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Current Debates & Teacher Reflections on Critical Race Theory in the United States

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Current Debates & Teacher Reflections on Critical Race Theory in the United States

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Current Debates and Teacher Reflections on Critical Race Theory in the United States

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Introduction

The lack of systematic collection of teacher beliefs presents a significant challenge for the U.S. educational system, impeding its ability to adapt to changing demographics and societal norms. This gap may result from a disconnect between educational research and classroom practices, impacting both teacher pedagogy and student relationships (Fang, 1995; Sabarwal et al., 2022). Teachers' varied beliefs play a crucial role in shaping the classroom learning environment, influencing their capacity to support and engage all students effectively (Sabarwal et al., 2022). Understanding these beliefs is essential for educational policymakers, administrators, and researchers, as it informs the design of effective professional development programs, curriculum development, and instructional strategies. Moreover, teacher beliefs are integral to the broader discourse on educational equity, as they affect the implementation of inclusive practices and the promotion of diversity in the classroom. One specific area requiring further exploration is teacher beliefs about teaching Critical Race Theory (CRT). Investigating

this domain can provide valuable insights into how educators can better address racial inequities and foster an inclusive educational environment.

CRT critically evaluates the institutions and practices of society in terms of how they might promote racial inequality (Ladson-Billings, 2022). Recently, controversy has arisen over the question of whether CRT has a place in education (Morgan, 2022). The issue is complex as the meaning of CRT is not uniform and beliefs about CRT are divergent. Critical Race Theory originated as a legal theory focused on how institutions of law are racially unjust (Delgado et al., 2017). This original form of CRT is only appropriate for advanced, college-level courses. However, CRT has also been interpreted more broadly as a concern with racial issues in U.S. institutions and history, which might be appropriate for secondary history and social studies courses as well as the elementary level. Advocates argue CRT should permeate educational practices so that students may understand societal structures and injustices (Capper, 2015). These

advocates conceptualize CRT as a framework that views knowledge as complex narratives, highlighting all student voices and experiences to understand oppression and promote diverse participation (Garcia & Mayorga, 2023). However, critics of CRT in schools have advanced definitions of CRT that differ from those used by the originators (Kendi, 2021). They view CRT, or the version of it implemented by teachers, to be racially divisive and focused on making white students feel guilty (Kendi, 2021). Opposition to Critical Race Theory in public schools has led to the removal of teacher training programs related to CRT and progressive textbooks that may contain elements of CRT (Morgan, 2022).

Given the controversy surrounding the teaching of CRT, it is important to understand teachers' perspectives. What is their awareness of CRT and what are their beliefs about it? What factors might influence their awareness and beliefs? While there is research on the topic of CRT, there is minimal regarding teachers' beliefs on the subject, its place in professional development, and whether they believe it belongs in the curriculum and professional development seminars. Accordingly, this manuscript's goal is to represent future, current, and retired teacher beliefs surrounding the topic of teaching CRT in schools.

Literature Review

To understand and contextualize teachers' perspectives, it is important to first review scholarly definitions of CRT and teacher beliefs. This literature review will give an overview of the various definitions of CRT, gaps in literature review, and the educational disparities and issues within the US. In addition, we will briefly review the literature on how teachers' beliefs influence curriculum and pedagogy.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT is defined in many ways, by many different scholars, individuals, and newscasters. At its basis, it takes a critical look at the racial inequities amongst those systems that notoriously oppress (Ladson-Billings, 2022). CRT rejects the narrative that the US educational system is equitable and uplifting to all students, regardless of race or ethnicity (Dixson & Anderson, 2018). Some scholars define CRT as having these properties, "(1) race continues to be significant in the United States; (2) U.S. society is based on property rights rather than human rights; and (3) the intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool for understanding inequity" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, pg. 8). CRT is challenging proof and logical explanations behind the racial stratification in society, reflection of legal doctrines, and a methodology to approach research (Chapman, 2013, Hylton, 2012, Solórzano, 1997). The most rampant inequities within the United States are racism, classism, and sexism and are endemic and semi-permanent (Solórzano, 1997), and is the systematic review of racially biased laws, systems and practices embedded within society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2021). CRT allows people to shed light on the systems that are oppressing individuals and "centers the research, pedagogy, and policy lens on communities of color and calls into question White middle-class communities as the standard by which all others are judged" (Yosso & Solórzano, 2005, pg. 126). There has been considerable controversy surrounding the teaching of CRT for over 40 years (Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 2016; Tate IV, 1997). CRT can be used as a tool to perform social checks and balances, to ensure the equitability of our educational systems (Hylton, 2012).

