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Engaging Ethnic-Diverse Students: A Research Based on Culturally Responsive Teaching for Roma-Gypsy Students

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Abstract: Intercultural Education is a key feature in the development of inclusion strategies aimed at ethnically diverse students. Transformative approaches towards learning such as Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) are essential in order to answer the educative needs that arise due to the coexistence between ethnic minorities and mainstream society. Therefore, cultural and historical representation of these communities play an important role as gatekeepers in order to achieve positive results as far as inclusive education is concerned. This article explores research based on a case study carried out in a high school located in the North-West of Spain developing successful learning stories after implementing the CRT methodology within the teaching of English as a foreign language. For its development, this article examines the trajectory of education with Roma-Gypsy students and moves forward with previous studies that endorse the success of using this approach among ethnically diverse students for their inclusion within the educative system. Intercultural and Plurilingual Education is a key feature in the development of inclusion strategies aimed at ethnically diverse students. This article includes research based on a case study carried out in a high school located in the North-West of Spain. It is aimed at: 1. Engaging ethnically diverse students to become part of the mainstream classroom through the inclusion of their culture; 2. Improving their language skills and competencies in the learning of a foreign language; 3. Raising the attendance at schools of ethnically diverse students. To achieve these targets the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) Methodology has been implemented. CRT is considered essential to answer the educative needs that arise due to the coexistence between ethnic minorities and conventional communities. After gathering and analyzing data, results show that: ethnically diverse students' motivation has been increased; it also expanded their social skills among peers; they gained more visibility; and finally, both diverse and non-diverse learners improved their proficiency in the English language. The discussion section states that the use of CRT Methodology traditionally used with Afro-American and Native-American students is also relevant for the Roma-Gypsy students that took part in this study.



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1. Introduction

This article discusses how including ethnically diverse students through the implementation of new educative approaches, such as Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), has contributed to overcoming the school struggles these students must face in their everyday mainstream school life. Within this research, some contributions have been made aiming at transforming the way in which intercultural education and inclusion are being faced in educative contexts and how, through these transformations, intercultural education can also lead to social changes as erasing the existent stereotypes and misconceptions towards ethnic minorities. The final statements of this research based on a case study are being supported by a qualitative methodology.

Intercultural education is nourished by learnings of all kinds, which have been and continue being connected with the students as well as with their social sphere. In other

words: the characteristics of the students, their origin, and their belonging to an ethnic group as well as its history and culture should serve as the main foundation for pedagogical developments. In addition, and especially when dealing with ethnically diverse students, we—as educators—have to bear in mind that families belonging to ethnic minorities perceive the risk that their children may run by being subjected to the occidental influences of a value system that is not their own while being schooled.

Therefore, with this research based on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), not only accepting Roma-Gypsy experiences would be considered as a fundamental part of inclusive education but, at the same time, they would be made part of the school along with the lives of gypsy and non-gypsy students. Last but not least, with this proposal contributions to the new National Roma Integration Strategies established by the European Parliament would be made in order to combat the negative attitudes towards people with a Romani background in Europe, as well as to the Spanish National Strategy for the Social Inclusion of the Gypsy Communities.

2. The Landscape of Education of Roma-Gypsy Students

2.1. *An International Vision: Europe*

For centuries, the Roma-Gypsy people have been misunderstood. The attitudes towards their community as well as the political decisions that concern them have been motivated by prejudices, ignorance, and stereotypes rather than by knowledge of the historical-cultural reality that revolves around them. This ignorance, the product of prejudices and stereotypes, contributes, in turn, to the non-presence of historical and cultural representations of the Roma people in history books—especially school textbooks—making it impossible to instill the knowledge that will lead to comprehension, understanding, and respect of this community in contexts of interpersonal and intercultural relationships such as those taking place at school. Therefore, and before moving on to the specific case of Spain regarding the landscape of Education of Roma-Gypsy students, it is appropriate to look at this community from the socio-historical and political point of view that has motivated many of the laws that have been regulating the European actions taken regarding them.

Roma-Gypsy Communities have been characterized by their way of life and this nomadic trend and movement were followed over and over again almost until the 1990s due to political as well as cultural reasons. Wherever they arrived, they were somehow faced with hostility by the mainstream community. International organizations have carried out studies as their migratory movements—looking for acceptance—are seen as a problem likely to cause difficulties on an international dimension. Seen as a problem and as a minor culture unable to “fit in”, fear, as well as rejection, arouse in Europe, and many overarching policies were developed. These policies went from exclusion to confinement reaching assimilation during the second half of the 20th century. However, today the situation has not improved a lot, as in terms of policymaking, indecision and innovation go hand-in-hand while the living conditions for Roma keep being difficult, as national and international reports have already stated [1–4].

The gypsy community has never been seen as it really is. The existent vision is based on prejudices and preconceptions of the non-Roma community towards this ethnic minority. Prejudices not only affect them on a social level but also on a political one. The dissemination of these perceptions—generalized and mistaken—through existing definitions in dictionaries, descriptions in literary works, press and television publications contribute to feeding the stereotypical image of public opinion by validating them. As a result, any organizational attempt to implement new integrating and/or inclusive policies or measures collides with the previously mentioned perceptions. This, in turn, hinders the proliferation of respectful attitudes and policies towards the Roma community. Regarding education, policies pursued by the state authorities towards Roma populations throughout their history in Europe and aimed at solving the so-called “gypsy problem”, have meant so often the eradication of Roma identity and lifestyle. Thus, education used to be seen as the central mean of achieving assimilation through the creation of a school environment in

which Roma children feel alienated rather than an environment in which Roma children could feel comfortable while being part of the Educative Community.

Most of the resolutions and recommendations adopted over the past four decades refer to the problems of providing schooling for Roma children and young people as well as the need to improve the conditions for such schooling as well as access to their rights in the field of education. Examples such as the Recommendation 563 (1969) of the Parliamentary Assembly and Resolution (75) 13 of the Committee of Ministers; Resolution 125 (1981) from the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe calling for specific preparation for teachers on the history and culture of Roma as part of intercultural education; the Resolution 249 (1993) on Cultural Cooperation; Recommendation 1203 (1993) on teacher training and school mediators; the General Policy Recommendation No. 3 on combating racism and intolerance against Roma/Gypsies; the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI); the Recommendation No. R (2000) 4 on the education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe as well as the Recommendation CM/REC (2009) 4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the education of Roma and Travelers in Europe. However, whatever strategies have been developed none of them seemed to have produced significant results as the situation of Roma/Gypsy people in Europe remains that the most exposed community to poverty, ignorance, and unemployment in Europe [5].

