

Beyond textbooks: Culturally responsive English teaching in resource-limited Madurese classrooms

ABSTRACT - This study examines the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in English language instruction within a geographically isolated context—specifically, the Sumenep Archipelago, with a focus on Gili Genting, Indonesia. In such remote settings, English teaching is often constrained by limited material resources and a perceived cultural misalignment with Madurese ethnic learners. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research investigates how CRT strategies are operationalized and what implementation challenges emerge in a senior high school in this region. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a single English teacher, selected for her sustained instructional experience in the target community. Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings indicate that the teacher strategically integrates Madurese cultural elements—including local folklore, communal values, and environmental artifacts—into English lessons to enhance relevance and learner engagement. While such culturally anchored instruction temporarily increased student participation, this engagement remained largely situational. Persistent challenges included a lack of instructional materials, absence of internet or digital media access, and student resistance rooted in the perceived irrelevance of English to daily life. The study concludes that in remote contexts, CRT manifests primarily through adaptive, interaction-dependent strategies but is severely circumscribed by infrastructural constraints. Critically, student resistance appears to stem more from perceived socio-cultural distance than from general motivational deficits, highlighting the need for systemic, context-sensitive support mechanisms.

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1. Introduction

The teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has gained prominence in global education, including Indonesia, because English is a vital international communication tool in the country (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Education in archipelagic regions like the Sumenep Islands in Madura, East Java, Indonesia, faces unique challenges because of limited infrastructure and access to teaching resources. Remote geographic conditions make it difficult to distribute teachers and materials, leading schools to often run multi-grade classes with scarce resources. This situation impacts students' motivation and results in low community participation in formal education (Di Biase & Maniku, 2020). Students' cultural identities significantly influence their language learning. Madurese culture highlights the importance of religiosity, self-respect, hard work, solidarity, and obedience to parents and teachers (Wahab et al., 2020). Madurese culture, known for its strong collectivism and close ties to the community, can shape how students learn and interpret English. Thus, adopting a teaching method that considers limited resources and aligns with local cultural values is essential for fostering students' academic achievement.

The Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach has proven effective in enhancing student engagement and achievement by incorporating their cultural traits, experiences, and viewpoints into the learning process (Gay, 2002; Vavrus, 2008). CRT highlights the significance of honoring and utilizing students' cultural identities to foster an inclusive and relevant learning environment. In English language teaching, CRT assists teachers in relating the curriculum to students' life experiences, enhancing motivation and comprehension.

Research on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) highlights its advantages in boosting student engagement and learning results. However, a notable knowledge gap exists concerning its implementation in remote regions with scarce resources, especially within specific ethnic contexts like the Madura tribe in Indonesia. Liao and Li (2023) show this research indicates that CRT effectively enhances students' intercultural competence in English-speaking classes at Chinese universities, although it was conducted in urban settings with sufficient resources. Similarly, Lan (2024) found that CRT boosts students' positive attitudes toward learning English in Chinese secondary schools, but doesn't solve challenges in regions with limited educational resources and infrastructure. In the Indonesian context, Azhary and Fatimah (2024) examined the integration of local cultures into English teaching materials by future teachers demonstrating an increase in student engagement. Nevertheless, this study concentrates on prospective teachers from different regions in Indonesia without specifically examining Madura's culture or the archipelago's conditions where teaching opportunities are limited. Yuliantari and Huda (2023) also explored the application of CRT in Indonesian secondary schools, which shows an increase in student motivation, but it does not explore how teachers manage resource limitations, such as a lack of textbooks or teaching media. Additionally, while the benefits of CRT are documented, its operationalization under the intersecting pressures of extreme resource scarcity, geographical isolation, and a strong, distinct ethnic identity like the Madurese remains largely unexplored.

Unlike earlier studies centered on urban settings or well-resourced areas, this research seeks to address this gap by examining how high school English teachers in the Sumenep

archipelago implement the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) approach under resource-constrained conditions. Despite the documented effectiveness of CRT in EFL classrooms, little is known about how English teachers in resource-constrained island contexts operationalize this approach. Teachers in the Sumenep Islands face intersecting challenges, including limited resources, geographical isolation, and strong local cultural values, which may shape the implementation of CRT in distinct ways. This study aims to identify CRT in English lessons used by teachers in low resource context in Gili Genting Island. To achieve this, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What culturally derived teaching strategies does an English teacher in a resource-limited Madurese classroom employ to integrate local culture and resources into English lessons?
2. What challenges does the teacher encounter when implementing this culturally responsive approach?

