EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON INTEGRATING SOUTH SUMATRAN LOCAL WISDOM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: AN ETHNOPEDAGOGICAL INQUIRY

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explores how South Sumatran English educators integrate local wisdom into language teaching through ethnopedagogical approaches. Conducted at secondary and tertiary institutions across South Sumatra, the research employed semi-structured interviews with five purposively selected educators, complemented by document analysis of syllabi and teaching materials. Participants ranged from early-career to highly experienced teachers, with teaching experience spanning 3 to 31 years across junior high schools, vocational high schools, universities, and language courses. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework, revealing four primary themes: perceived relevance and benefits, integration strategies, perceived impacts on learning, and implementation challenges. Findings demonstrate that educators strategically incorporate cultural elements, including *Pempek* cuisine, *Songket* textiles, *Pulau Kemaro* legends, and traditional games like *Congklak* to simultaneously enhance language acquisition and preserve regional heritage. However, implementation faces significant obstacles: inadequate institutional support, limited culturally-relevant resources, insufficient professional development opportunities, and absence of formal assessment frameworks for cultural integration. Despite these challenges, educators exhibit remarkable agency in developing authentic materials and designing culturally-responsive activities that foster students' linguistic competence alongside cultural identity formation. The study contributes theoretically by demonstrating how ethnopedagogy operationalizes culturally-responsive teaching in Indonesian higher education contexts, bridging Ladson-Billings' framework with Ausubelian meaningful learning principles. Practically, findings underscore urgent needs for systematic resource development, targeted faculty training programs, and institutional policy reforms supporting sustainable ethnopedagogical practice.

Keywords: curriculum development, heritage preservation, language pedagogy, teacher professional development, tertiary education

Introduction

The growing recognition of culturally responsive pedagogy in English Language Teaching (ELT) has prompted educators worldwide to reconsider how local cultural resources can enrich language learning experiences. In Indonesia, a nation characterized by extraordinary linguistic and cultural diversity encapsulated in the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), this discourse has become particularly relevant as the country strives to balance global English competence with the preservation of local identities (Alrajafi, 2021; Zein, 2018). Within this context,

ethnopedagogy, an educational approach that integrates indigenous knowledge systems and local wisdom into teaching practices has emerged as a promising framework for achieving this dual objective (Sugara & Sugito, 2022; Sakti et al., 2024).

The importance of understanding educators' perceptions in implementing culturally responsive approaches cannot be overstated. Teachers serve as the primary agents who translate curriculum policies into classroom practices, and their beliefs, attitudes, and perceived challenges significantly influence how educational innovations are adopted or resisted (Priestley et al., 2015). Despite national curriculum reforms such as the 2013 Curriculum and the current *Kurikulum Merdeka* that explicitly encourage the integration of local wisdom and character education (Rasidi et al., 2025), the successful implementation of ethnopedagogical approaches ultimately depends on how educators perceive their relevance, feasibility, and effectiveness in the classroom context.

Recent theoretical developments have further strengthened the rationale for culturally grounded ELT. The Global Englishes paradigm reconceptualizes English as a pluricentric language shaped by diverse sociocultural contexts rather than a monolithic entity bound to native-speaker norms (Borelli et al., 2020; Montakantiwong & Funada, 2025). This perspective, combined with the movement toward decolonizing ELT that seeks to dismantle colonial legacies in language education (Ratri et al., 2024), positions ethnopedagogy as not merely a supplementary approach but an essential methodology for developing learners who are both globally competent and culturally grounded. However, the extent to which these theoretical frameworks resonate with practitioners' experiences and inform their classroom decisions remains insufficiently explored.

A review of existing literature reveals a significant geographical gap in ethnopedagogical research within Indonesian ELT contexts. The majority of empirical studies have concentrated on the densely populated islands of Java (Mulyanah, 2024; Sakti et al., 2024; Swandana et al., 2025) and the culturally distinct traditions of Bali (Kertih, 2021), while outer islands with equally rich yet distinct cultural resources remain underrepresented. This omission is particularly problematic because pedagogical approaches developed in one cultural context may not directly transfer to regions with different historical backgrounds, cultural practices, and local wisdom traditions.

South Sumatra represents one such underexplored region that warrants scholarly attention. The province possesses a distinctive cultural identity profoundly shaped by its Malay heritage and the legacy of the ancient Sriwijaya Kingdom, one of the most powerful maritime empires in Southeast Asian history. This heritage has produced a specific repertoire of local wisdom, including folklore and legends such as *Sih Pahit Lidah, Silampari, Bujang Kurap*, and *Pulau Kemaro*; intricate artistic practices like *Songket Palembang* weaving; traditional architecture exemplified by *Rumah Limas*; and communal traditions such as *Bekarang Iwak* (Chotimah, 2018; Hasanadi, 2017; Siswanto et al., 2019). Despite this cultural wealth, empirical research examining how English educators in South Sumatra perceive and integrate local wisdom into their teaching practices remains conspicuously absent, leaving practitioners without context-specific frameworks or evidence-based guidance.

This gap is significant for several reasons. First, without understanding educators' perspectives, curriculum developers and policymakers lack crucial insights into the practical challenges and opportunities that shape classroom implementation. Second, the absence of region-specific research forces teachers to either rely on generic, culturally neutral materials or adapt frameworks designed for different cultural contexts, potentially compromising the authenticity and effectiveness of ethnopedagogical integration. Third, investigating educators' perceptions can illuminate the tensions and negotiations involved in balancing local cultural content with the demands of standardized language instruction, a practical concern that theoretical discussions alone cannot adequately address.

To address these gaps, the present study investigates the perceptions of English educators in South Sumatra regarding the integration of local wisdom in their teaching practices. Specifically, this research is guided by four questions: (1) How do English educators perceive the role and relevance of ethnopedagogy in their teaching? (2) What strategies do they employ to integrate local wisdom into classroom practice? (3) How do educators perceive the impact of these practices on students' learning outcomes? and (4) What challenges do they encounter when implementing ethnopedagogical approaches in English classrooms?

By situating these inquiries within a culturally rich yet underrepresented region in ethnopedagogical research, this study offers several contributions. Theoretically, it extends the discourse on culturally responsive ELT by providing grounded insights into how global theoretical frameworks are negotiated at the local level. Practically, it informs curriculum designers, teacher educators, and policymakers seeking to develop context-sensitive approaches that honor local cultural heritage while meeting the demands of contemporary English education. Ultimately, this research responds to the call for pedagogies that align English education with Indonesia's multicultural identity, ensuring that language learning serves not only instrumental goals but also the broader purpose of cultural preservation and identity formation.