2.2. A National Vision: Spain

As it has been pointed out, if there is something that shapes and influences the way life is seen and portrayed nowadays, that is history and the point of view or perspective from which historical events have been told. However, when dealing with social-ethnic minorities such as the Roma-Gypsy Community [6,7], and specifically within the Spanish context [8], finding documents that truly resemble their past is difficult: mainly because their history and culture have always been told from an occidental perspective that represents Roma-Gypsy as an inferior nation [9]. This is why, digging back in time (XVII–XVIII), one may find extensive legal documentation promulgated by the Spanish administration in order to achieve the separation as well as the social breakdown of this community [10].

Centuries later, in the second half of the 20th century, coinciding with a moment of changes in education thanks to new pedagogical currents that took place in Europe [11], changes in how to approach the education of Roma-Gypsy students were taken too. It was around 1899, when several schools founded by Christian priests, started to develop pedagogical activities with members of the Roma-Gypsy community. Nevertheless, they were taught from a racist perspective in order to try to erase their customs and convert them to Christianity, which was the religion imposed in the country at that time.

Later on, during Franco's dictatorship, educational policies as well as legal frameworks shaping the educative system appeared. However, these documents did not make any mention regarding this ethnic minority group as they were seen as a marginal and analphabet community. Despite no special mention or reference made about them on the educative policies, the Ministry of Education created in Madrid a "suburban patronage school" to welcome students from gypsy and non-gypsy origin who belong to poor families settled in the suburbs of the city. In the 1960s, specifically in 1965, and coinciding with the end of nomadism as well as the establishment of the first stable settlements of the Roma-Gypsy Community, children belonging to this ethnic minority group began to attend school. In the article *Education and the Roma Population* [12], this paradigm shift (Nomadism vs. Sedentarism) and their consequent schooling are classified into three different periods or stages according to how individuals were generally placed in schools in Spain: the volunteer stage; the institutional stage and the stage of school normalization.

The first stage or stage of volunteering (1965–1978) was carried out by volunteers belonging to religious and non-profit organizations, such as Caritas and Secretariado Gitano, in different parts and neighborhoods of Spain, which requested from the Ministry of Education the opening of some schools to attend the out-of-school rate of Roma-Gypsy children. The second stage or institutional stage began with the arrival of Democracy (1977)

after the signing of an agreement in 1978 between the Spanish Episcopal Conference and the Ministry of Education and Science in order to create “bridge” schools capable of facing the schooling of Roma students. However, and despite its institutionalization, segregation kept on existing as based on Art. 51 of the General Education Law, these schools “aim to prepare gypsy girls and boys in marginalized situations so that they can join ordinary school” [12]. In other words: Roma students were trained in order to become “normal” or, in other words, they sought to “de-gypsy” Roma students as this measure was perceived as the only way to prepare them to coexist with the majority non-gypsy community.

It was not until 1983 that the Ministry of Education developed the so-called “Compensatory Education” in the Royal Decree 1174/83 [13] in which educative policies were changed regarding those students considered disadvantaged from accessing the Educative System. Among those changes we could highlight schools being supplied with more teachers; scholarships to attend the school canteens as well as book and school supplies; or better incorporation of gypsy students to different educational institutions, among others. Those measures were followed by the Organic Law for the General Management of the Educative System (LOGSE) published in 1990 which included educational policies based on the Spanish Constitution and which in turn, as well, meant the beginning of intercultural education as cited by Catalá [14]. Those measures included: the fight against discrimination and inequality (be they for reasons of birth, race, sex, religion, or opinion); training for the exercise of freedom, tolerance, and solidarity in a plural society; training in respect for the linguistic and cultural plurality of Spain or the rejection of all types of discrimination and respect for all cultures [15]. This way, the 1990s Educative Law was for the first-time offering citizens the recognition of cultural diversity together with the right to education. Two aspects that together were supposed to allow children—regardless of their origin and condition—to feel and be part of the educative community. However, no traces of the recommendations made by Europe on the integration of this ethnic minority group had been included or integrated within them. Meaning that, despite the efforts of including interculturality within the school and educative framework, Roma-Gypsy students continue to be seen as intruders and not really as part of it.

Notwithstanding, since 1990, there have been no improvements that contribute to the inclusion of Roma Students as they are not recognized as a culture within the classroom, school, and society both by the system and the Educative Community. Therefore, we can venture to affirm that one of the main problems regarding the schooling as well as the inclusion of Roma-Gypsy students within the Educative System is that the mainstream society continues not recognizing and neither accepting them nor their culture. To this non-recognition and acceptance, we have to add the prejudices that have been installed in the colonized mind of the occidental people based on many misconceptions as a result of ignorance and generalization with which traditional and canonical authors, anthropologists, and historians have depicted this community. In fact, and based on the above, Catalá [14] mentions that proof of it can be seen in how cultural diversities are often interpreted as problematic. Therefore, Educative Systems tend to write legislations focused on curricular adaptations in order to “help” those that need to be included, rather than investing in intercultural educational policies, which will aim to end-up demotivation and truly include ethnic-diverse students to the common world (187–188) [16].

2.3. Roma-Gypsy Students and Culture: Why Should It Be Taught?

Introducing the Roma-Gypsy culture to all the people who are part of the educational community, both teachers and students (Roma and non-Roma) will promote the inclusion of this ethnic minority group through dialogue, knowledge, understanding, and, above all, empathy. Unfortunately, the existence of documentation that supports the history of the gypsy community is scarce and, in most cases, such documentation is the product of a Western society that has relied on the ideology of the supremacy of the majority ethnic groups over the minority ones. This, together with the long oral tradition linked to the gypsy community, means that many aspects of the history of the gypsy community are

unknown, have been lost, and go unnoticed. Therefore, it is not surprising that those Roma-Gypsy students who are part of the educational community of a school or high school do not feel represented in the day-to-day of their classes, since the legal framework shaping the curriculum, the books used as well as the contents taught by teachers only represent the mainstream culture, history, and politics.

