

Beyond assessments: Exploring strategies for Afro-Descendant students' success in Costa Rica

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Abstract

Purpose: This research aims to critically analyze the potential ramifications of comprehensive assessments on marginalized communities, with a specific focus on Afro-descendant students in the Caribbean/Atlantic region of Costa Rica. It intends to identify the potential effects of these assessments and propose policy and practice adjustments that can enhance their educational outcomes.

Research methodology: This research analyzes the recent assessment requirements and the historical background of educational assessments in Costa Rica and explores alternative teaching methods, including culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and the impact of the dialect and language continuum. Furthermore, the potential benefits of integrating the International Baccalaureate (IB) philosophy into the curriculum of all public schools are also investigated.

Results: Based on the analysis conducted, recommendations for policy and practice changes to address the potential impact of assessments on Afro-descendant students include creating a culturally responsive curriculum, recognizing non-standard dialects, using alternative assessment approaches, and emphasizing consideration of marginalized communities' needs and experiences in educational policy and practice decisions.

Limitations: This review does not provide an empirical investigation but rather synthesizes existing literature and provides recommendations for future research.

Contribution: This research significantly contributes to the existing literature on educational policy and practice in marginalized communities, particularly in relation to students of African descent in Costa Rica and suggests ways to improve their educational outcomes. Its insight can be of interest to policymakers, educators, and future researchers in education and social justice.

Keywords: *Comprehensive Assessments, Afro-descendant, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, International Baccalaureate (IB) philosophy, Dialect and Language Continuum*

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1. Introduction

Costa Rica strongly emphasizes education and training, allocating more than 6.5% of its GDP to these sectors (CIA, 2023; Maravalle & Pandiella, 2023; UNESCO, 2023; Worldbank, 2023). According to UNESCO (2023), nearly 70% of countries worldwide still fall short of the recommended education expenditures. While the recommended benchmark for education spending is between 4% and 6% of GDP, Costa Rica surpasses this range and exceeds the 4.9% average for the Latin America and

Caribbean region ([Maravalle & Pandiella, 2023](#); [UNESCO, 2023](#)). It is important to acknowledge that these benchmarks do not consider the unique challenges and needs of individual countries. Despite the commitment of Costa Rica to education, there are persisting issues with the quality of secondary education, particularly among the Afro-descendant population in the Caribbean/Atlantic region. This leads to ongoing racial and socio-economic gaps in secondary school enrollment, completion rates, and higher education participation. The region has a shortage of skilled workers, posing a significant threat to attracting foreign direct investment ([Bernard, 2023](#)). To address this challenge, the Costa Rican government and representatives in the Caribbean/Atlantic region must enhance the efficiency and quality of the public education system. This can be achieved by prioritizing efforts to improve education quality, providing support for students with learning gaps, and enhancing the selection and training of teachers and counselors ([Baiocchi, 2022](#); [Freidus & Ewing, 2022](#); [Maravalle & Pandiella, 2023](#); [Robles & Wiese, 2023](#); [Smagorinsky, 2022](#); [Wilcox & Lawson, 2022](#)). All stakeholders must work together to promote regional growth and equity through these measures.

At the onset of the 2023 academic year, the Ministry of Education in Costa Rica (*Ministerio de Educación Pública*) has implemented a new assessment initiative encompassing three types of learning assessments: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Diagnostic assessments are used to identify areas where students may need additional support or instruction. Formative assessments monitor students' progress and provide feedback to enhance learning during the academic period. Summative assessments are designed to evaluate the effectiveness of educational initiatives. The integration of these three assessment types aims to provide quantitative data to the administration for strategic decision-making purposes. However, it is crucial to consider whether the resulting data will be adequate for teachers to implement appropriate remedial measures before the subsequent assessment is conducted ([Bujanda et al., 2018](#); [Irons & Elkington, 2021](#); [Makara & Kuusinen, 2023](#); [MEP, 2023a](#)).

The 2023 comprehensive assessment initiative in Costa Rica offers valuable insights into students' proficiency and learning needs. It is important to thoroughly examine potential challenges, specifically regarding language and culture, when instructing and assessing Afro-descendant students, especially in the Caribbean/Atlantic region. A reassessment of funding mechanisms for university preparation, programs held during the university years, and post-university outcomes can contribute to increasing secondary school completion rates. Despite the implementation of vocational education reforms and initiatives, such as the establishment of Colegio Científico de Limón in 2002, which aims to prepare high-performing students for higher education, these efforts have not effectively reduced the educational gaps between those in the Caribbean/Atlantic region and other parts of the country ([Bernard, 2023](#)). This review will explore the historical context of educational assessment in Costa Rica, with a focus on current assessment practices, the potential of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), dialect and language approaches, and the integration of International Baccalaureate (IB) principles into the curriculum to promote educational success for Afro-descendant students ([Bau et al., 2021](#); [Galloway, Callin, James, Vimégnon, & McCall, 2019](#); [Imchen & Ndem, 2020](#); [Maravalle & Pandiella, 2023](#); [Mitchell- explored Walthour et al., 2023](#)). This review will address the following questions:

1. What potential effects could the new assessment requirement have on marginalized communities in Costa Rica, particularly the Afro-descendant communities in the Caribbean/Atlantic region?
2. How have public education policies historically impacted the Afro-descendant communities in Costa Rica?
3. How can alternative approaches, such as CRP and the integration of IB principles, be effectively implemented to support the Afro-descendant communities within Costa Rica public schools?

