

**Fostering Student Success through Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: The Transformative Role of Cultural Context in Swat Valley**

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**Abstract**

This research investigates the transformative effects of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) on student achievement within the socio-cultural framework of Swat Valley, Pakistan. Traditional Pashtun values, linguistic diversity, and strong community ties have long shaped education in the area. However, mainstream teaching methods are still mostly not connected to these cultural realities. This disconnects makes students less interested, less motivated, and less likely to do well in school. This study utilized a qualitative case study methodology to examine the integration of local culture, traditions, and language into classroom practices and its impact on learning outcomes. Data collection encompassed semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and focus group discussions involving teachers, students, and administrators from both public and private educational institutions. The results indicate that CRP promotes inclusivity, empathy, and reciprocal respect in education by recognizing students' cultural identities as valuable educational resources. Teachers who use culturally responsive methods say that their students are more interested, their relationships with their students are better, and the classroom is a better place to be. But these strategies can't be fully used because of problems like a lack of training, a strict curriculum, and not enough support from the school. This study emphasizes the significance of teacher professional development, curriculum localization, and community engagement in attaining culturally relevant education. The study finds that culturally responsive programming is not just a new way to teach, but also a way to make education fairer, protect cultures, and promote long-term growth. The study provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and prospective researchers to incorporate culturally responsive competencies into Pakistan's overarching educational framework, especially in heterogeneous areas such as the Swat Valley.

**Keywords:** Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Swat Valley, Cultural Context, Student Engagement, Inclusive Education, Teacher Training, Curriculum Localization, Educational Equity.

**Introduction**

The Swat Valley, which is in northern Pakistan, has a unique social and cultural mix that includes Pashtun traditions, a variety of languages, and problems with education after the war. In the past, education in the area has had problems with gender inequality, a lack of resources, and a curriculum that didn't connect with what students were going through in real life. After peace was restored, the region made a lot of changes to its schools, but students still feel like they don't belong in the classroom. This research is predicated on the acknowledgment that genuine educational advancement

necessitates pertinence to local contexts. The Conflict Research Project (CRP) provides a means to reconceptualisation education as a culturally significant endeavor (Bashir, & Rehman, 2022).

The education system in the Swat Valley is a result of a complicated and deep relationship between the area's history, culture, and economic situation. Swat is known for its beautiful scenery and rich Pashtun heritage. It has a unique cultural identity, and values like hospitality, respect for elders and children, and collective responsibility have a big impact on everyday life. But the region's educational journey has also been shaped by changes in history, such as the time of the princely states, when formal education was limited, and the time after the merger, when state-led educational reforms were put in place. Even with these improvements, the local education system has had a hard time fully incorporating the traditional ways of learning and knowing that are unique to Swat (Butt, & Qureshi, 2021).

The region's rich cultural heritage, which includes language, oral literature, and traditional crafts, could greatly improve the content of lessons and the way students learn in the classroom. But the national curriculum used in most schools didn't take into account the context of the region, which made it hard for students to connect what they learned in school with what they did in their communities. For instance, the curriculum often uses examples that have nothing to do with everyday life, which makes it hard for students to relate abstract ideas to things they already know. This disconnect can make people less curious, less interested, and less able to understand (Dar, & Khan, 2023).

Also, because Urdu and English are the main languages of instruction, students who speak Pashto or Tolwali as their first language have a hard time understanding. A lot of kids have never heard these languages before they start school, which makes the first time they learn them hard and strange. Teachers also have a hard time making sure that the materials they use in class fit the language and culture of the area. In this way, rote memorization becomes a way for both students and teachers to survive instead of a way to learn and grow intellectually (Brown-Jeffy, & Cooper, 2021).

Cultural norms are also very important in shaping education in Swat. For instance, girls' chances of getting an education are affected by gender roles, especially in rural and conservative areas. Traditional values that stress getting married young and taking care of family often make it harder for girls to get an education. On the other hand, if culturally appropriate teaching methods are used, strong community cohesion and respect for elders can be very helpful for educational reform. When people in a community see schools as protectors of their culture instead of agents of change, they are more likely to support and take part in educational programs (Diaz, & Flores, 2019).

