

LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has been recognized as an effective pedagogical approach that integrates students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process, yet limited research in Indonesia has examined English teachers' perceptions of CRT through a linguistic lens. This study explores how junior high school English teachers in Klaten perceive and discursively construct CRT in their classrooms. Employing a qualitative design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six English teachers of diverse backgrounds, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, focusing both on thematic content and linguistic markers such as lexical choices, metaphors, and stance-taking. The findings reveal three patterns of teachers' understanding: some framed CRT as a teaching method, others as a broader educational approach, while one admitted unfamiliarity with the concept. These perceptions were linguistically constructed through markers of uncertainty (e.g., interrogatives, hedges), evaluative and metaphorical language (e.g., "learning asset"), and stance-taking devices that reflected confidence or hesitation. In implementation, teachers integrated CRT through project-based learning, local cultural narratives, and school routines, though coherence varied depending on their conceptual grounding. Obstacles included limited teacher competence, insufficient facilities, students' cultural identity resistance to English, and low self-confidence, while strategies involved professional development, use of technology, relationship building, and material adaptation. The study concludes that teachers' discourse both reflects and shapes their engagement with CRT, and that without strong theoretical foundations, practices risk remaining intuitive rather than systematic. It recommends strengthening professional development programs to combine theoretical understanding and practical strategies, thereby supporting more inclusive and culturally grounded English language teaching in Indonesia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has been widely acknowledged as an effective pedagogical approach that values students' cultural backgrounds and integrates them into the learning process. In language education, CRT is especially relevant because language and culture are inseparable; teaching English in non-native contexts often raises questions about identity, relevance, and cultural positioning (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2021). While much of the



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research on CRT has been conducted in Western contexts, little is known about how Indonesian English teachers perceive and linguistically construct CRT in their classrooms.

In Indonesia, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning and competency development. This curriculum provides opportunities for integrating CRT principles, particularly in English language teaching, where cultural diversity and linguistic practices intersect. However, the success of CRT implementation depends not only on curriculum policy but also on how teachers discursively frame and enact CRT in their classroom practices (Assalihee & Boonsuk, 2023; Hidayati et al., 2024; Vargas-Murillo et al., 2023).

From a linguistic perspective, teacher perceptions are not merely cognitive understandings but are also constructed through language how teachers describe, justify, and evaluate CRT reveals their stance, identity, and positioning. Teachers' lexical choices, metaphors, and modality in speech can indicate their confidence, uncertainty, or resistance toward CRT, while also shaping classroom interactions (Ghaemi & Boroushaki, 2025). Thus, analyzing teacher discourse offers valuable insights into the deeper meanings they attach to CRT beyond pedagogical routines.

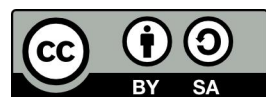
Despite the growing interest in culturally responsive pedagogy, limited research in Indonesia has examined English teachers' perceptions of CRT, particularly through a linguistic lens. Previous studies have primarily focused on curriculum integration, instructional methods, or student outcomes (Arifudin & Raza Ali, 2022; Rosyad et al., 2022), yet how teachers linguistically construct CRT in their talk remains underexplored. Addressing this gap is crucial because teachers' discourse not only reflects their perceptions but also influences how they implement CRT in practice.

This study aims to explore English teachers' perceptions of CRT in junior high schools in Klaten by examining their linguistic constructions in interviews. Specifically, it seeks to (1) identify how teachers conceptualize CRT, (2) analyze the implementation of CRT, (3) analyze the obstacles they face in implementing it, and (4) investigate the strategies they employ to overcome challenges. By taking a linguistic perspective, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how language shapes pedagogical perceptions and offers implications for teacher training, curriculum development, and policy in Indonesian EFL contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Curriculum

The Indonesian independent curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) emphasizes student-centered learning and flexibility in teaching methods, allowing teachers to adapt instructional strategies to students' cultural and personal contexts (Aini & Adiyono, 2023). Learning is linked to students' daily lives, and project-based learning is promoted to foster creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking (Suryati et al., 2023). Importantly, the curriculum creates opportunities for integrating culturally responsive teaching (CRT), particularly in English language education, where the recognition of cultural diversity can enhance the relevance and engagement of lessons (Rasyad et al., 2025). This study positions the Merdeka Curriculum as a framework that enables teachers to linguistically and pedagogically construct CRT in practice.



