

Development, Tool Validation, and Future Directions for the Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature

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This qualitative study seeks instrument validation of The Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature (Pfundheller & Liesch, 2023) by sixteen experts who hold a reading specialist and/or reading teacher license. Researchers collected data on the limitations, strengths, and potential uses of the framework by preservice and inservice teachers through focus groups. Results show the framework has a good variety of inclusive categories; however, other categories and types of diversity may need to be added to improve the framework. Furthermore, results show the framework has practical applications such as helping educators create classroom libraries and begin conversations with colleagues about diverse texts.

Keywords: inclusive literature, multicultural literature, diverse literature, classroom libraries

INTRODUCTION

Teachers nationwide are doing their best to navigate the controversy surrounding changing best practices for teaching students how to read, continued scrutiny of low student reading scores, and censorship in school and classroom libraries via conversations of banned books. While new mandates to address literacy instruction and low reading scores, such as “the science of reading,” are being legislated, the need for addressing inclusive literature in schools continues to exist (Hanover Research, 2022).

Currently, classroom literature does not mirror classroom demographics, even though students make more significant reading gains when they can see characters and circumstances that are familiar or relatable (Asunramu, 2018; Bishop, 1990; Bishop, 2015; Dunkerly & Moffit, 2023; First Book Research & Insights, 2023; Grasso, 2016). The *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* (Pfundheller & Liesch, 2023) is one of a limited number of frameworks available to help educators identify diverse literature.

Lack of Diverse Literature in Schools

Recommendations to include diverse literature in school and classroom libraries are well-documented. According to the 2017–2018 Literacy Research Panel of the International Literacy Association’s Literacy

Leadership Brief (Zapata et al., 2018), classroom literature must reflect our world, including diverse cultures, histories, and languages. The brief states that educators need to “reach for literature beyond the historical scope of the classics to include literature that portrays the vibrant and dynamic lives students bring to today’s classrooms” (Zapata et al., 2018, p. 3). In addition to literacy experts, scholars in education (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Krasnoff, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2009) call for culturally responsive teaching (CRT), where students work to understand their identities and those of others in the world, and educators use CRT as a teaching and learning tool. None of this can be accomplished without access to inclusive literature.

Researchers and experts in the field recommend all students have access to diverse literature in schools, however, not all students do (Flores, Osorio, & Colorado, 2021). Furthermore, most books do not include characters representing various backgrounds. Equity audits of primary grade book series document the lack of character diversity for underrepresented student groups (Balkarin & Roberts, 2019).

According to the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (2020) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, 41.8% of children’s books received in 2019 have at least one character who is white; 11.9% have Black characters; 5.3% have at least one Latinx character; 3.4% have at least one character with a disability; and 29.2% have at least one character who is an animal or “other.” Additional studies found similar results (First Book Research & Insights, 2023; Flannery, 2020). Students experiencing a lack of access to diverse literature are at a significant disadvantage.

Reading Outcomes and Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

An abundance of research on CRT practices supports using diverse texts in classrooms. Seeking multiple perspectives in textbooks and student responses is a practice that communicates high expectations and has been documented to improve student learning outcomes (Krasnoff, 2016). Enhancing the accessibility of books to encompass diverse student backgrounds boosts student motivation and engagement in reading, consequently improving reading proficiency (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Zapata et al., 2018). Furthermore, when students are motivated and engaged, they spend more time reading, which increases reading scores (First Book Research & Insights, 2023). First Book Research & Insights (2023) conducted a pilot study to grasp educators’ perspectives on diverse books. They found that after adding diverse books to their classroom libraries, students’ reading scores increased and students spent more time reading. Participants also stated that diverse books are important to include in classroom libraries but were a small portion of their classroom libraries and that most students chose to read books in which they could see themselves. Given the plethora of data promoting the inclusion of diverse literature in classrooms, Pfundheller and Liesch (2023) developed the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* to provide a tool for selecting and evaluating diverse literature.

Development of the Framework

The authors of the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* developed the framework after recognizing that educators needed guidance in selecting inclusive and diverse classroom literature. Hartsfield (2021) stated that diverse literature is “children and young adult literature that encompasses different races, cultural ethnicities, gender, sexuality, and ability” (p. 21). As educators, the authors searched for tools they could use in their classrooms to audit children’s books by the diversity represented in the stories; however, the authors could not find existing tools that specified different types of diversity to look for in literature. Therefore, the authors recognized that teachers encountered barriers to confirming that the books in their classrooms represented all their students. This barrier justified the importance of creating the framework.

After identifying a need for an inclusive literature framework, the authors reviewed existing tools and noted their essential elements while identifying necessary changes and additions. These tools included information found in *Teaching Diverse Youth Literature to Pre-Service Professionals* by Danielle E. Hartsfield (2021) and the “Reading Diversity Lite” checklist from *Learning for Justice* (Teaching Tolerance, 2016).

