

How Indonesian EFL Teachers Implement Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Systematic Literature Review

Citra Prasiska Puspita Tohamba
Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia
citra.prasiska@unm.ac.id

*** Corresponding author institutional address:**

Postgraduate Program, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

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Abstract: This study systematically reviews empirical research on the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) by Indonesian teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) published between 2019 and 2025. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol, seven empirical studies were selected and analyzed using thematic synthesis. The findings indicate that CRT implementation in Indonesian EFL contexts predominantly involves (1) integrating local cultural content into instructional materials, (2) fostering inclusive and supportive teacher–student relationships, and (3) adapting pedagogical strategies to students’ diverse cultural backgrounds. These practices contribute to increased student engagement, motivation, and confidence in learning English. The findings are theoretically aligned with Geneva Gay’s framework of culturally responsive pedagogy and Zaretta Hammond’s neurocognitive perspective on culturally responsive teaching. However, the review also reveals that CRT practices in Indonesia remain largely implicit and are not yet grounded in systematic theoretical understanding. This study highlights the need for stronger integration of CRT principles in EFL teacher education and professional development programs. The review contributes to the growing body of CRT research and offers pedagogical insights for culturally inclusive EFL instruction in multicultural contexts.

Keywords: *culturally responsive teaching; EFL teachers; systematic literature review; Indonesian context*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country characterized by a high level of cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and social diversity (Antara & Yogantari, 2018; Azzahra et al., 2024; Khairiah & Walid, 2020; Ruskhan, 2007). This diversity constitutes a defining feature of the educational context, including the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Ardiansyah et al., 2024; Nurosida et al., 2025; Turahman & Mutiarani, 2024). However, English language teaching practices in Indonesia are still frequently dominated by Western-oriented approaches,

particularly in terms of instructional materials, language use examples, and pedagogical strategies (Alfarisy, 2021). This condition potentially creates a disconnect between learning content and students' lived experiences, which may result in low levels of engagement, motivation, and meaningful language learning.

Within this context, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) emerges as a relevant and contextual pedagogical approach (Safitri et al., 2025). CRT emphasizes the importance of connecting the learning process with students' cultural backgrounds, values, and experiences as the primary foundation for developing academic understanding and skills (Fauzi & Rahmatih, 2025; Saputri et al., 2025). Geneva Gay (2018) defines CRT as a teaching practice that utilizes students' cultural characteristics as learning resources to enhance educational effectiveness, equity, and relevance. Thus, culture is positioned not as a barrier, but as an asset in the teaching and learning process. In the context of EFL instruction (Hidayati et al., 2024; Muhammad Adzha Yoanduanda et al., 2025; Najah et al., 2025; Nurosida et al., 2025; Reskyani et al., 2025), Gay's theory emphasizes that English teachers should connect language content with students' cultural experiences (Meihami, 2023). This can be achieved through the selection of topics, texts, and learning activities that are relevant to students' social and cultural lives. In this way, English is not positioned as a "foreign" language detached from students' realities, but rather as a tool for representing and negotiating meaning within their own cultural contexts.

In Indonesia, the application of Gay's theory is highly relevant given the diversity of students' cultural backgrounds, including regional languages, customs, and local values. EFL teachers who apply CRT principles act as facilitators who bridge local culture with global culture as represented through the English language. This approach is also aligned with national education policies that emphasize character education, local wisdom, and contextual learning. Furthermore, Zaretta Hammond (2014) strengthens the concept of CRT through an educational neuroscience perspective. In *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, Hammond explains that learning occurs more optimally when students feel emotionally safe, perceive their cultural identities as valued, and are cognitively engaged. Culturally responsive learning environments help activate higher-order cognitive functions, deepen information processing, and enhance knowledge transfer—elements that are particularly crucial in language learning.

In EFL instruction, the implementation of CRT holds significant potential for bridging the gap between the target language and students' cultural realities (Ibrahim & Mardiana, 2024). EFL teachers who apply CRT can integrate local culture, social values, and students' everyday experiences into learning materials, classroom activities, and instructional interactions (Idrus & Sohid, 2023; Meihami, 2023). This approach not only supports the development of linguistic competence but also fosters students' sense of belonging, self-confidence, and learning motivation.

