

# CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND LINGUISTIC AWARENESS AMONG HIGH-PERFORMING EFL TEACHERS: INTERCULTURAL INSIGHTS FROM INDONESIAN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS

## *ENSINO CULTURALMENTE SENSÍVEL E CONSCIÊNCIA LINGUÍSTICA ENTRE PROFESSORES DE INGLÊS COMO LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA DE ALTO DESEMPENHO: PERSPETIVAS INTERCULTURAIS DE INTERNAÇÕES ISLÂMICAS NA INDONÉSIA*

Article received on: 8/29/2025

Article accepted on: 11/28/2025

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

### Abstract

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is widely recognized as a framework for managing linguistic diversity, cultural identity, and equality in English-as-a-Foreign Language (EFL) settings. This study looks at how high-performing EFL teachers in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools conceptualize and implement CRT using linguistically informed English Language Teaching (ELT) approaches. Using qualitative data from in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and reflective writings, the study examines how twelve teachers incorporate cultural sensitivity, pragmatic awareness, and intercultural communication competence into their daily education. The findings reveal three key aspects of their practice: (1) linguistic-cultural scaffolding that validates students' first-language resources and discourse norms; (2) pedagogical responsiveness through culturally grounded materials, identity-affirming interaction, and intercultural dialogue; and (3) teacher agency in navigating institutional constraints. These teachers view language as both a communicative system and a cultural resource, weighing grammatical precision against intercultural meaning-making. The study contends that high-performing EFL teachers

### Resumo

*O Ensino Culturalmente Sensível (CRT) é amplamente reconhecido como uma estrutura para gerenciar a diversidade linguística, a identidade cultural e a igualdade em ambientes de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira (EFL). Este estudo analisa como professores de EFL de alto desempenho em internatos islâmicos indonésios conceituam e implementam o CRT usando abordagens de Ensino da Língua Inglesa (ELT) linguisticamente informadas. Utilizando dados qualitativos de entrevistas aprofundadas, observações em sala de aula e escritos reflexivos, o estudo examina como doze professores incorporam a sensibilidade cultural, a consciência pragmática e a competência em comunicação intercultural em sua educação diária. Os resultados revelam três aspectos-chave de sua prática: (1) estrutura linguístico-cultural que valida os recursos da primeira língua e as normas discursivas dos alunos; (2) capacidade de resposta pedagógica por meio de materiais culturalmente fundamentados, interação que afirma a identidade e diálogo intercultural; e (3) agência do professor na navegação pelas restrições institucionais. Esses professores veem a língua como um sistema comunicativo e um recurso cultural,*



serve as intercultural mediators whose linguistic awareness promotes equal participation and global readiness. Implications include incorporating CRT-linguistics ideas into teacher education, changing curricula to emphasize multilingual repertoires, and increasing institutional support for culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy. By combining CRT, linguistics, and intercultural communication, the study presents an empirically grounded model of linguistically aware CRT for EFL settings.

**Keywords:** Culturally Responsive Teaching. EFL Teachers. Linguistics. English Language Teaching. Intercultural Communication. Teacher Identity.

*ponderando a precisão gramatical em relação à construção de significado intercultural. O estudo argumenta que professores de EFL de alto desempenho atuam como mediadores interculturais cuja consciência linguística promove a participação igualitária e a preparação global. As implicações incluem a incorporação de ideias da linguística CRT na formação de professores, a mudança dos currículos para enfatizar repertórios multilíngues e o aumento do apoio institucional à pedagogia cultural e linguisticamente responsiva. Ao combinar CRT, linguística e comunicação intercultural, o estudo apresenta um modelo empiricamente fundamentado de CRT linguisticamente consciente para ambientes de EFL.*

**Palavras-chave:** Ensino culturalmente responsivo. Professores de EFL. Linguística. Ensino da língua inglesa. Comunicação intercultural. Identidade do professor.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In today's globalised culture, English language education (ELT) has evolved beyond grammatical precision and linguistic ability to promote multicultural understanding, intercultural awareness, and social responsibility. The rise of English as an international lingua franca has turned language schools into dynamic settings where students interact with varied identities, values, and worldviews (Baker, 2024; Zhang, 2023). As a result, English teaching is no longer only about transmitting linguistic structures; it has evolved into an intercultural communication practice in which teachers and students constantly negotiate meaning across cultures and perspectives (Liddicoat, 2024).

