

## Recontextualizing English Language Teaching through Local Wisdom in Islamic Higher Education: Insights from Lecturer Perspectives

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the integration of local wisdom into English Language Teaching (ELT) within the context of Islamic higher education, highlighting its role in enhancing pedagogical quality and cultural relevance. In many ELT settings, instructional practices remain dominated by globalized content that often overlooks local cultural identity and religious values. This research adopts a qualitative design using a census sampling technique involving all 18 English lecturers at IAIN Parepare, Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via digital platforms and direct interactions, and analyzed using thematic analysis, including coding, categorization, and interpretation. The findings indicate that lecturers perceive local wisdom as a valuable pedagogical approach that enhances student motivation, engagement, and comprehension by contextualizing learning through local cultural narratives and Islamic values. However, the integration of local wisdom is not yet fully optimized due to challenges such as limited curriculum support, insufficient institutional policies, lack of teaching resources, and resistance to pedagogical change. This study contributes to the development of culturally responsive pedagogy in ELT by demonstrating that integrating local wisdom can enrich learning experiences and strengthen students' cultural and religious identity. It also offers practical implications for curriculum development, teacher training, and institutional policy reform in Islamic higher education.*

**Keywords:** *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy; English Language Teaching; Islamic Higher Education, Lecturer Perception; Local Wisdom*

### Background

In the era of globalization, English Language Teaching (ELT) in higher education is increasingly expected to develop students' communicative competence while also addressing issues of identity, culture, and educational relevance. In Indonesia, this challenge is particularly significant, as higher education institutions are required not only to enhance global competitiveness but also to respond to diverse sociocultural realities across regions (Sakhiyya & Rahmawati, 2024). At the same time, recent studies emphasize that culture is not a peripheral element in language learning; rather, it plays a central role in shaping meaning-making, learner engagement, and identity construction (Al Mamun et al., 2023; Li, 2023). This indicates that ELT must move beyond purely linguistic objectives and incorporate cultural dimensions to remain relevant and effective.

This issue becomes more critical in Islamic higher education, where English instruction is expected not only to develop language proficiency but also to align with students' religious and cultural values. Research has shown that religion significantly influences teachers' professional identity and pedagogical decisions in Muslim contexts (Almayez, 2022; Nazari et al., 2023). In addition, studies on English teaching materials in Islamic institutions demonstrate that integrating religious values and local culture into ELT can enhance both language learning and character development (Darmayenti et al., 2021). These findings suggest that ELT in Islamic higher education should be understood as a multidimensional practice that integrates linguistic, cultural, and spiritual aspects.



One promising approach to addressing this challenge is the integration of local wisdom into ELT. Local wisdom refers to indigenous knowledge, values, and cultural practices that are rooted in local communities and transmitted across generations. In higher education, integrating local knowledge into the curriculum has been shown to enhance contextual relevance and support curriculum innovation (Mursyid et al., 2025). In ELT specifically, local culture-based materials have been found to improve students' engagement and comprehension, as the content is closely related to their lived experiences (Oktarina et al., 2022; Azizah et al., 2021). Moreover, recent research highlights that cultural representation in language learning materials plays a crucial role in shaping learners' perspectives and identity (Xiong et al., 2024). Therefore, incorporating local wisdom into ELT can make learning more meaningful and culturally grounded.

The integration of local wisdom is closely related to the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of connecting teaching practices with students' cultural backgrounds and experiences (Gay, 2018; Frankenberg & Siegmund, 2020). Studies indicate that culturally responsive teaching can enhance student motivation, participation, and intercultural competence in language learning (Johnson et al., 2023; Liu & Zhang, 2023). Furthermore, recent research suggests that culturally responsive approaches are more effective when supported by institutional policies, curriculum design, and professional development (Bakogiannis, 2025; Li, 2023). This implies that integrating local wisdom into ELT requires not only individual teacher initiative but also systemic support.

Despite these theoretical and empirical advancements, the integration of local wisdom into ELT in Islamic higher education remains underexplored, particularly from the perspective of lecturers as key agents of pedagogical implementation. Existing studies have primarily focused on material development or student outcomes, while limited attention has been given to how lecturers perceive and implement local wisdom in their teaching practices. In addition, challenges such as limited curriculum support, lack of resources, and resistance to pedagogical change continue to hinder effective implementation (Darmayenti et al., 2021; Mursyid et al., 2025).

Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of local wisdom in enhancing the quality of English language teaching at IAIN Parepare by examining lecturers' perceptions, pedagogical practices, and the challenges they encounter. This study offers novelty by focusing on lecturers' perspectives in Islamic higher education, which remains underexplored in ELT research. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to the development of more contextualized, culturally responsive, and pedagogically effective ELT practices.

## Literature Review

### 1. Culture in English Language Teaching

Recent developments in English Language Teaching (ELT) highlight that culture plays a central role in shaping language learning processes, moving beyond the traditional view of language as a neutral system. Culture influences how learners interpret meaning, construct identity, and engage with learning materials (Al Mamun et al., 2023). This perspective is reinforced by the Global Englishes paradigm, which challenges the dominance of native-speaker norms and promotes the recognition of diverse linguistic and cultural contexts in English use (Galloway & Rose, 2018).

In this regard, ELT practices that neglect learners' cultural backgrounds may create a disconnect between instructional content and students' lived experiences. Such a mismatch can reduce engagement and limit meaningful learning. Therefore, integrating cultural elements into ELT has become essential for creating relevant and inclusive learning environments (Liu & Zhang, 2023; Li, 2023).

## 2. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in ELT

Culturally responsive pedagogy has emerged as a key framework for addressing cultural diversity in education. It refers to teaching practices that incorporate students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and perspectives into the learning process to enhance engagement and academic achievement (Gay, 2018; Frankenberg & Siegmund, 2020).

In ELT, culturally responsive teaching allows learners to connect language learning with their sociocultural realities, thereby fostering deeper engagement and understanding. Empirical studies have shown that this approach enhances student motivation, participation, and intercultural competence (Johnson et al., 2023; Liu & Zhang, 2023). Furthermore, culturally responsive pedagogy promotes inclusive education by reducing cultural bias in teaching materials and classroom interaction (Bakogiannis, 2025).

However, the successful implementation of this approach requires not only teacher awareness but also pedagogical competence and institutional support. Recent studies emphasize that culturally responsive teaching becomes more effective when supported by curriculum design, policy frameworks, and professional development programs (Li, 2023; Bakogiannis, 2025).

## 3. Local Wisdom as a Pedagogical Resource

Local wisdom refers to indigenous knowledge, values, and cultural practices embedded within local communities and transmitted across generations. In educational contexts, it functions as a contextual resource that enhances the relevance and authenticity of learning (Mungmachon, 2012; Mursyid et al., 2025).

In ELT, the integration of local wisdom into teaching materials and classroom activities has been shown to improve student comprehension and engagement, as learners can relate more easily to culturally familiar content (Oktarina et al., 2022). Similarly, studies on local culture-based materials indicate that contextualized learning enhances accessibility and promotes meaningful language acquisition (Azizah et al., 2021).

Moreover, recent research highlights that cultural representation in language teaching materials plays a significant role in shaping learners' perspectives and identity (Xiong et al., 2024). Therefore, incorporating local wisdom into ELT not only supports language learning but also contributes to the preservation of cultural identity and the development of critical and contextual understanding.

## 4. English Language Teaching in Islamic Higher Education

In Islamic higher education, ELT extends beyond the development of linguistic competence to include the integration of religious and moral values. Studies have shown that English teaching materials can be designed to incorporate Islamic values while maintaining academic rigor (Darmayenti et al., 2021).

In addition, research on teacher identity suggests that religion significantly influences teachers' pedagogical beliefs and classroom practices in Muslim contexts (Almayez, 2022; Nazari et al., 2023). This indicates that ELT in Islamic institutions operates within a unique framework where language, culture, and religion are interconnected.

Thus, integrating local wisdom into ELT in Islamic higher education can serve as a bridge between global language competence and local religious identity, creating a more holistic and contextually grounded learning experience.

## 5. Challenges in Integrating Local Wisdom in ELT

Despite its potential benefits, the integration of local wisdom into ELT faces several challenges. One major issue is the lack of institutional support and curriculum flexibility,

which limits teachers' ability to adapt contextual content into their teaching practices (Sakhiyya & Rahmawati, 2024).

