

INVESTIGATING TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON CHALLENGES OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY IN ELT

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Abstract

This study investigates teachers' perspectives on the challenges of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) in English Language Teaching (ELT) within the Indonesian context. As English is widely taught as a global language, the need to integrate learners' cultural backgrounds into teaching practices has become increasingly significant. However, despite its recognized importance, the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy remains limited due to various pedagogical, institutional, and contextual constraints. This study aims to explore the challenges faced by English teachers and to understand how these challenges affect their teaching practices. A qualitative research design was employed, involving semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The participants consisted of English teachers from secondary schools who were selected purposively based on their teaching experience. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to teachers' experiences and perceptions. The findings reveal that teachers encounter several major challenges, including limited understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, lack of culturally relevant teaching materials, rigid curriculum requirements, and the dominance of Western cultural content in ELT resources. Additionally, institutional factors such as limited professional training and lack of support further hinder the effective implementation of CRP. The study concludes that although teachers acknowledge the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy, its implementation is still constrained by systemic and practical barriers. Therefore, there is a need for continuous professional development and curriculum reform to support teachers in integrating culturally responsive practices effectively in ELT classrooms.

Keywords: pedagogy, culture, teachers, challenges, ELT, perspectives

INTRODUCTION

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) is a transformative approach in English Language Teaching (ELT) that emphasizes students' cultural backgrounds in classroom instruction to foster engagement, inclusivity, and meaningful learning outcomes (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015; Baldwin, 2015). Based on the understanding that culture shapes students' cognition, motivation, and learning behaviors, CRP encourages teachers to leverage prior experiences, community knowledge, and social norms that can foster higher-order thinking, self-regulation, and

academic autonomy among learners (Hammond, 2015; Warren, 2018). Empirical research across various contexts provides evidence that culturally responsive practices can improve student achievement, support equitable learning environments, and empower educators to address systemic inequities in education (Masunungure & Maguvhe, 2025; Kucukakin et al., 2025; Viado, Lusuegro, Lacio, & Galigao, 2026).

Although this is highly promising pedagogically, the implementation of CRP in practice remains challenging. Teachers often face systemic and contextual barriers,

including inadequate professional development in teaching, limited access to culturally relevant instructional materials, and a rigid curriculum dominated by Western-oriented content (Panganiban-Lualhati & Panganiban, 2026; Faridah, Maksum, & Nurhasanah, 2024; Djokowidodo, Suwandi, & Ekowardani, 2025). Cultural norms within the classroom such as outcome-oriented learning behaviors in group activities, hierarchical interactions between students and teachers, and regard for authority can further complicate the implementation of CRP strategies, particularly when standard ELT methodologies are not aligned with local sociocultural values (Suryanto, 2024; Marcellino, 2008; Mokoginta, 2024).

In Indonesia, English language classrooms present a unique tension between global and local cultural influences. Studies indicate that while teachers recognize the pedagogical benefits of a culturally responsive approach, its implementation is constrained by limited institutional support, a scarcity of culturally relevant resources, and a standardised curriculum (Dewi, Parage, Wiramarta, & Darmawan, 2023; Faridah et al., 2024; Wahyuningtyas, Salmah, Pawoko, & Pramesty, 2025). Educators must understand students' behavior, communication styles, and social expectations, which are influenced by culture; therefore, educators require adaptive teaching strategies and flexible classroom management (Muzammil & Mariyadi, 2025; Suryanto, 2024). Research also emphasizes the importance of integrating local knowledge, building community partnerships, and creating an inclusive learning environment to enhance student engagement and achieve desired academic outcomes (Marwah, Anisah, & Nurzakiah, 2025; Sibarani, 2025; Faridah et al., 2024). Given this complexity, understanding teachers' perspectives on the challenges of CRP is crucial, especially for teachers in Indonesia with its immense

cultural diversity. This study investigates the barriers faced by English teachers in integrating culturally responsive practices in secondary schools, as well as explores how these challenges influence instructional decisions, classroom interactions, and pedagogical adaptations. This study addresses the following questions: What are the main challenges teachers face in implementing CRP? and How do these challenges influence their teaching practices? To answer these questions, research data will be collected using a questionnaire designed to measure teachers' understanding of CRP, their experiences in integrating cultural aspects into lessons, and their perceptions of barriers and institutional or resource-related factors affecting implementation. Ultimately, this study contributes to the development of culturally responsive ELT by bridging global theoretical frameworks with the complex realities of Indonesian classrooms. By highlighting teachers' voices and experiences, this study aims to provide input for policy, teacher education, and instructional design, to promote English language learning that is equitable, contextually relevant, and academically rigorous (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015; Faridah et al., 2024; Marwah et al., 2025).