This pedagogical shift necessitates English teachers serving as intercultural mediators, connecting learners' local cultural identities to the communicative norms of global English use (Byram, 2021; Dervin, 2016). As a result, language teaching evolves into a process of cultural translation and ethical engagement, rather than just linguistic instruction. Within this changing landscape, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has developed as an essential pedagogical technique that combines linguistic competency, cultural awareness, and equity and inclusion principles (Gay, 2018), (Ladson-Billings, 2021). CRT promotes teachers to see their students' cultural and linguistic origins as

assets rather than deficits, emphasizing cultural awareness as critical to effective English instruction. In the context of global English, CRT provides a paradigm for balancing communicative proficiency with cultural sensitivity, preparing students to participate ethically and confidently in international encounters (Paris & Alim, 2017),(Mehta, 2024).

Originally developed in multicultural education (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995) CRT promotes the recognition of students' cultural backgrounds as advantages in the learning process. It promotes teachers to modify teaching methods, classroom interaction, and evaluation in ways that respect students' cultural backgrounds. Recent research has expanded CRT beyond Western schooling to the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where the confluence of language and culture is especially important (Jha, 2023; Nunan & Choi, 2010). Students enter EFL classrooms with complicated linguistic repertoires that represent their regional languages, social hierarchies, and identity positions. Teachers who understand these linguistic facts can assist students in developing multicultural meanings while learning English as a global language.

Linguistics, particularly sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics, has helped us understand how language reflects cultural perspectives. From this perspective, meaning is shaped not just by language but also by the contextual and cultural contexts of interaction (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013; Liddicoat, 2024). Thus, successful language teaching must combine linguistic knowledge with cultural awareness in order to generate communicatively competent and culturally sensitive speakers.

Indonesia, being a multilingual and multicultural country, provides an unusually rich context for researching culturally responsive EFL training. With over 700 native languages spoken across the archipelago, students bring a diverse set of linguistic resources and cultural views to English classrooms (Musgrave, 2014; Sneddon, 2003). English is seen as a foreign language in Indonesia, taught largely for academic mobility and international communication, whereas Bahasa Indonesia serves as the national lingua franca, uniting the country's linguistic variety (Kirkpatrick, 2010; Lauder, 2008). As a result, EFL teachers must cross numerous language and cultural layers to develop and deliver instruction that respects students' local identities while reaching global communicative competence (Renandya & Widodo, 2016).

Among Indonesia's numerous educational environments, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) offer a distinct and contextually rich environment for investigating

culturally responsive pedagogy in English language instruction. These institutions combine academic learning with Islamic moral and character education, emphasizing communal living, religious discipline, and obedience to authority (Lukens-bull, 2015; Tanjung, 2022). Pesantren students often originate from many regions, bringing with them different dialects, cultural values, and communication conventions that improve classroom interactions (Edi et al., 2025). Teachers in these settings are required to reconcile global linguistic norms with local ethical and cultural values, resulting in a delicate balance between cultural preservation and global engagement. Despite these complications, pesantren have regularly generated high-achieving English learners, typically supervised by teachers who use culturally and linguistically relevant tactics without formal pedagogical training (Sari, 2023; Umar, 2022).

While research on CRT has grown internationally, actual studies linking CRT to linguistic awareness in EFL contexts are sparse, particularly in Asia. Most previous research in Indonesia has described teachers' efforts to incorporate local culture into English materials (Mahardika, 2018; Romrome & Ena, 2022) or to promote cultural discussion, but few have looked at how teachers use linguistic knowledge such as pragmatics, discourse, and sociolinguistics to implement culturally responsive pedagogy. The majority of research views culture and language as distinct entities rather than as mutually constitutive. Furthermore, existing material rarely focuses on high-performing instructors, whose pupils routinely outperform national or international English proficiency benchmarks and whose classroom practices could serve as models for effective CRT-linguistics integration.

Another study need is the underrepresentation of pesantren in international ELT and intercultural communication discourses. These institutions are typically viewed via a theological or sociological lens, rather than as hubs of sophisticated educational innovation. By investigating the experiences of pesantren instructors, this study provides a new perspective that blends intercultural, linguistic, and faith-based dimensions of teaching an intersection that has been largely lacking in previous research.

