Education	Senior
Bree	20	Elementary Education	Junior
Corey	19	Social Science Education	Sophomore
Kendra	22	Elementary Education	Senior
Anita	22	Elementary Education	Senior

FINDINGS

This study aimed to explore and analyze preservice teacher perceptions in preparing them to become culturally responsive teachers. The study was guided by the Geneva Gay theoretical framework of Culturally Responsive Teaching. The following themes for each research question articulate major findings.

RQ1 asked: What are preservice teacher perceptions of having a solid knowledge base about cultural diversity in teacher preparation program at a historically black university?

Theme 1: Inclusion and Safety

The theme of inclusion and safety stood out, highlighting the importance of creating a secure and inclusive environment for students. All participants concurred on the necessity of understanding the student cultural backgrounds and affirming their sense of importance. They emphasized that learning is most effective when there is a shared responsibility between students and teachers, with both parties working collaboratively towards the common goal of academic achievement.

Participant Candice emphasized the importance of educators creating an environment that affirms a sense of the importance of students. She stated, "People always say their school should be a safe place not just safe, as in, protection from school shooters or fire drills, but also how they feel within themselves. Educators can impact a child by listening to them. Every student should be able to feel themselves within their learning environment."

Freda echoed this sentiment: "A safe learning environment is key for students of color to fully excel and gain a sense of belonging." Meeka also emphasized the necessity of understanding students to build bonds that aid in academic success: "If you do not create that supportive environment, then there is a breakdown in communication and possibly can hinder the students' academic growth." Freda and Meeka highlighted the vital role that a safe and supportive learning environment plays in academic success and a sense of belonging for students, particularly those of color. By emphasizing a foundation of safety and inclusion, students of color may be able to achieve their full potential.

Debbie, Kim, and Corey emphasized the importance of an inclusive learning environment in addressing the needs of diverse learners. Debbie highlighted that gathering information about

students' cultural backgrounds "allows the students to feel included in the classroom." Kim stated, "Incorporating their values and culture into the curriculum creates a deeper connection and helps them to be more engaged in learning." Corey concurred, noting the necessity of understanding diverse cultures. He explained that similar skin tones do not imply similar backgrounds, emphasizing the broader benefits of cultural inclusivity. Corey elaborated:

> *There is a benefit in bringing diverse cultures into the classroom, not just to benefit one or two students, but to share with the entire classroom. By learning about different cultures and what is happening in the world, students can appreciate and understand how different and similar people really are despite their skin tone. This reveals the multifaceted importance of an inclusive learning environment in addressing the needs of diverse learners. By understanding and acknowledging students' cultural contexts, educators can make students feel recognized and valued in the classroom, which is essential for their emotional and psychological well-being.*

RQ2: What are preservice teacher perceptions of validating cultural identities of diverse students in teacher preparation at a historically black university?

Theme 2: Assumptions and Biases
The theme that emerged from the interviews was the participants acknowledgment of the tendency to make assumptions about students. They emphasized the importance of reflecting on these cultural biases to better understand and validate the cultural identities of students. Participants highlighted the crucial role of self-awareness and reflection in overcoming biases, noting that these practices are essential to a positive classroom environment. Additionally, they stressed the significance of interpersonal interactions in fostering a sense of inclusion and belonging among students.

Corey reflected on his attitudes in the classroom and everyday life, admitting, "I am going to be honest. I definitely have, and I do not do it on purpose. You know, everyone has an unconscious bias." Freda echoed this sentiment, noting that while it is natural to make assumptions, it is crucial to recognize that these assumptions might be flawed. Similarly, Kim added,

> *It's possible to bring attitudes and perceptions into the classroom. You may not intentionally but unintentionally bring those perceptions into the classroom. But I would try to think about it before I did it by refraining from judging.*

Participants reflected on their biases, acknowledging the importance of reassessing their initial assumptions about students. Anita recounted an incident from her student teaching experience where she assumed a particular student would be troublesome, only to find this assumption unfounded. She reflected;

> *. . . you cannot write someone off just based on that one interaction or the first interaction with them. So, being patient and giving them time and understanding . . . does not mean to write the narrative, for how smart they are, or how capable they are.*

This experience profoundly impacted her approach to interacting with students. She realized the importance of giving each student a fair chance to demonstrate their abilities over time. This shift in perspective led her to adopt a more open-minded and patient attitude in her teaching practices.

