

Students Perception of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in English Language Learning in East Kalimantan

Nurfani Yulianti

2111102421029@umkt.ac.id

Abdul Halim

ah918@umkt.ac.id

Ibrahim

ibr195@umkt.ac.id

Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur

ABSTRACT

This research explores students' perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in English language learning to identify its benefits and challenges. CRP emphasizes integrating students' cultural identities into the learning process to enhance understanding and engagement. This qualitative study involved 30 students from three different classes, with data collected through individual interviews and student reflection questionnaires, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings show that students generally have a positive view of CRP; they find it easier to understand the material and feel more motivated and emotionally connected when culture is involved. The main advantages are the relevance of the material to students' lives and the use of cultural media such as movies and music. However, two key challenges emerge: cultural disconnect and limitations of traditional teaching methods that fail to address students' diverse backgrounds. These results highlight the need for in-depth teacher training and the development of an inclusive, culturally informed curriculum to maximize the benefits of CRP in English language learning. The findings can guide teachers and curriculum developers to design lessons and materials that better reflect students' cultural backgrounds and learning needs.

Keywords: Perception; Culturally Relevant Pedagogy; ELT

INTRODUCTION

In our current era of demanding inclusive and effective learning environments, increasing attention is being paid to pedagogical approaches that incorporate students' cultural backgrounds for mutual respect. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), conceptualized by Ladson-Billings and developed by scholars such (Gay, 2018) and (Paris, 2012), has emerged as an important framework that places students at the center of the learning process while validating and integrating their cultural identities. (Gloria Ladson-Billings, 1995) further states that culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three areas of criteria: students' experience, academic

success, and students developing or maintaining cultural competence. According to (Capper, 2022), students develop critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. Although this approach continues to grow in educational settings, limited research examines how students understand and experience culturally responsive teaching practices, especially in language learning (Howard, 2019). English language education is unique and complex for applying pedagogy to culture, as it involves negotiating between different cultural frameworks and linguistic practices.

As emphasized by (Constrained et al., 2019), language learning never occurs in a cultural vacuum; rather, it is a place where learners must navigate their existing cultural identities alongside new linguistic and cultural systems. This navigation becomes even more important as classrooms become more diverse and pedagogical approaches seek to move beyond traditional Eurocentric models of language teaching (Canagarajah, 2019). While teachers and researchers have theorized extensively about the benefits of student-centered CRP approaches, the perspectives of those who matter most, the students themselves, remain underrepresented in scholarly discourse. As Hammond and Jackson (2022) put it, knowing how students respond and also seeing culturally responsive pedagogy can provide important insights into culture that cannot be captured by purely theoretical research focused on local people.

The problem this research addresses is the lack of understanding of how students themselves perceive and experience culturally relevant pedagogy in English language learning, which is critical for designing teaching methods that genuinely respect and incorporate students' cultural identities. What distinguishes this study from the (Darmawan et al., 2025) study, namely the purpose, it aims to assess knowledge about culturally responsive education among teachers and secondary school students in East Kalimantan, Indonesia.

Low learning achievement is a problem for educators and students. Therefore, the learning process is a key factor in efforts to improve learning outcomes (Sari, 2020). Teachers have not paid sufficient attention to the use of learning approaches. Additionally, students' understanding of the surrounding culture or the culture in Indonesia is still relatively low. This is because teachers choose to use books as learning resources, and they rarely relate the culture in the surrounding environment to the learning process (Fitriah et al., 2024). This lack of cultural integration in teaching highlights the urgent need for approaches like CRP, which deliberately connect lessons to students' cultural identities and everyday lives, making learning more relevant, engaging, and effective. Research has shown that applying CRP in the classroom can increase student engagement and motivation (Aima et al., 2024). The results of the research on the application of CRP in learning observation report text in class VIII 3 SMP Negeri Palembang showed students' involvement and motivation during learning.