2.2 Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) gained recognition in the late 1990s and early 2000s, particularly through Geneva Gay's influential work "Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice" (2000), which framed CRT as an approach that values students' cultural heritage and integrates it into classroom learning. CRT can be defined as an educational approach that links lesson content to students' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds to improve academic achievement and foster inclusivity (Gay, 2010).

In practice, CRT involves strategies such as integrating culturally relevant materials, encouraging group discussions to explore diverse perspectives, and designing projects that reflect students' cultural contexts (Abdalla & Moussa, 2024; Ghaemi & Boroushaki, 2025). Its benefits include increasing student motivation, strengthening cultural identity, and reducing achievement gaps between different student groups (Abacioglu et al., 2020; Tanase, 2020). However, challenges remain: many teachers lack formal training in CRT, and schools often face resource limitations that hinder culturally responsive curriculum development (Chuang et al., 2020; Massar, 2022).

2.3 Teacher Perception and Linguistic Construction of Culturally Responsive Teaching

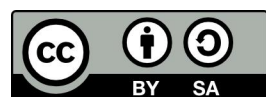
Teacher perceptions of CRT are crucial, as they directly shape how CRT is interpreted and implemented in classrooms. Teachers' understanding can influence their confidence in adopting innovative strategies and in building inclusive learning environments (Farah & Al-Hattami, 2023; Ghasemi, 2022). Positive teacher perceptions often lead to more engaged classrooms, where students feel recognized and supported. Conversely, limited understanding may hinder implementation despite curriculum opportunities.

From a linguistic perspective, teacher perceptions are not only cognitive but also discursively constructed. The way teachers talk about CRT through lexical choices (e.g., calling CRT a "method" or an "approach"), metaphors, stance-taking, and modality reveals their positioning and identity as educators (Meyers et al., 2024). This aligns with sociolinguistic perspectives that highlight how classroom interaction and teacher discourse shape both pedagogical practice and student engagement (Havik & Westergård, 2020). While students' and parents' perceptions of CRT are valuable (Blitch, 2013), this study focuses on teachers, given their central role in mediating curriculum policy and classroom practice through language.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Setting

This study employs a qualitative design to explore English teachers' perceptions of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in junior high schools. The design emphasizes rich descriptions and in-depth interpretations of participants' perspectives. Data were collected in Klaten Regency, Central Java, through direct interaction with teachers affiliated with the Subject Teacher Consultation Group (MGMP). This setting was chosen because MGMP plays a strategic role in curriculum development and professional learning among English teachers, making it an appropriate context to investigate CRT perceptions and practices.



Object and Subject of the Study

The object of this study is teachers' perceptions of CRT, including their conceptual understanding, classroom application, perceived obstacles, and strategies to address those challenges. Perceptions were understood not only as cognitive views but also as linguistically constructed through teachers' discourse. The study involved six English teachers (five female, one male) representing diverse teaching experiences (1–23 years), qualifications (bachelor's and master's degrees), employment status (civil servant and non-civil servant), and certification backgrounds. This diversity allowed for a broader representation of perspectives. Teachers were selected purposively from MGMP membership to ensure that participants had both practical teaching experience and involvement in curriculum discussions. Data saturation was determined when no new themes or linguistic patterns emerged from the interviews.

Data and Data Collection Technique

The primary data consisted of semi-structured interviews with MGMP English teachers. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian or English, depending on participants' preference, to allow them to express their views comfortably. The interview guide was aligned with the research objectives but remained flexible for probing questions. Teachers were invited to reflect on their understanding of CRT, describe its implementation, discuss obstacles encountered, and explain strategies used. Importantly, interviews also captured teachers' linguistic constructions of perception, including their lexical choices (e.g., referring to CRT as a “method” or “approach”), metaphors (e.g., teaching as “guiding” or “struggling”), and evaluative language (e.g., describing students as “active,” “lazy,” or “confident”). These linguistic markers served as indicators of how teachers frame cultural responsiveness and position themselves as educators.

Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (2020) interactive model, consisting of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis focused on both thematic content (teachers' understanding, implementation, obstacles, and strategies) and linguistic features that revealed stance, identity, and cultural framing. This dual-level analysis ensured that findings were grounded in both pedagogical practice and discourse analysis.

