



## The Importance of Cultural Responsiveness in Tertiary Foreign Language Education in Collectivist Contexts

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**ABSTRACT:** Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) holds that teaching is more effective and more equitable when it draws on learners' cultural knowledge, values and ways of participating. This systematic review, reported in line with PRISMA 2020, asks what the evidence indicates about the importance of culturally responsive practice in this setting and how far that evidence can be trusted. The evidence indicates that cultural responsiveness matters chiefly through four mechanisms: relational trust between teacher and learners, protection of face during participation, the pedagogic fit of imported methods such as communicative language teaching and group work, and the relevance of content to learners' identities and professional futures. Importance, however, is established mainly through perceptions and engagement rather than through demonstrated effects on learning; cultural explanations are routinely confounded with institutional ones such as examination washback; and the construct of collectivism is often applied in ways that the cross-cultural literature has shown to be essentialising. The review argues that importance should be treated as a well-supported but under-tested hypothesis, and that culture is better understood as a repertoire of practice than as a fixed trait. Implications and strategies for practice are addressed in a companion review.

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culturally responsive pedagogy, foreign language education, tertiary education, collectivism, face, communicative language teaching, importance, systematic review

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, tertiary FL education across East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Middle East has been reshaped by two forces that pull in different directions. The first is a policy discourse in which proficiency in English and other international languages is positioned as a prerequisite for graduate employability, mobility and national competitiveness; Vietnam's national foreign language project, for example, framed language proficiency as a pillar of integration and human-resource development (Government of Vietnam, 2008), and comparable discourses have been documented across the Asia-Pacific region (Nunan, 2003; Butler, 2011; Hamid & Nguyen, 2016). The second is the circulation of pedagogic models, notably communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language teaching and collaborative learning, whose assumptions about learner autonomy, talk, error and the teacher's role were developed in Anglophone, largely individualist settings. When policy mandates the adoption of such models, the classroom becomes the place where their assumptions meet learners' and teachers' existing expectations. A long line of scholarship argues that the encounter is rarely frictionless: the "communicative approach" has been questioned as culturally inappropriate (Ellis, 1996), its importation described as inviting potential cultural resistance (Hu, 2002), and its adoption in several Asian systems documented as partial, negotiated and often superficial (Anderson, 1993; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Li, 1998; Gorsuch, 2000; Carless, 2007).

Yet the same literature has been criticised for treating "the Asian learner" or "the collectivist classroom" as a stable object. Critics have shown that the stereotype of the passive, rote-oriented, teacher-dependent Confucian-heritage learner is empirically fragile (Biggs, 1996; Kember, 2000; Littlewood, 2000; Kennedy, 2002), that national-culture frameworks can reify what are in fact heterogeneous and changing practices (McSweeney, 2002; Baskerville, 2003; Holliday, 1999), and that traits attributed to "Confucian culture" are better explained by recent educational history, political economy and institutional arrangements (O'Dwyer,

2016; Ryan & Louie, 2007). A review of culturally responsive pedagogy in this setting must therefore do two things at once. It must take seriously the possibility that cultural expectations shape how FL pedagogy is received, because ignoring that possibility has repeatedly produced reforms that teachers and learners quietly reinterpret (Canh & Barnard, 2009; Carless, 2004), and it must resist the temptation to convert that possibility into a deterministic claim that would license lower expectations or generic prescriptions. The tertiary level deserves separate attention because it differs from the school settings in which most CRP research and most CLT critique were developed. Tertiary learners are adults who are making professional choices, who often study a foreign language alongside or in service of a discipline (English for Specific Purposes, EAP or a second foreign language), who may have substantial experience of both teacher-centred and interactive instruction, and who are institutionally positioned as emerging professionals rather than as pupils. Their classrooms are governed by credit systems, standardised proficiency tests and graduate-employment expectations, and their teachers frequently have little formal preparation in intercultural pedagogy (Borg, 2003; Nguyen & Ho, 2024). These conditions complicate any simple application of CRP and raise the question of whether the importance learners and teachers attach to cultural responsiveness is the same at university as in the settings where the construct originated. Despite this, no systematic synthesis has examined CRP in tertiary FL education across collectivist contexts, and the closest reviews either address CRP in other levels and subject areas (Morrison et al., 2008; Aronson & Laughter, 2016), culture integration in FL teaching without a responsiveness lens (Kramsch, 2013; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), or CRP in a single national setting (Istiadi & Yulianti, 2026).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Culturally responsive pedagogy: lineage, assumptions and critique