The French sociologist and professor at René Descartes University in Paris, Jean-Pierre Liégeois refers to the situation of the Roma community in school as well as the measures carried out by the Council of Europe since 1969 in its study of the case *The right to a quality education: towards a quality school education for Roma/Gypsies*. In this document, published by the European Council in March 2011, Liégeois recounts how most of the studies and works that this organization has carried out since 1984 concerning the Roma “show that the percentage of Roma children who attend school is regularly low; that a significant number have never been to school; that a small percentage has reached the threshold of secondary education; and, that the results, especially the habitual use of reading and writing, are not related to the period of schooling”, concluding that around the Roma community “the school has not fulfilled its role” [17] (p. 1). Many of the aspects concluded in this study continue to be a faithful reflection of the educational situation under which we find the Roma-Gypsy Community today. A reality that, in turn, UNESCO itself makes clear by stating that “of all European populations, the Roma are the most exposed to poverty, ignorance, and unemployment” (p. 79) [4]. A concept also introduced during this conference is “defectology” a term coined by the Soviet Union in the 1920s based on the idea that “disabilities” or “defects” could be corrected through medical techniques. Unfortunately, many children—even today—are categorized under this label and, as a result, segregated from the mainstream classroom. Among these children, many students of Roma-Gypsy origin could be found [4] (pp. 17–18). This situation is aggravated due to persistent racism (in and outside schools), discrimination, and far-reaching social exclusion as shown in European and National opinion surveys like the one we can see below [Figure 1].

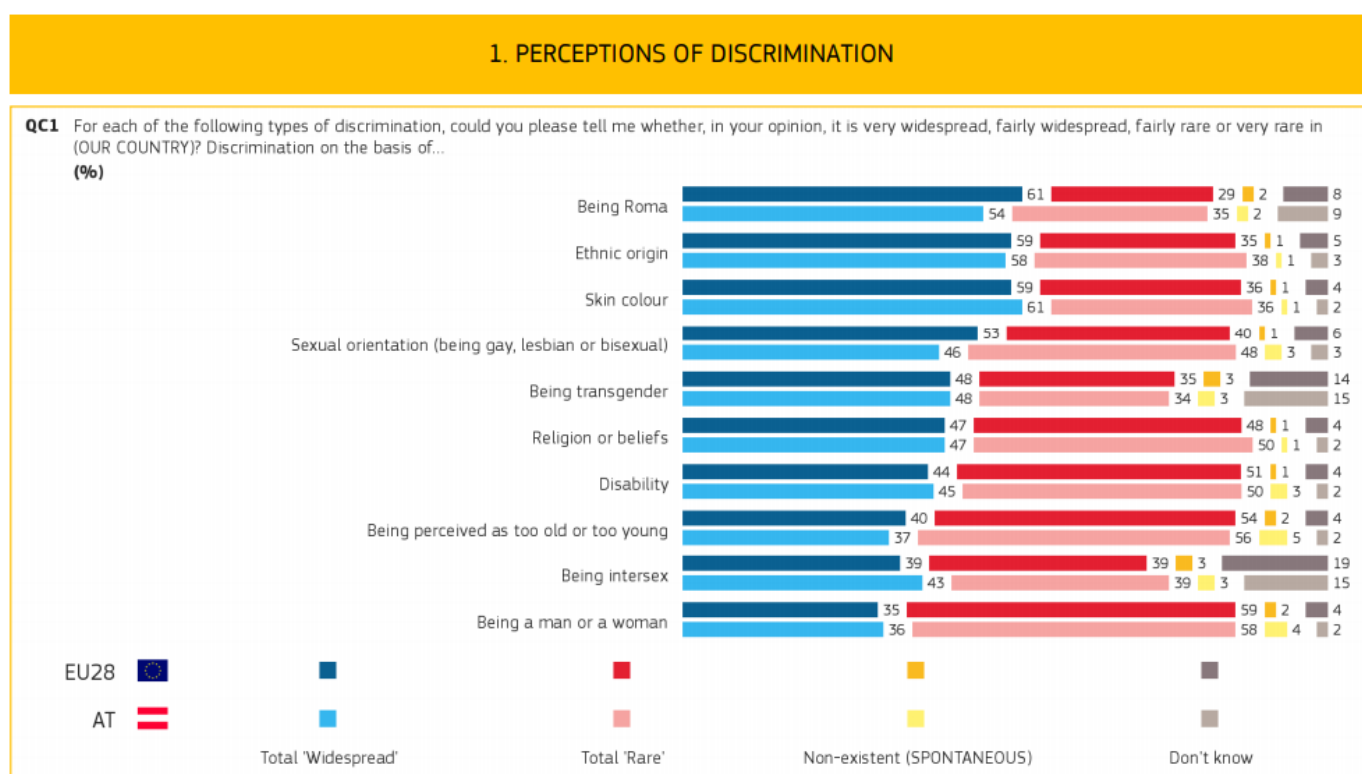


Figure 1. Perceptions of Discrimination. Special Eurobarometer 493. Discrimination in the European Union. May 2019.

Regrettably, today, the situation in Spain—with more than 725,000 Roma-Gypsy population—is not much better than that described at the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education celebrated in Russia in 2010. School absenteeism and abandonment among Roma-Gypsy students in Spain present high rates, especially in secondary education, as only 14.21% of them finish school and 3.15% reach higher education [18]. This data could be graphically observed in Table 1.

Table 1. Educational level reached by Roma-Gypsy population in Spain.

Study Levels	Year 2005		Year 2011		Year 2018	
Illiterate	13.1	71.2	8.6	59.3	9.85	36.46
Without studies	58.1		50.7		26.61	
Finished compulsory Primary studies	15.1		18.8		14.61	
Incomplete Secondary Studies	7.3		11.9		31.57	
Finished Secondary Studies (Compulsory Sec. Education, Upper Sec. Education, Vocational Training)	5.3	6.4	7.4	10	14.21	17.36
Higher Education/University studies	1.1		2.6		3.15	
Total	100		100		100	

Translated by Jennifer Meléndez-Luces from “Estudio Comparado sobre la situación de la población gitana en España en relación al empleo y la pobreza (2018)” (Comparative study on the situation of the Gypsy Population in Spain in relation with employment and poverty (2018)).

As we can see, Table 1 provides data from 2005 to 2018 regarding the educative level reached by the gypsy population, and the results being presented are quite alarming as less than 20% of the Roma-Gypsy population have finished Compulsory Primary Education. Somewhat more positive are the numbers representing Secondary Education. In 2005 only 5.3% of gypsies attending High School finished their studies, while there was an increase of 2.1% in 2011 and a doubling in 2018 with 14.2% of the Roma population having completed Compulsory Secondary Education. So, in view of the data, it can be stated that there is a necessity to look for new ways and approaches to promote education among the Roma-Gypsy community.