Additionally, the authors examined educational and conceptual theories relevant to selecting diverse literature. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) became the main foundation of the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature*. This conceptual theory analyzes how race, power, and privilege play a role in the context of schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995). A second theory that influenced this work was Bishop’s (1990 and 2015) research, which depicted books as mirrors or sliding glass doors, reflecting the individual reader’s experiences or allowing the reader to experience another world. The authors took the ideas, values, and perspectives of these theories to establish and support the foundation of the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature*.

The authors began developing and creating the tool with a circle, as circles are easy to use and follow. The framework reflects equality among categories, as one category is not more important than another. The authors selected the eight forms of diversity and then added descriptions and book examples for each category (See Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSIVE LITERATURE



Note. From Framework for Inclusive Literature in Teacher Education, by M. Pfundheller and J. Liesch, 2023, *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 23(15), p. 62. (<https://doi.org/10.33423/jhtep.v23i15.6406>). Copyright 2023 by North American Business Press.

The authors based the eight categories on a multifaceted selection of diverse traits and characteristics. Often, inclusive literature tools focus only on race and ethnicity while neglecting other types of diversity (Morgan, 2021; Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013). The authors included the following eight categories based on a variety of resources: Economic Class (Kapsos & Bourmpoula, 2013); Disability (Hartsfield, 2021); Race (San Diego Mesa College, 2015); Ethnicity (Jones et al., 2021); Family Structure (Tillman & Nam, 2008); LGBTQ+ (Hartsfield, 2021); Religion (Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020); Nondominant Culture (Hartsfield, 2021), and Physical Features & Appearances (White, 2023).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The researchers grounded this study in the transformative paradigm to focus on diverse and marginalized people's lives, experiences, and voices. In addition, *Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors* (Bishop, 1990 & 2015) served as the theoretical framework for this study, guided research decisions, including the development of the problem statement and research questions, and informed the study's design. According to Bishop's work on inclusive literature (1990 & 2015), mirrors are books reflecting personal experiences and perspectives, windows are books that examine a different type of experience or a perspective, and sliding glass doors are books that allow the reader to go beyond looking and step into a different experience and perspective.

The authors collected qualitative data through focus groups using participant's words and voices. Though they lacked diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, disability, and gender, they represented a variety of teaching licenses, types of jobs, and years in the field. The participants applied their expertise in literature and professional judgment to discuss a framework meant to improve the representation of various categories of diversity in literature. The theoretical framework served as the overarching perspective in collecting and analyzing data and interpreting the results.

METHODS

This qualitative study aimed to explore the strengths, framework limitations, potential applications, and validity of the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* tool for selecting diverse literature through focus groups consisting of experts who self-reported holding a reading specialist license and/or a reading teacher license. The technique of using experts to validate educational assessments and other tools is well-documented in literature as a measure to establish tool validity (Adams & Wieman, 2011; Almanasreh et al., 2019; Beck, 2020; Elangovan & Sundaravel, 2021; Khidhir & Rassul, 2023; Mukherjee, 2019; Sireci, 1998). When assessing the content validity of a tool, also known as expert judgment, the typical protocol is consulting experts and having them evaluate the tool (Fernández-Gómez et al., 2020; Luque-Vara et al., 2020). The study participants are experts in the field because they have proven academic training, which includes holding a reading specialist license and/or a reading teacher license, and their professional experience working in K-12 settings.

Multiple focus groups composed of experts were used in this particular study to discuss the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* using the following research questions (Pfundheller & Liesch, 2023):

RQ1: *What are the limitations of the Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature for selecting and evaluating diverse literature for young children?*

RQ2: *What are the strengths of the Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature?*

RQ3: *How can the Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature be utilized by preservice and inservice teachers?*

RQ4: *Is the Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature perceived to be a valid instrument for selecting and evaluating diverse literature?*

Participants

The study's purposeful sample included 16 participants in five focus groups. All participants were professional educators who had taught for at least one year in K-12. See Table 1 for demographic information about the participants in this study.

