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# **Culturally responsive teaching pedagogy as a form of knowledge ecology: A systematic literature review of EFL classrooms**

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## **Abstract**

*The pursuit of equity and social justice in higher education demands pedagogical approaches that transcend Western-centric traditions and legitimise diverse cultural epistemologies. This study examines Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) specifically in the Indonesian EFL context and intends to examine CRT as a pedagogical strategy and a way to problematise epistemological assumptions. Guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework and analysed through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) combined with document analysis, this research critically examines 22 documents. The findings indicate that, although CRT is recognised in national initiatives such as the Emancipated Curriculum and Emancipated Learning, its practical implementation remains uneven and largely superficial. At the classroom level, educators attempt to integrate indigenous knowledge, cultural identities, and local wisdom into English language teaching; however, these efforts are constrained by rigid, exam-driven curricula, limited professional support, and the pervasive influence of global English standards. The tension between internationalisation and localisation illustrates both the challenges and opportunities for CRT in reshaping Indonesian EFL education. Theoretically, CRT is positioned as a decolonial stance that resists epistemic hegemony while advancing epistemic justice by legitimising the ecology of knowledge. Practically, the study emphasises the urgency of aligning policies with CRT principles, expanding teacher training, and developing culturally sustaining instructional resources. By situating CRT at the nexus of social justice, decolonization, and global competence, this study contributes to global debates on inclusive and transformative education, highlighting its significance for the Global South and beyond.*

**Keywords:** *culturally responsive teaching; global south; knowledge ecology; pedagogical practice; systematic literature review*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The pursuit of equity and social justice in higher education necessitates pedagogical approaches that move beyond Western-centric traditions and legitimise diverse cultural epistemologies. In many post-colonial contexts, including Indonesia, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education continues to privilege dominant knowledge frameworks that marginalise students' cultural experiences and locally situated ways of knowing (Munandar & Newton, 2021; Anwar, 2016). Such practices reflect not only pedagogical limitations but also

unexamined epistemological assumptions embedded within EFL curricula and instructional practices.

Within Indonesian EFL classrooms, this epistemological imbalance manifests as a misalignment between instructional content and students' cultural identities, resulting in learning practices that are insufficiently responsive to local knowledge systems (Harrison & Skrebneva, 2019). Addressing this condition therefore requires more than pedagogical adjustment; it calls for a critical examination and problematization of how knowledge is constructed, legitimised, and reproduced within EFL education. As a response, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) provides a transformative pedagogical framework that acknowledges and appreciates students' lived realities, cultural identities, and local wisdom, ensuring that learning is meaningful and contextually grounded (Ladson-Billings et al., 2024; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Rather than focusing solely on cultural inclusion, CRT seeks to restructure pedagogical aims by legitimising diverse knowledge epistemologies within educational practice (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Within the broader discourse of internationalisation in higher education, CRT assumes an importantly critical role. Internationalisation, defined by increased mobility, collaboration, and alignment with global academic standards, has provided valuable opportunities for academic development (de Wit, 2022; Betty, 2017; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004). However, it has also been critiqued for reinforcing Western-centric epistemologies while marginalising indigenous and local knowledge traditions (Data & Starlight, 2024; Marginson and Sawir, 2011; Altbach and Knight, 2007;). In Indonesian higher education, especially in EFL instruction, Western paradigms remain dominant. These are visible in the curriculum, instructional materials, and pedagogical norms that prioritise target language culture over local wisdom, thereby perpetuating epistemic inequality and cultural erasure (Suwandani & Hidayati, 2025; Nurbatra & Masyhud, 2022).

The challenges of implementing CRT in Indonesia are multi-layered. At the practical level, lecturers often rely on instructional materials that are not culturally balanced (Powell et al., 2016). For instance, Jayanti and Mustofa (2023) demonstrated that despite the implementation of the Emancipated Curriculum in Indonesia, EFL textbooks are still dominated by Western-oriented target culture, with limited inclusion of local and international cultural perspectives. Mustapidaturrohman et al. (2022) and Suwandani and Hidayati (2025) further show that textbook themes tend to normalise Western lifestyles, such as "A Day in London" or "Holiday in New York," while offering only superficial or tokenistic engagement with Indonesian or broader global cultural contexts. We believe that these findings suggest that local knowledge and identities are systematically devalued or silenced within EFL education.

