

Analysing EFL Students' Motivation in English Learning through Culturally Responsive Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has gained increasing attention in English language education as classrooms become more culturally and linguistically diverse. By incorporating students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and identities into learning, CRT can foster inclusion, cultural awareness, and meaningful engagement. This study aimed to explore students' learning motivation, participation, and experiences during the implementation of CRT in English language learning. The participants were 20 fifth-semester students in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al Washliyah during the 2023/2024 academic year. A descriptive qualitative design was employed to examine students' perspectives and classroom experiences in their natural learning environment. Data were collected through classroom observations, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews with students and lecturers and analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data-source and method triangulation were used to enhance the credibility of the findings. The findings indicated that students reported greater motivation and participation during CRT-based learning and perceived the classroom environment as more enjoyable, inclusive, and supportive. Culturally relevant materials enabled students to connect their cultural backgrounds with English learning, deepen their understanding of language concepts, and strengthen their sense of belonging. The findings suggest that CRT can support motivation, participation, and inclusiveness in higher education English language classrooms.

Keywords: *English Foreign Language, Students' Motivation, English Learning, Culturally Responsive Teaching*

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INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is primarily learned as a foreign language because it is not commonly used as the main language of everyday communication. Consequently, Indonesian students may encounter challenges in developing English proficiency due to limited exposure to authentic English outside the classroom, differences between English and their first languages, and anxiety about communicating in an unfamiliar language. Nevertheless, English remains important in Indonesian higher education because it provides students with access to academic knowledge, international communication, professional opportunities, and global networks. English language education at the university level must therefore develop not only students' linguistic knowledge but also their confidence, participation, motivation, and ability to communicate across cultures. Fudiyartanto (2024) emphasizes that English functions as an important form of linguistic and cultural capital within the increasingly globalized Indonesian higher education system.

Among the factors influencing foreign language learning, motivation is particularly important because it determines why students begin learning English, how much effort they invest, and how persistently they respond to difficulties. Motivation is not a stable personal characteristic that students either possess or lack. Instead, it can change according to students'

learning experiences, classroom relationships, emotions, teaching materials, perceived competence, and opportunities to participate. Students who find English lessons relevant and enjoyable are generally more willing to engage in classroom activities and sustain their learning efforts. [Liu \(2021\)](#) explains that enjoyment in second-language learning can strengthen EFL students' academic motivation and engagement. Similarly, [Wang et al. \(2023\)](#) found that foreign-language enjoyment positively predicted university students' motivation and English achievement, with motivation partially mediating the relationship between enjoyment and achievement.

The social environment of the classroom also influences students' motivation. Students are more likely to participate when lecturers provide meaningful support, respect their perspectives, encourage autonomy, and create a safe environment in which mistakes are treated as part of the learning process. [Jia & Cheng \(2022\)](#) argue that social support from teachers and peers can help university EFL students maintain motivation when they experience academic challenges. This indicates that motivation is connected not only to individual goals but also to students' relationships with their lecturers, classmates, learning materials, and educational environment. Therefore, an effective English classroom should respond to students' social and cultural experiences rather than treating them as passive recipients of linguistic knowledge.

The relationship between language and culture is especially important in English language teaching. Language carries particular values, identities, meanings, practices, and ways of interpreting the world. Learning English therefore involves more than mastering grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and the four language skills. It also requires students to negotiate relationships between English-speaking cultures, international cultures, Indonesian cultures, and their own local cultural identities. When English instruction focuses predominantly on unfamiliar foreign cultural content, students may experience distance between classroom materials and their everyday lives. This distance can reduce participation, limit meaningful understanding, and create the impression that students' own cultural knowledge is less valuable than the cultures represented in English-language materials.