Culturally relevant pedagogy was articulated by Ladson-Billings (1995) as resting on three propositions: students must experience academic success, develop and maintain cultural competence, and develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo. Gay (2002, 2018) widened the conversation by describing culturally responsive teaching as the use of the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective, a formulation that foregrounded the teacher's practical repertoire. Villegas and Lucas (2002) located the roots of such teaching in teachers' sociocultural consciousness, affirming views of diversity and commitment to act as agents of change, while Gay and Kirkland (2003) emphasised that teachers' cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection must be developed deliberately rather than assumed. Later formulations pushed the concept in two directions. Paris (2012) and Paris and Alim (2014) argued that "responsive" and "relevant" remained deficit-adjacent because they positioned heritage practices as bridges to dominant norms, and proposed culturally sustaining pedagogy, which aims to sustain linguistic and cultural pluralism as part of schooling. Ladson-Billings (2014) accepted much of this critique and described her own work as having been "remixed". Sleeter (2012), in contrast, warned that CRP was being diluted into celebratory activities detached from rigorous academic content and from structural analysis, a concern echoed in practitioner-oriented syntheses that translate the approach into classroom routines and neuroscience-informed strategies (Hammond, 2015) and that have, in turn, been questioned for oversimplification.

Two features of this lineage matter for the present review. First, the empirical warrant for CRP is thinner than its prominence suggests. Synthesis work has found associations between culturally relevant practice and positive student outcomes, but it has also shown that studies are overwhelmingly qualitative or small-scale, concentrated in United States K-12 settings with racialised minority learners, and often vague about what teachers actually did (Morrison et al., 2008; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Byrd, 2016). The generalisation of these findings to adult FL learners who belong to the majority culture of their own society is therefore an inference, not an established result. Second, CRP was born as a response to systemic inequity, in which the culture being "responded to" belonged to groups marginalised by the school. In most tertiary FL classrooms in collectivist societies, learners share the dominant culture of their own institution; the cultural asymmetry lies instead in the provenance of the pedagogic models, the textbooks and the assessment norms, which tend to originate in Anglophone centres (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 1999; Holliday, 2006). This difference suggests that what counts as "responsiveness" in these contexts is conceptually closer to the postcolonial and postmethod traditions in applied linguistics (Holliday, 1994; Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2003; Bax, 2003) than to the race-centred original, and that the explicit sociopolitical dimension of CRP may need to be reinterpreted rather than simply carried over.

### 2.2. Collectivism: a useful hypothesis and a risky label

The notion that cultures differ in the weight they place on group membership, interdependence and harmony relative to individual autonomy has a long pedigree in cross-cultural psychology (Hofstede, 1986, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Hofstede's (1986) account of cultural differences in teaching and learning is the most cited bridge to education: in collectivist classrooms, he suggested, harmony and the avoidance of loss of face govern interaction, students expect to speak when called upon or in small cohesive groups, and the teacher-learner relationship carries a moral as well as an instructional character. Face-negotiation research gives these intuitions a communicative grounding, showing that concern for one's own and others' face shapes how people manage conflict, criticism and self-presentation (Ho, 1976; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Spencer-Oatey, 2000), and sociocultural accounts of the Confucian-heritage classroom describe distinctive "cultures of learning" in which the teacher's expertise, effort and perseverance are valued (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Jin & Cortazzi, 1998, 2006).

The same literature has accumulated formidable criticism. McSweeney (2002) and Baskerville (2003) questioned the methodological foundations of national-culture indices, in particular the assumption that nations are homogeneous cultural containers and that survey scores from a single multinational firm can stand for them. Hofstede (2002) replied, and meta-analytic evidence suggests that cultural-value measures do relate to outcomes, but that individual-level values tend to predict more than national averages (Taras et al., 2010) and that the empirical pattern of individualism and collectivism is more complicated than a simple East-West contrast (Oyserman et al., 2002). Within education, Signorini et al. (2009) argued that dimensional frameworks encourage teachers to explain student behaviour by nationality and thereby foreclose inquiry into individual histories, Holliday (1999) distinguished large “national” cultures from the “small cultures” of classrooms and institutions, and Atkinson (1999) cautioned that TESOL’s use of culture oscillates between essentialist and non-essentialist views. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) offered the most constructive alternative: learners should be understood as having repertoires of practice shaped by their histories of participation in specific communities, not as bearers of cultural traits. This review adopts that stance. Collectivism is treated as a hypothesis about which patterns of expectation may be salient, to be tested against what participants in a given classroom actually report and do, and the findings are interpreted with this limitation in view.