We also argue that structural and institutional constraints further limit the capacity of educators to implement culturally sustaining pedagogies. Although national initiatives such as Emancipated Curriculum and Emancipated Learning aim to promote autonomy, flexibility, and contextual relevance in Indonesian education, the operationalization of CRT within these frameworks remains fragmented and under-theorised. For instance, studies

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have shown that CRT is often implemented in isolated programs rather than as a comprehensive policy orientation. Fatmawaty, et al (2024) demonstrate that CRT practices are employed to enhance student involvement in marginalised schools; nevertheless, these pedagogical initiatives remain discrete interventions and have not yet developed into a systemic approach. In addition to that, Subechiana and Ratnawati (2024) highlight the integration of Islamic cultural values within the Emancipated Curriculum through the framework of CRT, indicating attention to local cultural dimensions. In line with these findings, Isdaryanti et al. (2024) examine capacity-building initiatives designed for educators in Indonesian schools abroad through the incorporation of CRT principles in lesson planning. Although these initiatives showcase the promise of CRT, they continue to be localised and fragmented, pointing to the lack of systematic theoretical integration. Lecturers are often caught in what Guldberg (2022) calls a pedagogical paradox, where efforts to align with global standards inadvertently undermine decolonial and culturally responsive goals. Therefore, we are concerned that without sufficient support, training, and policy alignment, CRT risks being reduced to isolated classroom practices rather than a coherent institutional commitment.

Given this context, the present study is timely and necessary. It aims to critically examine how CRT can be integrated into Indonesian EFL classrooms as a strategy to reconcile the demands of internationalisation with the principles of decolonial and inclusive education (Nurbatra & Masyhud, 2022). This research not only seeks to understand how CRT is conceptualised by EFL educators and learners but also how it is enacted within the limitations of curriculum, institutional expectations, and global educational pressures. Furthermore, the study centers on the importance of integrating local wisdom and indigenous epistemologies into EFL pedagogy as a means of achieving justice in knowledge production (Ajani, 2025; Kurtulmus & Irzik, 2017)

The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) how do Indonesian EFL educators perceive the principles of CRT pedagogy?; (2) to what extent are culturally responsive practices evident in curriculum design, instructional materials, and classroom pedagogy within EFL classrooms?; (3) what challenges do students and educators face in implementing CRT strategies in the EFL classroom?. By addressing these questions, this study contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations concerning the decolonization of knowledge, educational equity, and the repositioning of local epistemologies within globalised educational contexts. It also responds to calls by scholars such as Andreotti (2011) and Mignolo (2011), who emphasise the need for dialogic knowledge spaces that promote mutual enrichment rather than epistemic domination. Ultimately, the research aspires to inform educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers on how to cultivate culturally grounded and socially just English language education that affirms local identities while remaining globally competent.

**Review of Literature****CRT and Epistemic Justice in Knowledge Production**

CRT originally conceptualised by Ladson-Billings (1992), was not only an effort to promote equitable educational outcomes but also a challenge to dominant

epistemologies that marginalise non-Western ways of knowing. While Geneva Gay (2015, 2018) advanced CRT by advocating for its systematic integration across institutions, the underlying imperative of CRT, particularly in postcolonial contexts, is to reframe education as a site of epistemic justice. Rather than merely addressing representational diversity, CRT, when viewed through a decolonial lens, interrogates whose knowledge is produced, validated, and transmitted in academic spaces.

Recent scholarship emphasises the urgency of decolonising knowledge production in higher education, particularly in countries like Indonesia, where colonial legacies persist in curricular content and pedagogical paradigms (Akbar, 2024; Al Attar, 2023). These studies underscore how curricula often privilege Eurocentric epistemologies, thereby perpetuating epistemic violence and marginalising local, indigenous, and alternative knowledge systems (da Silva et al., 2023). As what Al-Chami (2024) points out, visionary platforms must position decolonisation as the core principle guiding how knowledge is produced and circulated in academic institutions, rather than treating it as an optional add-on.

Notwithstanding national policy initiatives such as Emancipated Curriculum and Emancipated Learning, the implementation of CRT and the promotion of curricular inclusion of diverse epistemologies in Indonesian higher education remain limited and uneven. Without authentic structural change and a fundamental shift in the knowledge framework or the ontology transformation, and local knowledge systems often remain on the periphery, lacking substantive influence (Ahuriri-Driscoll, 2021; Ramli et al., 2025). This resonates with the wider critique presented by Alemán (2017), who underscores the tension experienced by marginalised students when teaching approaches fail to correspond with their contextualised knowledge systems, an issue that moves issues of identity into the deeper realm of what is considered legitimate knowledge. In this context, CRT should be reconceptualised not just as a teaching approach for inclusion but as a transformative epistemological approach that interrogates the monocultural and hierarchical structures of knowledge production within universities worldwide. Such a reorientation aligns with the broader goals of decolonising higher education to achieve social justice in knowledge ensuring that diverse epistemologies are not only present but recognised, legitimised, and central to the curriculum (Khoo et al., 2020).