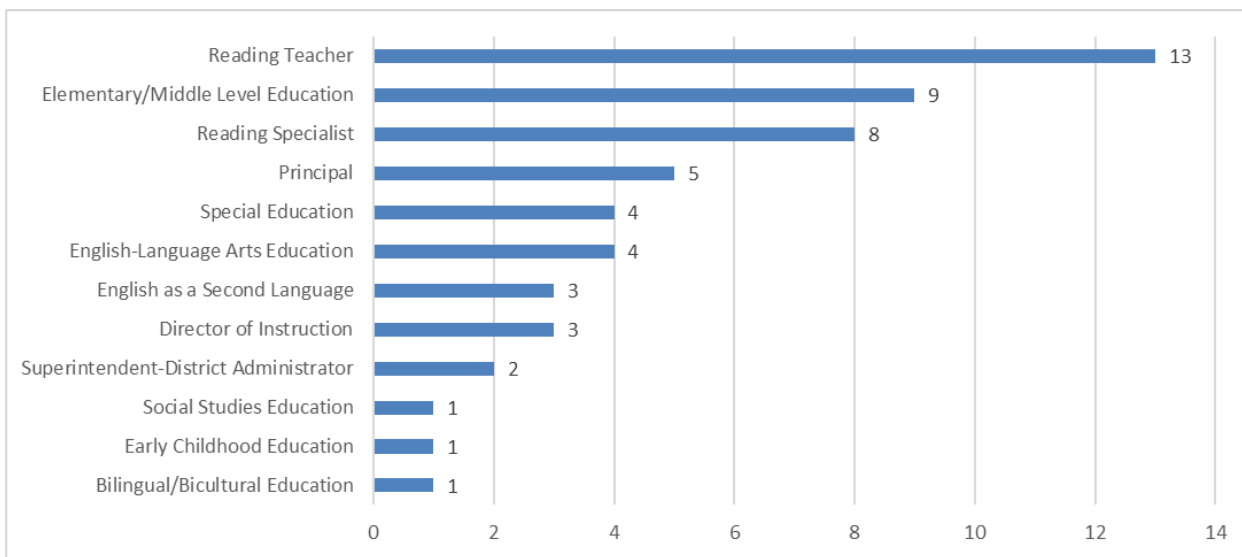
TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

| Demographic Characteristics | Number of Participants (n) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 16 | 100% |
| Male | 0 | 0% |
| Non-binary | 0 | 0% |
| Race | | |
| White | 15 | 94% |
| Black or African American | 1 | 6% |
| All other listed races | 0 | 0% |
| Ethnicity | | |
| White | 15 | 94% |
| Black or African American | 1 | 6% |
| All other listed ethnicities | 0 | 0% |
| Disability | | |
| Yes | 0 | 0% |
| No | 16 | 100% |
| Religious | | |
| Yes | 4 | 25% |
| No | 10 | 63% |
| Prefer not to answer | 2 | 13% |
| Location | | |
| Inside of Wisconsin | 10 | 63% |
| Outside of Wisconsin | 6 | 38% |

The participants were required to hold a reading specialist license, a reading teacher license, or both to participate in this study. A reading teacher license permits individuals to instruct reading in K-12 settings. Meanwhile, a reading specialist license authorizes individuals to administer K-12 reading programs, guiding other teachers and staff in reading instruction (UW–Madison Curriculum and Instruction Department, n.d.). Depending on the U.S. state, these licenses have slightly different roles, but most have the same core responsibilities.

Email addresses were retrieved from public databases for potential participants who met the study’s requirements. Potential participants were recruited through email and asked to participate in the focus groups. As stated above, many participants represented areas of expertise and licensure, as shown in Figure 2 below.

FIGURE 2
TEACHING LICENSES HELD BY PARTICIPANTS



Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data collection instruments included a short anonymous online demographic questionnaire via Qualtrics and expert focus groups conducted through Zoom. There was no connected data between the demographic questionnaire and the expert focus groups. Before the focus groups were conducted, participants completed the online anonymous demographic questionnaire. They were asked to read the ebook *Fly, Girl, Fly!: Shaesta Waiz Soars Around the World* by Nancy Roe Pimm (2020), a book representing all eight categories of inclusive literature presented in the framework. The survey also provided participants with the research questions during the focus group. Focus groups were the most appropriate method for data collection because “the main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents’ attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way that would not be feasible using other methods” (Gibbs, 1997, p. 2). Using focus groups as the method for data collection allowed a range of participants to share their reactions to the framework alongside other participants in a thought-provoking environment, which aimed to increase the richness of the data collected. Each focus group lasted 30–90 minutes, and participants explained their perceptions of the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature*.

Data Analysis

After conducting focus groups, the researchers transcribed the recordings for analysis. Researchers coded all data using the research software Dedoose. This first phase of coding, eclectic coding, produced 121 unique codes. Subsequently, the second cycle of coding methods, code mapping, was used to organize the initial 121 codes under the four separate research questions for the study (Saldaña, 2021). After mapping the codes under each research question, focused coding was used in the third cycle of coding to further reduce the codes into a reportable analysis based on thematic and conceptual themes (DeCarlo, 2018; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2016; Saldaña, 2021).

