

INTEGRATING LOCAL WISDOM INTO INTERCULTURAL EFL PEDAGOGY: BRIDGING GLOBAL ENGLISH AND INDONESIAN CULTURAL VALUES

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how Indonesian local wisdom can be reconceptualized as an epistemic framework in intercultural EFL pedagogy to bridge Global English and Indonesian cultural values. The research employed a qualitative approach using Critical Ethnography conducted over one academic semester. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis involving third-year EFL students at a private university in Indonesia. The data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis combined with Critical Discourse Analysis to identify patterns of meaning, power relations, and identity negotiation in classroom interactions. The results show that the integration of local wisdom in intercultural EFL pedagogy functions as an epistemic anchor that shapes students' intercultural understanding through collective values such as cooperation and social harmony. Students actively negotiate the normativity of Global English rather than accepting it as an absolute standard, resulting in the emergence of dialogic intercultural classroom spaces and the formation of hybrid intercultural identities. These findings indicate a shift from adaptive pedagogy toward reflective and critical intercultural pedagogy that recognizes the legitimacy of local knowledge in global English learning practices. In conclusion, integrating local wisdom into intercultural EFL pedagogy not only contextualizes language learning but also promotes epistemic justice by enabling students to mediate between global linguistic demands and local cultural identities.

Keywords: Local Wisdom, Intercultural EFL Pedagogy, Global English, Epistemic Justice

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the development of Global English has significantly transformed the landscape of language education. English is no longer viewed merely as a medium of international communication but has increasingly been associated with global mobility, cultural capital, and access to transnational economic networks (Bilecen, 2024; Bai et al., 2024; Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2025; Peltokorpi & Xie, 2025; Syam & Nurhikmah, 2025). Within this context, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy frequently follows normative standards rooted in Global North epistemologies, shaping the content of learning materials, intercultural communication approaches, and cultural representations. As a result, EFL classrooms in many developing countries often function as spaces for reproducing global values and perspectives that may not always align with local social and cultural realities.

At the same time, the discourse of intercultural competence (ICC) has developed rapidly and has become a dominant framework in intercultural EFL pedagogy. Several influential models have contributed significantly to the understanding of cross-cultural communication and intercultural learning processes (Nadeem, 2022; Ghasemi & Ahmadian, 2023; Tovar-Correal & Pedraja-Rejas, 2025; Wang et al., 2025; Syam et al., 2023). However, most of these frameworks were conceptualized within Western social and historical contexts. Although often presented as universal models, their implementation in Global South contexts frequently overlooks local knowledge systems, social practices, and cultural philosophies that shape communication within local communities. In the Indonesian context, EFL education exists at a complex intersection

between global linguistic demands and local cultural traditions.

On the one hand, English is promoted as a global language that provides access to international education, professional opportunities, and global communication. On the other hand, Indonesian society possesses strong traditions of local wisdom, including cooperation (*gotong royong*), deliberation, respect, and social harmony, which shape how individuals interpret relationships, communication, and collective identity. Despite this cultural richness, the tension between Global English and Indonesian cultural values has rarely been critically examined in intercultural EFL pedagogy (Hasnah et al., 2024; Munandar, 2025; Rahmawaty et al., 2024; Atmojo & Putra, 2022; Nurhikmah et al., 2023). Most studies still focus primarily on improving language skills or adapting curricula without critically examining the epistemological power relations embedded in global language education. Furthermore, the integration of local culture in language learning is often positioned instrumentally, functioning merely as supplementary material or contextual examples. Such an approach tends to overlook the deeper ideological dimensions through which English, as a global language, may shape ways of thinking, influence aspirations, and reproduce hierarchies of knowledge. Consequently, a conceptual gap remains in the literature regarding how local wisdom can be integrated not only as cultural content but also as an epistemological foundation for constructing a more contextual and equitable intercultural pedagogy.

Responding to this gap, this study raises a fundamental question: how can Indonesian local wisdom be reconceptualized as an epistemic framework within intercultural EFL pedagogy in order to critically bridge Global English and Indonesian cultural values? Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) explore how local wisdom values are interpreted and practiced within EFL classroom interactions; (2) analyze how Global English is negotiated within the framework of Indonesian cultural values; and (3) reconstruct a model of intercultural EFL pedagogy through a critical synthesis between global language practices and local cultural epistemologies.