### **Knowledge Ecology and Decoloniality**

The concept of knowledge production in education was influenced by colonial legacies of Eurocentrism (Sule, 2024). The colonial histories of knowledge structures have set Western epistemologies in a privileged position at the expense of indigenous and local ways of knowing (Connell, 2019; de Sousa Santos, 2018; Seleke et al., 2025). It is within this context that decoloniality can be seen as a response to the overwhelming presence of Western epistemologies. Decoloniality calls for questioning the dominance of Western ways of knowing and strives to achieve epistemic justice by valuing diverse forms of knowing, dismantling epistemic hierarchies, and intentionally undoing colonial knowledge positions within institutions and social contexts (Mignolo & Walsh,

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2018). This viewpoint is especially pertinent in postcolonial societies, like Indonesia, where a call to decolonising education goes beyond the invocation of inclusion, but highlights a transformative agenda that reimagines the fundamental aspects of curricula, pedagogies, and academic practices to transform educational systems toward greater equity, cultural responsiveness, and social justice (Akbar, 2024; Al Attar, 2023).

In relation to English language education, this means interrogating the implicit assumptions or questions and normative frameworks embedded in EFL materials and syllabi. As Al-Chami (2024) emphasises, English language classrooms in non-Western contexts often persist as sites of colonial hierarchies of knowledge unless they are deliberately disrupted by pedagogies of justice. Therefore, this research positions itself within the decolonial turn by investigating how CRT can contribute to socially just knowledge production. The goal is not only to diversify knowledge epistemologies but also to interrogate and restructure the ways in which students engage with and produce knowledge in the EFL classrooms. This requires a pedagogical shift that validates students lived experiences, local languages, and cultural epistemologies as legitimate sources of academic inquiry.

**CRT within EFL Contexts**

CRT has attracted growing attention in global educational debates, yet its practical application in EFL classroom, especially within non-Western contexts, remains limited and lacks a strong theoretical foundation (Gay, 2018; Lucas & Villegas, 2013). In Southeast Asia and particularly in Indonesian higher education, CRT is increasingly used to promote equitable participation, address cultural inequalities, and support diversity in EFL classrooms (Akbar, 2024; Alsup, 2021; Santosa & Hartati, 2023).

Prior studies demonstrate that CRT in English language classrooms supports the development of higher-order thinking, acknowledgment of cultural and personal identity, and student empowerment through adapting teaching practices to students' cultural backgrounds and societal contexts (Gorski, 2016). However, its ability to foster pedagogical transformation is frequently diminished when CRT is approached as an auxiliary component rather than as a central guiding philosophy. We build on these ideas by emphasising the necessity of incorporating CRT into teaching practices, curriculum design, and institutional policies. In its essence, CRT serves as a lens to reconsider the function of English education—as a way of thinking about English education as a place of diversity, inclusion, and social awareness.

**Institutional Structures and Teacher Agency in Enabling CRT**

Within Indonesian EFL higher education, the implementation of CRT is significantly affected by institutional factors and regulations (Yoanduanda et al., 2025). For example, across innovative and transformative instructional practices, factors such as a standardised curriculum and a rigid framework of assessment can simultaneously facilitate, promote and constrain their application in the learning environment (Fitriani et al., 2023). In this context, teacher authority—defined as the professional capacity to make pedagogical

decisions grounded in cultural awareness and contextual relevance. Educators with professional autonomy can creatively negotiate institutional constraints when supported by leadership, collaboration, and professional development (Howard, 2021).

Additionally, the diversity of learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds requires nuanced approaches, making consistent implementation more difficult (Markey et al., 2023). Educators are positioned as facilitators who are required to balance between providing great learning experiences for all students in culturally varied surroundings and a commercial strategy that prioritise increasing international student numbers, which remains a key challenge in implementation (Markey et al., 2023; Miller, Cunningham, & Lehmann, 2021). This tension underscores the need to embed equity-oriented policies within internationalisation agendas to prevent market-driven approaches from marginalising culturally responsive and socially just pedagogical practices. The findings further suggest that institutional transformation, alongside initiatives that strengthen professional autonomy, is essential for achieving effective and meaningful educational reform. Therefore, institutions should encourage teacher autonomy and collaboration while also incorporating culturally responsive policies into their syllabus or their curriculum and classroom practices (Hidayati et al, 2024; Nihayah et al., 2023).

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative systematic literature review (SLR) to analyse the implementation of CRT in Indonesian higher education EFL classrooms, with a focus on knowledge production and social justice. SLR involves systematically finding, assessing, and interpreting existing research evidence to address a specific research question (Halimah & Dewei, 2023). By mapping current research, SLR provides readers with updated on recent developments (Carrera-Rivera et al., 2022). In addition to consolidating existing knowledge, this approach exposes research gaps that warrant further exploration (Kitchenham et al, 2009).