This study is important for three reasons. First, it examines the linguistic dimension of culturally responsive teaching, demonstrating that responsiveness is manifested not just through cultural content but also through micro-interactional language use. Second, it emphasizes the pedagogical agency of Indonesian teachers who creatively apply CRT concepts in the face of exam-oriented curricula and inadequate technology

resources. Third, it adds to our understanding of how intercultural communication occurs in Islamic educational settings, increasing the cultural and geographic breadth of CRT work.

From a policy standpoint, the study provides evidence that teacher-education programs should contain culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (CLRT) competences, encouraging teachers to become reflective practitioners who can mediate between local realities and global communicative expectations. For scholars, the findings provide empirical support for theorizing CRT in multilingual faith-based situations, which are frequently overlooked in dominating ELT research.

Building on these demands, the current study contributes to theory and practice in a variety of ways. Theoretically, it presents a three-part framework that connects Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), Linguistics, and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), contending that linguistic awareness serves as an operational bridge between culture and communication. This integrated lens illustrates how teachers use cultural sensitivity to specific linguistic choices, interactional patterns, and discourse practices.

Empirically, the study presents qualitative evidence of how high-performing EFL teachers in Indonesian pesantren conceptualize and implement CRT using linguistically informed tactics like translanguaging, pragmatic comparison, and culturally contextualized grammar instruction. It focuses on the methods by which teachers maintain intercultural discourse, promote equal participation, and negotiate institutional limits.

The study has pedagogical implications for teacher education, curriculum change, and classroom creativity. It encourages educators to see students' multilingual repertoires as resources for meaning-making and to create materials that reflect their lived cultural experiences. Finally, our study confirms that language training based on CRT and linguistics not only improves communication competence, but also builds empathy, respect, and intercultural understanding qualities required for global citizenship in the twenty-first century.

Finally, this study identifies Culturally Responsive Teaching as a developing paradigm that integrates linguistic awareness, intercultural communication, and equity into English language instruction. By investigating high-performing EFL teachers in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools, it investigates how pedagogy can be both

internationally communicative and locally grounded. This study aims to demonstrate not just what culturally responsive teaching looks like in linguistically diverse classrooms, but also how it functions as an intercultural practice influenced by teachers' identities, values, and institutional realities. The next part discusses the theoretical and empirical literature that underpins this study, as well as the conceptual framework that connects CRT, linguistics, and intercultural communicative competence.

Another pressing research issue is the underrepresentation of pesantren in international ELT and intercultural communication discourses. These institutions are often analyzed from a theological or sociological standpoint, rather than as centers of educational innovation or intercultural learning (Lukens-bull, 2015; Siddiq, 2023). In actuality, pesantren are complex educational ecosystems that combine faith-based principles, multilingual realities, and global aspirations. This study provides a fresh viewpoint on English teaching by studying the experiences of pesantren instructors, combining intercultural, linguistic, and religious dimensions an intersection that has been mostly lacking in earlier research (Pendidikan, 2020; Wati et al., 2025).

This study is significant for three main reasons. First, it investigates the linguistic dimension of culturally responsive teaching, demonstrating that responsiveness is expressed not only through cultural content but also through micro-interactional language use, such as pragmatic choices, register variation, and discourse negotiation (Liddicoat, 2024; Taguchi & Roever, 2020). Second, it emphasizes the pedagogical agency of Indonesian teachers who creatively implement CRT principles despite exam-oriented curricula and restricted technical resources (Bal, 2022; Mehta, 2024). Third, it helps to understand how intercultural communication occurs in Islamic educational settings, broadening the cultural and geographical breadth of CRT research (Mehta, 2024), (Sutiyono et al., 2023).

In terms of policy, the study advocates for the integration of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching (CLRT) competencies into teacher-education programs, allowing teachers to act as reflective practitioners who mediate between local realities and global communicative demands (Gay, 2018; Villegas & Lucas, 2018). For scholars, the findings give empirical underpinning for theorizing CRT in multilingual, faith-based educational environments, which are frequently disregarded in prevailing ELT frameworks (Liddicoat, 2024; Zhang, 2023).

