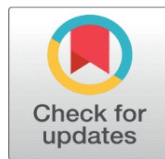


SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING: A STUDY OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN NAGALAND

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the social competence and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) practices of secondary school teachers in Nagaland, India, and examined their interrelationship as well as variations based on gender and teaching experience. A total of 378 teachers participated in the study. Social competence and CRT levels were assessed using z-scores. Findings revealed that while a majority of teachers exhibited average to above-average social competence, a significant proportion demonstrated low or below-average levels. Similarly, the implementation of CRT practices was generally limited, with only a small percentage of teachers demonstrating high levels of culturally responsive pedagogy. Independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVAs indicated no statistically significant differences in social competence or CRT based on gender or teaching experience. Importantly, a significant positive correlation was observed between social competence and CRT, suggesting that teachers with stronger interpersonal and relational skills are more likely to engage effectively in culturally responsive teaching. The study underscores the critical role of social competence in enabling culturally responsive pedagogy, particularly in culturally diverse classrooms such as those in Nagaland. Recommendations include targeted professional development, curriculum integration of social-emotional and cultural competencies, mentorship programs, and policy support to enhance inclusive and effective teaching practices.

Keywords: Social Competence, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Secondary School Teachers, Teacher Professional Development, Nagaland

1. INTRODUCTION

Effective teaching in increasingly diverse school education requires more than subject knowledge: it demands teachers' interpersonal skills, cultural awareness, and the ability to translate those competencies into classroom practice. Social competence is the set of skills that enable teachers to form supportive relationships, manage classroom interactions, resolve conflicts, and communicate across cultural boundaries. It has been identified as a foundation for creating learning environments where students feel respected and engaged. Contemporary frameworks for social and emotional competencies emphasise that teachers' own social-emotional skills influence both classroom climate and student outcomes,

acting as a buffer against stress and a scaffold for students' social learning [Collie et al. \(2025\)](#).

Parallel to the focus on social competence, a substantial body of scholarship argues that pedagogy must be culturally attuned to learners' identities, histories, and linguistic resources. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is rooted in the work of Ladson-Billings and others which reframes curriculum, assessment, and classroom interaction so that instruction affirms students' cultural backgrounds and leverages those backgrounds as assets for learning [Ladson-Billings \(1995\)](#), [Ladson-Billings \(2006\)](#). CRT is not merely adding diverse materials to lessons; it is a systematic shift in beliefs, expectations, and practices that positions culture centrally in teaching and learning. Empirical studies link culturally responsive practices to stronger teacher-student relationships, increased student engagement, and reductions in achievement gaps when implemented consistently [Plate et al. \(2025\)](#).

CRT requires teachers to form trusting relationships, practice perspective-taking, validate diverse worldviews, and adapt communication, all of which are aspects of social competence [Besan and Rajhans \(2025\)](#). The competencies of culturally responsive teachers explicitly include interpersonal capacities (e.g., relationship building, empathy, reflective dialogue) alongside pedagogical knowledge [Abacioglu et al. \(2020\)](#). Social competence is an ability that must be possessed by teachers, because with good social competence they have the social climate in schools will improve [Mennes et al. \(2024\)](#). The social competency of educators facilitates the attainment of learning objectives within the classroom. Social competence refers to the capacity to engage in communication with pupils, colleagues, and the broader community [Mustofa \(2020\)](#). Furthermore, the social competence of teachers is essential for enhancing a nation's human resources; hence, to elevate the quality of its human resources, a country must focus on augmenting the social competence of its educators [Vagi et al. \(2019\)](#). An effective learning process relies on educators who possess a thorough understanding of the subject matter, enabling them to demonstrate concepts effectively [Yin et al. \(2019\)](#). In the classroom situation, students are required to involve deeply in teaching and learning process, necessitating that teachers also exhibit a high level of proficiency for the same [Bourke et al. \(2018\)](#). Consequently, social competence functions as both a facilitator and an essential element of effective CRT.