This review holds great importance as it aims to provide insightful perspectives on the potential effects of the newly introduced 2023 comprehensive assessments on marginalized communities in Costa Rica. Notably, the impact on the Afro-descendant communities residing in the Caribbean/Atlantic region shall receive greater emphasis. This analysis seeks to uncover the historical implications of education policies that have affected marginalized communities in the country. Lastly, it explores alternative models such as CRP, the Dialect and Language Continuum, and the integration

of IB principles, which have the potential to address and diminish the achievement gaps experienced by these communities.

2. Literature Review

CRP has gained prominence in education, with extensive research exploring its implications for teaching and learning. The influential work of Ladson-Billings has had a significant impact, promoting a more inclusive and equitable approach to education. It emphasizes the significance of cultural competence and the need to understand and honor students' cultural backgrounds to foster academic success and advance social justice. The seminal article, written by Ladson-Billings, entitled *Like Lightning in a Bottle: Attempting to Capture the Pedagogical Excellence of Successful Teachers of Black Students* (1990), highlighted the unique skills possessed by effective teachers of African American students that were often overlooked in conventional teacher education programs. Additionally, the book titled *The Dreamkeepers* (1994) identified key characteristics of successful teachers of African American students, including high expectations, flexibility, community commitment, and cultural understanding. In the 1994 article, Ladson-Billings advocates for integrating multicultural education into teacher training programs, challenging prevailing cultural norms. Collaborating with William F. Tate IV, Ladson-Billings introduced CRP as a transformative approach to education that challenges power dynamics and promotes social justice and equity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The recent book published by Ladson-Billings in 2022 builds upon earlier works, underscoring the ongoing relevance of CRP in advancing equity and social justice in education (Ladson-Billings, 2022).

Chacón (2023) examined the symbolic deprivation of education as a human right in Costa Rica, emphasizing the persistent challenges historically marginalized groups faced in accessing quality education. The research stated the urgent need to address systemic inequities by implementing CRP and other strategies. Chan (2022) explored the significance of cultural diversity in early childhood education and emphasized the importance of integrating culturally responsive practices to foster equity, inclusion, and the development of a culturally responsive classroom environment. The research highlighted the positive impact of promoting identity development and academic achievement through culturally responsive approaches. Bernard (2023) discussed the concept of *educación diversificada* and its implications for Afro-descendant communities in Costa Rica. Moreover, Chela-Flores (2022) examined the dialectal division of Spanish, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the linguistic diversity within Spanish-speaking communities. The research stated that understanding dialect variation was vital for fostering CRP and creating an inclusive classroom atmosphere. Coleman (2023) reported the significance of a culturally responsive approach in enhancing literacy rates among marginalized students, recognizing and valuing their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The research posited that CRP could promote literacy development and positive identity formation for historically marginalized groups. Crogman and Jackson (2023) explored the potential of integrated education and learning to foster equity and inclusion. The research focused on the pivotal role of CRP in these efforts.

Expanding on the research on the importance of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, Aguilar-Sánchez (2018) examined the linguistic situation in Limón, Costa Rica. The research centered on language attitudes and emphasized the crucial role of considering dialect and language continuum within the CRP framework. The findings highlighted the experiences of speakers of *Limonese* Creole English, an Afro-Caribbean dialect, who faced linguistic discrimination and marginalization, with implications for their academic performance and sense of identity. Aguilar-Sánchez (2022) further delved into the complexities of *diglossia* and language contact in Limón, shedding light on the intricate linguistic environment teachers and students navigate in the region. The research emphasized the importance of understanding linguistic diversity and community attitudes for promoting CRP in the classroom. Similarly, Baiocchi (2022) reported the significance of incorporating cultural and historical considerations when addressing the inequities faced by Afro-descendant communities in Costa Rica. The research highlighted the activism of the Afro-Costa Rican Movement, which advocated for social justice and equity, including the right to education for Afro-descendants.

In exploring the dynamic role of teachers within the teaching and learning realm, [Butera et al. \(2021\)](#) stated the importance of empowering educators as agents of social change by implementing CRP. The research shed light on the transformative potential of teachers in fostering positive social impact through their interactions with students, emphasizing the significance of social influence in the teaching process. Similarly, [Beech et al. \(2022\)](#) examined the integration of the IB program in selected public schools in Costa Rica, focusing on its ability to provide historically marginalized groups with access to educational privileges. It was reported that the emphasis of IB on critical thinking, global awareness, and intercultural understanding aligned with the objectives of CRP, thereby promoting educational equity. The research stated the importance of integrating CRP principles in an IB education to foster equity and inclusion, particularly for historically marginalized groups. The research by [Beech et al. \(2022\)](#) and [Butera et al. \(2021\)](#) collectively underscored recognizing and appreciating linguistic and cultural diversities, cultivating critical thinking skills, fostering intercultural understanding, and empowering teachers and students as drivers of social change.

