

A Systematic Review of Culturally Responsive Teaching in Global and Indonesian Contexts

*Slamet Setiawan¹, Nabila Putri Rahmadani², Hanafi³

^{1,2} Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

³ Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember, Indonesia

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(*slametsetiawan@unesa.ac.id)

Abstract

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has gained increasing attention as a pedagogical approach aimed at promoting equity and inclusivity in diverse educational settings. This study presents a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) that examines the implementation of CRT practices across global contexts and in Indonesia, with a particular focus on teaching strategies and contextual adaptations. Drawing on selected empirical studies, the review categorizes CRT practices into three key implementation strategies: creating inclusive curriculum and content, cultivating cultural competence and awareness among educators, and fostering positive teacher–student relationships. Findings indicate that, globally, CRT is implemented through curriculum indigenization, decolonization, and the promotion of critical consciousness, often supported by structured professional development. In contrast, CRT in Indonesia emphasizes contextualization, localization of content, and student-centered learning across educational levels. While these practices enhance relevance and engagement, they remain largely classroom-focused and show limited attention to structural inequalities. This study identifies a gap between global and Indonesian implementations, particularly in the depth of critical engagement. It suggests the need for more comprehensive approaches that integrate cultural relevance with critical and systemic dimensions to strengthen CRT practices in Indonesia.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Teaching; Cultural Competence; Curriculum Contextualization; Educational Equity

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping individuals and societies, particularly in an increasingly globalized and culturally diverse world (Zalli, 2024). Humans develop and adapt within cultural environments, and differences in this adaptation influence learning behaviours and outcomes (Maynard & Chaudhary, 2021; Cheng et al., 2021). Classrooms today consist of students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds, creating

both opportunities and challenges for educators (Hossain, 2024; Lim, 2024). However, diversity is often not optimally utilized and may instead contribute to disparities when not properly addressed (Semião et al., 2023; Foster et al., 2024).

Despite increasing awareness of multicultural education, many teaching practices still rely on standardized and one-size-fits-all approaches that overlook students'

cultural identities and lived experiences (Khelifi, 2025). Such approaches often position students as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active participants whose backgrounds can enrich the learning process. As a result, learning becomes less relevant to students' real-life contexts, which may reduce motivation and engagement in the classroom. This condition can further lead to disparities in academic achievement, particularly among students from marginalized or underrepresented groups who may feel disconnected from the curriculum (Anyichie & Butler, 2023; Blackmon-Balogun, 2023). In addition, the lack of cultural alignment in teaching practices may limit opportunities for students to develop critical thinking and meaningful understanding, as learning is not linked to their prior knowledge and experiences.

One such approach is Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), which emphasizes the use of students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and perspectives to make learning more relevant and effective (Ashrafova, 2024; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRT encourages teachers to create contextual and inclusive learning environments that promote engagement, respect for diversity, and meaningful learning experiences (Cheng et al., 2021; Kramarczuk et al., 2023; Malo-Juvera et al., 2018). Various models and strategies have been developed to support its implementation across different educational contexts (Abdalla & Moussa, 2024).

Although CRT has been widely recognized and implemented since the 2000s, its effectiveness depends on factors such as policy support, curriculum design, and teacher readiness (Portes et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2014). In practice, the implementation of CRT remains uneven, particularly in contexts such as Indonesia (Istiadi & Yuliati, 2026; Rahmawanti et al., 2026). Differences in educational systems and socio-cultural conditions, along with challenges such as implicit bias and structural barriers, continue to hinder its effectiveness

(Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020; Biasutti et al., 2021). This indicates a gap between CRT theory and its practical application.

Therefore, this paper aims to examine Culturally Responsive Teaching by exploring its concepts, principles, and implementation in global and Indonesian contexts. In addition, this study identifies key teaching strategies and analyses challenges in implementing CRT, with the expectation of providing a comprehensive reference for developing more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments. **Definition and Principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is an instructional approach that recognizes and values students' cultural diversity as a central element in the learning process (Cheng et al., 2021). It positions learners' cultural identities, experiences, and perspectives as essential resources that influence how they understand and engage with educational content. Rather than treating culture as a supplementary aspect of teaching, CRT requires a fundamental shift in pedagogical orientation, where instructional practices are intentionally designed to be inclusive and responsive to diverse learners (Abdalla & Moussa, 2024). Furthermore, CRT extends beyond the incorporation of cultural symbols or celebrations, emphasizing the need for educators to critically examine their teaching practices, classroom interactions, and curriculum design to ensure that all students feel represented and valued. In this regard, CRT contributes to promoting educational equity by aligning instruction with students' cultural contexts, thereby enhancing engagement and academic achievement (Bassey, 2016; Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020).