Building on these demands, the current study adds to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it presents a triadic framework combining Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), Linguistics, and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), with linguistic awareness serving as the operational link between culture and communication (Byram, 2021; Dearsdorff & Jones, 2023). This integrated framework explains how teachers apply cultural sensitivity to specific linguistic judgments, interactional styles, and discourse practices that promote intercultural engagement.

The study provides qualitative evidence on how high-performing EFL teachers in Indonesian pesantren use linguistically informed practices like translanguaging, pragmatic comparison, and culturally contextualized grammar instruction to implement CRT (Paris & Alim, 2017; Wei & García, 2022). These initiatives demonstrate how instructors can preserve intercultural conversation, promote equitable participation, and navigate institutional constraints while upholding faith-based moral ideals (Lukens-bull, 2015; Nasution et al., 2024).

The study has important pedagogical implications for teacher education, curriculum reform, and classroom creativity. It encourages educators to see students' multilingual repertoires as resources for meaning-making and to create products that represent their lived cultural experiences (Anugrah, 2024; Karkar Esperat, 2024). Finally, the findings confirm that language education based on CRT and linguistics not only improves communicative competence but also fosters empathy, respect, and intercultural understanding all of which are necessary for global citizenship in the twenty-first century (Byram, 2020b; Dervin, 2016).

In summary, this study positions Culturally Responsive Teaching as an evolving paradigm that unites linguistic awareness, intercultural communication, and equity in English language education. By studying the practices of high-performing EFL teachers in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools, it reveals how pedagogy can remain both internationally communicative and locally grounded. The research consequently intends to highlight not just what culturally responsive teaching looks like in linguistically diverse environments, but also how it functions as an intercultural practice impacted by teachers' identities, values, and institutional realities. The following section examines the theoretical and empirical literature that underpins this study and gives the conceptual framework that connects CRT, linguistics, and intercultural communicative competence.

## 2 METHOD

### 2.1 Research design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate how high-performing EFL teachers envision and provide culturally responsive and linguistically aware education. Phenomenology is well-suited to comprehending individuals' lived experiences as they make sense of their teaching practices and professional realities (Manen, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). This approach derives meaning from participants' subjective interpretations, emotions, and thoughts rather than externally imposed categories (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Phenomenology highlights the substance of experience: how instructors perceive, act out, and reflect on their classroom interactions as representations of cultural and linguistic understanding (Vagle, 2018). This attitude is consistent with the study's goal of illuminating how instructors' intercultural awareness, linguistic ability, and pedagogical agency interact to shape responsive classroom discourse. According to Tracy (2024) qualitative research enables researchers to grasp the complexities and situatedness of human experiences through detailed description, narrative depth, and interpretive sensitivity.

This study's phenomenological viewpoint is also consistent with constructivist paradigms, which regard reality as socially created through interaction and language (Lincoln & Guba, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Teachers' practices of integrating language and culture are thus viewed as interpretive acts dynamic reactions to environmental, institutional, and personal elements (Dervin & Gross, 2016; Ortaçtepe, 2015). Rather than generalizing results, this approach seeks to provide contextually grounded insights into how culturally sensitive and linguistically aware pedagogy is lived and practiced in Indonesian pesantren classrooms.

Phenomenology was chosen above other qualitative traditions like grounded theory or case study because it focuses on the essence and significance of shared experiences rather than developing new theories or examining a specific instance (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Giorgi, 2009). This approach enables a nuanced understanding of how teachers view their instructional acts via the lenses of culture, language, and equity.

The study took an interpretive-constructivist approach, emphasizing depth over breadth. The data analysis aimed to uncover patterns of reflection, adaptation, and linguistic-cultural mediation in teachers' lived pedagogical experiences. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argue that interpretive qualitative investigation necessitates reflexivity and researcher transparency in order to account for how the researcher's positionality affects data interpretation. To ensure authenticity and trustworthiness, this study foregrounded reflexive journaling and iterative contact with participants.

Finally, this phenomenological design allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how high-performing EFL teachers apply theoretical principles of CRT and linguistics to culturally meaningful classroom practices, bridging theory and practice in ways that statistical or experimental designs cannot capture.