National and regional policy documents now explicitly call for teacher competencies that combine inclusive, culturally sensitive pedagogy with wider socio-emotional and professional capabilities. India's National Education Policy 2020 emphasises multilingualism, inclusivity, curriculum relevance to local cultures, and teacher capacity building, all directly relevant to CRT and to the social competences teachers need to enact it. Recently the policy document from National Council for Teacher education (NCTE) "National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST)" emphasises on accelerating demand for teacher education reforms that integrate multicultural and culturally responsive approaches with competency-based teacher standards.

Despite clear conceptual overlap, the intersection between teachers' social competence and their enactment of culturally responsive teaching remains under-researched, particularly at the secondary level where adolescent identity formation, disciplinary demands, and culturally heterogeneous classrooms intensify relational and pedagogical complexity. While frameworks like CASEL describe teacher competencies that support social-emotional learning school-wide [CASEL \(2025\)](#), and NEP-2020 also emphasise culturally sensitive and multilingual approaches,

relatively few empirical studies simultaneously examine whether (and how) teachers' social competence predicts their capacity to adopt culturally responsive practices in secondary classrooms. This gap is especially salient in contexts where India's NEP-2020 calls for teacher professional development that combines cultural relevance, multilingual instruction, and competency-based pedagogy. Furthermore, the state Nagaland is unique in their geographical and cultural aspect. The state consists of sixteen (16) major tribe having different cultural setup. In view of this the importance of social competence and CRT of teachers are of utmost need of the time. No research has been found till date explaining these variables together, especially in Nagaland state. Therefore, this study addresses that gap by investigating following objectives:

- 1) To study the level of social competence among secondary school teachers,
- 2) To study the extent to which secondary school teachers implement CRT practices,
- 3) To compare the social competence and CRT among secondary school teachers based on gender and teaching experience, and
- 4) To find out the strength and nature of the relationship between social competence and CRT of secondary school teachers.

Based on the objectives following null hypothesis has been framed:

- 1) There is no significant difference in male and female for social competence of secondary school teachers.
- 2) There is no significant difference in social competence of secondary school teachers with respect to teaching experience.
- 3) There is no significant difference in male and female for CRT of secondary school teachers.
- 4) There is no significant difference in CRT of secondary school teachers with respect to teaching experience.
- 5) There is no significant relationship between social competence and CRT of secondary school teachers.

2. METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey research method has been used for the study. Data has been analysed quantitatively to find out the results for the discussed objectives.

2.1. POPULATION

Secondary school teachers from the Nagaland state have been selected as the population. The number of secondary school teachers in Nagaland is 17758 [DSEL \(2024\)](#) which is 53.6 % of total teachers in Nagaland state.

2.2. SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE

378 sample were selected by stratified random sampling technique keeping in mind about gender and teaching experience of the population. Number of samples were selected for the study was based on the table provided by Gill et al. in 2010 which is based on the Yamane's formula given in 1967 and mentioned in second edition of the book published in 1973.

2.3. TOOL USED BY THE STUDY

Social Competence Scale and Culturally Responsive Teaching scale were used to collect data. Both the tools were developed and standardized by the researcher in 2024 to measure the social competence and CRT of teachers at secondary level.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

Collected data was analysed according to the objectives by IBM SPSS Statistics Grad Pack 29.0 STANDARD.

Objective 1: To study the level of social competence among secondary school teachers.

To achieve the objective 1, z-scores were calculated and based on the z-score, levels of the social competence of the secondary school teachers has been decided.