The implementation of CRT is guided by several key principles that support the creation of inclusive and effective learning environments. A central principle is the development of cultural competence among educators, which involves understanding students' cultural backgrounds, communication styles, and values, while also reflecting on one's own biases

and assumptions ([Abdalla & Moussa, 2024](#); [Villegas & Lucas, 2002](#)). Another important principle is the integration of culturally relevant content into the curriculum, ensuring that learning materials reflect the lived experiences of diverse student populations and enable learners to see themselves represented in the educational process ([Gay, 2002](#); [Nieto et al., 2008](#)). In addition, CRT emphasizes the importance of fostering positive teacher–student relationships based on trust, respect, and mutual understanding, as these relationships play a crucial role in creating a supportive and engaging classroom environment ([Abdalla & Moussa, 2024](#); [Norman, 2019](#)).

Beyond these core principles, CRT is also informed by broader theoretical perspectives such as Critical Race Theory and culturally relevant pedagogy, which highlight the role of education in addressing systemic inequalities and promoting social justice. These perspectives encourage educators not only to adapt their instructional practices but also to critically engage with structural issues that may affect students' learning experiences ([Briscoe & Jones, 2024](#); [Ladson-Billings, 1995](#)). Together, these definitions and principles position CRT as a comprehensive framework that integrates theory and practice in fostering inclusive, equitable, and culturally meaningful education. In addition to its core principles, CRT is underpinned by several theoretical perspectives that strengthen its conceptual foundation, particularly Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). Critical Race Theory provides a lens for understanding how systemic inequalities, including race and power structures, shape educational experiences and outcomes. Within the context of education, this perspective encourages educators to critically examine institutional practices and policies that may perpetuate inequity, while actively promoting more just and inclusive learning environments ([Briscoe & Jones, 2024](#); [Whitman & Jayakumar, 2023](#)). Meanwhile, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, as developed by Ladson-Billings, emphasizes

the importance of connecting students' cultural identities and lived experiences to academic content in ways that support both academic success and cultural affirmation. This perspective highlights that effective teaching should not only facilitate intellectual development but also empower students to maintain their cultural integrity and develop critical consciousness ([Ladson-Billings, 1995](#); [Bassey, 2016](#)).

Together, these theoretical perspectives reinforce CRT as more than a set of teaching strategies; they position it as a transformative approach that seeks to address educational inequities while fostering meaningful and culturally grounded learning experiences for all students.

Evidence of Culturally Responsive Teaching Application in the World

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) manifests through diverse pedagogical strategies that aim to bridge the gap between students' home cultures and school environments. Evidence from recent research across various global contexts highlights several key practices. In Australia, particularly within Aboriginal education, CRT is enacted through strong community engagement and the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems. Teachers collaborate closely with cultural mentors, such as Community Elders and Aboriginal Education Officers, to gain insights into local histories and ensure culturally appropriate pedagogical practices. This approach is further supported by efforts to understand the historical impacts of colonization and structural racism on students' lived experiences, as well as by curriculum indigenization that prioritizes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, cultures, and histories ([Bostwick et al., 2025](#)). Similarly, in the United States, CRT is frequently operationalized through arts integration and syllabus decolonization. Educators utilize the arts as both a “mirror” and a “window,” enabling students to explore their own identities while engaging with

diverse perspectives. This includes decentering the Western canon, implementing identity-centered activities such as visual journals, integrating culturally relevant contexts into subjects like mathematics, and facilitating critical discussions on social justice through artistic media ([Cameron et al., 2024](#)).

In European contexts, CRT implementation reflects a focus on critical consciousness, inclusivity, and contextualized learning. In the Netherlands, the use of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) supports the collaborative redesign of lesson plans that incorporate culturally responsive elements. Practices include structured discussions on current global issues to foster critical thinking, heritage-based assignments that allow students to connect academic content with their cultural backgrounds, and the diversification of visual teaching materials to better represent multicultural classrooms ([Alhanachi et al., 2021](#)). Meanwhile, in Germany, CRT is implemented through scaffolding strategies and meaningful connections to students' sociopolitical realities. Teachers employ linguistic scaffolding by leveraging students' first languages to support comprehension, while also integrating interpretative activities and linking historical content to contemporary contexts to enhance relevance and engagement ([Kehl et al., 2025](#)). Collectively, these examples demonstrate that while CRT practices vary across contexts, they consistently emphasize cultural relevance, student identity, and the development of critical and reflective learning experiences.