Furthermore, studies indicate that teachers often encounter difficulties due to limited resources, insufficient training, and resistance to pedagogical innovation (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). In higher education contexts, pedagogical change frequently depends on individual initiative rather than systemic support, resulting in inconsistent implementation (Bakogiannis, 2025).

Another challenge relates to the dominance of global or Western-oriented teaching materials, which often marginalize local culture and reduce the relevance of learning content (Xiong et al., 2024). This highlights the need for curriculum reform and institutional policies that support the integration of local wisdom in ELT.

## 6. Research Gap

Although previous studies have demonstrated the importance of integrating culture, local wisdom, and religious values in ELT, there is still limited research focusing specifically on Islamic higher education contexts, particularly from the perspective of lecturers as key implementers of pedagogy.

Most existing research emphasizes material development or student outcomes, while fewer studies examine how lecturers perceive and implement local wisdom in their teaching practices and how they address the challenges involved. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring lecturers' perceptions, strategies, and challenges in integrating local wisdom into English language teaching at IAIN Parepare.

## Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the integration of local wisdom in English Language Teaching (ELT) within the context of Islamic higher education. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions, experiences, and pedagogical practices in their natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, qualitative inquiry is widely used in language education research to capture complex social and cultural phenomena that cannot be adequately measured through quantitative methods (Dörnyei, 2017).

The participants of this study consisted of all 18 English lecturers at IAIN Parepare, Indonesia. A census sampling technique was applied to ensure comprehensive coverage of the population, allowing the study to capture diverse perspectives within the institution. This approach is particularly relevant in small populations, where including all participants enhances the richness and credibility of the data (Etikan et al., 2016). In addition, lecturers were selected as key informants because they play a central role in designing and implementing ELT practices in higher education contexts.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted using multiple platforms, including Google Forms, WhatsApp voice notes, and face-to-face interactions. The use of multiple data collection methods enabled methodological triangulation, which enhances the validity and depth of qualitative findings (Fusch et al., 2018). Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide flexibility, allowing participants to express their views in detail while still maintaining a clear focus on the research objectives (Kallio et al., 2016).

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following a systematic process of transcription, coding, categorization, and interpretation. Thematic analysis is widely recognized as a robust method for identifying patterns and themes in qualitative data, particularly in educational research (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The analysis began with familiarization with the data, followed by generating initial codes, organizing codes into themes, and refining themes to ensure coherence and relevance to the research questions.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, several strategies were employed. Credibility was achieved through data triangulation and prolonged engagement with the data. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a consistent and transparent data analysis procedure. Confirmability was addressed by minimizing researcher bias and grounding interpretations in the data. These criteria align with established standards for qualitative rigor in educational research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).

Overall, this methodological approach provides a comprehensive and rigorous framework for examining how local wisdom is perceived and implemented in ELT practices, as well as the challenges encountered by lecturers in Islamic higher education.

## Results

### 1. Lecturers' Perceptions of Local Wisdom in ELT

The findings indicate that the majority of lecturers perceive local wisdom as an essential component in enhancing the quality of English Language Teaching (ELT). Local wisdom is viewed not merely as supplementary content but as a pedagogical bridge connecting linguistic competence with cultural and Islamic values. Most participants emphasized that integrating local wisdom enables students to better relate to learning materials, thereby improving comprehension and engagement.

These findings suggest that lecturers recognize the epistemological value of local knowledge in contextualizing English learning within students' sociocultural realities. This aligns with the broader shift in ELT toward contextual and culturally grounded pedagogy.

### 2. Forms of Local Wisdom Integration in Teaching Practices

The study reveals that lecturers employ various strategies to integrate local wisdom into ELT. These strategies include the use of local narratives, traditional songs, cultural expressions, and Islamic value-based discussions within language learning activities.

**Table 1. Forms of Local Wisdom Integration in ELT**

Integration Strategy	Description	Frequency (Lecturers)
Local stories	Use of folklore and regional narratives	14
Traditional songs	Incorporation of local songs in listening tasks	10
Islamic value integration	Embedding moral and religious values	16
Contextual examples	Using local contexts in exercises	15

Source: Research Data (2025)

The table shows that the most frequently used strategy is the integration of Islamic values, followed by contextual examples and local stories. This indicates that lecturers tend to prioritize value-based and contextually relevant teaching approaches.