3. Research Methodology

This current research adopts a review approach to examine and consolidate existing literature, including articles, books, and other sources, regarding strategies for promoting the academic success of Afro-Descendant students within the education system of Costa Rica. Emphasizing the Afro-descendant population in the Caribbean/Atlantic region, the review aims to provide an overview and evaluation of the available research on the effects of comprehensive assessments on marginalized communities. Additionally, it aims to identify any gaps or inconsistencies in the current research body, which can highlight areas for future investigation. It also explores strategies focused on reducing the achievement gap within this community. The reviewed analyses, including the present one, inform the development of research questions, guide the design of new ones, and summarize the existing knowledge for policy and practical purposes.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Educational Policies on Marginalized Communities

Costa Rica is widely acknowledged for its strong commitment to education, leading to high literacy levels and educational achievements ([Maravalle & Pandiella, 2023](#)). Its history of education policies exemplifies the longstanding promises of the government to provide accessible and high-quality education for its citizens. Since establishing the first schools during the colonial era, the government has made notable strides in improving education access and quality. Education has been compulsory and free with a humanistic framework since 1869 ([Müller-Using & Vargas Porras, 2021](#)), prioritizing the holistic development of individuals, including their emotional, social, and intellectual growth, and emphasizing students' needs and interests over strict adherence to a curriculum or standardized testing ([Javadi & Tahmasbi, 2020](#); [Leach, 2022](#); [Tulasi & Rao, 2021](#)). However, despite these achievements, there are significant disparities that persist (tied to a *Vallecentrismo* ideology), particularly impacting marginalized communities in the Caribbean/Atlantic region ([Casadellà et al., 2022](#); [Freidus & Ewing, 2022](#); [Howard & Howard, 2021](#); [Javadi & Tahmasbi, 2020](#); [Leach, 2022](#); [Paulsrud, 2022](#); [Rodríguez-Martínez et al., 2022](#); [Rodríguez & Navarro-Camacho, 2022](#); [Tulasi & Rao, 2021](#); [UCR, 2019](#); [Wilcox & Lawson, 2022](#); [Yang, 2023](#)).

Vallecentrismo is a term that refers to a belief system emphasizing the significance of the *Valle Central*, or Central Valley in Costa Rica. This ideology suggests that the concentration of resources in the *Valle Central* has led to inequality and marginalization of the coastal and peripheral regions, particularly affecting the Afro-descendant population in the Caribbean/Atlantic area. As a result, these areas have experienced low levels of education, poverty, and various other challenges. It is important to note that *Vallecentrismo* is present in all seven provinces of the country ([Solano Rivera & Ramírez Caro, 2019](#); [Sotomayor, 2022](#); [UCR, 2019, 2022](#)). According to [UCR \(2022\)](#), the Costa Rican population has an 11.7% Afro-descendant genetic heritage. This percentage is even higher in the Caribbean region, reaching 30%, and is 14% in the Guanacaste area, 8% in the South, and 6% in the Central Valley (para. 12). This simply implies that Costa Rica is a country with different racial and

ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, it is crucial to raise awareness, ensure greater representation, and recognize the cultural heritage of the Afro-descendant population to preserve and celebrate their unique identity.

The historical policies implemented in Costa Rica have profoundly and enduringly impacted the Afro-descendant communities in the Caribbean/Atlantic region. These policies have resulted in systemic racism, discrimination, and exclusion from educational opportunities. As a consequence, Afro-descendant people have faced limited access to quality education, lower levels of literacy, and restricted social and economic mobility. The legacy of exclusion and inequality has perpetuated this cycle of poverty and marginalization. Sadly, even presently, an achievement gap persists between Afro-descendant and other groups, reflecting the lasting consequences of historical injustices ([Bernard, 2023](#); [Dixon & Caldwell, 2023](#)).

In the early 1900s, the Costa Rican government embarked on a series of educational reforms that had a transformative impact. The government centralized the academic system and introduced compulsory primary education, increasing opportunities for Costa Ricans to receive an education. The 1940s marked a milestone as the government shifted its focus towards improving the quality of education. It constructed more schools, enhanced teacher training, and established the first public university in the country, the Universidad de Costa Rica, demonstrating a commitment to higher education. In the 1970s, the government continued to enhance education quality and accessibility by implementing a national curriculum and expanding secondary education for all students. In the 1980s, further reforms were introduced to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system. These reforms included establishing a teacher training system and a national school accreditation program. The 1990s witnessed the introduction of the Basic Education Law, which overhauled the education system and introduced a new curriculum. These historical milestones have shaped the educational landscape of Costa Rica ([Abarca & Ramírez-Varas, 2023](#); [Freidus & Ewing, 2022](#); [Müller-Using & Vargas Porras, 2021](#); [Samuels & Vargas, 2023](#)).

Since 2000, the Costa Rican Ministry of Education has significantly enhanced access to quality education. These initiatives have been supported by increased government investment and the implementation of various programs. Education funding has encountered an upward trend, rising from 5.5% of GDP in 2000 to 7.8% in 2019. It is important to note that funding has experienced a slight decline in recent years, hovering around 6.5% of GDP ([CIA, 2023](#); [Maravalle & Pandiella, 2023](#); [UNESCO, 2023](#); [Worldbank, 2023](#)). The National Education Plan for 2010 to 2021 aimed to ensure access to high-quality education for all citizens, enhance teaching and counseling programs, expand educational opportunities for marginalized populations, and modernize the education system through technology integration. This plan has been extended and incorporated into the strategic plans for 2024 ([MEP, 2023c](#)).