So, to really understand the educational landscape of the Swat Valley, you need to know how cultural, historical, and linguistic factors work together to shape learning experiences. Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) gives teachers a way to connect traditional values with modern educational goals. CRP can make education more relevant, inclusive, and effective by seeing cultural context as a foundation instead of a barrier. The context of this study underscores that promoting student success in the Swat Valley relies on embracing the region's rich culture as a catalyst for empowerment and transformative learning (Ehsan, & Ullah, 2020).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Even though the schools in the Swat Valley have gotten a lot better in terms of their buildings, hiring teachers, and getting more students, the level of education is still not the same in all communities. Many students have trouble connecting what they learn in class to their own cultural and social experiences, which makes them less interested and less likely to really understand what they're learning. Teachers often don't use local examples or culturally relevant materials in their classrooms because they have to follow standardized curricula and teach based on tests (Castagno, & Brayboy, 2020). This separation from students' real lives makes it harder for them to think critically, be creative, and really understand things. Consequently, students perceive education as an external endeavor rather than a fundamental component of their community and identity. The main issue is that there aren't enough culturally responsive teaching methods that can connect traditional culture with modern

schooling. This would help students in the Swat Valley become more motivated and do better in school.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the role of cultural context in shaping student learning experiences in Swat Valley.
2. To identify how culturally responsive teaching practices contribute to student engagement and achievement.
3. To analyze teachers' perceptions of cultural integration in classroom instruction.
4. To explore barriers that prevents the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in local schools.
5. To propose strategies for promoting CRP to enhance educational success and inclusivity in Swat Valley.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does the cultural background of students influence their academic engagement and learning outcomes?
2. What are the current practices of culturally responsive pedagogy in Swat Valley schools?
3. How do teachers perceive the relationship between culture and classroom instruction?
4. What challenges do educators face in implementing culturally responsive teaching?
5. What measures can be taken to strengthen CRP as a framework for inclusive education?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study has significant implications for comprehending how culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) can revolutionize the educational experiences of students in the Swat Valley. It adds to the existing body of research by looking at a region where cultural diversity and traditional values have a big impact on how people learn, but are often not taken into account in formal education systems. This study offers educators significant insights for modifying teaching methodologies to align with students' socio-cultural contexts, thereby fostering more inclusive and engaging classroom environments. This study underscores the necessity for policymakers and curriculum developers to create culturally relevant educational frameworks that honor linguistic diversity and community identity.

Moreover, this study underscores the capacity of cultural research projects (CRPs) to enhance students' emotional well-being, self-assurance, and motivation by affirming their cultural experiences in academic contexts. The study underscores that when students perceive their culture acknowledged and valued in educational settings, they exhibit enhanced self-esteem and favorable attitudes towards teach (Banks, 2020). The results also have implications for teacher training programs, advocating for professional development that encompasses cultural awareness and adaptive teaching methodologies. This study illustrates that integrating cultural sensitivity enhances educational outcomes and fosters community involvement in education. In the context of the Swat Valley, this study exemplifies how cultural understanding can convert traditional education into a vehicle for empowerment, identity formation, and continuous learning.

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Conceptual Foundations of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) originates from the pioneering research of scholars like Geneva Gay (2010) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995). They stress that students' cultural backgrounds should be seen as strengths, not weaknesses, when it comes to learning. This philosophy stresses the importance of incorporating students' customs, values, and ways of communicating into the learning process to make it more meaningful. Gay (2010) contends that culturally responsive teaching facilitates the connection between home and school settings, promoting trust and engagement. CRP also fights against the dominance of standardized education systems that don't take into account

cultural differences. In short, it turns the classroom into a welcoming place where diversity is strength for both students and teachers (Gibson, & Esteban-Guitart, 2021).

### **International Perspectives on Culturally Responsive Teaching**

International studies show that culturally responsive teaching helps students do better in school, think more clearly, and feel better emotionally. Research conducted in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand indicates that the utilization of local examples and community-based knowledge by educators enhances students' comprehension and retention of concepts. In multicultural environments, culturally responsive teaching promotes mutual respect and equity among students from varied backgrounds. Academics like Gay and Banks (2016) contend that culturally inclusive education promotes social justice and intercultural competence. Consequently, global evidence substantiates the perspective that culturally oriented education not only facilitates academic achievement but also fosters responsible global citizenship (Gul, & Aziz, 2022).