### 3. Perceived Benefits of Local Wisdom Integration

Lecturers reported several benefits associated with the integration of local wisdom in ELT. These benefits are primarily related to student engagement, motivation, and comprehension.

**Table 2. Perceived Benefits of Local Wisdom Integration**

Benefit	Description
Increased motivation	Students show higher interest in learning
Active participation	More engagement in classroom interaction
Better comprehension	Easier understanding of materials
Cultural awareness	Stronger connection to local and Islamic values

Source: Research Data (2025)

These findings indicate that local wisdom contributes to creating a more meaningful and engaging learning environment. Students become more actively involved when learning materials reflect their cultural background.

#### 4. Students' Responses to Local Wisdom-Based ELT

Lecturers consistently reported positive student responses toward the use of local wisdom in English learning. Students were described as more enthusiastic, participative, and confident during classroom activities. This suggests that culturally relevant materials reduce psychological barriers in language learning and foster a more inclusive learning atmosphere.

#### 5. Challenges in Implementing Local Wisdom

Despite the positive perceptions and benefits, several challenges were identified. These challenges hinder the optimal integration of local wisdom in ELT.

**Table 3. Challenges in Local Wisdom Integration**

Challenge	Description
Curriculum limitation	Lack of formal support in curriculum design
Limited resources	Insufficient teaching materials
Resistance to change	Some lecturers reluctant to adopt new approaches
Subject constraints	Not all courses suitable for local wisdom integration

Source: Research Data (2025)

The findings suggest that structural and institutional barriers play a significant role in limiting implementation. This indicates that the issue is not only pedagogical but also systemic.

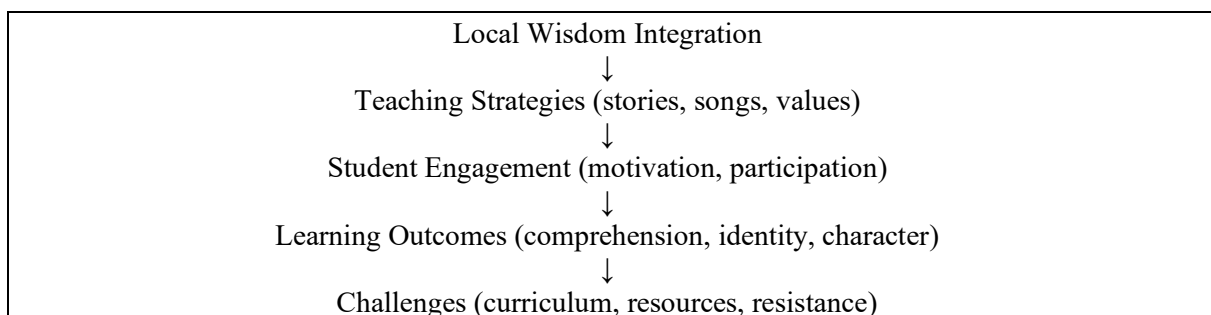
#### 6. Long-Term Educational Impact

Lecturers believe that integrating local wisdom has long-term benefits beyond language acquisition. It contributes to character building, strengthening students' Islamic identity, and fostering cultural awareness. These outcomes highlight the broader educational value of integrating local wisdom in ELT.

#### 7. Collaboration with Local Communities

Another important finding is the role of collaboration with local communities. Lecturers emphasized that engaging with local cultural sources can enrich teaching materials and provide authentic learning experiences. This suggests that ELT can extend beyond the classroom and become socially embedded.

To provide a clearer overview, the following conceptual framework summarizes the findings:



**Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Local Wisdom Integration in ELT**

This model illustrates that while local wisdom integration positively influences teaching and learning outcomes, its effectiveness is moderated by institutional and pedagogical challenges.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of local wisdom in English Language Teaching (ELT) plays a significant role in enhancing pedagogical quality within Islamic higher education. The positive perceptions expressed by lecturers indicate a strong awareness of the importance of contextualizing language learning. This aligns with the argument that ELT is inherently cultural and cannot be separated from learners' sociocultural backgrounds (Al Mamun et al., 2023). By embedding local wisdom into teaching practices, lecturers move beyond purely linguistic instruction and create a more meaningful and contextually relevant learning experience.