In 2016, the Costa Rican government initiated a bilingual program to foster bilingualism in schools ([Bujanda et al., 2018](#)). Subsequently, in 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning programs were implemented to ensure the continuity of education ([Arnold et al., 2023](#)). During this challenging period, under the leadership of Anna Katharina Müller Castro, who assumed the position of Minister of Education in 2022, Costa Rica experienced what was referred to as an educational blackout (*apagón educativo*). It became imperative to join forces and turn on the lights together (*encender juntos la luz*). This called for the collaboration of local governments, public-private partnerships, non-governmental organizations, legislators, churches, and community groups to contribute to educational initiatives ([Abarca & Ramírez-Varas, 2023](#); [Chacón, 2023](#); [MEP, 2022b, 2023c](#); [Montenegro, 2021](#); [OECD, 2021](#); [Samuels & Vargas, 2023](#)).

With the *Prueba de Bachillerato*, for example, a crucial exit exam for secondary school students in Costa Rica to obtain their diploma or bachillerato has been criticized. It is argued that the exam has limitations in accurately assessing student performance and lacks cultural relevance. Administered by the Costa Rican Ministry of Education, the *Prueba de Bachillerato* aims to evaluate the proficiency of students in subjects covered in secondary education, assessing their readiness for higher education or

the workforce. The passing grade for each section of the *Prueba de Bachillerato* is 70 out of 100. To pass the exam, students must obtain an average of at least 70 in all the sections of the exam ([Abarca & Ramírez-Varas, 2023](#)).

President Rodrigo Chaves Robles, who assumed office in May 2022, has pledged to tackle the educational inequalities present in Costa Rica, specifically focusing on marginalized communities. Recognizing the significance of education, the need to increase funding for schools is emphasized, as well as enhanced resources and support for teachers are also provided. Notably, Chaves Robles famously declared “No más pruebas FARO” ([Elguardian, 2022](#)) shortly after the election, referring to the national assessments known as *Pruebas Nacionales para el Fortalecimiento de Aprendizaje para la Renovación de Oportunidades* (FARO). In the campaign, the President emphasized the importance of creating a more equitable education system that ensures all students have equal access to resources and opportunities to succeed. Since assuming office, the Chaves Robles administration has taken measures to augment education funding and enhance access to educational resources in marginalized communities ([Bau et al., 2021](#); [Dixon & Caldwell, 2023](#); [Imchen & Ndem, 2020](#)).

In addition, the Chaves Robles administration has actively supported the 2023 revisions to assessment requirements for secondary school students to improve graduation rates. These changes align with the *Ruta de la Educación* initiative, which seeks to provide students with the competencies necessary for responsible citizenship, lifelong learning, and decent employment ([MEP, 2023e](#)). The new assessment requirements, announced in 2022 and implemented in March 2023, aim to address grade repetition and dropout rates concerns. By introducing more effective assessments and comprehensive data tracking, the objective is to effectively monitor student progress ([Maravalle & Pandiella, 2023](#); [MEP, 2023a, 2023c](#)). While the Chaves Robles administration has prioritized addressing educational disparities, significant challenges persist. The substantial disparity in education funding between the Caribbean/Atlantic region and other areas remains a significant issue, highlighting the need for targeted measures to improve the educational outcomes of individuals of African descent in the region ([Bau et al., 2021](#); [Bujanda et al., 2018](#); [Dixon & Caldwell, 2023](#); [Imchen & Ndem, 2020](#); [Samuels & Vargas, 2023](#)).

According to [Howard and Howard \(2021\)](#), the experiences of Afro-descendant/Black students are shaped by historical stereotypes, low expectations, and social marginalization. Their work correlates with the social exclusion perspectives reported by [Razza \(2018\)](#). Socially excluded individuals often face various obstacles in relation to academic success, including poverty, discrimination, language barriers, and limited access to quality education. Social exclusion can profoundly impact marginalized groups, making it challenging for them to secure employment and become productive members of society. To combat social exclusion and poverty, the concept of decent work was introduced. Disengagement from the learning process can lead to feelings of alienation and low self-esteem among individuals ([Howard & Howard, 2021](#); [Razza, 2018](#); [Saraví, 2022](#)).

Socially excluded young people in Latin America experience complex processes that impact their socialization, self-identity, and life trajectory across three main dimensions, namely space, self, and the life course ([Baiocchi, 2022](#); [Dixon & Caldwell, 2023](#); [Leach, 2022](#)). In terms of space, social exclusion often manifests as residing in segregated or marginalized areas, such as the Caribbean/Atlantic region of Costa Rica, where limited access to resources and services is prevalent. The sense of self can be adversely affected by marginalization, leading to low self-esteem, disengagement from education, and an increased likelihood of dropping out of school. Social exclusion has long-term consequences on life trajectories, including limited opportunities for higher education, employment, and social mobility. These challenges are particularly pronounced in Latin America, where poverty, gender inequality, and institutional weaknesses intersect, creating significant barriers for young people. Despite recent efforts in Costa Rica, significant disparities in educational outcomes persist. Admittedly, the Office of the Ministry of Education of Costa Rica reported that:

The state of schools and colleges is deplorable, the infrastructure is at an unprecedented level of deterioration, teachers work with their nails, before parents who every day see how their children have fewer opportunities...[asking]...If there are no robust public schools...who are the students who will be coming to public universities? ([MEP, 2022a](#)).