This study contributes both theoretically and methodologically. Theoretically, it offers an alternative framework that expands the discourse on intercultural pedagogy by incorporating epistemological perspectives from the Global South. Methodologically, the use of Critical Ethnography enables an in-depth interpretation of classroom practices as spaces where cultural meanings are produced, negotiated, and sometimes contested. Practically, the findings are expected to inform the design of EFL curricula that are more contextual, reflective, and oriented toward epistemic justice. Rather than merely proposing the inclusion of local culture in language learning, this research seeks to reposition the pedagogical paradigm from one centered on global standards toward a dialogic, critical, and culturally grounded approach rooted in Indonesian local wisdom.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach employing Critical Ethnography to examine how local wisdom is negotiated in the practice of intercultural EFL pedagogy in the Indonesian context. Unlike descriptive ethnography, this approach views the classroom as an arena for the production of meaning, power relations, and identity negotiations between Global English and local cultural values. Thus, language learning is not understood as a neutral process, but rather as a discursive practice that can both reproduce and challenge epistemological hierarchies. Epistemologically, this study is rooted in a critical-interpretivist paradigm, which positions social reality as a

construction formed through interaction and influenced by broader ideological structures. Local wisdom is positioned not simply as learning material, but as an epistemic resource with the potential to recontextualize the concept of interculturality in EFL. The study was designed as a semester-long embedded classroom ethnography to allow for prolonged engagement and generate thick descriptions. The research process included reflexive memoing to maintain critical awareness of the researcher's position and the relational dynamics in the field. With this design, the study aims to critically reconstruct a pedagogical model that bridges Global English and Indonesian cultural values in a dialogue and contextual manner.

Participants

Participants in this study were third-year EFL students from a private university in Indonesia. Participant selection was conducted through a purposive sampling strategy, taking into account their active involvement in courses that explicitly integrate intercultural communication issues and local cultural content. The number of participants was methodologically determined to allow for in-depth engagement and produce thick descriptions, in line with the Critical Ethnography approach, which emphasizes depth of analysis over breadth of representation.

Inclusion criteria included: (1) being enrolled in an EFL class that promotes an intercultural pedagogy approach; (2) having at least three semesters of learning experience; and (3) being willing to participate in classroom observations, group discussions, and in-depth interviews. The diversity of participants encompassed different social backgrounds, regions of origin, and levels of English proficiency, capturing the dynamics of value negotiation in classroom interactions. As part of the critical design, participants were positioned not as research objects but as co-constructors of knowledge. The relationship between the researcher and participants was built dialogically through prolonged engagement, allowing for an in-depth exploration of how they interpret the relationship between Global English and local wisdom in their daily learning experiences.

Materials and Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted over one academic semester through a combination of classroom observations, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of learning documents. This design enabled data triangulation and supported the principle of prolonged engagement in Critical Ethnography. The main materials observed included: (1) classroom interactions during EFL lectures based on intercultural pedagogy; (2) teaching materials such as syllabi, modules, and project assignments that incorporated elements of local wisdom; and (3) learning artifacts produced by students, including presentations and written reflections. Observations were conducted in a participatory manner using structured field notes and audio recordings to capture discursive practices in detail. Eighteen students participated in classroom observations, while 12 students were selected for semi-structured interviews to explore their personal experiences and interpretations of the relationship between Global English and Indonesian cultural values. Additionally, two focus group discussion sessions were conducted to facilitate collective dialogue and foster interactive negotiation of meaning. All data were transcribed verbatim and accompanied by reflexive memoing to document the relational dynamics and the researcher's positionality during data collection. This approach ensures that the

resulting data not only records pedagogical practices but also captures the structures of meaning and power relations that surround them.