## **2.2 Research setting and participants**

The study was carried out at three Islamic boarding senior high schools (pesantren) in East Java, Indonesia. Each institution integrates the national academic curriculum with Islamic moral education to create a learning atmosphere that values discipline, community solidarity, and multilingual interaction (Lukens-bull, 2015; Pahrurroji, 2009). These pesantren depict hybrid educational systems in which religious values coexist with state educational requirements, resulting in distinct sociolinguistic and cultural dynamics (Baker, 2024; Harizaj, 2017).

The schools serve students from several provinces who speak Javanese, Madurese, Sundanese, and Bahasa Indonesia, with English serving as a required foreign language in both academic and extracurricular programs (Muhammad & Purbani, 2024; Putri et al., 2025). This linguistic diversity reflects Indonesia's larger multilingual landscape, where English learning coexists with strong local and religious identities (Dervin, 2016; Lee & Canagarajah, 2021).

This study focuses on three outstanding teachers: teacher AT, CH, and NR, whose classroom practices demonstrated unique yet complimentary expressions of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (CLRT). All participants had at least a bachelor's degree in English education, and six had master's degrees in applied linguistics or TESOL, indicating a professionalisation tendency among EFL educators in Indonesian faith-based institutions (Nurbatra, 2022; Ortaçtepe, 2015). Their teaching experience

spanned from six to eighteen years, providing valuable insights into prolonged pedagogical reflection and intercultural practice in pesantren-based ELT settings (Abdurrizal et al., 2022).

### **2.3 Data collection procedures**

To ensure triangulation, data were collected between January and June 2025 from numerous sources. Semi-structured interviews (in English and Indonesian) probed instructors' comprehension, tactics, and obstacles in adopting CRT and linguistically informed pedagogy. Classroom observations (18 sessions in all) documented real-time exchanges, teacher-student dialog, and cultural references made during instruction. Reflective notebooks and lesson plans were collected as records, providing insight into teachers' long-term reflections and material selection. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. Field notes were obtained during observations to document classroom language use and intercultural interactions. To ensure reliability, all transcripts were translated and checked by members.

### **2.4 Data analysis**

The data was analyzed using (Braun & Clarke, 2022) thematic analysis paradigm, which included deductive and inductive coding. Deductive codes were influenced by the conceptual framework (CRT-Linguistics-ICC), whereas inductive codes came from patterns and meanings in teachers' narratives. The analysis was conducted in six stages: (1) data familiarization, (2) initial coding, (3) theme generation, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition, and (6) report writing. The data was managed manually. To ensure analytic rigour, two EFL researchers conducted peer debriefings to review coding consistency and theme logic. Themes were validated by triangulation of interviews, observations, and documents, which increased credibility.

### **2.5 Researchers' reflexivity and ethics**

The researcher's expertise as an EFL instructor and former pesantren teacher provided a complex insider-outsider perspective. Reflexive journaling was used to track

biases and emotional positions. The Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Islam Lamongan provided ethical approval. Participants gave written consent, and pseudonyms were utilized throughout. Data confidentiality was guaranteed, and participants might withdraw at any time.

### 3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative analysis of interviews, classroom observations, and teaching documents revealed that the three high-performing EFL teachers AT, CH, and NR used complex, reflective, and contextually responsive teaching practices that incorporated both cultural and linguistic dimensions of English language instruction. Their techniques demonstrate Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) as more than just an attitude, but a collection of linguistically informed educational strategies interwoven in daily classroom conversation. The findings are divided into three interconnected themes that depict the dynamic interaction of teachers' cultural awareness, linguistic ability, and professional agency. Theme 1, Linguistic-Cultural Scaffolding for Classroom Discourse, investigates how teachers used students' first languages and cultural knowledge to moderate English acquisition. Theme 2, CRT-Linguistic Strategies in Practice, focuses on teachers' classroom innovations that integrate linguistic awareness to intercultural competence development. Finally, Theme 3, Challenges, Constraints, and Navigation, addresses the institutional, pedagogical, and sociocultural issues that influence teachers' ability to maintain CRT-informed instruction in the pesantren context.

#### 3.1 Finding

##### *3.1.1 Theme 1: linguistic-cultural scaffolding for classroom discourse*

By incorporating their students' native tongues, regional cultural settings, and sociolinguistic identities into their English instruction, all three teachers purposefully scaffold classroom conversation. Deliberate translanguaging and pragmatic awareness strategies that recognized learners' native tongues as cultural and cognitive assets rather than barriers were reflected in this scaffolding (Burton et al., 2025; Zhang, 2023).