Although CRT has been widely discussed in international literature, empirical research on the implementation of CRT by EFL teachers in Indonesia remains relatively limited and scattered across various journals. Some studies focus on the integration of local culture in English language teaching, while others examine teachers' and students' perceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy. However, to date, there has been a lack of systematic synthesis of these empirical findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of how CRT is implemented by EFL teachers in Indonesia, what strategies are employed, and what challenges are encountered.

Therefore, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is needed to identify, analyze, and synthesize empirical research findings related to the implementation of CRT in EFL teaching in Indonesia. By employing the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, this study aims to provide a systematic, transparent, and

evidence-based overview of CRT practices among Indonesian EFL teachers during the period 2019–2025. Specifically, this article seeks to address the following research question: How do EFL teachers in Indonesia implement Culturally Responsive Teaching based on empirical studies published between 2019 and 2025?

The findings of this systematic review are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of more inclusive, contextual, and culturally responsive English language teaching in Indonesia, as well as to serve as a reference for educators, researchers, and educational policymakers.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. The SLR approach was selected to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical research examining the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) by EFL teachers in Indonesia (Liu et al., 2025). The use of PRISMA ensures transparency, consistency, and replicability in the review process (Selçuk, 2019).

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted systematically using Google Scholar as the primary database due to its extensive coverage of national and international publications relevant to Indonesian educational contexts. In addition, manual searches were performed in nationally accredited journals (SINTA-indexed) to ensure that no significant studies were overlooked.

The search employed combinations of the following keywords:

- “culturally responsive teaching”
- “English as a Foreign Language (EFL)”
- “English language teaching”
- “English teachers”
- “Indonesia”

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the reviewed studies, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied:

Inclusion criteria:

- Empirical research studies (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods)
- Focus on the implementation, perceptions, or impacts of CRT in EFL instruction
- Conducted in the Indonesian context
- Published between 2019 and 2025
- Written in English or Indonesian and available in full text

Exclusion criteria:

- Conceptual or theoretical papers without empirical data
- Studies conducted outside EFL contexts or outside Indonesia
- Duplicate publications or studies lacking relevant CRT-related data

Study Selection Process (PRISMA)

The study selection followed four main stages of the PRISMA framework: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Yepes-Nuñez et al., 2021). During the identification stage, all retrieved articles were collected and duplicates were removed. The screening stage involved reviewing titles and abstracts to ensure alignment with the research focus.

Articles that passed the screening stage were then subjected to full-text review during the eligibility stage. Studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded with clear justification. Finally, studies that met all criteria were included in the qualitative synthesis.

Data Extraction and Analysis Techniques

Data from the selected studies were systematically extracted using a structured extraction form containing the following information:

- Author(s) and year of publication
- Educational context and level
- Research design and methodology
- Focus of CRT implementation
- Key findings

Data analysis employed a thematic synthesis approach, in which findings from the reviewed studies were grouped into major themes related to CRT implementation in EFL contexts. These themes were then analyzed and interpreted based on the theoretical frameworks of Culturally Responsive Teaching proposed by Geneva Gay and Zaretta Hammond.

Data Validity and Credibility

To enhance the validity and credibility of the review findings, several strategies were applied, including:

- The use of clear and consistent inclusion and exclusion criteria
- A systematic and transparent study selection and analysis process
- Triangulation of findings through cross-study comparison

These strategies were intended to minimize bias and strengthen the reliability of the synthesized results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Based on the synthesis of seven empirical studies that met the PRISMA selection criteria, the findings were organized into four major themes representing how EFL teachers in Indonesia implement Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). These themes align with the conceptual dimensions of CRT proposed by Geneva Gay as well as the neuro-pedagogical principles articulated by Zaretta Hammond.

