

## Exploring Culturally Responsive Teaching Clusters in Indonesian Higher Education EFL Contexts: Patterns and Students' Perspectives

**Movi Riana Rahmawanti<sup>1\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>English Education Department, Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor  
(movi.riana@uika-bogor.ac.id)

**Syifa Dwi Handayani<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>English Education Department, Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor  
(syifadwihandayani@gmail.com)

**Amalul Umam<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup>English Education Department, Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor  
(amalul.umam@uika-bogor.ac.id)

**Rindudinnia Aidaintan<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>4</sup>Teacher Professional Education Department, Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor  
(arindudinnia@gmail.com)

**Indah Sri Redjeki<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>5</sup>English Education Department, Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor  
(indahsri.redjeki@bogor-uika.ac.id)

\*corresponding author

---

**Abstract:** *Numerous studies have indicated that Culturally Responsive Teaching promotes inclusivity, increases student engagement, builds learners' confidence, and fosters meaningful EFL learning. This study examines the implementation and impact of Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in Indonesian EFL classroom focusing on identifying specific CRT clusters. The research aims to determine the types of CRT clusters manifested in classroom practices and to analyze students' perceptions and responses toward CRT Practices over one semester. Employing a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design, the study integrates descriptive quantitative analysis with in-depth qualitative inquiry. Quantitative data were derived from 20 students' reflective journals by calculating the frequency of CRT practices and categorizing them into Clusters A, B, and C. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews from 12 participants and journal analysis to explore students' experiences on Culturally responsive teaching. The findings reveal that all three CRT clusters were meaningfully implemented, with Cluster B—creating an inclusive, safe, and supportive environment—emerging as the most dominant. Overall, CRT positively enhanced students' confidence, engagement, and comprehension in English Learning.*

---

**Keywords:** *culturally responsive teaching; EFL classroom; language teaching;*

---

**Article History:**

Received	: 29 December 2025	Accepted	: 25 March 2026
Revised	: 25 February 2026	Available Online	: 30 March 2026

---

**Suggested Citation Format:**

Rahmawanti, M. R., Handayani, S. D., Umam, A., Aidaintan, R., & Redjeki, I. S. (2026). Exploring Culturally Responsive Teaching Clusters in Indonesian Higher Education EFL Contexts: Patterns and Students' Perspectives. *PANYONARA: Journal of English Education*, 8(1), 132–151. <https://doi.org/10.19105/panyonara.v8i1.24054>

---



Copyright © 2026 The Author. The journal uses an Open Access policy under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License

## INTRODUCTION

English has become a universal language that is used in many forms of communication (Mocanu, 2022). English serves not only as a school lesson, but also as a mean of global communication for people from different cultural background. As the main global language, it dictates what we are taught in school. Sometimes it makes students feel like their own culture is less important than the rest of English-speaking world. As English is used to mediate meaning, values, and interaction, learners are required not only to develop linguistic competence but also to navigate cultural differences and power relations embedded in communication. Therefore, understanding English as a lingua franca calls for pedagogical approaches that recognize English as a dynamic tool for intercultural negotiation rather than a fixed native speaker learning model (Oliveira, 2024). This emphasizes the importance of adjusting the English learning practices by empowering students to incorporate the most suitable cultural context to their learning.

Common framework of English teaching, for example: such as grammar-translation method and structured-focused approaches, seeing language as a set list of rules of learning English, excluding real-life practices (Lo, 2023). Instead of considering about students' real life, these models focus on perfect grammar, translation based learning, or native-like pronunciation. As a result of such an approach, learners' identities, lived experiences, and cultural resources are largely excluded from classroom practices by only focusing on fixed norms. By treating language as an objective tool rather than a socially situated practice, standardized ELT limits opportunities for meaningful interaction and critical engagement that the students might have (Nurraida et al., 2024). It will reinforce linguistic hierarchies, positioning learners as deficient users of English rather than legitimate meaning-makers in diverse communicative and cultural contexts.

Within the Indonesian context, the integration of cultural elements into English language teaching is increasingly significant due to the country's extensive cultural and linguistic diversity. Indonesia consists of numerous ethnic communities, each characterized by distinct languages, traditions, and perspectives on life. In response to this diversity, national education policy highlights the importance of culturally grounded instruction. The government law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System urges that educational

practices should consider cultural values and norms while developing students' academic growth (Tohri et al., 2022). The policy emphasizes that English classes activities should connect with students' cultural background and norms in a way that actually make sense for students' lives.

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is a way of teaching that fixes the flaws of old-fashioned teaching by connecting lesson to the students' cultural background (Chang & Viesca, 2022). CRT emphasizes the importance of culture as a main component of English learning. It also emphasizes the need of integrating students' own culture, stories, and identities as main parts of the school books, teaching methods and lesson plans in the classroom. CRT positions students as active participants and meaning- makers in the classroom rather than passive recipients of knowledge. CRT supports meaningful engagement in EFL Classroom that supports academic growth and cultural affirmation by incorporating students' cultures and realities into the classroom.