Culturally Responsive Teaching offers a pedagogical approach for addressing this concern. CRT recognizes students' cultural backgrounds, identities, prior experiences, languages, and community knowledge as valuable resources for learning. Rather than merely adding cultural celebrations or traditional objects to lessons, culturally responsive instruction connects curriculum, teaching activities, classroom interactions, and assessment with students lived realities. In higher education, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction can include culturally relevant materials, opportunities for students to share their experiences, collaborative learning, inquiry-based activities, critical comparison of cultures, and tasks that allow students to connect new knowledge with what they already know. [Kim \(2024\)](#) argues that such practices can support a more inclusive higher education learning environment in which culturally and linguistically diverse students' knowledge and experiences are acknowledged and valued.

CRT is particularly relevant to EFL education because it can connect English learning with students' identities and local cultural knowledge while simultaneously developing intercultural awareness. [Meihami \(2023\)](#) study of EFL teachers' experiences in university-level Teaching English as a Foreign Language programs showed that CRT principles were not yet sufficiently addressed in teacher education. Although some courses developed sociocultural awareness and constructivist perspectives, participants reported limited preparation in cultural knowledge, culturally responsive teaching strategies, cross-cultural community building, and affirmative attitudes toward student diversity. These findings demonstrate the need for more explicit and systematic implementation of CRT within English language education programs.

Recent empirical evidence also indicates that CRT can contribute to positive language-learning experiences. [Liao & Li \(2023\)](#) examined CRT in university oral-English classrooms and found that culturally responsive learning activities supported the development of students' intercultural attitudes, awareness, and competence. By inviting students to examine

cultural experiences and participate in the co-construction of cultural understanding, CRT positioned learners as active contributors to the learning process rather than as recipients of predetermined cultural information. Such involvement may be motivational because students can connect English with personally meaningful experiences while learning to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds.

In the Indonesian higher education context, [Reskyani et al. \(2024\)](#) explored university students' motivation in learning English speaking through CRT. Their findings revealed three central themes: positive experiences with culturally responsive learning, appreciation of cultural diversity, and a positive relationship between CRT and students' motivation. Students felt more valued and listened to when their cultural realities were incorporated into speaking activities. The study consequently suggested that CRT could create a more supportive classroom environment and encourage students' motivation to communicate in English. However, the study involved only three English department students and focused specifically on speaking. Its findings therefore need to be extended to a broader understanding of students' motivation in learning English and examined across other Indonesian university contexts.

Although recent studies have investigated CRT, intercultural competence, culturally relevant materials, and EFL motivation, research directly examining how university students experience motivation when CRT is implemented remains limited. Existing research has frequently focused on teachers' preparation, intercultural competence, specific language skills, or contexts outside Indonesia. Even within Indonesian higher education, insufficient attention has been given to how CRT influences different dimensions of motivation, including students' interest, enjoyment, confidence, classroom participation, persistence, and willingness to learn English. Furthermore, culturally responsive practices may produce different outcomes depending on students' cultural backgrounds and the institutional context in which they are implemented.

Despite the growing interest in Culturally Responsive Teaching, several important research gaps remain. First, an empirical gap exists because most previous studies have examined CRT in relation to intercultural competence, culturally relevant materials, teachers' preparedness, or particular language skills. Comparatively little research has directly explored how students experience motivation when CRT is implemented in university-level English learning. Consequently, limited evidence is available regarding how culturally responsive instruction relates to different dimensions of EFL motivation, such as interest, enjoyment, confidence, participation, persistence, and willingness to continue learning English.

Second, a contextual gap exists in Indonesian higher education. Much of the existing CRT research has been conducted outside Indonesia or in educational environments with different cultural, linguistic, and institutional characteristics. Although [Reskyani et al. \(2024\)](#) investigated university students' motivation in culturally responsive English-speaking activities, their study involved only three English department students and focused exclusively on speaking. Therefore, its findings cannot fully explain how students experience CRT across broader English-language learning activities or in other Indonesian university settings. In particular, there is still limited research involving students at Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah, whose diverse cultural backgrounds may shape their responses to culturally responsive instruction. Third, a scope gap is evident because previous studies have often emphasized a single outcome, such as speaking performance, intercultural awareness, or teachers' understanding of CRT. This narrow focus provides insufficient explanation of how CRT may simultaneously shape students' emotional, behavioural, and motivational experiences. A broader investigation is therefore needed to understand how culturally relevant materials, classroom interactions, collaborative activities, and opportunities to share cultural knowledge contribute to students' enjoyment, confidence, sense of belonging, and active participation in English learning. Fourth, a methodological gap remains because students' motivation in CRT-based classrooms has not been sufficiently explored through multiple qualitative data sources. Motivation is a complex and dynamic experience that may not be fully understood through a single questionnaire or a limited number of participants. Classroom observations, student questionnaires, and interviews with both students and

lecturers are needed to provide a more comprehensive and credible account of how culturally responsive practices are implemented and experienced in a natural classroom setting.