2.4. Why Teaching Ethnic Minorities in the EFL Classroom through Culture?

The cultural aspects surrounding a language are very important, as the cultural heritage of each society is—at the same time—linked to the evolution of its tongue. For this reason, it could be stated that, while teaching English or any other foreign language, it is important to incorporate and involve all the elements that have been key in the history and culture of different communities or countries, especially, because by doing so we will be contributing to the promotion and understanding between different peoples whose historical backgrounds and cultural legacies are very different [19]. However, appearances are deceptive, as when it comes to teaching English as a foreign language—and any other language—it seems that there is only one way of teaching culture through it, and it is by making use of cultural and historical content that has been repeated and extended for students from primary to further education. What is more, both books and teachers fall into a bounded culture, meaning that the development of the socio-cultural competence among students seemed to not have been considered as one of the main purposes of education when selecting the contents and materials that would present English Speaking Countries to them. As exemplified by Lund in his study of textbooks for the Teaching of English, both fictional and non-fictional text being used in the different textbooks that were analyzed fall into the same contents: London, Shakespeare, King Henry VIII, the Tower of London, or the Loch Ness among others [20]. As a result, different cultural, social, and historical aspects of the English-speaking countries which might be considered less popular or canonical by the mainstream society are left outside the picture. Such as for example the city of Birmingham where many families lived during the aftermath of WWI, the Traveler Communities roaming the roads of England, or the merchants—most of them of gypsy origin—that used the water canals for the distribution of goods. So, it could be said that English Textbooks do not present real English people and neither a broader picture of

English-speaking countries, which limits students' opportunities to explore language and culture in different situational contexts.

Without going any further, the Council of Europe within its Common European Framework published in 2018 [21] introduced the "Intercultural Dimension" as one of the aims of language teaching and learning. In fact, they consider that the essence of acquiring this intercultural dimension does not only rely on the fact that the "learner of the foreign language" must be aware of the culture that has shaped the interlocutor's identity but, at the same time, and this being more important for the development of our proposal, aware of the culture that has shaped an identity of its own [22]. It is also stated that, thereby, students would be able to avoid stereotyping as instead of perceiving the interlocutor as a representation of an ascribed identity, they would be perceived as an individual "whose qualities are to be discovered" [22] (p. 9). Nevertheless, the dominant mainstream culture continues to be reflected in all aspects of most schools from the way the curriculum has been written to the way in which teachers interact with both students and families. Thus, when ethnic minority cultures are given the opportunity of being in the picture attention is only given to superficial cultural aspects like food and celebrations [23].

Therefore, my question is: if as educators we only teach our students a small, fragmented part of the history of a country or language, are we not, in turn, contributing to the creation of stereotypes? Today's students, more than ever, need to be involved and aware of the cultural richness that exists under the banner of the English language beyond the UK, the British Colonies, and the United States. This includes the existent ethnic minorities and cultures which have contributed to the formation of the English language and culture as it is known nowadays.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Humanistic Approach to Teaching and Learning

As believed by the educational reformer John Dewey, people develop themselves as social individuals and therefore each learner should be at the starting point of education. As a result, "the social life of the child is the basis of concentration, or correlation, in all his training and growth" [24]. It was he who also spoke about the importance of the teacher as a member of the community. A community that in the end, he shall assist while responding to the social influences that, somehow, construct the learner's mind [24]. However, most of his ideas as well as the deficiencies he was able to identify decades ago—some even persist in today's educative system—have not been considered for the improvement of it. For example, when dealing with ethnic-diverse students the social aspect of these learners is often neglected. This is especially true when they belong to minor communities often considered deviant by mainstream society. In other words: the educative development of these students is often approached in isolation and only paying attention to their cognitive capacities while leaving aside their social development.

Dewey's ideas together with those developed by the pedagogists, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, contributed to what we know today as "student-centered learning" [25–27]. That is, the student functions as the center of the educative process. For them, to assimilate concepts and thus learn, interaction and active engagement are vital. As a result, students must be given an active role and be the responsible agents of their learning process. In fact, it was Piaget who advanced that learning is achieved by appealing to experience [Piaget, 1964] as knowledge is acquired after an active process is carried out by the students. Hence, it can be said that when appealing to student-centered conceptualizations; acknowledgment should not only be given to cognitive but also to affective and social needs.

In relation to the "student-centered learning", humanistic education arose during the second half of the 20th century—specifically during the 1960s and 1970s—influenced by psychologists Maslow, Rogers, and Bugental, who were positing a holistic view of individuals. This new vision was a response to the common educational theories of the time that were mainly focusing on behaviorism and psychoanalysis. Thus, while these theories were focused on modifying students' behavior and academic approach to rewards

and punishment; they considered that students would inherently make good decisions once their needs are met. Therefore, to educate and make the learning real and attainable it is necessary to consider students as individuals provided with intellect and emotions alike. In other words: to educate it is necessary to focus on the cognitive, affective, and physical needs of the learner. Later on, Williams and Burden [28] quoting Thomas and Harry-Augstein considered that learning in order to take place and be an enriching experience must be personal: “for education to be an enriching experience the meanings that emerge must become personal, and they must be significant and important in some part of the person’s life”. Meaning that students’ personal experiences should be considered for the teaching and learning process.

It was Stevick [29] who affirmed that pupils learn in a better way when they feel comfortable with themselves and with their classmates and that when being taught using a methodology that focuses on their personal strengths, learning will be more effective. Besides, Moskowitz emphasizes that “empathy” is also another important aspect to consider when teaching as it helps not only students to see themselves in the place of others; but also, teachers to see themselves in the place of their students. In addition, Williams and Burden [28] state that humanistic education is based on the idea that students differ, and they need to be encouraged to be themselves and not to try to look like others. Most of these ideas were also considered by Paulo Freire who considered that educational content should be derived from the daily experiences the students encounter in life as individuals. Therefore, students learn to participate in their own learning process and as a result, they transform the world within their reality [30].

3.2. *Culturally Responsive Teaching*

The influence of the humanistic approach to learning can be seen in Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). This student-centered approach bears in mind the student’s cognitive processes but also the cultural background they belong to in order to make their learning effective and personal. Additionally, this humanistic way of approaching education posits a bilateral flow of ideas that enriches both—teachers and students—through the teaching and learning process.