Chen and Yang (2017) defined the concept of Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) clusters as a systematic framework to classify pedagogical strategies that support CRT-based teaching. These clusters consist of teaching models that facilitate the cultural, emotional, and cognitive traits of students' from various cultural backgrounds. Based on this framework, teachers are able to identify students' cultural identities and background and incorporate them into classroom practices. There are 3 CRT Clusters: (A) knowing students' cultural backgrounds, (B) establishing inclusive, safe, and supportive learning environments, and (C) moving beyond the classroom context. Each cluster represents important part of teachers' and learners' role to emphasizes cultural understanding, inclusive communication, and real-life context learning.

Existing studies on culturally responsive teaching (CRT) have yielded significant results, yet a further study required. Chen and Yang (2017) primarily examine the effectiveness of CRT in increasing classroom participation and communication in an adult ESL context. However, the study involves only three participants and focuses on short-term behavioral outcomes, limiting its generalizability and depth of analysis. Nurbatra and Masyhud (2022) investigated teacher-centered implementation of CRT, identifying nine pedagogical practices such as promoting local wisdom and encouraging diverse perspectives. This study highlights teachers' roles and competencies in conducting CRT

practices but it does not systematically analyze how these practices are structured or how they are experienced and valued by students.

A significant research gap prevails in the absence of longitudinal, large-scale, and systematically categorized studies of CRT practices in many contexts. There is also lack of integrative frameworks linking CRT practices and student perspectives in real life. This limitation originated from previous focus on teachers or immediate outcomes of CRT practice, rather than linking the practice into students' experiences. To address this gap, this study emphasizes on students' views to provide a more thorough understanding of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in practice in EFL contexts. There are two research aims in this study. First, this study tries to identify the types of CRT clusters that occur in EFL classroom practices, particularly how CRT clusters are enacted in EFL classroom. Second, this study aims to examine the effects of these CRT practices by analyzing how students experience, interpret, and respond to culturally responsive teaching practices.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching in the EFL Classroom**

Culturally responsive teaching is an instructional approach that deliberately acknowledges and integrates students' cultural backgrounds into every aspect of the learning process, rather than treating culture as a peripheral or incidental element. CRT positions it at the center of teaching and learning (Patras et al., 2024). It is conceptualized as a central pedagogical framework that integrates student cultural background into all dimensions of teaching and learning. This perspective highlights that learners' cultural backgrounds shape their communication, understanding, and meaning-making processes in academic setting. As a result, it is important to incorporate cultural dimensions in learning models to enhance the success of learning.

Similarly, White (2022) states that culturally responsive teaching is an approach that highly embeds cultural awareness into teaching model, lesson planning, instructional delivery, and assessment practices. CRT highlights culture as a guiding principle for pedagogical decisions in the classroom. This aligns with Ashrafova (2024) , who views culturally responsive teaching as a comprehensive framework to ensure inclusivity across all stages of education, particularly in EFL Settings. Collectively, these perspectives

underscore CRT as a systematic, integrative, approach that connects cultural awareness with instructional effectiveness, moving beyond surface- level inclusion, toward sustained, responsive, culturally- based educational practices.

### Clusters of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Chen and Yang (2017) proposed the idea of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) clusters as an organized framework of instructional strategies designed to support culturally responsive pedagogy in classrooms. These clusters consist of grouped teaching practices that address students' cultural, emotional, and cognitive needs within diverse learning environments. The concept encourages teachers to move beyond simply recognizing cultural differences by actively incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into classroom activities. The framework includes three primary clusters: (A) understanding students' cultures, (B) building inclusive and supportive learning environments, and (C) extending learning beyond the classroom context.

**Tabel 1.**

Clusters of Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) proposed by Chen and Yang (2017)

Clusters	Instructor's role or activities	Student's role or activities	Supporting resources
<b>Cluster A: Knowing student culture (aware of students' culture, beliefs, and value)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking students to share their culture and beliefs on the discussion topics</li> <li>• Accepting all answers without judgments</li> <li>• Charting student ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-introduction</li> <li>• Poem writing</li> <li>• Drawing pictures</li> </ul>	Phuntsog (1998), Geneva Gay (2000)
<b>Cluster B: Creating inclusive, safe, and supportive learning setting (Incorporating culture into classroom)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Related cultural stories, concept, and vocabulary to past or future experience.</li> <li>• Use culture appropriate activities to emphasize sentence structures.</li> <li>• Show the academic differences among cultures.</li> <li>• Encourage sharing and communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group discussion activities</li> <li>• Presentations</li> <li>• Weekly Journals</li> </ul>	Garcia-Vasquez, Vasquez, and Lopez (1997), Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995)
<b>Cluster C: Go beyond (Stimulating students to expand their learning and thinking beyond the scope of the lesson and their own culture)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking students if they have new questions or ideas on how to use what they learned to explore in a real practic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Putting the new sentence structures and essay writing skills in the future learning</li> </ul>	Schmidt, Siago, Stephan (2011), Sleeter and Cornbleth (2011)