Literature review

This literature review establishes the conceptual and empirical foundation for examining educators' perceptions on integrating local wisdom into English Language Teaching (ELT). The review is organized into three interconnected sections. First, it presents the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study: ethnopedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy, the Global Englishes paradigm and decolonizing ELT perspectives, and educators' agency in curriculum implementation. Second, it examines the contextual intersection of local wisdom traditions in South Sumatra with Indonesian ELT policies and empirical studies from Southeast Asian contexts. Finally, it synthesizes the literature to identify the specific research gap this study addresses and articulate its intended contributions to the field.

Conceptual framework

Ethnopedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy

Ethnopedagogy is a theoretical framework that emphasizes the integration of cultural values and indigenous knowledge systems into teaching and learning processes. Zhuzeyev et al. (2022) define ethnopedagogy as an educational approach that draws upon the rich history of teaching methods from different cultures, positioning it as an interdisciplinary science that can be integrated with various academic disciplines. The framework posits that education should not be culturally neutral but should instead root itself in learners' immediate environment and heritage to make learning more meaningful and relevant (Sakti et al., 2024). Sugara and Sugito (2022) further elaborate that ethnopedagogy functions as an ethnically-based learning model that utilizes local wisdom, traditions, and ethnic values both as teaching tools and resources for knowledge acquisition.

Ethnopedagogy aligns closely with culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), a framework developed primarily in Western educational contexts that advocates using students' cultural knowledge and lived experiences as conduits for effective instruction (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRP recognizes the diverse cultural backgrounds of students and aims to establish inclusive, engaging

learning environments that affirm learners' identities (Caingcoy, 2023; Gumartifa et al., 2025). Both frameworks share fundamental assumptions: they challenge the notion of cultural neutrality in education, advocate for inclusive practices that validate learners' identities, and seek to foster equitable learning outcomes by bridging home and school cultures. The convergence of these frameworks provides a robust theoretical basis for incorporating local wisdom into ELT, enabling educators to design learning experiences that connect global English competencies with localized cultural content.

Global Englishes paradigm and decolonizing ELT

The Global Englishes paradigm offers a complementary theoretical lens for understanding why local wisdom integration matters in ELT. This paradigm reconceptualizes English not as a monolithic entity owned by native speakers but as a pluricentric language continuously shaped by diverse sociocultural contexts worldwide (Galloway & Rose, 2015; Borelli et al., 2020). Montakantiwong and Funada (2025) describe Global Englishes as an encompassing mindset that directly contests the predominance of Western cultural content in ELT materials and advocates for pedagogies reflecting local realities. From this perspective, English belongs equally to all its users, and legitimate varieties of English emerge from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including those in Expanding Circle countries like Indonesia.

Closely related to Global Englishes is the movement toward decolonizing ELT, which involves critically rethinking curricula and practices to dismantle colonial legacies and linguistic hierarchies that have historically privileged Inner Circle English varieties and Western cultural norms (Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Ratri et al., 2024). Decolonizing ELT creates space for indigenous knowledge systems by questioning whose culture is represented in teaching materials and whose voices are legitimized in language classrooms. This movement advocates for the inclusion of local cultural content, local varieties of English, and locally-produced materials as acts of epistemic justice that affirm learners' cultural identities while developing their English proficiency.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide strong justification for ethnopedagogical approaches in Indonesian ELT. They argue that pedagogies rooted in learners' lived experiences are not merely supplementary enhancements but essential components of equitable, effective language education. By positioning ethnopedagogy within the broader frameworks of Global Englishes and decolonizing ELT, this study situates the integration of South Sumatran local wisdom as both a pedagogically sound practice and a form of cultural affirmation that resists the homogenizing tendencies of globalized English education.

Educators' perspectives and agency

While policy frameworks and theoretical paradigms provide the rationale for ethnopedagogical approaches, their actual implementation depends fundamentally on educators. Teacher agency refers to the capacity of educators to make context-sensitive pedagogical decisions within structural constraints, actively shaping their professional practice rather than merely executing predetermined curricula (Priestley et al., 2015). This ecological perspective on agency recognizes that teachers' actions are influenced by iterational factors (past experiences and professional histories), projective factors (aspirations and goals), and practical-evaluative factors (immediate contextual conditions and available resources).

Understanding educators' perceptions is critical because teachers frequently navigate tensions between standardized curricula, institutional expectations, and students' cultural and linguistic needs.

In the Indonesian context, where curriculum reforms explicitly encourage cultural integration, educators' beliefs about ethnopedagogy significantly influence whether and how local wisdom is incorporated into English lessons (Gumartifa et al., 2025). Research by Utami and Kuswandono (2023) demonstrates that Indonesian EFL teachers' self-efficacy and reflective awareness strongly influence their adaptation of instructional materials. Similarly, Wulansari and Lestari (2024) found that teachers actively negotiate policy mandates by exercising control over lesson planning, assessment design, and instructional adaptation. Putri (2024) further reveals that variations in school culture, autonomy levels, and administrative support significantly impact agency implementation among Indonesian English teachers.

Beyond the Indonesian context, Min (2024) emphasizes that teachers' ability to implement culturally responsive pedagogy depends on both individual dispositions and enabling school environments, reinforcing the ecological nature of agency. Similarly, Marzulina et al. (2025) demonstrate that English lecturers in South Sumatra function as cultural change agents who strategically integrate digital innovation with local wisdom preservation, exemplifying how educator agency mediates between technological advancement and cultural sustainability. Marzulina et al. (2025) argue that educators function as agents of change who go beyond content delivery to inspire learning and help students understand their surroundings within both local and global communication frameworks.

Local wisdom integration in Indonesian and southeast Asian ELT contexts

Local wisdom as educational resource

Local wisdom refers to a body of knowledge accumulated and transmitted across generations, geographically and historically specific to particular communities. It encompasses norms, beliefs, values, mythical traditions, rituals, artistic creations, and literary works that constitute communities' cultural heritage (Yamin, 2017). When connected to education, local wisdom has the power to enrich learning by establishing environments rooted in students' social, cultural, and immediate surroundings, thereby providing relevant experiences and perspectives that promote deep engagement and culturally situated understanding (Ratri et al., 2024; Sartika et al., 2024).

Empirical evidence from southeast Asian contexts

The integration of local cultural content into ELT reflects a broader movement across Southeast Asia. In Thailand, Forman (2014) found that teachers exercise significant agency by supplementing textbooks with local cultural examples to make learning more meaningful. Malaysian studies demonstrate that integrating local cultural themes can significantly improve students' English writing performance by providing familiar and relatable content (Abdullah et al., 2021). In the Philippines, scholars advocate for integrating local English varieties and cultural content as a means of decolonizing language education and legitimizing Filipino learners' linguistic identities (Madrunio & Martin, 2018). These regional studies illustrate the implementation of ethnopedagogical principles through material adaptation, contextualized curriculum development, and affirmation of local identities in English classrooms.