In a study conducted by (Barella, 2020), they examined the development of teaching materials designed to produce a product that would help students improve their English skills. The study also discussed how a teacher can manage their teaching by using rich local materials and resources to create engaging learning experiences. In contrast, what makes this study different is its focus on directly capturing students' voices and lived experiences with culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in the English classroom, rather than merely examining teacher practices or theoretical perspectives filling a gap in existing studies by centering on students' perceptions. Additionally, this research was conducted in East Kalimantan, whereas Fina's study was conducted in West Kalimantan.

This gap in the literature calls for research that specifically examines students' perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy and how these approaches validate and interpret their cultural identities in the learning process. This qualitative study addresses this research gap by investigating students' perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy in English language learning. The study focuses on students' interviews and experiences through in-depth personal interviews and student reflection questionnaires to understand the lived realities of culturally responsive teaching practices. The findings of this study have significant implications for English language teaching, curriculum development, and teacher education programs. By describing students' thinking about CRP, this study contributes to our understanding of how pedagogical practices can simultaneously enhance language proficiency while affirming students' cultural identities and fostering more equitable educational environments. According to Freeman and Sato (2023), a student-centered language teaching approach to cultural sensitivity requires reflection and adaptation in line with the evolving needs of students' perspectives. This study provides important insights to inform such reflection and adaptation, enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of English language education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), a concept developed by (Gloria Ladson-Billings, 1995), aims to increase student engagement, particularly among marginalised groups. CRP has been recognised ((Castagno & Brayboy, 2008) (Gay, G., & Howard, 2000) (Gloria Ladson-Billings, 1995) (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) as a promising approach to address educational challenges and transform the learning experiences of historically neglected groups. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), CRP is a model that engages students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by integrating cultural references into the teaching of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This model not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to assert their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge injustice (Gloria Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Past studies have shown that CRP, when applied to both instruction and assessment, is more effective in improving academic achievement than CRP that focuses solely on instruction (Pilotti & Al Mubarak, 2021). However, the benefits of incorporating culturally relevant content into teaching and assessment practices often take time to become fully apparent. In the Indonesian context, studies have shown that using languages other than English in the classroom can enhance communication skills and improve teacher-student interactions (Madkur et al., 2024). This pedagogical strategy helps students navigate cultural differences, engage in meaningful intercultural communication, and adapt their language use to different cultural settings.

(Feng, 2024) emphasised that CRP in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) in China increased students' motivation, engagement, and participation. Similarly, (Azhary & Fatimah, 2024) found that the integration of local culture into English language teaching materials promoted culturally responsive teaching through the incorporation of three dimensions of local culture: products, practices, and perspectives. Despite these developments, CRP implementation in Indonesia remains understudied (Patras et al., 2023)(Penelitian et al., 2024). Studies focusing on CRP, particularly in East Kalimantan, remain scarce, while many countries continue to strive to preserve their cultural identity in addition to achieving academic outcomes. This research gap presents an opportunity to further investigate how CRP can be implemented effectively in the local educational context of East Kalimantan.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is a theoretical model that integrates students' cultural knowledge, life experiences, and learning preferences into classroom practices, with the aim of improving academic achievement and cultural identity development. Recent research indicates that CRP not only improves learning outcomes but also supports students' social-emotional growth and critical awareness (Ann E. Lopez, 2018) (Peristeris, 2017) (Feng, 2024). Teachers who implement CRP are expected to create a classroom environment where students feel seen, heard, and valued thereby becoming more motivated and actively engaged in the learning process (Azhary & Fatimah, 2024). This approach also emphasizes the importance of cultural responsiveness in instructional materials and interaction patterns to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to succeed.