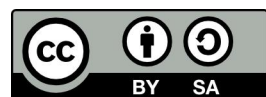
Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality by anonymizing names and schools, protecting participants' right to withdraw at any stage without consequences, and maintaining cultural sensitivity throughout the research process. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and findings are presented honestly, without personal identifiers, to preserve research integrity.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Profile of Interviewee

To provide a clear context for the data analysis, it is important to present the background information of the interview participants. By examining these profiles, the research can better



interpret how individual differences in background and professional experience may influence teachers' perceptions and implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). In table 1 there are 6 teachers, 5 of whom are female and 1 of whom is male. Teacher T1 is a male teacher who has a master's education qualification with 4 years of teaching experience and has the status of an uncertified teacher. The teacher teaches in a private school and is active in participating in seminars. Teacher T2 is a female teacher who has a bachelor's education qualification with 23 years of teaching experience, who is a certified teacher in a public school, and who is active in participating in seminar activities. Teacher T3 is a female teacher who has a bachelor's education qualification with 22 years of teaching experience in a certified public school and is active in participating in seminar activities. Teacher T4 is a teacher who teaches in a public school with 2 years of teaching experience, who has a bachelor's degree, and who is not a certified teacher. The teacher is active in participating in seminar activities. Teacher T5 is a female teacher who has a bachelor's education background and has 1 year of teaching experience in a public school. The teacher is not a certified teacher, but the teacher is active in participating in seminar activities. Teacher T6 is a female teacher who has 17 years of teaching experience as an English teacher in a public school, with a bachelor's degree in education, and is active in participating in seminar activities.

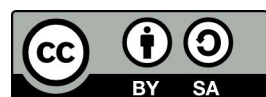
Table 1. Profil Interviewee

Interviewee	Gender	Qualification	Teaching Experience	Status	Teaching Certificate	Type of School	Active in Attending Seminars
T1	Male	Master	4 Years	Non Civil Servant	No	Private School	Yes
T2	Female	Bachelor	23 Years	Civil Servant	Yes	State School	Yes
T3	Female	Bachelor	22 Years	Civil Servant	Yes	State School	Yes
T4	Female	Bachelor	2 Years	Non Civil Servant	No	State School	Yes
T5	Female	Bachelor	1 Year	Non Civil Servant	No	State School	Yes
T6	Female	Bachelor	17 Years	Non Civil Servant	No	State School	Yes

Of the 6 interviewee teachers in the table presented, there is 1 male teacher and 5 female teachers. Based on educational qualifications, 1 teacher has a master's (S2) educational background, and five other teachers have a bachelor's (S1) educational background. From teaching experience, 1 teacher has more than 20 years of teaching experience (T2 and T3), 1 teacher has 17 years of teaching experience, 1 person has 4 years of teaching experience, and 2 others have less than 3 years of teaching experience. 2 teachers are civil servants, while the other 4 are non-civil servant teachers. Only two interviewees have teaching certificates, and these teachers are also civil servant teachers. Then, related to the type of school, 1 teacher teaches in a private school, and 5 other teachers teach in public schools. The 6 teachers are active in participating in seminar activities.

4.1.2. Teacher's Understanding of CRT

Based on the interviews, three distinct perspectives emerged regarding the concept of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT): some teachers perceived it as a teaching method, others as a broader educational approach, while one teacher admitted not fully understanding the term.



However, beyond these differences in content, teachers' linguistic constructions revealed how their perceptions were shaped and expressed.

For instance, T1 explicitly framed CRT as "*metode pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris*" ("a method of teaching English") rather than as an approach. His utterance "*CRT itu apa ya mbak?*" ("What is CRT?") signals uncertainty, with the use of the interrogative particle *ya* softening his stance and indicating a lack of authority in defining the concept. Moreover, he used the evaluative phrase "*tanpa CRT pun guru juga sudah menerapkan*" ("even without CRT, teachers have already applied it"), which positions CRT as redundant and conflates it with long-standing local culture-based teaching. This lexical framing shows that his perception is limited and rooted in traditional pedagogical practices rather than CRT as a theoretical framework.

In contrast, T2 demonstrated stronger conceptual knowledge, describing CRT as a "*pendekatan pembelajaran*" ("a learning approach"). The repeated use of modal expressions like "*menurut saya*" ("in my opinion") highlights stance-taking, constructing herself as a knowledgeable yet modest authority. She also employed asset-based metaphors, stating that students' cultural backgrounds are "*aset pembelajaran*" ("a learning asset"), which aligns with CRT literature emphasizing cultural diversity as a pedagogical resource (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Such lexical and metaphorical choices indicate a more advanced understanding of CRT and a discourse that values student identity.