Evidence of Culturally Responsive Teaching Application in Indonesia

Building upon the diverse global applications of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), the Indonesian context demonstrates a localized adaptation of these principles, shaped by the country's rich cultural diversity and evolving educational policies. While international practices emphasize community engagement, critical consciousness, and

curricular transformation, CRT in Indonesia tends to foreground the contextualization of learning materials and the empowerment of student voices within classroom practices. This reflects a shift toward making learning more relevant to students' lived experiences, while also aligning with national initiatives such as the Kurikulum Merdeka, which promotes flexibility, inclusivity, and student-centered learning.

At the elementary level, CRT is primarily manifested through efforts to connect curricular content with students' everyday realities. Teachers foster inclusive learning environments by encouraging students to share personal narratives related to the subject matter, thereby promoting active participation and mutual respect among learners from diverse backgrounds ([Dewi et al., 2025](#)). Instructional practices are also adapted to reflect students' daily experiences, helping to bridge achievement gaps in multicultural classrooms. In addition, culturally responsive strategies are employed to support inclusive group dynamics, ensuring that all students feel recognized and valued during collaborative learning activities.

In the domain of English Language Teaching (ELT), CRT practices are characterized by a strong emphasis on content localization and sociocultural relevance. Pre-service teachers in Indonesia demonstrate the use of local cultural resources, such as folklore (e.g., Roro Jonggrang) and traditional culinary practices (e.g., Nasi Lengko), to make abstract language concepts more accessible and meaningful ([Najah et al., 2025](#)). Furthermore, contemporary and vocationally relevant examples, such as digital-era professions, are integrated to enhance student engagement. The incorporation of technology also plays a significant role, as students are given autonomy to utilize mobile devices for independent learning and to select their preferred modes of assignment submission. These practices are further supported by contextual diagnostic assessments, which enable teachers to tailor

instruction based on students' socio-cultural backgrounds.

At the tertiary level, CRT is increasingly embedded within institutional frameworks, particularly through the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka. In this context, culturally responsive practices are reflected in collaborative and participatory pedagogies that emphasize student agency, such as allowing learners to select culturally relevant topics for discussion and presentation ([Hidayati et al., 2024](#)). Partnerships with external practitioners further strengthen the connection between academic learning and real-world cultural contexts. Additionally, community immersion programs, such as the GIAT initiative, provide students with opportunities to engage directly with local communities, fostering deeper cultural understanding and social responsibility. Assessment practices are also designed to be transparent and culturally sensitive, ensuring fairness and accommodating diverse learning profiles.

In secondary science education (STEM), CRT is implemented through the integration of technology and differentiated learning approaches, reflecting a move toward more personalized and culturally grounded instruction. Teachers utilize interactive Android-based modules to deliver content that aligns with students' digital habits while embedding local environmental contexts into scientific concepts ([Arif et al., 2025](#)). This approach not only supports meaningful contextualization but also encourages student-centered collaborative inquiry, where learners act as co-constructors of knowledge. By combining CRT with differentiated instruction, educators are able to address both cultural diversity and varying academic abilities, ultimately fostering deeper engagement and bridging the gap between abstract scientific knowledge and students' real-life experiences. Teaching Strategies in CRT

Drawing on the framework of effective Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) implementation, teaching practices

across both global and Indonesian contexts can be systematically categorized into three overarching strategies: (1) creating inclusive curriculum and content, (2) cultivating cultural competence and awareness among educators, and (3) fostering positive teacher–student relationships.