Addressing these gaps is particularly important in English Language Education Study Programs because students are not only learning English but are also preparing to become future English teachers. Their experiences of culturally responsive instruction may affect their current motivation and shape their future understanding of how to teach learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Examining students' responses to CRT can therefore provide practical insights into how lecturers select culturally relevant materials, organize classroom interactions, connect English with local knowledge, and establish inclusive learning environments.

Accordingly, this study aims to describe and analyse how fifth-semester students in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah experience their motivation to learn English during the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching. Specifically, the study examines students' experiences of culturally relevant learning materials and classroom activities and how they perceive these practices as shaping their interest, enjoyment, confidence, participation, persistence, sense of belonging, and willingness to continue learning English. The study is guided by the following research question: How do fifth-semester EFL students experience their motivation to learn English during the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching at Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah?

METHOD

A clear research design is essential because it provides a systematic framework for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting research data. [Creswell \(2013\)](#) defines research design as a plan that integrates research approaches, data-collection procedures, and data-analysis methods. Based on the purpose of the present study, a descriptive qualitative research design was employed. This design was selected because the study aimed to describe and interpret students' motivation to learn English during the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in an English as a Foreign Language classroom. Qualitative descriptive research is particularly appropriate when researchers seek to provide a comprehensive description of participants' experiences while remaining close to their own words and perspectives ([Sandelowski, 2000](#)).

Descriptive qualitative research enables researchers to examine participants' experiences, behaviors, perceptions, and classroom interactions in their natural setting. In this study, the researchers did not manipulate the learning environment or provide experimental treatment. Instead, they observed how CRT was implemented by the lecturer and explored how students responded to culturally relevant teaching materials and classroom activities. Particular attention was given to students' interest, participation, enthusiasm, confidence, and willingness to engage in the English learning process. Such an approach is consistent with qualitative inquiry, which emphasizes understanding experiences and meanings within their natural contexts ([Merriam & Tisdell, 2016](#)).

The study was conducted in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah, Medan. The participants consisted of 20 fifth-semester students selected through purposive sampling. The number of participants was determined based on the composition of the selected class, in which all 20 students had experienced English lessons incorporating Culturally Responsive Teaching. Therefore, the researchers included the entire class to obtain comprehensive information about students' motivational experiences within the same instructional context. The inclusion of all class members also allowed the researchers to capture variations in students' cultural backgrounds, participation, confidence, interest, and responses to culturally relevant learning activities. Purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative research because participants are selected

based on their relevance and ability to provide information-rich data concerning the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015).

In descriptive qualitative research, the adequacy of the sample is determined primarily by the relevance and richness of the information provided rather than by statistical representativeness. The 20 participants were considered sufficient because they had direct and sustained experience with the phenomenon being investigated and could provide detailed information through observations, questionnaires, and interviews. At the same time, the number was manageable for an in-depth analysis of individual responses, classroom interactions, and recurring motivational patterns. Qualitative researchers commonly consider the richness, variability, and saturation of information when evaluating the adequacy of a purposive sample (Guest et al., 2006). The selection criteria included students who were officially enrolled in the selected class, had participated in English lessons incorporating CRT, and were willing to participate voluntarily in the study. Thus, the participants were selected not to represent all Indonesian university students statistically, but to provide a detailed contextual understanding of motivation during CRT implementation in the selected EFL classroom.