Study Limitations

This study included several limitations. The focus group participants lacked racial, ethnic, disability, and gender diversity, which limited the study sample. See Table 1 for demographic information about the participants in this study. Another limitation of this study was the collection of one type of data and the lack of data triangulation. Future studies should incorporate triangulation to increase the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of this study's findings and to help verify results. In addition, if the study is replicated, researchers should consider defining the word "evaluating" (in the context of Research Question 4) for study participants.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

The participants were asked to answer four questions during the focus groups. The first research question was: What are the limitations of the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* (Pfundheller & Liesch, 2023) for selecting and evaluating diverse literature for young children? Five recurring themes emerged from the responses to this question (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
LIMITATIONS OF THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR
INCLUSIVE LITERATURE

| Emergent Themes | Frequency of Observations (n) |
|--|-------------------------------|
| The framework did not encompass all categories and types of diversity. | 32 |
| The framework does not address biases and stereotypes. | 15 |
| The framework does not solve potential problems for selecting and evaluating books. | 15 |
| The framework does not address factors beyond the "starting point" or the rudimentary/introductory concepts to diverse literature. | 9 |
| The book examples in the framework were limited. | 8 |

When asked about the framework limitations of the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature*, three themes emerged as particularly noteworthy, with the most significant framework limitation identified as the framework not encompassing all categories and types of diversity (n = 32). Specifically, some participants felt the categories' descriptions were limiting and suggested further elaboration. For example, one suggestion was to expand on the definition of economic class. Another participant proposed "adding other things like rural, urban because those can definitely play in the factors of economic class or maybe it should be socio-economic." Some participants also suggested adding categories such as geography, employment, intersectionality, language, medical conditions, and/or physical attributes combined with race.

The second most common theme suggested that the framework does not address biases and stereotypes (n = 15). A participant shared, "Just because literature mentions something doesn't necessarily mean that it is representative or accurately represented." Another participant suggested that teachers should be aware of their biases before using the framework because confirmation bias may happen otherwise. Confirmation bias happens when someone takes in information but filters it through their viewpoint (Casad & Luebering, 2024).

Confirmation bias can cause stereotyping. Another participant shared, "Some teachers really haven't grappled with [their biases] or tackled the ways that we can catch ourselves up by inadvertently reinforcing stereotypes." Teachers can inadvertently reinforce stereotypes by not being aware of their own biases and ingrained viewpoints toward other people from diverse demographics (University of Colorado Boulder,

2023). Another participant stated that a priority should be “making sure that the framework in and of itself doesn’t create any stereotypes.” The participants pointed out that the framework could potentially suggest biases and stereotypes and not represent accurate mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors.

There were 15 mentions that “potential problems may occur with selecting and evaluating books.” One concern was that the framework suggested coverage of diverse populations, but descriptions of the categories in the framework were poorly written. A different participant stated, “When I think about the evaluation of the literature, I don’t know... if all of these identities are included or represented in our literature or if we’re actually thinking about the quality of the literature.” Books need to be both inclusive and well-written to be mirrors and windows for those reading them (BookTrust, 2022). Another shared that books should be sliding glass doors. “I think that it’s a great stepping stone to begin conversations, but I’m not sure if the intention is to measure or to look at text to understand the culture represented within the text.” Participants found the framework to have potential problems when selecting and evaluating books.

Research Question 2

In contrast to the framework limitations discussed in research question 1, research question 2 asked: What are the strengths of the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* (Pfundheller & Liesch, 2023)? The response to this question yielded five themes, as shown in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3
STRENGTHS OF THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR
INCLUSIVE LITERATURE

| Emergent Themes | Frequency of Observations (n) |
|--|-------------------------------|
| The framework has a good variety of inclusive categories. | 27 |
| The framework is a great starting point to use as a tool. | 19 |
| The framework can help with selecting and analyzing literature. | 8 |
| The framework reflects the theory of the windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors, reflecting themselves and others. | 6 |
| The framework helps promote and support banned books. | 3 |

When asked about the strengths of the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature*, two themes are prominent with the most significant being that the framework has a good variety of inclusive categories (n = 27). One participant stated that they appreciated the shape of the framework. “I like the circle as a model... there’s nothing hierarchical about it... that might translate in some sort of way subliminally.” Another participant shared that this lack of hierarchical approach can be significant for students because “with the different categories... I can see all kids fitting in this framework in some ways, this idea that you can belong in many cultural groups.” The framework was illustrated in a circle, so there was no hierarchical arrangement position. It aimed to prevent specific individuals or groups from being at the top of the social system while others were lower (Virley, 2013). Several participants mentioned that the different categories could potentially help teachers meet the unique dynamics and makeup of their classrooms, with one participant stating, “I like the broad categories because that does allow for a teacher who maybe has a very unique set of students to kind of think about ... a whole other category which I don’t think would necessarily come up.” Participants shared that they found the framework to have a good variety of inclusive categories and prevented a diversity hierarchy.