Recent research has confirmed the importance of CRP in enhancing student motivation and engagement (Feng, 2024) reported that when CRP was implemented in EFL classrooms in China, students became more motivated, more active in participating, and showed greater interest in language learning. Similarly, (Azhary & Fatimah, 2024) emphasize that integrating local culture into English teaching materials allows students to connect the content of learning with their life experiences, thereby increasing relevance and retention. This integration

encompasses three main cultural components: products (e.g., artifacts, food), practices (e.g., rituals, customs), and perspectives (e.g., values, beliefs), which serve to deepen students' cultural understanding and language skills simultaneously. In the Indonesian context, the relevance of CRP is beginning to gain attention. (Madkur et al., 2024) found that giving students the opportunity to use their mother tongue in English class can help improve communication and strengthen the relationship between teachers and students. This approach allows students to express themselves with more confidence, especially when discussing intercultural topics or complex emotions. However, despite its great potential, the implementation of CRP in Indonesia has been rarely studied. (Patras et al., 2023) and (Penelitian et al., 2024) note that empirical research on CRP is still limited, particularly in regions such as East Kalimantan where cultural identity plays a significant role in students' daily lives. These studies call for more in-depth research to understand how CRP can be adapted and effectively applied in rural areas and culturally homogeneous regions, where diversity often manifests in more subtle forms, such as differences in family customs, beliefs, and religious practices. Another dimension of CRP is how it is integrated not only into teaching but also into assessment practices. (Pilotti & Al Mubarak, 2021) emphasize that culturally responsive assessment can further enhance academic achievement by aligning evaluation methods with students' learning styles and cultural contexts. However, they also caution that the benefits of such an approach may take time to fully manifest, highlighting the need for long-term implementation and monitoring.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design to examine students' views on Cultural Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) in English language learning. This study used a qualitative descriptive design, which is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration of students' real experiences, feelings, and perceptions in their own words. This design helps uncover detailed insights about how students interpret and respond to CRP in their English learning context insights that cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods alone. To gain a comprehensive understanding, data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. The study participants consisted of 30 EFL students from three different classes (XI TO 3, AKL 3, and X MPLB 10) at SMK Negeri 15 Samarinda, a public vocational school located in Sungai Kunjang, Samarinda City, East Kalimantan. The students came from diverse cultural backgrounds and were aged between 15 and 19 years old. From this group, five students were purposefully selected for in-depth interviews based on their consistent interest and active participation in class, as well as their ability to communicate their thoughts clearly and reflectively. Selecting a smaller group for interviews allowed for more focused, detailed discussions that provided richer, more meaningful data to support the study's objectives.

Instrument and Procedure

The research instrument is being designed to address three key questions: (1) How are students perceiving the role of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in their language learning? (2) What aspects of CRP are students finding most beneficial? and (3) What challenges are students experiencing when learning through CRP? To explore these questions, semi-structured student interviews are being conducted, featuring five open-ended questions that focus on students' experiences with learning English through cultural integration. Additionally, questionnaires are being administered and are being structured around key dimensions of CRP, such as the cultural relevance of teaching materials, inclusive teaching strategies, and teacher-student relationships within the local cultural context. The questionnaires are being divided into five sections: demographic information, experiences of learning English, cultural integration in learning, the impact on motivation and comprehension, and challenges and expectations.

Data Analysis

This study employs a qualitative approach using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to identify recurring patterns and themes in students' responses. Thematic analysis is a systematic method for analyzing qualitative data by recognizing, organizing, and interpreting meaningful patterns that emerge from participant responses. This approach will allow for an in-depth exploration of how students perceive Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) in their English learning, which aspects they find most beneficial, and the challenges they experience. The data collected from semi-structured interviews and student reflection questionnaires analyzed through six stages of thematic analysis: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. The transcribed interviews were coded to identify themes related to students' experiences with CRP, including their perceptions of cultural integration in learning, motivation, comprehension, and teacher-student interactions in a culturally relevant classroom. The student reflection questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency of reported challenges) and qualitative coding to categorize common difficulties students experience with CRP. The results triangulated with interview findings to ensure credibility and consistency in theme identification. To enhance trustworthiness, member checking is conducted by sharing key findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Additionally, peer debriefing will refine coding and theme development and ensure consistency and rigor in the analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' Perception towards the Role of CRP in Learning

This study explored students' perceptions of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) in English language learning, drawing insights from self-reflection questionnaires

and in-depth interviews with participants who offered honest and varied reflections about how CRP shapes their learning experiences. Through careful thematic analysis, five major themes emerged: contextual learning through culture, engaging cultural media, positive impacts of cultural learning, challenges in multicultural classrooms, and cultural learning as social interaction. Students generally demonstrated a positive understanding of the role of CRP in helping them learn English more effectively. Many students shared that connecting lessons to their own cultural backgrounds made new material feel familiar and easier to grasp. M explained this clearly, saying:

“Learning that connects with local culture helps understanding,” while FJR reinforced this by explaining, “When it involves our own culture, we understand and comprehend better.”