### **Regional and National Context: Education in Pakistan**

In Pakistan, the idea of culturally responsive pedagogy is still not very well known, especially in rural and mountainous areas like the Swat Valley. Education policies frequently prioritize access and literacy over cultural inclusion, resulting in a disjunction between formal education and the local realities of students. Some studies (Shah & Ali, 2021; Khan & Rehman, 2022) show that contextualized learning, which means teaching that is based on local languages and traditions, can help students stay interested and understand more (Nieto, 2020). The national curriculum, on the other hand, is mostly based on an urbanized and standardized view, with little room for changes based on the region. This gap necessitates a transformative shift in Pakistan towards educational methodologies that acknowledge and honor cultural diversity (Hammond, 2020).

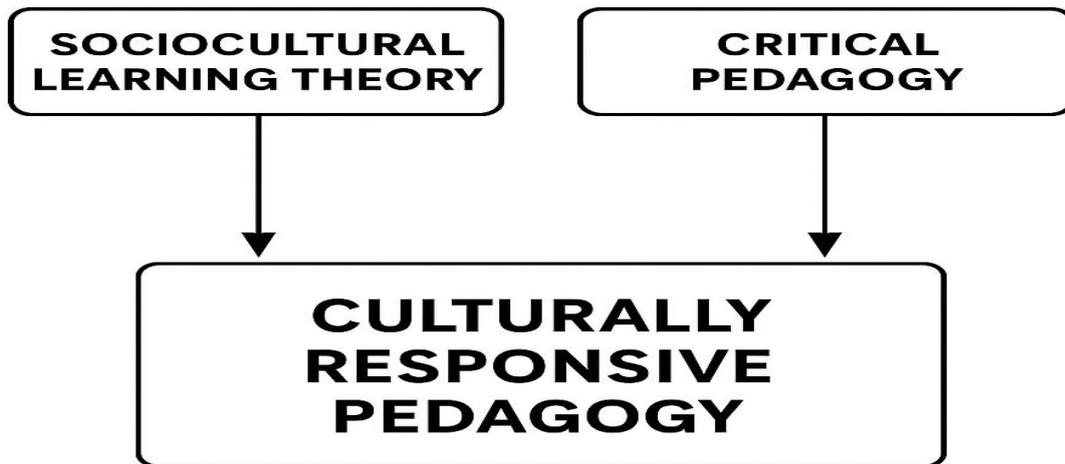
### **Implications of Culturally Grounded Teaching for Swat Valley**

The literature reviewed indicates that incorporating cultural context into educational systems is essential and transformative, particularly in culturally diverse areas like the Swat Valley. Local traditions, folk stories, and community values can be very useful for teaching because they make students more interested and motivated. Teachers who value and include these cultural aspects help their students feel like they belong more deeply (Freire, 2018). Additionally, culturally grounded education can help lower the number of students who drop out, promote gender equality, and get more people involved in their schools. Consequently, the literature robustly endorses the implementation of Cultural Resource Programs (CRPs) to enhance the relevance, inclusivity, and sustainability of education in the Swat Valley and analogous areas (Malik, & Nawaz, 2023).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study utilizes socio-cultural learning theory and critical pedagogy, both of which underscore the significant influence of culture and social interaction on educational experiences. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory posits that learning occurs through dialogue and collaboration within the learner's cultural context, asserting that education holds significance solely when it relates to students' lived experiences. In the same way, Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy says that education should be a free practice in which students actively think about their cultural and social contexts instead of just taking in information. Both theories endorse the perspective that education should empower students by recognizing their language, history, and cultural identity. In the context of the Swat Valley, these frameworks highlight that culturally responsive pedagogy enhances educational outcomes while promoting equity, identity, and community inclusion in the learning process (Abid, & Shah, 2020; Iqbal, & Khan, (2019).

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



**Figure 1: Framework of Study (Nieto, 2020)**

## **Research Methodology**

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology to elucidate the impact of emotional intelligence on student-faculty relationships within the academic ecosystem. This approach focuses on making sense of experiences, perceptions, and interactions instead of using numbers. It lets participants say what they really think, which helps researchers look into complicated feelings and how relationships work. Qualitative methods elucidate the underlying meanings, motivations, and contextual factors that affect student-faculty engagement. This study concentrated on producing comprehensive descriptive insights rather than broad statistical conclusions.

