Foreign Language Instruction Probe
Vol. 5, No. 2, November 2026
https://jurnal.stit-buntetpesantren.ac.id/index

DOI: https://doi.org/10.54213/flip.v5i2
p-ISSN: 2830-5949
e-ISSN: 2830-4837

Culturally Responsive ELT in Pesantren: Teachers' Strategies and Challenges

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Received: 10 April 2026
Revised: 03 June 2026
Accepted: 20 November 2026

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Abstract

The integration of English in religious educational institutions requires pedagogical approaches that align global language demands with local value systems. This study investigates how English instruction is implemented in a semi-modern *pesantren* in Indonesia and examines the institutional factors shaping teachers' practices. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Guided by Friedman's system theory, the data were analyzed across three dimensions: structure, substance, and legal culture. The findings reveal that English instruction is institutionally permitted through supportive leadership, substantively adapted through contextualized curriculum practices, and culturally legitimized by framing English as an instrumental tool compatible with Islamic identity. Teachers modify materials to ensure religious appropriateness while maintaining national curriculum standards. The study demonstrates that instructional practices are shaped by systemic negotiation rather than individual initiative alone. These findings highlight the importance of institutional alignment in implementing culturally grounded English education and suggest that religious institutions can accommodate global linguistic competence without compromising their ideological foundations. Theoretically, the study extends culturally responsive ELT scholarship by demonstrating that pedagogical responsiveness in faith-based educational settings is institutionally mediated through the interaction of governance structures, curricular substance, and shared ideological values. Furthermore, it adapts Friedman's system theory as a useful framework for analyzing language education practices in religious institutions, thereby broadening its application beyond its traditional legal context.

Keywords**:** Culturally responsive ELT; ELT in *Pesantren*; Institutional governance; Language ideology; System theory.

To cite this article (Gaya APA Edisi 7th): Umar and Supriyani (2026). Culturally Responsive ELT in Pesantren: Teachers' Strategies and Challenges Penguatan. *Foreign Language Instruction Probe*. https://doi.org/10.54213/flip.v5i2

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Introduction

The global expansion of English has significantly reshaped educational systems, including those grounded in religious traditions. As English functions as a global lingua franca in academic, economic, and technological domains (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2015), its incorporation into faith-based institutions presents both opportunities and tensions. In Indonesia, *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) represent one of the oldest and most influential educational institutions, characterized by strong religious authority, communal living, and moral instruction (Azra, 2004; Lukens-Bull, 2019). Within such contexts, English is not merely an academic subject but a language often associated with globalization, Western modernity, and socio-economic mobility (Kachru, 1986; Zeng & Yang, 2024). Consequently, implementing English language teaching (ELT) in *pesantren* involves negotiating global linguistic demands with deeply embedded religious and cultural values.

In recent years, the intersection between global English and faith-based education has attracted growing scholarly attention. Studies in Muslim-majority contexts such as Malaysia, Pakistan, and the Middle East indicate that English instruction in religious institutions is frequently framed within discourses of modernization, employability, and global engagement, while simultaneously negotiated through theological and moral boundaries (Hasibuan et al., 2025; Yaccob et al., 2022). Rather than viewing English as a purely secular or Western construct, religious schools increasingly reinterpret it as a strategic resource that can support religious outreach, academic advancement, and participation in transnational networks. However, these processes often involve complex negotiations between institutional authority, community expectations, and pedagogical practice. Such tensions underscore that English education in religious settings cannot be understood merely as curriculum implementation but must be examined as an institutional and ideological process embedded within broader socio-religious dynamics.