For these students, culture acts as more than just a topic; it becomes a cognitive bridge that connects unfamiliar English material to knowledge they already have from daily life. M also described how lessons that draw examples from local contexts help him feel more confident and able to relate the lesson to real experiences. Students pointed out that when teachers use cultural examples familiar to their environment such as local traditions, places, or cultural practices they feel more motivated and more capable of applying what they learn. M emphasized through the questionnaire that cultural learning is:

“Very helpful in learning English and being able to interact in a foreign language with friends.”

By linking new language skills to their daily reality, students like FJR said they can remember material better and feel more connected to the lesson. This shows that CRP does not only support comprehension inside the classroom but also empowers students to use English meaningfully in everyday life. However, both M and FJR pointed out that this positive impact can be reduced if the cultural content used does not match everyone's background. In classes with students from different cultures, using examples from only one culture may leave others feeling left out. M highlighted this challenge by saying:

“Including my own culture helps me understand, but for others, it might require extra effort.”

FJR echoed that learning can feel more difficult and boring if the subject matter does not connect to any culture at all, explaining:

“If culture is not included, it's harder and learning becomes boring.”

M added that some English terms are still difficult to understand when directly translated into Indonesian. Both agreed that purely reading texts without context or real-life dialogue often fails to maintain students' interest. One described this by saying:

“If you are told to just read, it is too boring.”

These reflections highlight how crucial it is for teachers to use diverse, inclusive cultural examples that reflect the variety within the classroom so that all students

feel represented. Another insight that stood out strongly is that CRP influences students emotionally as well as cognitively. Many students described feelings of pride, value, and motivation when their culture became part of classroom learning. FJR captured this sentiment by saying:

“I feel very proud when my culture is linked to learning, and I feel valued.”

This sense of pride strengthened her motivation to participate more actively in class and boosted her confidence in learning English. M also described how CRP gave him the opportunity to help classmates understand culture through lessons, sharing:

“I feel proud and motivated when I help my friends understand a culture and teach vocabulary through cultural media.”

This shows that CRP can create spaces for peer learning, where students not only benefit individually but also feel encouraged to support each other.

Students also described how using engaging cultural media such as local films, music, or novels makes English learning more enjoyable. M said:

“I prefer learning English through films, music, and novels it makes me more enthusiastic.”

FJR added through the questionnaire that learning with cultural media sparks greater excitement and curiosity. For them, cultural media are not just entertainment but useful tools that connect classroom material to real life. Despite these clear benefits, M and FJR also highlighted the challenges of applying CRP in diverse classrooms. They recognized that cultural examples are not always universal, and what works well for one student might not work for another. They also pointed out that teachers sometimes lack the material or training needed to fairly represent all students' cultures. FJR explained:

“There is a lack of material from teachers that relate to the culture of all students who have different backgrounds and teacher training.”

These challenges show that while CRP has strong potential, it must be designed and implemented thoughtfully. Finally, both M and FJR viewed cultural learning as an opportunity for social interaction that builds knowledge and community. M shared:

“I enjoy learning through cultural discussions. it expands my knowledge about other cultures,” while FJR expressed that she enjoys cultural dialogue because it allows her to “introduce our culture to others.”

Overall, these reflections suggest that CRP is not only a method for making English more understandable but also a meaningful approach that connects students emotionally, motivates them to participate, and helps them build stronger social ties. However, their experiences also show that CRP must be inclusive and adaptable to truly serve diverse classrooms, ensuring that every student feels seen, respected, and connected to what they are learning.

