

Ethnopedagogy in English Language Teaching: Teacher Beliefs and Implementation of Brain-Based and Cultural Approaches in Senior High Schools, Tana Toraja

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates ethnopedagogical strategies in English Language Teaching (ELT) through the lens of teacher beliefs, specifically examining how Toraja cultural approaches are integrated by senior high school English teachers in Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected from three English teachers through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal that all three teachers hold strong and positive beliefs that integrating Toraja local culture including rituals, folklore, traditional food, and sacred sites facilitates students' comprehension, memory retention, and confidence. Teachers view ethnopedagogy not only as an instructional strategy but as a moral responsibility to preserve Toraja culture and instill character values. Implementation analysis shows that ethnopedagogical strategies are most consistently applied in opening activities, speaking simulations, and closing reflections, while gaps remain in the use of culturally diverse audio-visual media and listening skill development. This study contributes to the growing body of research on culturally responsive ELT in indigenous contexts and recommends integrating ethnopedagogy with systematic professional development for teachers in culturally rich but under-resourced regions.

KEYWORDS: ethnopedagogy, teachers' beliefs, cultural approach, English language teaching, senior high school

INTRODUCTION

English language education in Indonesia has experienced significant transformation, particularly as national educational policies increasingly emphasize the integration of local cultural values into pedagogical practices. Among the most debated issues in this context is the perceived tension between global language acquisition and the preservation of local cultural identity a tension that is especially salient in regions with rich indigenous heritage such as Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi. Tana Toraja is internationally recognized for its distinctive cultural traditions, including elaborate mortuary rituals (Rambu Solo'), thanksgiving ceremonies (Rambu Tuka'), ancestral house architecture (Tongkonan), and a rich system of local wisdom that has been transmitted across generations (Ratini et al., 2025; Tangdilintin, 2014). These cultural resources represent an extraordinary pedagogical opportunity that has been insufficiently explored in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT).

Ethnopedagogy, as an educational approach that foregrounds indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and local traditions as foundations of the formal learning process, offers a compelling framework for bridging global linguistic competencies with local cultural identities (Suparlan, 2015; Alwasilah, Suryadi, & Karyono, 2009). In the context of ELT, ethnopedagogy recognizes that language is never culturally neutral and that meaningful language learning is facilitated when students can see their own values, experiences, and identities reflected in the subject matter (Brown, 2007; Gay, 2018). This perspective challenges the historically dominant paradigm in Indonesian ELT that has privileged Western cultural contexts, which Toraja students frequently find abstract, distant, and disengaging.

Central to the effectiveness of any pedagogical approach is the role of teacher beliefs. Research consistently demonstrates that teachers' beliefs function as a cognitive and affective filter that shapes how they interpret curriculum demands, design learning experiences, and interact with students (Pajares, 1992; Borg, 2003). Teachers who hold positive beliefs about the pedagogical value of local culture are more likely to implement contextually meaningful instruction. However, the relationship between teachers' explicitly stated beliefs and their actual classroom practice the gap between espoused and enacted beliefs remains a significant area of inquiry in the ELT literature (Borg, 2003; Wati, 2018).



Despite the growing body of international research on culturally responsive teaching, there is a notable scarcity of empirical studies examining these approaches in the specific context of Toraja ELT. Previous research on ethnopedagogy in Indonesian ELT has focused primarily on Javanese, Papuan, and Purbalingganes contexts (Mutoharoh, 2022; Yuliana et al., 2024; Gumartifa, Sofendi, & Mirizon, 2025), leaving a significant gap in understanding how teachers in indigenous communities with strong oral and ceremonial cultural traditions such as Toraja navigate the integration of local culture with contemporary ELT. This study addresses this gap by investigating three research questions: (1) What are English teachers' beliefs regarding the integration of cultural approaches in ELT at senior high schools in Tana Toraja? (2) How do teachers implement ethnopedagogical strategies based on cultural approaches in their classrooms?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), selected for its capacity to capture the depth, context, and complexity of teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. The case study design is particularly appropriate for investigating how ethnopedagogical strategies are enacted in specific institutional and cultural contexts in this case, senior high schools in Tana Toraja where contextual factors significantly shape instructional practice.

Participants and Setting

Three English teachers from senior high schools in Tana Toraja participated in this study: MTR, AGS, and ATN (names anonymized). All three were experienced teachers with more than ten years of teaching English at the senior high school level. The research was conducted during the odd semester of Academic Year 2025–2026, spanning February to May 2026, across three senior high schools in Tana Toraja District, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Participants were selected purposively based on their documented implementation of cultural elements in English instruction, identified through a preliminary survey.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three complementary methods.