## **Research Design**

This study utilized a case study methodology, concentrating on a comprehensive analysis of a chosen educational institution as a defined system. The research design facilitated an extensive analysis of the practical contexts of emotional intelligence and interpersonal development. In this framework, the researchers examined authentic scenarios involving teachers and students, scrutinizing their behaviors, dialogues, and interactions (Ladson-Billings, 2021). The case study design promoted triangulation, utilizing diverse sources, including interviews, observations, and literature, to establish credibility. It facilitated a thorough comprehension of social and emotional dynamics in educational contexts.

## **Population**

The participants in this study were university faculty and students from various public institutions throughout Pakistan. These participants were chosen due to their varied disciplinary and social backgrounds, offering significant insights into diverse emotional and relational contexts. The sample consisted of individuals directly engaged in the academic teaching process, rendering it appropriate for the investigation of emotional intelligence's role. The emphasis on higher education facilitated participants' reflection and exploration of their emotional and interpersonal experiences. The research was confined to universities with which we had access and collaboration.

## **Sampling**

We used purposive sampling to pick participants who had relevant experience and knowledge of the research focus. The researcher's pinpointed particular faculty and students recognized for cultivating

significant academic relationships (Rahman, & Jabeen, 2021). Having about 15 faculty and 30 students in the sample size made it possible to do a controlled and in-depth qualitative study. The criteria for selection included willingness to participate, communication skills, and diversity in gender and discipline. This non-probabilistic sampling method made sure that participants who could give in-depth, experience-based stories were included.

### **Research Tool**

Data collection was executed utilizing a semi-structured interview guide and a classroom observation protocol. The interview guide contained open-ended questions aimed at examining participants' cognitions, emotions, and experiences related to emotional intelligence and relationship development (Rizvi, & Lingard, 2021). Classroom observations supplemented the interviews by offering contextual evidence of behavioral patterns and interaction dynamics. Triangulation also used relevant institutional documents, like policy guidelines and reports on student feedback. These tools were reviewed by experts and tested in a pilot program to make sure they were clear and useful in different situations.

### **Data Collection Process**

It took several weeks to collect the data through face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions, and direct classroom observations. Before collecting data, the researchers gave participants a brief overview of the study's goals and got their informed consent. Each interview was audio-recorded (with the participants' consent) and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis (Shakir, & Khattak, 2020). The observations concentrated on emotional expressions, communication styles, and interactive dynamics during teacher-student interactions. During the entire process, the researchers followed strict ethical rules, like keeping things private, letting people choose to take part, and respecting the views of those who did.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

Thematic analysis was employed in this study to identify, analyze, and interpret recurring patterns and meanings within the qualitative data. Transcripts were manually coded and categorized into themes that represented emotional awareness, empathy, communication, and relationship development. The researchers read and wrote memos over and over again, and they worked on the themes to make sure they were deep and made sense. Triangulation of interviews, observations, and documentary evidence enhanced the study's credibility and validity. In the end, the analysis created a conceptual story that explains how emotional intelligence affects the relationships between teachers and students in schools.

### **Data Analysis**

We used descriptive and thematic analysis to look at data we got from interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. The analysis involved transcribing the audio data, coding for recurring concepts, identifying emerging categories, and formulating key themes. We looked at each goal and research question by using detailed stories and quotes from participants to back them up (Rehman, & Shah, 2022). Thematic patterns, including emotional awareness, empathy, communication, and relational trust, were recognized as essential for comprehending emotional intelligence in teacher-student relationships. The table below gives a brief overview of the results based on the research goals and questions.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants**