By contrast, T5's immediate counter-question "*Apa itu CRT, mbak?*" ("What is CRT, miss?") illustrates a lack of familiarity. The use of the honorific address "*mbak*" reflects politeness and deference, but the absence of descriptive elaboration shows that CRT is not part of his/her pedagogical repertoire. This linguistic minimalism contrasts with T2's elaborated discourse and reflects how limited conceptual awareness is enacted linguistically.

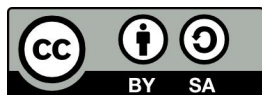
Taken together, the analysis shows that teachers' perceptions of CRT are not only reflected in what they claim to understand but also in how they linguistically construct their knowledge. Teachers with limited understanding tend to use uncertainty markers, interrogatives, and reductive comparisons (e.g., "even without CRT..."), while those with stronger awareness employ evaluative and metaphorical language that frames cultural identity as a pedagogical asset. This aligns with previous studies showing that teachers' discourse choices reveal underlying ideologies about culture and pedagogy (Abacioglu et al., 2020)

4.1.3. The Implementation of CRT

The interview data revealed three distinct ways in which teachers perceived and implemented Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT): through project-based learning, by linking texts with students' cultural backgrounds, and by adapting classroom practices to existing school norms. Beyond the pedagogical practices themselves, teachers' linguistic expressions highlight their stance toward CRT, the metaphors they draw upon, and the lexical choices that reflect how they conceptualize culturally responsive pedagogy.

For example, T2 strongly framed CRT as "project-based learning" with structured steps. His use of procedural verbs ("*mengelompokkan*," "*membuat*," "*mempersiapkan*") indicates a systematic stance, emphasizing process and order. He explained:

"Saya menggunakan project based learning dengan menggunakan introduction, Project launch dengan mengelompokkan cerita yang diminati oleh siswa, lalu selanjutnya siswa



akan membuat story map mulai dari introduction, complication sampai pada di resolution sesuai dengan strukturnya jika menggunakan narrative text, development mempersiapkan siswa untuk medianya bisa dengan menggunakan canva, manual dan power point.”

(“I use project-based learning with an introduction, project launch by grouping stories that interest the students, then the students will create a story map starting from the introduction, complication, to the resolution according to its structure if using narrative text. Development prepares students for their media, which can be done using Canva, manual, and PowerPoint.”) (T2)

The lexical field here, story map,” “development,” “structure” demonstrates a discourse of technical rationality (Schön, 1983), where culture is operationalized as part of a structured learning project. T2’s stance is authoritative and confident, marked by declarative statements without hedges, suggesting stronger familiarity with CRT principles.

By contrast, T6 positioned CRT more relationally, stressing cultural connections through lexical items tied to tradition (“*mitos*,” “*fakta sejarah*,” “*unggah-ungguh*”). He stated:

“Saya biasanya menerapkan pendekatan pembelajaran ini dengan mengaitkan antara Pelajaran dengan kisah mitos, fakta sejarah, atau nilai-nilai tradisional seperti unggah-ungguh yang bisa disebut dengan tata krama dalam budaya Jawa mbak.”

(“I usually apply this learning approach by linking the lessons with mythological stories, historical facts, or traditional values such as ‘unggah-ungguh,’ which can be referred to as etiquette in Javanese culture.”) (T6)

Here, the lexical choice of “*unggah-ungguh*” a culturally embedded term functions as a metaphor for respect and order in the classroom. The stance marker “*biasanya*” (“usually”) suggests that CRT is not a radical innovation but a continuation of habitual practices. This shows a cultural contextualization of CRT, aligning with studies that highlight teachers’ discourse as a mediator between curriculum and cultural identity.

Meanwhile, T4 drew on moral and affective discourse, using lexical items such as “*greetings*,” “*berdoa*,” “*lebih sopan*” to describe his practice:

“Kalau saya menerapkan CRT itu dengan greetings, berdoa karena menyesuaikan dengan pembiasaan yang ada di sekolah, karena di sekolah tersebut masih ada beberapa anak yang kurang peka tentang menghormati satu sama lain. jika mengajarkan kepada anak tentang dialog mengucapkan dengan kata yang lebih sopan tentang cara ngomong kepada guru, teman dan orang tua. Siswa dari kelas 8 diberi contoh menggunakan cerita dari lingkungan sekitar daerahnya dan siswa diminta untuk guru telling story di kelas jadi mereka itu bisa Latihan berbicara dalam Bahasa inggris mbak.”