Before transitioning to English, AT often encouraged students to brainstorm in their mother tongue, either Javanese or Madurese. She clarified:

Before switching to English for the speaking exercise, I invite students to discuss the subject in their native tongue. This enables students to openly express their thoughts before considering the accuracy of their English.

It was observed that bilingual pair work frequently came before English-only conversation, allowing for easier meaning negotiation and a more thorough conceptual grasp. This approach is a prime example of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (CLRT), which uses students' existing repertoires to boost confidence and understanding (Gay, 2018), (Pawan et al., 2023).

In a similar vein, CH deliberately chose readings and analogies that were culturally recognized. She created a text about Madura's fishing communities and used it in one lecture to contrast teamwork and community collaboration in English-speaking settings. This method brought attention to cultural similarities and differences while also raising student participation. According to research, teaching that is connected to students' cultural schemas improves motivation and relevance (Abdurrizal et al., 2022; Jeon et al., 2022).

NR, who is renowned for her accuracy in language, helped pupils observe speech coherence and pragmatic signals. She inquired: *“What do you mean when you say “you know” or “like” in English? In a formal email, would you say that?”* Her reflective questioning encouraged metapragmatic awareness, which is the notion that pragmatic competence entails contextual, relational, and cultural sensitivity in addition to grammar (Liddicoat, 2018; Taguchi & Roever, 2020).

Across these classes, linguistic-cultural scaffolding legitimized students' native languages and promoted a sense of community. Teachers served as intercultural mediators, connecting form, meaning, and culture a process shown to promote both academic achievement and cultural identity affirmation (Nurbatra, 2022; Putrawan et al., 2022).

### 3.1.2 Theme 2: *crt-linguistic strategies in practice*

Participants identified three sub-strategies under this theme: a) culturally relevant materials and tasks, b) student identity Development and peer interaction, and c) explicit intercultural communication competence (ICC) development.

#### 3.1.2.1 *Culturally relevant materials and tasks*

All three teachers created resources that reflected their students' cultural and language experiences. AT created a local storytelling project in which students interviewed elders about traditional proverbs in Indonesian or regional dialects, translated them into English, and explored moral principles in the classroom. This initiative incorporated translation, discourse transformation, and intercultural inquiry, enabling students to connect linguistic form with social significance.

Teachers reported that culturally embedded projects increased motivation and improved comprehension. These techniques are consistent with research indicating that CRT necessitates recontextualizing curriculum content to reflect learners' social and linguistic environments (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Sundberg, 2013). Translation and rephrasing activities helped students understand register variation, discourse structure, and pragmatic nuance (Liddicoat, 2024; Wei & García, 2022). CH, in particular, included cultural issues into grammar classes, explaining abstract language rules using examples of Islamic ideals or local customs. She explains: "*When teaching conditional statements, I utilize examples from everyday life, such as 'If you help others, God will help you.'*" *Students connect easily.*"

This approach exemplifies culturally sustainable pedagogy, in which local cultural values impact the moral and communicative aspects of English learning (Pan, 2023; Paris & Alim, 2017).

#### 3.1.2.2 *Student identity development and interaction with peers*

As part of their CRT method, each instructor prioritized student identity development and cross-linguistic peer engagement. NR implemented a "language autobiography" project, which asked students to describe how their mother tongue

affected their identity and how they negotiate meaning in English. Students then discussed their reflections in bilingual groups.

NR noted that this method enabled students to "see themselves in the language," assisting them in developing hybrid, multicultural identities. Identity work based on CRT minimizes alienation and increases engagement by confirming learners' cultural and linguistic selves (Kehl et al., 2024; Najah, Syifaun, et al., 2025).

AT also fostered cross-linguistic peer mentoring, pairing students from various regions to collaborate on brief text translations. This increased intercultural empathy and collaboration, which is consistent with Byram's (2020) belief that intercultural competence develops through dialogic engagement. According to research, collaborative, reflective learning increases self-efficacy and metalinguistic awareness (Dervin, 2023; Norton & Pavlenko, 2018).