Indonesian ELT policies and local wisdom integration

In Indonesia, character building and cultural awareness constitute central foci of national educational policies, reflecting a strong commitment to cultivating moral values and social responsibility among students. Successive curriculum reforms, including the 2013 Curriculum (*Kurikulum 2013*) and the current *Kurikulum Merdeka*, explicitly emphasize character education and cultural integration (Rasidi et al., 2025). Initiatives such as the Pancasila Student Profile further institutionalize values of social responsibility, cultural pride, and global competence. These policy frameworks create both opportunities and imperatives for integrating local wisdom into English language instruction.

Empirical research from various Indonesian regions demonstrates the benefits of ethnopedagogical approaches. Sakti et al. (2024) examined local wisdom integration in a Yogyakarta school curriculum, revealing enhanced student comprehension of cultural heritage alongside character development. In Kalimantan, Isnaniah et al. (2025) found that incorporating indigenous knowledge into English classrooms transformed learning into culturally meaningful experiences that enhanced learning outcomes. Minsih et al. (2025) demonstrated that integrating cultural literacy into science education promotes comprehensive student development by fostering reasoning integrated with cultural context. These studies confirm the pedagogical value of local wisdom integration while illustrating its implementation across different Indonesian contexts.

Local wisdom traditions in south Sumatra

South Sumatra possesses a distinctive cultural identity profoundly shaped by its Malay heritage and the legacy of the Sriwijaya Kingdom, one of the most powerful maritime empires in Southeast Asian history (Swastiwi, 2023). This rich cultural landscape includes unique traditional houses (*Rumah Limas*), ceremonial clothing, regional dances, and culinary specialties that play vital roles in preserving local identity and community cohesion. Local wisdom in this region manifests in diverse forms: folklore and legends such as *Sih Pahit Lidah*, *Silampari*, *Bujang Kurap*, and *Pulau Kemaro*; traditional values embedded in community practices; tangible heritage including the Ampera Bridge, *Songket* weaving, *Pempek*; and communal traditions such as *Bekarang Iwak* (Chotimah et al., 2018; Marzulina et al., 2025; Utari et al., 2024).

These cultural elements hold significant potential for enriching English language classrooms. Folklore such as the legend of Pulau Kemaro or the historical significance of the Musi River can serve as contextualized reading materials or multimodal resources that foster culturally sustaining pedagogy. Recent research by Marzulina et al. (2025) demonstrates the practical integration of South Sumatran cultural elements, including *Bidar* boats, *Rumah Limas* architecture, *Songket Palembang* textiles, and *Kue Maksuba* culinary traditions into digital English language reading instruction, revealing that such culturally grounded pedagogical approaches simultaneously enhance linguistic competence and strengthen students' cultural identity. Such localized material integration supports not only vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension but also strengthens students' cultural awareness, enabling them to engage with global English discourses while maintaining and valuing their local identity.

Research gap and study contributions

While Southeast Asian and Indonesian studies demonstrate growing interest in integrating local cultural content into ELT, the existing literature reveals significant gaps that this study addresses. First,

the geographical distribution of ethnopedagogical research within Indonesia is markedly uneven. The majority of empirical studies concentrate on Java (Mulyanah, 2024; Sakti et al., 2024; Swandana et al., 2025) and Bali (Kertih, 2021), while outer islands with equally rich yet distinct cultural resources remain substantially underrepresented. This omission is problematic because pedagogical approaches developed in one cultural context may not transfer directly to regions with different historical backgrounds, cultural practices, and local wisdom traditions.

Second, despite the theoretical emphasis on educators' agency in implementing culturally responsive approaches, limited research has investigated how English teachers in peripheral Indonesian regions perceive, negotiate, and enact ethnopedagogical practices. South Sumatran educators' perspectives remain largely undocumented, leaving practitioners without context-specific frameworks or evidence-based guidance for integrating the region's distinctive cultural heritage into their English instruction.

Third, while existing research has examined the outcomes of local wisdom integration on student learning, few studies have systematically explored the challenges educators face in implementing ethnopedagogical approaches, particularly the tensions between standardized curriculum requirements, institutional constraints, and culturally responsive aspirations. Understanding these challenges from practitioners' perspectives is essential for developing realistic, sustainable frameworks for local wisdom integration.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating South Sumatran English educators' perceptions regarding the integration of local wisdom in their teaching practices. By centering educators' voices, their perceived relevance of ethnopedagogy, their implementation strategies, their assessment of impacts on student learning, and their experienced challenges, this research provides grounded insights into the practical realities of culturally responsive ELT in an underexplored Indonesian context. Theoretically, the study extends the discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy and Global Englishes by examining how these frameworks are negotiated at the local level. Practically, it informs curriculum developers, teacher educators, and policymakers seeking to support ethnopedagogical implementation with evidence of both opportunities and constraints. Ultimately, this research contributes to ongoing efforts to align English education with Indonesia's multicultural identity while equipping learners with globally relevant language competencies.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate English educators' perceptions regarding the integration of South Sumatran local wisdom into their teaching practices. The following sections detail the methodological procedures used to address the research questions.

Research design and approach

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Yin, 2018) to gain an in-depth understanding of educators' perspectives and practices regarding ethnopedagogical integration in English language classrooms. A case study approach was selected because it allows for intensive examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). The case is bounded by the specific phenomenon of ethnopedagogical practices among English educators within the distinct sociocultural context of South Sumatra, Indonesia.

A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate for this investigation for several reasons. First, the research questions focus on understanding 'how' and 'what' aspects of educators' experiences, which require interpretive methods that capture participants' subjective meanings and lived realities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Next, ethnopedagogical practices are deeply embedded in cultural contexts that resist quantification, necessitating methods that can capture nuance and complexity. The last, given the limited existing research on this topic in South Sumatra, an exploratory qualitative design provides the flexibility needed to discover unanticipated themes and generate rich, contextually grounded insights that can inform future research.

Research site

The research was conducted in South Sumatra Province, Indonesia, a region selected for its distinctive cultural heritage and underrepresentation in ethnopedagogical research. South Sumatra possesses a rich cultural landscape shaped by Malay traditions and the historical legacy of the Sriwijaya Kingdom, manifested in diverse forms of local wisdom including folklore, traditional arts, and communal practices that hold potential for integration into English language instruction. The province encompasses various educational institutions across urban and semi-urban areas, providing access to educators working in diverse teaching contexts. This geographical focus enabled the researcher to examine how educators in this specific cultural milieu perceive and negotiate the integration of regional local wisdom into their English teaching practices.

Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that involves deliberately selecting information-rich cases relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). This criterion-based approach ensures that participants possess the knowledge and experience necessary to provide meaningful insights into the research questions (Suri, 2011). Five English educators were recruited from a doctoral cohort of twelve students based on their professional backgrounds in English Language Teaching (ELT) and their current teaching positions in South Sumatra.

The inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) hold valid teaching certification in English language education, (2) be currently teaching English in South Sumatra at any educational level, and (3) have demonstrated experience with or expressed interest in integrating local cultural content into their teaching, as evidenced by their professional activities, teaching portfolios, or self-reporting during initial screening. Potential participants were contacted via email and WhatsApp messaging, provided with information sheets detailing the study's purpose and procedures, and asked to confirm their eligibility against the stated criteria before providing consent.

The sample size of five participants was determined to be sufficient for this qualitative investigation based on several methodological considerations. In qualitative research, sample adequacy is judged not by numerical size but by the sample's ability to generate rich, detailed data that effectively addresses the research questions (Baker et al., 2024; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Studies focused on in-depth understanding of specific phenomena typically employ smaller samples that allow for intensive engagement with each participant's perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Furthermore, the homogeneity of the sample, all participants being English educators in South Sumatra with interest in cultural integration increases the likelihood of reaching informational redundancy with fewer participants (Guest et al., 2006). The diversity in teaching levels (secondary and tertiary) and years of

experience (ranging from 3 to 31 years) within this sample ensures representation of varied perspectives while maintaining analytical depth.

Table 1: *Participant demographics*

Pseudonym	Teaching Level	Experience	Professional Background
Educator A	Junior High School	3 years	Early-career educator focused on making English relatable to young learners through contextual approaches
Educator B	Vocational High School	19 years	Experienced vocational educator specializing in English for specific purposes
Educator C	University & English Course	17 years	Senior lecturer and teacher educator with expertise in methodology
Educator D	University	19 years	Senior lecturer specializing in creative writing and literature-based instruction
Educator E	University	31 years	Senior lecturer with extensive experience in grammar instruction and curriculum development

Data collection

Interview protocol development

The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews, selected for their ability to provide a flexible yet focused framework that allows participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring coverage of all topics relevant to the research questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interview protocol was developed following established qualitative instrument design guidelines (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Kalkbrenner, 2021) through a systematic four-phase process: (1) ensuring alignment between interview questions and research questions, (2) constructing an inquiry-based conversation flow, (3) receiving feedback on interview protocols, and (4) piloting the interview protocol.

The initial protocol comprising 46 open-ended questions was reviewed by two senior lecturers with expertise in qualitative research methodology, who provided feedback using structured evaluation templates (Elangovan & Sundaravel, 2021). Based on their recommendations, questions were refined for clarity, redundant items were consolidated, and the sequencing was adjusted to improve conversational flow. A pilot interview was subsequently conducted with one educator who met the inclusion criteria but was not included in the final sample, following best practices for iterative refinement (Omam et al., 2023). This pilot resulted in further revisions to question wording and the addition of probing questions to elicit more detailed responses.

Interview procedures

All interviews were conducted in English, the professional language shared by all participants as English educators. Interviews were conducted either in person at locations convenient for participants or online via video conferencing platforms (WhatsApp Video Call or Google Meet) to accommodate the geographical distribution of participants across South Sumatra and ensure accessibility. Each interview session lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Each participant was interviewed once, with occasional follow-up messages via WhatsApp used to clarify responses or request elaboration on specific points when needed.

The interview sessions followed a consistent structure beginning with rapport-building questions about participants' teaching backgrounds, followed by questions addressing each research question in sequence: perceptions of ethnopedagogy's relevance, integration strategies employed, perceived impacts on student learning, and challenges encountered. This organization allowed for natural progression through topics while ensuring comprehensive coverage of all research questions.

Ethical procedures

Ethical considerations guided all phases of data collection. Prior to participation, each potential participant received an information sheet detailing the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, and confidentiality measures. Electronic informed consent was obtained from all participants before interviews commenced. All interview sessions were audio-recorded with explicit permission from participants. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms (Educator A through E) were assigned to all participants, and any identifying information was removed from transcripts (Gibbs, 2018). Audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely on a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher, and recordings will be deleted upon completion of the research project.

Data analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher to maintain accuracy and develop intimate familiarity with the data. Transcription was completed using Microsoft Word, with timestamps noted to facilitate later verification against audio recordings. The transcribed data were then analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis framework, selected for its theoretical flexibility and systematic approach to identifying patterns of meaning across qualitative datasets. All coding and analysis were conducted manually without the use of qualitative data analysis software; a decision made to maintain close engagement with the data and ensure interpretive depth.

The analysis proceeded through six phases as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). In Phase 1 (familiarization), the researcher read each transcript multiple times while noting initial analytical impressions and potential items of interest. Phase 2 (generating initial codes) involved systematically working through each transcript, identifying meaningful segments of text, and assigning descriptive codes. Codes were recorded in a separate Microsoft Excel spreadsheet alongside the corresponding data excerpts and transcript locations. Phase 3 (generating initial themes) involved collating codes into potential themes based on shared meanings and patterns relevant to the research questions. In Phase 4 (reviewing themes), candidate themes were evaluated against the coded data and entire dataset to ensure internal coherence and meaningful distinction between themes. Phase 5 (defining and naming themes) involved refining each theme's scope and articulating its central organizing concept. Finally, Phase 6 (writing up) entailed weaving the analytical narrative together with illustrative data excerpts to present a coherent account of findings.

Table 2: *Sample of coding process*

Data Excerpt	Initial Code	Theme
"I use local stories so students feel closer to the material."	Use of local folklore; Creating relevance	Strategies for integrating local wisdom
"Sometimes I struggle because the curriculum is too rigid."	Curriculum constraints; Limited flexibility	Challenges in implementation
"Students become more motivated when they recognize cultural content."	Increased motivation; Cultural recognition	Perceived impacts on learning

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this qualitative study was established through several measures addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It should be acknowledged that this study relied solely on semi-structured interviews as the data source; therefore, traditional data triangulation through multiple methods was not employed. However, several alternative strategies were implemented to enhance the rigor and credibility of findings.