### **Related Study on Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Several studies serve as the foundation and key references for the study. These studies provide theoretical and empirical support, particularly in understanding how Culturally Responsive Teaching enhances engagement, inclusivity, and meaningful language learning in diverse EFL contexts as follows:

#### **Culturally Responsive Teaching in the EFL Classroom: Asian Context**

According to Liao and Li (2023), culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in Chinese learners' contexts demonstrate strong potential to enhance intercultural learning by fostering openness, diverse perspectives, and critical, meaningful engagement in EFL contexts. In Indonesian setting, Nurbatra and Masyhud (2022) explores how teachers implement culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in a multicultural higher education. It highlighted teachers' limited ability to apply culturally responsive practices in higher education. Based on the study, there are nine core CRT Practices found in the study, and that teachers' competence is really important in effectively integrate CRT into language learning. In addition, Malik & Imtiaz (2025) showed that CRT improves engagement and participation in the classroom. There are some challenges that emerged from the practices, such as curricula, limited training, and assessment constraints.

In diverse Asian setting, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) shows significant potential to increase cross-cultural proficiency, educational equity, and increase learners' involvement. However, this model only works if the teachers are well-trained, the curriculum is flexible, and there are institutional supports. Persistent challenges include limited training, rigid systems, and uneven implementation across diverse EFL educational settings still appears nowadays.

#### **Culturally Responsive teaching impacts on students' improvement**

Previous research has highlighted the positive impact of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) on EFL learning in diverse settings. Sutrisno et al. (2024) found that integrating cultural elements into writing instruction led to significant improvements in students' writing performance compared to traditional approaches. These findings suggest that CRT not only enriches students' learning experiences but also promotes the development of essential language skills, including speaking, collaboration, and writing, through culturally meaningful and relevant instruction.

#### **Teachers' views on culturally responsive teaching Experiences**

There are some findings in relation to CRT Practices, as the findings of Meihami (2023) indicate that EFL teachers encountered varied learning experiences in courses that purported to incorporate culturally responsive teaching (CRT) principles. Many teachers

reported limited and largely unsatisfactory exposure to key CRT components, such as the development of cultural knowledge, culturally grounded instructional strategies, the formation of cross-cultural learning communities, and the cultivation of affirmative attitudes toward students' cultural diversity. In contrast, teachers described more positive experiences in courses that emphasized sociocultural awareness and constructivist perspectives on teaching and learning. These mixed experiences suggest that current TEFL programs have not systematically or adequately supported the comprehensive development of CRT competencies.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design, an approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods in purposeful ways through research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Using Purposive sampling, this study selected 20 higher education students in one university in Bogor, based on their relevance to the research objective. All of the participants experienced a culturally responsive teaching environment in one culture-based course within one semester from August 2025 – to January 2026.

The instruments of this study were adapted from other study conducted by Chen and Yang (2017) to suit the classification of CRT clusters. It includes students' reflective journals and interview. In ensuring the validity of the adapted instruments, the researchers involve expert judgements from 2 EFL pedagogy experts to validate the instruments. Reflective journals serve to facilitate metacognitive engagement, allowing students to process cultural subtleties and language acquisition in a subjective, long-term personal journey. Interviews complement this by providing a platform for narrative analysis, to enable the researchers to examine deeper into specific students' reactions and emotional responses to CRT practices in EFL Contexts (Alt et al., 2022). For the reflective journal, each student wrote 3 reflective journals within one semester. They were written after meeting 4, 9, and 14. There were 60 reflective journals in total. In relation to reflective journal, the quantitative component served a focused, descriptive role, utilizing systematically track and "count hits" from student journals. These frequencies in reflective journals are then categorized into specific culturally responsive teaching (CRT) clusters specifically clusters A, B, and C, as

proposed by Chen and Yang (2017). These frequencies are subsequently presented as percentages and analyzed to determine overall ranking of each CRT's Clusters.

Semi-structured interview was conducted after the semester and the CRT's session over. The use of semi-structured interviews is appropriate to explore students' perspectives in CRT's on their experiences, interpret CRT's instruction within CRT Clusters, and to analyze CRT's effect on students' learning. From total 20 participants there are 12 participants agreed to be interviewed, and the interview list consists of 5 questions (3 questions represents each CRT's clusters, and 2 questions represent overall experiences and effect of their CRT's experiences during their learning). After the semester is over, the 12 participants were directly interviewed one by one. The interview results were transcribed and coded, and later the participant were informed about the data analysis result to ensure their acceptance to the data display.

Ethical consideration was carefully addressed to ensure the integrity of this study by informing the consent from all 20 participants prior to data collection to ensure their voluntary participation and understanding of the research purpose. Participant anonymity was maintained by assigning codes (Participant 1-20), in interview data and reflective journal analysis, all data were treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes. These procedures ensure respect for participants' right, safety, and privacy throughout the research process.