(“If I implement CRT with greetings and prayers to align with the existing habits at school, because there are still some children who are less sensitive about respecting one another. If teaching children about dialogue using more polite words on how to speak to teachers, friends, and parents. Eighth-grade students were given examples using stories from their local environment, and the students were asked to tell stories in class so they could practice speaking in English.”) (T4)



Unlike T2's structured discourse or T6's cultural-heritage framing, T4's modality is normative ("*harus sopan*," "*kurang peka*"), highlighting behavioral correction and moral instruction. The evaluative terms ("*kurang peka*," "*lebih sopan*") reveal a stance that prioritizes social etiquette and values as part of CRT. This echoes findings by Karatas (2020), who emphasizes the emotional and ethical dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Taken together, these linguistic patterns indicate that while teachers may describe different implementations of CRT, their lexical choices and stance-taking reveal how they construct culture in pedagogical terms: as structured process (T2), as cultural heritage (T6), or as moral practice (T4). Such discourse variation underscores that CRT is not a monolithic concept but mediated through teachers' lived experiences and linguistic framing, supporting the argument that perception and practice are co-constructed discursively.

4.1.4. Teacher's Obstacle of Implementing CRT

The interviews revealed four main obstacles in the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT): teachers' limited capacity to integrate CRT into the curriculum, inadequate facilities and media, students' reliance on local identity that discourages English learning, and students' lack of self-confidence. Importantly, teachers' linguistic choices in describing these challenges reveal how they frame responsibility, agency, and barriers in discourse.

T2 emphasized the difficulty of "integrating" CRT with the curriculum. His lexical choice "*menyatukan*" ("integrate/unite") implies that CRT and the current curriculum are perceived as separate entities requiring negotiation. He stated:

"Menurut saya kendala yang dihadapi guru saat ini adalah tentang kemampuan guru dalam menerapkan pendekatan pembelajaran ini 'bagaimana mereka menyatukan antara CRT dengan kurikulum yang sekarang.'"

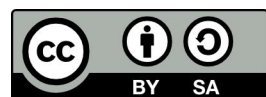
("In my opinion, the challenge faced by teachers today is their ability to implement this learning approach, 'how they integrate CRT with the current curriculum.'") (T2)

Here, the stance marker "*menurut saya*" ("in my opinion") softens the claim, signaling modesty, while the metaphor of "*menyatukan*" portrays CRT and curriculum as two pieces needing alignment. T2 also highlighted facility-related obstacles with a modal dependency on school conditions:

"Kemampuan siswa dalam beradaptasi dengan CRT memiliki kendala yang dihadapi yaitu keterbatasan media dalam hal ini tergantung dari fasilitas sekolah yang memenuhi atau tidak."

("Students' ability to adapt to CRT faces obstacles, namely the limitation of media, which depends on whether the school's facilities meet the requirements or not.") (T2)

The phrase "*tergantung dari fasilitas sekolah*" positions responsibility outside the teacher, shifting agency to institutional infrastructure. This reflects a discourse of constraint, where structural limitations are foregrounded.



By contrast, T4 problematized students' attitudes and identities, using direct reported speech to illustrate their rejection of English:

"Menurut saya siswa lebih terpatok pada lingkungan karena beberapa siswa ini menganggap bahwa tidak suka dan tidak butuh Bahasa Inggris karena sebagai orang Jawa 'ah bu aku ini orang Jawa.'"

("In my opinion, students are more influenced by their environment because some of these students think that they don't like and don't need English because, as Javanese people, they say, 'Oh ma'am, I'm Javanese.'") (T4)

Here, the lexical choice "*terpatok*" ("stuck/attached") metaphorically frames students as restricted by their environment. The reported speech "*ah bu aku ini orang Jawa*" serves as a stance-taking device, showing resistance and constructing identity as a barrier to learning English.

T4 also drew attention to students' lack of self-confidence, using contrasting lexical structures ("*aktif*" vs. "*tidak mau aktif*," "*malu*," "*takut salah*"):

"Siswa yang kurang memiliki kepercayaan diri, terkadang di satu kelas aktif dalam berbicara Bahasa Inggris namun ada juga siswa yang tidak mau aktif dalam berbicara Bahasa Inggris karena malu dan takut salah."