As previously mentioned, an aspect that is often debated when dealing with education is the relationship between the low achievement of students and their background; especially when dealing with foreign, ethnic minorities, or impoverished students. This continuous debate does not allow us as educators to realize that one of the many possible solutions regarding the engagement of these students might be the acquisition of knowledge (contents and competencies) through the implementation of their own culture in the classroom since teaching is both a contextual and a situational process. In fact, and using Geneva Gay’s words, “ecological factors, such as prior experiences, community settings, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities of teachers and students” must be included and implemented within the educative curriculum as all of them are to be considered tools that facilitate both the teaching and the learning process [31]. However, these facts tend to be ignored and fall into oblivion when students—whom the teaching process should be directed—belong to ethnically diverse communities, especially poor ones. Consequently, they are likely to be taught through the use of a Eurocentric Framework in which there is no place for ethnic minority cultures as, apparently, education has nothing to do with cultures or heritages but with the teaching of intellectual, vocational, and civic skills. That kind of teaching ends up leaving behind fanciful notions such as cultural diversity because it is believed that ethnically diverse students—usually considered by the educative systems as “underachievers”—must only learn several skills that could be applied to life in order to assimilate the values and culture of the mainstream society and assimilate to it. Unfortunately, this has dire consequences because students forget who they really are and the culture they belong to.

It should not be forgotten that being able to bring the culture of ethnic minority groups to the classroom, as in our particular case, gypsy culture, requires knowing the cultural

dimensions as well as other aspects such as social, political, and economic conditions that, in turn, are responsible for the inequality among those minority students who are part of the educational community. It is, on many occasions, also seen as a huge challenge by teachers as they mistakenly believe that to treat students differently because of their cultural orientations is racial discrimination [31]. At the same time, teachers commit the mistake of failing to recognize the influence of culture on their own as well as on their students' attitudes, values, and behaviors. Mainly because the way we educate is deeply ingrained in the predominant worldview and cultural norms leave aside other approaches to teaching and learning. Therefore, not approaching the teaching and learning of students from an ethnic and cultural side makes it difficult for them to reach their full potential [32]. However, many teachers do not consider their teaching approaches as problematic. On the contrary: they attribute ethnic diverse students' school failure to what they "do not have" or "cannot do" as in the case of Roma-Gypsy students. Therefore, a very different pedagogical approach is necessary to improve the performance of ethnic minority students, one that considers their personal and cultural strengths and capabilities as Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) does.

Before delving into this methodology that emerged in the early 1990s, it is important to explain that the same core methodology has been given different names since it had its first appearance. Knowingly: Culturally Relevant Education (CRE); Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP); and Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT).

However, and despite the different terms coined, all of them coincide in making use of the definition of the word "culture" as it is central to how all learning takes place [31] and to the way it helps us, as individuals, understand the world around us. On the one hand, UNESCO has defined "culture" as "the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" [33] (p. 68). However, on the other, the definition of culture seems to be more complex as there exist three levels to consider when dealing with it: surface, shallow, and deep [34]. This same conception of the term "culture" was later taken and broadened by the pedagogist Zaretta L. Hammond—also a contributor to the CRT Methodology—as she believes that both the "shallow" and the "deep" culture contribute to the way in which we experience life [35]. As we can see, both definitions are strongly connected to the ways in which societies, groups, and communities tend to define their identity, which in turn, provides the key to understanding the interaction among peoples in contexts of globalization as well as the way in which individuals understand education and approach learning.

Once the term "culture" has been explained, it is necessary to cover the theoretical framework that lies underneath the CRT Methodology. Chronologically speaking, the scholar-practitioners that gave life to such methodology were: Gloria Ladson-Billings, Lisa Delpit, Geneva Gay, and Sonia Nieto. The four of them are considered the Matriarchs of the CRT Model [36] after making distinct contributions that together form the essential baselines from where educators can start implementing it. Ladson-Billings has been studying since the 1980s the practices carried out by teachers who taught African American students as well as the implementation of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed developed by Paulo Freire [37–39]. "Her work encourages a more robust insightfulness from a pedagogical perspective into the racial achievement and performance gaps that were uncovered quantitatively through the analysis of standardized test scores" [36]. In 1995, it was Lisa Delpit who contributed to the CRT Methodology after calling teachers to action "to better understand the scope of influence of the cultural power they hold" [36]. Her research explores how larger societal power imbalances and cultural conflicts are recreated within the school as well as classroom background and, therefore, deny educational opportunities to ethnically diverse (minority) students. In Delpit's words: "the culprit in these situations is not simply racism, though it certainly plays a part. It is the reluctance of people, especially those with power and privilege, to perceive those different from themselves except through their own culturally clouded vision" [40]. For this reason, teaching in

general, but specifically a multicultural group, is considered by Delpit a complicated process that is not to be merely answered by “the replication of teaching techniques and tools” [36] but through the “differing perspectives on the debate over ‘skills’ vs. ‘process’ approaches that can lead to an understanding of the alienation and miscommunication”, and thereby to a better understanding of the ethnically diverse students.

The CRT Model has also been contributed to by Geneva Gay. In her eyes, the CRT is connected to the definition of culture—including cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles—as through it, it is possible to make learning more effective among students while enhancing their strengths. It is, therefore, the “behavioral expression of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognizes the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning” [31] that will allow the creation of learning communities in which both—cultural differences and heritage—and their inclusion within the curriculum would be possible. At the same time, CRT contributes to: acknowledging the legitimacy of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum; build meaningful bridges between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstraction and lived sociocultural realities; use of different instructional strategies connected to different learning styles; teach students to know and praise their own and another’s cultural heritage; and, incorporate the information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in school [31] (p. 37). However, the CRT approach is not only characterized by bringing cultural aspects of students belonging to ethnic-diverse groups to the curriculum and to the classroom but also by being comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative as well as emancipatory. Is, in other words, not the kind of teaching that has been designed to fit the school culture to the students’ culture but the one that makes use of the students’ culture as the basis for education. Therefore, CRT strategies should be considered as a foundational construct in education settings [41].

In addition, [35] it has been stated that during the last decades, despite much research have been carried out supporting the idea of matching school culture with students’ culture to promote academic success, they have not been widely applied when dealing with the instruction of ethnically diverse students. Mainly because there is a persistent trend of denial of the existence of ethnically minority cultures. This is the case of the ethnic minority group that concerns our study: the Roma-Gypsy. Therefore, the denial must end, and ethnic materials should be implemented in order to teach both fundamental and non-fundamental skills. All students can learn using materials written by and about ethnically diverse people—in our specific case Roma-Gypsy people—as, by doing so, these ethnic minority groups would be recognized and therefore the learning experience would be constructed upon them fulfilling the basis of Culturally Responsive Teaching: validation, comprehension, multidimensional, transformational, and emancipation. All of them are capable of empowering students so they can develop their critical thinking and analyze the world in which they live and work towards social change.