The use of local narratives, traditional songs, and Islamic values reflects the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes the integration of learners' cultural identities into the learning process (Gay, 2018; Frankenberg & Siegmund, 2020). In this study, lecturers' practices demonstrate that local wisdom is not only used as teaching content but also as a pedagogical strategy that facilitates student engagement. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that culturally responsive teaching enhances motivation, participation, and intercultural competence in language learning (Johnson et al., 2023; Liu & Zhang, 2023). Therefore, local wisdom can be understood as a practical manifestation of culturally responsive pedagogy in the ELT context.

Furthermore, the reported increase in student motivation and participation supports the notion that contextualized learning environments are more effective in promoting active engagement. When students encounter familiar cultural references in learning materials, they are more likely to feel connected to the content and participate actively in classroom interaction. This finding is in line with studies showing that local culture-based materials improve comprehension and accessibility in EFL learning (Oktarina et al., 2022; Azizah et al., 2021). This finding further supports recent studies highlighting the importance of intercultural competence in EFL learning (Liu & Zhang, 2023). It also reinforces the idea that language learning is more effective when it is grounded in learners' lived experiences.

In the context of Islamic higher education, the integration of local wisdom carries additional significance, as it facilitates the alignment between language learning and religious values. The findings suggest that lecturers perceive English teaching not only as a tool for communication but also as a medium for strengthening students' Islamic identity. This perspective is supported by research indicating that religion influences teacher identity and pedagogical decision-making in Muslim contexts (Almayez, 2022; Nazari et al., 2023). Thus, ELT in Islamic institutions should be viewed as a multidimensional practice that integrates linguistic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions.

However, despite these positive outcomes, the study also reveals significant challenges in implementing local wisdom in ELT. The lack of curriculum support and institutional policy indicates that the integration of local wisdom remains largely dependent on individual lecturer initiative. This finding reflects broader issues in educational reform, where innovation often fails to be institutionalized due to structural constraints (Fullan, 2007). Without formal recognition and support, pedagogical innovations such as local wisdom integration are likely to remain inconsistent and unsustainable. This suggests that the issue is not merely pedagogical but also reflects deeper structural limitations in curriculum design and policy implementation.

Additionally, the limited availability of teaching resources and resistance to pedagogical change highlight the practical difficulties faced by lecturers. Previous studies have shown that successful implementation of culturally responsive teaching requires not only teacher awareness but also adequate training and institutional support (Li, 2023; Bakogiannis, 2025).

This indicates that improving ELT practices in Islamic higher education requires a systemic approach involving curriculum development, professional training, and institutional policy reform.

Another important finding is the role of collaboration with local communities in enriching teaching practices. This reflects the concept of “communities of practice,” where learning is socially constructed through interaction with broader cultural contexts (Wenger, 1998). By engaging with local communities, lecturers can access authentic cultural resources and create more meaningful learning experiences. This extends the scope of ELT beyond classroom boundaries and positions it as a socially embedded practice.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that local wisdom is not merely an additional element in ELT but a transformative pedagogical approach that enhances both learning quality and cultural relevance. However, its successful implementation requires alignment between individual lecturer practices and institutional structures. Therefore, future efforts should focus on integrating local wisdom into curriculum design, providing professional development for lecturers, and strengthening institutional policies to support culturally responsive ELT in Islamic higher education.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the integration of local wisdom in English Language Teaching (ELT) significantly enhances the quality of learning in Islamic higher education. Local wisdom functions not only as contextual content but also as a culturally responsive pedagogical approach that promotes student engagement, motivation, and deeper comprehension. By incorporating local cultural narratives and Islamic values, ELT becomes more meaningful and aligned with students’ sociocultural and religious identities.

However, the implementation of local wisdom remains inconsistent due to several structural challenges, including limited curriculum support, insufficient institutional policies, lack of teaching resources, and resistance to pedagogical change. These findings indicate that the successful integration of local wisdom requires not only individual lecturer initiative but also systemic support at the institutional level. The study contributes to the development of culturally responsive pedagogy in ELT by demonstrating that local wisdom can serve as a transformative approach in Islamic higher education.

This study is limited to a single institutional context and a qualitative design, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research is recommended to examine the impact of local wisdom integration using quantitative or mixed-method approaches and to explore its application across broader educational contexts. Such efforts will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how culturally grounded ELT can be optimized to improve both linguistic competence and character development.

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