



Culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogical practices for ethnic minority students in the northern province of Thailand

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogical practices for ethnic Karen students in northern Thailand. Using a qualitative approach with participatory action research (PAR) elements, the study involved document analysis, interviews, classroom observations, and collaborative teaching unit design at Ban Karen School. Findings reveal a complex landscape of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) implementation. While the school's curriculum remains predominantly Thai-centric, some teachers incorporate students' ethnic backgrounds into extra-curricular activities and specific lessons. The school principal demonstrates support for CRP, but teachers lack formal training in multicultural education. Students respond positively to culturally responsive activities, showing increased engagement and cultural pride. However, significant challenges to CRP implementation include high teacher turnover, heavy workloads, lack of resources, and cultural and linguistic mismatches between teachers and students. The study recommends implementing ongoing professional development programs focused on CRP, revising school policies to value Karen language use, and creating a school-wide CRP implementation plan. These findings contribute to understanding the complexities of implementing culturally responsive education in ethnically diverse contexts and suggest pathways for creating more inclusive learning environments for ethnic minority students in Thailand.

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Introduction

In contemporary education, the traditional “one-size-fits-all” approach has been increasingly criticized for failing to address the diverse needs of learners, especially those from varied socio-cultural, historical, and linguistic backgrounds. This standardized model often overlooks individual differences, potentially exacerbating learning disparities. In response, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) has emerged as a holistic alternative. Grounded in principles of inclusivity and equity, CRP celebrates cultural diversity and adapts instruction to students’ unique experiences and identities, aiming to create more equitable learning outcomes (Banks, 2010; Gay, 2015).

Thailand has recognized indigenous and ethnic minority rights to manage their own educational systems, aligning with principles of cultural responsiveness and equity (Ministry of Culture, 2010). Indigenous education networks and partnerships have emerged, focusing on integrating mother tongue instruction. The Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) program, implemented in several northern Thai schools with ethnic minority populations, exemplifies this approach. MTB-MLE respects cultural diversity and enhances educational outcomes by making learning more relevant and inclusive (Kosonen, 2009).

Challenges in implementing CRP for ethnic minorities are global. From Maori students in New Zealand (Bishop et al., 2009) to Native Americans in the US (McCarty & Lee, 2014) and immigrants in Western Europe (Banks, 2014), educators worldwide struggle to balance mainstream curricula with culturally responsive approaches. These global experiences offer insights for addressing ethnic Karen students’ needs in Thailand, situating this study within the broader discourse on educational equity and inclusion (Leepreecha & Meixi, 2018).

This study examines the implementation of CRP for ethnic Karen students at Ban Karen School, a pseudonymous institution in Chiang Mai’s mountainous highlands. Serving over 300 predominantly Karen students from kindergarten to junior secondary level, the school has integrated community-based projects into its curriculum. These initiatives, including farming and cultivation activities, support the local economy while providing culturally relevant, hands-on learning experiences. This approach aligns with CRP principles by connecting students’ cultural heritage and lived experiences with academic learning. The school’s vision emphasizes developing skills for a self-sufficient local economy while nurturing students’ unique characters. This

study aims to answer the following research question: How are culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogical practices implemented for ethnic minority students in the northern province of Thailand?

Literature Review

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) has emerged as a crucial strategy for promoting equity and inclusion in diverse educational settings. This literature review examines CRP’s theoretical foundations, applications, and relevance to ethnic minority education in Thailand, situating the present study within the broader landscape of culturally responsive education.

Banks (2010) outlines four levels of integrating multicultural content into curriculum and teaching: 1) contribution approach, 2) additive approach, 3) transformation approach, and 4) social action approach. These levels progress from simple inclusion to active engagement, providing a framework for educators to create inclusive learning environments that foster cultural competence, empathy, and social responsibility.