Inter-rater reliability is essential in this study to ensure consistency in coding CRT cluster occurrences from students' reflective journals and interview data. Two independent coders were involved in analyzing the data using the predefined CRT clusters (A, B, and C), each coder separately identified and counted relevant units, after which their results were compared. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus to refine coding accuracy, and to quantify reliability. An agreement index such as Cohen's Kappa (Ibrahim & Mohd Matore, 2025) was applied to measure consistency beyond chance. The Kappa value resulted from the measurement was 0.84: indicating a high level of inter-rater reliability among the raters in the study. This procedure guarantees the empirical stability and objectivity of the data, to ensure the credibility of data analysis.

Given their shares institutional affiliation with the participant cohort, the researchers acknowledge that such proximity could introduce subjective bias in data analysis and

interpretation. Therefore, reflexivity is maintained by critically reflecting on assumptions and minimizing subjective influence throughout the research process. Reflexive tools and strategies such as participant validation, triangulation, inter-rater reliability, and structured documentation were applied, ensuring that findings accurately represent students' perspectives rather than researcher expectations (Taylor et al., 2016).

Following a thematic analysis approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021), the researchers familiarized themselves with data by reading the transcripts, and generated initial codes by identifying meaningful data segments. These codes were then organized into themes provided based on three distinct CRT clusters from Chen and Yang (2017), which function as the study's primary analytical framework. The themes were defined in Cluster A, Cluster B, Cluster C, and impact of CRT practices to students in EFL Classroom. After the themes were clearly defined and named, the findings were reported with supporting data extracts and displayed following 4 themes defined earlier. Each theme is presented with supporting excerpts from reflective journals and interviews, illustrating how raw data underpin the analysis. This approach ensures that data presentation is systematic, transparent, and logically connected to the coding process, to clearly trace the development from initial data to final interpretations.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### **Culturally Responsive Teaching's Clusters in EFL Classroom**

The data were derived from students' reflective journals written during one semester of experiencing CRT-based teaching in the EFL classroom and semi structured interview. A total of 20 students documented their learning experiences, perceptions, and classroom interactions related to culturally responsive practices. Analysis of these journals indicates that not all CRT clusters were equally represented in the implementation of CRT-based instruction, while several students frequently described experiences related to creating inclusive, safe, and supportive learning environments (Cluster B), fewer entries reflected practices associated with knowing students' cultural backgrounds (Cluster A) or extending learning beyond the classroom context (Cluster C). This finding suggests that although CRT principles were present, their implementation was uneven across clusters. The journal data

reveal that certain dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy were emphasized more strongly than others during the semester.

**Table 2.**  
 The result of Reflective Journal about CRT Clusters

<b>CRT Clusters</b>	<b>Conceptual Focus</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Cluster A	Knowing students' cultural backgrounds	7	35%
Cluster B	Inclusive, safe, supportive environments	10	50%
Cluster C	Moving beyond classroom context	3	15%

This study set out to examine the emergence of Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) clusters in a CRT-based EFL classroom by analyzing students' reflective journals over one semester. Drawing on Chen and Yang's (2017) framework, CRT is conceptualized into three clusters: Cluster A (knowing students' culture), Cluster B (creating inclusive, safe, and supportive learning settings), and Cluster C (going beyond the classroom context). The findings reveal that even though all three clusters appeared in the CRT practices, clusters' distribution was uneven across the sessions.

Based in quantitative data, Cluster B was the most frequently identified in the classroom (50%), followed by Cluster A (35%), while Cluster C was least represented in the study (15%). This result indicates that the implementation of CRT was primarily concentrated on fostering an inclusive and supportive classroom climate, as cluster B suggested. Students' journals frequently described the occurrence of CRT practices such as group discussions, presentations, and weekly reflections, develops opportunities to express confusion or understanding without fear of judgment.

These practices align strongly with Cluster B, which emphasizes culturally inclusive interaction, communication, and supportive learning environments. The dominance of Cluster B suggests that the instructor successfully established a classroom atmosphere that encouraged participation and respected diversity. This finding also reinforced by interview result, for instance, one student noted,

*"The lecturer often asked about our personal experiences, which really helped us connect the theory to real life. It made the lessons feel more relevant and easier to understand. We felt more comfortable sharing our ideas, and it makes the classroom more conducive when our background was valued"*  
 (Participant 1)

indicating that learning was connected to lived realities. This approach positioned students as active contributors rather than passive recipients. Similarly, another student wrote,

*"The lecturer invited students to discuss and share their personal experiences, and always respect our opinion about the matter discussed" (Participant 2)*

This excerpt is a proof to highlight that the teacher supported a classroom climate that encouraged open dialogue, mutual respect, and meaningful participation.