Aspects of the CRP That Are Most Beneficial to Students

This study identified a range of benefits students experience when culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is integrated into English language learning. Based on interviews and questionnaires with participants OCT, AR, and H, five main themes emerged: improved understanding through cultural connection, increased motivation and cultural pride, a more meaningful and engaging learning experience, the use of cultural media as learning tools, and contextual and experiential learning. Many students shared that connecting English lessons to their own cultural backgrounds directly supports their understanding of the material. OCT explained that learning felt clearer and more manageable when it drew on cultural knowledge they already had, saying:

“I understand it more easily because I directly mastered the history of my culture.”

H agreed, describing how lessons that use familiar cultural contexts help make complex ideas simpler:

“If culture is included in learning, of course, it is very helpful.”

For some students, adding local culture and daily situations into lessons helps them relate new expressions and meanings to real life. For instance, H mentioned that understanding certain English expressions became easier when the teacher used examples from Central Java’s cultural settings. These responses reveal how culture functions as a bridge between what students already know and what they are learning, strengthening their grasp of new language skills. Students also shared that relating English lessons to culture fuels motivation and a sense of pride. AR emphasized how lessons felt more exciting and meaningful when they connected with cultural elements, stating:

“The more enthusiasm, of course, because it’s also fun to learn to relate to culture.”

OCT echoed this feeling, explaining that seeing their local culture valued in class made them feel:

“Very proud and happy.”

Such emotional responses show that CRP does more than just support understanding; it also builds students’ self-esteem and reinforces their identity within the learning process. One student noted that integrating culture is rare in English lessons, and when it happens, it can inspire deeper motivation to engage with the subject. Several students highlighted that learning becomes more meaningful and engaging when it moves beyond monotonous textbook exercises. They described how English lessons that focus only on grammar or vocabulary can feel repetitive and uninspiring. AR captured this well by saying:

“If you only learn about vocabulary, grammar, it’s a bit boring.”

Instead, students said they wanted creative and active approaches. For example, OCT described how lessons that combine culture make learning feel:

"More challenging, more exciting."

They see the challenge of understanding cultural elements in English as an opportunity, not an obstacle making lessons both stimulating and enjoyable. One of the strongest preferences students expressed was for the use of cultural media such as films, music, or folklore as learning tools. H shared that watching English-language films with local or folklore themes made lessons more interesting and easier to follow, saying:

"If I prefer English-language films... It's more interesting to learn."

For AR, music also played a role in expanding vocabulary and pronunciation skills, explaining:

"I also know some of the vocabulary from the song and also the way the English is pronounced."

These cultural media are more than entertainment; they make abstract language concepts concrete, fun, and memorable. Students also emphasized how contextual and experiential learning activities help them stay engaged and understand the material more deeply. OCT explained that visiting cultural sites or doing real-life projects makes learning English feel relevant and alive:

"I prefer to visit cultural places like that and projects like that."

H shared a similar perspective, saying they prefer learning activities that involve them directly rather than passive listening:

"If I just sit and listen, I can easily get sleepy. But if there are activities that involve me directly, I become more understanding and interested."

This shows that students want learning to be practical and linked to their real experiences. When English lessons connect with their daily realities whether through visits to cultural places, creating cultural projects, or hands-on activities they find the material more meaningful, enjoyable, and easier to remember. However, the analysis reveals the other side of the learning process, namely the challenges faced if teachers do not apply an experiential or contextual approach. Some students complained about the use of conventional methods, such as reading texts from textbooks without any variation or supporting interesting activities. They think this method makes them feel bored, anxious, and lack understanding of the material. One statement seems to be:

"If asked to keep reading endlessly, it's very boring."

The statement shows that passive learning methods that are irrelevant to students' daily experiences can lower motivation and hinder the process of understanding. In other words, a teaching approach that does not consider the cultural context and students' experiences can be an obstacle to learning, both in terms of motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes.