4. Method. Study of a High School Scenario in Northwestern Spain

4.1. Introduction

In this article, we address the following research questions: 1. How can we, as teachers, attract ethnically diverse students belonging to ethnic minority groups in the EFL classroom? and 2. Which characteristics of the CRT Methodology have contributed to improving academic achievements and end up absenteeism among Roma-Gypsy Students? This article is part of a larger research project investigating the inclusion of ethnically diverse students—specifically Roma-Gypsies—to overcome the different inequalities they have to confront while being part of the educational systems when learning English as a foreign language. The research that supports this article is characterized by the interest that emerged regarding the inclusion of ethnically diverse students who tend to be at risk of social exclusion and how, through the implementation of CRT, it is possible for them to

find their way to advance and develop successful educational trajectories. The information that will be presented and explained corresponds to a qualitative case study carried out in a high school located in the northwest of Spain. For its development, qualitative research has been carried out.

The primary objectives that were established from the beginning of our study were: 1. To engage ethnically diverse students to become part of the mainstream classroom through the inclusion of their culture; 2. To improve their language skills and competencies in the learning of a foreign language (academic performance); 3. To raise attendance at schools of ethnically diverse students.

In the following sections the presentation of the participants, the instruments used, the analysis carried out, and the results obtained would be explained in greater detail and real examples would be provided. In addition, it has to be stated that the negotiations with the high school in order to have access to its facilities as well as being given a targeted group to implement the CRT approach were long due to the COVID-19 situation and the protocols established by the pertinent authorities.

4.2. Participants

The proposed study was carried out in a high school located in the city of A Coruña in northwestern Spain. The number of students attending this public high school is 390 and out of them, 40 students are of Roma-Gypsy origin. Out of these 40 students, 45% are boys and 55% are girls. However, although the percentage of girls is higher, there are more boys reaching higher educative levels than girls; some of them accessing to Upper-Secondary Education. The targeted valid participants were 25 pupils—eight Gypsy—studying 1st year of ESO. The class could be described as a “mixed ability” group as we find different educative backgrounds. Most of them had a low level of English and a scarce level of motivation to learn the subject. In the case of Gypsy students, the low level of motivation, as well as the low academic performance and absenteeism, is related to the lack of connection among their lives and the “reality” presented in the materials used because as they have stated during assemblies and interviews “I don’t understand what good English can do for me”. Unfortunately, this statement is linked to the lack of awareness on the part of the students (both gypsy and non-gypsy), as well as teachers, of the existence of gypsy culture beyond the borders of Spain.

4.3. Instruments

Academic performance and absenteeism were the two main objectives to be analyzed and assessed after the implementation of the CRT educative proposal. Therefore, different instruments were used in order to check if the previous aspirations were achieved. First of all, interviews were carried out among teachers and participants before, during, and after the implementation of our pedagogical proposal with the aim of improving the teaching practice and getting some feedback regarding both students’ opinions and teachers’ experiences. In addition, a classroom diary (Figure 2) was written to “record” the sessions. Within it, information about activities, students’ attitudes as well as positive and negative results were included. Additionally, paper-based questionnaires were employed with the purpose of getting more feedback from those students who felt shier during the interviews. A pre-test questionnaire (Figure 3) was conducted focusing on Students’ motivation as well as on the English language as most of the students have difficulties in reading comprehension in this foreign language. Based on this initial experience, vocabulary was adapted, and some sentences were rewritten as well as restructured to make them easier to understand. Once the pre-test was assessed, it was decided to include the Spanish translation of the sentences in further questionnaire tests. Photographs, as well as recordings of the activities, were carried out too.

N.º Sesión	Día	Dinámica(s)	Timing	Actividad(es)	Tarea(s)	Actitud alumnado	Resultados basados en la observación realizada
1 – Presentación & Toma de Contacto	04/11/2020	Presentación	10'	Kahoot: Get to know the teacher?	Con el fin de evitar el uso de nuevas tecnologías en el aula, el alumnado hizo uso de los palos de madera de colores para responder a las preguntas que aparecían en pantalla.	La actitud del alumnado ha sido positiva ante la puesta en práctica de nuevas dinámicas basadas en una metodología totalmente desconocida para ellos. La participación del alumnado ha sido del 100% y todos han prestado un gran interés en las actividades y/o juegos que se iban realizando.	A primera vista los resultados parecen positivos tras la primera toma de contacto.
			10'	Preguntas: profesor-alumnado, alumnado-profesor, alumnado-alumnado	Ronda de preguntas para conocer mejor al alumnado y evaluar su destreza comunicativa así como su participación y nivel de motivación en el aula.		
		Guessing Game	20'	¿Qué llevas en la mochila?	El alumnado trata de adivinar que llevan sus compañeros en la mochila. La actividad no solo busca saber que objetos materiales tiene cada alumno sino que sean capaces de identificar otro tipo de mochila, de carácter emocional donde las críticas, los prejuicios y los problemas personales		

Figure 2. Classroom Diary.

Pre-Test: Survey on Motivation / November '20

This survey is confidential and anonymous
Read each of the following statements and how much you agree or disagree with them.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

1. I work hard at school

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

2. It's important to me that I improve my general skills this year

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

3. It's important to me that I improve my English skills this year

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Figure 3. Pre-Test (Initial Survey on Motivation).

4.4. Analysis (Justify)

According to the questionnaires completed by the students and the collective interview and thanks to the analysis, it can be demonstrated that this research has helped students in order to improve their academic performance as well as stop absenteeism as we can see on the two graphics attached below. In addition, it has contributed to fostering critical thinking through the discovery of Roma-Gypsy history and culture for both gypsy and non-gypsy students. Moreover, visibility has been given to the history of an ethnic minority group that seems not to have space in our educational system and a broader vision of the “Samudaripen”, or Roma Genocide.

4.4.1. Students’ Academic Performance

Below a graphic representing Students’ academic performance [Figure 4] is being presented for the purpose of providing evidence regarding the improvements done by the targeted students after implementing the CRT Approach.