Cluster A, that focuses on recognizing and valuing students' cultural backgrounds, appeared moderately throughout the result. Students stated that some activities such as sharing personal experiences, introducing their cultural identities, and connecting lesson topics with their own traditions and beliefs, appeared in CRT Practices. Even though these practices demonstrate awareness of cultural diversity, they were not as consistently emphasized as inclusive classroom interaction. This finding also supported by interview result that Cluster A, which emphasizes knowing students' cultural backgrounds, was evident in several participants' practice experiences. One student noted,

*"She encourages students to share example from our native language, so we can understand more about the context and the meaning in our language, not only in English." (Participant 3)*

This excerpt indicates that the lecturer invited learners to draw on their linguistic resources during discussions. Similarly, the question, "How does this work in your language?", demonstrates intentional efforts to connect English concepts with students' own languages. Interview data further confirmed this practice:

*"The lecturer related the lesson to students' cultural background, and sometimes compare the idea between some different cultural backgrounds, so we can understand different cultural practices" (Participant 4)*

These findings show that students' cultural and linguistic identities were acknowledged and meaningfully integrated into instruction.

Lastly, cluster C was minimally reflected in students' reflective journals about CRT practices. Only a small proportion of entries indicated that students were encouraged to extend their learning beyond classroom tasks or apply English skills to real-world that based on intercultural contexts. Some students mentioned applying writing skills or sentence structures for future learning, but structured opportunities to explore knowledge

beyond the classroom appeared limited. Interview data also indicate the presence of Cluster C, where learning extends beyond classroom boundaries in CRT practices. One participant noted,

*“As all of us will become a professional teacher once we graduated, the lecturer motivated students to apply what they learned to future teaching practices, and to face students’ cultural differences once we became teacher”*

*(Participant 5)*

highlighting the emphasis on transferring classroom knowledge into real professional contexts. This suggests that instruction was oriented not only toward theoretical understanding but also toward preparing students for culturally diverse teaching environments. Similarly, another participant stated,

*“By the end of our session, the lecturer ask us to do reflection whether it is important to understand others cultural background. The lecturer stimulated students to think further and do reflection by connecting classroom learning to future professional roles”*

*(Participant 6)*

These findings demonstrate that students were encouraged to view cultural awareness as essential for their future professional careers as English teachers.

The research results from 20 students’ journals and interviews show uneven CRT implementation in EFL Classroom. It is confirmed that Cluster B (50%) dominated, emphasizing inclusive and supportive classroom environments in CRT practices. Cluster A (35%) moderately reflected cultural recognition, while Cluster C (15%) was least evident. Overall, all three CRT clusters were present in CRT practices, but the distribution is uneven.

### **Students’ Perspectives on the Impact of Culturally Responsive Teaching in the EFL Classroom**

The second theme emerging from the data concerns students’ direct experiences of the impact of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) on their learning. Analysis of reflective journals and interview transcripts from 12 participants revealed three recurring patterns: CRT practices fostered students’ confidence and active participation, enhanced their comprehension of course content through culturally relevant examples, and strengthened their readiness for future professional teaching roles. Each of these patterns is presented

below with supporting evidence drawn from participants' own voices. One impact is that CRT practices foster students' confidence and active participation. The data indicate that when lecturers intentionally create space for students to share their ideas, personal stories, and cultural perspectives, students feel more secure and valued in the learning process. This is clearly reflected in the following excerpt:

*"The lecturer encouraged interaction by inviting students to share opinions and experiences during discussions, which helped students feel safe and comfortable participating in class. We're not feel judged if we have different opinions, and we feel safe when state our opinion" (Participant 7).*

This statement highlights the importance of a supportive classroom climate in reducing students' anxiety and hesitation. The non-threatening environment cultivated through CRT practices appears to reduce fear of making mistakes, particularly in EFL settings where language anxiety is common. As a result, students develop greater self-confidence, participate more actively in classroom activities, and contribute more meaningfully to collaborative learning processes. This finding suggests that CRT plays a crucial role in promoting equitable participation by validating students' identities and experiences.

Another impact relates to how CRT enhances students' understanding of course content through culturally relevant examples. The findings reveal that lecturers frequently connect theoretical material with students' cultural backgrounds and everyday experiences. Such practices help bridge the gap between abstract academic concepts and students' lived realities. This is supported by the following excerpt:

*"Our cultural experiences were used to help explain concepts and support understanding. Sometimes when the lecturer ask us to relate the material in our experiences, it makes more sense to us" (Participant 8).*

This statement demonstrates that cultural references function as cognitive scaffolding, enabling students to grasp complex ideas more effectively. By embedding lessons within familiar cultural contexts, lecturers make learning more accessible and meaningful. For example, discussions of linguistic structures, lesson planning strategies, or teaching methodologies become clearer when linked to students' own social and cultural environments. CRT does not merely acknowledge cultural diversity symbolically; it is also

actively integrating culture into instructional pedagogy practices to enhance students understanding.

CRT practices demonstrate a significant impact on students' readiness as future professional English speakers. The findings show that students are empowered to reflect on how their students' cultural awareness and inclusive learning strategies can be applied beyond EFL classroom into real-life context. This future direction of CRT is evident in the following excerpt:

*"The lecturer motivated students to apply what they learned to future teaching practices, especially in handling cultural diversity in the classroom. So when we became a professional teacher, we have to consider students' cultural differences to make the learning more effective"*  
(Participant 9).