Although the benefits of culturally responsive pedagogy in ELT have been documented well in international literature (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015; Masunungure & Maguvhe, 2025), research investigating how Indonesian English teachers perceive the challenges of implementing CRP remains limited. Most studies still focus on student learning outcomes or provide general recommendations without exploring teachers' direct experiences, perceptions, and contextual constraints faced in the classroom. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining teachers' perspectives on CRP, as well as highlighting the systemic, institutional, and practical factors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in English Language Teaching

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) has become a prominent approach in modern education, particularly in multicultural learning environments. CRP refers to teaching that acknowledges, respects, and leverages students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and identities as meaningful resources in the learning process. According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive pedagogy is a pedagogical framework that integrates students' cultural knowledge, prior knowledge, communication styles, and performance patterns into teaching practices to make learning more relevant, equitable, and effective. Culture is viewed not merely as a social characteristic but as a key factor that can influence cognition, motivation, interaction, and academic engagement. Similarly, Hammond (2015) explains that culturally responsive pedagogy relates to cognitive development and brain-based learning. Hammond argues that students learn more effectively when instruction connects with their cultural frames of reference because culture shapes memory pathways, memory processing, and intellectual engagement. From this perspective, CRP is not merely about expressing cultural diversity but also about developing students' intellectual capacity, self-regulation, and higher-order thinking skills. Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in developing a culturally responsive learning environment that supports rigorous academic standards.

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), culturally responsive pedagogy is particularly important because the English language often carries cultural values, communication styles, and social norms associated with Western societies that must be unpacked. Suryanto (2024) explains that English language teaching in Indonesia involves a complex interaction

between local cultural values and the global culture of the English language. Indonesian students often encounter cultural differences embedded in English language materials that may not align with their social experiences and values. Consequently, educators need to adapt teaching strategies and learning materials to bridge cultural gaps and ensure meaningful learning experiences. Mokoginta (2024) further highlights the differences between local and international cultures in Indonesian ELT classrooms, which create several gaps. Although Indonesian culture is integrated into ELT teaching materials, many students still show greater interest in the target language's culture. This poses a challenge for teachers striving to preserve local cultural identity while preparing students for global communication. Therefore, teachers must carefully balance the representation of local and global cultures in the teaching materials they create and in classroom interactions. Marcellino (2008) emphasizes that Indonesia's cultural diversity influences the English language learning process. Cultural traits such as respect for authority, obedience, and reluctance to challenge teachers can affect student participation in class as well as their communication patterns. In many classrooms in Indonesia, students tend to be passive during discussions due to cultural norms that emphasize politeness. These cultural characteristics require teachers to implement adaptive and culturally sensitive teaching strategies that encourage participation while respecting local values.

In general, culturally responsive pedagogy in ELT aims to create an interactive classroom environment where students' cultural identities and experiences are acknowledged and leveraged as learning assets. By integrating students' cultural backgrounds into instruction, teachers can enhance motivation, engagement, and academic achievement

while fostering intercultural understanding within the classroom.

Theoretical Framework of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The theoretical foundation of culturally responsive pedagogy is heavily influenced by multicultural education, sociocultural learning theory, constructivism, and critical pedagogy. Gay (2010) explains that CRP is based on the belief that culture shapes the way students think, communicate, and learn. Therefore, effective teaching must employ instructional methods that take into account students' sociocultural realities. One important theoretical contribution comes from Hammond (2015), who integrates neuroscience with culturally responsive pedagogy. Hammond argues that students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds often become "dependent (confused) learners" because the educational system fails to provide adequate cognitive support. Through culturally responsive teaching, teachers can build on students' prior experiences, strengthen neural connections, and foster independent learning. Hammond introduced the "Ready for Rigor" framework, which emphasizes four essential components: awareness, learning partnerships, information processing, and community building.