Credibility was established primarily through member checking, wherein preliminary thematic summaries were shared with participants for verification of accuracy and resonance with their intended meanings (Birt et al., 2016). Additionally, within-method triangulation was achieved by comparing responses across the five participants, who represented diverse educational levels (secondary and tertiary) and varying years of experience (3 to 31 years), allowing for identification of convergent patterns and divergent perspectives within the dataset (Carter et al., 2014).

Transferability is supported through thick description of the research context, participant characteristics, and methodological procedures, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to other settings (Nowell et al., 2017). Dependability was addressed through maintenance of a detailed audit trail documenting all methodological decisions, analytical processes, and iterations of theme development. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexive journaling, in which the researcher documented personal assumptions, biases, and interpretive decisions throughout the research process, ensuring that findings remain grounded in participant data rather than researcher preconceptions (Shenton, 2004).

While acknowledging that the findings are context-specific to South Sumatran English educators, the methodological rigor applied throughout data collection and analysis ensures that the insights generated provide a trustworthy foundation for understanding ethnopedagogical perceptions in this underexplored context. Future studies may consider incorporating additional data sources such as classroom observations or document analysis to enable methodological triangulation and further strengthen the evidence base.

Findings

The thematic analysis of interviews with five English educators from across South Sumatra yielded four major themes corresponding to the four research questions guiding this study. Each theme encompasses multiple sub-themes that emerged from systematic coding of participant responses. Table 3 presents a comprehensive overview of the themes, sub-themes, representative codes, and data sources. The subsequent sections provide detailed descriptions of each theme, supported by illustrative quotations from participants.

Table 3: *Overview of themes, sub-themes, codes, and sources*

Theme	Sub-theme	Representative Codes	Sources
Theme 1: Perceived Relevance and Benefits of Ethnopedagogy	1.1 Meaningful and relatable learning	Connecting to students' lives; familiar content; less foreign; culturally relevant	Educator A, B, C
	1.2 Cultural identity and value preservation	Cultural sustainability; sense of identity; heritage appreciation; pride	Educator D, E

Theme	Sub-theme	Keywords	Educator
	1.3 Alignment with national curriculum	*Kurikulum Merdeka*; Pancasila Student Profile; character values; moral lessons	Educator A
Theme 2: Strategies for Integrating Local Wisdom	2.1 Local narratives and historical figures	Pulau Kemaro legend; Ki Marogan; Si Pahit Lidah; reading materials; moral values	Educator A, B, E
	2.2 Traditional games and cultural artifacts	Congklak; Songket; culinary; artifacts; tangible items; hands-on learning	Educator C, D, E
	2.3 Role-playing and dramatization	Story performance; script writing; local costumes; casting roles; applause	Educator D
Theme 3: Perceived Impacts on Student Learning	3.1 Increased engagement and participation	More engaged; familiar content; active participation; enthusiasm; curiosity	Educator A, E
	3.2 Enhanced confidence and identity connection	Boosted confidence; willing to speak; identity affirmation; pride in culture	Educator D
	3.3 Deeper discussions and critical thinking	Multiple perspectives; religious aspects; economic aspects; social aspects; rich discussions	Educator D
Theme 4: Challenges in Implementation	4.1 Lack of culturally relevant materials	No ready materials; absence of resources; difficult implementation; need to create own	Educator A, B
	4.2 Time and workload constraints	Lack time; heavy workload; design slides; create videos; preparation burden	Educator B
	4.3 Limited institutional support	Moral support only; need resources; need training; lack practical support	Educator B

Perceived relevance and benefits of ethnopedagogy

The first theme addresses research question 1, exploring how English educators perceive the role and relevance of ethnopedagogy in their teaching. Analysis revealed that all five participants viewed the integration of local wisdom as highly relevant and beneficial, with their perceptions organized into three sub-themes: meaningful and relatable learning, cultural identity and value preservation, and alignment with the national curriculum.

Meaningful and relatable learning

Participants consistently reported that integrating South Sumatran local wisdom made English lessons more meaningful and relevant to students' lives. Educators observed that students were better able to connect with content when familiar cultural references were employed, transforming English from an abstract foreign language into a medium for expressing their own experiences and identities. Educator A articulated this perspective:

> *"When I use the legend of Pulau Kemaro, I am not just teaching narrative text; I am teaching them how to connect global knowledge with their own identity... It makes English less foreign and more relatable."* (Educator A)

This sentiment was echoed by other participants. Educators B and C similarly emphasized that "this approach helps students feel closer to the material and makes learning meaningful." The use of locally familiar content reduced the perceived distance between students and the English language, facilitating deeper engagement with learning materials.

Cultural identity and value preservation

Several educators noted that ethnopedagogy supports cultural sustainability and fosters students' sense of identity. Participants contrasted the use of local content with typical Western-centric materials, observing that students demonstrated greater interest and engagement when cultural references resonated with their lived experiences. Educator D explained:

> *"Local wisdom helps students in learning English. Most of the time, they learn text based on foreign culture like Halloween or Thanksgiving. But Indonesian students don't know anything about that. When we use local content, there will be a lot of discussions."* (Educator D)

Educator E reinforced this perspective, noting that local wisdom integration "*makes it easier to understand the material, makes the learning fun, and increases students' enthusiasm and curiosity about their own local wisdom.*" These responses indicate that educators perceive ethnopedagogy as serving dual purposes: enhancing language learning while simultaneously preserving and promoting cultural heritage.

Alignment with national curriculum

Teachers highlighted that integrating local wisdom aligns with the goals of Indonesia's national curriculum frameworks. Educator A specifically connected ethnopedagogical practices to the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and the Pancasila Student Profile:

> *"Students not only learn the language but also develop character values like curiosity, respect for culture, and collaboration. It aligns with Kurikulum Merdeka because it encourages them to explore local identity and moral lessons. It also reflects the Pancasila Student Profile, especially being proud of their culture and showing social awareness."* (Educator A)

This alignment between ethnopedagogical approaches and official curriculum objectives provides educators with institutional legitimacy for integrating local wisdom into their English instruction.

Strategies for integrating local wisdom

The second theme addresses research question 2, examining the strategies educators employ to integrate local wisdom into classroom practice. Analysis revealed three primary approaches: utilizing local narratives and historical figures, incorporating traditional games and cultural artifacts, and implementing role-playing and dramatization activities.

Local narratives and historical figures

Participants reported extensively using local legends and historical figures as vehicles for teaching English language skills. These narratives served multiple pedagogical purposes, including reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and moral education. Educator A described the approach:

"The story of Pulau Kemaro I use as reading material. The students read in English and discuss things like moral values." (Educator A)

Educator B similarly described using the legend of *Ki Marogan* to support reading comprehension and vocabulary development. Educator E reported incorporating various South Sumatran legends into grammar instruction, explaining: "*I include in my teaching materials, like culinary of South Sumatra, artifacts, legends like Si Pahit Lidah and others.*" These examples demonstrate how local narratives can be adapted across different language skill areas.