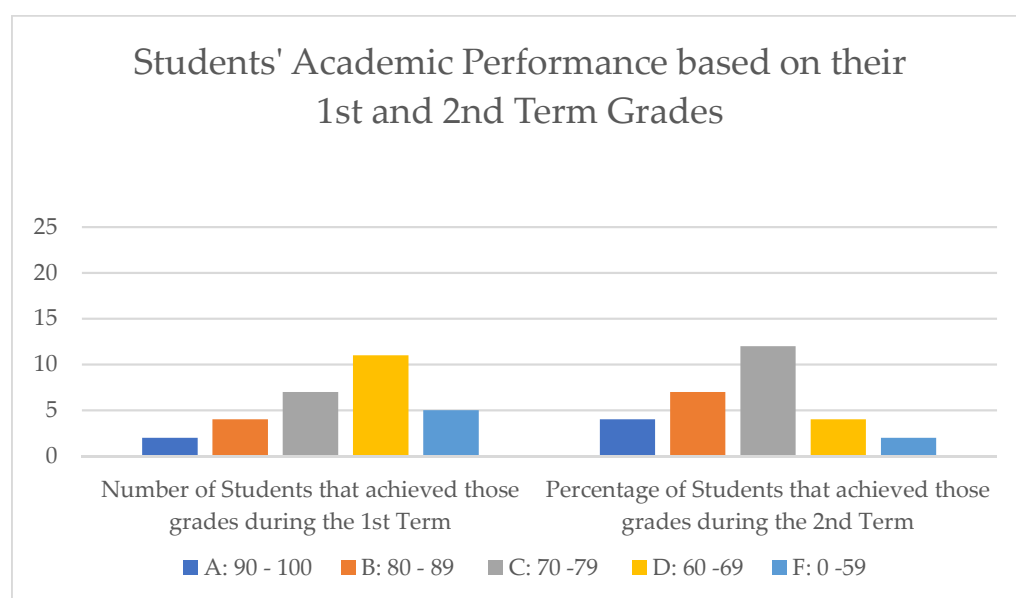


Figure 4. Graphic comparing students’ academic performance based on their grades during the 1st and 2nd Term.

The implementation of the CRT Pedagogy took a total of six months: from November 2020 until April 2021. Meaning that it was a long process of observation as well as gathering information. As one of the objectives established as the core for the implementation of the CRT Pedagogy was to assess if its students were able to improve their Academic Performance the most representative way of showing this data was through the grades achieved by the students during the 1st and 2nd semester. As it can be seen, the number of students achieving better grades after the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching is higher than before its implementation. Furthermore, the number of students failing the subject is lower during the second semester than during the first semester.

4.4.2. Students’ Attendance

In this case, the graphic presented [Figure 5] provides data related to the students’ attendance: while CRT Approach was being implemented and while a more traditional (book-based) approach was being used in class.

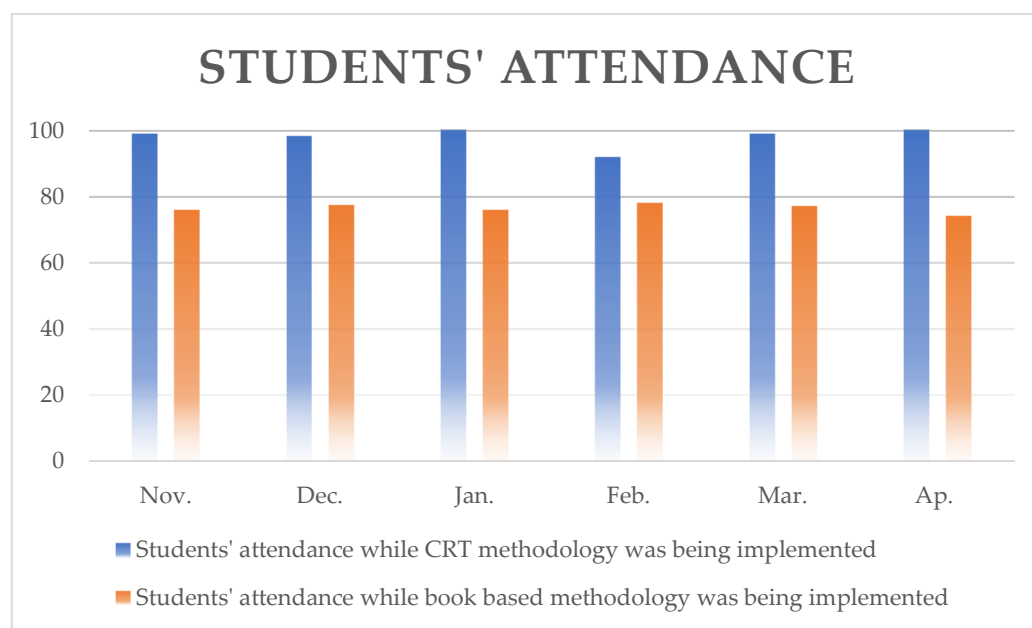


Figure 5. Graphic showing a comparison of students' attendance depending on the methodology being used in class.

As it has been done with the academic performance, Students' attendance to class has been recorded. The graphic shows different bars which represent the months through which the CRT Approach has been implemented. As the CRT activities were only taking place one day per week, we have calculated the average attendance each month to the lessons in which the CRT Approach was being implemented as well as those in which a more book-based methodology was being implemented. Therefore, the graphics show that those days in which more CRT activities were implemented within the targeted participants' group, more students attended the class, while when the only material used by the students throughout the class was the student's book, fewer students attended the class.

4.5. Results

The results of implementing this Culturally Responsive Teaching proposal could be summarized as follows:

- Increase motivation among students: students participated more in the classroom and absenteeism among Gypsy students decreased.
- Social skills among Gypsy and non-Gypsy students were developed, easing inclusion among the Educative Community thanks to cultural activities that helped them to understand unknown aspects about gypsy culture. Communication between both groups has been reinforced too and an increasing trend of groups where cultural diversity is palpable.
- Through the development of different activities (research projects, role plays, listening activities . . .). Gypsies have won more visibility inside the high school and awareness about their cultural heritage has been enlarged as it can be seen in Figure 6 after analyzing the survey filled by the students.
- Help students achieve a certain level of proficiency in the English language allowing them to communicate in real situations while helping them to recognize its positive effects.