In the context of ethnic minority education in Thailand, particularly for Karen students, these levels offer a valuable lens for analyzing current practices and potential areas for improvement. The contribution approach, often seen in Thai schools, involves adding basic multicultural content, such as highlighting accomplishments of diverse individuals. While this is a starting point, it risks tokenism if not developed further. The additive approach, incorporating multicultural content as supplementary material, is more common in schools with established MTB-MLE programs. However, for truly effective CRP, schools like Ban Karen should aim for the transformation and social action approaches. The transformation approach involves fundamentally restructuring curriculum to incorporate diverse perspectives across all subjects, challenging stereotypes and promoting critical thinking. This aligns with Thailand’s policy goals of preserving ethnic minority cultures while preparing students for success in broader society (Premsrirat & Person, 2018).

The social action approach, which empowers students to address societal issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, represents the highest level of CRP implementation. While challenging to achieve, especially given resource constraints in rural Thai schools, this approach holds the most potential for fostering active citizenship and cultural pride among ethnic minority students. In our study of Ban Karen School, we utilize Banks’ (2010) framework as both an analytical tool

and an aspirational model. It allows us to assess current practices, identify areas for improvement, and suggest pathways for enhancing CRP implementation. Building on this framework, our research employs culturally responsive storytelling as a key methodology. Storytelling, deeply rooted in Karen oral traditions, serves as a bridge between Banks' theoretical levels and practical classroom application. This approach aligns particularly well with the transformation and social action levels, as it allows students to engage critically with their cultural heritage while developing important literacy and communication skills.

Culturally responsive storytelling enhances CRP practices in several ways. First, it centers students' voices and experiences, validating their cultural knowledge (Gay, 2015). Second, it provides a familiar format for exploring complex themes, making abstract concepts more accessible. Third, it encourages intergenerational learning, as students often draw on family and community stories, strengthening school-community ties (Moll et al., 1992). We chose storytelling over other methods

due to its cultural relevance to Karen traditions and its versatility in addressing various curriculum areas. Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of storytelling in CRP, particularly for indigenous and minority students. For example, Iseke (2013) found that indigenous storytelling practices in Canada fostered cultural pride and academic engagement among First Nations students.

Ban Karen School has developed local curriculum initiatives that align with CRP principles, exemplifying Banks' transformation approach. These initiatives, such as integrating Karen weaving with mathematics and art, and combining cultural knowledge with science in herbal medicine projects, restructure the curriculum to incorporate diverse perspectives across subjects. By connecting academic content with students' cultural experiences, these initiatives foster both academic achievement and cultural pride. This approach provides a foundation for examining the implementation of CRP within the conceptual framework of Banks' levels of multicultural content integration (Figure 1).