### **2.3 Culturally responsive pedagogy and foreign language education**

Language education has long recognised culture as integral to language learning, but the dominant lines of work concern the target culture and learners’ movement toward it. Kramsch (1993) argued that language teaching is cultural teaching and later reframed culture as symbolic and discursive practice (Kramsch, 2013). Byram (1997) specified the components of intercultural communicative competence, and subsequent models emphasised intercultural awareness, mediation and the decentring of native-speaker norms (Deardorff, 2006; Risager, 2007; Baker, 2011; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). CRP poses a complementary question that this tradition has addressed less directly: how do the cultural orientations that learners and teachers bring to the classroom shape what happens there, and how can teaching respond to them without treating them as obstacles? Related questions have been explored under different banners, including appropriate methodology (Holliday, 1994), the “context approach” (Bax, 2003, and the rejoinder by Harmer, 2003), postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2006), culturally appropriate cooperative learning (Nguyen et al., 2005, 2006; Nguyen-Phuong-Mai et al., 2012), and research on learner and teacher beliefs in Asian classrooms (Rao, 2002; Savignon & Wang, 2003; Phan, 2008). Because few studies use CRP terminology, any review that searched only for the label would miss most of the relevant evidence, while one that searched only for “culture” would be swamped by studies of cultural content in textbooks.

Implications and strategies for practice are the subject of a companion review and are discussed here only where they bear on the interpretation of the evidence. The review addressed two questions:

1. What is the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy for teaching and learning in tertiary foreign language education in collectivist contexts, and through which mechanisms?
2. How should culturally responsive pedagogy be applied in tertiary foreign language education in collectivist contexts, given the evidence reviewed?

## **3. METHOD**

### **3.1 Research Design**

The review followed the PRISMA 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021; Moher et al., 2009) and drew on guidance for systematic reviews in the social sciences (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006; Gough et al., 2017; Booth et al., 2016). A protocol specifying the questions, search strategy, eligibility criteria, appraisal and synthesis procedures was drafted before screening began. [Insert registration or repository details if applicable.] Because the primary studies were heterogeneous in design, ranging from phenomenological interviews to large questionnaire surveys, classroom ethnographies and conceptual critiques, a convergent qualitative synthesis was adopted in which quantitative and qualitative findings were translated into themes. Following the logic of recent systematic reviews in language teaching (Macaro et al., 2018), the review privileges transparency about what the evidence can and cannot support over the pursuit of a single pooled estimate, and reporting of the synthesis followed ENTREQ (Tong et al., 2012).

### **3.2 Databases**

Searches were designed to capture the construct under its many labels. The databases searched were Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, ERIC, ProQuest Education, Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts and Google Scholar, supplemented by regional indexes (Vietnam Journals Online, ThaiJO, Garuda and CNKI where accessible) and by backward and forward citation searching from key papers. The search window ran from January 2000 to September 2026. Search strings combined five blocks with Boolean operators: pedagogy; language education; and context (collectivistic), the Importance of Cultural Responsiveness. The decision to include context terms for both East and Southeast Asia and the Arab Gulf reflected the aim of avoiding the equation of “collectivist” with “Confucian-heritage”, an equation that the literature on essentialism warns against (O’Dwyer, 2016).

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. The importance of culturally responsive practice

#### 4.1.1 *Relational trust and the moral character of the teacher's role*

The most consistent theme across studies is that learners in collectivist contexts judge teaching through the quality of the relationship it expresses, and that responsiveness is experienced as care, competence and approachability rather than as a set of techniques. Jin and Cortazzi's (1998) account of Chinese students' expectations, in which the good teacher is knowledgeable, morally exemplary and caring, has been echoed in studies of Vietnamese classrooms. Sullivan's (2000) ethnographic account of a Vietnamese university English class showed a teacher using playfulness and the relational norms of the setting to build interaction that Western accounts of CLT would not have predicted, and Phan (2004) argued that Vietnamese university classrooms are far more varied than stereotypes of teacher-centred passivity allow. Teachers appear to share this relational understanding: expatriate teachers in Saudi higher education identified building relationships with students and linking lessons to their lives as central to making instruction effective (Hamdan, 2014), and Saudi teachers who drew on local customs and national events in EFL instruction believed that doing so improved engagement and cultural pride (Al-khresheh et al., 2026). Beyond FL education, meta-analytic and review evidence indicates that affective teacher-student relationships are associated with engagement and achievement, and that relationships in university settings remain under-researched relative to their importance (Roorda et al., 2011; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014).