Figure 1

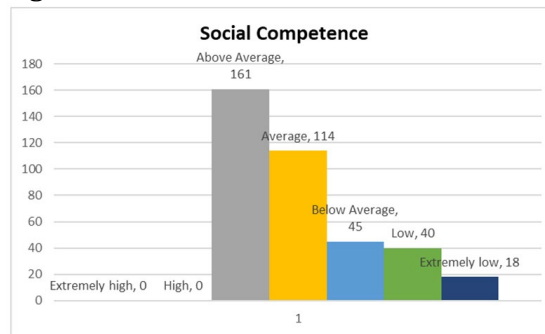


Figure 1 Level of Social Competence for Secondary School Teachers in Nagaland

According to the [Figure 1](#), 0 % of the teachers were having extremely high and high social competence. 43% of the teachers were having above average, 30% at the average level, 12% at below average, 10% having low and 5% of the teachers having extremely low social competence in Nagaland.

Objective 2: To study the extent to which secondary school teachers implement CRT practices

Like objective 1, to achieve the objective 2, z-scores were calculated and based on the z-score, extent of use for the CRT of the secondary school teachers has been decided.

Figure 2

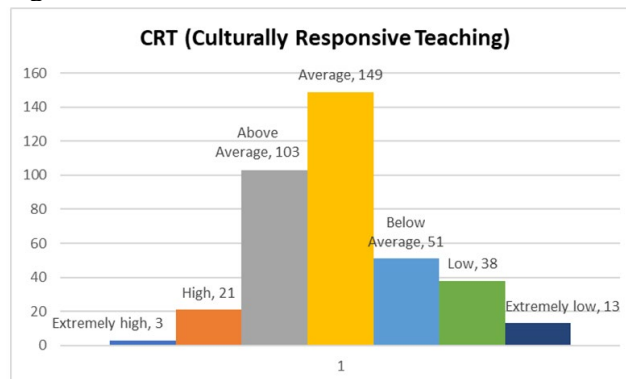


Figure 2 Extent to Which Teachers Were Using Culturally Responsive Teaching in Classroom

According to [Figure 2](#), only 1% and 6% of the teachers were using Culturally responsive teaching at extremely high and at high level respectively in the classroom settings in Nagaland state. 27% of the teachers were at above average level, 39% were at average, 14% were at below average, 10% at low and 3% of the teachers were at extremely low level in using culturally responsive teaching in the classrooms.

Objective 3: To compare the social competence and CRT among secondary school teachers based on gender and teaching experience.

Based on objective 3, four (4) null hypotheses were framed, and analysis has been done based on the hypothesis.

Null Hypothesis 1 There is no significant difference in male and female for social competence of secondary school teachers

Table 1

Table 1 Mean Difference Between Male and Female Secondary School Teachers in Nagaland for Social Competence

	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value	Sig/not sig.
Male	113	188.22	17.518	194.446	-1.314	0.19	Not significant
Female	265	190.74	15.911				
Total	378	189.99	16.425				

The results [Table 1](#) show that female secondary school teachers in Nagaland have a slightly higher mean score (190.74) than their male counterparts (188.22), with standard deviations of 15.91 and 17.52 respectively, indicating a similar spread of scores for both groups. An independent-samples t-test, using Welch's adjustment for unequal variances, produced a t-value of -1.314 with 194.446 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.190. Since this p-value is greater than the conventional 0.05 significance level, the difference in mean scores between male and female teachers is not statistically significant. This means that the small observed difference of about 2.5 points is likely due to chance rather than a real gender-based difference. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no difference between the two groups is retained, indicating that male and female secondary school teachers in Nagaland do not differ significantly on the measured variable.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in social competence of secondary school teachers with respect to teaching experience.

Table 2

Table 2 Mean Difference Among Teaching Experience Secondary School Teachers in Nagaland for Social Competence

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10349.307	27	383.308	1.469	.065
Within Groups	91353.627	350	261.010		
Total	101702.934	377			

The one-way ANOVA results [Table 2](#) show that the social competence scores of secondary school teachers were compared across different teaching-experience groups. The analysis yielded a between-groups sum of squares of 10,349.31 with 27 degrees of freedom, resulting in a mean square of 383.31. The within-groups sum of squares was 91,353.63 with 350 degrees of freedom, giving a mean square of 261.01. The calculated F-value is 1.469 with an associated p-value of 0.065.