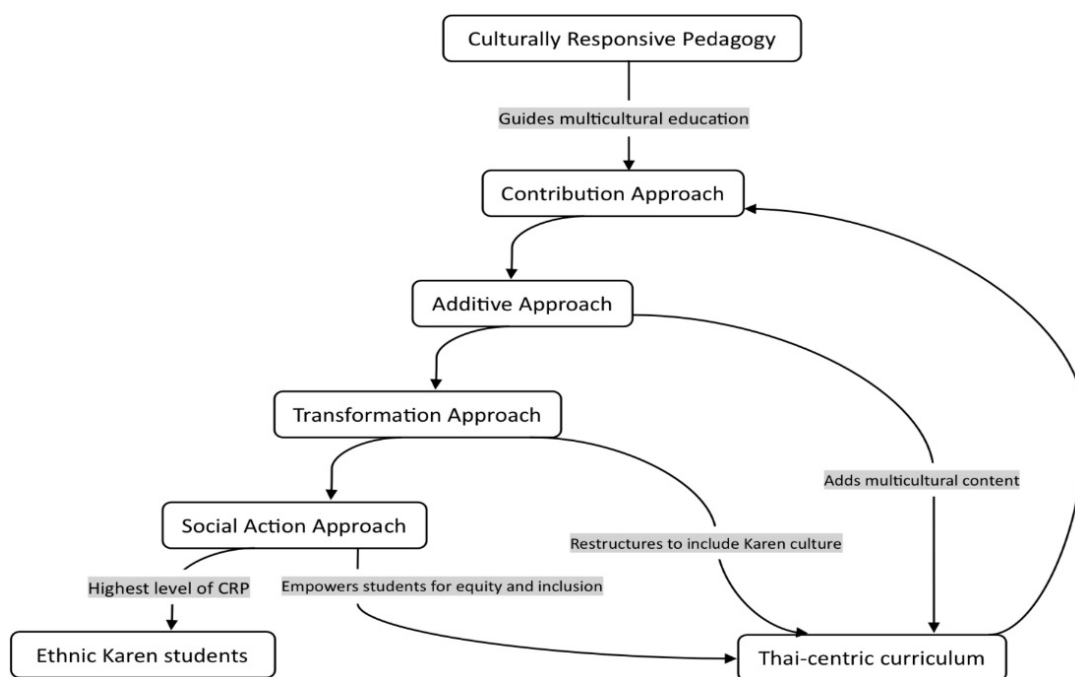


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative approach with PAR elements structured in four distinct stages as follows (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

1) *Initial phase through data collection and contextual understanding*: We began by collaborating with the school principal and teachers to collect comprehensive data about the school, teachers, students, and local community contexts. This involved document analysis by examining school records, policy documents, and curriculum materials, conducting initial interviews with the principal and key teachers and recording detailed field notes about the school environment and community setting.

Data analysis in this phase involved thematic coding of documents and interview transcripts, and descriptive analysis of field notes. This initial analysis informed our approach to subsequent phases by identifying key areas of focus for CRP implementation. To establish a rationale for CRP, we utilized community-based education principles, operationalizing them through collaborative mapping exercises with teachers to identify local cultural resources, guided reflections on how to integrate community knowledge into lesson plans and workshops on creating culturally relevant teaching materials using local resources.

2) *Field visits and in-depth data collection*: Building on insights from the initial phase, we conducted classroom observations by focusing on 7th and 8th grade classrooms, using a structured observation protocol to record teacher-

student interactions and cultural elements in instruction, engaging the school principal and teachers in discussions about their perspectives on ethnic Karen students and CRP and immersing ourselves in school activities to gain a holistic understanding of the school culture.

Analysis of this phase involved coding of observation notes and interview transcripts, with codes grouped into emerging themes. These themes directly informed the design of the collaborative teaching units in the next phase.

3) *Collaborative design and implementation*: Leveraging findings from the previous phases, we conducted collaborative design workshops with three teachers, co-created teaching units and lesson plans incorporating CRP principles and implemented culturally responsive storytelling activities (Iseke, 2013). This phase was directly informed by the challenges and opportunities identified in phase two, ensuring that the designed activities addressed observed needs and built on existing strengths.

4) *Implementation and reflection*: In this final phase, we observed the implementation of co-designed CRP activities, particularly focusing on storytelling, facilitated student presentations of narrative posters, conducted post-implementation interviews with teachers and students and held reflection sessions to gather feedback on the CRP activities.

Data analysis in this phase involved thematic coding of observation notes, student artifacts, and interview transcripts. We also conducted a comparative analysis between pre- and post-implementation data to assess the impact of the CRP activities (Table 1).

Table 1 Key emerging themes identified through our analysis of CRP practices

Theme	Key findings	Representative quotes
1. Curriculum and school culture	Predominantly Thai-centric curriculum, Karen culture absent from main curriculum and some integration in extra-curricular activities	<i>Learning through mainstream Thai language was perceived as legitimate official knowledge, as it aligned with standardized examinations, higher education admission systems, recognized credentials, and socio-economic mobility in modern society.</i>
2. Teachers' perspectives	Some deficit views towards Karen students, varied perspectives based on experience and background and lack of formal training in CRP	<i>Most Karen boys are lazy, and they are incompetent in studying. They usually don't pay attention to the class. (Teacher A, demonstrating deficit view)</i>
3. Principal's support for CRP	Initiated Karen language and culture classes, allocated resources for cultural displays and organized professional development workshops	<i>We must preserve Karen culture while meeting national academic standards. Students are interested in cultural diversity, but we face pressure to improve overall educational quality.</i>
4. CRP implementation	Mainly in extra-curricular activities and specific lessons, community-based education approach used and limited integration into daily teaching	<i>We supplement textbooks with community-based learning experiences. Students visit local sites like forests, paddy fields, and markets to learn about Karen culture firsthand.</i>
5. Student responses to CRP	Increased engagement and interest, enhanced comprehension with familiar contexts and pride in cultural heritage	<i>When we talk about our own traditions in class, it makes me want to pay more attention. (Prai, 8th-grade student)</i>