Participants mentioned 19 times that the framework is a great tool to use as a starting point. One participant commented, “I think that it’s a really great stepping stone to begin conversations.” Another agreed and shared, “I feel like this framework gives [teachers] a starting point to... audit the works that they have... to see if [books] meet their students’ [needs].” The participants noted that the framework has

the potential to evolve and adapt over time to reflect diversity better while still serving as an initial step in promoting inclusive literature.

Research Question 3

After discussing framework limitations and strengths, focus groups were asked: How can preservice and inservice teachers utilize the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* (Pfundheller & Liesch, 2023)? Preservice teachers are those enrolled in a teacher education program but have yet to have a teaching license. In contrast, inservice teachers have graduated from a teacher education program and have earned a teaching license. Ten common themes emerged from the responses to this question, separating the results into two parts: preservice teachers and inservice teachers (see Table 4 and Table 5, respectively). Six themes were related to inservice teachers, and four were related to preservice teachers.

TABLE 4
HOW INSERVICE TEACHERS UTILIZE THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSIVE LITERATURE

| Emergent Themes | Frequency of Observations (n) |
|--|-------------------------------|
| The framework helps select classroom libraries. | 22 |
| The framework can open conversations with students and staff. | 22 |
| The framework helps build and adapt curriculum for teaching children’s literature. | 12 |
| The framework helps build skills, social awareness, and self-awareness. | 4 |
| The framework helps teachers stay current on literature and book recommendations. | 3 |
| The framework brings a sense of belonging to the classroom for students. | 3 |

Inservice Teachers

Two themes were frequently stated when asked how inservice teachers utilize the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature*. The first theme was that the framework helps select classroom libraries (n = 22). One participant stated, “I think this would be a really good resource for classroom teachers when they’re looking at their classroom library... because I know it’s so important to have diverse literature.” Classroom libraries are an array of books, materials, and resources within a classroom setting (International Schools Services, 2020). Multiple participants shared that the framework could serve as a checklist to examine classroom libraries and ensure representative diversity in classroom books. A participant added, “I immediately go to teachers using this [framework] when they’re looking at classroom resources and wondering... ‘Do I have inclusive literature in my own classroom that my students can see themselves in?’” The participants suggested that teachers could use this framework themselves to monitor the books they are using in their classrooms.

Take your current teachers to take a look at their libraries they currently have and then look at this [framework] and go, “Do I have books that talk about abilities or disabilities? ... books that specifically address race ... or am I missing that?” How can I bring that in where they ... evaluate their own classroom libraries or the books they’re using within the classroom to think about whether they are inclusive?

The framework can help select text for classroom libraries by helping staff consider whether they have inclusive literature and what categories of diversity they are missing.

Multiple participants spoke about the usefulness of using this tool to both update their libraries and recommend books to students. This framework helps teachers be aware of the books they choose for classroom libraries and helps them select books that represent each of the eight categories of diversity so students can access books that are windows and mirrors.

The second theme revealed that the framework allows for open conversations with students and staff (n = 22). One participant stated, “I would see this as a great piece to start conversations.” Another participant said, “Sometimes these graphics [framework] are great to start that conversation whether it be preservice or inservice teachers.” Specifically, participants mentioned how the framework facilitates conversations around identities. A participant shared, “It could start to be a scaffold to conversations around identities and how our identities shape who we are as teachers.” Teachers should also be aware of their identities to facilitate student discussions, encouraging them to converse and understand their identities (Vedder-Weiss et al., 2018). Another participant stated, “Thinking about that conversation with our students, to start to have our students share out ... who they are as people showing up into our classroom ... We can select those texts that are windows and doors and mirrors.” The framework is excellent for opening conversations with students and staff about identity.

Additionally, the results indicated that participants perceived the framework as supporting conversations that bridged the disparities between content and curriculum. A participant stated, “This type of work is so important because it starts to bridge those conversations and allows you to start looking at content and curriculum and ... experiences that students are having ... and hopefully provide some depth in those spaces.” Another participant emphasized, “I think those conversations are critical.” Participants shared that the framework highlights and supports discussions about identities and helps connect content and curriculum.

Preservice Teachers

Four emerging themes were evident when asked how preservice teachers utilize the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* (see Table 5).