Traditional games and cultural artifacts

Teachers incorporated tangible cultural items and traditional games to create hands-on, experiential language learning opportunities. Educator C described using traditional games for interactive language practice:

"I bring Congklak to the class. We use English to talk about the rules and strategies. It's playful, but they are learning commands, numbers, and turn-taking." (Educator C)

Educator D integrated *Songket* (traditional woven fabric) into lessons by having students describe patterns and cultural significance in English. These approaches transform cultural artifacts into authentic contexts for language use, embedding English practice within culturally meaningful activities.

Role-Playing and dramatization

Dramatization of local stories emerged as another widely used strategy, engaging students in comprehensive language production through performance. Educator D provided a detailed account of this approach:

"I started asking my students to perform local stories in 2019, reading original stories, writing scripts, casting roles, using local costumes. After the performance, they received a lot of applause." (Educator D)

This strategy integrates multiple language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening within an authentic communicative context that celebrates local cultural heritage.

Perceived impacts on student learning

The third theme addresses Research Question 3, exploring educators' perceptions of how ethnopedagogical practices impact students' learning outcomes. Three sub-themes emerged: increased engagement and participation, enhanced confidence and identity connection, and deeper discussions and critical thinking.

Increased engagement and participation

Educators consistently reported that familiarity with cultural content increased student engagement and active participation in lessons. Educator A observed: "Students are generally more engaged because the content is familiar to them." Participants noted that stories from outside the region elicited comparatively less curiosity and participation, suggesting that cultural relevance directly influences student motivation.

Enhanced confidence and identity connection

Familiar cultural materials were reported to support confidence-building and identity affirmation among students. Educator D explained the connection:

> *"Familiarity with the cultural content boosted students' confidence, making them more willing to speak and participate in discussions."* (Educator D)

This finding suggests that ethnopedagogical approaches may help reduce affective barriers to English language production by grounding communication in familiar cultural terrain.

Deeper Discussions and Critical Thinking

Teachers noted that local wisdom fostered richer classroom discussions and enhanced students' critical thinking skills. When engaging with familiar cultural content, students demonstrated capacity for multi-perspectival analysis. Educator D described:

> *"They have a lot to talk about, perspectives from religious, economic, and social aspects. It is very nice to hear their perspectives."* (Educator D)

This capacity for nuanced discussion indicates that cultural familiarity enables students to engage more deeply with content, moving beyond surface-level comprehension to critical analysis.

Challenges in Implementation

The fourth theme addresses Research Question 4, examining the challenges educators encounter when implementing ethnopedagogical approaches. Three significant barriers emerged: lack of culturally relevant materials, time and workload constraints, and limited institutional support.

Lack of Culturally Relevant Materials

The most frequently cited barrier was the absence of ready-to-use teaching materials incorporating South Sumatran local culture. Educators reported that existing textbooks and commercial materials rarely include local content, forcing them to develop their own resources. Educator A explained:

> *"In my school we don't have materials or teaching resources that integrate our culture which makes the implementation a bit difficult."* (Educator A)

Time and Workload Constraints

Closely related to the material shortage, teachers expressed difficulty in preparing localized materials due to time limitations and heavy workloads. Educator B articulated this challenge:

> *"We lack time to create new content. I have to design slides and videos showing local traditions, but we lack time to prepare more."* (Educator B)

This response highlights the additional burden placed on motivated teachers who must function as curriculum designers without corresponding reductions in their teaching loads.

Limited Institutional Support

Although teachers reported receiving moral encouragement for their ethnopedagogical efforts, practical institutional support was described as limited. Educator B noted the disparity between verbal support and tangible resources:

> *"I receive mostly moral support from my schools, but we need resources, maybe more trainings and more materials with the local culture of South Sumatra included."* (Educator B)

This gap between encouragement and practical support indicates a systemic need for institutional investment in ethnopedagogical resources and professional development.

Across the four research questions, the findings reveal that English educators in South Sumatra perceive ethnopedagogy as a highly relevant and beneficial approach that aligns with national curriculum goals while fostering meaningful, culturally grounded learning experiences. Educators employ diverse strategies, including local narratives, traditional games, cultural artifacts, and dramatization to integrate South Sumatran local wisdom into their English instruction. These practices are perceived to enhance student engagement, boost confidence, strengthen cultural identity, and promote deeper critical thinking. However, significant barriers persist, including the absence of ready-made culturally relevant materials, time constraints that limit material development, and a gap between institutional encouragement and practical support. These findings collectively suggest that while ethnopedagogical approaches hold substantial promise for English language teaching in South Sumatra, their broader implementation requires systemic support in the form of resource development, reduced teacher workloads, and targeted professional development.

Discussion

This study examined English educators' perspectives on integrating South Sumatran local wisdom into English language teaching through an ethnopedagogical lens. The findings reveal a compelling portrait of educators who recognize the transformative potential of culturally grounded pedagogy yet navigate significant systemic constraints in their implementation efforts. This discussion interprets these findings in relation to existing literature, explores their theoretical and practical implications, and situates them within the broader discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy in English language teaching.

The dual function of ethnopedagogy: language learning and cultural preservation

The findings demonstrate that educators perceive ethnopedagogy as serving dual pedagogical purposes, facilitating English language acquisition while simultaneously preserving and promoting local cultural heritage. This dual function challenges the persistent assumption in English language teaching that effective instruction requires immersion in target language cultures, typically Western contexts. As Educator A articulated, using the legend of *Pulau Kemaro* allows students to "*connect global knowledge with their own identity*," transforming English from an abstract foreign construct into a meaningful medium for expressing local realities. This perspective aligns with scholarship emphasizing that language learning need not necessitate cultural alienation (Kramsch, 2013; Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Rather, the integration of local cultural content can create what Vygotsky (1978) conceptualized as effective zones of proximal development, where familiar cultural scaffolding supports the acquisition of new linguistic competencies.

The educators' emphasis on making English "less foreign and more relatable" reflects a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between cultural relevance and cognitive engagement. When Educator D contrasted local content with typical Western-centric materials like Halloween or Thanksgiving, cultural phenomena that "*Indonesian students don't know anything about*", she highlighted a fundamental pedagogical principle: meaningful learning occurs when new knowledge connects to existing schemas (Ausubel, 1968). The use of South Sumatran legends, traditional games, and cultural artifacts provides students with conceptual anchors that facilitate comprehension and retention. This finding resonates with Freire's (1970) assertion that education should begin with learners' lived experiences rather than imposing external cultural frameworks that may be irrelevant or alienating.