Table 1 Continued

Theme	Key findings	Representative quotes
6. Challenges in CRP implementation	High teacher turnover, heavy workloads and time constraints, lack of resources and cultural/linguistic mismatches	<i>Sometimes I don't understand everything in Thai. It would be helpful if we could use Karen sometimes to explain difficult ideas.</i> (Chalaw, 8 th -grade student)
7. Opportunities for improvement	Need for ongoing professional development, revision of school policies and greater community involvement	<i>It would be great if our elders could come to school sometimes to teach us about our traditions.</i> (Suthee, 8 th -grade student)

Regarding instrument validity, interview protocols were piloted with a small group of teachers not involved in the main study and refined based on feedback. Observation checklists were developed based on established CRP literature and validated by experts in multicultural education and educational research. Researchers also maintained reflective journals throughout the study to acknowledge and mitigate potential biases.

Key Informant

Key informants were purposively selected based on specific research objectives and characteristics relevant to the conceptual framework. The sample included as follows. One school principal was selected due to their pivotal role in shaping school policy and curriculum decisions. Three teachers were chosen based on their subject specializations (social studies, English/Thai language, and science) to represent diverse curriculum areas. These subjects were identified in the initial phase as key areas for CRP integration. Twelve 8th grade students (seven female and five male) were selected as these students had the most extended experience in the school, providing rich perspectives on their educational journey (Irizarry, 2009). The gender balance aimed to ensure diverse viewpoints. Students were chosen based on their willingness to participate and parental consent.

The selection of these key informants allowed for a comprehensive understanding of CRP implementation from administrative, instructional, and student perspectives. The diversity in teacher subjects and student demographics enabled us to explore how CRP manifests across different areas of the curriculum and how it impacts various student experiences. This approach to key informant selection aligns with our research objectives by providing insights into the multi-faceted nature of CRP implementation in the specific context of Ban Karen School.

Ethical considerations

Given the sensitive nature of working with ethnic minority students and the power dynamics inherent in educational research, we adhered to strict ethical guidelines as follows. We obtained written informed consent from all adult participants. For students, we secured both parental consent and student assent, ensuring that all information was provided in both Thai and Karen languages. All data were anonymized, with pseudonyms used for the school and participants. Data were stored securely and accessible only to the research team. Regarding cultural sensitivity, we consulted with Karen community leaders to ensure our research practices respected local customs. We explicitly also discussed our role as researchers with participants, emphasizing that their participation was voluntary and would not affect their standing in the school. To ensure the rigor of our research, we used multiple data sources (interviews, observations, documents) and methods to cross-verify findings. Preliminary findings were shared with participants to ensure accurate representation of their perspectives.

Results and Discussion

Before presenting our findings, we define two key terms: “mainstream Thai-centric curriculum” refers to educational content and approaches reflecting dominant ethnic Thai cultural norms, including standard Thai language instruction, national history, and centralized testing standards. “Cultural practices” encompasses daily school routines, traditions, and social norms, including classroom interactions, school rituals, and activities that reinforce cultural values. Our findings and discussion are organized according to four main themes and seven key emerging themes as follows (Table 1).

The seven emerging themes presented in Table 1 provide an organizational framework for our detailed findings. Each theme represents a critical aspect of CRP implementation at Ban Karen School, supported by empirical evidence and participant voices. Below, we examine each theme in detail.

Curriculum, teaching methods, and school culture in relation to culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP)

Through document analysis, field notes, and classroom observations, it became evident that a mainstream Thai-centric school curriculum, along with relevant teaching methods and cultural practices, was consistently reinforced on a daily basis for all teachers and students. In contrast, local ethnic culture, specifically Karen culture, was notably absent from the curriculum, teaching approaches, and school practices.