Semi-Structured Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with each teacher individually, with sessions ranging from 45 to 90 minutes and recorded with participants' consent. Interview questions explored teachers' beliefs about cultural integration, rationales for ethnopedagogical practices, and self-assessments of implementation challenges.

Classroom Observations: Classroom observations were conducted for each teacher during April 2026, focusing on how teachers integrated Toraja cultural elements across different stages of instruction including opening activities, main teaching activities (speaking, writing, reading, listening), and closing activities. Detailed field notes were taken during each observation session.

Document Analysis: Document analysis was conducted on lesson plans, teaching materials, student worksheets, and PowerPoint presentations to supplement and triangulate the interview and observation data.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2018). In the first phase, interview transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve familiarization. In the second phase, initial codes were generated both deductively (guided by the theoretical framework of ethnopedagogy) and inductively (guided by emerging patterns from the data). Codes included teacher beliefs, cultural integration, opening activities, media use, speaking strategies, writing strategies, reading strategies, listening strategies, and closing activities. In the third phase, codes were organized into potential themes. In the fourth phase, themes were reviewed and refined. In the final phase, themes were defined and named. Trustworthiness was established through member checking, triangulation across data sources (interviews, observations, and documents), and prolonged engagement at each research site (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS

Teachers' Beliefs towards Cultural Integration

All three teachers expressed strong and consistent positive beliefs that integrating Toraja local culture into English Language Teaching (ELT) facilitates students' comprehension, memory retention, and confidence. The analysis of interview data revealed three major themes regarding teachers' beliefs: (1) learning from the familiar to the unfamiliar, (2) cultural connection as a source of student confidence, and (3) ethnopedagogy as a moral mission for cultural preservation.



Table 1. Teachers' Beliefs towards Cultural Integration

Teacher	Core Belief	Key Statement	Thematic Category
MTR	Learning must progress from local context to foreign concepts	"We must start from small to large, from near to far, and from our context. When we learn our own culture first, then when we teach foreign culture, it will be easy" (Interview, April 12, 2026)	Learning from familiar to unfamiliar
AGS	Cultural connection builds student confidence and interest	"When linked to things they have experienced, they are certainly interested. Students would be more confident because they know what they are doing" (Interview, April 13, 2026)	Cultural connection as source of confidence
ATN	Culturally familiar content is absorbed more quickly by students	"What they learn is something attached to them, something they always encounter in their environment. The method of integrating local wisdom and cultural values in learning practices will be absorbed more quickly by students" (Interview, April 14, 2026)	Cultural familiarity enhances learning speed
MTR	Ethnopedagogy creates love for Toraja culture and instills cultural identity	"We must teach them to love their own culture first. When they are proud of Toraja, they will learn English better" (Interview, April 12, 2026)	Moral mission for cultural preservation
AGS	Ethnopedagogy encompasses social values and local etiquette	"Local wisdom is not just about ceremonies. It is about manners, about how we respect others, about how we behave as Toraja people" (Interview, April 13, 2026)	Moral mission for cultural preservation
ATN	English teaching must prevent cultural erosion among the younger generation	"The current generation's level of awareness or curiosity about culture has begun to erode. So that culture does not disappear, we teach English with this approach" (Interview, April 14, 2026)	Moral mission for cultural preservation

Implementation of Ethnopedagogical Strategies

Opening Activities

In opening activities, all three teachers demonstrated consistent and highly effective culture-based strategies. They opened lessons with Toraja cultural greetings and asked about students' experiences attending Rambu Solo' ceremonies, visiting Londa, or preparing traditional food. They also created curiosity through pictures of culturally significant objects such as Tau Tau effigies or the Linggayoni stone.

ATN was observed asking students who had helped prepare Pa'piong (traditional Toraja food stuffed in bamboo). When several students raised their hands, he invited them to describe the process in simple English with scaffolding support. This strategy effectively activated prior cultural knowledge while reducing English production anxiety.

Table 2. Ethnopedagogical Strategies in Opening Activities

Strategy	MTR	AGS	ATN	Description
Using Toraja cultural greetings	✓	✓	✓	Opened with Toraja-specific greetings
Asking about students' cultural experiences	✓	✓	✓	Questions about Rambu Solo', Londa visits, traditional food preparation
Using pictures of culturally significant objects	✓	✓	✓	Displayed images of Tau Tau, Tongkonan
Activating prior cultural knowledge through questioning	✓	✓	✓	Asked students to share personal experiences related to Toraja culture
Scaffolding English production with cultural content	✓	✓	✓	ATN explicitly asked about Pa'piong preparation process



Use of Media and Materials

In terms of media and materials, teachers demonstrated varied but consistent use of culture-based resources. All three teachers used Toraja cultural reading texts, including descriptive texts about Mount Kandora, Londa, and Tongkonan houses. They all used photos and pictures of Tana Toraja such as Tau Tau, Londa, Kete Kesu, and ceremonial practices. All teachers also contrasted Toraja vocabulary with English, explaining words like tongkonan (traditional house), tau tau (effigy), and pa'piong (traditional food).