CRT has become a highly contentious topic in education due to its

challenging of longstanding narratives about race and equity in the United States. At its core, CRT examines the systemic inequities that persist within educational and other societal structures, arguing that these inequities are deeply rooted in historical and ongoing racial discrimination (Ladson-Billings, 2022). Critics of CRT often argue that its teachings foster division and resentment, while proponents contend that it is essential for understanding and addressing the pervasive racial disparities that continue to exist (Dixson & Anderson, 2018). The debate over CRT has intensified in recent years, with some states enacting laws to restrict its inclusion in school curricula, viewing it as a threat to traditional educational values and patriotism. This controversy underscores the broader struggle over how history and current social issues should be taught, reflecting the ongoing conflict between different perspectives on race, equity, and justice in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Despite the opposition, CRT remains a critical framework for scholars and educators committed to uncovering and challenging the racial injustices embedded within educational systems (Yosso & Solórzano, 2005).

CRT differs from Culturally Relevant Pedagogy/Theory (CRP/CRT) in the topics it explores and is often applied in ways that align with CRP, but originally CRT was more cynical and exclusive (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). While the goals and applications of both may be similar, CRT has a focus on the systems and dynamics that exist that oppress the individuals in specific countries. This approach not only clarifies the distinctions between CRT and CRP but also enhances the exploration of the identified problem within the paper, offering a nuanced perspective on the broader discourse surrounding CRT and its

implications in educational settings. Although CRT is based on peer-reviewed research, there is strong pushback by legislators and some educators regarding teaching, understanding, or speaking about this in the K-12 setting (Morgan, 2022). This pushback may be related to the varied beliefs of what CRT is, and likewise teacher reactions for or against CRT may be related to consequential beliefs. A proportion of people claim that teaching CRT causes a greater divide between races or may be too expensive to adapt curriculum to existing standards. Critics of the foundational philosophies state that CRT proposes a movement toward change, and pushback against the ever-present dominant white culture (Litowitz, 1996). Critical race theory was particularly helpful in understanding how Whiteness and colorblind ideologies affect the ways pre-service teachers conceptualize race in their practice and in their work with their colleagues, students, and their students' families (Douglas et al., 2016). The intention is not to teach K-12 students this ideology outright, but rather to incorporate Critical Race Theory (CRT) into the teaching methods and curriculum. This underscores the importance of gathering insights from teachers regarding their beliefs and experiences with CRT, and whether it should be integrated into classroom practices.

Teacher Beliefs

Teacher beliefs have been studied across a variety of contexts, namely teacher practices, inclusive pedagogy, and understanding diverse cultures within the classroom (Brousseau, 1988; Fang, 1996; Wilson et al., 2022). Teacher beliefs have the potential to impact student outcomes and are imperative for understanding the phenomena of teaching (Sabarwal et al., 2022). Unfortunately, no previous studies have explored teacher beliefs in the context

of CRT. Understanding teachers' beliefs about CRT has particular relevance to understanding the decisions they make about curricular materials and pedagogical practices; that is, it has relevance to the vetting process they engage in.

Vetting, as a systematic process, serves to assess and validate the content, methods, and materials used in educational settings. This vetting process is partially driven by external factors, such as educational standards. Thorough vetting involves aligning instructional materials with educational standards and objectives (Johnson, 2018). However, the vetting process is also influenced by internal factors, including teacher beliefs (Pajak et al., 2015). Consequently, understanding teacher beliefs is critical to understanding instructional decisions, curriculum choices, and overall classroom dynamics. Teacher beliefs about CRT are likely to influence such decision making, particularly with respect to issues of diversity and inclusivity. Before we can understand such influences, we need to know what teachers' beliefs are.