Despite the majority of students being current members and descendants of the local Karen ethnic community, the curriculum, teaching methods, and school culture were structured according to the mainstream standard-based curriculum. This approach has been criticized for its lack of relevance and cultural insensitivity (Jungck & Kajornsin, 2003). Learning through mainstream Thai language was perceived as legitimate official knowledge, as it aligned with standardized examinations, higher education admission systems, recognized credentials, and socio-economic mobility in modern society. This Thai-centric focus was reflected in the curriculum, teachers' instructional practices, classroom decorations, school culture, and daily activities.

The curriculum documents, textbooks, and instructional materials predominantly reflected mainstream Thai language, with students' ethnic cultures and lived experiences rarely represented. Notably, only standard Thai was permitted in the classroom, discouraging students from speaking their mother tongue. Although four local ethnic teachers taught in the 4th and 6th grade classrooms, Thai remained the dominant language, with mother tongue allowed only when students struggled to understand Thai. School culture further reinforced this Thai-centric approach. For example, students gathered in rows at 8 am daily to pray and sing the national Thai anthem, with no regular activities acknowledging ethnic cultural backgrounds or diversity in morning events or school public spaces. Classroom decorations and bulletin boards exclusively displayed mainstream Thai stories and modern imagery. The sole representation of Karen culture was a map showing the process of making Karen costumes, exhibited in a local-style pavilion distant from the main school buildings.

Although Thailand's educational policy mandates have created legitimate spaces for nuanced forms of CRP in schools, implementation has been largely tokenistic (Arphattananon, 2021; Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2016; Wallace & Athamesara, 2004). The findings clearly indicate that while the school has made some efforts to

incorporate elements of students' ethnic backgrounds, there remains significant room for improvement in creating a fully culturally responsive learning environment. The predominance of Thai-centric curriculum and practices suggests a need for more comprehensive and systemic changes to truly reflect and value the diverse ethnic backgrounds of the student body.

School principal and teachers' perspectives on ethnic minority students

Our research revealed a range of deficit views held by some teachers at Ban Karen School. These perspectives often centered on perceived academic deficiencies, behavioral issues, and cultural misalignments. For instance, Teacher A expressed: *"Most Karen boys are lazy, and they are incompetent in studying. They usually don't pay attention to the class. They prefer to attend vocational school to become mechanics. Even though they receive higher education, most students end up being farmers at home. They think it's better for them because they don't have to compete with others"*.

This statement reflects a generalized negative perception of male Karen students, attributing academic disengagement to inherent traits rather than considering systemic factors or cultural differences. In classroom observations, we noted instances where these deficit views manifested in subtle ways. For example, during a Thai language class, a teacher was observed calling on Karen students less frequently than their Thai counterparts, potentially reflecting lower expectations for their participation and performance.

These deficit views, commonly observed in ethnic and indigenous contexts globally (Pale, 2019), significantly influence classroom dynamics and student achievement. Teachers holding such perspectives tend to provide less challenging work, fewer leadership opportunities, and reduced interactions with Karen students, potentially leading to prejudice and oppression (Toyota, 2005). This creates a self-fulfilling prophecy: reduced expectations and opportunities result in lower academic performance and engagement, reinforcing teachers' initial deficit views.

Interestingly, we found that teachers' perspectives varied based on several factors. To illustrate, more experienced teachers often demonstrated more nuanced views of Karen students, recognizing individual differences and potential. Teachers from diverse backgrounds or those who had lived in multicultural environments tended to hold fewer deficit views. Science and math teachers, on average, expressed fewer deficit views compared

to language and social studies teachers. This may be due to the perceived “universal” nature of STEM subjects. For instance, Teacher B, with over 15 years of experience teaching in diverse communities, shared: “*Each student brings unique strengths to the classroom. Our Karen students often have rich ecological knowledge that enhances our science lessons. It’s about finding ways to tap into their existing knowledge and experiences.*”

Though challenges remain, the school has made some efforts to address these deficit views. The school organized a workshop on cultural sensitivity, but attendance was voluntary and not all teachers participated. Efforts to bring Karen community members into the school for cultural events have helped some teachers develop more positive perspectives. The school principal has also implemented a system where teachers with more positive views of Karen students mentor those struggling with deficit perspectives. The following excerpt illustrates the principal’s perspective: “*We must preserve Karen culture while meeting national academic standards. Students are interested in cultural diversity, but we face pressure to improve overall educational quality. To achieve this balance, we need specialized teacher training in local cultural knowledge, supported by higher education institutions.*”