The first component is self-awareness, which focuses on teachers' understanding of their own biases, assumptions, and cultural expectations. Teachers must critically reflect on how their cultural perspectives influence classroom interactions and instructional decisions. The second component involves building learning partnerships through trust, empathy, and collaborative relationships between teachers and students. The third component emphasizes instructional strategies that develop cognitive capacities, including scaffolding, metacognition, and higher-order thinking activities. Finally,

community building can foster a socially and emotionally safe learning environment where students feel valued and respected. Warren (2018) also emphasizes empathy as a crucial disposition for culturally responsive educators. Teachers who can understand students' perspectives, cultural experiences, and emotional needs will implement inclusive and equitable teaching practices. Empathy supports culturally responsive decision-making and strengthens teacher-student relationships, which are essential for a positive classroom environment.

Additionally, the book *Becoming a Multicultural Educator* (2024) presents a four-step professional development model for multicultural educators consisting of awareness, knowledge, skills, and reflection. Teachers must first become aware of cultural diversity and inequities before acquiring knowledge about students' cultural backgrounds. Afterward, they can develop culturally responsive teaching skills and continuously reflect on their teaching practices to enhance equity and inclusion. This theoretical perspective demonstrates that culturally responsive pedagogy is not merely a teaching strategy but a comprehensive educational philosophy that emphasizes equity and inclusion in student empowerment.

Teachers' Perspectives on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Teachers' perceptions and attitudes significantly influence the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. Various studies consistently show that teachers who hold positive beliefs about cultural diversity tend to employ inclusive teaching practices. Goodman (2008) examined teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and found that a multicultural curriculum can positively influence teachers' support for culturally responsive practices. Teachers who participate in professional development related to multicultural

education demonstrate greater awareness of diversity and a stronger commitment to equity-oriented teaching.

Dewi et al. (2023) studied the perceptions and practices of English teachers at an international school in Bali. The findings indicate that teachers recognize the importance of integrating cultural awareness into classroom instruction. Teachers implement multicultural education by creating collaborative learning, exploring students' backgrounds, and conducting cultural activities that celebrate local and global traditions. Similarly, Muzammil and Mariyadi (2025) explored teachers' perceptions of multicultural classroom management in Singkawang, Indonesia. Teachers emphasized flexible classroom management with fair treatment, cultural tolerance, and collaborative learning as key strategies to promote inclusivity. This study highlights the crucial role of teachers in facilitating intercultural understanding and social cohesion. Haryani (2025) investigated Indonesian mathematics teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy. Although teachers recognize the importance of connecting lessons to students' cultural contexts, many still view subjects like mathematics as culturally neutral. These findings suggest that teachers may require additional support in understanding how culture can influence all learning processes for students, including language learning. Panganiban-Lualhati and Panganiban (2026) further explain that teachers' beliefs, the institutional environment, and professional experiences significantly influence the implementation of CRP. Teachers who receive adequate professional support and development from the government demonstrate greater confidence in applying culturally responsive teaching strategies.

In general, these studies indicate that teachers generally support culturally responsive pedagogy; however, effective implementation depends on teachers'

cultural awareness, professional competence, and adequate institutional support.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Indonesian Educational Contexts

Indonesia is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, comprising hundreds of ethnic groups, regional languages, and sociocultural traditions. This diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for culturally responsive pedagogy. Marwah, Anisah, and Nurzakiah (2025) studied culturally responsive pedagogy in multilingual classrooms in Papua, Sulawesi, and Yogyakarta. The study identified a gap between educational policies and classroom practices. Although national educational frameworks such as the Merdeka Curriculum promote inclusivity and diversity, their implementation remains hindered by resource constraints, teacher preparation, and institutional support.

Sibarani (2025) highlights the importance of integrating local cultural values into the classroom. By incorporating Batak ulos cultural values into education, teachers can strengthen inclusivity, cultural identity formation, and social cohesion among students. Similarly, Wahyuningtyas et al. (2025) demonstrate that integrating local cultural elements such as oral literature and traditional media enhances students' literacy, engagement, and cultural appreciation. These findings suggest that local culture can serve as a valuable and useful pedagogical resource, rather than an obstacle to learning. Teachers who integrate local cultural knowledge into their instruction can create learning experiences that are more meaningful and contextually relevant for students especially those learning a language from a different culture.