Within the framework of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) in English teaching, we are now faced with major challenges related to cultural incompatibility and limitations in teaching methods, especially in a multicultural classroom environment. This issue points to shortcomings in the way materials are delivered that are often not appropriate for all students' backgrounds, as well as traditional learning approaches that are less responsive to their cultural needs. The findings in Table 1 indicate that when students' cultures are integrated into the learning process, they tend to have an easier time understanding the material and are more emotionally connected. FJR, an interview respondent, stated:

“When it comes to our own culture, we understand and understand better.”

This statement reinforces the idea that the relationship between subject matter and students' cultural background can significantly improve the quality of learning (Gay, 2018); (Paris, 2012). However, this situation is different from what is presented. When the learning process does not pay attention to cultural diversity or only highlights one particular culture, students who come from other cultural backgrounds feel alienated. M describes this with his statement:

“When I include examples of my own culture in learning, it helps me understand, but for others it may require extra effort.”

Students realize that this approach makes it easier for them personally, but it is a challenge for friends from different cultures. This suggests that a lack of balanced cultural representation can result in gaps in understanding and engagement in the classroom. This situation reflects that while CRP strives to embrace cultural diversity, there are still cultural gaps in its implementation when teachers fail to create an inclusive and appropriate learning environment for all students.

This shows the limited pedagogical approach teachers use. Some students complain that the learning process is still one-way and less relevant. OCT said:

“If you are told to go forward, just keep reading, it's very boring.”

Which reflects students' disinterest in passive methods and does not encourage them to think critically or reflect on their culture. AR added that:

“English learning should be more creative, not just relying on text in books.”

The interviews above show students' desire for a more varied and enjoyable approach. Aside from boredom, conventional methods that limit student participation also show the failure of teachers to apply the basic principles of CRP, which are supposed to encourage active engagement, critical thinking, and strengthening of student identity (Ladson-Billings, 1995; (Mensah, 2018). Without making room for students' cultural experiences, the learning process becomes less contextual and loses its social relevance.

This study found that integrating students' cultural identities into English language lessons boosts motivation and emotional engagement. Students reported feeling more valued and proud when their local culture was included, and they became

more eager to participate especially when lessons used media like movies, songs, or folklore. This is in line with research conducted by Underwood & Mensah (2018), which emphasizes that emotional engagement in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) is vital for developing confidence among students. The findings are also supported by (Paris, 2012), who argues that cultural involvement is not only symbolic but must contribute to the preservation of students' culture. Research by (Azhary & Fatimah, 2024) also shows that learning materials that include local cultural perspectives can increase cultural awareness and active participation of students. In addition, Hammond and Jackson (2022) emphasize the importance of CRP as an approach that is able to connect the curriculum with students' identities as a whole.

In addition, this study also found positive responses from students are seen towards contextual and experiential learning approaches, such as cultural projects or field trips. This is in line with the principle of experiential learning described by (Larsen-Freeman, D., & Sato, 2023), which shows that direct experience increases cognitive and affective involvement in the language learning process. (Capper, 2022) also underlines that context-focused learning activities help students build critical awareness of social and cultural structures. In their review, (Chang et al., 2022) emphasized how important training is for teachers to design activities that are relevant to students' local contexts. On the other hand (Prayitno et al., 2024) show that learning experiences that include students' cultural context not only improve understanding but also strengthen intercultural competence in a multicultural classroom.

However, there are major challenges in implementing CRP, especially about cultural diversity in the classroom. When a teacher only highlights one particular culture, students from different backgrounds feel isolated and have difficulty understanding the material being taught. This is in line with the warning conveyed by (Paris, 2012) that the CRP needs to maintain cultural sustainability without excluding other groups. In a review of education for indigenous students, (Castagno, A. E., & Brayboy, 2018) emphasized that non-inclusive pedagogical methods can reinforce the structure of injustice in the classroom. Gay & Howard (2000) added that teachers who lack understanding of cultural diversity tend to adopt a homogeneous approach, which is not able to reach all students. (Fitriah et al., 2024) also noted that many teachers in Indonesia have not received adequate training in the development of culture-based learning.