A comprehensive strategy is needed to address social exclusion in the Caribbean/Atlantic region. This strategy should prioritize equal access to quality education, provide necessary support and resources to marginalized students, and address systemic barriers contributing to social exclusion. Additionally, implementing targeted interventions, fostering community partnerships, and embracing culturally responsive teaching methods can promote inclusivity and create positive learning environments for all students. Addressing social exclusion in education ensures that every student reaches their full potential and makes meaningful contributions to society ([Freidus & Ewing, 2022](#); [Saraví, 2022](#)).

4.2 The 2023 Comprehensive Assessment and the Implications on Learning

A robust education system is vital for the advancement and prosperity of a country, as highlighted in the World Development Reports (WDR) on education in 2018 and 2021. In Costa Rica, the comprehensive assessments conducted during the 2023 school year aim to gauge students' knowledge base and inform educational policies. These assessments incorporate diagnostic, formative, and summative evaluations, although there are concerns about the potential narrowness and the neglect of other essential aspects of education. Challenges remain in improving educational opportunities for Afro-descendant students, including the funding disparity between schools in the Caribbean/Atlantic region and other parts of the country, which can be attributed to historical discrimination and neglect. CRP presents a potential approach to address these issues in the classroom. Urgent action is required to secure additional funding and resources to enhance educational initiatives in the Caribbean/Atlantic region. This involves providing greater access to technology and educational materials, expanding professional development opportunities for educators, and diversifying the range of educational programs and opportunities available to Afro-descendant students ([Alfaro Viquez, 2022a, 2022b](#); [Baiocchi, 2022](#); [Bau et al., 2021](#); [Bujanda et al., 2018](#); [Butera et al., 2021](#); [Chacón, 2023](#); [Chufama & Sithole, 2021](#); [Devi, 2022](#); [Ferguson, 2023](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [Guskey, 2022](#); [Imchen & Ndem, 2020](#); [Irons & Elkington, 2021](#); [Ismail et al., 2022](#); [MEP, 2022b, 2023a, 2023c, 2023d, 2023e](#); [Myrry et al., 2022](#); [Paulsrud, 2022](#); [Samuels & Vargas, 2023](#); [Sarfa & Danushka, 2021](#); [WDR, 2018, 2021](#)).

4.3 CRP and the Afro-descendant Communities of the Caribbean/Atlantic Region

CRP is an educational approach that values and incorporates students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and values to enhance their academic success and overall well-being ([Ladson-Billings, 1994a, 1994b](#)). It builds upon the principles of critical pedagogy (CP), which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a response to systemic oppression and inequality in education, as highlighted in the seminal work written by Paulo Freire, titled *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* ([Bello, 2023](#); [Soler-Gallart, 2023](#)). CP challenged traditional educational models that ignored the diverse cultural contexts of students and advocated for education as a transformative tool to empower individuals in critically analyzing and reshaping oppressive social structures. Similarly, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), which is often attributed to Geneva Gay based on the book published in 2000 titled, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, and the 2018 edition where CRT was defined as “using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them” (p. 36). Other scholars, such as James Banks, Lisa, Delpit, and Sonia Nieto, made significant contributions to the development of this field ([Baiocchi, 2022](#); [Chan, 2022](#); [Ginsberg et al., 2023](#); [Karatas, Eckstein, Noack, Rubini, & Crocetti, 2023](#)).

It is important to clarify that CRP and CRT are not synonymous terms but are sometimes used interchangeably and associated with Ladson-Billings. Although both theories share similar goals, CRT specifically refers to teachers' instructional practices and strategies to bring CRP to the classroom. This includes using culturally relevant materials and resources, incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into lessons, and building strong relationships with students from diverse backgrounds and their families. CRP, on the other hand, is a broader framework that provides

educators with flexibility in adapting their practices to meet the needs of diverse students ([Devi, 2022](#); [Ginsberg et al., 2023](#); [Paulsrud, 2022](#)).

To create a culturally responsive learning environment, teachers can use materials and resources that are culturally relevant and reflect the experiences and perspectives of Afro-Caribbean individuals. This may involve incorporating literature and history books that highlight the contributions and accomplishments of Afro-Caribbean people in the region. Furthermore, teachers can integrate cultural perspectives into their lessons by including discussions and activities that explore these traditions, values, and beliefs, such as incorporating lessons on traditional Afro-Caribbean music, dance, and cuisine. This enables students to develop a stronger connection to their cultural heritage and cultivate a sense of pride in their identity. Teachers can establish positive relationships with students and their families by respecting and valuing their cultural backgrounds, actively listening to the voices of these individuals, acknowledging cultural practices, and recognizing significant contributions to diverse communities ([Baiocchi, 2022](#); [Karataş et al., 2023](#)).