However, teachers in Indonesia continually face challenges related to curriculum demands, standardized assessments, and a lack of culturally relevant teaching resources. Therefore, the

successful implementation of CRP in Indonesia requires collaboration among teachers, policymakers, curriculum developers, and educational institutions.

Several previous studies have extensively examined culturally responsive pedagogy in various educational contexts. However, research specifically investigating English teachers' perspectives on the challenges of implementing CRP in Indonesian ELT classrooms remains limited. Suryanto (2024) focuses on cultural issues in Indonesian ELT and emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive strategies. Mokoginta (2024) examines the integration of culture in Indonesian ELT teaching materials, highlighting the profound differences between local and international cultures. Marcellino (2008) discusses cultural diversity and classroom interactions in English language education in Indonesia.

Faridah et al. (2024) investigate the challenges and opportunities of implementing culturally responsive teaching in several schools across Indonesia. Similarly, Dewi et al. (2023) explore English teachers' perceptions and multicultural practices in schools. International studies conducted by Masunungure and Maguvhe (2025), Viado et al. (2026), and Kucukakın et al. (2025) identified common challenges such as a lack of professional training, limited and inadequate resources, and institutional constraints. Despite these contributions, few studies have specifically examined how secondary school English teachers in Indonesia perceive and experience challenges in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in their daily classroom practices. Therefore, this study aims to address this research gap by exploring teachers' perspectives on the pedagogical, institutional, and contextual barriers that influence the implementation of CRP in ELT classrooms in Indonesia.

This study is based on the theoretical perspective of culturally responsive pedagogy proposed by Gay (2010) and Hammond (2015). This conceptual framework assumes that effective English language instruction must integrate students' cultural backgrounds, identities, and experiences into teaching practices. The implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy is influenced by several interrelated factors, including teachers' cultural awareness, professional competence, instructional materials, institutional support, curriculum flexibility, and classroom diversity. Teachers who possess cultural awareness and strong pedagogical competence tend to effectively implement culturally responsive teaching strategies and can enhance the value of the learning experience itself. However, various barriers can hinder such implementation, such as limited professional development opportunities, a lack of culturally relevant instructional materials, an exam-oriented curriculum, and inadequate institutional support. These challenges can affect teachers' instructional decisions, classroom interaction patterns, and the ability to create an inclusive learning environment. Therefore, this study investigates how English teachers perceive these challenges and how they influence their classroom practices in Indonesian secondary schools.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate English teachers' perspectives on the challenges of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) in English Language Teaching (ELT). Qualitative research is well-suited for examining complex social phenomena in educational contexts, thereby enabling a deep understanding of educators' experiences, perceptions, and teaching practices (Creswell, 2013). This design allows the

researcher to collect context-rich, reliable data regarding the barriers, strategies, and contextual factors influencing the implementation of CRP in Indonesian secondary school classrooms.

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive approach was used in this study to systematically collect detailed information while preserving the authenticity of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). This approach aligns with the study's objective to explore teachers' perspectives, challenges, and perceived needs regarding CRP, without imposing predefined categories or hypotheses. This study is grounded in the interpretive paradigm, which acknowledges that knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and the participants, resulting in diverse perspectives emerging across various classroom settings (Creswell, 2013).

Subjects of Research

The participants were English teachers from secondary schools in Indonesia, specifically junior high schools (SMP), senior high schools (SMA), and vocational high schools (SMK). Selection criteria included: active teaching experience in English as a Foreign Language (ELT), interaction with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, and a willingness to participate in the study. Teachers with varying levels of experience (ranging from one year to more than five years) were included to ensure a broad range of perspectives. The sample size was determined based on data validity principles, specifically continuing data collection until no new themes emerged (Creswell, 2013).