Furthermore, this approach was employed to integrate diverse yet thematically aligned studies and policy documents within a transparent and rigorous analytical framework that supports systematic and replicable examination of pedagogical innovations (Azizah et al., 2025; Juwita & Umamah, 2025). Methodologically, this study deliberately combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and document analysis to address both *what* is represented in EFL-related texts and *how* such representations are ideologically constructed. Document analysis (Bowen, 2009) is first used as a foundational analytic procedure to systematically select, categorise, and code curricular documents, policy texts, and scholarly publications, enabling the identification of recurring themes related to CRT, knowledge production, and social justice. Building on this thematic mapping, Fairclough's (1995) CDA is then applied to interrogate the discursive and ideological dimensions of these themes, particularly how language constructs, legitimises, or marginalises certain epistemologies within Indonesian EFL contexts. This sequential integration allows document analysis

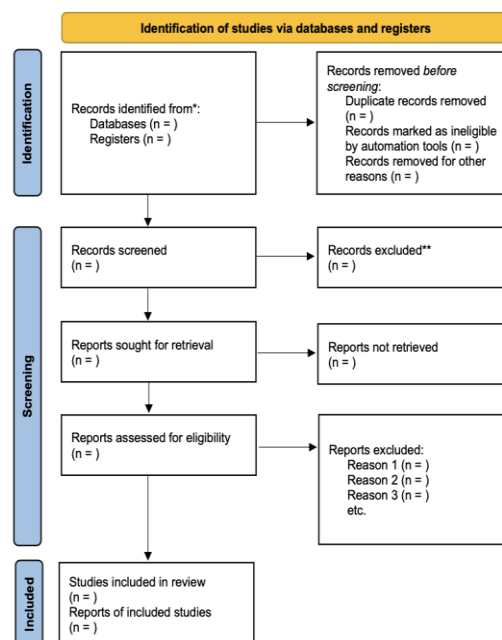
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to function as an organising and descriptive phase, while CDA serves as an interpretive and critical phase that situates the identified themes within broader sociocultural, historical, and power relations (Izzah et al., 2024; Susanto & Chojimah, 2024). Through this methodological synergy, the study moves beyond surface-level thematic description to critically examine how CRT is framed, constrained, or enabled within dominant educational discourses.

### Data Collection Process and Sources

Following the PRISMA 2020 framework (Page et al., 2021; Tedja et al., 2024), the review proceeded through four stages. Relevant studies were identified using predefined keywords across databases via Publish or Perish (Scopus API). Screening removed duplicates and irrelevant titles, eligibility applied inclusion/exclusion criteria (empirical focus on CRT in Indonesian EFL and social justice), and the final inclusion retained qualified studies as shown in the PRISMA flow diagram as presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** PRISMA 2020 Diagram Flow for Systematic Literature Review (Page et al., 2021)

The review encompassed a wide range of sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. It included 13 peer-reviewed articles from national and international journals, contributing both perspectives and findings. The review also covered four national policy documents—for example, the Emancipated Curriculum and Emancipated Learning frameworks. The sources also included three EFL curricula from higher education and two academic reports discussing teacher education and curriculum reform in Indonesia (Kidwell, 2021; Yanti, 2023).

### Identification

During the Identification stage, we undertook an exhaustive and thorough search of key databases that included Scopus, ERIC, Web of Science, the DOAJ, ScienceDirect and Google Scholar, along with both peer-reviewed and grey literature, in order to capture as much high-quality, interdisciplinary research as possible and to include both well-known studies as well as emerging or harder-to-find studies pertaining to CRT and the EFL context. This stage covered the timespan of January 2024 to August 2025. Limiting the review to this period allows the analysis to foreground contemporary interpretations and enactments of CRT that are directly shaped by current policy frameworks, internationalisation pressures, and decolonial debates in higher education, rather than earlier conceptual discussions developed under different curricular and ideological regimes (de Wit & Jones, 2022; Snyder, 2018). In systematic literature reviews, a focused and theoretically justified temporal boundary is methodologically appropriate when the aim is to capture policy-sensitive and practice-oriented developments following major educational reforms (Kitchenham et al., 2009). To mitigate potential concerns regarding representativeness, the review incorporates both peer-reviewed empirical studies and national policy documents, complemented by reference mining and manual screening of reputable Indonesian journals, a strategy commonly recommended to capture contextually significant scholarship that may not yet be indexed in major international databases (Bowen, 2009; Page et al., 2021; Tedja et al., 2024).

