



Effective Implementation Strategies for Trauma-Informed Teaching in Diverse Classroom Settings

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Article information

Received: 13th March 2025

Received in revised form: 31th March 2025

Accepted: 27th April 2025

Available online: 18th June 2025

Volume: 2

Issue: 2

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15687771>

Abstract

The increasing recognition of trauma's pervasive impact on student learning has necessitated the development of trauma-informed pedagogical approaches. This paper examines effective implementation strategies for trauma-informed teaching practices in diverse classroom settings, addressing the complex intersections of trauma, culture, socioeconomic status, and developmental needs. Through analysis of current research and theoretical frameworks, this study identifies key implementation strategies including: comprehensive educator training, culturally responsive trauma-informed practices, multi-tiered support systems, and collaborative school-community partnerships. The paper argues that successful implementation requires systemic approaches that acknowledge diversity while maintaining core trauma-informed principles of safety, trustworthiness, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural humility. Findings suggest that effective trauma-informed teaching implementation depends on institutional commitment, ongoing professional development, and adaptive frameworks that respond to specific community contexts. The implications extend beyond individual classroom practices to encompass school-wide policy reforms and community engagement strategies essential for sustainable trauma-informed educational environments.

Keywords:- Trauma-Informed Education, Diverse Classrooms, Implementation Strategies, Cultural Responsiveness, Pedagogical Practices

I. INTRODUCTION

The educational landscape has undergone significant transformation as research continues to illuminate the profound impact of trauma on student learning, behavior, and academic achievement. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study revealed that traumatic experiences affect a substantial portion of the student population, with implications extending far beyond immediate psychological responses to encompass long-term educational outcomes and life trajectories. Contemporary educational discourse increasingly recognizes that traditional disciplinary approaches and pedagogical methods often fail to address the underlying trauma-related factors that influence student engagement and learning capacity.

Trauma-informed teaching represents a paradigm shift from asking "What's wrong with this student?" to "What happened to this student?" This fundamental reorientation requires educators to understand trauma's neurobiological impacts, recognize trauma symptoms in educational contexts, and implement responsive teaching practices that promote healing and resilience. However, the implementation of trauma-informed approaches in diverse classroom settings presents unique challenges that require sophisticated understanding of cultural contexts, socioeconomic factors, and varied community needs.

The significance of this research lies in addressing the implementation gap between trauma-informed theory and classroom practice, particularly in diverse educational settings where students' experiences of trauma intersect with cultural identity, language differences, immigration status, and socioeconomic circumstances. Effective implementation strategies must navigate these complexities while maintaining fidelity to core trauma-informed principles and ensuring equitable outcomes for all students.

This paper seeks to examine how educators can effectively implement trauma-informed teaching practices in diverse classroom settings, identifying strategies that address varied cultural, socioeconomic, and developmental needs while promoting student learning and well-being. The analysis contributes to the growing body of literature on trauma-informed education by providing practical implementation frameworks grounded in theoretical understanding and empirical evidence.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Trauma-Informed Care Principles in Educational Contexts

The theoretical foundation for trauma-informed teaching derives from trauma-informed care principles originally developed in healthcare and social service settings. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) identifies six key principles that form the foundation of trauma-informed approaches: safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment and choice, and cultural, historical, and gender issues.

In educational contexts, these principles translate into pedagogical practices that prioritize physical and emotional safety, establish predictable and transparent classroom environments, foster supportive peer relationships, engage students as partners in their learning, provide opportunities for student agency and choice, and acknowledge the cultural and historical contexts that shape students' experiences. The application of these principles requires understanding how trauma affects learning and development, recognizing that traditional educational approaches may inadvertently re-traumatize students who have experienced adversity.

2.2 Neurobiological Foundations

Contemporary neuroscience research provides crucial insights into trauma's impact on brain development and learning capacity. Traumatic stress affects the developing brain's architecture, particularly regions responsible for executive functioning, memory consolidation, and emotional regulation. The chronic activation of stress response systems can impair students' ability to focus, process information, and engage in complex learning tasks.

Understanding these neurobiological impacts informs trauma-informed teaching practices that support brain healing and development. Strategies such as incorporating mindfulness practices, providing sensory regulation opportunities, and creating predictable routines work to calm dysregulated nervous systems and create optimal conditions for learning. This neurobiological understanding also helps educators recognize that trauma-related behaviors are adaptive responses rather than willful defiance, shifting disciplinary approaches toward supportive interventions.