Because the p-value is greater than the 0.05 significance level, the result is not statistically significant. This means that the small differences observed in mean social competence among teachers with varying years of teaching experience are likely due to random variation rather than a true effect of experience.

Accordingly, Null Hypothesis 2 which states that there is no significant difference in social competence of secondary school teachers with respect to teaching experience is retained.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in male and female for CRT of secondary school teachers.

Table 3

Table 3 Mean Difference Between Male and Female Secondary School Teachers in Nagaland for CRT

Column1	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value	Sig/not sig.
Male	113	145.71	17.755	188.532	-1.682	0.094	Not significant
Female	265	148.94	15.535				
Total	378	147.98	16.274				

The independent-samples t-test compared the CRT scores of male and female secondary school teachers. Male teachers (n = 113) had a mean score of 145.71 with a standard deviation of 17.76, while female teachers (n = 265) had a slightly higher mean of 148.94 with a standard deviation of 15.54. Using Welch's correction for unequal variances, the test produced a t-value of 1.682 with 188.532 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.094 [Table 3](#).

Since the p-value is greater than the conventional 0.05 significance level, the observed difference of about 3.2 points is not statistically significant. This indicates that any variation in CRT scores between male and female teachers is likely due to chance rather than a true gender effect.

Therefore, Null Hypothesis 3 is retained: there is no significant difference in the CRT of male and female secondary school teachers.

Null Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference in CRT of secondary school teachers with respect to teaching experience.

Table 4

Table 4 Mean Difference Among Teaching Experience Secondary School Teachers in Nagaland for CRT

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8732.446	27	323.424	1.283	.16
Within Groups	87972.695	349	252.071		
Total	96705.141	376			

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether the CRT scores of secondary school teachers differ according to their teaching experience. The analysis showed a between-groups sum of squares of 8,732.45 with 27 degrees of freedom, giving a mean square of 323.42. The within-groups sum of squares was 87,972.70 with 349 degrees of freedom, yielding a mean square of 252.07. The resulting F-value was 1.283 with a p-value of 0.160 [Table 4](#).

Because the p-value is greater than the 0.05 significance level, the difference in CRT scores across the various teaching-experience groups is not statistically significant. This means that any small variations observed among teachers with

different lengths of service are likely due to chance rather than a real effect of teaching experience.

Therefore, Null Hypothesis 4 has been retained, there is no significant difference in the Culturally Responsive Teaching of secondary school teachers with respect to teaching experience.

Null Hypothesis 5: There is no significant relationship between social competence and CRT of secondary school teachers.

Table 5

Table 5 Relationship Between Social Competence and CRT Of Secondary School Teachers in Nagaland

		CRT	SC
CRT	Pearson Correlation	1	.233
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	378	378
SC	Pearson Correlation	.233	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	378	378

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson product-moment correlation was computed to examine the relationship between social competence and CRT among secondary school teachers. The analysis shows a moderate correlation coefficient (r) [Bin et al. \(2021\)](#) of 0.233 with a p-value less than 0.001, based on a sample size of 378 teachers.

This positive coefficient indicates a moderate but meaningful positive relationship. Teachers with higher levels of social competence tend to show slightly higher levels of culturally responsive teaching as the p-value is below the 0.01 significance level, the relationship is statistically significant.

Therefore, Null Hypothesis 5 is rejected. There is a significant positive relationship between social competence and culturally responsive teaching among secondary school teachers, although the strength of the association is modest.

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to assess the levels of social competence and the extent of implementation of CRT practices among secondary school teachers in Nagaland. The findings reveal a nuanced landscape of teacher competencies and pedagogical practices, with significant implications for educational development in the region.