Data collection was conducted through three stages: classroom observation, questionnaire administration, and interviews. First, classroom observations were conducted to examine the implementation of CRT during the teaching and learning process. The researchers acted as non-participant observers and recorded how the lecturer incorporated students' cultural backgrounds, local knowledge, experiences, and culturally relevant materials into English instruction. The observations also focused on lecturer-student interactions, student participation, classroom engagement, and observable indicators of learning motivation. Observation allows qualitative researchers to examine behaviors and interactions as they occur within the natural research setting.

Second, a questionnaire was administered to obtain information about students' motivational responses to the implementation of CRT. The questionnaire examined aspects such as students' interest in learning English, enjoyment of classroom activities, confidence in expressing ideas, active participation, and willingness to continue learning English.

Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students and the lecturer. The interviews provided more detailed explanations of participants' experiences and perceptions regarding culturally responsive English instruction. Students were encouraged to explain how culturally relevant materials and activities influenced their motivation, participation, and understanding of English. The lecturer was also interviewed to obtain information about the teaching strategies used, the selection of cultural content, and the students' responses during the lessons. Semi-structured interviews are useful in qualitative research because they provide a flexible structure that enables researchers to explore participants' thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and experiences through follow-up questions and probing (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

The data obtained from observations, questionnaires, and interviews were analyzed descriptively. The researchers organized the data, identified recurring patterns, categorized the findings into relevant themes, and interpreted the themes in relation to EFL students' motivation and the implementation of CRT. Thematic analysis provides a flexible approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting recurring patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data analysis also followed systematic procedures of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to facilitate the identification and interpretation of meaningful patterns (Miles et al., 2014). Data from the three collection techniques were compared through triangulation to strengthen the credibility and consistency of the research findings. Methodological triangulation enables researchers to compare evidence obtained through different data-collection methods and thereby strengthen the

credibility of qualitative findings (Carter et al., 2014). Attention was also given to qualitative research quality through systematic procedures, transparency, credibility, and coherence throughout the research process (Tracy, 2019).

Table. 1 Observation Guide

No.	Culturally Responsive Teaching	Suitability	
		Appropriate	Inappropriate
1.	Students think about their cultural identity.		
2.	Learners are involved in cultural understanding and developmentconstruction through learning materials		
3.	Students have discussions to understand different perspectives.		
4.	Students work together in groups to analyze lesson concepts from a cultural perspective.		
5.	Students reflect on and analyze their values and understanding, which they then showcase through a project.		

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Table 2 Question Leading

No.	Question leading
1.	Is it important to include the local culture in your teaching?
2.	Which local cultural elements need to be revived?
3.	What is your reason for thinking it's important?
4.	What teaching strategies do you use to include cultural elements?
5.	What are the challenges?

Table 3. Questionnaire of Motivation for English Learning Based on Culturally Responsive Teaching

Section	No.	Questionnaire
Section 1: Demographic Information	1.	Age: o Under 18 o 18-25 o 26-35 o 36 and above
	2.	Gender: o Male o Female o Other
	3.	Country of Origin:
	4.	First Language:
	5.	Level of English Proficiency: o Beginner o Intermediate o Advanced
	6.	How long have you been learning English? o Less than 1 year o 1-3 years o 4-6 years o More than 6 years
Section 2: Motivation for Learning English	7.	What are your main reasons for learning English? (Select all that apply) o Academic purposes o Career opportunities o Travel o Personal interest o Cultural understanding o Other (please specify):