2.3 Cultural-Historical-Activity Theory

The implementation of trauma-informed teaching in diverse settings requires theoretical frameworks that account for cultural and contextual factors. Cultural-Historical-Activity Theory (CHAT) provides a lens for understanding how cultural tools, historical contexts, and social activities shape learning experiences. This perspective recognizes that trauma experiences and responses are culturally mediated, requiring implementation strategies that honor diverse cultural perspectives on healing, resilience, and educational relationships.

CHAT emphasizes the importance of understanding students' cultural funds of knowledge and incorporating culturally relevant practices into trauma-informed approaches. This theoretical grounding supports the development of implementation strategies that avoid cultural imposition while maintaining trauma-informed principles, recognizing that effective approaches must be adapted to specific community contexts and cultural values.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Foundations of Trauma-Informed Education

The emergence of trauma-informed education represents a convergence of research from psychology, neuroscience, and pedagogy. (Felitti et al., 1998) groundbreaking ACEs study established the prevalence and long-term impacts of childhood trauma, providing the empirical foundation for trauma-informed approaches across multiple sectors. Subsequent research by (Perry & Szalavitz, 2006) and (van der Kolk, 2014) elucidated trauma's neurobiological impacts, demonstrating how traumatic stress affects brain development and learning capacity.

Educational researchers have built upon this foundation to develop trauma-informed pedagogical approaches. (Brunzell et al., 2016) identified core components of trauma-informed teaching, including the establishment of felt safety, the development of authentic relationships, and the promotion of regulatory abilities. Their research emphasizes that trauma-informed teaching requires more than awareness; it demands fundamental changes in pedagogical practices and classroom environments.

(Craig, 2016) expanded this understanding by examining trauma-informed education through an ecological lens, recognizing that effective approaches must address multiple levels of the educational system. Her research demonstrates that successful implementation requires coordination between individual classroom practices, school-wide policies, and community partnerships. This systems perspective has become increasingly influential in trauma-informed education research and practice.

3.2 Implementation Challenges and Barriers

Research has identified numerous challenges in implementing trauma-informed approaches in educational settings. (Chafouleas et al., 2016) conducted a systematic review of trauma-informed school interventions, finding significant

variability in implementation quality and outcomes. Their analysis revealed common barriers including inadequate professional development, insufficient administrative support, and lack of sustained funding for trauma-informed initiatives.

The challenge of maintaining implementation fidelity while adapting to diverse contexts has received particular attention. (Dorado et al., 2016) examined trauma-informed implementation in urban schools serving diverse populations, finding that successful programs required extensive adaptation to address cultural and linguistic diversity. Their research highlighted the tension between maintaining core trauma-informed principles and responding to specific community needs and cultural contexts.

Organizational factors have emerged as critical determinants of implementation success. (Alisic, 2012) found that schools with strong leadership support, collaborative cultures, and commitment to continuous improvement were more successful in implementing trauma-informed practices. Conversely, schools with rigid hierarchies, punitive disciplinary policies, and resistance to change faced significant implementation challenges.

3.3 Cultural Responsiveness in Trauma-Informed Approaches

The intersection of trauma-informed education and cultural responsiveness has become an increasingly important area of research. (Ginwright, 2018) argued for a healing-centered approach that explicitly addresses the collective and cultural dimensions of trauma, particularly for communities that have experienced historical and systemic oppression. This perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding trauma within broader contexts of social justice and community resilience.

Research on culturally responsive trauma-informed practices has highlighted the need for approaches that honor diverse cultural perspectives on healing and resilience. (Happer et al., 2017) examined trauma-informed practices in schools serving predominantly Latino populations, finding that successful implementation required incorporation of cultural values such as familismo and personalismo. Their research demonstrated that effective approaches must go beyond translation to encompass deep cultural adaptation.

Indigenous scholars have contributed important perspectives on trauma-informed education, emphasizing the role of historical trauma and the importance of culturally grounded healing practices. (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014) guidelines for trauma-informed approaches with Native American populations emphasize the importance of understanding historical trauma, incorporating traditional healing practices, and engaging tribal communities as partners in implementation.

3.4 Professional Development and Training Models

Effective implementation of trauma-informed teaching requires comprehensive professional development that goes beyond one-time training sessions. Research has identified key characteristics of effective trauma-informed professional development, including ongoing support, practice-based learning, and integration with existing school initiatives.