Similarly, Meeka shared, "I have come to understand in many cases, there is so much more to the individual. I am trying to learn not to make assumptions or allow my long-held views to direct how I interact with students, especially with diverse students."

Theme 3: Adaptation to Diverse Communication Styles
The theme of diverse communication styles highlights the need to effectively adapt teaching methods to engage students from various cultural backgrounds. By respecting and acknowledging these diverse communication styles, educators can build trust and demonstrate care through empathetic communication, creating a supportive and success-oriented learning environment. To understand the communication styles of diverse students, educators need to adjust teaching methods to demonstrate responsiveness to the unique needs of each student, fostering a more effective and supportive learning environment to create a space where all students can thrive. Kisha stated, "Communication styles are very important because you can understand the student at all times." Understanding how students communicate can help educators tailor and drive their instruction more effectively. The participants discussion supported the idea that teachers can create a more engaging classroom environment by acknowledging and adapting to these diverse communication styles. Kim stated, "I have to offer them a safe space to express themselves. I need to understand their culture and ideas so that I can use that knowledge in my lessons. It seems hard, but I know it is necessary."

Kendra and Bree supported the idea that understanding and adapting to diverse communication styles is essential for effective instruction. Kendra stated,

> *I allow my students to communicate in the way they're used to because I want students to basically get involved in the instruction. I want them to be able to carry themselves and hold a conversation. Sometimes, they may sound rude or don't use proper grammar, but they are engaged and motivated to learn.*

In support, Bree mentioned that students express themselves differently, and it is important to acknowledge those differences so that learning can take place. She stated, "Communication style is definitely important because a student may have a trigger, and the teacher does not know how they communicate, which can cause the student to shut down." Participant responses highlighted the importance of understanding how students communicate so that educators can create an environment suitable for all learners. Additionally, the participant responses demonstrated that acknowledging diverse communication styles enhances student comprehension and builds stronger relationships. Understanding cultural backgrounds through diverse communication styles is vital for effective teaching. Recognizing and adapting to how students communicate allows educators to connect more deeply and tailor their methods to create an environment conducive to diverse learners. Debbie conveyed that she learned from her teacher preparation program that communication styles are influenced by culture. She emphasized that recognizing these cultural influences can significantly improve interactions and understanding between teachers and students. Debbie stated,

> *We have learned that different cultures have different ways of communicating. Also, we know that kids are very expressive and very loud, especially if the students are from different cultures. I feel that teachers just have to let them express themselves and, most importantly, reflect on how we are expressing ourselves to students.*

Similarly, Meeka stated, "How they communicate at home is how they communicate at school. They are assertive in conversations; it is because of their personality or even their background. We have to be aware of how they perceive words." Overall, the participants felt it is important for educators to recognize cultural backgrounds, appreciate the diverse communication styles of students, which will enable educators to better connect with students and foster deeper engagement and empathy.

RQ3: What are preservice teacher perceptions of implementing culturally responsive teaching in teacher preparation program at a historically black university?

Theme 4: Support Systems and Resources
Participants suggested that support systems and resources aided in the effectiveness of becoming culturally responsive. Support systems included institutional resources needed for instructor guidance and training. Participants indicated that having access to teaching resources could impact their ability to develop cultural competence and effective teaching practices. They believed a commitment to fairness and inclusivity likely stemmed from a supportive environment that encouraged such practices, which would aid in becoming culturally responsive teachers. They expressed that the importance of having a robust and supportive teacher preparation program will create the confidence and needed skills to meet the needs of ethnically diverse learners. Candice stated, "This program requires us to do field experience before student teaching, so I think that field experience actually helped to get us out in the real world and see it versus like looking at videos. It helped to prepare me." Supported by Kisha who stated,

> *Most of these lecturers and those professors give really great ideas. I was initially nervous about going into the education field. I respect everyone of all cultures, ethnicities, races and above. These lectures gave me a little bit of confidence, and so that made me feel excited that I was able to learn that and then share with other people.*