Extensive research provided evidence of the positive effects of CRP on academic achievement, students' engagement, and well-being ([Gay, 2018](#)). [Ladson-Billings and Tate \(1995\)](#) reported that African American students taught with CRP exhibited higher academic achievement and self-esteem levels than those taught using traditional methods. [Paris and Alim \(2014\)](#) reported the effectiveness of CRP in promoting language and literacy development among students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Implementing CRP can pose challenges, including resistance from educators unfamiliar with the approach or holding biases and assumptions about students from different cultures ([Ferguson, 2023](#); [Milner, 2010](#)). Furthermore, defining culture itself can be complex, and educators may struggle to strike a balance between honoring diverse cultural backgrounds and providing a cohesive educational experience that prepares students for success in a globalized world ([Crogman & Jackson, 2023](#); [Ginsberg et al., 2023](#); [Pasternak et al., 2023](#); [UN, 2022](#); [Villegas & Lucas, 2002](#); [Zhang et al., 2023](#)).

Looking ahead, the future of CRP holds great potential as it continues to garner significant attention. With an increasingly diverse world, there is a growing recognition of the need to foster inclusive learning environments that value equity and celebrate the cultural diversity of students. Advancements in technology are poised to support the integration of CRP by offering online resources and tools that can enhance teaching and learning experiences. Further research is warranted to investigate the effectiveness of CRP in different contexts and to develop specific guidelines and frameworks for implementing CRP across different subjects and grade levels ([Devi, 2022](#); [Ferguson, 2023](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [Ginsberg et al., 2023](#); [Paulsrud, 2022](#); [Pihen González & Arya, 2022](#); [Wilcox & Lawson, 2022](#)).

The issue of students being underprepared is a complex problem with multiple factors at play. One potential factor is the lack of CRP in classrooms. However, CRP has the potential to positively influence educational outcomes for marginalized communities, such as the Afro-descendant communities in the Caribbean/Atlantic region of Costa Rica. While there is evidence to support the positive impact of CRP on educational outcomes for marginalized students, and as [Ladson-Billings \(1990\)](#) contends in the article, *Like Lightning in a Bottle: Attempting to Capture the Pedagogical Excellence of Successful Teachers of Black Students*, teachers can create culturally responsive environments by building strong relationships with students and their families, employing effective teaching strategies that consider the strengths and needs of Afro-descendant/Black students. Further research in this area can help develop specific guidelines and frameworks for implementing CRP in different educational contexts ([Baiocchi, 2022](#); [Ferguson, 2023](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [Ginsberg et al., 2023](#); [Ladson-Billings, 1994a, 1994b, 2022](#); [Pihen González & Arya, 2022](#); [Zhang et al., 2023](#)).

Additionally, ongoing evaluation and assessment of the impact of CRP on student outcomes is necessary. This entails developing suitable assessment tools and metrics that can effectively capture the multifaceted nature of CRP and its effect on student learning. It is important to acknowledge that while CRP has successfully improved educational outcomes for marginalized students, it is not a cure-

all for every educational inequity and challenge. To achieve true educational equity and social justice, there is a need to address significant structural and systemic barriers. These barriers include disparities in educational funding, unequal access to resources and opportunities, and discrimination and bias within the education system. Integrating CRP into the discussion of the new assessment approach for Afro-descendant populations in Costa Rica, particularly in the Caribbean/Atlantic region, can provide valuable insights ([Baioocchi, 2022](#); [Bau et al., 2021](#); [Chacón, 2023](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [Imchen & Ndem, 2020](#); [Wilcox & Lawson, 2022](#)).

It is crucial to recognize that assessment alone cannot tackle the fundamental issues contributing to educational inequalities. The integration of CRP can play a significant role in fostering an inclusive and diverse curriculum. This approach enables all students to appreciate and understand their peers' diverse histories and cultures, promoting a sense of belonging. Academic achievements and well-being can improve as students feel their cultural backgrounds and experiences are valued and integrated into the learning process. However, when students perceive their cultural identities as ignored or devalued, they may disengage from learning, leading to academic underperformance and even dropout rates ([Baioocchi, 2022](#); [Devi, 2022](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [Paulsrud, 2022](#)).

4.4 Dialect Continuum and Language Continuum

The impact of Dialect Continuum and Language Continuum initiatives on the educational experiences of Afro-descendant students in the Caribbean/Atlantic region is closely tied to the principles of CRP. This region is characterized by diverse cultures and languages, including Spanish, Creole, and English. It is also known for its unique dialect and language continuum, which gradually transitions from one dialect or language to another due to historical, social, and linguistic factors, contributing to its cultural and linguistic diversity. Afro-descendants in this region often speak Creole or a Spanish variant influenced by Creole. Many individuals also speak a Creole variant of English tied to the region's British and Caribbean roots. Unfortunately, these language variations, such as *Limonese English*, often face stigmatization and are deemed unacceptable in formal educational settings, leading to further marginalization of Afro-descendant students ([Aguilar-Sánchez, 2018](#); [Baioocchi, 2022](#); [Chela-Flores, 2022](#); [Coleman, 2023](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [Joseph-Haynes et al., 2021](#); [Leung & Loschky, 2021](#); [Pacheco, 2023](#); [Sharpe, 2021](#)).