Data Collection Procedures and Instruments

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, carefully designed for this study and divided into three sections:

1. **Section A (Teacher Background):** Contain Teacher background including Name, teaching experience, and school level.
2. **Section B (Close-Ended Questions):** There are 7 items question that each question contain Three option multiple-choice that assessing familiarity, confidence, current practices, materials, professional development, institutional support, and student responsiveness regarding CRP.
3. **Section C (Open-Ended Questions):** This last section designed to capture teachers' understanding, perceived challenges, and reflective opinions on CRP implementation using 3 items question.

The questionnaire was reviewed in light of previous research to ensure the clarity, reliability, and appropriateness of its items. Open-ended questions were used to allow participants to describe their experiences and challenges in greater depth in their own words, resulting in data suitable for thematic analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

Open-ended responses (Section C) were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Creswell's (2013) data analysis spiral. The analysis process involved:

1. Immersion in the data through repeated reading of responses.
2. Initial coding of meaningful statements related to teacher experiences, perceptions, and challenges.
3. Grouping codes into categories to identify patterns.
4. Developing broader themes representing recurring issues, strategies, and institutional factors.
5. Interpretation in relation to research questions and existing literature on CRP.

This This method allows researchers to identify expected themes as well as those that emerge naturally, while preserving the richness and context of the participants' narratives. Participant review is conducted to enhance the credibility of the findings, during which participants verify the accuracy of the initial interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards are strictly adhered to in this research. Participants gave their consent to complete the provided questionnaire and were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, as well as the right to withdraw at any stage. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant educational institution, in accordance with Creswell's (2013) guidelines for qualitative research. The researcher also reflected on position and potential biases to ensure transparency in the interpretation of the data.

Limitations

This study prioritizes depth of understanding over breadth; therefore, findings may not be generalizable beyond the teachers in the sample and will differ for other subject areas not related to language, as well as for science teachers. Additionally, self-reported data may be susceptible to response bias. Nevertheless, the qualitative approach provides substantial contextual insights into teachers' perspectives and challenges regarding CRP, thereby offering a solid foundation for recommendations regarding professional development and institutional support for the advancement of learning (Creswell, 2013).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study examines English teachers' perspectives on the challenges of implementing Culture-Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesian secondary

schools. These findings were derived from responses to closed-ended and open-ended questions in a questionnaire distributed to English teachers from junior high schools (SMP), senior high schools (SMA), and vocational high schools (SMK). To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, all participants were identified using pseudonyms such as Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2), and so on.

The analysis yielded four main themes related to the challenges of implementing CRP in ELT classrooms: (1) limited understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, (2) a lack of culturally relevant teaching materials, (3) curricular and institutional constraints, and (4) classroom diversity and student engagement challenges. These findings indicate that although teachers generally recognize the importance of integrating students' cultural backgrounds into English language instruction, the practical implementation of CRP remains limited due to systemic, pedagogical, and contextual barriers.

Tabel 1. Background Profile of Participants

Participant Code	School Level	Teaching Experience
P1	Vocational High School	> 10 Years
P2	Senior High School	> 10 Years
P3	Vocational High School	1–5 Years
P4	Junior High School	6–10 Years

P5	Vocational High School	1–5 Years
P6	Junior High School	1–5 Years

The table demonstrates that the participants represented diverse educational settings and teaching experiences. This diversity enriched the data and provided broader insights into the implementation of CRP across different school contexts.

Theme 1: Limited Understanding of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

One of the most dominant findings of this study was that many teachers possessed only a partial understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy. Although participants acknowledged the importance of respecting students' cultural backgrounds, several teachers admitted that they were unfamiliar with the theoretical foundations and practical strategies of CRP.

Tabel 2. Teachers' Familiarity with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Level of Familiarity	Number of Participants	Interpretation
Very Familiar	2 (33.3%)	Teachers understood CRP concepts and implementation strategies
Somewhat Familiar	3 (50%)	Teachers recognized CRP but lacked practical application knowledge
Not Familiar	1 (16.7%)	Teacher had minimal understanding of CRP

Several participants explained that they had never received formal training regarding culturally responsive teaching. For example, Participant 3 (P3) stated that:

"I know that students come from different cultural backgrounds, but I am still confused about how to integrate culture effectively into English lessons."

Similarly, Participant 6 (P6) explained that:

"Most teacher training programs focus more on curriculum targets and grammar instruction rather than cultural responsiveness."