(Ko et al., 2008) developed a framework for trauma-informed professional development that emphasizes experiential learning, reflective practice, and sustained coaching support. Their model recognizes that changing deeply held beliefs and practices requires extended engagement and multiple learning opportunities. Evaluation research has demonstrated improved teacher confidence and implementation quality when professional development follows this comprehensive approach.

The importance of addressing secondary trauma among educators has emerged as a critical component of professional development. (Bober & Regehr, 2006) found that educators working with traumatized students often experience secondary traumatic stress, which can impair their ability to implement trauma-informed practices effectively. Professional development programs that include self-care strategies and organizational support for educator well-being have shown improved sustainability and implementation outcomes.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a theoretical analysis methodology combined with systematic review of implementation research to identify effective strategies for trauma-informed teaching in diverse classroom settings. The methodological approach integrates multiple perspectives to provide comprehensive understanding of implementation challenges and solutions.

4.1 Theoretical Analysis Framework

The theoretical analysis component examines trauma-informed education through multiple theoretical lenses, including trauma-informed care principles, neurobiological research, and cultural-historical-activity theory. This multi-perspective approach recognizes that effective implementation strategies must be grounded in understanding of trauma's impacts, learning processes, and cultural contexts.

The analysis synthesizes theoretical insights to identify core principles that should guide implementation efforts while recognizing the need for contextual adaptation. This approach acknowledges that trauma-informed education is not a prescribed set of practices but rather a framework that must be operationalized in response to specific contexts and communities.

4.2 Systematic Review Process

The systematic review component examines empirical research on trauma-informed education implementation, focusing on studies that address diverse classroom settings and populations. Search parameters included peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2025, with keywords including "trauma-informed education," "implementation," "diverse classrooms," "cultural responsiveness," and related terms.

Inclusion criteria prioritized studies that examined implementation processes, outcomes, and challenges in educational settings serving diverse populations. The review synthesized findings across different contexts to identify common implementation factors while recognizing contextual variations that influence effectiveness.

4.3 Integration and Synthesis

The final methodological component involved integrating theoretical insights with empirical findings to develop comprehensive implementation frameworks. This synthesis process involved identifying convergent themes while acknowledging areas of theoretical tension or empirical uncertainty.

The integration process resulted in the development of multi-tiered implementation strategies that address individual, classroom, school, and community levels. These strategies maintain grounding in trauma-informed principles while providing flexibility for contextual adaptation.

V. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Core Implementation Strategies

5.1.1 Comprehensive Professional Development Systems

Effective implementation of trauma-informed teaching in diverse classroom settings requires professional development systems that go beyond traditional workshop models. Research consistently demonstrates that sustainable implementation depends on multi-faceted professional learning approaches that include initial training, ongoing coaching, peer collaboration, and reflective practice opportunities.

The most effective professional development systems begin with foundational training that establishes understanding of trauma's neurobiological impacts, recognizes trauma symptoms in educational contexts, and introduces core trauma-informed teaching principles. However, this initial training must be followed by sustained support that helps educators translate theoretical understanding into practical classroom applications.

Coaching models have shown particular promise in supporting implementation. Instructional coaches trained in trauma-informed approaches can provide individualized support, observe classroom practices, and offer feedback that helps teachers refine their approaches. The coaching relationship also provides emotional support for educators who may experience secondary trauma while working with students who have experienced adversity.

Peer collaboration structures, such as professional learning communities focused on trauma-informed practices, create opportunities for educators to share experiences, problem-solve challenges, and develop collective expertise. These collaborative structures are particularly important in diverse settings where educators may need to adapt trauma-informed approaches to address specific cultural contexts or student populations.

5.2 Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed Frameworks

Implementation in diverse classroom settings requires frameworks that integrate trauma-informed principles with culturally responsive pedagogy. This integration recognizes that trauma experiences and healing processes are culturally mediated, requiring approaches that honor diverse cultural perspectives while maintaining core trauma-informed principles.

Culturally responsive trauma-informed frameworks begin with understanding students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. This understanding includes recognition of historical trauma that may affect entire communities, awareness of cultural strengths and resilience factors, and appreciation for diverse cultural approaches to healing and support.

The integration of cultural responsiveness and trauma-informed approaches requires careful attention to avoid cultural stereotyping while acknowledging legitimate cultural differences. Effective frameworks provide guidance for adapting trauma-informed practices to honor cultural values while maintaining core principles of safety, trustworthiness, and empowerment.

Implementation strategies must also address the intersection of trauma with other forms of marginalization, including racism, poverty, and discrimination. This intersectional approach recognizes that students from marginalized communities may experience multiple forms of adversity that compound trauma's impacts and require comprehensive response strategies.