Gap in Literature

Although there is an enormous amount of literature surrounding Critical Race Theory, equity, and inclusion amongst the English-speaking educational systems, the perspectives of teachers and future teachers has not been directly asked or reflected on. Increasing literature supports the fact that the American educational system is systematically oppressing those of minority groups and those who are not neurotypical (Gillborn, 2015; Mustaffa, 2017). Teacher beliefs surrounding this topic and CRT are seldom reflected empirically.

Current Study

The current study aims to unveil the thoughts, beliefs, and inclinations of teachers towards the subject of CRT (as a pedagogical approach to “delivering”

content) through an online volunteer-based survey. The goal was to parse feelings of inclusion amongst curriculum and professional development and understand the holistic vision of educators today. Further aims were to understand teachers' perceptions of the impacts of social and legal opposition to CRT-based to eliminate predispositions about teacher beliefs and allowed the data to speak for themselves.

Research Questions

Research Questions

1. How do teachers rate their level of knowledge of CRT?
2. How do teachers rate the importance of CRT?
3. Are years teaching and income during youth predictive of reported knowledge of CRT and reported importance of CRT?
 - a. Does first-generation student status moderate these potential relationships?
4. What themes emerge in teachers' comments about their knowledge of CRT and the importance of CRT?

Method

Approval to conduct the current study was received from a university institutional review board (IRB) and ethical practices were followed in conducting this research. Participants completed this survey on their own time, in their own designated location. No researcher has access to any identifying information about the participants. All identification was stripped from the data and data was stored in a password protected electronic file.

Participants

A total of fifty-four participants were recruited for the study through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling methods. Four participants were excluded due to not completing at least 50%

of the survey, resulting in a final sample of 48 participants (M age = ~46; 7 Males, 30 Female, 15 undisclosed/non-binary) who successfully completed the majority of both the quantitative and qualitative portion of the survey. The inclusion criteria required participants to be future, active, or retired teachers or administrators. No compensation or benefits were provided for participation. The recruitment process involved both convenience and snowball sampling. Recruitment took place by sending emails to schools, future teachers engaged with the Generation Teach program in Colorado, and teachers in the United States. Some demographic information was collected but was not required for survey completion.

Procedure

Participants were asked to sign an electronic consent form to help ensure they understood the purpose of the study and that they, and anyone who has been mentioned during the study by the participants, would remain confidential. Participants completed up to 12 Likert scale and open-ended questions, along with a demographic questionnaire.

Measures

Perceptions of CRT were assessed with a self-report survey designed by the researchers. An initial version of the survey was developed in a pilot study with 11 pre-service teachers. This survey was revised with some items dropped and seven open-response items added. Responses from the pilot study to items retained in the revised study were included with current data analysis. Table 1 displays the survey items targeting knowledge of and beliefs about CRT and clarifies which items were included in the pilot and final survey. Two Likert-scale items targeted participant perceptions of knowledge of CRT and importance of CRT. Eight open-ended response items assessed beliefs about CRT and its role in education along with information about received training in CRT. In addition, the survey asked participants to report the number of years they had taught, estimations of their household income during their early teens (12-15 years old) based on provided income ranges, and whether they were a first generation college student or not. Demographic questions asking participants to report their gender, ethnicity and age were also included.

Table 1

Survey Items Targeting Knowledge of and Beliefs about Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Likert Items

- Are you aware of critical race theory?^{1,3} (CRT Knowledge)
- Critical Race Theory is important to teach in school.^{2,4} (CRT Importance)

Open-Response Items

- Please share your beliefs about teaching Critical Race Theory in school.²
- Please explain your understanding of Critical Race Theory.¹
- Is teaching Critical Race Theory in schools beneficial for students? Please explain why or why not.¹
- Is learning about Critical Race Theory as a teacher or educator important? Please explain why or why not.¹
- Please share your beliefs about diversity, equity, and inclusion within the context of Critical Race Theory.¹
- What resources or best practices have you used or been taught that are related to CRT?¹
- What resources have you used or have been provided to learn about CRT?¹
- Do you have any remaining thoughts that you think the researchers ought to know?¹