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	8.	How motivated are you to learn English? o Not motivated at all o Slightly motivated o Moderately motivated o Very motivated o Extremely motivated
	9.	Do you enjoy learning English? o Not at all o A little o Somewhat o Quite a bit o A great deal
Section 3: Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) Practices	10.	How often does your English teacher incorporate your cultural background into the lessons? o Never o Rarely o Sometimes o Often o Always
	11.	How much do you feel that your cultural background is respected and valued in your English class? o Not at all o A little o Somewhat o Quite a bit o A great deal
	12.	Does your teacher use examples and materials that reflect diverse cultures, including your own? o Never o Rarely o Sometimes o Often o Always
	13.	How do culturally responsive teaching practices affect your motivation to learn English? o Decrease motivation o No effect o Slightly increase motivation o Moderately increase motivation o Greatly increase motivation
Section 4: Personal Experiences and Perspectives	14.	Describe a time when your cultural background was included in an English lesson. How did it make you feel?
	15.	In what ways do you think culturally responsive teaching can improve English learning for students from diverse backgrounds?
	16.	What challenges do you face in learning English that you feel could be addressed through culturally responsive teaching?
	17.	Do you have any suggestions for your teacher on how to make the English lessons more culturally responsive?
	18.	Please share any additional comments or experiences related to your motivation in learning English and the role of culturally responsive teaching.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were derived from classroom observations, questionnaire responses, and semi-structured interviews. The data were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns concerning students' motivation and experiences during the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). Five major themes emerged: cultural relevance increased interest and enjoyment, recognition of cultural identity strengthened students' sense of belonging, collaborative cultural activities encouraged participation, local cultural content made English learning more meaningful, and several challenges limited the consistent implementation of CRT.

Participant Profile

The participants were 20 students aged mainly between 20 and 23 years. They consisted of 15 male and five female students, all of whom were Indonesian and reported Indonesian as their first language. Regarding English proficiency, 13 students identified themselves as intermediate learners, five as beginners, and two as advanced learners.

Their length of English-learning experience also varied. Ten students reported that they had learned English for one to three years, five for more than six years, four for four to six years, and one for less than one year. These differences indicate that the participants entered the classroom with varying levels of English proficiency, learning experience, confidence, and familiarity with English-language activities.

Questionnaire Results Overview

Table 4 summarizes the principal questionnaire findings across overall motivation, the perceived motivational effect of CRT, cultural recognition, the incorporation of students' cultural backgrounds, and the use of culturally diverse materials.

Table 4. Summary of Questionnaire Results (N = 20)

Questionnaire indicator	Response distribution, n (%)	Key interpretation
Overall motivation to learn English	Very/extremely motivated: 16 (80%); other levels combined: 4 (20%)	High motivation; mean = 4.0/5
Perceived effect of CRT on motivation	Greatly: 13 (65%); moderately: 4 (20%); slightly: 2 (10%); no effect: 1 (5%); decrease: 0 (0%)	17 students (85%) reported a moderate or great increase
Cultural background respected and valued	A great deal: 5 (25%); quite a bit: 7 (35%); somewhat: 5 (25%); a little: 2 (10%); not at all: 1 (5%)	12 students (60%) reported high cultural recognition
Cultural background incorporated into lessons	Always: 4 (20%); often: 6 (30%); sometimes: 6 (30%); rarely: 3 (15%); never: 1 (5%)	10 students (50%) selected often or always
Use of culturally diverse materials	Always: 6 (30%); often: 7 (35%); sometimes: 4 (20%); rarely: 2 (10%); never: 1 (5%)	13 students (65%) selected often or always

Source: Questionnaire data processed by the researchers.