Two cautions apply. The first concerns the status of these findings as evidence of importance. Most of the supporting studies elicit what learners and teachers say they value, which establishes salience but not effect; the claim that culturally responsive relationships improve learning is, in the FL literature, an inference from affective and engagement outcomes rather than a demonstrated result, and the Saudi study explicitly notes that reported benefits are teacher perceptions, not measured outcomes (Al-khresheh et al., 2026). The second concerns interpretation. Relational expectations of this kind are not unique to collectivist societies; they appear in teacher-student relationship research from many contexts (Roorda et al., 2011), so the claim that they are *culturally* distinctive depends on comparative evidence that most single-site studies cannot provide. What the evidence does support is a more modest and still practically significant proposition: that in the settings studied, learners interpret structured guidance, preparation and visible effort by the teacher as signs of commitment, and that pedagogies which present such guidance as an obstacle to learner-centredness risk being misread.

#### 4.1.2 *Face, reticence and the architecture of participation*

A second strand, larger and better developed, concerns participation. Studies from East and Southeast Asia report that learners fear public error and negative evaluation, hesitate to volunteer answers, and prefer low-risk formats such as pair work with familiar partners, rehearsal time and indirect feedback (Tsui, 1996; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Jackson, 2002; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Nguyen, 2025). Face-negotiation theory offers a plausible mechanism, since public error threatens both the speaker's face and, in settings where the teacher is respected, the teacher's (Ho, 1976; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), and models of willingness to communicate show that situational confidence and affiliation, not just linguistic ability, determine whether learners speak (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Wen & Clément, 2003; Peng & Woodrow, 2010). Linh and Loi (2024) add an important nuance: their participants described fear of losing face, of failing and of being misjudged as discouraging risk-taking, yet many initially denied that culture influenced them, which the authors interpret as "assimilation" of cultural traits into self-concept. This finding cuts two ways. It supports the claim that face-related concerns are real and consequential, and it warns that learners' own explanations of their behaviour may under-report cultural influence, so that surveys asking directly about "culture" may be systematically misleading.

Against this must be set a substantial body of evidence that reticence is not reducible to culture. Cheng (2000) argued that the reticence of Asian students is better explained by a combination of language proficiency, classroom conditions, prior experience and affect than by Confucian values; Harumi (2011) found that Japanese learners' silence had multiple meanings, including needing time to prepare, uncertainty about the answer and respect, and that teachers often misinterpreted it; Nakane (2007) and King (2013) showed that silence is socially constructed in interaction and varies with task, group and teacher behaviour; and Zhou et al. (2005) documented how Chinese students' participation changed when they were invited to share indigenous knowledge. Studies of foreign language anxiety show that fear of negative evaluation is a general phenomenon (Horwitz et al., 1986), and Nguyen's (2025) study of Vietnamese pre-service teachers attributes anxiety to linguistic, personal and sociocultural factors together. The most defensible synthesis is therefore interactional: face concerns are a salient, patterned and teachable-around aspect of participation in many collectivist classrooms, but they are modulated by proficiency, task design, group familiarity and the teacher's own conduct. For practice this matters because an interactional account directs attention to features that teachers can alter, such as the visibility of error, the predictability of turn-taking and the availability of preparation time, whereas a trait account invites the conclusion that learners simply "are" quiet.

#### 4.1.3 *Pedagogic fit: communicative methods, group work and autonomy*

A third strand addresses the fit between imported methods and the settings in which they are used. The classic position, that CLT is culturally inappropriate and encounters resistance (Hu, 2002; Ellis, 1996; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Anderson, 1993), has been substantially qualified by later empirical work. Learners in several settings do not reject communicative activities but value them

alongside structured and form-focused work (Rao, 2002; Savignon & Wang, 2003), the perception of Asian students as unquestioning of teacher authority is not supported by large cross-national survey evidence (Littlewood, 2000), and teachers' difficulties in implementing CLT are attributed by teachers themselves to a combination of examination systems, class sizes, training and the demands of CLT, not to learners' culture alone (Li, 1998; Gorsuch, 2000; Carless, 2007; Littlewood, 2007; Butler, 2011). Studies of how teachers actually handle imported innovations show adaptation as the norm, whether openly, as in Hu's (2005) ecological account of Chinese instructional practice, or "behind closed doors", as in Canh and Barnard's (2009) Vietnamese case, so that the question is not whether adaptation occurs but whether it is informed, reflective and supported. Pham's (2007) call for CLT with "unity within diversity" and Kumaravadivelu's (2001, 2006) postmethod framework both express this position.