First, the strategy of creating inclusive curriculum and content is consistently reflected in efforts to align instructional materials with students' cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, diverse perspectives and voices, although the forms of implementation vary across contexts. In global settings, this is evident in curriculum indigenization in Australia, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are prioritized, as well as in syllabus decolonization in the United States through the inclusion of diverse voices and the decentering of the Western canon ([Bostwick et al., 2025](#); [Cameron et al., 2024](#)). Similarly, in the Netherlands, inclusive curriculum design is supported through heritage-based assignments and the diversification of instructional materials ([Alhanachi et al., 2021](#)). In the Indonesian context, this strategy is primarily realized through strong contextualization and localization of content across educational levels. Teachers adapt instructional materials to students' everyday experiences, integrate local cultural resources such as folklore (e.g., Roro Jonggrang) and traditional practices (e.g., Nasi Lengko), and embed local environmental contexts into STEM learning through technology-enhanced modules ([Dewi et al., 2025](#); [Najah et al., 2025](#); [Arif et al., 2025](#)). At the higher education level, curriculum inclusivity is further supported by the flexibility of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which allows students to engage with culturally relevant topics and community-based learning ([Hidayati et al., 2024](#)). Together, these practices highlight a shared global emphasis on inclusivity, while indicating that Indonesia places a stronger focus on contextual adaptation rather than explicit curricular decolonization.

Second, the strategy of cultivating

cultural competence and awareness among educators is evident in both contexts through teachers' engagement with students' sociocultural realities, though supported by different mechanisms. Globally, cultural competence is often developed through structured and collaborative approaches, such as partnerships with cultural mentors in Australia and participation in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in the Netherlands, which facilitate reflective practice and the redesign of culturally responsive lessons (Bostwick et al., 2025; Alhanachi et al., 2021). In Germany, teachers further demonstrate cultural competence through linguistic scaffolding, leveraging students' first languages to ensure equitable access to learning (Kehl et al., 2025). In contrast, in Indonesia, cultural competence tends to be developed through classroom-based and experiential practices. Teachers employ contextual diagnostic assessments to identify students' cultural schemata and adapt instruction accordingly, while differentiated instruction reflects sensitivity to both cultural diversity and varied learning needs (Najah et al., 2025; Arif et al., 2025). At the institutional level, initiatives such as community immersion programs (GIAT) provide opportunities for deeper engagement with local communities (Hidayati et al., 2024). These patterns suggest that while global contexts emphasize systemic and collaborative professional development, the Indonesian approach is more practice-oriented and context-driven.

Third, the strategy of fostering positive teacher-student relationships is manifested through practices that prioritize student identity, voice, and active participation across both contexts. In global settings, this is reflected in identity-centered activities in the United States, such as visual journals and arts-based reflections, as well as in dialogic classroom practices in the Netherlands that encourage students to express and negotiate diverse perspectives (Cameron et al., 2024; Alhanachi et al., 2021). In Germany, meaningful

engagement is further supported through interpretative activities and the connection of academic content to students' sociopolitical realities (Kehl et al., 2025).

Similarly, in Indonesia, relational aspects of CRT are emphasized through practices that promote student agency and inclusive participation. Teachers encourage students to share personal experiences, provide autonomy in learning processes and assessment formats, and implement collaborative and participatory pedagogies that position students as active co-constructors of knowledge (Dewi et al., 2025; Najah et al., 2025; Hidayati et al., 2024; Arif et al., 2025). These findings indicate a strong convergence across contexts in recognizing the centrality of relationships in CRT, although Indonesian practices tend to emphasize classroom interaction and engagement rather than critical dialogue on sociopolitical issues.

Overall, this integrated analysis demonstrates that while CRT practices in both global and Indonesian contexts are aligned with the three core implementation strategies, they differ in their depth and orientation. Global practices tend to incorporate more explicit critical and structural dimensions, whereas Indonesian practices are more focused on contextualization, pedagogical adaptation, and student engagement. This suggests an important area for further development in the Indonesian context, particularly in strengthening the critical and transformative aspects of CRT implementation.

Challenges in Implementing CRT

Despite its strong theoretical potential to promote educational equity, the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) continues to encounter complex and interrelated challenges across various global contexts. One of the most persistent barriers lies in the prevalence of deficit thinking and racialized ideologies, where students' academic difficulties are often attributed to perceived shortcomings in their

cultural, linguistic, or familial backgrounds ([Bostwick et al., 2025](#)). Even when teachers attempt to adopt CRT practices, underlying biases may still persist, as evidenced in contexts such as Germany, where minoritized languages and cultural identities are sometimes pathologized and microaggressions occur without teachers' awareness ([Kehl et al., 2025](#)). In addition, CRT implementation is frequently constrained by broader political and curricular pressures. In some contexts, such as the United States, legislative interventions and administrative policies have limited the inclusion of topics related to systemic inequality and social justice, while dominant curricula often remain Eurocentric or "whitewashed" ([Cameron et al., 2024](#); [Bostwick et al., 2025](#)). Similar tensions are also evident in Australia, where integrating Indigenous perspectives remains challenging due to historically Western-oriented definitions of academic success ([Bostwick et al., 2025](#)).