Note. ¹Included in the final survey only. ²Included in both the pilot and final survey. ³Response scale: 1 = none at all, 2 = a little, 3 = a moderate amount, 4 = a lot, 5 = a great deal. ⁴Response scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the quantitative data. In addition, stepwise regression analysis was undertaken to explore predictive relationships, followed by moderation analysis to further understand these relationships (Hayes, 2012). The analysis of open-ended responses was conducted using Taguette, open-source qualitative software developed by Rampin et al. (2021). This software helped an in-depth examination of the qualitative data by systematically highlighting and encoding word usage patterns across the participant cohort. In addition, the analysis involved the generation of visual representations, in the form of word clouds, using the Qualtrics platform. These visual aids were instrumental in enhancing the comprehension of teacher beliefs.

Results

Quantitative Results

Responding to research question 1, our investigation found that participants

indicated moderate pre-existing awareness or familiarity with CRT. Roughly 11% of participants had been taught about CRT, while 88% had not been previously taught about the subject. The mean score for the CRT knowledge item was 3.19, indicating participants, on average, reported “a moderate amount” of knowledge of CRT (see Table 2). Specifically, 29.03% reported they know “a lot” or “a great deal” about CRT, whereas 27.42% reported they know “a little” or “none at all” about CRT.

Regarding research question 2, participants reported a slightly higher but still moderate level of perceived importance with respect to teaching CRT in schools. The mean score for the CRT importance item was 3.46; suggesting participants, on average, were between “neither agree nor disagree” and “agree” for this item (see Table 2). Specifically, 57.45% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the importance of teaching CRT in schools, whereas 25.53% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics & Correlations of Likert Scales

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Mean (SD)</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> |
|---------------------------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| CRT Knowledge | 3.19 (1.11) | 47 | | | |
| CRT Importance | 3.46 (1.28) | 47 | .18 | | |
| Years of Teaching Service | 12.27 (10.05) | 35 | -.36* | .06 | |
| Income During Youth | 5.79 (3.76) | 34 | -.004 | -.07 | -.07 |

Note. $p < .05$

Table 2 also presents the correlations between the dependent variables (CRT knowledge, CRT importance) and the predictor variables (years teaching experience, income during youth). Years teaching were moderately, negatively correlated with CRT knowledge. Income

was not significantly correlated with either dependent variable. To further explore these relations and address research question 3, two regression analyses were conducted with CRT knowledge and CRT importance as the dependent variables (see Table 3).

Table 3*Regression Analyses of CRT Knowledge & CRT Importance*

| <i>Predictor</i> | <i>CRT Knowledge (n = 30)</i> | | | | <i>CRT Importance (n = 30)</i> | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------------------|
| | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | β | <i>R</i> ² | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | β | <i>R</i> ² |
| Years of Experience | -.06 | .02 | -.52* | | .01 | .02 | .07 | |
| Income During Youth | .02 | .05 | .08 | .23* | -.00 | .07 | -.00 | .06 |

Note. $p < .05$ *

Years of teaching experience emerged as a significant predictor ($\beta = -0.52$, $p = 0.00$) for CRT knowledge, explaining a substantial proportion of the variance ($F(2, 28) = 5.43$, $p = 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.23$). Participants with fewer years of teaching experience were more likely to report knowledge of CRT.

To probe this relationship further, a moderation analysis was executed to explore if first-generation status moderated the relationship between years of teaching experience and CRT knowledge. However, results indicated that first-generation status did not serve as a moderator ($\beta = 7.20$, 95% CI [-12.32, 26.73]).

In the regression analysis predicting CRT importance, no significant relationships were observed between participants' self-reported beliefs about the importance of CRT and their years of experience or income during youth ($F(2, 28) = 0.08$, $p = 0.93$, $R^2 = 0.06$).

Qualitative Results

The qualitative data helped us further understand teachers' knowledge of CRT, beliefs about its place in education, and perceived challenges to implementing it. Specifically, we identified four major themes: (1) understanding CRT (2) reasons against teaching CRT, (3) reasons for teaching CRT, and (4) barriers against teaching CRT.