These findings indicate that teachers' limited pedagogical knowledge became a significant barrier to implementing CRP effectively. This result aligns with Hammond (2015), who emphasized that teachers require both theoretical understanding and practical strategies to create culturally responsive classrooms. Without sufficient professional preparation, teachers may struggle to connect instructional materials with students' cultural experiences.

Furthermore, the findings support previous research conducted by Faridah et al. (2024), which reported that Indonesian English teachers often experience uncertainty in adapting culturally responsive approaches due to insufficient training opportunities. The absence of continuous professional development contributes to teachers' lack of confidence in applying CRP principles in classroom instruction.

Theme 2: Lack of Culturally Relevant Teaching Materials

Another major challenge identified in this study concerned the limited availability of culturally relevant teaching materials in ELT classrooms. Most participants reported that English textbooks predominantly contained Western cultural content, while local cultural contexts were minimally represented.

Tabel 3. Teachers' Perceptions of ELT Materials and Cultural Representation

Response Category	Number of Participants	Description
Agree	4 (66.7%)	ELT materials are dominated by Western cultural content
Neutral	1 (16.7%)	Materials contain limited local cultural representation
Disagree	1 (16.7%)	Materials are considered relatively balanced

Participants explained that textbook topics frequently focused on foreign lifestyles, holidays, food, and social practices that were less familiar to Indonesian students. Participant 2 (P2) noted:

"Students sometimes find the examples difficult to relate to because the materials mostly describe Western culture rather than local experiences."

Participant 4 (P4) also stated:

"I often need to modify the materials by adding local examples so students can understand the lesson better."

This finding demonstrates that teachers were required to independently adapt teaching resources to make lessons more meaningful and contextually relevant for learners. However, such adaptation demanded additional time, creativity, and pedagogical skills. The findings correspond with Gay's (2010) argument that culturally responsive teaching requires instructional materials that reflect students' cultural identities and experiences. When students cannot relate to learning materials,

classroom engagement and comprehension may decrease. In the Indonesian ELT context, the dominance of Western-oriented textbooks may unintentionally marginalize local cultural identities.

Additionally, these results support previous studies by Dewi et al. (2023) and Wahyuningtyas et al. (2025), which found that Indonesian teachers often experience difficulties accessing teaching resources that integrate local culture into English learning. Therefore, teachers must continuously adapt materials to bridge the gap between global English content and students' local realities.

Theme 3: Curriculum and Institutional Constraints

The third major theme concerned institutional barriers and curriculum-related challenges. Many participants reported that rigid curriculum requirements and assessment-oriented educational systems limited their ability to implement culturally responsive teaching practices.

Tabel 4. Institutional Challenges in Implementing CRP

Institutional Factor	Number of Participants Reporting the Challenge
Limited Time Allocation	5
Examination-Oriented Curriculum	6
Lack of Institutional Support	4
Limited Professional Training	5

Teachers explained that they were often pressured to complete curriculum targets and prepare students for examinations, leaving little opportunity for culturally responsive activities such as discussions,

collaborative projects, or community-based learning.

Participant 1 (P1) explained:

“The curriculum is very focused on test preparation, so it is difficult to spend extra time discussing cultural topics.”

These findings reveal that institutional expectations strongly influenced teachers’ instructional decisions. Although teachers recognized the pedagogical value of CRP, they often prioritized curriculum completion due to external accountability pressures. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted by Panganiban-Lualhati and Panganiban (2026), which highlighted how standardized educational systems can restrict teacher autonomy and creativity in culturally responsive instruction. Furthermore, Marcellino (2008) argued that Indonesian English education has traditionally emphasized linguistic competence and examination achievement rather than sociocultural understanding.

The findings also indicate the need for institutional reform and policy support. Without systemic encouragement, teachers may perceive culturally responsive pedagogy as an additional burden rather than an integrated component of effective teaching practice.

Theme 4: Classroom Diversity and Student Engagement Challenges

The final theme identified in this study involved challenges related to classroom diversity and student engagement. Teachers explained that students possessed varying cultural backgrounds, communication styles, learning preferences, and levels of confidence in participating during English lessons.