The principal’s commitment to CRP manifests in various tangible ways. Here are specific examples of how this support translates into action. First, *specific initiatives and programs*; the principal initiated a weekly Karen language and culture class for all students. This program, taught by local Karen elders, aims to preserve the Karen language and cultural practices among the student body. The school also launched a project where students work with community members on traditional Karen crafts, such as weaving and woodcarving. These products are then sold at local markets, with proceeds supporting both the school and local artisans. Second, *resource allocation for CRP-related activities and materials*; resources were allocated to create permanent displays of Karen cultural artifacts throughout the school, including traditional clothing, tools, and artwork. Each display includes informational placards in both Thai and Karen. Third, *professional development opportunities*; the principal organized a series of semester workshops on cultural competence, inviting experts from local universities and NGOs to train teachers on CRP principles and practices. In addition, the principal encourages teachers to conduct action research on CRP in their classrooms. Time is allocated during staff meetings for teachers to share their findings and discuss implementation strategies.

Under the principal’s guidance, the school adopted a policy that recognizes Karen as an official language of communication alongside Thai. All school announcements and important documents are now provided in both languages. The school dress code was also modified to allow students to wear traditional Karen clothing or incorporate Karen design elements into their school uniforms on designated days. Regarding community engagement initiatives, monthly sessions were established where parents are invited to share aspects of Karen culture with teachers, fostering mutual understanding and respect.

These concrete examples demonstrate how the principal’s support for CRP extends beyond rhetoric to tangible actions that impact various aspects of school life. By allocating resources, changing policies, providing professional development, and fostering community engagement, the principal has created an environment that values and incorporates Karen culture throughout the educational experience (Jatuporn, 2025). It is important to note that while these initiatives represent significant progress, challenges remain in fully implementing CRP across all aspects of the school’s operations and curriculum. These efforts face obstacles since the school lacks funds for comprehensive, ongoing professional development on cultural responsiveness. Frequent staff changes make it challenging to sustain long-term efforts to change perspectives while broader societal attitudes towards ethnic minorities in Thailand influence teacher perspectives and are difficult to address at the school level alone.

Teachers’ pedagogical practices relevant to CRP

Despite lacking formal CRP training, teachers at Ban Karen school implemented practices aligning with international approaches, integrating CRP principles across various subjects and community-based projects (Gibbs & Howley, 2000; Pale, 2019; Singh & Espinoza-Herold, 2014). Experienced teachers’ familiarity with CRP was likely influenced by nearby MTB-MLE projects aimed at improving equity in marginalized areas. Teachers recognized that incorporating students’ ethnic backgrounds and experiences enhanced academic achievement, critical thinking, and participation in both school and community.

Classroom observations revealed that CRP was primarily implemented through extra-curricular activities and specific lessons, rather than being fully integrated into the school curriculum. During the co-design process, we observed that some teachers had made significant efforts

to incorporate students' ethnic cultural backgrounds and lived experiences into their classes. Several teachers employed a community-based education approach, engaging students with local elders to learn about real-life experiences, the importance of environmental resources, and the values of local wisdom inherited from previous generations of the ethnic Karen community (Wallace & Athamesara, 2004).

However, it is significant to note that these meaningful activities were limited to subjects such as social studies, science, arts, and literacy classes, often in extra-curricular forms or as specific lessons. They were not consistently incorporated into regular day-to-day teaching units and lesson plans. The following excerpts illustrate how teachers integrated students' ethnic cultural experiences into their teaching practices: *"We supplement textbooks with community-based learning experiences. Students visit local sites like forests, paddy fields, and markets to learn about Karen culture firsthand. They also engage in hands-on activities, such as preparing traditional foods and creating presentations on local cultural elements. These practices make learning more relevant and engaging for our students."*