Understanding CRT

Participant #1's perspective provided a poignant illustration, emphasizing CRT's critical role in fostering a comprehensive understanding of historical realities and addressing systemic inequalities. This narrative aligned with anti-racist pedagogies, underscoring the need for a holistic and inclusive educational approach. Such sentiments were recurrent in participant responses, suggesting that understanding CRT may function as a transformative tool for educators striving towards inclusivity. One teacher said,

I believe teaching [CRT] in schools is crucial to help kids learn about the history of our country and fully understand how inequality and white supremacy have affected the development of the world. [CRT] is essential to teach to provide the full story to students, not just the Eurocentric currently existing curriculum.

This teacher understands that CRT has a specific purpose in our curriculum that supports anti-racist pedagogies. Statements like these lead us to believe that understanding CRT can be a tool for helping all teachers become more holistic and inclusive in their teaching practices.

I believe removing the barriers is something that should be spoken about when it comes to CRT. I also know there are education-specific CRT papers like Ladson-Billings. Educating people in this specific context may help more than focusing on CRT through the lens of law.

This participant underscored the importance of dismantling barriers and advocated for a focus on education-specific CRT literature. The recurring theme of barriers illuminated nuanced challenges in the adoption and implementation of CRT, setting the stage for further thematic exploration in later studies.

Reasons Against Teaching CRT

Reasons against teaching CRT included not knowing how to incorporate CRT into one's teaching or simply not knowing enough about the topic. One teacher believed CRT to be a curriculum, and said, "I have never used a single piece of it, it's a horrific curriculum. I [will never] use it." This teacher equated CRT with a particular curriculum, which they found undesirable. A majority of participants cited a lack of resources and professional development. One teacher stated, "I haven't been taught anything about CRT. I have tried to educate myself on the subject with as many free resources as I can get my hands on." Another teacher said they "have not used or been provided with any resources. We do not teach it in our schools". Most schools do not require training in CRT, so the responsibility to learn often falls onto teachers. Some teachers may have access to reliable resources, but it must also be recognized that teachers tend to be overworked and underpaid, so the addition of more professional development can be burdensome.

In addition to those who were uncomfortable teaching CRT because they did not feel prepared, some teachers were strongly opposed to CRT. Of those who responded to the open-response items, 6% expressed reservations about teaching CRT, citing perceived harm. One teacher commented that CRT promoted "racist narratives." Another teacher stated that CRT "divides people by color and increases negative racial relations." These teachers believed that CRT should not be taught by any teachers. Other teachers were not explicitly opposed to CRT, but expressed a powerful desire for autonomy. One teacher captured this sentiment well:

My main approach to including any controversial topic in education is that it should always be up to the individual teacher to determine what to include in their classroom. The individual teacher is a professional that is capable of making that decision and ultimately knows their students best, so this decision should be left for the teacher to make.

Reasons for Teaching CRT

Reasons for teaching CRT were intrinsically tied to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Participants recognized CRT as a tool aligned with DEI, fostering open perspectives, and enriching the collective educational experience. One teacher made a point regarding having open perspectives in the classroom, "It is important to be open to innovative ideas and perspectives. CRT is a tool that can enhance the classroom and better connect us to the past." CRT is aligned with DEI, and both offer a multitude of unique perspectives that may align with the students in their classroom. One teacher proudly said, "Without diversity there is no creativity. Everyone receives help from diversity—different perspectives enrich the collective

experience.” The keynote from their perspective is that everyone does receive help from DEI initiatives, and if CRT is a piece of that whole, we ought to include it in our teachers' framework. One response heeded was that having CRT is the expansion of DEI initiatives, and it has the potential to truly transform the experience of minority students,

CRT enacted in a meaningful way could have a transformational effect on minority populations within a school and empower them to feel a part of a whole rather than labeled as "other", "less than," or "foreigner." CRT can bring about profound change which is why people are pushing so hard against it.”