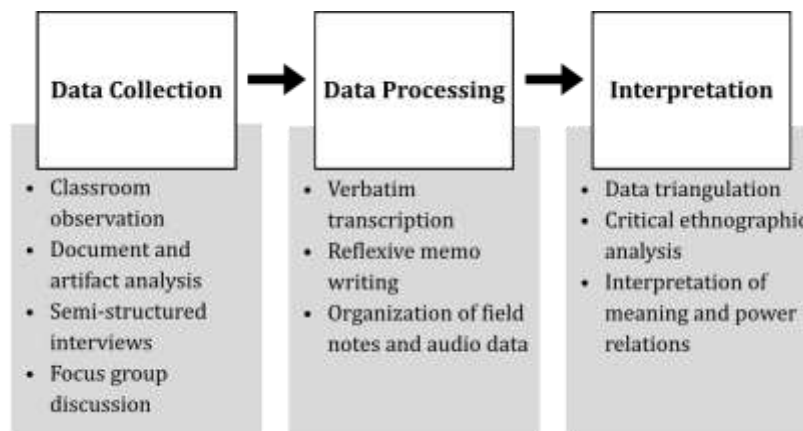


Figure 1. Procedures of critical ethnography

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in a step-by-step, reflective manner, combining Reflexive Thematic Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This combination was chosen to maintain consistency with the Critical Ethnography approach, which requires reading data not only at the thematic level but also at the ideological level and power relations articulated through language. The first stage involved a data-familiarization process through repeated readings of interview transcripts, observational results, and learning artifacts. At this stage, the researcher developed initial codes inductively without using a predetermined category framework, allowing themes to emerge from classroom practices themselves.

This process was supported by qualitative analysis software that systematically organized and mapped the data. The second stage focused on developing thematic patterns that represent how local wisdom is interpreted, negotiated, and articulated in the context of intercultural EFL pedagogy. The frequency of theme occurrence was not used as the primary indicator of significance; instead, attention was paid to the depth of meaning and the context in which it emerged. The third stage used Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how language reproduces or challenges normative assumptions about Global English and local culture. This analysis allows for the identification of ideological structures, subject positions, and forms of resistance or reproduction of power in classroom interactions. Throughout the analysis process, reflexive memoing was conducted to document the researcher's interpretations, assumptions, and shifts in understanding. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through peer debriefing and analytical discussions with fellow researchers to ensure consistency of interpretation and the rigor of critical analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis reveals that the integration of local wisdom into intercultural EFL pedagogy does not occur as an additive or symbolic process, but rather as a site an complex epistemic negotiations between Global English and Indonesian cultural values. Through a combination of classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and discourse analysis, five main patterns were identified that demonstrate how students and lecturers actively construct, challenge, and reconstruct the meaning of interculturality

in learning practices. These findings demonstrate that the classroom functions as a dialogic intercultural space, where English, as a global language, is not passively accepted but negotiated through the lens of local wisdom, such as cooperation, social harmony, and a collective orientation.

The analysis shows that classroom interactions reflect the tension between the normativity of Global English and the aspiration to maintain local cultural identity. However, this tension does not lead to polarization but rather produces hybrid forms of intercultural agency that are contextual and reflective. Thus, the findings of this study not only describe pedagogical practices but also reveal the dynamics of power relations, subject positions, and the possibility of reconstructing pedagogy toward epistemic justice in the Indonesian EFL context.

Local wisdom as epistemic anchor

The analysis shows that local wisdom is not merely additional cultural content but rather functions as an epistemic anchor in shaping students' intercultural orientation. In various classroom interactions, values such as cooperation (gotong royong) and social harmony serve as the primary frame of reference when students interpret the concepts of collaboration, respect, and cultural understanding. Rather than adopting the Western definition of ICC, which is based on individual agency, students reconstruct intercultural competence as a collective practice rooted in shared values. This demonstrates that local wisdom functions as a source of knowledge legitimacy, not simply as a contextual illustration.

This quote demonstrates how students interpret English through the lens of local culture. English is not understood as a tool for individual self-expression, but rather as a medium for expanding collective practices. In class discussions about global teamwork, students explicitly link the concept to social experiences in the local community.

“Western textbooks say ‘be assertive’, but in our context, being respectful and maintaining harmony is more important.” (Student 12)

This finding confirms that local wisdom functions as an epistemic anchor that stabilizes students' identities when confronted with the normativity of Global English, while also opening up space for a dialogical and contextual recontextualization of the meaning of intercultural competence.

Negotiating the normativity of Global English

The findings indicate that students do not accept Global English as a completely taken-for-granted norm, but engage in a reflective and selective negotiation process. In various class discussions, English is understood simultaneously as an opportunity and as a representation of global standards that carry certain cultural assumptions. Students recognize the importance of English proficiency for academic and professional mobility. Still, they also question the pressure to emulate native-speaker norms that are considered less relevant to local contexts.

“We are told to speak like native speakers, but sometimes I feel that it makes us forget who we are. Why should we sound American to be considered good?”
(Student 4)

This statement indicates a critical awareness of the ideology of native-speakerism. English is no longer positioned as a single model to be replicated, but rather as a resource that can be strategically appropriated. During group presentation activities, several students consciously maintained local expressions when explaining Indonesian cultural concepts in English.