Table 1. Empirical Studies on the Implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching in EFL Instruction in Indonesia (2019–2025)

No.	Author(s) & Year	Educational Level & Context	Methodology	Main Focus	Key Findings
1	(Muhammad Adzha Yoanduanda et al., 2025)	Junior High School EFL, Samarinda	Mixed methods (pre–post test, observation, interviews)	CRT integration in EFL classrooms	CRT implementation contributed to increased student engagement and learning outcomes; challenges included the availability of cultural materials and teacher readiness.
2	(Najah et al., 2025)	Pre-service English Teacher Education	Qualitative (case study)	Pre-service teachers' perceptions and experiences of CRT	Pre-service teachers recognized the value of CRT but encountered difficulties in implementation due to limited training and resources.
3	(Nurosid a et al., 2025)	SMP Negeri 36 Surabaya	Classroom Action Research (cycles)	CRT in teaching reading comprehension	A CRT-based approach improved students' English reading comprehension through cultural contextualization.
4	(Reskyani et al., 2025)	Universitas Muslim Indonesia	Qualitative (case study)	Students' attitudes	Students perceived CRT as an

				and experiences of CRT in speaking classes	inclusive practice that positively influenced their learning experiences.
5	(Hidayati et al., 2024)	Higher Education (ELT context)	Qualitative	CRT implementation in tertiary ELT	Culturally responsive instructional strategies supported inclusivity and the development of critical thinking skills.
6	(Hidayati et al., 2024)	University-level English Education Program	Qualitative	CRT within the “Emancipated Curriculum”	The study emphasized the need for curriculum adaptation to explicitly incorporate CRT in order to promote inclusive learning.
7	(Muhammad Adzha Yoanduanda et al., 2025)	Secondary School EFL	Observation and interviews	Teachers’ challenges and perceptions of CRT	Teachers understood the value of CRT but required stronger institutional support for effective implementation.

Theme 1: Integration of Local Culture as a Meaningful Learning Resource

All reviewed studies indicate that Indonesian EFL teachers actively integrate local culture, traditional wisdom, and students’ lived experiences into English language teaching materials. These practices include the use of folklore, local social values, cultural traditions, and everyday life contexts as discussion topics, reading texts, and speaking or writing tasks.

From Geneva Gay’s perspective, this practice reflects the principle of a culturally responsive curriculum, in which learning content is adapted to students’ cultural backgrounds to enhance relevance and meaningfulness. Gay emphasizes that instruction rooted in students’

cultural experiences not only improves academic understanding but also fosters positive learner identity.

From Hammond's viewpoint, the use of culturally familiar contexts helps reduce students' affective filters and increase cognitive engagement. When students recognize themselves in instructional materials, the brain enters a state of relaxed alertness, allowing second language processing to occur more effectively. This finding is particularly relevant in the Indonesian EFL context, where cultural distance between the target language and students' lived realities often becomes a learning barrier.

Theme 2: Teacher–Student Relationships and a Socio-Emotionally Safe Learning Environment

The second theme highlights the importance of positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and students as a foundational element of CRT implementation. Several studies report that EFL teachers strive to create inclusive classrooms by respecting students' cultural differences, regional languages, and social backgrounds. This practice is reflected in how teachers respond to students' errors, encourage participation without fear, and facilitate respectful classroom dialogue.

Within Gay's framework, this aligns with the concept of culturally responsive caring, which emphasizes pedagogical concern grounded in an understanding of students' cultural identities. Teachers are positioned not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as facilitators who recognize and value students' voices and identities.

Similarly, Hammond underscores that supportive teacher–student relationships foster trust, which is essential for cognitive development. Emotionally safe learning environments enable EFL students to take linguistic risks, such as attempting to speak English without fear of correction or stigmatization. This explains why the reviewed studies consistently report increased student participation and self-confidence.

Theme 3: Adaptation of Pedagogical Strategies to Students' Cultural Diversity

Another key finding indicates that Indonesian EFL teachers adapt instructional strategies to align with students' cultural characteristics, including the use of group work, collaborative discussions, and dialogic approaches. These strategies provide opportunities for students to share cultural perspectives while developing communicative English skills.

According to Geneva Gay, adapting pedagogical strategies is central to CRT because learning is inseparable from how students construct meaning based on their cultural backgrounds. Culturally responsive teachers are able to select methods that support collective learning styles and social values embraced by students.