4.1. SOCIAL COMPETENCE LEVELS

The data indicate that a substantial proportion of teachers exhibit social competence levels that are either average or above average. Specifically, 43% of teachers were categorized as having above-average social competence, while 30% were at the average level. However, a notable 15% of teachers were identified as having below average or low social competence, suggesting areas for targeted professional development.

These findings align with existing literature that underscores the importance of social competence in effective teaching. Teachers' abilities to manage classroom dynamics, build supportive relationships, and communicate effectively are critical

for fostering positive learning environments [Abacioglu et al. \(2020\)](#). The variation in social competence levels among teachers in Nagaland highlights the need for context-specific training programs that address the unique cultural and social dynamics of the region.

4.2. IMPLEMENTATION OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

The study also examined the extent to which teachers implement CRT practices. The results revealed that only a small percentage of teachers 1% at an extremely high level and 6% at a high level reported consistent use of CRT strategies in their classrooms. In contrast, 27% were at an above-average level, and 39% were at an average level. Alarming, 23% of teachers were at below average or low levels of CRT implementation.

These findings are consistent with research indicating that while teachers may recognize the value of CRT, its consistent application in classrooms remains limited. Factors such as lack of training, insufficient resources, and limited awareness of culturally responsive methodologies can impede the effective implementation of CRT practices [Karataş et al. \(2022\)](#). In the context of Nagaland, where classrooms are characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity, the need for culturally attuned pedagogical approaches is particularly pressing.

4.3. GENDER AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE DIFFERENCES

The analyses of Null Hypotheses 1 to 4 revealed that there were no statistically significant differences in social competence or CRT between male and female secondary school teachers, nor across different teaching experience groups. These findings suggest that, within this sample, gender and years of teaching experience are not major determinants of these competencies. This aligns with previous research indicating that while gender differences may appear in certain pedagogical behaviours, such as communication styles, they are often minimal or non-significant when broader social-emotional and culturally responsive competencies are considered [Abacioglu et al. \(2020\)](#), [Yew and Mohamad Nasri \(2019\)](#). Similarly, teaching experience does not necessarily guarantee higher levels of CRT; some veteran teachers may rely on entrenched teaching practices that are less adaptable to culturally diverse classrooms, whereas younger teachers may benefit from more recent training or exposure to inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies. The literature further suggests that professional development, reflective practice, and targeted exposure can moderate the relationship between experience and teaching competencies, indicating that experience alone is insufficient unless it is accompanied by structured support and opportunities for adaptive learning [Karataş et al. \(2022\)](#).

4.4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND CRT

One of the key findings of the study is the statistically significant positive relationship between social competence and CRT ($r = .233, p < .001$). While the correlation is modest, it indicates that secondary school teachers who have stronger social competence tend to report higher CRT practices or orientations.

This result aligns with theoretical expectations: socially competent teachers, those who can build relationships, manage interpersonal dynamics, display empathy, perspective-taking, and cultural awareness are better positioned to create

classrooms that validate students' identities, adapt communication, and manage the relational dimension of culture in pedagogy. Various literature supports this relationship. Studies on teacher multicultural attitudes and perspective taking show that these contribute to more inclusive pedagogical practices [Abacioglu et al. \(2020\)](#). Similarly, literature on social-emotional learning and cultural competence suggests that when teachers are socially and emotionally aware, they are more likely to implement responsive practices that consider students' cultural backgrounds and needs [Rothstein \(2023\)](#).