CRP activities incorporating students' ethnic backgrounds significantly enhanced their academic performance and community engagement. One teacher noted, *"When we use Karen folktales in literacy lessons, students are much more engaged. They ask questions and make connections to their lives."* Teachers observed increased student participation when local culture was integrated, as evidenced by another teacher's comment: *"During our Karen New Year project, even usually quiet students actively contributed ideas."* However, consistent CRP implementation remained limited due to various constraints. As one teacher explained, *"We want to include more culturally relevant content, but we struggle with time constraints and aligning it with the national curriculum requirements."*

CRP implementation at Ban Karen School still faces significant challenges. Most teachers, originating from outside the region, lack deep understanding of students' mother tongue and local cultures. Despite some willingness to learn, a mismatch persists between teachers' pedagogical knowledge and students' cultural contexts, hindering effective CRP implementation. High teacher turnover creates gaps in CRP expertise, while heavy workloads and time constraints limit teachers' ability to engage in extra-curricular CRP activities. Additionally, the Thai-centric curriculum further restricts CRP resources and best practices (Sahasewiyon, 2004; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Pale, 2019).

Despite supportive policies, CRP implementation at Ban Karen School often reduces to tokenism. Local educators struggle with isolated populations and community resistance to non-traditional pedagogies (Gibbs & Howley, 2000). Teachers' CRP approaches range from superficial to critical, action-oriented practices, impacting students' civic identity development (Arphattananon, 2021). However, current practices often simplify to uncritical cultural celebrations, undermining CRP's transformative potential. This underscores the need for more comprehensive, critical CRP strategies to achieve true educational equity and justice.

Students' perspectives and experiences with CRP

Through a combination of focus group discussions, individual interviews, and observations of student-led presentations, we gathered rich data on how students perceived and engaged with culturally responsive pedagogical practices.

Students were organized into three groups to present local stories using storyboards. This activity revealed several key insights. Regarding enthusiasm and engagement, *"I've never felt so excited about a school project before. It was like bringing our home into the classroom,"* shared Mina, an 8th-grade student. In terms of connection to community, students actively consulted parents and community elders, demonstrating the bridge CRP can create between school and community. As Korn, an 8th-grader, explained, *"My grandmother was so happy when I asked her about our traditional stories. She said it's important that we don't forget."* Regarding pride in cultural heritage, the presentations fostered a sense of pride among students. *"I didn't realize how cool our Karen stories are. Now I want to learn more,"* said Sornchai, an 8th-grade student.

Following CRP activities, students reported increased engagement and interest in learning. Regarding relevance of curriculum, *"When we talk about our own traditions in class, it makes me want to pay more attention,"* noted Prai, an 8th-grade student. Students reported better comprehension when lessons incorporated familiar cultural contexts. Nikom, an 8th-grader, shared, *"It's easier to understand math when we use examples from our daily life in the village."* In addition, the introduction of Chinese New Year decorations sparked curiosity. *"I never knew other cultures had similar traditions to ours. It makes me want to learn about more cultures,"* said Mai, an 8th-grade student.

Students also provided valuable insights into the challenges they face and suggestions for improvement.

Some students expressed difficulty with Thai-only instruction. “*Sometimes I don’t understand everything in Thai. It would be helpful if we could use Karen sometimes to explain difficult ideas,*” suggested Chalaw, an 8th-grade student. Regarding the desire for more cultural integration, “*I wish we could have more lessons that include our Karen culture, not just in special projects,*” said Prena, an 8th-grader. Students also expressed enthusiasm for more community involvement in their education. Suthee, an 8th-grade student, proposed, “*It would be great if our elders could come to school sometimes to teach us about our traditions.*” These student perspectives provide crucial insights into the effectiveness and potential areas for improvement in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in this context.

The students’ insights not only highlight areas for improvement but also reflect broader systemic challenges in implementing CRP at Ban Karen School. Their suggestions for bilingual instruction, increased cultural integration, and community involvement directly correspond to several key barriers identified in our analysis.