This study employed a qualitative single case study design and conducted semi-structured interviews with senior high school English teachers on the Sumenep archipelago, Gili Genting island. This study will utilize Geneva Gay's (2018) framework of Culturally Responsive Teaching as its primary theoretical lens to analyze the teacher's practices and the constraints she faces. This study contributes to the CRT literature by extending its application to under-researched archipelagos and ethnic contexts. Practically, the findings offer insights for EFL teachers working under material constraints. Contextually, the study foregrounds Madurese cultural dynamics in English language education.

2. Literature review

2.1. Culturally responsive teaching

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is a teaching approach that leverages students' cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to improve learning effectiveness. CRT is also theoretically grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy and critical pedagogical traditions that position culture as central to knowledge construction and power relations in education (Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRT assumes that academic knowledge will be more meaningful and easier to understand if it is linked to students' life experiences, thereby improving their academic achievement (Gay, 2002). Gay (2002, 2018) conceptualizes CRT as a pedagogy that draws on students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles to make learning more relevant and effective. Within language education, CRT is particularly significant because language learning is deeply intertwined with culture, identity, and social interaction.

According to Gay (2018), CRT is characterized by several core components (1) teacher attitudes and expectations/caring, it focuses on the concept of cultural caring, (2) cultural communication in the classroom, this explains the relationship between culture and communication, (3) ethnic and cultural diversity in curriculum content, this emphasizes the use of materials that accurately reflect the history, contributions, and perspectives of different ethnic groups, (4) culturally congruent instructional strategies, which adapt teaching methods to students' cultural learning styles (*learning styles*), (5) developing a cultural diversity knowledge

base, this teacher must have factual knowledge about cultural diversity to be able to implement the other four pillars effectively. These components function as the primary analytical framework of this study, guiding the examination of how culturally responsive principles are enacted and negotiated within the constraints of a resource-limited classroom context.

2.2. CRT in English as foreign language (EFL) context

A growing body of research highlights the positive impact of CRT on EFL learning outcomes. Liao and Li (2023) found that a study with 14 CRT sessions on English oral learning shows that CRT encourages openness, diverse perspective sharing, and critical meaning processes that enrich students' learning experiences. Similarly, Aristia, Siswantara, and Ismiati (2025) and Fauzi et al. (2025) reported that integrating local cultural aspects into the EFL curriculum improves students' intercultural awareness, empathy, motivation, and communication skills, although challenges such as limited resources and teacher training persist. These findings suggest that CRT can serve as an effective pedagogical approach to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps in EFL settings. In Indonesia, several studies have explored the integration of local culture into English teaching. Fadhillah and Alifa (2024), Moneka, Yukamana, and Mayasari (2025) demonstrated that learning materials that integrate local cultures, such as traditions, regional languages, and folklore, make content more relevant and meaningful for students, thereby increasing motivation and learning participation. However, these studies were largely conducted in urban or relatively well-resourced educational contexts and did not explicitly address the constraints faced by teachers in remote or archipelagic regions. While prior studies demonstrate that CRT enhances engagement in EFL classrooms, these discussions often assume the availability of adequate instructional materials and institutional support. A critical question remains: how can culturally responsive principles be enacted in classrooms where teachers face severe resource limitations, including the absence of textbooks, digital media, and internet access? This tension between pedagogical ideals and material realities becomes more visible in geographically isolated and under-resourced contexts.

2.3. Teaching English in resource-limited and remote context

From sociocultural perspectives, teaching practices are always shaped by the material institutional conditions in which they occur (Andrews et al., 2021; Cross & Atinde, 2015; Ebersöhn & Loots, 2017). Resource availability influences not only what teachers can use, but how pedagogical approaches are interpreted, adapted, or even redefined in practice (Andrews et al., 2021; Tibane et al., 2024; Zhang, 2023). Thus, understanding CRT in under-resourced settings requires examining how teachers translate culturally responsive principles into feasible instructional actions within constrained environments.