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that while a considerable number of secondary school teachers in Nagaland possess average to above-average levels of social competence, there remains a notable proportion with low or below-average social competence, highlighting the need for targeted professional development in this area. Social competence, which encompasses skills such as effective communication, relationship building, conflict management, and empathy, is essential for creating supportive and engaging classroom environments, and the variation observed suggests that not all teachers are equally equipped to navigate the interpersonal and cultural complexities of diverse classrooms. In terms of CRT, the study revealed that very few teachers consistently implement CRT practices at high levels, with the majority operating at average or above-average levels, and a significant minority at low or below-average levels. This points to a gap between teachers' awareness of culturally responsive pedagogy and its practical application, which may be influenced by factors such as limited training, insufficient resources, and the challenges of addressing linguistic and cultural diversity in classrooms. Importantly, the study established a positive and significant relationship between social competence and CRT, indicating that teachers with higher social competence are more likely to engage effectively in culturally responsive practices, thereby reinforcing the idea that interpersonal skills and cultural awareness are interdependent components of effective teaching. Taken together, these results underscore the critical role of developing both social competence and culturally responsive pedagogical skills among teachers, not only to enhance individual teaching effectiveness but also to foster inclusive and equitable learning environments that respect and leverage the diverse cultural backgrounds of students. Given the unique socio-cultural context of Nagaland, where classrooms comprise students from multiple tribes with distinct languages and traditions, strengthening these competencies among teachers is essential for improving student engagement, reducing disparities in learning outcomes, and ultimately enhancing the overall quality of education in the state.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. COMPREHENSIVE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

Developing and implementing ongoing professional development programs that focus specifically on enhancing both social competence and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) will impact the quality of teaching and learning. Training should include modules on effective communication, empathy, conflict resolution, perspective-taking, and classroom relationship management, alongside strategies for adapting teaching to students' cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds. Simulation exercises, role-playing, and peer mentoring could be used to strengthen practical skills.

6.2. INTEGRATION OF CRT INTO TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Incorporating CRT and social-emotional skill development into pre-service teacher education programs will be beneficial. Curriculum should provide both theoretical knowledge and practical applications, including case studies of culturally diverse classrooms, lesson planning for inclusion, and culturally responsive assessment strategies.

6.3. CONTEXTUALIZED TEACHING RESOURCES

Providing teachers with teaching materials and resources that reflect the cultural, linguistic, and historical diversity of Nagaland's sixteen tribes will create inclusivity in the classrooms. This could include multilingual texts, folk stories, examples from local traditions, and culturally relevant case studies that help teachers implement CRT effectively in their classrooms.

6.4. MENTORSHIP AND PEER LEARNING NETWORKS

Establishing mentorship programmes, where experienced teachers with strong social competence and CRT practices guide novice teachers. Additionally, create peer learning communities within and across schools to facilitate sharing of best practices, collaborative problem-solving, and reflection on classroom experiences related to social competence and CRT.

6.5. INSTITUTIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

School administrations should actively encourage and support teachers to practice CRT and enhance social competence by providing time for collaborative planning, professional learning communities, and opportunities to engage with students' communities. Recognition programs, incentives, or awards could motivate teachers to adopt and maintain culturally responsive and socially competent practices.

6.6. REGULAR ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

Introduction of mechanisms for regular assessment of teachers' social competence and CRT practices will provide a better assessment techniques for the teachers. Feedback should be constructive and linked to professional development opportunities. Observations, self-assessments, and student feedback can help teachers identify strengths and areas for growth.

6.7. POLICY-LEVEL INITIATIVES

Advocate for policies at the state and national level that prioritize social-emotional skills and culturally responsive pedagogy in teacher standards, performance evaluation, and continuous professional development will enhance motivation and dedication of teachers and ultimately quality education. Policies should also allocate adequate resources for teacher training, culturally relevant learning materials, and research on effective CRT practices.

6.8. COMMUNITY AND PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Administration should encourage teachers to actively engage with local communities and parents to understand students' cultural backgrounds and expectations. Workshops, cultural events, and home-school interactions can strengthen teachers' awareness and ability to integrate students' cultural knowledge into classroom teaching.

6.9. RESEARCH AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Administration should promote further research particularly action research and other culturally diverse contexts in Nagaland to examine effective strategies for improving social competence and CRT. Schools should implement evidence-based interventions and monitor their impact on student engagement, learning outcomes, and teacher effectiveness.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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