Several interconnected factors hinder CRP implementation at Ban Karen school as follows: Thai-centric curriculum and standardized testing limit local adaptations, inadequate teacher preparation in multicultural education and CRP, cultural and linguistic mismatches between teachers and students, resource limitations, including heavy workloads and lack of culturally appropriate materials, insufficient community engagement in curriculum development and

decision-making, resistance to change due to ingrained beliefs about mainstream Thai education and lack of systemic support and a comprehensive school-wide CRP approach. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving policy changes, teacher education reform, community partnerships, and sustained stakeholder commitment. Table 2 thus presents a comparative analysis of pre- and post-CRP implementation data at Ban Karen School.

Table 2 reveals three major patterns in CRP implementation at Ban Karen School. The strongest positive impacts emerged in student engagement, cultural pride, and community involvement, with increased student participation and cultural sharing. While moderate improvements occurred in academic performance and teacher attitudes, curriculum integration and language use showed inconsistent progress requiring systematic implementation. These findings suggest that while CRP shows promise for creating inclusive learning environments, sustained success demands addressing both pedagogical and structural challenges.

This side-by-side comparison assesses changes in various aspects of the educational experience, highlighting the impact of culturally responsive pedagogical practices. This comparative analysis is based on qualitative observations, interviews, and limited quantitative data collected during the study period. Long-term, systematic evaluation would be needed to fully assess the impact of CRP implementation.

Table 2 Comparative analysis of pre- and post-CRP implementation data

Aspect	Pre-implementation	Post-implementation	Impact assessment
1. Student engagement	Low participation in class discussions Limited enthusiasm for school projects	Increased voluntary participation High enthusiasm for culturally relevant projects	Positive: students more actively engaged in learning
2. Academic performance	Below average scores in standardized tests High absenteeism	Moderate improvement in test scores Decreased absenteeism	Moderate positive: some academic gains, but more long-term observation needed.
3. Cultural pride	Students hesitant to express cultural identity Limited knowledge of Karen traditions	Increased willingness to share cultural knowledge Active interest in learning about Karen culture	Strongly positive: enhanced sense of cultural identity and pride
4. Language use	Exclusive use of Thai in classrooms Students struggling with Thai-only instruction	Some integration of Karen language in lessons Students more comfortable in bilingual setting	Positive but limited: more systematic integration of Karen language still needed
5. Teacher attitudes	Prevalence of deficit views towards Karen students Limited understanding of CRP principles	Increased appreciation of Karen culture Growing interest in CRP methodologies	Moderately positive: shift in attitudes observed, but ongoing professional development required
6. Curriculum integration	Karen culture absent from mainstream curriculum Exclusively Thai-centric content	Some integration in specific lessons and extra-curricular activities	Positive but inconsistent: CRP principles applied more in certain areas, need for systematic integration across curriculum

Table 2 Continued

Aspect	Pre-implementation	Post-implementation	Impact assessment
7. Community involvement	Limited interaction between school and community Parents hesitant to engage with school	Increased community participation in school activities Parents more involved in children's education	Strongly positive: enhanced school-community relationship, but potential for further development
8. Student-teacher relationships	Formal, distant relationships Limited understanding of students' backgrounds	More open and culturally sensitive interactions Teachers showing interest in students' culture	Positive: improved rapport, but room for further development of culturally responsive relationships

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) implementation at Ban Karen School in northern Thailand, revealing a complex landscape where a predominantly Thai-centric curriculum offers minimal ethnic minority representation. While principals and teachers show positive attitudes towards CRP, they lack formal multicultural education training, limiting CRP primarily to extra-curricular activities. Although students demonstrate increased engagement and cultural pride in response to CRP, significant challenges persist, including teacher turnover, heavy workloads, resource scarcity, and cultural/linguistic mismatches.

Based on these findings, we recommend implementing mandatory CRP-focused professional development programs, developing teacher mentorship pairs, and collaborating with universities for specialized ethnic minority education courses. The school should also implement a Karen language-inclusive policy, revise assessment methods, and create a school-wide CRP plan with clear accountability measures. Future research should examine the effectiveness of professional development models and CRP's long-term impact on student achievement and cultural identity.

While Ban Karen School faces implementation challenges, opportunities exist for creating a more inclusive learning environment. Through targeted professional development, policy changes, and community engagement, schools can develop sustainable CRP implementation that benefits not only ethnic minority students but enriches Thailand's educational system as a whole.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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