Another weakness identified in this study related to the application of CRP is the dominance of conventional teaching approaches. Many students reveal that methods such as passive reading from textbooks without cultural context lead to boredom and a lack of motivation. This shows that there is a gap between CRP theory and practice in the field. (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) stated that the success of CRP is closely related to the teacher's ability to connect the subject matter with the students' life. In addition, (Penelitian et al., 2024) show that the implementation of CRP in Indonesia is still uneven and experiences many challenges in terms of

teacher training. (Sari, 2020) highlights that students' motivation is greatly influenced by learning strategies that are relevant and contextual to their background. Therefore, curriculum development and training for teachers must be focused on improving a deep pedagogical understanding of student diversity.

This study's insights should be read with some limitations in mind. The small sample, drawn from one public vocational school in East Kalimantan, means the results may not reflect EFL students in other regions or school types. The qualitative approach depends on participants' self-reported perceptions and researcher interpretation, which can introduce subjectivity. Also, since participants were selected for their active classroom engagement, they may not represent students who are less motivated or less confident sharing their views.

Despite these limits, the findings highlight clear steps for practice. First, EFL teachers should weave local culture naturally into lessons to strengthen understanding and motivation. Practical ways include using real-life cultural examples, folklore, or local traditions to explain language points. Second, lessons should make use of varied cultural media like films, music, and local stories to create learning that feels fresh and relevant. Third, schools should support experiential tasks such as cultural projects, field visits, or community-based assignments so students actively connect English with real cultural contexts. Finally, teacher training programs should focus on helping teachers plan inclusive, adaptable, and culturally responsive lessons that respect diverse student backgrounds and prevent cultural bias. By applying these steps, CRP can become a practical strategy that bridges cultural identity and language skills helping EFL learners feel recognized, motivated, and connected to their learning.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) approach has a positive influence on English language learning in multicultural classroom settings. The findings reveal that students show improved understanding, stronger motivation, and deeper emotional engagement when their local culture is meaningfully integrated into learning materials. Qualitative data from interviews and reflection questionnaires indicate that connecting lessons to students' cultural backgrounds helps them relate new knowledge to familiar contexts, making learning more relevant, enjoyable, and personally meaningful. Moreover, the inclusion of cultural elements encourages greater student engagement through contextual and experiential activities such as cultural discussions, creative projects, and the use of multimedia resources. These culturally grounded practices align with the idea that learning becomes more effective when students see their identities reflected in the classroom.

Despite its advantages, the implementation of CRP still faces several challenges. Two main barriers were identified in this study: cultural disconnection and pedagogical limitations. Cultural disconnection occurs when teaching materials

represent only part of students' diverse backgrounds, which can lead to unequal participation and understanding. Pedagogical limitations arise when teachers rely on conventional, lecture-based methods that lack contextual relevance, resulting in a learning atmosphere that students often perceive as monotonous and less engaging. The findings also highlight that the success of CRP depends not only on the inclusion of local cultural content but also on teachers' ability to manage cultural diversity fairly, design participatory lessons, and promote reflective and student-centered learning. Therefore, this study provides important insights for curriculum developers, teacher educators, and policymakers who aim to create more inclusive and culturally responsive English language instruction.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several directions for future research are recommended. Further studies should involve larger and more diverse groups of students across different educational levels and regional contexts to better understand how CRP works in various learning environments. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods would provide deeper insights, such as measuring students' language proficiency before and after CRP-based instruction. Long-term studies are also necessary to observe how continuous exposure to CRP affects students' motivation, academic performance, and cultural awareness over time. Future research should also examine teachers' perspectives to understand their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in applying CRP. Comparing teachers' and students' viewpoints could reveal practical gaps and areas of alignment in classroom practice. Additionally, research on the effectiveness of teacher training programs that focus on CRP would be valuable in determining how professional development impacts teaching quality. Exploring the use of technology and multimedia tools to enhance CRP, especially in resource-limited schools, could offer innovative solutions for equitable language education. Finally, policy-related research should analyze how institutional frameworks and national education systems support or limit the integration of culturally relevant pedagogy in English language teaching.

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