Group-based learning is the arena in which the cultural argument has been tested most directly. Nguyen et al. (2005) argued that Western cooperative learning conflicts with several features of Confucian-heritage collectivism, such as in-group and out-group distinctions, face concerns and teacher authority, while Nguyen et al. (2006) reported that a culturally appropriate adaptation, built around stable groups and the cultural value of mutual help, worked better, and Nguyen-Phuong-Mai et al. (2012) later argued that reform should build a hybrid of indigenous and imported forms because cooperative learning in some form already exists in Vietnamese education. These findings sit alongside general evidence that cooperative learning works when positive interdependence and individual accountability are structured (Johnson & Johnson, 2009), that pair interaction patterns determine learning opportunities in L2 classrooms (Storch, 2002; Watanabe & Swain, 2007; Philp et al., 2014), and that free-riding is a problem of group work everywhere, with its causes not reducible to social loafing (Hall & Buzwell, 2013). The point of convergence is that group work is not culturally unsuitable in collectivist contexts, but its success depends on features, namely stability, shared goals, fairness and teacher mediation, that are sensitive to relational norms. Autonomy follows a similar logic. Littlewood (1999) argued that autonomy takes different forms in East Asian contexts, with reactive and proactive variants, and Linh and Loi (2024) found that all six Hofstede dimensions were reported by learners as hindering autonomy to some degree, with uncertainty avoidance and restraint most often cited. That finding illustrates both the potential of the cultural account and its weakness, since the authors themselves suggest that Hofstede's classification of Vietnam as low in uncertainty avoidance does not fit their data.

#### **4.1.4 Content, identity and professional relevance**

The fourth strand concerns what is taught. Learners and teachers in several settings regard content that connects with learners' lives, local contexts and future professions as more motivating and as a mark of respect. Teachers in Saudi Arabia reported that familiar content made English more relevant and fostered cultural pride (Al-khresheh et al., 2026), expatriate teachers there linked lessons to learners' lives as a core strategy (Hamdan, 2014), and Vietnamese tertiary teachers strongly endorse integrating culture into language teaching, yet their practice remains largely "culture as information", centred on facts about English-speaking countries and a static view of culture (Nguyen & Ho, 2024; Dung, 2026). The gap between endorsement and practice is revealing: it suggests that the importance of cultural responsiveness is accepted in principle, as the review's first strand also found, but that teachers lack the models, materials and time to enact it. Learners, for their part, rarely have the vocabulary of intercultural competence, even though they judge it important; Nguyen (2023) found that most English majors had not heard of the term "intercultural sensitivity" but defined it in ways close to the literature and rated it important for professional success.

These findings connect to wider arguments about identity, ownership and the purposes of FL learning. Norton (2013) and Darwin and Norton (2015) showed that learners' investment in a language depends on whether the classroom positions them as legitimate speakers with valuable identities and capital, and the English-as-an-international-language literature argues that learners should be prepared to use the language with other multilingual speakers, not only to approximate native-speaker norms (McKay, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Baker, 2011). Moll et al.'s (1992) "funds of knowledge" offers a model for treating learners' households and communities as sources of curricular content, and in tertiary programmes with disciplinary orientations, English for Specific Purposes research suggests that relevance is both motivational and epistemic because it connects language learning to the discourses learners will need (Hyland, 2002; Belcher, 2006; Basturkmen, 2010). It is important not to over-read this evidence: much of it concerns teachers' perceptions rather than learner outcomes, and "local" content can easily become a new form of stereotyping if it is chosen by teachers and not negotiated with learners. Culturally sustaining critiques apply here with force, since a pedagogy that merely substitutes local examples for foreign ones without asking whose knowledge counts has not shifted the underlying hierarchy (Paris, 2012; Sleeter, 2012).