Debbie and Meeka highlighted how instructional support helped with preparedness to become culturally responsive. Debbie stated, "We actually had a professional development on how to treat different cultures within the classroom. My teacher preparation definitely got me prepared for cultural things." Similarly, Meeka said that she participated in panel discussions monthly that focused on mental health, education, and students from different cultural backgrounds. These panel discussions allowed her to gain more knowledge and understanding about the different cultures she will experience in the classroom. Meeka stated, "The different panelists asked questions that you do not really think about. I do think they try to make sure we are aware of many multicultural backgrounds." Anita shared a similar view but expressed concern about sustainability. She stated, they prepared us as much as they could, and it is really up to us to get that experience and really see how what we have learned in the classroom fares

out when we get our own classroom." Freda supported by stating, "You have to actually encounter different cultures in order to learn how to be culturally competent because people probably forget about the information that they learn from a book after they graduate. But overall, my program has prepared me to an extent.

Kendra emphasized the importance of utilizing the information provided by the teacher preparation program while seeking to expand knowledge through additional research. She indicated that while the teacher preparation program provided foundational information, it is up to the novice teacher to acquire self-knowledge to enhance diverse educational practices. Kendra stated, "They only talked about the surface, not in-depth information. I guess it comes with experience, and you would have to do your own type of research." Supported by Bree who stated;

> *I feel like it did prepare me for cultural responsiveness, but we did not go in-depth. I have to do my own research or ask advice from other teachers like my mom or her friends who are all teachers. This is something I need to be more knowledgeable on before I enter the classroom.*

Corey and Kim expressed the need for more experience before assessing if the teacher preparation program had prepared them to be culturally responsive. Both participants felt that hands-on experiences would better equip them to address the diverse needs of their students and refine their instructional approaches obtained in the teacher preparation program. Kim discussed that she would be starting her student teaching and "does not really know if she will be prepared for a diverse population of students." Similarly, Corey felt he needed to acquire more skills to ensure he was culturally responsive. Corey stated, "I do not necessarily think it comes from being in the classroom. I think it takes being in the field that will help to determine if I am prepared."

Table 2: Emergent Themes

Research Questions	Themes	Theoretical Framework Alignment
RQ1: What are preservice teachers' perceptions of having a strong knowledge base about cultural diversity at a historically black university?	Inclusion and Safety	Trait: Comprehensive and Inclusive Component: Care
RQ2: What are preservice teachers' perceptions of validating cultural identities of diverse students at a historically black university?	Assumptions and Biases Adaptation to Drive Communication Styles	Trait: Validating Component: Communication/Care
RQ3: What are preservice teachers' perceptions of the implementation of culturally responsive teaching in a teacher preparation program at a historically black university?	Support Systems and Resources	Trait: Multidimensional Component: Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Curriculum Content/Care

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted using a qualitative research methodology. The study included in-depth interviews from 10 preservice teachers in a teacher education program at a historically

black university. The interviews gathered detailed descriptions of the participant perceptions of culturally responsive teaching.

In this research, four salient themes were selected from the array of emerging themes to ensure a focused and meaningful analysis of the data. This approach allowed for a deeper exploration of the most prominent and relevant aspects of the participant experiences and perceptions. Prioritizing these key themes also helped in maintaining clarity and coherence in the study. By concentrating on these four central themes, the research was able to more effectively highlight the significant patterns and insights that have the most impact on the study. Four salient themes emerged from this research including: (1) the importance of inclusive and environment (2) learning environment to build trusting relationships between students and teachers learning by recognizing assumptions and biases (3) communication styles demonstrating acknowledgement and respect of the cultural identities of students, (4) additional support and resources from teacher preparation programs needed to enhance cultural competencies and effective teaching strategies.

Culturally Responsive Teaching framework by Gay (2018) explores creating environments that support students' cultural identities by having a strong knowledge base about cultural diversity. This study emphasized the critical need for an inclusive and safe learning environment that respects and incorporates student cultural backgrounds. This is achieved with a supportive atmosphere where cultural backgrounds are acknowledged and valued to enhance students' sense of importance and belonging. Research by Holden et al. (2023) also confirmed that environments where students feel safe and supported significantly enhance the experiences of students of color. Providing these students encouragement and support helped them feel included and fostered a sense of belonging, which enhanced academic performance (Holden et al., 2023). Inclusive education occurs when student differences and diversity are acknowledged, understood, and addressed. (Azukaego et al., 2022; Bassey, 2016; Siacor, et al., 2024). To create a stable and inclusive learning environment, educators must implement techniques that ensure students physical and emotional safety, fostering sustainable success (Amrisal, 2024).