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) has been widely advocated as an approach that aligns instruction with learners' cultural backgrounds, identities, and social realities (Gay, 2018a; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2021; Maulana et al., 2025). In ELT, culturally responsive pedagogy encourages teachers to contextualize materials, adapt communicative practices, and integrate students' lived experiences into classroom interaction (Hidayati et al., 2024a; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Research indicates that culturally grounded pedagogy enhances learner engagement, motivation, and academic performance (Ladson-Billings, 2022; Nieto, 2015). Recent developments in culturally responsive pedagogy have further expanded its theoretical scope beyond cultural relevance toward cultural sustainability. (Alim et al., 2020) introduce the concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy, emphasizing the importance of not only recognizing students' cultural identities but actively sustaining and affirming them within educational spaces. Likewise, (Howard, 2021; Patras et al., 2024) highlights the cognitive dimensions of culturally responsive teaching, arguing that instruction becomes transformative when it connects deeply with learners' identity frameworks and community knowledge systems. Within language education, these perspectives suggest that responsiveness involves more than contextualizing examples; it requires aligning language instruction with learners' social, cultural, and ideological realities. In religious educational contexts such as *pesantren*, where faith-based values constitute a central dimension of identity, culturally responsive ELT must therefore account for religious epistemologies as integral components of learners' lived experiences. However, much of the existing literature on culturally responsive ELT focuses on secular or multicultural

public-school settings, with limited attention to religious-based institutions where ideological orientations toward language may differ significantly(Huong, 2025a; Johnson, 2022; Patras et al., 2024). In *pesantren* environments, pedagogical decisions are often shaped not only by educational considerations but also by religious authority, institutional norms, and communal expectations.

Recent scholarship on English education in *pesantren* has examined issues such as teacher beliefs, learner motivation, curriculum innovation, and identity construction (Andriani, 2024; Hadist & Anwar, 2023; STATS et al., 2025). These studies provide important insights into how English is taught and perceived within Islamic boarding schools, highlighting efforts to integrate communicative approaches, digital technologies, and contextualized learning materials. However, existing research has largely concentrated on classroom-level practices and individual attitudes, offering limited explanation of the institutional mechanisms that enable, regulate, or constrain such pedagogical decisions.

More importantly, the implementation of English language teaching in *pesantren* has rarely been examined as an institutional process shaped by the interaction of leadership authority, organizational governance, curriculum policy, and shared religious values. As a result, the relationship between pedagogical practice and the broader institutional environment remains insufficiently understood. This limitation is particularly significant because educational practices in *pesantren* are embedded within hierarchical structures of authority and strong religious traditions that may influence how English is interpreted, legitimized, and implemented.

Furthermore, while culturally responsive pedagogy has been widely studied in secular and multicultural educational settings, relatively little attention has been paid to how culturally responsive ELT operates in faith-based institutions where religious identity constitutes a central dimension of learners' cultural experience. Consequently, current scholarship provides limited theoretical understanding of how institutional structures and religious ideologies mediate the enactment of culturally responsive English teaching in *pesantren* contexts.

Addressing these gaps requires an analytical framework that moves beyond technique-oriented descriptions toward a systemic examination of institutional dynamics. Therefore, this study employs Friedman's system theory to investigate how structural authority, curricular substance, and institutional culture interact to shape teachers' strategies and challenges in implementing culturally responsive ELT within a semi-modern *pesantren*.

Moreover, studies examining ELT in *pesantren* contexts have predominantly described teaching techniques, curriculum innovation, or students' attitudes (Madkur, 2023; Putri et al., 2025; Umar, 2021, 2022; Umar et al., 2025), without sufficiently analyzing the broader institutional system that frames teachers' pedagogical choices. Language practices are shaped by formal regulations, implicit norms, and power relations embedded within institutions (Flikke & Øyslebø Sørensen, 2025; Reilly et al., 2024) Teaching strategies, therefore, cannot be fully understood apart from the structural and cultural environments in which they operate. To address this gap, this study adopts (Friedman, 1975) system theory, which conceptualizes institutions through three interrelated components: structure, substance, and legal culture. Although originally developed in legal studies, this framework has been applied to analyze institutional governance and policy implementation in educational contexts (Cotterrell, 2017). Within *pesantren*, structure refers to leadership authority and organizational governance; substance encompasses curriculum design, instructional materials, and assessment