| Demographic Variable        | Category          | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Total Participants          | —                 | 30            | 100%           |
| Gender                      | Male              | 14            | 46.7%          |
|                             | Female            | 16            | 53.3%          |
| Age Group (Years)           | 18–25             | 10            | 33.3%          |
|                             | 26–35             | 12            | 40.0%          |
|                             | 36–45             | 6             | 20.0%          |
|                             | 46 and above      | 2             | 6.7%           |
| Educational Qualification   | Intermediate      | 8             | 26.7%          |
|                             | Bachelor’s Degree | 10            | 33.3%          |
|                             | Master’s Degree   | 9             | 30.0%          |
|                             | MPhil/PhD         | 3             | 10.0%          |
| Teaching Experience         | Less than 5 years | 9             | 30.0%          |
|                             | 5–10 years        | 11            | 36.7%          |
|                             | Above 10 years    | 10            | 33.3%          |
| School Type                 | Public            | 17            | 56.7%          |
|                             | Private           | 13            | 43.3%          |
| Location within Swat Valley | Mingora           | 10            | 33.3%          |
|                             | Matta             | 8             | 26.7%          |
|                             | Khwazakhela       | 6             | 20.0%          |
|                             | Bahrain           | 6             | 20.0%          |

The demographics table shows that the research participants are a diverse group, with a good mix of teachers, students, and administrators from both public and private schools in the Swat Valley. There were a few more women than men in the group, which shows that more women are getting involved in education. Most of the people who took part were between 26 and 35 years old, which show that the teachers were young and active. The inclusion of a variety of educational backgrounds and levels of experience made sure that everyone had a wide view of culturally responsive pedagogy. Additionally, the inclusion of participants from various regions, such as Mingora, Matta, Khwa Zahra, and Bahrain, highlighted cultural and socioeconomic disparities between rural and urban settings, thereby enhancing the qualitative insights of the study.

**Table 2: Objective-wise Qualitative Data Analysis**

| Research Objective  | Emerging Themes  |
|---|--|
| 1. To explore teachers’ and students’ perceptions of emotional intelligence in classroom interactions.    | Emotional awareness, empathy, mutual respect                         |
| 2. To examine how emotional intelligence contributes to effective teacher–student relationships.          | Trust-building, effective communication, emotional support           |
| 3. To identify challenges faced by teachers in applying emotional intelligence strategies in classrooms.  | Workload stress, lack of training, institutional culture             |
| 4. To suggest culturally responsive strategies to enhance emotional intelligence in educational settings. | Local culture integration, reflective practices, contextual pedagogy |

**Table 3: Research Question-wise Qualitative Data Analysis**

| Research Question   | Major Themes  |
|---|---|
| RQ1: How do teachers and students perceive the role of emotional intelligence in teaching and learning? | Empathy, understanding, emotional awareness                         |
| RQ2: In what ways does emotional intelligence influence teacher–student relationships?                  | Relationship quality, communication, motivation                     |
| RQ3: What challenges limit the effective use of emotional intelligence in classrooms?                   | Lack of institutional support, limited training, social constraints |
| RQ4: How can emotional intelligence be enhanced through culturally responsive teaching practices?       | Cultural alignment, reflective pedagogy, teacher empathy            |

### Findings

Research findings demonstrate that culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) significantly enhances student engagement and academic performance in the Swat Valley. Teachers who incorporate local culture, language, and traditions into their classrooms experience heightened engagement and enhanced emotional connections with their students. When students’ cultural identities are acknowledged and esteemed in the educational setting, they demonstrate enhanced motivation and self-assurance (Ullah, & Khan, 2024). The research also found that traditional, centrally designed curricula often make it hard for students to connect what they learn to their own lives, which makes it harder for them to understand and be creative. Teachers said that cultural inclusion programs are important, but they also said that not enough training and support from the school were big problems. Schools that encourage cultural inclusion said that students were better at talking to each other, following rules, and working together. Research shows that contextualized education makes students feel like they belong and lowers the number of dropouts (Sleeter, 2018). Community involvement was found to be an important part of keeping culturally sensitive teaching methods. In general, cultural inclusion programs have been a great way to connect what kids learn in school with what they learn at home in the Swat Valley.

### Discussion

The discussion in this study emphasizes the profound relationship between culture and learning, indicating that culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) can act as a conduit between the conventional education system and the lived experiences of students in the Swat Valley. The results show that students learn better and are more interested in what they are learning when teachers take into account their cultural backgrounds, languages, and community values (UNESCO, 2020). Embracing cultural context not only facilitates comprehension but also elevates identity and self-esteem for learners who frequently perceive themselves as marginalized by standardized curricula. This finding corresponds with theoretical perspectives from Geneva Gay (2010) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), who assert that students achieve optimal learning when their cultural strengths are regarded as assets rather than impediments (Niazi, & Ahmad, 2018).