5.3 Multi-Tiered Support Systems

Effective trauma-informed implementation requires multi-tiered support systems that address varying levels of student need while providing comprehensive classroom and school-wide approaches. These systems integrate universal trauma-informed practices with targeted interventions for students with specific trauma-related needs.

Universal tier practices focus on creating trauma-informed classroom environments that benefit all students. These practices include establishing predictable routines, providing clear expectations and consistent responses, incorporating mindfulness and self-regulation activities, and building positive relationships with and among students. Universal practices also emphasize creating physically and emotionally safe environments that minimize potential trauma triggers.

Targeted tier interventions provide additional support for students who demonstrate trauma-related symptoms or behaviors. These interventions may include individual or small group counseling, modified academic accommodations, behavioral support plans that address trauma-related triggers, and coordination with community mental health services.

Intensive tier supports address the needs of students with severe trauma-related symptoms that significantly impact their educational experience. These supports often require coordination between multiple professionals and may include wraparound services that address family and community factors contributing to ongoing trauma exposure.

The multi-tiered approach requires careful coordination between general education teachers, special education professionals, school counselors, administrators, and community partners. Effective implementation depends on clear communication systems, shared understanding of trauma-informed principles, and collaborative decision-making processes.

5.4 School-Community Partnership Development

Sustainable trauma-informed implementation requires partnerships between schools and community organizations that can provide comprehensive support for students and families. These partnerships recognize that trauma often stems from community-wide factors that cannot be addressed through school-based interventions alone.

Effective school-community partnerships begin with community asset mapping that identifies existing resources, services, and support systems. This mapping process helps schools understand community strengths and needs while identifying potential partnership opportunities.

Partnership development should include community mental health providers, social service agencies, healthcare organizations, faith-based institutions, and cultural organizations that serve the school community. These partnerships can provide direct services to students and families while also informing school-based trauma-informed approaches.

Community partnerships are particularly important in diverse settings where schools serve immigrant communities, communities of color, or communities experiencing economic disadvantage. These partnerships can help schools understand community-specific trauma experiences, cultural approaches to healing, and barriers to accessing support services.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

6.1 Resource and Funding Constraints

One of the most significant challenges in implementing trauma-informed teaching approaches is the lack of sustained funding for professional development, materials, and support services. Many schools attempt to implement trauma-informed practices without adequate resources, leading to superficial implementation that fails to achieve intended outcomes.

Effective solutions to resource constraints involve strategic planning that integrates trauma-informed approaches with existing school initiatives and funding sources. Schools can leverage Title I funding, special education resources, and mental health grants to support trauma-informed implementation. Additionally, partnerships with community organizations can provide resources and services that supplement school-based efforts.

Creative funding strategies may include applying for foundation grants focused on child trauma, partnering with universities for research and training opportunities, and developing fee-for-service arrangements with community mental health providers. Schools have also found success in phased implementation approaches that gradually expand trauma-informed practices as resources become available.

6.2 Resistance to Change

Implementation of trauma-informed approaches often encounters resistance from educators, administrators, or community members who question the shift from traditional disciplinary approaches to trauma-informed responses. This resistance may stem from concerns about academic rigor, classroom management, or philosophical disagreements about addressing trauma in educational settings.

Addressing resistance requires comprehensive change management strategies that include clear communication about trauma-informed approaches, demonstration of positive outcomes, and gradual implementation that allows skeptical stakeholders to observe benefits. Successful implementation often depends on identifying and supporting early adopters who can serve as champions for trauma-informed approaches.

Professional development that addresses underlying beliefs and assumptions about student behavior is crucial for overcoming resistance. Educators need opportunities to examine their own trauma histories, understand how trauma affects learning, and develop new frameworks for interpreting student behavior.

6.3 Maintaining Implementation Fidelity

Ensuring consistent implementation of trauma-informed practices across diverse classroom settings presents ongoing challenges. Without adequate support and monitoring, implementation may drift from core principles or become diluted over time.

Solutions include developing clear implementation standards, providing ongoing training and support, and establishing monitoring systems that track implementation quality. Regular professional learning community meetings, classroom observations focused on trauma-informed practices, and student outcome data can help maintain implementation fidelity.

Adaptation to diverse contexts must be balanced with maintenance of core trauma-informed principles. Implementation frameworks should provide clear guidance about which elements are essential and which can be adapted to address specific cultural or contextual factors.