Teaching English in resource-limited settings presents distinct challenges, including limited access to teaching materials, inadequate infrastructure, and constrained instructional time. Research on education in remote and archipelagic areas in Indonesia indicates that infrastructure limitations, such as poor internet connections and a lack of learning resources, are major obstacles to improving the quality of education in the region (Putri et al., 2025; Riady et

al., 2025; Salsabila et al., 2025). These constraints can restrict teachers' ability to implement innovative approaches such as CRT, despite its potential benefits.

Existing literature suggests that teachers in low-resource contexts often rely on improvisation and locally available materials to support instruction. However, studies rarely examine how cultural responsiveness intersects with resource limitations in shaping English teaching practices. Moreover, there is limited empirical evidence on how teachers adapt CRT principles when formal teaching media, textbooks, or digital resources are scarce. These structural limitations raise important questions about the practical enactment of CRT in geographically isolated and resource-constrained environments, particularly in regions with strong ethnic identities such as the Madurese community.

2.4. Madurese cultural context

Madurese culture is characterized by unique and stereotypical collectivism, strong religiosity, and communal identity, with a strong adherence to Islamic teachings (Taufiqurrahman, 2007). The socio-cultural traits shape student communication patterns, learning preferences, and classroom interactions (Ambarwati & Indriastuti, 2022; Danang Prastyo et al., 2025). Oral traditions and communal storytelling practice remain significant cultural features (Hannan & Abdillah, 2019), which are particularly relevant to the language learning context (Retnowati, 2018). Understanding these cultural dynamics is essential when examining how CRT principles are translated into instructional practices in Madurese EFL classrooms.

Taken together, the literature suggests that while CRT holds strong potential in EFL education, its enactment is shaped by contextual realities, including material constraints and culturally specific learning norms. Examining how these dimensions intersect in a remote Madurese classroom provides a focused lens for understanding the practical boundaries and possibilities of culturally responsive pedagogy.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This research employs a qualitative revelatory single-case study design methodology (Yin, 2018) to examine how Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is enacted in English language instruction within resource-limited classrooms. A revelatory case study is appropriate when a researcher gains access to a phenomenon that is rarely accessible for empirical investigation. The selected case, an English teacher working under extreme geographical isolation and limited educational infrastructure in the Sumenep archipelago (Gili Genting Island) provides insight into the practical enactment of CRT in a setting that is typically underrepresented in educational research.

The purpose of this study is not statistical generalization but a deep, contextualized understanding of how culturally responsive pedagogy is negotiated within structural constraints. By focusing intensively on a single information-rich case, the study seeks to illuminate the

processes, tensions, and adaptations involved in implementing CRT in a specific and rarely examined context.

While these findings are not intended to be statistically representative, in-depth engagement with this case allows for analytical generalization of theoretical propositions regarding CRT in the context of resource constraints and geographic isolation (Yin, 2018).

3.2. Research setting and participant

The study was conducted at a senior high school on the Sumenep archipelago (Gili Genting), Madura, East Java, Indonesia. The region is characterized by geographical isolation, limited educational infrastructure and transportation access, restricted internet connectivity, and minimal availability of instructional resources. The participant (pseudonym: Ms. S) is a Madurese English teacher with five years of teaching experience. She holds a bachelor's degree in English Education and has been actively involved in teaching EFL in resource-constrained classrooms. As a local educator who was raised and educated in the same cultural environment, she brings an insider's perspective on how Madurese cultural values intersect with classroom practices and pedagogical decision-making.

The case was purposively selected as the research participant based on the following criteria: (1) active involvement in EFL teaching, (2) experience teaching in a resource-limited school, and (3) familiarity with Madurese cultural values. Purposive sampling was used to select an information-rich case that could provide meaningful insights into CRT implementation (S. Campbell et al., 2020; Palinkas et al., 2015). The geographical inaccessibility of the island and the scarcity of documented research in this context position the case as revelatory in nature (Yin, 2018), allowing for in-depth exploration of a pedagogical phenomenon that is ordinarily difficult for researchers to access.

3.3. Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to capture the participant's experiences, instructional strategies, and perceived challenges related to CRT implementation. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow flexibility while ensuring that key research topics are systematically addressed (Adams, 2015; Wilson, 2014). Two in-depth interviews were conducted over a four-week period to allow for reflection and iterative clarification of emerging themes. The interviews were conducted via Zoom meeting. The use of online interviews was necessary due to geographical distance and transportation constraints between the researcher and the research site. Each interview was conducted in two sessions of approximately 90 minutes to minimize participant fatigue and maintain analytical depth. The interviews were conducted in Madurese to allow the participant to express ideas naturally.