practices; and legal culture denotes shared beliefs, religious values, and ideological orientations toward English. This systemic perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how culturally responsive ELT is enabled, negotiated, or constrained within *pesantren* settings.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how English teachers in *pesantren* implement culturally responsive pedagogy and to examine the structural, substantive, and cultural factors that shape their strategies and challenges. By situating teachers' classroom practices within a broader institutional framework, this research seeks to contribute to scholarship on ELT in religious educational contexts and to extend discussions of culturally responsive pedagogy beyond secular settings. In doing so, it highlights the importance of understanding ELT not only as a pedagogical endeavor but also as a socially and institutionally embedded practice.

Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how culturally responsive ELT is implemented in *pesantren* and to examine the structural, substantive, and cultural factors shaping teachers' strategies and challenges. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and institutional contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted in Darussalam Buntet *pesantren* in Cirebon, Indonesia that integrates formal secondary education with *pesantren* traditions. The *pesantren* was selected purposively due to its active English program and its explicit emphasis on integrating religious values into general subjects. Participants consisted of four English teachers who had at least three years of teaching experience in the institution. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants were directly involved in curriculum implementation and classroom instruction.

Data Collection

Data were collected over a three-month period using multiple techniques to ensure triangulation. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher to explore their pedagogical strategies, perceptions of culturally responsive teaching, and the challenges they encountered. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent.

Second, classroom observations were carried out to document instructional practices, teacher–student interaction, material adaptation, and the integration of Islamic values into English lessons. Observation notes focused on how teachers contextualized content and negotiated cultural elements during instruction.

Third, document analysis was conducted on institutional policies, curriculum documents, lesson plans, and teaching materials to identify how English instruction was formally structured and substantively designed within the *pesantren*.

Analytical Framework and Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically following the procedures of data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation (Miles et al., 2014). (Friedman, 1975) system theory served as the analytical lens guiding the coding process. Specifically, data were categorized into three interconnected dimensions:

1. Structural dimension
   Institutional leadership, governance, regulations, and organizational support influencing ELT implementation.
2. Substantive dimension
   Curriculum design, teaching materials, assessment practices, and classroom pedagogical strategies.
3. Cultural dimension
   Teachers' beliefs, religious values, shared norms, and ideological orientations toward English within the *pesantren* community.

Initial open coding was conducted to identify recurring patterns in interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents. These codes were then grouped into categories aligned with the three dimensions of Friedman's framework. Cross-data comparison was conducted to ensure consistency and to identify relationships among structural, substantive, and cultural factors.

Analytical Framework Based on Friedman's System Theory

Number	Indicators (System Dimension)	Sub-Indicators	Goal Achievement
1	Structure	Leadership authority; institutional regulations; English language policy; allocation of instructional time	To identify how institutional governance and formal rules shape teachers' pedagogical strategies
2	Substance	Curriculum design; syllabus content; teaching materials; assessment practices; integration of Islamic values in ELT	To examine how curricular and instructional components reflect culturally responsive ELT practices
3	Legal Culture	Teachers' beliefs about English; religious norms; community expectations; attitudes toward Western knowledge	To analyze how shared values and ideological orientations influence teachers' classroom decisions

Figure 1. Analytical Framework Based on Friedman's System Theory

The operationalization of Friedman's system theory in this study is summarized in Table 1, which outlines the indicators, sub-indicators, and analytical objectives used to categorize the data.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study followed the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation by comparing data obtained from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The convergence of evidence from multiple sources enabled the researchers to validate recurring themes and reduce potential bias. In addition, member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of the interview findings with participants to verify the accuracy of interpretations.

Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the research setting, participant characteristics, and institutional context of Darussalam Buntet *Pesantren*, allowing readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar educational environments. Dependability was strengthened through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting data collection procedures, coding decisions, and analytical processes throughout the study. Finally, confirmability was ensured by systematically linking interpretations to empirical evidence derived from interviews, observations, and institutional documents, thereby minimizing the influence of researcher subjectivity.

Through these procedures, the study sought to establish the rigor and credibility of its qualitative findings.

Results and Discussion

Result

The findings are presented according to the three dimensions of Friedman's system theory: structure, substance, and legal culture. Data obtained from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were coded thematically using a combination of inductive and theory-driven approaches. Initial codes were generated from recurring patterns in the data and subsequently categorized into the structural, substantive, and cultural dimensions of the analytical framework. To enhance clarity and traceability, interview excerpts are identified using participant codes (e.g., T1, T2, T3, and T4), while observational and documentary evidence is integrated to support triangulation. The results section first presents the findings within each dimension, followed by an interpretative discussion that highlights the interrelationships among institutional governance, pedagogical practices, and religious values in shaping culturally responsive ELT within the *pesantren* context.

Structural Dimension: Leadership Authority and Institutional Orientation

Observation data indicate that Darussalam Buntet *Pesantren* operates as a semi-modern institution that integrates kitab kuning study with formal schooling from elementary to university levels. The coexistence of traditional and formal education reflects an adaptive institutional structure rather than a rigid classical model.

Interview data strongly confirm this structural orientation. All four teachers emphasized that the *Kiai's* leadership significantly shapes educational development. Although the *Kiai* has a classical *pesantren* background, he explicitly allows and supports formal education, including English instruction. One teacher stated that:

"*The* Kiai *does not reject English; he sees it as necessary for students' future as long as it does not contradict Islamic teachings*" *(*T1*).*

Another participant added that institutional meetings regularly discuss how general subjects can coexist with religious priorities.

Document analysis of the school curriculum further confirms that English is officially embedded within the formal educational structure and follows national standards. However, it does not replace religious subjects as the institutional core.

The convergence between observation (dual educational system), interviews (leadership support), and documents (formal curriculum inclusion) indicates that culturally responsive ELT at Darussalam Buntet is structurally enabled. The *pesantren's* governance model creates a regulated but open space where English is permitted within

religious boundaries. This supports Friedman's structural dimension, where authority and institutional arrangements shape pedagogical possibilities.

Substantive Dimension: Curriculum Adaptation and Classroom Negotiation

Classroom observations reveal that English lessons follow the national curriculum; however, teachers frequently adapt materials to suit the *pesantren* environment. During observed sessions, teachers contextualized reading texts by relating them to Islamic values, boarding school life, and students' daily routines. For example, when discussing descriptive texts, teachers encouraged students to describe their dormitory life rather than unfamiliar Western settings.

These observations are reinforced by interview data. Teachers reported consciously modifying textbook content when it was perceived as culturally distant or potentially inappropriate. One participant explained:

"*Sometimes the examples in textbooks are too Western. We adjust them so students can relate to them*" *(T2).*

Another teacher mentioned replacing names and contexts in dialogues to make them more familiar to students.

Document analysis of lesson plans also shows handwritten notes indicating adaptation of examples and discussion topics. Although the syllabus follows national standards, teachers insert contextual explanations to align lessons with Islamic moral values.

This triangulation demonstrates that culturally responsive ELT is not reflected in curriculum design at the macro level but emerges through micro-level pedagogical adaptation. Teachers exercise agency within the substantive framework provided by national education policy. In Friedman's terms, the substance (curriculum and materials) is formally standardized but practically negotiated in classroom implementation.

Cultural Dimension: Religious Identity, Social Positioning, and English Ideology

Observation findings indicate that most students come from middle-class families. The *pesantren* charges moderate fees—higher than traditional classical *pesantren* but lower than fully modern boarding schools. This socio-economic positioning influences institutional identity: the *pesantren* seeks modernization without abandoning tradition.