In addition, the educators' recognition that ethnopedagogy supports "cultural sustainability" and fosters students' "sense of identity" reflects growing awareness of education's role in cultural preservation, particularly in contexts where globalization pressures threaten local traditions. Educator E's observation that local wisdom integration "*increases students' enthusiasm and curiosity about their own local wisdom*" suggests that ethnopedagogical approaches can reverse cultural erosion by repositioning local knowledge as academically valuable. This finding contributes to post-colonial critiques of English language teaching that have long argued against the implicit cultural imperialism embedded in conventional ELT methodologies (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1998). By centering South Sumatran cultural content, these educators are engaging in what might be termed "cultural reclamation pedagogy," asserting the legitimacy and educational value of local knowledge systems within a discipline historically dominated by Western cultural norms.

Pedagogical innovation within structural constraints

The diverse integration strategies employed by participants: local narratives, traditional games, cultural artifacts, and dramatization, demonstrate considerable pedagogical creativity. These approaches transform static cultural knowledge into dynamic, interactive learning experiences. When Educator C brought *Congklak* to the classroom, using English to discuss "rules and strategies," she created an authentic communicative context where language served a genuine social function rather than existing as an abstract academic exercise. Similarly, Educator D's elaborate dramatization projects, involving script writing, costume design, and performance, engaged students in comprehensive language production across all four skills while celebrating cultural heritage.

These strategies exemplify what Gay (2010) terms "culturally responsive teaching," which involves using "the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them." The educators' approaches also reflect task-based language teaching principles (Ellis, 2003), where language learning emerges from meaningful, purpose-driven activities rather than decontextualized grammar exercises. The integration of traditional games and dramatization creates what Lantolf and Thorne (2006) describe as "culturally mediated learning," where cultural artifacts function as psychological tools that mediate cognitive development and language acquisition.

However, the pedagogical innovation evident in these strategies exists in tension with significant structural barriers. The most frequently cited challenge, the absence of ready-to-use culturally relevant materials, reveals a systemic gap in educational infrastructure. As Educator A noted, "*we don't have materials or teaching resources that integrate our culture which makes the implementation a bit difficult.*" This finding exposes the continued dominance of commercial textbook publishers whose materials typically reflect Western cultural contexts, assuming a universal English learner divorced from specific cultural locations. The burden thus falls on individual teachers to function as curriculum designers, creating

localized materials without corresponding reductions in teaching loads or provision of development time.

Educator B's lament that "*we lack time to create new content. I have to design slides and videos showing local traditions, but we lack time to prepare more*" illustrates what Hargreaves (1994) identified as the "intensification" of teachers' work, where expanding professional expectations occur without commensurate increases in time or resources. This intensification is particularly pronounced for educators committed to ethnopedagogical approaches, who must not only master standard curricular content but also research local cultural traditions, develop culturally appropriate materials, and create assessment tools aligned with their pedagogical innovations. The creative labor required for ethnopedagogical implementation represents invisible work that existing institutional structures fail to recognize or support adequately.

The gap between institutional rhetoric and material support

Perhaps the most revealing finding concerns the disparity between moral encouragement and practical institutional support. Educator B's observation that "*I receive mostly moral support from my schools, but we need resources, maybe more trainings and more materials with the local culture of South Sumatra included*" exposes a common phenomenon in educational reform: the adoption of progressive rhetoric without corresponding investment in implementation infrastructure. School administrators may verbally endorse ethnopedagogical approaches, particularly given their alignment with the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and Pancasila Student Profile, yet fail to provide the tangible resources: time, materials, professional development, and collaborative spaces, necessary for sustainable implementation.

This gap reflects what Lipsky (2010) terms the "street-level bureaucracy" problem, where frontline workers (teachers) are expected to implement policy directives with insufficient resources, forcing them to develop informal coping strategies or abandon ambitious goals. The findings suggest that ethnopedagogical implementation in South Sumatra currently depends on individual teacher initiative and commitment rather than systemic support structures. While such dedication is admirable, relying on teacher voluntarism creates unsustainable conditions that risk burnout and ensure uneven implementation across schools and regions.

The alignment that Educator A identified between ethnopedagogical approaches and the *Kurikulum Merdeka* presents both opportunity and irony. On one hand, this alignment provides educators with institutional legitimacy, allowing them to frame culturally responsive teaching as fulfilling official curriculum objectives rather than representing idiosyncratic pedagogical preferences. The Pancasila Student Profile's emphasis on cultural pride and social awareness creates conceptual space for ethnopedagogical practices. On the other hand, the gap between curriculum rhetoric and material support reveals the superficiality of policy commitment. If national curriculum frameworks genuinely prioritize cultural rootedness and local identity, as their stated objectives suggest, then substantial investment in culturally relevant teaching materials, teacher professional development, and reduced workloads to enable material creation becomes not optional but essential.

Impact on students: beyond language acquisition

The perceived impacts on student learning extend beyond conventional language acquisition metrics to encompass affective, cultural, and cognitive dimensions. The reported increases in engagement and participation reflect what Krashen (1982) identified as the crucial role of affective factors in language learning. When students encounter familiar cultural content, their affective filters

lower, reducing anxiety and increasing willingness to communicate, a finding that Educator D explicitly noted when observing that "*familiarity with the cultural content boosted students' confidence, making them more willing to speak and participate in discussions.*"

The enhanced capacity for deeper discussions and critical thinking represents particularly significant educational outcomes. Educator D's observation that students analyzing local cultural content demonstrated "perspectives from religious, economic, and social aspects" suggests that cultural familiarity enables more sophisticated cognitive engagement. This finding challenges deficit perspectives that sometimes frame non-Western students as lacking critical thinking capacities. Instead, it suggests that when students possess robust background knowledge, in this case, deep familiarity with local cultural contexts, they demonstrate analytical capabilities that may remain dormant when engaging with unfamiliar Western content. This aligns with Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, which positions analysis, synthesis, and evaluation as higher-order thinking skills that require solid foundational knowledge.

The identity affirmation and cultural pride that educators reported observing among students carry implications beyond immediate academic outcomes. In contexts where globalization and Westernization exert powerful homogenizing pressures, education that validates local knowledge and cultural traditions performs important identity work, particularly for adolescents navigating questions of belonging and self-concept. The "pride in culture" that emerged in the findings suggests that ethnopedagogical approaches may contribute to what Paris and Alim (2017) term "culturally sustaining pedagogy," which not only responds to cultural diversity but actively works to sustain pluralism against assimilationist pressures.