The first interview focused on the participant's professional background, teaching context, and general understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, while the second interview probed more deeply into specific classroom practices, challenges, and contextual adaptations identified during preliminary analysis. Conducting multiple interviews is recommended in qualitative inquiry to deepen data richness, allow iterative probing, and refine

emerging interpretations across sessions (Seidman, 2019). The two-interview structure enabled the researcher to revisit initial responses, clarify ambiguities, and explore evolving insights in greater depth. To enhance data credibility, member checking was employed by returning the interview transcripts to the participant for verification and confirmation (Kornbluh, 2015).

3.4. Data analysis

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six phases proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The analysis was conducted inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data while being theoretically informed by the framework of Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2018). The framework consisted of five components, which served as an analytical lens in interpreting patterns of practice and constraint. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis, researcher triangulation was applied by discussing coding decisions and emerging themes with a research colleague, thereby reducing potential interpretive bias (Campbell et al., 2018; Schlunegger et al., 2024).

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. *Madurese culture-based teaching strategies and local resources*

4.1.1. *Use of local objects and plants*

The interviewed teacher explained that the limitations of teaching materials, including the absence of textbooks, projectors, or internet access, motivated her to incorporate local objects and plants into her English lessons at a high school in the Sumenep Islands, particularly Gili Genting. As she stated:

It is difficult to have an appropriate textbook or internet access, so I use what is around us. I ask students to look at the coconut, mango tree, flower plants or the school board and describe it in English. That is easier for them because it is part of their daily life. (Interview 1)

Items such as class nameplates, mango trees, coconuts, flower plants, and other local features integral to the school environment and daily life on Gili Genting Island are used to teach vocabulary like “board,” “rose,” “coconut,” “palm,” and “mango.” The teacher encourages students to observe these objects around the school and facilitates discussions about their functions, features, or usefulness in English. For instance, when teaching the word “coconut,” she prompts students to describe parts of the coconut tree, such as “The leaves are green” or “The fruit is hard” Similarly, for “board”, she shows the school nameplate and asks students to identify types, like “headmaster’s nameplate” or “green signboard,” and encourages them to form sentences. She further explained: “If I explain vocabulary from books only, they do not understand. But if I point to the real object, they respond immediately” (Interview 2)

The findings indicate that the teacher deliberately relies on immediate environmental resources as substitutes for formal instructional materials. These findings suggest that the teacher's strategy reflects key principles of CRT, particularly the use of students' lived experiences as pedagogical resources. This approach aligns with the principles of CRT, which highlights the importance of tailoring learning to students' cultural backgrounds and leveraging local resources in the educational process (Stein et al., 2024). It is also relevant to the theory of Gay, which emphasises the importance of integrating students' life experiences, particularly those of ethnic Madurese, to make English more applicable to their maritime and agricultural lives (Gay, 2018). Research by Minh Hung et al. (2025) also shows that integrating local culture into English classrooms can result in diverse language practices, cultural competence, as well as increased learning autonomy and social skills. These findings challenge the assumption that CRT requires technology to be effective (Cheng et al., 2021, 2022; Chuang et al., 2020). In the context of limited resources, local objects themselves can be effective learning tools (Appiah-Odame, 2024).

In the context of Gili Genting, the reliance on local plants and school objects demonstrates how CRT is enacted not merely as cultural inclusion but as pedagogical adaptation within material constraints. Rather than treating resource limitation as a deficit, the teacher transforms the immediate environment into a culturally grounded instructional medium.

4.1.2. Integration of Madurese culture through local folklore

Teachers incorporate Madurese culture by using local folklore about the origins of Gili Genting to boost student engagement. Students are tasked with exploring this folklore by discussing it with their relatives at home, recording it in notebooks, and then presenting the stories in class.

I asked them to ask their parents about the story of Gili Genting island when they go home. Then, they write it and try to tell it again in English. They are more excited because it is their own story. (Interview 1)

The diverse stories shared by students help expand their vocabulary and cultural understanding. This practice reflects a contextual pedagogy that aligns with CRT's emphasis on ethnic and cultural diversity in curriculum content (Gay, 2018). These results are in line with Daeli et al. (2025) and Mishra and Satpathy (2020), who found that the association between language learning and folklore may contribute to higher learning motivation.