Many teachers wanted to have CRT-based professional development and want their students to truly have the best learning experience possible. A prevailing sentiment among teachers was the desire for more pedagogy and professional development focused on CRT initiatives. Over 60% of respondents to the open-response questions perceived CRT as a positive addition to their curriculum and pedagogy, citing its potential to reduce bias, enhance cultural attitudes, and offer a more complete and correct history.

Teachers emphasized the transformative potential of CRT, envisioning it as an expansion of DEI initiatives that could empower minority populations and bring about profound change. One teacher said that despite barriers, like lack of institutional PD, self-propulsion helped incorporate CRT into the pedagogy:

I have had no formal training or materials. But I try to add voices and stories that are otherwise missing. For example, in my Unit on the West, I teach an entire class on Bass

Reeves, the inspiration for the lone ranger, and a Deputy Marshall with over 3000 arrests in a 30+ year career, and he happened to be Black and a former slave. Not only is his story important (and fascinating!) but it is also important to understand why when his story was loosely adapted for tv...the Lone Ranger was made white. For some reason real history had to be changed for society to consume the content. It is worth trying to understand why.

Barriers Against Teaching CRT

Participants articulated internal reasons against teaching CRT, citing factors such as a lack of knowledge on incorporation, internal beliefs, and overwhelming workloads. Noteworthy was the acknowledgment of a dearth of resources and professional development, highlighting the onus placed on teachers to independently acquire knowledge on CRT. Some of the perceived barriers emerged in teachers' reasons against teaching CRT as described above and many educators believed they lacked resources and professional training to effectively teach CRT.

Teachers also identified administrative and political barriers including prohibitions on speaking about CRT, talking about CRT or related topics, and the banning of topics and related books in schools. These barriers are outside of teachers' power and are difficult to overcome when your job could be threatened by teaching or learning about CRT. In addition, simple misunderstanding and confusion seems to be a major barrier, with one participant saying that “until someone can clearly explain the issue, the confusion surrounding this issue will only increase. Educated adults have trouble understanding and discussing CRT.”

Another participant made the point,

CRT is a lightning rod term that is highly misunderstood by the general population, including parents of some of my students. As much as it pains me to say, I think we would have better results teaching about institutional racism and discrimination if we get rid of the labels and focus on training teachers first rather than try to add CRT as a mandate in the classroom.

This participant acknowledged the opposition to CRT due to misunderstanding of what it entails and, consequently, did not advocate mandating CRT in the classroom. However, the participant still believed training in and teaching of institutional racism and discrimination was important – just without the label of CRT.

Discussion

The study revealed that, on average, participants exhibited a moderate level of pre-existing familiarity or awareness of CRT. Nearly a quarter of the participants expressed confidence in their understanding of CRT, while more than half expressed a lack of confidence. These results suggest significant variability in teachers' understanding of CRT. Participants expressed moderate importance for teaching CRT. Slightly over half endorsed the importance of teaching CRT, while roughly a quarter believed it was unimportant. This indicates that although a majority sees the importance of teaching CRT, there is notable variation in these beliefs. Overall, these quantitative results provide insight into teachers' perspectives on the current CRT debate. Although the sample in this study was limited and the results cannot be directly generalized to the entire U.S. population, they suggest that teachers may see more importance in CRT than the broad

public, which has expressed significant concern and opposition to CRT.

Nevertheless, we should be mindful of the variation in teachers' beliefs, mirroring the conflicting opinions of the general public (Fang, 1996). Additionally, there is significant variability in teachers' perceived understanding of CRT.

The quantitative results also indicated that years of teaching experience was a negative predictor of CRT knowledge, suggesting that those with less experience tended to possess a higher level of understanding. This is likely a consequence of the recency of teacher preparation training, as issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) have been increasingly emphasized in teacher education programs (Beverly & Gillian-Daniel, 2024). Thus, newer teachers are more likely to have received information about CRT in their education programs. Interestingly, years of teaching experience did not predict perceived importance of CRT, indicating that while new teachers may be more confident in their knowledge of CRT, they do not necessarily see it as more important. Neither first-generation status nor income during youth were significant predictors of perceived CRT knowledge and importance. Some participants expressed opposition to teaching CRT. They believed CRT has racist intentions and undertones, reflecting beliefs similar to those held by various conservative and right-wing groups that argue CRT promotes division and a negative view of American history. They fear that CRT might instill a sense of guilt or victimhood based on race, which they see as counterproductive to achieving racial harmony.