### **3.1.2.3 Explicit ICC development**

All three teachers included explicit teaching in intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in their lessons. CH explained: "*We compared polite inquiries in Indonesian, Javanese, and English. We role-play email writing and explore potential misunderstandings.*"

These classes covered pragmatic competency (linguistics), cultural understanding (CRT), and global communication skills (ELT). Such integration operationalizes ICC, as defined by Byram (2020) and Deardorff (2020), which is a synergy of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and cultural competencies.

NR extended this approach by modeling intercultural interactions. In one observation, students practiced responding to potential miscommunications between Indonesian and Western classmates. This reflective activity promoted empathy and cultural curiosity, both of which are basic ICC characteristics (Li & Kulich, 2025; Suharni et al., 2024).

Teachers used these tactics to enhance ELT beyond grammatical instruction, producing culturally conscious global communicators. Their classes exemplified the intersection of CRT and linguistics, indicating that explicit, reflective language practice is essential for culturally responsive instruction (Dervin, 2023; Liddicoat, 2024).

### 3.1.3 Theme 3: challenges, constraints, and navigation

Despite their skill and devotion, AT, CH, and NR experienced a number of institutional and environmental hurdles to maintaining CRT-linguistics integration. (a) Institutional and systemic constraints Teachers cited inflexible curricula, exam-driven instruction, and inadequate resources as significant obstacles. CH commented: *"I would like to construct more culturally relevant projects, but the exam system requires grammar drills and textbook completion."* This tension echoes global findings that standardized testing contexts limit teachers' authority in applying CRT techniques (Mehta, 2024; Byrd & Alexander, 2021). (c) Professional development and knowledge gaps. Although all three teachers displayed advanced reflective practice, they reported limited access to formal professional development in CRT and applied linguistics. NR shared: *"My MA classes did not go into great detail about translanguaging or pragmatic skills. I learned from observing others and reading publications."*

Such self-directed learning highlights the importance of formal CRT-linguistics training in EFL teacher education (Pan, 2023; Villegas & Lucas, 2018). (c) Student and community factors. Cultural and linguistic variety among students occasionally presented practical issues in grouping and assignment design. AT explains: *"My students speak several different languages, including Javanese, Madurese, and Sasak. Sometimes I have to deliberately combine groups so that everyone may participate."*

Furthermore, pesantren community expectations, which emphasise discipline and religious education, sometimes hampered exploratory, discussion-based approaches. CH noticed: *"We must preserve classroom discipline and respect religious standards, so I tailor intercultural assignments to reflect pesantren values."* These limits highlight the context-sensitive nature of culturally responsive teaching, which necessitates ongoing negotiation of institutional ethos and intercultural openness (Dervin, 2016; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013; Liddicoat, 2024).

Overall, the results show that AT, CH, and NR practise culturally sensitive and linguistically aware teaching through translanguaging, identity affirmation, and intercultural task design. Despite structural limitations, their classrooms use CRT as an evolving, context-based approach that connects language form, cultural meaning, and global citizenship.

### 3.2 Discussion

Data analysis revealed three major elements that shed light on how high-performing EFL teachers implement culturally and linguistically responsive teaching in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools: Linguistic and cultural scaffolding in classroom interaction. Teacher's Identity as Intercultural Mediator Institutional Ecology and Pedagogic Agency These topics demonstrate how instructors purposefully use linguistic awareness and cultural sensitivity to promote equity, participation, and intercultural competence

### 3.3 Linguistic and cultural scaffolding in classroom interaction

The professors displayed a nuanced understanding of how linguistic forms express cultural meaning. Atika frequently contextualized language instruction with familiar local issues including family traditions, national holidays, and community duty. For example, during a session on past tense, she asked students to discuss their Ramadan or Independence Day events. This technique provided a pragmatic foundation, allowing pupils to connect abstract verbal structures to meaningful circumstances.

Chusunun used translanguaging purposefully, switching between Bahasa Indonesia, Javanese, and English to emphasize small pragmatic differences, especially in courtesy statements. For example, she described how the English phrase "Could you please...?" corresponds to the Javanese indirectness used to express respect. This method aligns with Wei & García (2022) view of translanguaging as a tool for improving intercultural understanding, rather than an indication of lack.