However, this is different from research that views the use of folklore as an addition to the curriculum (Hasby et al., 2025; Garita & Alvarado, 2020). This research shows that when students actively collect and reconstruct folklore, they not only learn the structure of the language but also affirm their cultural identity in the target language. It goes beyond passive integration and places students as cultural mediators in classroom discourse. This reflects Gay's research (2018) emphasis on embedding authentic ethnic and cultural narratives within curriculum content, rather than treating culture as a decorative add-on.

4.1.3. *Strengthening cultural identity through group activities*

Teachers use Madura's culture-based group activities to enhance students' identities and foster collaboration, aligning with the collectivist values of the Madurese community, particularly on Gili Genting island. In folklore-related tasks, students are split into small groups to create simple English dialogues about the origin stories of Gili Genting and other folklore. For instance, one group asked by the teacher might say: "I can know the story about Gili Genting Island by asking my parents." (Interview 1)

Teachers then encourage each group to present their dialogue to the class, using a chalkboard or hand gestures to illustrate the story. Some students, however, still lack the confidence to speak in front of the class. The teacher explained: "When I ask them to speak alone, many of them are shy and afraid of making mistakes. But when they are in groups, they support each other and feel braver." (Interview 2)

To address students' hesitation, teachers guide them to speak or present using the "repeat after me" method, where students mimic the teacher's words based on their stories. "Sometimes I say the sentence first, and they repeat it together. After that, they try to say it again with their own words. It helps them feel more confident." (Interview 2)

This activity not only improves speaking skills but also helps students reflect on how folklore can strengthen their community and sense of belonging. Teachers assign group projects to promote Gili Genting specialties as part of the school's curriculum implementation, known as the P5 Independent Curriculum. In this activity, students sell various local specialties created by their groups to enhance their appeal. Common items include brown sugar (*Ghula Cobbhu*), *Bapel*, and others. To make their products more engaging, students name their foods in English, such as "Sweet Red Peanut Sugar, "*Chobhhu*' Delight," and "Bapelicious." During class, the teacher explains and practices how to present and sell these goods in English. The teacher stated: "They feel proud when they can explain their local food in English. They say that "This is our traditional food, but we can introduce it in English." (Interview 2)

This approach is highly relevant to Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), as it uses group activities to reinforce students' cultural identities by promoting collaboration that embodies Madura's communal values (Gay, 2018). Gay (2018) emphasized that learning should foster an environment where students feel appreciated as members of their cultural community, which enhances motivation and engagement. In Gili Genting, activities like creating dialogues about folklore or selling local foods enable students to showcase their cultural identity in English, boosting their confidence. For instance, when students perform a dialogue about folklore, they learn vocabulary such as "culture", "myth" or "character" while also reflecting on the significance of communal events that affirm their life experiences.

The interview data further indicate that participation levels increased significantly during group-based cultural activities compared to individual assignments. As the teacher noted: "If they work individually, only a few students speak. But in groups, almost all of them participate. Even the quiet students try to say something." (Interview 2)

The evidence shows that collaboration functions as a participation scaffold rather than merely a classroom management strategy. This pattern also reflects what Gay (2018)

conceptualized as “caring for” rather than simply “caring about.” Teachers do not accept student silence or hesitation as normal, but actively intervene through supportive strategies such as repetition, guided dialogue, and structured group support to ensure participation. High expectations are maintained, as students are still required to speak, present, and reconstruct stories in English despite their initial reluctance.

This approach aligns with the CRT principle that learning should be culture-based and student-centered, supported by research showing that in Papua, adapting school environments and teaching materials to local cultures, like constructing Korowai treehouse-style classrooms and using nearby forests, helps students feel more connected and develop a sense of ownership of their school (Fiharsono et al., 2023). However, this research introduces a specific aspect by emphasizing Madura collectivism, where group cooperation mirrors the community’s social structure without requiring structural modification of the physical learning environment.

Although cooperative learning has long been associated with improved academic outcomes, most of his research frames it primarily as a cognitive strategy (Mendo-Lázaro et al., 2022; Nevia, 2025; Setyaningsih & Sriyanto, 2025). On the contrary, this study shows that in the context of Madura, group-based learning functions as an identity affirmation practice. Students not only develop speaking potential, but also display their cultural narratives publicly in English. This adds a dimension of socio-cultural identity to cooperative learning that is underemphasized in the mainstream literature.