A variety of Boolean operators and advanced search strings were used to ensure those specific studies were precisely and comprehensively retrieved during this time span. The search strategy included combinations such as: ("culturally responsive teaching" or "culturally relevant pedagogy" or "culturally sustaining pedagogy") and ("EFL" or "English as a Foreign Language") and ("Indonesia") and ("social justice" or "knowledge production"). To ascertain we covered thoroughly the focus area and included studies that were excluded in prominent databases, we carried out reference mining and reviewed reputable Indonesian journals by hand to obtain contextually relevant research output, which might have otherwise been missed.

### **Screening**

The screening stage involved a review of 300 titles and abstracts, after duplicates had been removed. The eligibility was based on two main inclusion criteria: (1) the publication date, which needed to fall between January 2024 and August 2025; (2) the study content needed to relate to CRT, EFL/ELT, or educational knowledge production; (3) studies needed to use empirical or theoretical lenses with social justice or pedagogical perspectives; and (4) the studies were in English, or in Bahasa Indonesia with an English translation.

The criteria for exclusion in this section were studies that focused on primary education, and insufficient theoretical framing discussion, which is common in other reviews (Liu et al., 2025), as stated in the limitations on timeframe, research focus, and language to retain quality and relevance. Within the EFL field, a structured multi-stage screening procedure was applied to exclude both non-empirical research and those situated in unrelated contexts.

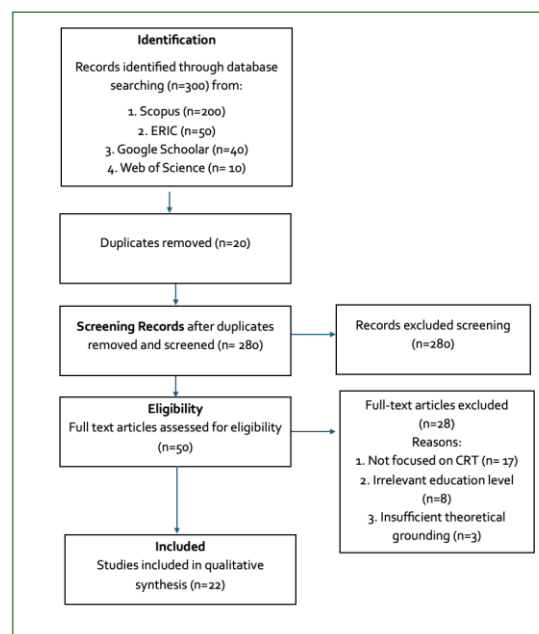
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Through these processes, the review applied explicit criteria to exclude studies lacking conceptual clarity, empirical relevance, and pedagogical theoretical insight (Mamad & Vigh, 2024). Using these procedures, the review focused on 50 documents, which were all analyzed deeply.

### Eligibility and Inclusion

During the eligibility stage, we conducted a thorough review of the full texts. Articles that did not substantially address CRT, issues of social justice, or knowledge production in EFL contexts were excluded. We reviewed a total of 22 documents - peer-reviewed journal articles, higher education curriculum frameworks, government and institutional policy documents, and institutional syllabi (Khoerunissa et al., 2025). The results of the SLR process are generated by applying the four stages sequentially which are presented in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2.** The Diagram Flow of Systematic Literature Review: Results and Process

### Data Analysis Procedures

#### Analytical Framework

This study employed two complementary qualitative methods: document analysis (Bowen, 2009) to assess a wide range of textual sources and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995) to examine how language reflects and challenges power, ideology, and social practices. While CDA involves textual, discursive, and sociocultural dimensions, this study emphasised the sociocultural practice dimension, since textual and discursive aspects were addressed through document analysis and thematic coding (Bowen, 2009; Tanjung et al., 2023). This focus highlights how language is shaped by society and culture. It shows the power relationships and social influences behind the word, which might not be clear if we only look at the text or how it is used (Altun, 2023). Examining sociocultural practice allowed the study to uncover how CRT-

related discourses both perpetuate prevailing ideologies like neoliberalism, global English, and simultaneously intersect with postcolonial histories, structural language inequalities, and ongoing decolonisation efforts within university curricula (Chang, 2025; Baker et al., 2024). This emphasis aligns with the study's broader aim of examining social justice in knowledge production, making visible the ways in which curricular discourses both enable and constrain equitable educational practices (Babu et al., 2024). By examining curricula closely, researchers can see how the material taught, how it is represented, and the structures of institutions affect who can access learning, showing both the potential and the obstacles to fostering educational equity (Denis & Anwar, 2023).

In addition, document analysis was carried out using Bowen's (2009) approach of skimming, reading, coding, and interpreting, to best highlight areas of common themes, representation, contradictions, and gaps. Codes were generated by way of deductive reasoning from the CRT framework (acknowledging cultural validation, equity, and student empowerment) and inductively based on patterns that arose in the data (keywords: linguistic hegemony, curriculum constraints and policy disparities (Azizah et al., 2025).