“I prefer to explain musyawarah in English without translating it fully. Some concepts cannot be replaced. English should adapt to us too.” (Student 15)

This negotiation demonstrates that the normative nature of Global English is not absolutely hegemonic. Students engage in strategic appropriation, utilizing English as a global communication tool without completely sacrificing their linguistic and cultural identities. This process marks the emergence of an awareness that intercultural competence is not about conforming to global standards but rather about mediating and reconstructing meaning in context.

Classroom as a dialogic intercultural space

The data shows that the classroom does not function as a one-way transmission of global culture, but rather as a dialogic intercultural space where meaning is actively negotiated. The interaction between global texts and local experiences generates critical conversations that demonstrate how students and lecturers collaboratively reconstruct their understanding of interculturality. The discussion does not stop at an introduction to other cultures but evolves into a reflection on one's own position within global-local relations.

In one observation session, the lecturer facilitated a discussion on the concept of individualism in international textbooks. Rather than accepting the concept as universal, students compared it to social practices in their communities.

“In the textbook, being independent means making your own decisions. But in my family, important decisions are discussed together. Maybe independence can have different meanings.” (Student 9)

This dialogue demonstrates that the classroom becomes a space for unpacking the normative assumptions inherent in global material. In the other hand, English functions as a discursive medium that allows for comparison, rather than a sole authority.

On another occasion, the lecturer emphasized:

“We are not here to replace our values with Western values. We are here to understand differences and reflect on our own.” (Lecturer)

This statement reinforces the classroom's function as a dialogic contact zone. Through this reflective practice, students learn to view intercultural competence as a reciprocal process in which global English and local wisdom interact critically and contextually.

Hybrid intercultural identities

Further analysis shows that the negotiation between Global English and local wisdom not only influences how students understand intercultural communication but also shapes their identities in a more complex way. Students no longer see themselves as “EFL learners” striving to achieve global standards, but rather as subjects capable of mediating two cultural horizons. This process gives rise to what can be called hybrid intercultural identities, identities that are neither fully local nor fully global, but rather exist in a dialogical and reflective position.

In in-depth interviews, several students revealed a shift in their self-perceptions.

“Before, I thought speaking good English meant acting like foreigners. Now I feel I can speak English and still be Indonesian. I don’t have to change who I am.”
(Student 2)

This statement demonstrates a transformation from an imitation orientation to a mediational position. English is no longer associated with a loss of identity, but rather as a tool for expanding self-representation.

Another student added:

“When I explain our culture in English, I feel like I am representing Indonesia. It makes me more confident, not less.” (Student 14)

This quote demonstrates the emergence of intercultural agency rooted in local wisdom. This hybrid identity is not the result of assimilation but rather of critical negotiation. Thus, the practice of intercultural EFL pedagogy in this context not only develops linguistic competence but also fosters subjects capable of moving flexibly and reflectively within the global landscape.

Epistemic justice

The findings of this study indicate that the integration of local wisdom into intercultural EFL pedagogy encourages a structural reconfiguration of pedagogy, not simply an adaptation of teaching methods. This shift is evident in the way lecturers design materials, facilitate dialogue, and position English not as a single standard, but as a medium for negotiating meaning. In several observation sessions, lecturers explicitly invited students to critique cultural assumptions in global textbooks and compare them with Indonesian social practices. This strategy marks a shift from content integration to epistemic integration. This reconfiguration is also reflected in the changing orientation of learning evaluation. The emphasis is no longer solely on linguistic accuracy or closeness to native-speaker norms, but on students’ ability to reflect on their cultural positionality in global interactions. This practice shifts the focus from reproducing global standards to developing critical intercultural awareness rooted in local contexts. Structurally, the EFL classroom in this study began to function as a space that strives for epistemic justice, namely, the recognition of the legitimacy of local knowledge within global discourse. English is not rejected; rather, it is deconstructed and recontextualized dialogically. The emergent pedagogy creates a space for epistemic equality between Global English and Indonesian cultural values.

This research shows that the integration of local wisdom into intercultural EFL pedagogy is not simply a strategy for contextualizing material, but rather a process of epistemic negotiation that reconfigures the relationship between Global English and

Indonesian cultural values. Findings regarding local wisdom as an epistemic anchor, negotiations regarding the normativity of Global English, the emergence of dialogic intercultural spaces, and the formation of hybrid intercultural identities indicate a shift from adaptive pedagogy to reflective and critical pedagogy. The classroom no longer functions as a medium for reproducing global standards, but as an arena for mediating meaning and establishing intercultural agency rooted in local contexts.