In addition, some cross-cultural studies argue that collectivist class norms tend to emphasize individual expression and critical voices within groups, thus inhibiting courage and limiting diversity (Hong et al., 2016; Hornsey et al., 2006). The findings in this study contradict this assumption. Instead of restricting expression, structured group dialogue and product presentation activities provide a more psychologically safe environment for students who are less confident individually. The collectivist pedagogical orientation in this case serves as a bridge to communicative participation, not as an obstacle.

Further, by renaming local products such as *Ghula Cobbu’* to English forms such as “Brown Sugar” or “Bapelicious”, students are symbolically integrating local identity with global linguistic practices. These findings are in contrast to studies that state that learning English can distance students from local cultural identities (Muhammad Ajmal et al., 2020; Sultan, 2025; Xiao et al., 2023). Instead, this study shows that English can be repositioned as a tool for cultural representation and promotion. In this context, the implementation of CRT in Gili Genting does not obscure local identity, but rather reinforces it through language.

4.1.4. Pedagogical adaptation of teachers in a limited context

Teachers demonstrate notable pedagogical flexibility to address resource shortages on Gili Genting Island, showcasing creativity in their teaching methods. They incorporate local items and Madura culture and develop simple strategies like oral storytelling, vocabulary games, spontaneous conversations, and impromptu activities to maintain student interest. As the teacher explained: “I bring a coconut leaf or a flower into the class and ask them to guess. They enjoy it because it is real, not only from the book.” (Interview 1)

This approach's significance for CRT is in empowering teachers to adapt learning to suit the cultural and contextual needs of students (Gay, 2018). Gay (2018) states that culturally responsive teachers adapt their teaching methods to align with students' experiences and learning styles (Gay, 2018). In the context of Sumenep or Gili Genting, strategies like oral storytelling and role-play are highly appropriate for the Madurese oral tradition, which is rich in folklore and community interaction. For instance, storytelling about the origins of Gili Genting Island helps students connect with familiar oral traditions, making English more meaningful. The teacher noted: "Madura People like telling stories. When I ask them to tell stories in English, even simple ones, they feel it is close to their daily life." (Interview 2)

The use of guessing games and spontaneous dialogues also demonstrates an interactive learning style that aligns with Madura's collective culture, emphasising learning through collaboration and shared experiences.

This method aligns with research findings, as shown in (Baene et al., 2023; Utami et al., 2021). Research shows that teachers in remote areas are devising innovative strategies to overcome resource shortages. They often utilize available local materials and tools, such as using the local language to connect lessons to students' everyday experiences, making learning more relevant and meaningful. In this study, it is not only a reaction to shortcomings, but a strategy that is consciously aligned with the student's culture. The use of storytelling, spontaneous dialogue, and environmental objects is not only a solution to limitations, but also a form of deliberate conformity with students' social habits and social traditions.

The integration of oral storytelling shows the intersection between the transmission of traditional knowledge and modern language learning. Instead of positioning English as a foreign language that is marginalized, teachers integrate it into narrative structures that are familiar to students. This supports the argument of Anlimachie et al. (2025) that culturally responsive pedagogy should bridge home and school knowledge. At the same time, this finding challenges the view that globalization through English automatically erodes local traditions (Kasiyarno & Apriyanto, 2025; Nupus, 2025; Qizi & Mizrobovna, 2025). In the context of Gili Genting, English is a medium to rearticulate local narratives, not replace them.

These practices are examples of what Gay (2018) defined as culturally congruent instructional strategies, in which teaching methods are intentionally aligned with students' culturally patterned ways of learning, including collectivism, oral narrative traditions, and socially mediated participation. The teacher's ability to strategically integrate folklore, collectivist interaction patterns, and local environmental objects demonstrates a cultural knowledge base as described by Gay (2018). Such pedagogical decisions demonstrate not mere familiarity, but an informed awareness of students' sociocultural backgrounds as a basis for instructional design.