Interview responses reveal a generally positive perception of English. Teachers consistently framed English as an instrumental tool rather than a cultural threat. One participant explained:

"*English is important for university and career, but our students must remain grounded in Islamic values*" (T3).

Another teacher emphasized that mastering English enables students to "contribute to da'wah and represent Islam internationally."

Importantly, no participants expressed ideological resistance to English. Instead, they highlighted concerns about content appropriateness and moral boundaries. This suggests that resistance is not directed toward the language itself but toward potential cultural influence.

The cultural dimension therefore reflects a balanced ideological stance. Shared beliefs within the *pesantren* community position English as compatible with religious commitment, provided that its use remains value-oriented. This supports Friedman's concept of legal culture, where collective norms and values regulate how institutional rules are interpreted and enacted.

Cross-Dimensional Interpretation

When examined holistically, the findings demonstrate strong interconnection among structure, substance, and culture:

1. Structural openness (leadership support) allows English to exist formally.
2. Substantive adaptation (curricular modification) ensures cultural alignment.
3. Cultural ideology (positive but value-bound perception of English) legitimizes classroom implementation.

Interview data consistently support observational findings, indicating that teachers' strategies are not isolated pedagogical choices but responses to institutional and ideological conditions. Culturally responsive ELT in Darussalam Buntet *Pesantren* therefore emerges as a systemic negotiation shaped by governance, curriculum policy, and shared religious values. These results suggest that in semi-modern *pesantren* contexts, English is neither fully resisted nor uncritically embraced. Instead, it is strategically accommodated within a religiously grounded institutional system.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that culturally responsive ELT in Darussalam Buntet *Pesantren* cannot be understood solely as a matter of classroom strategy. Instead, it emerges from the interaction between institutional authority, curricular design, and shared ideological orientations. Using (Friedman, 1975) system theory as an analytical lens reveals that structure, substance, and legal culture operate interdependently rather than independently.

From a structural perspective, the leadership of the *Kiai* plays a legitimizing role in the institutional acceptance of English. This aligns with Friedman's notion that institutional authority defines the operational boundaries within which practices are permitted. In this *pesantren*, the *Kiai's* classical educational background does not translate into resistance toward modernization; rather, it frames modernization as acceptable when aligned with religious values. This structural openness reflects what (Spolsky, 2009) describes as the role of "language management" in shaping language practices within institutions. English is formally included in the curriculum not merely because of national policy but because institutional authority authorizes its presence.

This finding contrasts with studies conducted in more conservative religious educational settings where English has been perceived as a potential vehicle of Western cultural influence and therefore subjected to greater institutional restrictions. For example, research in several faith-based contexts has reported tensions between language modernization and religious preservation, leading to more cautious attitudes toward English instruction (Muhalim, 2023; Wong & Mahboob, 2018)(Mahboob & Lin, 2016; Shamim, 2011). In contrast, the leadership of Darussalam Buntet *Pesantren* adopts a more accommodative stance, framing English as a strategic resource that can coexist with Islamic educational goals.

However, structural permission alone does not determine pedagogical practice. The substantive dimension—curriculum and instructional materials—reveals a layered negotiation between national educational standards and local cultural expectations.

Although English instruction follows the national curriculum, teachers adapt materials to ensure cultural relevance and religious appropriateness. This finding resonates with (Gay, 2018a) concept of culturally responsive teaching, which emphasizes contextualizing content to students' cultural realities. Yet, in the *pesantren* context, responsiveness is not only cultural but also ideological. Teachers' adaptations are shaped by moral considerations and communal norms, suggesting that culturally responsive pedagogy in religious institutions requires alignment with value systems, not merely student identity.

While this finding supports previous studies reporting the adaptation of English materials to local cultural contexts (Hidayati et al., 2024b; Huong, 2025b), it also extends existing research by showing that adaptation in *pesantren* is motivated not only by cultural relevance but also by religious considerations. This differs from findings in secular school settings where contextualization is primarily intended to improve engagement and comprehension rather than to maintain alignment with institutional value systems (Banks, 2021). The *pesantren* context therefore introduces an additional ideological dimension to culturally responsive pedagogy.