Moreover, educators in Swat acknowledged that implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) enhanced classroom dynamics, cultivated empathy, and mitigated behavioral challenges by rendering education more inclusive and emotionally supportive. The study also found systemic problems, though, like inflexible curriculum structures, a lack of training for teachers, and limited resources at the school. These problems are part of a bigger problem that rural education systems in developing countries face, where national standards often hide local diversity. Teachers really wanted professional development programs that would help them learn how to teach in a way that includes everyone and how to be emotionally intelligent (Mohammad, & Sadiq, 2022).

The results also show how important it is for people to get involved in their communities, since parents

and elders are very important for culturally based learning. Teachers can help students understand abstract ideas by using folktales, local languages, and native ways of solving problems. This method not only helps students do better in school, but it also helps preserve cultural heritage and promote social harmony. The discussion showed that cultural diversity programming is more than just a way to teach; it is a way of thinking that changes the way we think about education as a way to include people from different cultures and give them power. To put cultural diversity programming into practice in the Swat Valley, teachers, policymakers, and local communities must work together to create curricula, training, and policies that honor cultural diversity and encourage academic excellence (Ali, & Hussain, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

The study found that culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) could greatly change education in the Swat Valley by making learning more relevant to students' cultural and social lives. Students are more interested, motivated, and confident when teachers bring local customs, language, and values into the classroom (Ahmad, & Anjum, 2021). CRP promotes mutual respect, connects local culture with formal education, and makes learning more meaningful and open to everyone. Research findings demonstrate that culturally inadequate pedagogical approaches hinder student achievement and classroom participation. So, cultural competence and emotional intelligence should be at the top of the list for teacher training programs. Schools should also work with communities to keep indigenous knowledge alive and use it in their teaching. (Gay, 2018). Policymakers need to make curricula that are flexible and take into account the diversity of the area instead of forcing everyone to follow the same rules. In short, Cultural Resource Programs (CRPs) have become a way to get equal access to education, empowerment, and long-term learning in culturally rich areas like the Swat Valley.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Teacher Training Programs**

Teachers should be trained in culturally responsive pedagogy and inclusive teaching strategies through comprehensive professional development workshops. These programs need to stress the importance of knowing about students' cultural backgrounds and using that knowledge to plan lessons. Ongoing mentoring and peer learning can help keep culturally responsive teaching methods strong. These steps will make teachers feel surer of them and encourage inclusion in classrooms with a lot of different kinds of students.

#### **Curriculum Localization**

To make learning more relevant to students, curriculum designers should include local history, language, and traditions in school content. Education becomes more meaningful and reflects cultural identity when it takes into account what students have been through. Local case studies, folklore, and indigenous problem-solving methods should be part of the curriculum. This indigenous approach can help people feel proud of their culture and get more involved in their studies.

#### **Community Involvement**

Schools, parents, and community leaders should work together more to make the cultural basis of education stronger. Cultural fairs, storytelling sessions, and cultural heritage projects can help students learn in the classroom and in the community. Parental involvement helps keep cultural traditions alive in schools. These kinds of partnerships can help connect old and new ways of learning.

#### **Policy Support**

The principles of cultural inclusion reform must be formally included in curriculum frameworks and teacher training standards at both the provincial and national levels. Policymakers should set aside money for research, workshops, and learning materials that are open to all cultures. Making cultural

inclusion reform a permanent part of policy will make sure that educational change lasts for a long time. This kind of help will make schools in places like the Swat Valley more inclusive and fair.

### **Future Research**

Subsequent research ought to concentrate on assessing the enduring effects of culturally responsive instruction on student achievement and socio-emotional development. Longitudinal and comparative studies can elucidate the extensive applicability of culturally responsive instruction across various regions. Examining the gender, socioeconomic, and linguistic aspects of culturally responsive instruction will enhance this comprehension. This kind of research will help shape future changes and make culturally based education more effective.

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