("Students who lack self-confidence, sometimes in one class are active in speaking English, but there are also students who do not want to be active in speaking English because they are shy and afraid of making mistakes.") (T4)

The evaluative terms "*malu*" ("shy") and "*takut salah*" ("afraid of mistakes") signal affective barriers, while the contrastive modality ("*terkadang... namun*") highlights inconsistency across students. This language reflects a discourse of deficit (Valencia, 2010), where obstacles are attributed to students' psychological limitations rather than systemic supports.

In summary, teachers' linguistic framing of obstacles to CRT reveals different orientations: T2 constructs obstacles as structural and procedural (integration, facilities), while T4 frames them as cultural and affective (identity attachment, confidence). These discursive patterns demonstrate how perceptions of CRT challenges are not neutral but shaped by lexical, metaphorical, and stance-taking strategies, aligning with discourse-analytic approaches to teacher cognition (Hyland, 2005; Duff, 2012).

4.1.5. Overcoming Obstacles in CRT Implementation

Although teachers encountered several obstacles in implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), the interviews reveal that they developed coping strategies such as enhancing their knowledge and competencies, utilizing available media and technology, strengthening student-teacher relationships, and adapting learning materials. Importantly, teachers' linguistic expressions demonstrate how they frame these solutions in terms of agency, effort, and responsibility.

T2 framed professional development as the primary strategy to overcome teachers' limitations. He explicitly used the lexical marker "*ditingkatkan*" ("improved"), which conveys a



developmental stance, emphasizing growth rather than deficit. His modality is deontic (*“bisa ditingkatkan”* / “can be improved”), suggesting possibility and necessity rather than mere aspiration:

“Kemampuan guru berkaitan dengan kompetensi guru bisa ditingkatkan melalui pelatihan, workshop, seminar atau mencari sumber belajar lain untuk menunjang kemampuan guru dalam CRT.”

(“Teachers’ competencies can be improved through training, workshops, seminars, or by seeking other learning resources to support their ability to implement CRT.”) (T2)

Here, the evaluative stance positions teachers as active agents of change, shifting responsibility to self-initiated improvement. This reflects what Hyland (2005) terms a *“stance of empowerment,”* where modality indicates possibility and agency.

In addressing material limitations, T2 stressed adaptation through available technology. His statement uses pragmatic lexical choices like *“menggunakan fasilitas”* (“use facilities”) and *“teknologi yang ada”* (“existing technology”), signaling a practical stance toward resource constraints:

“Siswa menggunakan fasilitas dan teknologi yang ada untuk keterbatasan media.”

(“Students use the available facilities and technology for media limitations.”) (T2)

By foregrounding students as actors (*“siswa menggunakan...”*), T2 transfers part of the agency to learners, suggesting a collaborative adaptation process.

T4, meanwhile, used audiovisual tools as compensatory strategies. His lexical choice *“memperlihatkan video cerita”* (“show story videos”) highlights the importance of modeling through examples, positioning technology as a mediator of cultural and linguistic input:

“Guru memperlihatkan video cerita kepada siswa agar siswa bisa mendengarkan dan dari video itu bisa memberikan contoh cara ngomong menggunakan Bahasa Inggris.”

(“The teacher shows story videos to the students so they can listen and learn how to speak English through examples.”) (T4)

The clause *“agar siswa bisa...”* marks intentionality, signaling purpose and expected outcome, with a stance of optimism about audiovisual media as a tool for overcoming linguistic insecurity.

Beyond resources, teachers also highlighted relational strategies. T2 underscored the value of personal connections, using the metaphor *“membangun hubungan”* (“build relationships”), which conceptualizes rapport as a structure that can be strengthened over time:

“Guru membuat koneksi dengan siswa untuk mengetahui dan membangun hubungan dengan siswa.”

(“Teachers build connections with students to better understand and relate to them.”) (T2)

This metaphor of *“building”* portrays teacher-student relationships as constructive and cumulative, resonating with socio-constructivist notions of identity and interaction (Duff, 2012).



Similarly, T3 used more procedural lexical markers such as “*survey, diskusi informal, dan observasi*” (“surveys, informal discussions, and observations”), reflecting an investigative stance. His statement constructs the teacher as a researcher of student needs:

“*Melakukan survey, diskusi informal, dan observasi untuk lebih dapat mengenali siswa.*” (“I conduct surveys, informal discussions, and observations to better understand my students.”) (T3)

The verb choices (“*melakukan,*” “*mengenali*”) emphasize deliberate action and continuous effort, signaling a professional stance rooted in inquiry and reflection.