These findings challenge the commonly assumed universality of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) models, which are often grounded in Western epistemological traditions (R'boul, 2022; Thinh & Hung, 2025; Dantas de Paula et al., 2025; Pang et al., 2024; Vesali Mahmoud & Sheikhattar, 2024; Syam et al., 2025). While many ICC frameworks emphasize individual agency as the core of intercultural competence, the findings of this study indicate that within the Indonesian context intercultural competence is reconstructed through collective orientations such as cooperation and social harmony. Interculturality, therefore, is not simply understood as the ability to adapt to other cultures, but rather as a dialogic practice rooted in cultural identity and shared social values.

The negotiation of native-speaker norms observed in this study further demonstrates that Global English does not function as a fully hegemonic system, but is instead strategically appropriated by learners. This finding contributes to the broader debate on linguistic imperialism and native-speakerism by showing that students are capable of mediating global linguistic standards while maintaining the legitimacy of their local cultural identities (Zhang & Lütge, 2023; Wu & Wang, 2026; Ramli et al., 2025; Liera et al., 2023; Fathurrochman et al., 2025; Ghamrawi et al., 2025). In this sense, English is not merely imitated but is adapted and negotiated as a communicative resource within local cultural frameworks. The emergence of hybrid intercultural identities in this study further reinforces the argument that identity in language learning is dynamic, relational, and contextually constructed.

Moreover, these findings resonate with the growing discourse surrounding the decolonial turn in applied linguistics, which emphasizes the importance of epistemic pluralism and the recognition of multiple knowledge traditions within global academic discourse (Melchior, 2023; Hoggan-Kloubert & Hoggan, 2023; Apostolidou, 2022; Beaumont & de Coning, 2022; Omodan, 2025; Bschrir & Lohse, 2024). While earlier studies have acknowledged the importance of local context in language education, this research advances the discussion by positioning local wisdom not merely as cultural content but as an epistemic resource that shapes how knowledge is interpreted and negotiated in intercultural communication. From the perspective of critical applied linguistics, such an approach highlights the potential of the classroom to function as a contact zone where power relations can be negotiated and meanings can be recontextualized through dialogue. Furthermore, the findings regarding the emergence of dialogic intercultural spaces broaden the understanding of the classroom as a site of reciprocal interaction rather than a space for one-directional cultural transmission. This perspective supports the view that intercultural pedagogy should move beyond the traditional cultural transfer model toward a more reflective and dialogic framework that encourages critical engagement with both global and local cultural perspectives.

Overall, this research contributes to the development of intercultural pedagogy grounded in the principle of epistemic justice, namely the recognition of the legitimacy of local knowledge within global academic discourse. From a pedagogical perspective, these findings highlight the importance of shifting from mere content integration

toward epistemic integration, where local cultural values function as interpretive lenses for understanding English as a global language. Methodologically, the use of Critical Ethnography emphasizes the importance of reading classroom practices as spaces where meaning, identity, and power relations are continuously negotiated rather than as neutral instructional settings. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a single private higher education institution with a relatively small number of participants, which means that the generalization of the findings should be approached cautiously. Additionally, the focus on a single semester of observation may not fully capture the long-term dynamics of intercultural identity development among EFL learners.

The researcher's role as an insider researcher may also have influenced the interpretation of the findings, although reflexive memoing was employed throughout the research process to reduce potential bias. Future studies could expand the scope of investigation by involving diverse institutional contexts and regional settings in order to explore variations in intercultural EFL pedagogical practices. Longitudinal research would also be valuable for understanding how hybrid intercultural identities evolve over time. Furthermore, exploring the integration of local wisdom within digital intercultural communication environments could provide new insights into identity negotiation in an increasingly interconnected global era.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the integration of local wisdom into intercultural EFL pedagogy not only serves as contextual cultural content but also as an epistemic framework that reshapes the relationship between Global English and Indonesian cultural values. The findings suggest that local wisdom serves as an epistemic anchor that guides students' intercultural understanding through collective values such as cooperation and social harmony, while Global English is critically negotiated rather than accepted as an absolute norm. The classroom emerges as an intercultural dialogic space where students and lecturers collaboratively interpret global knowledge through local cultural perspectives, resulting in the formation of a hybrid intercultural identity that allows learners to mediate between global and local contexts. Consequently, intercultural pedagogy shifts from a cultural adaptation model to a reflective and critical approach that promises epistemic justice by recognizing the legitimacy of local knowledge in global English learning practices.

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