Limonese English, a dialect spoken in the Port Limón province of Costa Rica, has its roots in the English spoken by Caribbean immigrants who migrated to the country in the late 1800s and early 1900s to work on railways and banana plantations. Over time, this dialect has evolved, giving rise to distinct language variations that coexist within society and are used in different social contexts, a phenomenon known as *diglossia*. In this setting, one variety is considered prestigious and used in formal situations such as education, government, and media, while the other is non-prestigious and used in informal settings like home, family, and community. These two variations differ in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and usage, and individuals may switch between them depending on the situation. *Diglossia* is observed in various societies worldwide and carries significant social, cultural, and political implications. Presently, *Limonese English* is spoken by many individuals in the Port Limón province and is recognized as a distinct dialect of English ([Aguilar-Sánchez, 2018, 2022](#); [Joseph-Haynes et al., 2021](#); [Sharpe, 2021](#)).

[Aguilar-Sánchez \(2018\)](#) examined attitudes towards *Limonese English* and traditional varieties of English in Costa Rica. The research included two inquiries focusing on the social perception of these two language variations and whether the preference aligned with the global tendency favoring traditional varieties. The findings indicated that *Limonese English* continues to be viewed as inferior, while British and US English are essential for success. However, *Limonese English* is gaining recognition as an authentic language by its speakers, and its usage is expanding in various contexts. The research suggested that incorporating academic English could breathe new life into the variety of English spoken in Limón. Evidence suggested that Afro-Costa Ricans used *Limonese English* more frequently than previously documented. While traditional varieties are favored due to their perceived prestige, governmental and educational policies endorse British and US English ([Aguilar-Sánchez, 2018, 2022](#); [Baioocchi, 2022](#); [Joseph-Haynes et al., 2021](#); [Sharpe, 2021](#)).

The adoption of dialect continuum and language continuum approaches has the potential to enrich CRP and foster academic success among Afro-descendant students. Educators can embrace a culturally responsive approach to language and dialect by acknowledging and valuing the linguistic diversity present in the region. This involves incorporating Creole, Spanish, and English variants into the classroom, utilizing culturally relevant and meaningful language that resonates with Afro-descendant students, and recognizing the intrinsic worth of these dialect and language variations. Such inclusive practices contribute to the creation of equitable learning environments, fostering improved educational outcomes for students ([Baiocchi, 2022](#); [Coleman, 2023](#); [Devi, 2022](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [Leung & Loschky, 2021](#); [Pacheco, 2023](#); [Paulsrud, 2022](#)).

It is important to consider alternative means of effectively meeting the educational needs of Afro-descendant students in the region. A viable approach involves the development of culturally responsive teaching materials that authentically reflect their cultural experiences and perspectives. This can be achieved by integrating culturally relevant content into the curriculum and employing teaching methods sensitive to their cultural backgrounds. The active involvement of Afro-descendant communities in creating educational materials and providing a platform to voice their input can result in designed educational policies and initiatives that cater to the specific needs and experiences of Afro-descendant students. This collaborative approach fosters trust and cooperation between educators and Afro-descendant communities, thereby increasing their engagement and participation in educational programs. Additionally, equipping educators with the necessary knowledge and skills through teacher training and professional development programs helps them better comprehend the cultural context of Afro-descendant students and effectively teach and assess these students ([Baiocchi, 2022](#); [Coleman, 2023](#); [Ferguson, 2023](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [Pihen González & Arya, 2022](#)).

The inclusion of dialect and language continuum in educational policies offers advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, it promotes inclusive and culturally responsive educational practices, facilitating more effective language acquisition and literacy development. It recognizes and embraces the linguistic variations present among Afro-descendant students. Incorporating these variations can enhance students' motivation and engagement in language learning. However, implementing such policies may present difficulties for educators who lack the resources and training to effectively integrate dialect and language continuum into their teaching practices. Negative attitudes or resistance towards non-standard dialects or languages may also arise, along with concerns about standardization, assessment, and the potential economic and social costs involved. Despite these challenges, recognizing the language continuum can create a more inclusive educational environment that respects and embraces the linguistic diversity of Afro-descendant students ([Aguilar-Sánchez, 2018, 2022](#); [Baiocchi, 2022](#); [Coleman, 2023](#); [Robinson, 2022](#); [Yang, 2023](#)).

The incorporation of English teaching closely aligned with the dialects spoken in the Caribbean/Atlantic region offers numerous potential advantages, such as narrowing the language divide, tackling educational inequalities, and safeguarding linguistic heritage. The Ministry of Education of Costa Rica continues its program, Bridges for English (*Puentes para el inglés*), which aims to enhance English language skills in the region ([MEP, 2023b](#)). However, challenges in implementing this approach, such as assessment, curricular standardization, and teacher training, may arise. The recognition and use of the dialect continuum and language continuum can be a powerful tool in promoting fairness and inclusivity in language education for the Afro-descendant communities ([Aguilar-Sánchez, 2018, 2022](#); [Baiocchi, 2022](#); [Coleman, 2023](#); [Devi, 2022](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [Paulsrud, 2022](#); [UN, 2022](#); [Wilcox & Lawson, 2022](#); [Yang, 2023](#)).

4.5 The IB Approach and its Potential Impact on Marginalized Communities

The Liceo Mario Bourne de Limón in the Caribbean/Atlantic region has recently embraced the IB Program, joining a group of twenty schools nationwide ([MEP, 2023d](#)). This initiative began in the 2023 school year, providing a significant opportunity for 1,033 students to benefit from an educational framework that promotes intercultural understanding, international mindedness, and holistic development ([Beech et al., 2022](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [Maire, 2021](#)). The IB principles,

founded in 1968, align with the importance of CRP and the dialect and language continuums which are important concepts and can help create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. By adopting a holistic approach to education that focuses on academic, personal, and social development, the IB Program promotes equity, inclusion, and academic, personal, and social growth, particularly benefiting marginalized communities such as the Afro-descendant communities ([MEP, 2023d](#)).