Overall, teachers’ discourse reveals distinct frames of overcoming obstacles: developmental frame (t2) through training and professional growth, pragmatic-technological frame (t2, t4) using existing resources and media, relational frame (t2, t3) strengthening teacher-student connections. These strategies, articulated through specific lexical and stance-taking choices, reflect how teachers linguistically construct themselves as proactive agents navigating structural and cultural constraints in CRT implementation.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that teachers’ understandings, practices, obstacles, and strategies related to Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) are not only pedagogical but also discursive, reflected in the way they linguistically construct CRT. This section discusses each research question by integrating both pedagogical and discourse analysis perspectives.

Teachers’ Understanding of CRT

The first research question addressed teachers’ conceptual understanding of CRT. The interviews showed varied interpretations: some teachers positioned CRT as a “method,” others as a broader “approach,” while a few openly admitted not knowing the term. These differences are not merely cognitive but also discursive. For example, Teacher 1’s utterance, “*CRT itu apa ya mbak? ... sepertinya bukan pendekatan namun lebih ke metode*” (“What is CRT? ... seems to be not an approach but rather a method”), uses epistemic modality (“*sepertinya*” / “seems”) and hedging that reveal uncertainty and tentativeness.

By contrast, Teacher 2 used assertive stance markers such as “*merupakan*” (“is”), and value-oriented metaphors like “*aset pembelajaran*” (“learning asset”), projecting confidence and agency. Teacher 5’s very brief counter-question, “*Apa itu CRT, mbak?*” illustrates epistemic void, showing no entry point into the discourse. These linguistic markers confirm that teachers’ positions toward CRT are mediated by lexical choice, modality, and stance-taking. Such findings resonate with Idrus et al. (2023), who found that Indonesian teachers’ interpretations of CRT vary according to background knowledge and access to academic resources. Similarly, Shtulman & Young (2023) and Shim & Yoon (2024) emphasize that a strong conceptual grasp is essential for coherent practice. In this study, teachers who framed CRT as an *approach* demonstrated more systematic integration of cultural values, while those who viewed it merely as a method or remained unfamiliar tended to apply it intuitively and inconsistently.

Implementation of CRT

In practice, some teachers translated their understandings into classroom strategies with varying degrees of systematicity. Teacher 2 integrated CRT principles into project-based learning



involving local culture, while Teacher 4 emphasized habitual practices such as greetings, prayers, and manners. Teacher 6, however, incorporated cultural elements only spontaneously, without recognizing them as CRT practices. The linguistic patterns here also reveal teachers' positioning: Teacher 2 drew on academic discourse ("articles"), projecting legitimacy, whereas Teacher 4 relied on institutionalized routines, framing CRT as embedded in school culture.

These findings echo Azhary & Fatimah (2024), who argue that integrating local culture into teaching enhances relevance and engagement, and align with Martin et al. (2024), Nuraini et al. (2025), Solas & Kamalodeen (2022), who show that culturally grounded pedagogy increases student motivation. Hidayati et al. (2024) also highlight that student-centered practices, evident in Teacher 3's adaptation of materials and assessments to student histories, are key for effective CRT. However, the results also indicate that teachers have yet to fully articulate the relationship between CRT and the Merdeka curriculum, suggesting a gap between intuitive practice and explicit theoretical framing.

Obstacles in Implementing CRT

Teachers reported four main obstacles: limited teacher ability to integrate CRT into the curriculum, lack of facilities and media, students' perception of English as unnecessary due to strong local cultural attachment, and students' lack of self-confidence. Discursively, Teacher 2's modality in "*bagaimana mereka menyatukan antara CRT dengan kurikulum*" ("how they integrate CRT with the curriculum") signals uncertainty and difficulty, while Teacher 4's quote, "*ah bu aku ini orang Jawa*" ("oh ma'am, I am Javanese"), illustrates identity-based resistance through direct reported speech, constructing cultural identity as a rationale for rejecting English. Moreover, the phrase "*malu dan takut salah*" ("shy and afraid of making mistakes") reveals the affective discourse of anxiety that constrains students' participation.