#### **4.1.5 Critical appraisal of the evidence on importance**

Taken together, the four strands support the conclusion that cultural responsiveness is regarded as important by many teachers and learners in tertiary FL settings in collectivist contexts, that it operates through identifiable mechanisms, and that the dominant rationale is relational and pragmatic rather than critical. Yet three limitations warrant sustained attention. First, the strength of evidence for *effect* is low. The corpus consists overwhelmingly of perception data, and there are few comparisons of culturally adapted and unadapted instruction on learning outcomes; claims that responsiveness improves language gains are therefore hypotheses supported mainly by studies of affect and engagement. Self-report is vulnerable to social desirability, to the assimilation of cultural narratives described by Linh and Loi (2024), and to the tendency of teachers to attribute difficulties to learners or to culture instead of to their own pedagogy, a pattern that Li (1998) documented and that Cheng (2000) and O'Dwyer (2016) caution

against. Second, the evidence is confounded by institutional conditions. Washback from high-stakes examinations, large classes, prescribed syllabi and workload shape both teacher practice and learner expectations, so that what researchers label “cultural” preferences often coincide with rational responses to assessment regimes (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng, 2005; Shohamy, 2001). Studies that do not separate these influences risk attributing to culture what institutions produce. Third, the conceptual apparatus is uneven. Many studies adopt Hofstede’s dimensions without engaging with the critiques (McSweeney, 2002; Baskerville, 2003; Signorini et al., 2009), and several treat Confucian heritage as explanatory without evidence of its operation, a move challenged by historical and educational analyses (Ryan & Louie, 2007; O’Dwyer, 2016). The confidence judgement for the relational and participation mechanisms is moderate, because multiple independent studies converge and some include disconfirming cases; for pedagogic fit and content relevance it is low to moderate, because of heavier reliance on teacher self-report and limited comparative evidence.

A further tension deserves explicit mention because it bears on the meaning of “importance”. Several of the most-cited studies suggest that learners value structured guidance, teacher expertise and examination relevance, whereas CRP in its original form centres critical consciousness and challenge to dominant norms. This tension is often presented as a cultural difference, but it can equally be read as a difference of context: tertiary learners facing high-stakes examinations and uncertain labour markets can rationally prefer pedagogies that visibly serve those ends. The review therefore treats the pragmatic and relational orientation reported in the evidence as a valid anchor for responsiveness, while noting that it neither exhausts the meaning of CRP nor excuses teachers from the obligation to maintain high academic expectations (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2012) and to cultivate learners’ capacity to question, which the critical-thinking debate shows to be both culturally contested and educationally indispensable (Atkinson, 1997; Egege & Kutieleh, 2004; Stapleton, 2002).

Establishing that cultural responsiveness matters does not by itself determine what teachers should do, and the distinction is important because the move from importance to prescription is where essentialism most often enters. A finding that learners value relational trust or face-safe participation supports the design of classroom conditions that attend to those concerns; it does not support the conclusion that all learners in a collectivist setting want the same thing, or that attention to face should replace attention to challenge. The companion review therefore treats strategies as hypotheses derived from the evidence presented here, grades their support separately, and examines the teacher and institutional conditions without which they are unlikely to work.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This systematic review synthesised evidence on the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in tertiary FL education in collectivist contexts. The evidence indicates that responsiveness is regarded as important by teachers and learners, often without being named as such, and that it operates through four identifiable mechanisms: relational trust and the moral character of the teacher’s role, face and the architecture of participation, the fit between imported methods and local classrooms, and the relevance of content to identity and professional futures. Confidence in the relational and participation mechanisms is moderate, because several independent studies converge and some report disconfirming cases, whereas confidence in the pedagogic-fit and content-relevance mechanisms is low to moderate because it rests more heavily on teacher self-report and offers few comparisons of adapted and unadapted instruction.

The evidence is thinner than the prominence of the claim suggests. Importance is established largely through what teachers and learners say they value, not through demonstrated effects on learning; cultural explanations are frequently confounded with institutional conditions such as examination washback, class size and prescribed syllabi; and the construct of collectivism is often invoked without engagement with the critiques that have shown it to be unstable and prone to stereotype. Conceptually, the review supports a form of CRP that is relational, pragmatic and professionally anchored, that treats culture as a repertoire of practice to be elicited and extended rather than as a trait to be accommodated, and that remains open to a critical dimension without importing it uncritically from its original racial-justice context.

The limitations of the review itself should be acknowledged: it is restricted to published studies in languages the reviewers could read, the heterogeneity of constructs limits comparability, the reliance on self-reported perceptions in the primary studies limits causal inference, and the dominance of East and Southeast Asian studies limits generalisation to other collectivist regions. Future research should use culturally responsive constructs explicitly, compare teachers and learners within the same setting, measure institutional and proficiency variables alongside culture, and test culturally adapted instruction against standard instruction on learning outcomes. Within these limits, the review supports the conclusion that cultural responsiveness is important in tertiary FL education in collectivist contexts, and that the appropriate response to that importance is inquiry into particular learners and classrooms, not the application of cultural profiles.

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