The cultural dimension further complicates the picture. Shared beliefs within the *pesantren* community position English as an instrumental resource rather than a cultural threat. This reflects what (Pennycook, 2017a) describes as the localization of global English, where global languages are appropriated within local ideological frameworks. English is reframed as a tool for academic advancement and religious representation rather than Westernization. Such positioning reduces ideological tension and enables institutional acceptance.

This finding differs from earlier assumptions that English is frequently perceived as a threat to local cultural or religious identities in traditional educational settings. Some studies have reported concerns that English may function as a carrier of Western cultural values, generating resistance among religious communities (Pennycook, 2017b; Phillipson, 2013). In the present study, however, English is largely viewed as an instrumental and value-neutral resource. Rather than rejecting the language, teachers and institutional stakeholders selectively appropriate it for educational advancement and religious outreach. This suggests that ideological responses to English are highly context-dependent and shaped by local institutional cultures.

Importantly, the interrelationship among the three dimensions supports Friedman's systemic argument: structure provides authorization, substance provides operational form, and legal culture provides legitimacy. In Darussalam Buntet, culturally responsive ELT is possible because these three elements are relatively aligned. The leadership does not prohibit English, the curriculum allows adaptation, and the community frames English positively within Islamic discourse. Where these dimensions are aligned, pedagogical negotiation becomes productive rather than conflictual.

This systemic alignment also explains why teachers' challenges are moderate rather than oppositional. Teachers do not report ideological resistance but instead face the practical challenge of balancing standardized materials with cultural sensitivity. This finding contrasts with studies in more conservative religious contexts where English may be viewed as culturally invasive. Thus, the semi-modern character of the *pesantren* becomes a critical contextual variable.

Theoretically, the findings challenge the tendency in culturally responsive ELT scholarship to conceptualize responsiveness primarily as a teacher-driven practice (Gay, 2018b; Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2021)(Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2021; Gay, 2018). While previous studies have focused on teachers' instructional decisions, the present study

demonstrates that such decisions are institutionally mediated through leadership structures, curriculum arrangements, and shared ideological beliefs. This suggests that culturally responsive pedagogy in religious educational settings should be understood not merely as an instructional approach but as an institutional phenomenon emerging from the interaction of structure, substance, and culture.

Moreover, this study contributes to language policy scholarship by illustrating how informal ideological norms (legal culture) can be as influential as formal policy (structure and substance). As (Shohamy, 2006) argues, language policy is not only what is written in documents but also what is practiced and believed. In Darussalam Buntet, English policy operates through tacit approval, cultural framing, and pedagogical adaptation rather than explicit ideological debates.

Overall, the findings suggest that semi-modern *pesantren* provide a hybrid institutional space where global and religious discourses intersect. Within this space, English is accommodated through moral filtering and contextual adaptation. This challenges binary assumptions that religious institutions either resist or fully embrace globalization. Instead, the case of Darussalam Buntet demonstrates a negotiated modernity in which English is selectively integrated into a value-based educational system.

This negotiated integration also invites a reconsideration of how globalization is conceptualized within religious educational institutions. Rather than perceiving globalization as a homogenizing force that erodes local identities, the findings from Darussalam Buntet *Pesantren* illustrate a process of selective appropriation. English is not adopted as an ideological package but reinterpreted through Islamic moral frameworks. This supports contemporary sociolinguistic perspectives that view global languages as locally recontextualized resources rather than carriers of fixed cultural meanings. In this sense, *pesantren* function as active agents in shaping the meaning and purpose of English within their own epistemological boundaries.