These findings support Idrus et al. (2023), who note teachers' limited conceptual grounding, and Hidayati et al. (2024), who stress the need for training to integrate CRT with national curricula. They also align with Murti (2023), who observed limited culturally diverse resources, and with Ariesta et al. (2024), who show that students' motivation depends on the perceived cultural relevance of learning. The affective barriers of low self-confidence echo Kotluk & Aydin (2021), who identify psychological challenges in culturally responsive learning, and Karatas' (2020), who emphasizes the importance of a safe classroom environment. Thus, the obstacles span both technical (teacher competence, resources) and affective domains (student identity, motivation, and confidence).

Strategies to Overcome Obstacles

Teachers adopted four main strategies: (1) enhancing competencies through training, workshops, and self-learning, (2) using available media and technology such as videos, Canva, and PowerPoint, (3) building rapport with students through informal discussions, surveys, and observations, and (4) adapting materials and assessments to students' cultural backgrounds. Linguistically, Teacher 2's statement *kemampuan guru ... bisa ditingkatkan melalui pelatihan* ("teachers' competencies can be improved through training") uses assertive modality, projecting proactive stance, while Teacher 4 framed technology use through demonstrative action: "*guru memperlihatkan video cerita*" ("the teacher shows story videos"), emphasizing practical immediacy.



Teacher 3's choice of active verbs (*"melakukan survey, diskusi informal, dan observasi"* / "conduct surveys, discussions, and observations") conveys agency and sustained effort in connecting with students. These findings are consistent with Ariesta et al. (2024), who emphasize continuous professional development; Hidayati et al. (2024), who stress adapting pedagogy to cultural contexts; Abdalla & Moussa (2024), who highlight the role of technology in CRT; Murti (2023), who points to resource limitations; and Karatas' (2020) alongside Akram & Li (2024), who underline the importance of strong teacher-student relationships. Nevertheless, as Idrus et al. (2023) observe, without solid theoretical grounding, many of these strategies risk remaining intuitive rather than systematic, underscoring the need for both technical training and reflective awareness of multicultural values.

5. CONCLUSION

This study highlights that teachers' understandings of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) remain uneven, ranging from seeing it as a method, as an approach, to not knowing the concept at all. These differences are not only conceptual but also discursive, as reflected in the linguistic choices teachers used to frame CRT. Such variation shows that CRT has not yet become a shared pedagogical foundation, which in turn influences how consistently it is applied in classrooms.

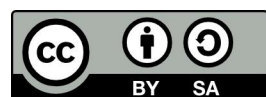
The implementation of CRT varied in practice: some teachers systematically integrated cultural content through project-based learning, while others relied on school routines or spontaneous references to local culture. These patterns suggest that while intuitive practices exist, the lack of explicit theoretical grounding limits the coherence and depth of CRT enactment. Teachers' positioning whether drawing on academic discourse or institutional routines also shaped how they constructed CRT in their classrooms.

Obstacles emerged both technically and affectively. Teachers struggled to align CRT with the curriculum and faced limited facilities, while students' cultural identity sometimes discouraged engagement with English. At the same time, low self-confidence and fear of mistakes created barriers to participation. These challenges reveal that CRT implementation cannot be addressed solely by improving teaching strategies; it also requires attending to student psychology and perceptions of cultural relevance.

Teachers responded to these challenges through strategies such as professional development, using available technology, building rapport with students, and adapting materials to their cultural contexts. While these efforts demonstrate agency and adaptability, the absence of a strong theoretical foundation risks leaving such strategies intuitive rather than systematic. Professional development must therefore focus not only on practical skills but also on reinforcing teachers' conceptual and reflective awareness of CRT.

In the broader context of English teaching in Indonesia, CRT plays a crucial role in bridging global language learning with local cultural identity. By grounding English instruction in students' cultural experiences, CRT promotes inclusivity, validates diverse identities, and enhances student motivation. Strengthening teachers' conceptual and reflective competence in CRT is therefore not just a pedagogical necessity but also a pathway to more equitable, culturally sensitive, and engaging education for Indonesian students.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that professional development programs for teachers emphasize both the theoretical foundation and the practical strategies of CRT, ensuring



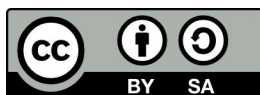
that teachers not only gain methods but also develop reflective awareness of cultural diversity. Schools and policymakers should provide structured training, accessible resources, and opportunities for collaborative learning communities where teachers can share practices. Integrating CRT explicitly into the Merdeka Curriculum, supported by technology and culturally relevant materials, will help bridge the gap between intuitive practice and systematic implementation, thereby fostering more inclusive and engaging English language classrooms.

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