TABLE 5
HOW PRESERVICE TEACHERS UTILIZE THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSIVE LITERATURE

| Emergent Themes | Frequency of Observations (n) |
|---|-------------------------------|
| The framework helps with selecting literature for lesson plans. | 9 |
| The framework helps preservice teachers learn how to build a classroom library. | 7 |
| The framework provides examples of types of diversity and texts. | 7 |
| The framework creates conversations for preservice teachers. | 4 |

When asked how preservice teachers can utilize the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature*, the emergent theme is that the framework helps with selecting literature for lesson plans (n = 9). One participant stated:

I would certainly use this as a tool ... for planning lessons. Making sure ... they’re being intentional about selecting literature that aligns well to their student population and then giving them an opportunity to sometimes introduce them to other perspectives.

Another participant shared that the framework helps select culturally responsive texts. The participant shared her culturally responsive strategies for teaching preservice teachers by having them layer on their thinking around text selection. “... this graphic [framework] would be very helpful in helping them think about text selection in any assignment.” BookTrust (2022) writes that it is essential to incorporate a variety of diverse texts into the curriculum across all subjects. The framework can aid this by helping to select literature for lesson plans.

During the focus groups, the participants shared how this framework could help them select books for their lessons. “This is critical in helping them identify what is common in children’s literature and what needs more attention in children’s literature for the purpose of creating those mirrors and windows in our

classroom.” This participant connected to the theoretical framework of Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors (Bishop 1990 & 2015).

One participant emphasized the significance of the framework for preservice teachers, stating, “As my students move into creating lesson plans and evaluating curricula, having this tool even in that class would be amazing.”

Another participant shared that they could think of multiple collegiate classes that could use the framework with their preservice teachers. One participant stated:

I can think of three [collegiate] classes I could use [the framework] in when I’m teaching ... One [class] is ... teaching culturally diverse learners. This [framework] actually would set the stage nicely. Not explicitly for text selection but for kind of a guidepost for students to think about in terms of all the different kinds of diversities we might be talking about. But as my students move into creating lesson plans and evaluating curricula, having this tool even in that class would be amazing. Of course, in teaching children’s literature this [framework] could have such a beautiful home.

The participants shared that they consider the framework helpful in selecting literature for lesson plans.

Research Question 4

During the focus groups, participants were asked research question 4: Is the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* (Pfundheller & Liesch, 2023) perceived to be a valid tool for selecting and evaluating diverse literature?

Tool for Selection of Diverse Literature

All participants emphasized that the framework was valid for selecting diverse literature for young children (see Table 6).

**TABLE 1
PERCEPTIONS OF VALIDITY FOR SELECTING BOOKS**

| Emergent Themes | Frequency of Observations (n) |
|--|-------------------------------|
| The framework is a valid instrument for selecting books. | 25 |
| The framework is not valid for selecting books. | 0 |

All the interviewed participants (n = 25) believed the framework is valid for selecting diverse classroom literature. One participant stated, “I think it’s absolutely a valid instrument. I think it could continue to grow and change over time. But I think it’s an excellent starting spot. It’s clear. It has great examples that connect to it ... it’s a good tool.” No participant explicitly claimed that the framework was not valid for book selection (n = 0).

Tool for Evaluation of Diverse Literature

However, while participants agreed that the framework could help them select books, not all confirmed that it was appropriate for evaluating diverse literature for young children (Table 7).

**TABLE 2
PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE UTILITY OF EVALUATING BOOKS**

| Emergent Themes | Frequency of Observations (n) |
|---|-------------------------------|
| The framework is a valid instrument for evaluating books. | 17 |
| The framework is not valid for evaluating books. | 9 |

The participants differed in whether they believed the *Framework for Inclusive Literature* was appropriate for evaluating books. One reason was that the framework does not prevent the portrayal of stereotypes in diverse characters, settings, or situations. Adding diversity to classroom libraries does not necessarily make the representation authentic and without stereotypes. Some suggested the need for an alternative or an additional tool for book evaluation, emphasized caution against relying solely on this framework, and raised doubts about its effectiveness in measuring cultural relevance. One participant shared, “Even though I pick something that would apply to this [framework] doesn’t mean it’s necessarily good ... because it [the book] covers economic class ... doesn’t necessarily mean it’s a good book to be using.” Another participant shared a similar thought, “When we think about how we are picking them to be inclusive, just because they talk about something doesn’t necessarily mean it’s what we want kids to hear or what we want them to be reading.” The participants shared that the framework helps us recognize and become aware of different types of diversity when picking literature. However, it does not confirm that the books are not biased and stereotypical.

At the same time, some participants believed that the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* serves as a tool that can be used for evaluating books (n=17). A participant stated, “I think it’s an evaluation tool,” sharing that they believe using this framework for evaluating diverse literature makes sense. One participant confirmed that it is an appropriate tool for both selecting various kinds of books and evaluating them, “Yes, I feel it’s a valid instrument ... [for] evaluating the kinds of books I have in my classroom.” Another participant suggested that one could use it for self-evaluation. “It’s just like a self-evaluation, for instance, your classroom, library, or even ... evaluating units that you’ve already developed.”