Nuril highlighted comparative discourse by asking students to consider cultural disparities in greetings, praises, and refusals. She inquired, "How do you greet elders in your own language? "How do you say thanks in English?" Through these analytical questioning, students came to see language as more than just vocabulary, but also as a reflection of social ideals.

These examples demonstrate how language awareness, particularly in pragmatics and sociolinguistics, is critical to culturally sensitive instruction. Teachers' scaffolding transformed classrooms into intercultural communication laboratories, where students learned how to negotiate meaning across cultures. Similar findings are reported by

Ajabshir and Vahdany (2017) and Celik (2019), who claim that culturally relevant discourse activities improve EFL learners' pragmatic ability and motivation.

### **3.4 Teacher's identity as intercultural mediator**

The participants saw themselves as intercultural mediators, balancing global English norms with local moral frameworks. NR claimed that "My goal is not simply to teach English, but also to assist kids tolerate differences." She believed that teachers should model openness while adhering to Islamic ethical bounds, which aligned with Dervin (2023) concept of dialogic interculturality.

When responding to students' cultural misunderstandings, AT emphasized empathy and patience, noting, "Some students believe Western culture means independence without respect. We stress that comprehending culture entails enjoying rather than mimicking. Her method exemplifies Byram (2020) notion of critical cultural awareness, which encourages students to question cultural assumptions while respecting their own traditions.

CH's assessment of pupils' accents demonstrated her commitment to linguistic inclusivity: "Even if the accent is Madurese or Indian-like, the main thing is meaning." By normalizing accent diversity, she questioned deficit theories and recognized kids' linguistic identities. Such sentiments support Lee and Canagarajah (2021) claim that global Englishes should welcome many accents and identities rather than imposing native-speaker norms.

Collectively, these teachers' self-perceptions reflect identity work that combines faith, professionalism, and intercultural empathy. Their practices represent intercultural communication competence not as a static talent, but as a moral and relational position developed via reflection and interaction (Ali et al., 2023).

### **3.5 Institutional ecology and pedagogic agency**

Teachers demonstrated strong professional devotion, yet they worked inside limited institutional systems. Participants reported limited access to digital media, a lack of structured CRT workshops, and exam-focused curricula centered on TOEFL or IELTS

preparation. CH noted, "Public schools receive numerous workshops; here, we only focus on instruction."

Despite these limits, instructors used pedagogical agency (Chen, 2024) to tailor courses to local requirements. They made culturally appropriate materials out of communal anecdotes, Islamic narratives, and local proverbs. For example, AT used a writing assignment to describe a local charity event during Ramadan, bridging English composition with social responsibility. This resourcefulness exemplifies what Pan (2023) calls contextual professional learning, in which teachers develop knowledge through local invention.

Teachers also engaged in collaborative reflection by holding informal peer talks and sharing issues and instructional strategies. This collegial culture compensates for structural scarcity, replicating Najah, Nabilah, et al. (2025) discovery that Indonesian teachers maintain CRT practices through community support rather than official policy demands.

These data show that culturally sensitive and linguistically aware teaching flourishes through teacher-driven adaptation based on intercultural purpose and local understanding, rather than institutional dictates.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

This study looked at how high-performing EFL teachers in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools use linguistic and intercultural perspectives to deliver culturally responsive teaching. The findings show that CRT in EFL instruction goes beyond cultural content selection and includes language-based mediation, identity negotiation, and reflective practice. Teachers serve as intercultural mediators, creatively combining worldwide English norms with local sociocultural and religious beliefs. Their classrooms show that linguistic awareness of speech, pragmatics, and sociolinguistic variation is critical for equitable and meaningful learning.

Despite minimal institutional support, instructors demonstrated considerable professional agency, demonstrating that culturally responsive pedagogy is maintained via reflection, collaboration, and moral commitment. Thus, the study frames linguistically informed CRT as an empowering model for EFL situations that aim to strike a balance between global competency and local roots.

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### **Authors' Contribution**

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### **Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

### **How to cite this article (APA)**

Fatmawaty, R., Retnaningdyah, P., & Mustofa, A. CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND LINGUISTIC AWARENESS AMONG HIGH-PERFORMING EFL TEACHERS: INTERCULTURAL INSIGHTS FROM INDONESIAN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS. *Veredas Do Direito*, e234173.

<https://doi.org/10.18623/rvd.v23.n1.4173>