4.2. *Challenges in implementing CRT*

4.2.1. *Limitations of implementing CRT*

Teachers interviewed noted that the main challenge in implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) at a high school in the Gili Genting Islands is the shortage of

teaching materials, such as textbooks, digital media, and internet access. As the teacher stated: “We do not have complete textbooks for all students. There is no internet connection in the classroom, and we do not use LCD or videos. So, I rely only on the blackboard and markers.” (Interview 1)

They mainly use blackboards, markers, and objects from the school environment, which restricts their ability to teach more complex topics like grammar (tenses) and vocabulary. The teacher further explained: “Teaching grammar is the most difficult part. If I want to explain tenses, I can only write simple examples on the board. I cannot show videos or give many exercises because we do not have enough materials.” (Interview 2)

For example, to teach the simple present tense, teachers draw a basic diagram and incorporate local examples like “The leaf is green”. However, this method is limited in offering diverse exercises and explaining abstract ideas, due to the lack of proper exercise books or instructional videos. Teachers resort to improvisation, such as describing coconut trees to teach vocabulary like “leaf” or “fruit,” but these methods often fall short of meeting the standards of the national curriculum standards. The teacher acknowledged: “Sometimes I feel the explanation is too simple compared to what is written in the curriculum. But, I have to adjust to the situation here.” (Interview 2)

Gay highlights that implementing CRT requires resources, enabling teachers to create culturally relevant materials, like texts or media that mirror students’ experiences (Gay, 2018). In Gili Genting, the scarcity of teaching resources limits teachers’ ability to consistently incorporate Madura culture into their materials. For instance, while teachers can use plants to teach vocabulary, developing complex grammar lessons such as “If the flower has withered, the girl will be sad” is challenging without textbooks or written examples. This illustrates the gap between the ideal of CRT and the practical constraints faced by resources, as shown in Nurkhamidah (2020) and Puspasari et al. (2023).

Teachers who identify limited infrastructure as a major obstacle in teaching English in remote areas of Indonesia frequently encounter a shortage of facilities like internet, electricity, technological devices, and sufficient teaching materials, which hinders the adoption of modern learning approaches or the use of information and communication technology (Ujianti, 2021). Additionally, the teacher expressed concern that constant reliance on the same simple methods might reduce student motivation. As noted: “If I always use the same guessing or storytelling activity, students may become bored. But, I have limited options.” (Interview 1)

This highlights a tension between creativity and sustainability. While improvisation initially increases engagement, limited pedagogical variation may eventually constrain innovation (Ammar et al., 2024; Paniagua & Istance, 2018).

4.2.2. *Student resistance to English*

Teachers identified students’ resistance to learning English as a key challenge in implementing CRT. According to the interviews, many students perceive English as distant from their daily lives in Gili Genting, where Madurese and Indonesian dominate communication. The teacher explained:

Students often ask, why do we need English here? They feel English is not used in their daily activities, when I asked them to describe a fruit in English, a student said, “This fruit doesn’t exist in English here, Mom.” They think English is only for things outside their world.” (Interview 1)

This response highlights a deeper issue: students struggle to see English as relevant to their socio-cultural environment. English is perceived not merely as difficult, but as disconnected from local identity and everyday experience. From the perspective of Gay’s (2018) cultural communication framework, this resistance may also reflect differences in communication norms. Madurese students are accustomed to communal and contextual interaction patterns, while English classroom discourse often prioritizes individual, direct, and performance-based expression. Therefore, the teacher’s use of group storytelling and collective repetition can be understood as an attempt to align instructional communication patterns with the students’ culturally familiar interaction styles. In remote island contexts where exposure to global interaction is limited, the instrumental value of English is not immediately visible.

To address this resistance, teachers incorporate folklore as a cultural bridge. For instance, they ask students to describe the story of the origin of Gili Genting in English. As the teacher stated: “If I ask them to tell the story about the origin of Gili Genting in English, they become more enthusiastic because they already know the story. They just need to find the English words.” (Interview 2)

By using this familiar cultural content, the teacher attempts to reposition English not as a foreign intrusion but as a tool for expressing local identity. This method seeks to make English more meaningful by connecting it with Madurese culture. In these findings, CRT involves teachers working to overcome resistance by adopting a student-centered approach (Gay, 2018). He highlighted that CRT can boost student motivation by making learning culturally relevant, which is crucial for minimizing resistance to unfamiliar subjects. These results align with the research presented in (Lan, 2024), who found that CRT enhances students’ positive attitudes towards English; however, this study reveals specific challenges in remote settings with limited resources.