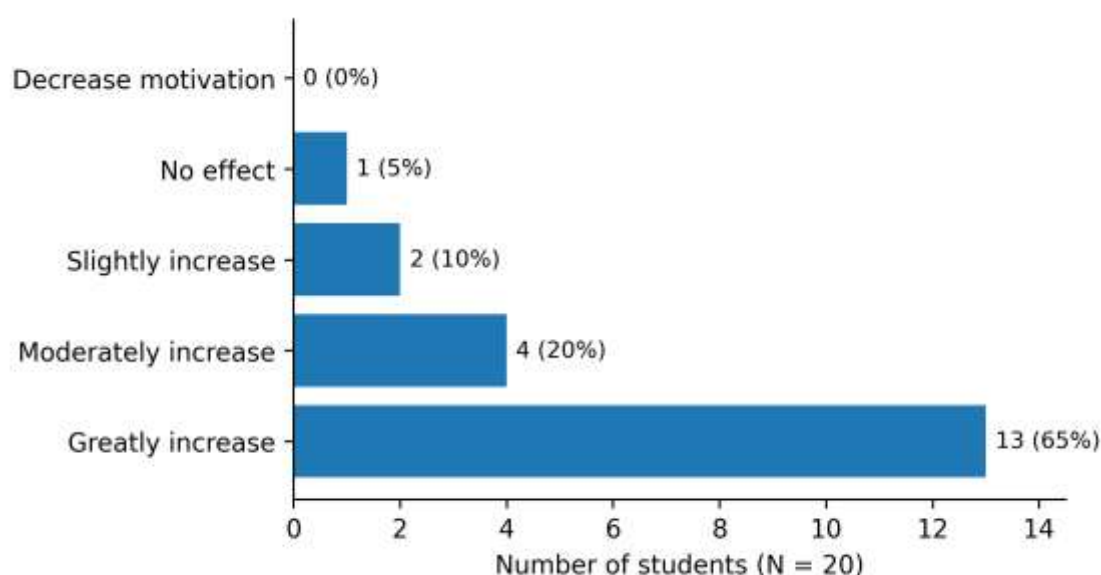


Figure 1. Students' Perceived Effect of CRT on Motivation (N = 20)

The consolidated results show a predominantly positive motivational pattern. Most students reported high motivation, while 85% perceived that CRT moderately or greatly increased their motivation. The responses also indicate generally positive cultural recognition

and use of diverse materials, although the variation across categories suggests that CRT was not experienced with the same consistency by every participant.

Theme 1: Cultural Relevance Increased Students' Interest and Enjoyment

The first theme showed that students became more interested in English lessons when the lecturer incorporated culturally familiar topics, local traditions, and community experiences into classroom activities. Students considered the lessons more enjoyable because they could connect unfamiliar English expressions with knowledge that they already possessed.

The questionnaire findings supported this theme. Thirteen students stated that CRT greatly increased their motivation, four reported that it moderately increased their motivation, and two indicated a slight increase. Only one student reported that CRT had no effect. In addition, 16 students selected the two highest categories of motivation, namely "very motivated" and "extremely motivated." The mean motivation score was 4.0 on a five-point scale, corresponding to a high level of motivation.

A student explained:

"[Insert the student's exact statement about becoming more interested in learning English when local culture or familiar traditions were included in the lesson.]" (Student 1, Interview)

Another participant described the learning atmosphere:

"[Insert the exact statement explaining that the culturally related lesson was more enjoyable, less stressful, or easier to follow.]" (Student 2, Interview)

These responses suggest that students' motivation was influenced by the perceived relevance of the learning materials. When students recognized the topics and could relate them to their own lives, they were more willing to pay attention, ask questions, and contribute to classroom activities. Cultural familiarity did not replace English-language learning; instead, it provided a meaningful context through which students could understand and practise the language.

This finding supports the view that motivation is affected by students' emotional and classroom experiences. Enjoyable and personally relevant activities can encourage learners to invest more effort and participate more actively. In this study, culturally familiar content reduced the psychological distance between English and students' everyday experiences.

Theme 2: Recognition of Cultural Identity Strengthened Students' Sense of Belonging

The second theme concerned students' feelings of recognition and acceptance. Students responded positively when their cultural identities, traditions, and community knowledge were acknowledged in the classroom. They felt that their personal experiences were treated as legitimate sources of knowledge rather than being excluded from the formal curriculum.

The questionnaire data showed that five students felt that their cultural backgrounds were respected "a great deal," while seven selected "quite a bit." Five students reported that their cultural backgrounds were respected "somewhat." Only two selected "a little," and one selected "not at all." Thus, most participants experienced a relatively high level of cultural recognition.

One participant stated:

"[Insert the exact quotation showing that the student felt respected, proud, accepted, or valued when their cultural background was discussed.]" (Student 3, Interview)

Another student explained:

"[Insert the exact quotation describing how being allowed to share a local tradition or cultural story created a sense of belonging.]" (Student 4, Interview)

The lecturer's explanation may also be included:

"[Insert the lecturer's exact statement about the importance of acknowledging students' cultural backgrounds in English-language teaching.]" (Lecturer, Interview)

The findings indicate that cultural recognition contributed to an inclusive classroom atmosphere. Students were not positioned merely as recipients of knowledge delivered by the lecturer. They became contributors who brought cultural experiences, family knowledge, local expressions, and community stories into the learning process.