Participants differed on whether the framework could be used to evaluate books. Some perceived a lack of capability, highlighting that utilizing a book featuring at least one category of diversity from the framework does not automatically ensure authentic representation without stereotypes. Others felt that the framework adequately addressed the task of examining current classroom literature.

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study explored the strengths, limitations, potential applications, and authentication of the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* tools through focus groups of participants holding a reading specialist license and/or a reading teacher license. Below is a discussion of some of the most salient findings and the authors’ recommendations related to the study’s results.

Framework Strengths

The results of this study revealed that the framework possesses a variety of strengths (RQ2), including a variety of inclusive categories and uses in the classroom. Participants shared that they liked the shape of the framework being a circle because it prevents a hierarchical approach to the eight different diversity categories. Using a circular framework emphasizes that no cultural group is subordinate to others (Grasso, 2016). The framework aligns with a transformative paradigm perspective since it avoids alienating or suppressing any diversity category through a hierarchical approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2007).

Participants shared that they felt the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* (Pfundheller & Liesch, 2023) was a great tool to use as a starting point. The framework parallels other inclusive literature frameworks that seek to help bridge gaps for students learning about their identity. It aligns with the *Inclusive Language Framework* (Nee & Macfarlane, n.d.) and its four principles:

- Principle One: Inclusive language conveys respect to all people.
- Principle Two: Inclusive language communicates a message effectively through precise language.
- Principle Three: Inclusive language acknowledges diversity.
- Principle Four: Inclusive language involves continual improvement (p. 2).

The *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* aligns with principle 1 by helping teachers select classroom books to ensure that every student is represented. Additionally, the framework is a tool for starting the conversation around identities, which helps prevent stereotyping and improves respect for others. The framework uses precise and inclusive terms and definitions for the eight diversity categories, similar to the intention of principle two. The framework aligns with principle three by using precise language to clarify ambiguous terminology. Lastly, principle four emphasizes that terminology and language preferences are constantly changing, so the authors of the framework plan to update it as those changes occur. The *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* aligns with the principles of the *Inclusive Language Framework* by meeting and matching all four principles of inclusive language.

All participants found that the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* was an appropriate tool for selecting books and most found it to be appropriate for evaluating books (RQ4). Thus, the selection of books in classrooms could be either a mirror, window, and/or sliding glass door.

Framework Limitations

In seeking to learn about the framework's perceived limitations, it became apparent that many participants felt the framework did not encompass *all* categories and types of diversity (RQ1). One participant suggested another potential category, "I like [...] what you said too, now with the economic class adding other things [like] rural, urban because those can play in the factors of economic class." The authors disregarded a category for residential locations because household decisions are due to the cost of living, quality of housing, and community features indicating topics of economic class. Furthermore, there has been a persistent disparity "between the earnings of rural and urban workers. In fact, the divide may be widening. In cities, people earn about 23% more than people in rural areas" (Trovall, 2023, para. 1). Similarly, this would classify rural and urban living areas under the category of economic class due to the cost of living, housing quality, and community services and their impact on income.

In developing the framework, the authors considered many other categories of diversity but did not include what was already covered in the existing eight categories. For example, they considered adding gender but did not because it was already included in the definition of LGBTQ+. The authors also contemplated adding Disability/Ability but concluded that all categories (including disability) encompass abilities. For example, a child with a physical disability may not have a mental or emotional disability; therefore, the child also has an Ability. Ergo, while this identified framework limitation is worth noting, it also points to the need for further clarification of and/or education about the categories of diversity included in the framework.

Another key framework limitation identified throughout this study was the framework's inability to address biases and stereotypes. While the framework was created to evaluate if diversity is included in books (not *how* those categories are included and represented), the authors recognize the importance of this framework limitation and would like to offer four alternative resources to be used in tandem with the framework. First, suppose individuals are looking to evaluate how a character is represented within a book. In that case, there are multiple resources to help, such as ensuring students have appropriate mirrors when reading books (Bishop, 1990 & 2015). Next, *Diverse BookFinder* (2018) is a lending library search tool that provides an updated collection of children's picture books featuring Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) characters. Third, *Lee & Low Books* (2021) help identify representation within books in the *Home Library Questionnaire*. This is a questionnaire for parents to use at home with the books their children are reading. It has an area where the parents write the title, author, and date next to a book, for example, that "explores the immigrant experience beyond the Ellis Island narrative" (question 14). The questionnaire prompts parents to think through the storyline and diversity of representation found within the books. Finally, *Teaching Tolerance* (2016) created *Reading Diversity: A Tool for Selecting Diverse Texts Extended Edition*, which has one page addressing diversity and representation. It asks four questions on the book's representation: the identity of the author, the identity of character(s), which component(s) of text exhibit accurate representations of a person's experience, and presence of stereotyping within the book. The questions prompt educators to think through their books' different forms of representation.