This quotation indicates that students are not only learning theoretical concepts about cultural responsiveness but are also guided to envision how these concepts can inform their professional roles as future educators. Students begin to understand the practical relevance of CRT practices in EFL context through reflective activities, discussions, and some exposure to diverse cultural settings. CRT cultivates students' awareness of sociocultural diversity and serves as a bridge between academic preparation and professional competence.

In conclusion, the effect of CRT Teaching derived from the data show that CRT positively influences students' academic engagement, cognitive development, and internalization of professional norms and attributes. The data provide valid evidence that students perceive CRT as empowering, relevant, and practically valuable in their learning experiences. Therefore, the integration of CRT principles in EFL classrooms not only enriches immediate learning experiences but also prepares students to become culturally sensitive and inclusive educators in the future.

## **Discussion**

This discussion addresses the research objectives by examining the implementation of CRT Clusters and impact of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) within EFL contexts. It identifies emerging CRT clusters in instructional practices while exploring student

perspectives on these methods. Ultimately, the findings offer insights into fostering more inclusive, meaningful, and effective language learning environments.

### **The CRT Clusters Identified in EFL Classrooms**

This study revealed that all three clusters of Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) proposed by Chen and Yang (2017) were present in the observed EFL classrooms, though with notably uneven distribution. Cluster B that creating an inclusive, safe, and supportive learning environment, emerged as the most dominant practice, which indicates a broader pattern in higher education EFL contexts where relational and affective dimensions of teaching are prioritized as the foundation for effective instruction in the classroom.

The strong dominance of Cluster B aligns consistently with related research, as Liao & Li (2023) found that inclusive and supportive environments significantly enhanced students' confidence to communicate within multicultural EFL classrooms. Similarly, Hidayati et al. (2024) found that CRT practices support emotional well-being, and also increase mutual respect during student engagement in English learning. These results suggest that emotional security is not merely a supplementary feature in language learning, but also support the effectiveness of it. In ensuring the success of learning, students who come from highly diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds need a respectful and non-judgmental classroom climate. This is further reinforced by the nature of discussion-based learning and reflective assignments common in EFL courses, which inherently require trust and psychological safety to function effectively. Cluster B, therefore, serves not simply as one of three equal components but as the foundational layer upon which the other CRT clusters are built.

Cluster A — understanding students' cultures — was also identified, though less prominently. In CRT practice, teachers invited students to share their cultural perspectives, also introduce themselves in culturally expressive ways, and engage in creative tasks such as writing in the classroom. These approaches reflect Eden et al.'s (2024) idea that students' cultural experiences should be viewed as important classroom pedagogical resources rather than peripheral additions to instruction in the classroom. Moreover, they similarly noted that understanding students' beliefs allows teachers to design instruction that genuinely respects intercultural diversity and students' cultural background. The relatively lower presence of Cluster A compared to Cluster B suggests a pedagogical pattern that

teachers tend to establish emotional safety first through the instruction before systematically incorporating students' cultural knowledge into instruction in the classroom. This has important implications for teacher education programs, which should train pre-service EFL teachers not only to recognize cultural diversity but to use the knowledge consistently and purposefully throughout their language learning.

Cluster C, which extending learning beyond the classroom, was the least frequently identified practice, appearing primarily in interview data rather than in students' reflective journals hits. This discrepancy is itself significant that Cluster C surfaced more clearly in spoken reflection than in written journals. It suggests that while students were aware of the future dimension of their learning, it was not yet deeply integrated in their real-life classroom experience. This finding aligns with Liao & Li (2023), who similarly noted that connecting culturally responsive practices to real-life experience remains one of challenging parts of CRT to practice consistently. The low representation of Cluster C refers to a clear area for pedagogical development to connect learning into real-life context.

### **The Impact of Culturally Responsive Teaching in the EFL Classroom**

Beyond identifying the distribution of CRT clusters, the findings carry significant pedagogical implications for how CRT shapes students' broader learning experiences in Indonesian EFL higher education. First, the data demonstrate that CRT practices play a meaningful role in reducing language anxiety and fostering active participation. When lecturers intentionally created space for students to share personal experiences and cultural perspectives, students reported feeling more secure, valued, and willing to take communicative risks. This finding is consistent with Liao and Li's (2023) study which revealed that culturally responsive classrooms foster a sense of belonging and emotional safety, that in result, increases learners' motivation and self-efficacy during English learning. For EFL learners that frequently experience anxiety in in speaking, this affective dimension of CRT is not incidental but pedagogically critical for their learning. English teachers should give specific attention to strategies for reducing students' anxiety and building emotional safety classes as core components of culturally responsive practice.

Second finding of the study suggest that bridging academic materials to students' cultural backgrounds and values functions as effective cognitive scaffolding. Students

consistently showed that culturally relevant materials made complex linguistic and pedagogical concepts more contextualized and impactful to them. This supports the wider argument in the CRT studies that culture is not merely a motivational tool but a way of making knowledge accessible and relevant to diverse students that having difficulties in comprehending the learning (Abdalla & Ahmat, 2024). Curriculum designers and materials developers working in Indonesian EFL contexts should consider how local cultural references, narratives, and experiences can be more systematically integrated into course content, rather than relying predominantly on Western or globally standardized examples.