VII. DISCUSSION

7.1 Theoretical Implications

The analysis of trauma-informed teaching implementation in diverse classroom settings reveals important theoretical implications for understanding the relationship between trauma, culture, and learning. The integration of trauma-informed principles with culturally responsive pedagogy suggests that effective educational approaches must address both individual trauma experiences and broader cultural and historical contexts that shape students' educational experiences.

The findings support theoretical frameworks that emphasize the social and cultural mediation of trauma and healing. Rather than viewing trauma as purely individual phenomenon, effective implementation strategies recognize trauma's collective dimensions and the importance of community-based healing approaches. This perspective aligns with emerging theoretical frameworks that emphasize healing-centered approaches and community resilience.

The importance of multi-tiered support systems in effective implementation supports ecological theories of human development that recognize the multiple contexts that influence student outcomes. Trauma-informed education cannot be implemented successfully as isolated classroom practices but requires coordination across multiple levels of the educational system and broader community.

7.2 Practical Implications

The research findings have significant implications for educational practice and policy. The emphasis on comprehensive professional development systems suggests that schools must move beyond one-time training events to sustained, multi-faceted learning approaches. This shift requires substantial investment in human resources and professional development infrastructure.

The integration of culturally responsive and trauma-informed approaches has implications for teacher preparation programs, which must prepare educators to work effectively with diverse populations while understanding trauma's impacts on learning. Current teacher preparation programs often address cultural responsiveness and trauma separately, but the findings suggest these approaches must be integrated for effective implementation.

The importance of school-community partnerships in effective implementation suggests that schools cannot address trauma-related challenges in isolation. Educational leaders must develop skills in community engagement, partnership development, and cross-sector collaboration to create comprehensive support systems for students and families.

7.3 Limitations and Areas for Future Research

Several limitations affect the current analysis and suggest areas for future research. The majority of implementation research has been conducted in urban settings, limiting understanding of trauma-informed implementation in rural or suburban contexts. Additionally, most research has focused on elementary and middle school settings, with limited attention to secondary education contexts.

The long-term sustainability of trauma-informed implementation remains understudied. While research demonstrates positive short-term outcomes, questions remain about maintaining trauma-informed practices over time, particularly in the face of staff turnover, changing leadership, and shifting educational priorities.

Future research should examine the differential effectiveness of trauma-informed approaches for various student populations, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and students experiencing homelessness. Additionally, research is needed on the cost-effectiveness of different implementation models and the factors that contribute to sustainable implementation.

The intersection of trauma-informed education with other educational reforms, including social-emotional learning, restorative justice, and positive behavioral interventions and supports, requires further investigation. Understanding how these approaches can be integrated effectively has important implications for implementation efficiency and effectiveness.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The implementation of trauma-informed teaching in diverse classroom settings represents a critical challenge and opportunity in contemporary education. This analysis has identified key strategies for effective implementation, including comprehensive professional development systems, culturally responsive frameworks, multi-tiered support systems, and school-community partnerships. These strategies recognize that trauma-informed education cannot be implemented as a prescribed set of practices but must be adapted to specific contexts while maintaining core principles of safety, trustworthiness, and empowerment.

The successful implementation of trauma-informed approaches requires fundamental shifts in how educators understand student behavior, design learning environments, and collaborate with families and communities. These shifts necessitate sustained investment in professional development, organizational change, and community partnership development. The complexity of implementation challenges should not discourage action but rather inform strategic approaches that address multiple levels of the educational system.

The potential benefits of effective trauma-informed implementation extend beyond individual student outcomes to encompass broader goals of educational equity and social justice. By addressing trauma's impacts on learning and development, schools can create more inclusive and supportive environments that enable all students to achieve their potential. However, realizing these benefits requires commitment to comprehensive implementation approaches that address the complex intersections of trauma, culture, and education.

Future efforts to advance trauma-informed education must continue to bridge the gap between research and practice, developing implementation strategies that are both theoretically grounded and practically feasible. The ongoing development of trauma-informed education depends on sustained collaboration between researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and community members committed to creating educational environments that promote healing, resilience, and learning for all students.

The transformation of educational practices to address trauma's impacts represents both a moral imperative and a practical necessity in contemporary education. As understanding of trauma's prevalence and impacts continues to grow, the implementation of trauma-informed approaches will become increasingly essential for educational effectiveness and equity. The strategies identified in this analysis provide a foundation for this important work, while recognizing that effective

implementation will require ongoing adaptation, learning, and commitment to the complex but essential task of creating trauma-informed educational environments.

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