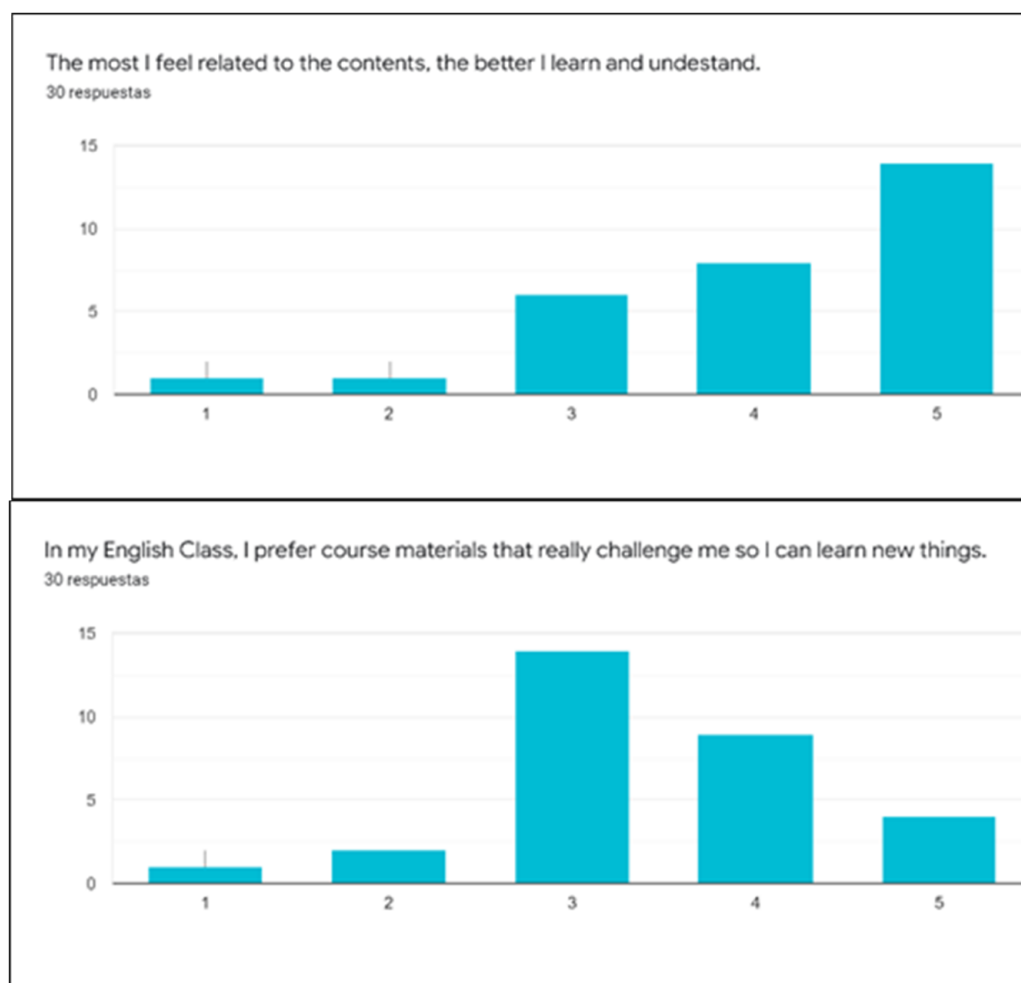


Figure 6. Examples taken from the survey carried out after implementing the CRT Approach.

5. Discussion

Social-emotional skills are vital for intercultural education as well as inclusion. Starting from this premise, our research is aimed to implement Culturally Responsive Teaching as an approach to engaging ethnically diverse students to overcome the low level of academic achievement reached by Roma-Gypsy as well as to solve the problem connected with the lack of high school assistance among the same group of students. Implementing Roma-Gypsy culture and history within the Educative Framework through the use of CRT, would not only contribute to the improvement of their educational opportunities but also help to erase the misconceptions and stereotypes existent towards them. As previously mentioned by [19,21,22,24,25], a wide body of research evidence highlights the benefits of implementing the CRT approach in an intercultural classroom with the aim of offering better quality education to students, especially those who belong to ethnically diverse communities.

Moreover, by drawing on the teaching and learning processes that have been implemented within the targeted valid participants, an answer to the research questions has been given, one that, in addition, would have the potential to provide good suggestions for policymakers and stakeholders in order to foster the inclusion of ethnically diverse students who belong to minority groups as well as their representation in Educative Legal Frameworks. In addition, the case analyzed in this article suggests that using materials written by and about Roma-Gypsy people contributes to the improvement of the academic performance of those students who belong to this ethnic minority group as well as to diminish the number of times students fail to attend school. Additionally, the positive

representation of their culture within the school context has contributed to the obliteration of stereotypes among non-gypsy students, teachers, and the entire educative community.

Using a humanistic approach to teaching and learning in the English Classroom helped us as teachers to better understand students and to make their learning more personal [28] and, therefore, engaging. As ethnically diverse students' culture is allowed within the classroom, importance is being paid to their cognitive, affective, and physical needs as learners [28]. Furthermore, while including minority cultures such as the Roma-Gypsy as part of the teaching and learning process, students of this origin would feel comfortable with themselves and the classroom as their classmates have discovered different facts about their culture [29]. This last aspect has contributed to the development of empathy too [42] as students and teachers have been able to put themselves in the place of ethnically diverse students. Besides, students have been encouraged to be themselves and appreciate their own culture while improving their academic performance [28].

Finally, this research discusses the relevance of including identity as a paramount issue to contribute to building a more inclusive, global, and democratic society for the XXI century citizens.

6. Conclusions

A limitation of this research is that this case study focuses on a specific geographic location: a high school located in the northwest of Spain. However, it is believed that—despite its limitation—it is a true reflection of what is happening in many other territories both at the national and international level. In turn, this research is transferable to other contexts making it invaluable. That is why, thanks to this case study based on the CRT, it is found that: plurilingualism and intercultural teaching are promoted. The inclusion of ethnically diverse students is reinforced, and, in addition, the foundations for a real equitable education are laid. Therefore, by teaching ethnic-diverse students with a Cultural perspective, we have redefined the frame and included Roma-Gypsy students within the school. Likewise, these ethnically diverse students are empowered, and visibility has been offered to their community and the outlooks and problems surrounding them. At the same time, an attempt to describe an educative action that would enhance the academic success of social-ethnic minority students has been attained. It should be noted that the initial objectives of our research have been achieved. Last but not least, it is also important to make these actions and approaches visible within the educational laws that support the national curricula of our country.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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