Furthermore, the study suggests that institutional alignment plays a decisive role in determining whether culturally responsive ELT can be sustained. Where leadership authority, curriculum flexibility, and shared values operate coherently, teachers are empowered to innovate without fear of ideological contradiction. Conversely, in contexts where structural support is weak or cultural attitudes toward English are ambivalent, pedagogical efforts may encounter resistance or fragmentation. Therefore, the implementation of culturally responsive ELT in religious institutions should be examined not only at the classroom level but also at the level of institutional coherence.

Finally, this case underscores the importance of viewing teachers as mediators situated within institutional systems rather than autonomous actors operating independently. Their pedagogical decisions reflect ongoing negotiation between national education policy, institutional authority, and community ideology. Recognizing this systemic positioning deepens our understanding of teacher agency in religious contexts and suggests that sustainable ELT reform requires engagement with governance structures and cultural belief systems alongside pedagogical training.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how culturally responsive ELT is implemented in Darussalam Buntet *Pesantren* and to examine the structural, substantive, and cultural factors shaping teachers' strategies and challenges. The findings demonstrate that culturally responsive ELT in this context is not solely the result of individual teacher

initiative but emerges from a systemic negotiation among institutional governance, curriculum design, and shared religious values. By applying Friedman's system theory, this study reveals that the relative alignment between structure (leadership support), substance (curricular flexibility), and legal culture (positive yet value-bound perceptions of English) enables English instruction to function within a religious educational environment without generating ideological conflict.

Rather than positioning English as a cultural threat, the pesantren community reframes it as an instrumental resource compatible with Islamic identity. This reframing allows teachers to adapt materials and instructional practices in ways that maintain moral coherence while meeting national educational standards. Consequently, culturally responsive ELT in this semi-modern pesantren context reflects a negotiated form of modernization, where global linguistic competence is integrated without displacing religious foundations.

Theoretically, this study contributes to ELT scholarship by extending culturally responsive pedagogy beyond secular and multicultural settings into faith-based institutions. It demonstrates that responsiveness in religious contexts must be understood institutionally, not merely pedagogically. Teachers' classroom decisions are structurally authorized, substantively mediated, and culturally legitimized. Therefore, analyses of ELT in religious institutions should account for governance structures and ideological climates alongside instructional strategies.

Practically, the findings suggest several implications for ELT in religious educational settings. First, institutional leaders play a crucial role in legitimizing English instruction; supportive governance can reduce ideological tension and foster pedagogical innovation. Second, curricular flexibility is essential to allow teachers to contextualize materials in culturally and religiously meaningful ways. Third, professional development programs for teachers in religious institutions should emphasize strategies for adapting global ELT materials while maintaining local value systems.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of viewing religious educational institutions not as resistant to globalization but as active agents negotiating modern knowledge within their own epistemological frameworks. Future research may expand this inquiry by comparing different types of *pesantren*—traditional, semi-modern, and fully modern—to examine how variations in institutional alignment influence the implementation of culturally responsive ELT.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted in a single semi-modern *pesantren*, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other types of *pesantren* with different institutional orientations, governance structures, or ideological traditions. Second, the study focused primarily on teachers' perspectives and institutional documents; therefore, the voices of students, administrators, and community stakeholders were not examined in depth. Third, as a qualitative case study, the findings provide contextual understanding rather than statistical generalization. Future research may employ comparative multi-site designs involving traditional, semi-modern, and modern *pesantren* to explore how variations in institutional structure, curriculum policy, and religious culture influence the implementation of culturally responsive ELT across different contexts.

In sum, culturally responsive ELT in *pesantren* is best understood as a systemic accommodation of global English within a value-oriented educational structure. Recognizing this complexity can inform more context-sensitive approaches to English education in religious institutions worldwide.

Author Contribution Statement

The authors' contributions to this article are as follows: Author 1 acted as the initiator and conceptor of the article; Author 2 contributed to the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Statement of Interest

All authors declare that they have no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest relevant to this research.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or nonprofit sectors.

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