At the pedagogical level, challenges also arise from the ambiguity of CRT as a framework and the practical realities of classroom implementation. CRT is often enacted superficially, reduced to symbolic recognition of cultural diversity - such as celebrating food or festivals - without addressing deeper structural inequities or fostering critical consciousness ([Kehl et al., 2025](#)). This conceptual ambiguity makes it difficult for teachers to translate CRT principles into concrete instructional strategies, as reported in studies from the Netherlands ([Alhanachi et al., 2021](#)). Furthermore, time constraints and heavy workloads limit teachers' capacity to redesign lessons or develop culturally responsive materials ([Alhanachi et al., 2021](#)). These issues are compounded by limited access to high-quality, context-specific resources, which can reduce teachers' confidence in addressing culturally sensitive topics. Professional and relational limitations, including insufficient institutional support, weak collaboration structures, and discomfort in facilitating discussions on race and social justice, further

hinder meaningful implementation ([Cameron et al., 2024](#); [Alhanachi et al., 2021](#)).

In the Indonesian context, CRT implementation is further complicated by issues related to teacher competency, resource availability, and systemic constraints. Although many educators recognize the importance of CRT, a significant "recognition-implementation gap" persists, as teachers struggle to translate theoretical understanding into classroom practice ([Dewi et al., 2025](#); [Najah et al., 2025](#)). This gap is often linked to limited exposure to CRT during teacher education programs, resulting in insufficient pedagogical skills and confidence. Additionally, the scarcity of localized instructional materials remains a major challenge, particularly in English Language Teaching (ELT), where resources tend to reflect Western-oriented contexts that are disconnected from students' lived experiences ([Najah et al., 2025](#); [Arif et al., 2025](#)). At the institutional level, structural constraints continue to limit CRT adoption despite policy initiatives such as the Kurikulum Merdeka, as teachers face tensions between standardized assessment demands and the need for pedagogical innovation ([Arif et al., 2025](#); [Dewi et al., 2025](#)). Moreover, the sociostructural diversity of Indonesian classrooms - including variations in socioeconomic status, gender, and regional access to education - adds further complexity, requiring teachers to navigate intracultural differences while balancing academic standards and diverse learner needs ([Hidayati et al., 2024](#); [Najah et al., 2025](#)).

Conclusion

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has emerged as a comprehensive pedagogical framework for addressing diversity in education by integrating students' cultural identities, experiences, and perspectives into the learning process. This study highlights that CRT is not only grounded in strong conceptual and theoretical foundations but also supported by various principles and strategies aimed at fostering inclusive, relevant, and

equitable learning environments. Through its emphasis on cultural competence, curriculum relevance, and positive teacher–student relationships, CRT contributes to enhancing student engagement, academic achievement, and overall learning experiences. However, its implementation remains influenced by contextual factors such as educational systems, teacher readiness, and institutional support.

A comparative analysis of CRT practices across global and Indonesian contexts reveals both convergences and divergences in how CRT is conceptualized and implemented. At a fundamental level, both contexts demonstrate a shared commitment to creating inclusive and culturally relevant learning environments, particularly through curriculum contextualization and student-centered approaches. However, significant differences emerge in the depth and orientation of implementation. In global contexts, CRT is often closely linked with critical consciousness and structural critique, addressing issues such as systemic inequality and social justice. In contrast, CRT practices in Indonesia tend to be more pedagogically oriented, focusing on classroom-level adaptations without extensive engagement with broader structural issues. Additionally, disparities in teacher capacity development and institutional support further influence the effectiveness of CRT implementation, with global contexts generally benefiting from more structured professional development systems, while Indonesia still faces a recognition–implementation gap.

Overall, this study identifies a critical gap in the Indonesian context, where efforts to implement culturally relevant and student-centered learning have not yet been fully complemented by the transformative and critical dimensions of CRT. This finding underscores the need to move beyond surface-level adaptations toward a more holistic approach that integrates cultural relevance with critical awareness of inequality and systemic factors. Therefore, future efforts should focus on strengthening teacher capacity,

enhancing policy support, and promoting deeper institutional integration of CRT. By doing so, CRT can be more effectively utilized not only as a tool for inclusive education but also as a transformative framework for achieving socially just and equitable learning systems.

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