### **Trustworthiness and Ethics**

Trustworthiness and Ethics Trustworthiness was established through credibility (triangulation, peer debriefing), dependability (audit trail), confirmability (researcher reflexivity), and transferability (thick description) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, and ensuring participants' well-being, following institutional ethical guidelines.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Indonesian EFL Educators' Perception of the Principles of CRT Pedagogy**

The findings of this systematic review indicate that Indonesian EFL educators predominantly conceptualise CRT as the integration of local wisdom and learners' cultural experiences into pedagogy (Arvianti & Wahyuni, 2022; Hidayati et al., 2024; Ratnaningsih, 2025). Across the reviewed studies, this perception reflects the need to negotiate internationalisation pressures, in which students are expected to gain global competence without losing their cultural roots. The reviewed literature consistently reports that CRT grounded in local wisdom is perceived as creating meaningful and impactful pedagogy while simultaneously supporting global competitiveness (Puspita et al., 2024). Thus, embedding local culture in English teaching supports cultural preservation, inclusivity, engagement, and social justice (Yuliati, 2022).

Within the reviewed literature, educators are reported to employ CRT by recognising students' cultural repertoires as valuable educational resources (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Villegas & Lucas, 2022). These repertoires are reflected in curricula, lesson plans, and syllabi that highlight indigenous knowledge and cultural identity (Hadiyanto et al., 2023; Sari, 2022). The findings document classroom practices such as the use of folktales, proverbs, and traditional songs in English learning activities, indicating that local cultural

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artifacts are commonly mobilised as instructional resources in Indonesian EFL classrooms (Rachmawati & Madya, 2021). Consistent with these practices, lesson plans reviewed under the Emancipated Curriculum emphasise contextual pedagogy that explicitly links English instruction with students' local cultural environments (Siregar, 2023). Taken together, these findings suggest that CRT in Indonesian EFL contexts is most concretely enacted through pedagogical contextualization, in which local cultural resources function as integral mediators of language learning rather than as supplementary content.

Despite this shared orientation toward contextualization, the findings also reveal considerable variation in the depth and clarity of educators' understandings of CRT. While some studies report conceptions that foreground student empowerment, cultural sustainability, and critical engagement, others indicate that CRT is perceived and enacted in more symbolic terms, with limited influence on instructional design and assessment practices (Shay, 2017). A recurring theme across the reviewed studies is educators' perceived need to balance global academic and communicative expectations with the preservation of local cultural values (Fatmawaty et al., 2024). In this regard, CRT is consistently positioned as a mediating framework through which teachers attempt to reconcile participation in global English discourses with the maintenance of local identity and cultural relevance (Widodo, 2016; Zacharias, 2014).

**CRT Practices in Curriculum Design, Instructional Materials, and Classroom Pedagogy within EFL Classrooms**

The findings reveal that although CRT is widely acknowledged at the conceptual and policy levels, its implementation in EFL curriculum design, instructional materials, and classroom practice varies considerably. This variation is evident in curriculum documents that tend to emphasise cultural awareness while offering limited concrete pedagogical guidance for classroom enactment (Ifenatuora, 2025). As a result, classroom practices frequently rely on generic cultural references rather than sustained engagement with students' local contexts. At the policy and curricular level, analysis of the reviewed documents further shows that English education is increasingly positioned as a means of promoting intercultural communication, recognition of local knowledge, and the development of global citizenship (Yuliantari & Huda, 2023). Within these documents, CRT-related principles are articulated primarily at the level of curricular aims and learning outcomes, rather than being consistently translated into concrete pedagogical guidelines.

Overall, these findings suggest that, within the reviewed literature, EFL is framed not solely as linguistic instruction but also as a medium for promoting cultural understanding and intercultural awareness (Rachmawati & Madya, 2021; Siregar, 2023). Despite this framing, the analysis reveals a gap between curricular discourse and instructional practice, indicating that the presence of CRT in formal curriculum design does not automatically ensure its systematic implementation in classroom pedagogy. This gap matters because it constrains the transformative potential of CRT, allowing cultural responsiveness to remain at the level of policy rhetoric rather than pedagogical practice.

In addition to that, the findings reveal substantial variation in how institutions operationalise these curricular objectives. Some curricula articulate explicit learning outcomes related to cultural responsiveness, whereas others address multicultural or moral values only in broad or superficial terms (Sari, 2022; Setyowati, 2020). This uneven operationalization suggests that the enactment of CRT is highly dependent on institutional interpretation and local implementation contexts. In relation to instructional materials, the reviewed studies identify two dominant patterns. Locally developed textbooks and modules increasingly incorporate Indonesian contexts, including folklore, local traditions, and community-related themes (Rohmah & Priyanto, 2019; Widodo, 2018). However, the findings also indicate that Western-centric materials remain prevalent and are often insufficiently adapted to Indonesian sociocultural contexts (Chao, 2021).