The IB programs worldwide aim to foster students with a global perspective and cultural awareness. Graduates of these programs are well-equipped to thrive in an ever-changing world and possess the skills and knowledge needed to address global challenges successfully ([Baiocchi, 2022](#); [Beech et al., 2022](#); [Devi, 2022](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [Maire, 2021](#); [Paulsrud, 2022](#); [UN, 2022](#); [Wilcox & Lawson, 2022](#)). Due to its rigorous and challenging curriculum, the IB program promotes critical and creative thinking, preparing graduates for success in higher education and beyond. Esteemed higher education institutions worldwide acknowledge the rigor and quality of the IB program, often granting advanced placement to IB students. Employers also value the strong communication and intercultural skills fostered by an IB education, making it an asset for students pursuing careers in international business, diplomacy, and other global fields. Traditionally, the introduction of the IB program in Latin America has been primarily limited to private schools catering to affluent students, perpetuating social inequality. However, since the mid-2000s, several Latin American countries, including Ecuador, Peru, Argentina in South America, and Costa Rica in Central America, have introduced this program in select public schools. According to the research conducted by [Beech et al. \(2022\)](#), this expansion of access to the IB program in public schools within countries marked by significant socioeconomic disparities is viewed as an endeavor to promote equity, providing students with an educational opportunity previously accessible only to those attending private schools.

The potential implementation of the IB approach in all public schools across Costa Rica has the potential to create a more inclusive and equitable education system, specifically for marginalized communities such as the Afro-descendant communities in the Caribbean/Atlantic region. However, achieving this goal would require significant investment in resources, including teacher and administrative staff training, as well as the development of a comprehensive curriculum incorporating additional assessments such as performance-based assessments, self-assessments, and peer assessments ([Beech et al., 2022](#); [Maire, 2021](#); [Paulsrud, 2022](#)). Despite the associated costs, the potential benefits of the IB approach for marginalized communities make this investment worthwhile. The IB program has the capacity to cultivate a sense of belonging and active engagement in the learning process, thereby leading to enhanced educational outcomes for all students ([Baiocchi, 2022](#); [Beech et al., 2022](#)).

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

This review critically analyzes the impact of the new assessment requirement of Costa Rica on marginalized communities, with a specific focus on Afro-descendant students in the Caribbean/Atlantic region. It examines the historical context of standardized assessment and proposes alternative approaches, such as CRP, the incorporation of dialect and language continuum, and the potential implementation of the IB program to address the achievement gap among marginalized communities. This review also emphasizes the need for further research and provides practical recommendations for policymakers and educators to address the potential consequences of the new assessment policy on Afro-descendant students. Future research should prioritize identifying effective strategies to bridge the achievement gap in marginalized communities. Costa Rica must prioritize the educational needs of marginalized communities and explore alternative assessment methods that support linguistic and cultural diversity. It is essential to adopt inclusive policies and practices that embrace the lived experiences of marginalized communities in order to attain equitable outcomes in the education system of Costa Rica ([Chan, 2022](#); [Devi, 2022](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [Hua & Gao, 2021](#); [Karataş et al., 2023](#); [Paulsrud, 2022](#); [Sama et al., 2021](#); [Yang, 2023](#); [Zakharov & Carnoy, 2021](#)).

5.2 Limitations

The existing body of research on assessment requirements in the educational system of Costa Rica is insufficient, highlighting the need for additional research that employs a multifaceted research methodology ([Aguilar-Sánchez, 2018](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [García Segura, 2019](#); [López et al., 2021](#); [Robinson, 2022](#)). Furthermore, future research endeavors could explore the incorporation of CRP, dialect and language continuum, as well as the principles of the IB, specifically addressing historically marginalized groups such as the Indigenous populations in the Caribbean/Atlantic region and other areas of the country ([Baiocchi, 2022](#); [Devi, 2022](#); [Ferguson, 2023](#); [Galloway et al., 2019](#); [Paulsrud, 2022](#); [Pihen González & Arya, 2022](#); [Sharpe, 2021](#)).

5.3 Suggestions

Teachers' training and professional development opportunities serve as crucial initial steps for the successful implementation of CRP within Costa Rican schools ([Aguilar-Sánchez, 2018, 2022](#); [Joseph-Haynes et al., 2021](#); [Sharpe, 2021](#)). It is also highly recommended to develop a culturally responsive IB curriculum that caters to the specific needs of marginalized communities ([Galloway et al., 2019](#)). Therefore, to foster educational equity, the government must prioritize the needs of marginalized communities when making policy and practice decisions, particularly following the implementation of the 2023 school year assessments ([Galloway et al., 2019](#)). CRP and policies that incorporate dialect and language continuum approaches can contribute to addressing educational outcome gaps and fostering educational success for marginalized communities ([Devi, 2022](#); [Ferguson, 2023](#); [Pacheco, 2023](#); [Paulsrud, 2022](#); [Pihen González & Arya, 2022](#)).

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