4.2.3. Impact on student engagement

Despite facing limited teaching materials and student resistance, teachers report that Madura’s culture-based strategies boost student engagement. Discussions about folklore allow students to share experiences about local stories. The teacher noted that students are more active when the material relates to Madura culture and group activities because these topics and activities are relevant to their lives. However, this engagement is limited by resource shortages, which restrict the variety of activities. Gay (2018) emphasizes that CRT fosters an inclusive learning environment by respecting students’ identities, which boosts motivation and participation. However, limited resources restrict the full implementation of CRT, preventing teachers from offering more diverse activities. Interview data reinforces this pattern. The teacher stated: “When we talk about stories of Gili Genting, students are more confident. They want to speak because they already know the story” (Interview 1), the teacher added: “If the topic is

about their daily life and local tradition, students are more confident. They want to speak because they already know the story.” (Interview 1)

This statement shows that engagement increases when students’ language assignments are rooted in cultural knowledge that students are used to. They don’t start from scratch; they translate familiar experiences into new languages. This also reduces cognitive and emotional barriers. This is similar to research by Li (2025) and Samsudin et al.(2025), which found that material that is contextual and relates to students’ local experiences or cultures encourages more active expression and more meaningful interactions in the classroom. But this study provides an important affirmation. In Gili Genting, involvement is situational, not sustainable. Engagement increases when activities connect with local cultures, but decreases when learning shifts to abstract grammar or textbook-based exercises that are less contextual.

These nuances challenge the simplistic understanding in CRT that assumes that culturally responsive strategies automatically result in consistent engagement (Quimot & Esteban, 2025; Putri et al., 2025). In this context, engagement depends on a balance between cultural proximity and linguistic guidance. When tasks become more structurally complex without adequate material support, participation decreases. The teacher said: “Students are active in storytelling, but when we move to grammar exercises, they become quiet again.” (Interview 2)

Thus, CRT does increase participation, but the impact is uneven in conditions of limited resources. Engagement is strongest in oral, collaborative, and culturally based activities, while it is weakest in tasks that demand complex linguistic structures and intensive written exercise. In the context of rural Indonesia, research states that increased engagement will lead to the stability of overall learning motivation (M et al., 2025; Mulya & Susilo, 2025; Putra et al., 2025). The findings of this study show a more dynamic picture. Engagement is volatile and vulnerable. It is influenced not only by cultural relevance, but also by the structural support and design of learning tasks. Cultural connections alone are not enough to guarantee long-term academic engagement without systemic reinforcement.

5. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in English instruction at a senior high school in Gili Genting, Sumenep Archipelago, Indonesia, has partially succeeded in mitigating resource limitations through Madurese culture-based pedagogical strategies. Teachers draw upon local cultural resources-including folklore traditions and environmentally available artefacts such as plants and trees within the school grounds-to develop contextualized learning experiences aligned with the sociocultural identities of Madurese ethnic learners. These practices enhance student engagement by rendering English instruction relevant to communal values of collectivism and solidarity, while simultaneously facilitating language skill development through collaborative activities and pedagogical improvisation. The findings suggest that, in remote contexts, CRT operates primarily in adaptive, interaction-driven forms rather than through systematically developed instructional

materials. This extends existing CRT literature by demonstrating that cultural responsiveness can persist even under severe infrastructural constraints.

Nevertheless, considerable challenges persist, notably material limitations and student resistance grounded in the perceived irrelevance of English to daily life. These constraints impede the optimal implementation of CRT, particularly in teaching abstract linguistic concepts, and reinforce the perception of English as functionally marginal within local environments. The study further challenges the assumption that rural learners automatically ascribe prestige or aspirational value to English. In this context, resistance is shaped predominantly by perceived local irrelevance rather than by low motivation per se. Future research should investigate the development of affordable, digital culture-based educational resources to support CRT in rural settings and compare its effectiveness across diverse ethnic and geographical contexts. The present findings thus hold potential for informing the design of more contextualized and inclusive educational frameworks.

Declaration on the use of AI

The authors used artificial intelligence tools (ChatGPT and Grammarly) solely for language refinement and proofreading purposes. All conceptual development, analysis, interpretation, and final writing decisions remain entirely the responsibility of the authors.

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