Classroom-based studies included in the review show that pedagogical practices partially reflect CRT principles. Some EFL teachers implement project-based learning connected to local communities, such as interviews with artisans or reflective writing on cultural heritage (Astuti & Lammers, 2017; Nugroho et al., 2020). At the same time, the findings indicate continued reliance on grammar-translation and exam-oriented approaches, limiting opportunities for cultural engagement (Apriani et al., 2020; Susanto & Ningsih, 2021).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that culturally responsive practices are present across curriculum, materials, and pedagogy but remain unevenly embedded and largely dependent on individual educators' initiatives rather than systemic implementation.

### **The Challenges Students and Educators Face in Implementing CRT**

The implementation of CRT in EFL classrooms is shaped by a range of pedagogical and structural challenges experienced by both educators and students. Across the reviewed studies, a persistent tension emerges between CRT's emphasis on localised knowledge and the continued dominance of global English standards and proficiency benchmarks (Gorski, 2016). Lecturers consistently report difficulties in reconciling culturally responsive practices with institutional expectations for standardised English competence, which often prioritise measurable proficiency outcomes over contextualised learning (Kubota, 2020; Marlina, 2018).

From the learner perspective, the findings suggest that some students perceive the inclusion of local cultural content as misaligned with their aspirations for achieving global English proficiency and international mobility (Nortvedt, 2020). The reviewed studies further indicate that entrenched hierarchies of language and culture shape students' attitudes toward local knowledge and non-dominant English varieties, often positioning them as less legitimate or less valuable within formal educational settings (Canagarajah, 2013; Phan, 2017; Sung, 2021).

Beyond classroom-level concerns, institutional and structural constraints also pose significant challenges to the meaningful enactment of CRT. Limited access to professional development, rigid curricular frameworks,

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heavy teaching workloads, and pressure to align with international standards constrain educators' capacity to integrate culturally responsive approaches in sustained and systematic ways (Bennett et al., 2018; Siregar, 2023). These constraints are particularly pronounced in under-resourced and non-metropolitan institutions, where disparities in institutional support further exacerbate inequities in CRT implementation (Retnaningdyah et al., 2024; Widodo, 2018).

**DISCUSSION**

This discussion interprets the findings of the systematic review by situating them within broader theoretical and empirical debates on CRT, English language education, and curriculum reform in postcolonial and Global South contexts. Rather than treating CRT as a universally enacted pedagogical model, this section examines how the reviewed literature reflects context-specific interpretations, constraints, and tensions shaping CRT implementation in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

**Conceptualising CRT as Pedagogical Contextualisation**

In the Indonesian EFL context, CRT is most often understood through efforts to bring local wisdom and students' lived cultural experiences into classroom practices (Gay, 2018). Teachers tend to draw on familiar traditions, values, and community knowledge as a way to make English learning more meaningful and accessible (Fitriani et al., 2023; Setyowati, 2020; Puspita Ratri et al., 2024). This interpretation reflects core ideas in culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy, particularly the emphasis on affirming learners' cultural identities and treating them as legitimate resources for learning rather than peripheral additions to the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 2021). Similar patterns have been reported in Indonesian and Southeast Asian studies, where cultural integration is frequently framed as contextualization rather than as a broader critical engagement with power, knowledge production, and language ideologies (Lim et al., 2019).

However, the findings of this review also suggest that CRT is frequently enacted as a strategy for enhancing relevance and engagement rather than as a transformative framework that challenges dominant epistemologies. This tendency reflects what Ladson-Billings (2021) describes as the ongoing tension between culturally responsive intentions and the structural conditions of schooling that limit critical pedagogical enactment. In the Indonesian EFL context, contextualization through local cultural content appears to function as a pragmatic response to curricular demands, enabling educators to localise English instruction while remaining aligned with national standards and institutional expectations.

**Policy Endorsement and the Limits of Curricular Translation**

A key finding of this review is the discrepancy between policy-level recognition of CRT principles and their uneven translation into curriculum design, instructional materials, and classroom pedagogy. While curriculum documents increasingly frame English education as a vehicle for intercultural communication, local knowledge recognition, and global citizenship (De Wit &

Jones, 2022; Knight, 2000), the reviewed studies indicate that these aspirations often remain at the level of discourse rather than practice.

This policy–practice gap mirrors concerns raised in curriculum studies and CRT scholarship, which caution that rhetorical commitments to multiculturalism and cultural responsiveness do not automatically result in pedagogical change (Shay, 2017). Within the reviewed Indonesian EFL literature, CRT-related objectives are more frequently articulated in broad curricular aims than embedded in concrete guidance for assessment, materials development, or instructional strategies. As a result, the enactment of CRT becomes highly dependent on individual educators’ agency and interpretation, echoing findings from prior research on curriculum reform and teacher autonomy in Indonesia (Nihayah et al., 2023).