From Hammond's perspective, collaborative strategies support students' progression from dependent learners to independent learners through social and cognitive scaffolding. Peer interaction strengthens meaning-making processes and facilitates more natural internalization of the target language. In Indonesia's predominantly collectivist cultural context, these strategies are both culturally relevant and pedagogically effective.

Theme 4: Challenges in CRT Implementation and the Need for Teacher Capacity Building

Despite the implementation of CRT practices, the review reveals that most EFL teachers have not yet applied CRT in a systematic and theory-driven manner. Many CRT-related practices are carried out intuitively, without a deep conceptual understanding of the frameworks proposed by Gay or Hammond. Additionally, limited professional training, rigid curricula, and strong emphasis on cognitive outcomes present significant challenges.

From Gay's perspective, these conditions highlight the need for stronger teacher preparation programs that cultivate critical cultural awareness and pedagogical competence. Hammond likewise emphasizes the importance of professional development that helps teachers understand the interconnection between culture and the neuroscience of learning.

These findings suggest that the success of CRT implementation in Indonesia is highly dependent on institutional support, particularly within teacher education and continuous professional development programs.

Discussion

The findings of this review demonstrate that CRT practices in Indonesian EFL classrooms largely reflect contextual responsiveness rather than explicit theoretical application. The integration of local culture into instructional content aligns closely with Geneva Gay's principle of culturally responsive curriculum, which emphasizes the use of students' cultural knowledge as an academic resource (Gay, 2002, 2018). By contextualizing English materials within familiar cultural frameworks, teachers enhance instructional relevance and support students' identity affirmation as language learners (Sanjaya et al., 2025).

From a neurocognitive perspective, as articulated by Zaretta Hammond (2014), culturally familiar content reduces affective barriers and promotes a state of emotional safety conducive to deeper cognitive engagement (Alexander, 2021). The reported increases in student motivation and participation suggest that CRT practices contribute to more efficient cognitive processing in EFL learning, particularly in contexts where language anxiety is prevalent.

The emphasis on supportive teacher–student relationships further reinforces Hammond's assertion that trust and relational safety are prerequisites for higher-order learning. In collectivist cultural contexts such as Indonesia, relational pedagogies are especially significant, as learning is often socially mediated (Asri et al., 2025; Efendy et al., 2023; Munandar & Newton, 2021). The findings indicate that CRT-based relational practices enable students to take linguistic risks and engage more actively in communicative tasks.

Similarly, the adaptation of pedagogical strategies to cultural learning preferences supports Gay's view that effective teaching must be aligned with students' sociocultural orientations. Collaborative and dialogic approaches not only resonate with collectivist values but also facilitate scaffolding processes that promote learner autonomy over time (Muzaffarova, 2025; Najah et al., 2025; Reskyani et al., 2025). This convergence between cultural alignment and pedagogical effectiveness highlights CRT's dual academic and social value.

Despite these positive outcomes, the findings also reveal a critical limitation: CRT implementation remains largely implicit and fragmented. The absence of systematic theoretical grounding suggests a gap between classroom practice and scholarly CRT frameworks. This gap underscores the need for structured integration of CRT principles into EFL teacher education curricula and sustained professional development programs.

Overall, the discussion indicates that while Indonesian EFL teachers demonstrate culturally responsive tendencies in practice, the transformative potential of CRT can only be fully realized through explicit theoretical engagement, institutional support, and policy alignment. Strengthening these dimensions would enable CRT to function not merely as contextual adaptation but as a coherent pedagogical framework that advances equity and effectiveness in EFL education.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review demonstrates that Indonesian EFL teachers implement Culturally Responsive Teaching primarily through culturally relevant materials, inclusive relational practices, and adaptive pedagogical strategies. While these practices positively influence student engagement and confidence, CRT implementation remains largely implicit and insufficiently theorized. Strengthening CRT integration in EFL teacher education and professional development is therefore essential. By aligning classroom practice with the

theoretical contributions of Geneva Gay and Zaretta Hammond, Indonesian EFL instruction can more effectively address cultural diversity and promote equitable learning outcomes.

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