Other participants believed teaching CRT would be too much of a burden given their heavy workloads or felt that their specific content areas did not warrant the inclusion of CRT in the curriculum. These

participants were not opposed to CRT on moral or political grounds but saw it as an additional strain on their already extensive responsibilities or deemed it irrelevant to their subject matter. For instance, teachers of subjects like mathematics or physical education might struggle to see the direct applicability of CRT in their daily teaching practice. Additionally, some teachers emphasized their desire for autonomy in their teaching methods and content choices. They argued that whether or not to include CRT in their curriculum should be a personal decision left to individual educators. These teachers value their professional judgment and believe that mandating CRT education could infringe upon their freedom to tailor their teaching to the needs and contexts of their students.

Despite these varied perspectives, it is crucial to recognize the importance of equipping teachers with knowledge about CRT. Understanding CRT can provide teachers with tools to create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment, helping them address and mitigate racial disparities within the classroom. This fosters a more supportive and fair educational experience for all students. Most participants identified barriers to teaching CRT. Many expressed a need for professional development to gain a better understanding not only of the theory itself but also how to implement it in the classroom. These concerns align with broader research, which emphasizes that high-quality professional development (PD) is a critical element in modern education enhancement. Policymakers acknowledge that the effectiveness of schools is contingent on the capabilities of their educators (Guskey, 2002).

Implications

Given the integral role of PD in the teaching profession, it is suggested to include CRT as part of the country's PD

requirements. Few PD programs currently incorporate race or Critical Race Theory (CRT) education, nor how to train teachers on how to use CRT as an informational tool. Teachers have also identified political and administrative barriers. This includes prohibitions on discussing CRT, talking about CRT or related topics, and the banning of topics and related books in schools. These barriers are outside of teachers' control and are difficult to overcome when their jobs could be threatened by learning or teaching CRT.

The idea is not to teach K-12 students this ideology but to have teachers be knowledgeable on CRT to be able to use the information as a resource to help make their classrooms fairer. Teachers should preserve students' educational futures by providing them with reliable tools for learning and giving them the knowledge to go forward in their educational careers, despite racial or legal barriers. By including CRT in PD programs, teachers can be better prepared to navigate discussions about race and inequality, thereby promoting a more informed and empathetic school culture. This knowledge is not intended to be directly taught to K-12 students as a standalone ideology but rather to inform teachers' approaches and interactions, ensuring that all students receive an education that respects and acknowledges their diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the relatively small sample size of the population surveyed, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of American teachers. To enhance the reliability and validity of our results and allow for more robust comparisons, future research should aim to interview a larger and more diverse sample. Moreover, efforts should be made to expand

the scope of data collection to encompass a broader range of demographic backgrounds and educational contexts within the field of education. Additionally, future studies should focus on refining the measurement scales used in this research to improve their reliability and validity, thereby increasing their utility for researchers in the field.

Conclusion

The current study found considerable variability in teachers' perceptions of their knowledge of CRT and the importance of teaching CRT. However, a majority of teachers endorsed the importance of CRT. In addition, the study revealed that years of teaching experience significantly predicted teachers' knowledge of CRT, with less experienced teachers being more familiar with CRT. Surprisingly, teachers' beliefs about the importance of CRT were not significantly linked to their years of experience. Perceptions of knowledge of CRT and the importance of CRT were not significantly related to first-generation or income during youth. Qualitative findings highlight both support for and resistance to teaching CRT. While a majority of participants see it as essential for fostering inclusivity and challenging dominant narratives, some see it racist and contentious. Many participants perceived barriers to teaching CRT such as lack of training and resources, as well as administrative constraints. This study underscores the nuanced and complex landscape of CRT in education, revealing both the critical need for comprehensive teacher training and the persistent challenges that must be addressed to effectively integrate CRT into the curriculum, thereby ensuring an equitable and inclusive educational environment.

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