Tabel 5. Challenges Related to Student Diversity and Classroom Interaction

Challenge Category	Number of Participants
Students’ Low Confidence	4
Diverse Learning Styles	6
Communication Barriers	3
Passive Classroom Participation	5

Several teachers reported that some students were reluctant to express opinions openly due to cultural norms emphasizing respect for authority and classroom hierarchy.

Participant 2 (P2) added:

“Students from different cultural backgrounds respond differently during discussions. Some are active, while others prefer to stay silent.”

These findings demonstrate that implementing CRP requires teachers to possess adaptive classroom management skills and intercultural sensitivity. Teachers must understand students’ cultural communication patterns and create safe learning environments that encourage participation. The findings align with Suryanto (2024), who emphasized that cultural norms influence classroom interaction patterns in Indonesian educational settings. In many Asian contexts, students may demonstrate respect through silence and passive listening rather than active verbal participation. Consequently, teachers need culturally appropriate engagement strategies that accommodate students’ diverse communication preferences.

Additionally, Hammond (2015) argued that culturally responsive teaching promotes emotional safety and student empowerment by validating learners’ identities and experiences. Therefore, creating inclusive classroom environments

is essential for fostering meaningful student engagement in ELT. In sum, the findings based on six teacher participants indicate that the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in Indonesian ELT classrooms remains constrained by multiple interconnected factors. Teachers generally demonstrated positive attitudes toward CRP and acknowledged its importance in promoting inclusive and meaningful learning experiences. However, practical implementation was hindered by limited pedagogical knowledge, inadequate teaching materials, institutional pressures, and classroom diversity challenges.

The findings suggest that teachers' understanding of CRP is still largely conceptual rather than practical. Many participants recognized the importance of respecting cultural diversity but lacked concrete strategies for integrating cultural responsiveness into lesson planning, classroom interaction, and assessment practices. This highlights the urgent need for continuous professional development programs focusing specifically on culturally responsive pedagogy in ELT. Moreover, the dominance of Western cultural content in English teaching materials reflects the broader tension between global English education and local cultural representation. While English serves as an international language, integrating local cultural contexts remains essential to ensuring that learning experiences are meaningful and accessible for students.

Institutional factors also emerged as significant barriers. Examination-oriented educational systems and rigid curriculum structures limited teachers' to implement interactive and culturally responsive learning activities. Therefore, educational policymakers and school administrators should provide stronger institutional support through curriculum adaptation, teacher training, and resource development. Finally, the findings emphasize that culturally responsive pedagogy requires

more than cultural awareness alone. Effective implementation demands pedagogical adaptability, intercultural competence, supportive educational policies, and culturally relevant instructional resources. By addressing these challenges, English teachers can create more equitable, inclusive, and contextually relevant learning environments that better support diverse learners in Indonesian classrooms.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examines English teachers' perspectives on the challenges of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) in English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesian secondary schools. The findings indicate that although teachers generally recognize the importance of integrating students' cultural backgrounds into the classroom learning process, the practical implementation of CRP remains limited due to several interrelated challenges. This study identifies four main barriers affecting the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy: teachers' limited understanding of CRP, a lack of culturally relevant teaching materials, curricular and institutional constraints, and challenges related to classroom diversity and student engagement. Teachers often face difficulties in adapting teaching practices due to inadequate professional training, the dominance of Western-oriented ELT teaching materials, exam-focused curriculum demands, and varied student communication patterns influenced by cultural norms.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that teachers have already attempted to adapt teaching materials and learning strategies independently; however, these efforts are hindered by limited institutional support and insufficient time allocation. Consequently, the implementation of culturally responsive practices by teachers

remains partial and inconsistent. This study concludes that professional development programs focused on culturally responsive teaching strategies are needed to strengthen teachers' pedagogical competencies and confidence. Furthermore, curriculum reform and the development of culturally relevant ELT teaching materials are essential to support a more inclusive and contextually meaningful English language learning experience.

In sum, this study contributes to the growing discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy in ELT in Indonesia by highlighting teachers' voices, experiences, and contextual realities. These findings are expected to provide valuable insights for teacher education programs, educational institutions, and future researchers interested in developing equitable and culturally responsive English language education.

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