### **Competing Language Ideologies and Global English Norms**

The challenges identified in this review highlight the enduring influence of dominant language ideologies in shaping CRT implementation. Across the reviewed studies, tensions emerge between CRT’s emphasis on localised knowledge and the continued dominance of global English standards and proficiency benchmarks. This finding resonates with Global Englishes and decolonial scholarship that critiques the privileging of standardised, Western-centric norms in English language education (Baker et al., 2024; Mignolo, 2011).

From the learner perspective, the reviewed studies suggest that some students perceive local cultural content as less instrumental for achieving global mobility and professional aspirations. Such perceptions reflect deeply embedded hierarchies of language and culture that position certain English varieties and cultural references as more legitimate than others (Canagarajah, 2013; Kurtulmus & Irzik, 2016). The findings of this review thus illustrate how CRT implementation is mediated not only by pedagogical choices but also by broader ideological constructions of English, success, and global participation.

### **Structural Constraints and Institutional Inequities**

Beyond ideological tensions, the review underscores the significance of institutional and structural constraints in shaping CRT enactment. Limited access to sustained professional development, rigid curricular frameworks, heavy workloads, and accountability pressures were consistently identified as barriers to meaningful CRT implementation. These findings align with broader research emphasising that culturally responsive pedagogy requires systemic support rather than isolated teacher initiative (Comstock et al., 2023).

Importantly, the reviewed studies indicate that these constraints disproportionately affect under-resourced and non-metropolitan institutions, reinforcing existing educational inequities. This pattern reflects concerns raised in decolonial and social justice-oriented scholarship, which highlights how structural conditions shape whose knowledge is valued and whose pedagogical practices are supported (Andreotti, 2011; Khoo et al., 2020; Babu et al., 2024). Within this context, CRT risks becoming an aspirational ideal rather than a

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sustainable pedagogical practice unless accompanied by institutional commitment and resource allocation.

**Implications for CRT in Indonesian EFL Contexts**

The findings of this systematic review position CRT as a widely recognized pedagogical orientation within Indonesian EFL contexts. While educators actively seek to integrate local wisdom and cultural relevance into English teaching, CRT is often enacted within the boundaries of global English norms and standardised assessment regimes. Consequently, CRT is often operated at the surface only or functions as a form of inclusion instead of being the dimensions of epistemology and structure in the classrooms.

These findings imply that advancing CRT in EFL contexts requires moving beyond surface-level cultural inclusion toward more coherent alignment among curriculum policy, instructional materials, teacher education, and assessment practices. Strengthening professional development that explicitly addresses language ideologies, epistemic justice, and decolonial perspectives may enable educators to engage more critically with the structural conditions shaping English language education (Ajani, 2025; Baker et al., 2024).

**CONCLUSION**

This study examined the potential of CRT to promote social justice and equity in knowledge production within Indonesian EFL higher education through a qualitative systematic literature review guided by PRISMA 2020 and analysed using CDA. The synthesis of 22 selected studies indicates that, although CRT is increasingly acknowledged in policy discourse and educational initiatives, its implementation in curricula and classroom practices remains uneven and fragmented. Educators' efforts to integrate culture, local wisdom, and indigenous knowledge are often constrained by Western-centred curricula, exam-oriented pedagogies, and the dominance of global English standards, resulting in ongoing tensions between internationalisation and local relevance.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings position CRT not merely as a pedagogical approach but as a decolonial framework that advances epistemic justice by legitimising diverse knowledge systems and empowering students as active participants in knowledge production. However, the review also reveals that without coherent institutional policies, curriculum reform, culturally sustaining instructional resources, and sustained professional development, CRT risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative in practice.

Practically, this study highlights the need for systemic support to ensure effective CRT implementation, including embedding CRT principles into curricula and assessment practices, strengthening teacher education in CRT and decolonial pedagogy, and developing context-sensitive learning materials. As a limitation, this study relies on secondary data from published sources. Future research should therefore incorporate longitudinal and classroom-based studies to examine the impact of CRT on student identity development, language learning outcomes, and critical consciousness.

Overall, this study contributes to global debates on decolonizing higher education by demonstrating how CRT can support inclusive and socially just English language education in the Global South, while balancing the demands of global competence and local cultural relevance.

### AUTHORS STATEMENTS

**Nabila Yumna Istiadi** sourced the literature, analyzed data, co-wrote the findings and discussion and ensured the manuscript followed the journal template. **Yuliati Yuliati** contributed to data analysis, interpreted the findings, and proofread the drafts.

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