Third, and perhaps most significantly for the specific population studied, CRT was found to strengthen students' readiness for their future professional roles as English teachers. Students reported that the implementation of culturally responsive teaching encouraged them to reflect on how cultural awareness influence effective English teaching practice. This corresponds with Akmalia et al.'s (2023) finding that culture-based learning supports critical thinking and professional competence among pre-services teachers' learning. The significance is that CRT functions to develop students' English language skills and also their pedagogical awareness as future professional educators. This dual benefit makes CRT particularly valuable in pre-service teacher education contexts such as the one examined in this study, and argues strongly for its more systematic integration into English Education Department curricula across Indonesia.

Taken together, these findings confirm that CRT, when implemented across all three clusters — even unevenly — produces meaningful and multidimensional benefits for EFL learners. However, the uneven distribution across clusters also signals that current implementation remains incomplete. The challenge for Indonesian EFL educators and institutions is to move beyond the relational comfort of Cluster B toward a more balanced, intentional, and sustained application of all three CRT dimensions.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study are better understood when viewed through the framework of Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and its clusters, rather than simply showing certain CRTs' practices in EFL Classroom. The research results reveal a shift from seeing language as neutral, practical practice only to understanding it as culturally shaped pattern. This supports the idea that Culturally Responsive Teaching deliberately

acknowledges and integrates students' cultural backgrounds into every aspect of the learning process (Patras et al., 2024). Thus, the classroom becomes not only a place to learn language but also a space where students' cultural identities are recognized, valued, and identified as key role to maximize students' learning in EFL Classroom.

From an analytical perspective, the use of CRT clusters shows how teaching can balance the global role of English with the need to represent local cultures and student's cultural background. As noted, learners must navigate cultural differences and power relations embedded in communication (Oliveira, 2024), when lessons are connected to students' cultural experiences, learners become active meaning-makers rather than passive learners. This challenges traditional ELT approaches that conceptualize language as a neutral and decontextualized system (Lo, 2023), and promotes a more socially grounded view of language learning that involve students' cultural background. In addition, the CRT cluster framework by Chen and Yang (2017) helps explain how these practices work together as a system. CRT's focus on knowing students' cultures, building inclusive and supportive learning environments, also extending learning beyond the classroom context, shows that effective teaching practice comes from the integration of these CRT Clusters into EFL Classrooms. This supports the idea that CRT is a systematic, integrative approach that connects cultural awareness with instructional practices in EFL classroom (White, 2022).

This study also answers a gap in previous research by focusing on students' experiences rather than only examine teachers' practices as the main actor of CRT implementation in EFL classroom. It shows that students do not just receive culturally responsive teaching, but also interpret and internalize it into their learning experiences, so the whole picture of CRT's implementation can be analyzed thoroughly. This aligns with the idea that learners' cultural identities fundamentally shape their engagement, understanding, and meaning-making processes (Patras et al., 2024). Therefore, CRT influences not only students' participation but also deeper learning processes and the success of students' English learning in many aspects of the learning. In conclusion, this study confirms that CRT, through its cluster framework, provides a meaningful alternative to traditional ELT, that involves culture into EFL Classroom. It supports a more inclusive and context-sensitive approach, where students' cultural backgrounds play a central role in both language learning and identity development.

For further research, there some areas that underexplored for example by examining the long-term impact of culturally responsive teaching (CRT), particularly by giving greater attention to Cluster C, which focuses on extending learning beyond the classroom. This cluster is crucial to stimulate students generating new questions and apply their knowledge beyond classroom, fostering deeper intercultural competence and critical thinking. The implementation of cluster C remains underexplored and often less visible

compared to other clusters in CRT practices. In addition, comparative research across different educational levels, for example primary, secondary, and higher education is needed to understand how CRT practices develop and function in varied learning contexts.

#### **DECLARATION OF AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES**

In developing this work, the authors utilized ChatGPT to support information retrieval, along with DeepL (V.24.4.3) to enhance linguistic accuracy and readability. The authors have carefully reviewed, revised, and refined the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the final manuscript.