According to Pfundheller and Liesch (2023), the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* serves as a framework for determining if diversity is included in a book, not a tool for evaluating how the categories are included and represented (Q4). Larrick (1965) affirmed that diversity is difficult to find in children's books, and when books have diverse representations, they can potentially be harmful. BIPOC have been fighting for years for fair representation that is not racist and stereotypical in books (Hartsfield, 2021). This current study indicates that the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* should be paired with an additional instrument to assess a text's fair representation and authentic portrayal of diversity in books.

Future Recommendations

In the future, the framework can be used by preservice and inservice teachers in multiple ways (RQ3): building libraries or classroom collections, conversations on diversity, and lesson planning and curriculum. The sections below explore recommendations for using the framework based on the results of this study.

Building Libraries

Supporters of inclusive literature can use the framework to select a variety of inclusive literature for their classroom and personal libraries. Exposure to diverse literature in a classroom helps students learn about other cultures and their own culture (Castro, 2020). The framework can help update classroom libraries to better represent different forms of diversity in their book selection. The framework can help educators recognize eight different forms of diversity to include in their classroom libraries. A collection of diverse books benefits all learners by creating an inviting environment (Ivester et al., 2019).

Classroom libraries should have books with more recent publication dates within the last five years (Booksource, 2023; Hartsfield, 2021; Tyso, 2022). Hartsfield (2021) stated, "... many classic texts such as *Little House on the Prairie* (2008) (originally published in 1935) are fondly remembered, but problematic in their depiction of marginalized groups" (p. 2). Classic novels are not always accurate in their representation of the current population. Tyso (2022) suggests having classics and at least 30% of the books on classroom shelves with a publication date within the last five years. Recently published books can teach the same fundamental lessons as books with older publication dates but in a more recognizable style and accurately portray current populations (Booksource, 2023).

The *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* was created to support preservice and inservice teachers and librarians with their libraries. "Using the framework, school librarians and classroom teachers can analyze their collections to ensure that all students are represented in the books they see and use in their learning" (Pfundheller & Liesch, 2023, p. 64). Student demographics in classrooms are diverse, so teachers should be aware of all different forms of diversity when selecting books. They should represent their classroom demographics equitably. Using the framework as a guide allows teachers to refer to the categories and ensure they represent each in their classroom books. Educators can use the framework to aid in selecting books that fall into each category to make the books they read aloud and their classroom libraries more diverse.

Conversations on Diversity

The *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* is a great starting point for conversations around diversity and helps with the selection of books. However, teachers should facilitate conversations independently by presenting themes and concepts and allowing students to converse, answer questions, and assist in thought-provoking discussions. Books are a great way to start a conversation about worldwide injustice and issues (Dunkerly & Moffit, 2023; Grasso, 2016). Multicultural literature can help open student discussions on culturally sensitive topics (Grasso, 2016). The framework helps with this starting point rather than with subsequent discussions.

Lesson Planning and Curricula

The framework is an initial step in creating a curriculum to help teachers use diverse literature in their classrooms. The authors of the framework intend that the books are not only collected on classroom shelves,

but rather, they are read, discussed, and analyzed. Multicultural books should be intertwined into curriculum elements (Grasso, 2016). Having other elements of multicultural books included can create a positive school climate that "... contributes substantially to the success of diverse students" (Sarraj et al., 2015, p. 231). While helping to select educational materials, the framework provides knowledge. It helps develop awareness and thus is a potential tool for selecting a broader community that needs diverse literature. It can support current and future teachers in these endeavors; however, additional resources may be needed.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore the strengths, framework limitations, potential applications, and validity of the *Multidimensional Framework for Inclusive Literature* tool. The findings from this research highlight significant outcomes about these aspects, along with suggestions for future research endeavors and potential implications.

Future investigations might replicate this study with reading teachers and/or reading specialist licenses to enhance the framework's credibility, broaden the participant pool to gauge current educators' perspectives, and engage in discussions with teachers from different geographic areas. In addition, having a diverse demographic of educators with different racial and ethnic backgrounds, all sexes, and disability statuses would strengthen future studies.

Numerous participants expressed enthusiasm for exploring the new framework and discussed how they plan to integrate it into their future teaching, classrooms, and personal lives. One participant enthusiastically stated, "I'm already thinking of using it and sharing it, and if you make any updates ... or if you know changes to wording or add other slices of pie, I want to be on the list to receive." In conclusion, this study successfully elicited the expertise of specialists to contribute to scholarship advancing literacy and culturally responsive teaching practices in all classrooms.

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