This recognition appears to have strengthened students' emotional connection to the class. When students believed that their identities were respected, they became more comfortable expressing ideas and interacting with others. Therefore, the motivational effect of CRT was associated not only with interesting materials but also with students' sense of being acknowledged within the classroom community.

Theme 3: Collaborative Cultural Activities Encouraged Participation

The third theme showed that group discussions and cultural projects encouraged greater classroom participation. During the observed lessons, students discussed cultural traditions, compared different perspectives, collected information, developed narratives, and presented their findings in English.

The lecturer initially introduced the lesson concept and then invited students to relate it to their own cultural experiences. Students were subsequently organized into groups to investigate local stories, traditional expressions, values, or practices. They collected information from various sources, including parents, relatives, and community elders. The information was then summarized and presented as an English-language product.

A student described the group activity:

"[Insert the exact quotation explaining that group discussion made the student more willing or confident to participate in English.]" (Student 5, Interview)

Another participant commented on cultural exchange:

"[Insert the exact quotation showing that the student learned about classmates' cultures and developed respect for different perspectives.]" (Student 6, Interview)

The lecturer observed:

"[Insert the lecturer's exact statement indicating that students became more active, cooperative, or enthusiastic during the cultural group project.]" (Lecturer, Interview) The activities encouraged students to use English for an authentic communicative purpose. They did not speak merely to complete isolated language exercises; they used English to explain information that was personally and socially meaningful. This gave students a stronger reason to communicate.

The group activities also supported intercultural understanding. Students were exposed to traditions and perspectives that differed from their own. Through discussion, they learned that classmates might interpret cultural practices differently. CRT therefore supported both English-language participation and respect for cultural diversity.

Nevertheless, grouping students strictly according to ethnicity should be approached carefully. Future implementation may use culturally diverse groups or allow students to select cultural topics without being expected to represent an entire ethnic community. This can prevent cultural stereotyping and ensure that students are treated as individuals with diverse experiences.

Theme 4: Local Cultural Content Made English Learning More Meaningful

The fourth theme revealed that students considered English learning more meaningful when they used the language to discuss local culture and community knowledge. Students were given opportunities to transform culturally based information into narratives, presentations, or project products.

The classroom observations showed that students initially experienced difficulty identifying traditional expressions from their own communities. However, after consulting

parents, relatives, or community members, they obtained more authentic information. They then organized the information and presented it in English.

One student explained:

"[Insert the exact quotation describing how using English to explain local culture helped the student understand vocabulary, speaking, writing, or the lesson more clearly.]"

(Student 7, Interview)

Another student stated:

"[Insert the exact quotation explaining that learning English became useful because it could be used to introduce Indonesian or local culture to other people.]"

(Student 8, Interview)

The lecturer similarly noted:

"[Insert the lecturer's exact statement about the relationship between familiar cultural content and students' understanding of English.]" *(Lecturer, Interview)*

These findings demonstrate that language and culture were integrated rather than taught separately. Local culture served as the content, while English functioned as the means through which students described, interpreted, and presented that content. This integration helped students connect new English expressions with existing knowledge.

The project also encouraged student-centered learning. The lecturer acted primarily as a facilitator who guided students, monitored their progress, provided language support, and assisted when problems emerged. Students had greater responsibility for collecting information, deciding how to organize it, and presenting the final product.

Such responsibility may strengthen motivation because learners gain a sense of ownership over the learning process. The students' cultural knowledge became an academic resource, while English became a practical tool for communicating that knowledge.

Theme 5: Language Barriers and Limited Cultural Materials Remained Challenges

Although the overall response to CRT was positive, the findings also identified several implementation challenges. Some students experienced difficulty explaining culture-specific terms in English. Others indicated that culturally relevant materials were not used consistently across lessons.