Theoretical and practical implications

These findings contribute to ongoing theoretical debates about the nature of English as an international language and the cultural politics of English language teaching. The educators' successful integration of South Sumatran local wisdom challenges linguistic imperialism models that position English and local languages/cultures as inherently oppositional. Instead, these practices demonstrate possibilities for what Canagarajah (2013) terms "translingual practice," where English becomes a flexible communicative resource that speakers adapt to express local meanings and identities rather than serving as a vehicle for Western cultural transmission.

The study's findings also have practical implications for multiple stakeholders. For teacher educators, the results suggest that pre-service and in-service professional development should explicitly address strategies for culturally responsive teaching, providing prospective teachers with both theoretical frameworks and practical tools for integrating local wisdom. For educational publishers and material developers, the findings reveal a significant market gap and social need for culturally localized English teaching materials. Marzulina et al. (2025) provide empirical evidence that South Sumatran cultural content, ranging from traditional architecture (*Rumah Limas*) and crafts (*Songket* Palembang) to culinary practices (*Kue Maksuba*) and transportation traditions (*Bidar* boats) can be effectively digitized and integrated into English language reading curricula through platforms such as YouTube and WhatsApp, demonstrating that culturally grounded materials simultaneously enhance linguistic competence and strengthen cultural identity. Developing region-specific textbook series that integrate local legends, historical figures, cultural practices, and linguistic examples while meeting curriculum standards could simultaneously reduce teacher workload and improve pedagogical effectiveness.

For educational policymakers, the gap between curriculum rhetoric and material support demands attention. If the *Kurikulum Merdeka* genuinely prioritizes cultural rootedness, then substantial investments become necessary: establishing resource centers for culturally relevant teaching materials, creating collaborative networks where educators can share ethnopedagogical innovations, providing professional development focused on culturally responsive pedagogy, and most importantly, reducing teacher workloads to enable sustainable material development. The digital ethnopedagogical model documented by Marzulina et al. (2025) suggests that technology infrastructure including reliable internet access and institutional support for digital platforms—represents a critical investment area, as digital tools can amplify the reach and sustainability of culturally responsive pedagogical innovations when properly supported. Without such systemic support, ethnopedagogical implementation will remain dependent on extraordinary individual effort rather than becoming standard practice.

The findings also suggest possibilities for cross-regional collaboration. Rather than each teacher independently developing materials, provincial or national initiatives could facilitate collaborative material development, where educators from different South Sumatran districts contribute culturally specific content to shared repositories. Marzulina et al.'s (2025) finding that lecturers function as cultural change agents who horizontally diffuse innovations through informal peer networks suggests that establishing formal communities of practice could accelerate the spread of culturally responsive pedagogical approaches across institutions. Such collaboration would distribute the creative labor while producing diverse materials reflecting the province's cultural heterogeneity. This approach recognizes that South Sumatra itself encompasses multiple ethnic groups and cultural traditions, requiring nuanced attention to intra-regional diversity rather than treating "South Sumatran culture" as monolithic.

Ultimately, this study illuminates both the promise and challenges of ethnopedagogical approaches in English language teaching. The educators' experiences demonstrate that integrating local wisdom creates more engaging, meaningful, and culturally affirming learning experiences while fostering critical thinking and maintaining pedagogical rigor. However, realizing this promise across the educational system requires moving beyond individual teacher innovation toward systemic infrastructural support. The question is not whether ethnopedagogy works, the evidence suggests it does but rather whether educational systems will provide the resources necessary to implement it sustainably and equitably.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored English educators' perspectives on integrating South Sumatran local wisdom into English language teaching through ethnopedagogical approaches. Through semi-structured interviews with five educators across South Sumatra, the research revealed that teachers perceive ethnopedagogy as highly relevant and beneficial, serving the dual function of facilitating English language acquisition while preserving cultural heritage. Educators employ diverse strategies including local narratives, traditional games, cultural artifacts, and dramatization to integrate regional wisdom into their instruction. These practices reportedly enhance student engagement, boost confidence, strengthen cultural identity, and promote critical thinking by grounding language learning in familiar cultural contexts.

However, significant barriers constrain broader implementation. The absence of ready-made culturally relevant teaching materials forces educators to function as curriculum designers without corresponding reductions in workload or provision of development time. While teachers receive moral encouragement from institutions, particularly given the alignment between ethnopedagogical

approaches and the *Kurikulum Merdeka*'s emphasis on cultural rootedness, practical support remains limited. This gap between institutional rhetoric and material investment creates unsustainable conditions where ethnopedagogical implementation depends on individual teacher initiative rather than systemic infrastructure.

The findings contribute to ongoing discussions about culturally responsive pedagogy in English language teaching, demonstrating that effective language instruction need not require cultural alienation or immersion in Western contexts. Instead, centering local knowledge systems can create more meaningful, engaging, and equitable learning experiences. However, realizing the full potential of ethnopedagogical approaches requires systemic support: investment in culturally relevant material development, professional development focused on culturally responsive teaching, collaborative networks for sharing pedagogical innovations, and reduced teacher workloads to enable sustainable implementation.

Future research should examine student perspectives on ethnopedagogical approaches, investigate the relationship between culturally grounded instruction and measurable learning outcomes, and explore cross-regional variations in implementation strategies. Additionally, action research projects could document collaborative material development processes, providing models for scalable ethnopedagogical resource creation. As Indonesia continues implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* with its emphasis on cultural identity, ethnopedagogical approaches offer promising pathways for achieving curriculum goals while honoring regional diversity and promoting educational equity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations emerge for advancing ethnopedagogical practice in South Sumatran English language teaching. First, provincial education authorities should establish a centralized repository of culturally relevant teaching materials, facilitating collaborative development and resource sharing among educators across districts. This digital platform could include lesson plans, multimedia resources, assessment tools, and student work exemplars organized by cultural theme and language skill.

Second, professional development programs should specifically address ethnopedagogical implementation, providing educators with training in cultural research methodologies, material adaptation techniques, and assessment strategies appropriate for culturally grounded instruction. Third, schools should allocate dedicated preparation time for teachers engaged in material development, formally recognizing this labor as legitimate professional work rather than voluntary additional effort.

Fourth, future research should examine student perspectives and learning outcomes associated with ethnopedagogical approaches, employing mixed-methods designs that capture both quantitative achievement data and qualitative experiences. Finally, partnerships between universities and schools could facilitate action research projects documenting effective practices, creating evidence-based models for scalable implementation while addressing the current resource gap constraining broader adoption.

Disclosure statement

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