Preservice teachers acknowledged the presence of assumptions and biases about students based on cultural backgrounds and emphasized the need for self-reflection to overcome these biases. Building strong, bias-free relationships with students was seen as crucial. According to this research finding, preservice teachers were unaware of their biases regarding students of color and not fully equipped to address the needs of ethnically diverse learners. There has also been research to support that teachers with rigid beliefs exhibit greater biases towards their students and were more prone to fostering student comparisons (Stephens et al., 2021). Another study concluded that teacher preparation programs were not equipped to ensure novice teachers build and maintain positive relationships with students of color and ensure they can develop an engaging curriculum based on their cultural background (Johnson et al., 2020). Many teacher education programs lack dedicated coursework on cultural diversity, leading numerous preservice teachers to begin their careers with misconceptions, false beliefs, and stereotypes about students of color (Vaughan, 2005, cited by Li & Nelson, 2022). This is more prevalent among White teachers who have deficit ideology, including expectations, and limited knowledge about culturally related materials (Logan et al., 2018; Davis & Museus, 2019).

Participants recognized the importance of adapting teaching methods to include cultural diversity, although some expressed challenges in doing so due to the current political climate and lack of comprehensive training. Effective teaching and classroom management are connected to recognizing and respecting diverse cultural behaviors and values. The findings from this study aligns with existing findings; it is important for teachers to adjust their teaching methods to meet the needs of diverse learners. Tailored teaching methods enhance the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential for students to analyze information, make informed decisions, and think critically (Obidovna, 2023). Educators who implement linguistically responsive pedagogy, as introduced by Villigas and Lucas (2011, 2013), believe that acknowledging language diversity is crucial for student learning. This approach highlights that language supports the acquisition and application of knowledge, affirming students' identities. When preservice teachers understand culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, they are better equipped to appreciate students' backgrounds, cultural identities, and language challenges, reducing barriers to effective education (Kimanen et al., 2019).

The availability of support systems and resources is crucial for preservice teachers to develop cultural competence and effective teaching practices. Participants highlighted the need for robust institutional support to become culturally responsive educators. Despite U.S. state mandates requiring preservice teachers to possess knowledge of teaching diverse learners, many higher education institutions provide limited instructional time on cultural responsiveness (Kennedy & Lopez, 2022). Akcaoglu and Kayis (2021) concluded that a major challenge for teacher preparation programs is to equip teachers with sufficient self-efficacy to meet the needs of diverse learners. Addressing this gap necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes ongoing professional development, mentorship, and practical experiences that emphasize cultural competence, ensuring that preservice teachers are well-prepared to create inclusive and effective learning environments.

CONCLUSION

This study's methodological approach, grounded in qualitative research, allowed for a nuanced understanding of the preservice teachers' experiences and perceptions. By using Geneva Gay's framework, which includes traits such as being comprehensive and inclusive, validating, and multidimensional, the study was able to identify key themes such as inclusion and safety, assumptions and biases, communication styles, and adapting teaching methods. These themes underscore the importance of creating an educational environment where all students feel valued and supported, which is essential for their academic success and overall well-being.

The research findings have significant implications for both policy and practice in teacher education. For policy, there is a need to integrate CRT more deeply into teacher education standards and accreditation requirements, moving beyond isolated courses to a more holistic infusion throughout the curriculum. Practice implications include adopting comprehensive approaches that provide preservice teachers with practical, immersive experiences in diverse settings, as highlighted by Muniz's (2019) survey of teaching standards. These strategies are essential for developing teachers' ability to create inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments, which are critical in our increasingly globalized educational landscape.

This study underscores the necessity for teacher preparation programs to evolve in response to the growing cultural diversity in schools. By incorporating comprehensive training in CRT and providing ongoing support and mentorship, teacher education programs can better equip educators to meet the needs of all students. Future research should continue to explore the long-term impacts of these training programs and identify the most effective methods for fostering cultural competence. Ultimately, this research adds valuable insights to the current body of knowledge, highlighting the importance of cultural responsiveness in education and providing a roadmap for enhancing teacher preparation programs.

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