The questionnaire showed variation in the incorporation of students' cultural backgrounds. Four students reported that their cultural backgrounds were always incorporated, six selected often, six selected sometimes, three selected rarely, and one selected never.

A similar pattern appeared in relation to culturally diverse materials. Six students stated that the lecturer always used materials representing different cultures, seven selected often, four selected sometimes, two selected rarely, and one selected never. Although most responses were positive, these results show that not all students experienced culturally responsive instruction to the same extent.

One participant explained the language challenge:

"[Insert the exact quotation about difficulty translating a local expression, traditional term, or cultural concept into English.]" *(Student 9, Interview)*

Another student commented on the materials:

"[Insert the exact quotation stating that some materials remained disconnected from the student's background or that more cultures should be represented.]" *(Student 10, Interview)*

A participant recommended:

"[Insert the exact quotation suggesting more local stories, cultural events, student presentations, or culturally diverse texts.]" (Student 11, Interview)

The lecturer may describe the practical challenge:

"[Insert the lecturer's exact statement about limited teaching resources, preparation time, students' language ability, or the difficulty of representing different cultures fairly.]" (Lecturer, Interview)

These challenges demonstrate that CRT requires more than the occasional inclusion of local stories or traditional celebrations. It must be implemented systematically through teaching materials, interaction patterns, classroom activities, and assessment. Lecturers also need to provide linguistic scaffolding so that students can express complex cultural ideas in English.

For example, students may be given vocabulary lists, model texts, guiding questions, sentence starters, or bilingual planning opportunities before completing an English presentation. Such support would allow students to concentrate on developing their ideas without being prevented from participating by limited vocabulary.

The integrated findings indicate that CRT positively influenced students' motivation to learn English. Students became more interested and engaged when the lessons connected English with their cultural identities, local knowledge, and personal experiences. Cultural recognition also helped create a classroom environment in which students felt respected and valued.

The strongest questionnaire evidence was found in students' assessment of CRT's motivational effect. Seventeen of the 20 participants reported that CRT either greatly or moderately increased their motivation. This pattern was consistent with the reported positive experiences from classroom activities and interviews.

The findings also demonstrate that motivation was multidimensional. CRT influenced students' enjoyment, interest, participation, confidence, sense of belonging, and willingness to communicate. Its effect was therefore not limited to students stating that they "liked" the lesson. It influenced how they interacted with the lecturer, collaborated with classmates, interpreted learning materials, and used English for meaningful purposes. However, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that cultural content automatically improves motivation. Its effectiveness depends on how the content is selected and implemented. Cultural materials must be relevant, inclusive, and connected to clear language-learning objectives. Lecturers should avoid presenting cultures as fixed or uniform and should allow students to express different experiences within the same cultural group. Overall, CRT provided a promising approach to English-language teaching in higher education. It enabled students to connect their identities and community knowledge with English learning while developing awareness of other cultural perspectives. More consistent culturally diverse materials, stronger language support, and wider opportunities for cultural sharing could further improve its influence on student motivation and engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined how fifth-semester EFL students experienced their motivation to learn English during the implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) at Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah. The findings show that students generally experienced stronger motivation through increased interest, enjoyment, confidence, participation, belonging, and willingness to continue learning. These experiences emerged when English learning was connected to students' cultural identities, local knowledge, personal experiences, and community practices. Culturally familiar topics made lessons more relevant and meaningful, while recognition of students' cultural backgrounds helped them feel respected and valued. Group discussions, cultural projects, and presentations provided authentic opportunities to use English collaboratively. Lecturer support through facilitation, feedback, monitoring, and meaningful interaction also contributed to students' motivation.

CRT further enhanced cultural awareness and respect for diverse perspectives. However, some students had limited cultural knowledge or difficulty expressing culture-specific concepts in English. Overall, CRT was experienced as a motivating and inclusive approach, although its benefits depended on consistent implementation and appropriate linguistic support. As a descriptive qualitative study involving 20 students, the findings reflect contextual experiences rather than causal effects or broad generalizations.

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