#### **REFERENCES**

- Abdalla, H., & Moussa, A. (2024). Culturally responsive teaching: Navigating models and implementing effective strategies. *Acta Pedagogica Asiana*, 3(2), 91–100. <https://doi.org/10.53623/apga.v3i2.432>
- Akmalia, R., Situmorang, M. S., Anggraini, A., Rafsanjani, A., Tanjung, A., & Hasibuan, E. E. (2023). Penerapan pembelajaran berbasis budaya dalam meningkatkan mutu pendidikan Di SMP swasta Pahlawan Nasional. *Jurnal Basicedu*, 7(6), 3878–3885. <https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v7i6.6373>
- Alt, D., Raichel, N., & Naamati-Schneider, L. (2022). Higher education students' reflective journal writing and lifelong learning skills: Insights from an exploratory sequential study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.707168>
- Ashrafova, I. (2024). Culturally Responsive Teaching: Strategies for promoting inclusivity in the classroom. *Global Spectrum of Research and Humanities*, 1(1), 100–110. <https://doi.org/10.69760/gsrh.0101202409>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. SAGE Publications Inc. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69909-7\\_3470-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69909-7_3470-2)
- Chang, W.-C., & Viesca, K. M. (2022). Preparing teachers for Culturally Responsive/Relevant Pedagogy (CRP): A critical review of research. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, 124(2), 197–224. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681221086676>
- Chen, D., & Yang, X. (2017). Improving active classroom participation of ESL students: Applying culturally responsive teaching strategies. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 7(1), 79–86. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0701.10>
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. Plano. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. SAGE.
- Eden, C. A., Chisom, O. N., & Adeniyi, I. S. (2024). Cultural competence in education: Strategies for fostering inclusivity and diversity awareness. *International Journal of Applied Research in Social Sciences*, 6(3), 383–392. <https://doi.org/10.51594/ijarss.v6i3.895>
- Hidayati, A. F., Yuliati, Y., & Hutagalung, F. D. (2024). The implementation of culturally responsive teaching in ELT classrooms within the concept of emancipated curriculum. *ELT Forum: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 13(2), 150–162. <https://doi.org/10.15294/elt.v13i2.7731>
- Ibrahim, S. N. A., & Mohd Matore, M. E. E. (2025). The validity of the Malaysian teachers' global competency level instrument using Cohen Kappa, content validity ratio and content validity index analyses. *Journal of Applied Science, Engineering, Technology, and Education*, 7(1), 82–93. <https://doi.org/10.35877/454RI.asci3848>

- Liao, H., & Li, L. (2023). Facilitating EFL learners' intercultural competence through culturally responsive teaching in oral English classrooms. *System*, 115, 103070. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.103070>
- Lo, S. (2023). Pedagogical translation for vocabulary learning: the parallel-text approach. *Taiwan Journal of TESOL*, 20(2), 97–135. [https://doi.org/10.30397/TJTESOL.202310\\_20\(2\).0004](https://doi.org/10.30397/TJTESOL.202310_20(2).0004)
- Malik, M., & Imtiaz, A. (2025). Voices from the classroom: Pakistani ESL teachers' experiences with culturally responsive pedagogy. *International Journal of Linguistics and Culture*, 6(1), 9–28. <https://doi.org/10.52700/ijlc.v6i1.284>
- Meihami, H. (2023). Culturally responsive teaching in TEFL programs: Exploring EFL teachers' experiences. *English Teaching & Learning*, 47(1), 119–144. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42321-022-00108-7>
- Mocanu, V. (2022). English as a lingua franca and European identity – parallelisms in their development. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, 11(1), 25–41. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jelf-2022-2074>
- Nurbatra, L. H., & Masyhud, M. (2022). Infusing culturally responsive teaching in higher education: Insights for multicultural education in Indonesia. *Journal of Innovation in Educational and Cultural Research*, 3(4), 722–730. <https://doi.org/10.46843/jiecr.v3i4.321>
- Nurraida, N., Islami, C. M., & Daulay, S. H. (2024). Enhancing educational factors to address language dilemmas in the ELT class. *PEBSAS: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 2(2), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.61721/pebsas.v2i2.377>
- Olateju Temitope Akintayo, Chima Abimbola Eden, Oyebola Olusola Ayeni, & Nneamaka Chisom Onyebuchi. (2024). Cross-cultural instructional design: A framework for multilingual and interdisciplinary education. *International Journal of Frontiers in Science and Technology Research*, 6(2), 060–070. <https://doi.org/10.53294/ijfstr.2024.6.2.0038>
- Oliveira, M. M. de. (2024). English as a lingua franca and interculturality: navigating structure- and process-oriented perspectives in intercultural interactions. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 24(2), 105–117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2023.2254285>
- Patras, Y. E., Rahmawati, Y., Japar, M., & Hidayat, R. (2024). Today and future of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) : Indonesia needs it. *Jurnal Kependidikan: Jurnal Hasil Penelitian Dan Kajian Kepustakaan Di Bidang Pendidikan, Pengajaran Dan Pembelajaran*, 10(4), 1652–1664. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jk.v10i4.12985>
- Sutrisno, D., Abbas, A., & Muhammad. (2024). Enhancing writing skills through cultural integration: Exploring the impact of culturally-responsive writing instruction in diverse EFL classrooms. *Global Synthesis in Education Journal*, 2(3), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.61667/rpm4cp30>
- Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, M. L. (2016). Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource. In *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada* (Vol. 5, Number 1).
- Tohri, A., Rasyad, A., Sururuddin, M., & Istiqlal, L. M. (2022). The urgency of Sasak local wisdom-based character education for elementary school in East Lombok, Indonesia. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, 11(1), 333–344. <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v11i1.21869>
- White, A. L. (2022). Reaching back to reach forward: Using culturally responsive frameworks to enhance critical action amongst educators. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 44(2), 166–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2021.2009748>