However, only one teacher showed a short video about Toraja culture (Rambu Solo' ceremony), and only one teacher narrated Toraja folklore or legends in English (the legend of Mount Kandora and Linggayoni sacred stone). None of the teachers used Toraja songs linked to English, nor did they use physical cultural artifacts such as carvings or motifs in their lessons.

Table 3. Use of Culture-Based Media and Materials

Type of Media/Material	MTR	AGS	ATN	Description of Use
Toraja cultural reading texts	✓	✓	✓	Descriptive texts about Mount Kandora, Londa, Tongkonan houses
Photos/pictures of Tana Toraja	✓	✓	✓	Images of Tau Tau, Londa, Kete Kesu, ceremonial practices
Toraja vocabulary contrasted with English	✓	✓	✓	Words: tongkonan (traditional house), tau tau (effigy), pa'piong (traditional food)
Video about Toraja culture	✗	✓	✗	AGS showed short video of Rambu Solo' ceremony (3 minutes)
Toraja folklore/legends in English	✓	✗	✗	MTR narrated the legend of Mount Kandora and Linggayoni sacred stone
Toraja songs linked to English	✗	✗	✗	Not used by any teacher
Physical cultural artifacts (carvings, motifs)	✗	✗	✗	Not used by any teacher

Speaking Activities

For speaking activities, simulation and role play emerged as the most successful ethnopedagogical strategies. AGS described a highly engaging simulation:

"We simulated at Londa. Some played tourist guides, some played tourists. We gave them keywords 'tau-tau, ceremonial, aluk rambu solo, aluk rambu tuka'. They played as guides, and they exchanged roles in the simulation. They were very enthusiastic" (Interview, April 13, 2026).

Classroom observations confirmed high student engagement during these simulations, with typically passive students actively participating when given culturally familiar roles. Teachers also engaged students in question-and-answer sessions about Toraja culture, discussions of Toraja cultural values, and cultural show-and-tell activities where students described Toraja artifacts.

Table 4. Ethnopedagogical Strategies in Speaking Activities

Strategy	MTR	AGS	ATN	Description
Simulation and role play (tourist guides)	✓	✓	✓	Students played guides and tourists at Londa; high engagement observed
Question and answer about Toraja culture	✓	✓	✓	Teachers asked; students responded about cultural practices
Discussion of Toraja cultural values	✓	✓	✓	Values included respect for ancestors, community solidarity
Cultural show-and-tell	✓	✓	✓	Students described Toraja artifacts or cultural objects
Paired conversations about cultural experiences	✓	✓	✓	Students discussed their own experiences attending ceremonies



Writing Activities

For writing activities, all teachers assigned descriptive tasks about Toraja cultural places and traditional food. Students were asked to write descriptive texts about Tongkonan houses, Londa burial sites, and traditional Toraja ceremonies. However, variation in writing types (narrative, argumentative, expository) remained limited.

Table 5. Ethnopedagogical Strategies in Writing Activities

Strategy	MTR	AGS	ATN	Description
Descriptive writing about Toraja cultural places	✓	✓	✓	Students described Tongkonan houses, Londa burial sites
Descriptive writing about traditional Toraja food	✓	✓	✓	Students described pa'piong and other traditional foods
Narrative writing based on Toraja folklore	✓	✗	✗	MTR assigned narrative writing based on Mount Kandora legend
Argumentative writing about cultural preservation	✗	✗	✗	Not assigned by any teacher
Expository writing about Toraja ceremonies	✗	✗	✗	Not assigned by any teacher

Reading Activities

Reading activities showed strong cultural integration across all teachers. Students read Toraja-themed texts, answered culturally contextualized comprehension questions, and engaged in discussions of cultural values such as respect for ancestors and community solidarity. Vocabulary building using Toraja cultural terms was also consistently observed.

Table 6. Ethnopedagogical Strategies in Reading Activities

Strategy	MTR	AGS	ATN	Description
Reading Toraja-themed texts	✓	✓	✓	Texts about Mount Kandora, Londa, Tongkonan, Rambu Solo'
Culturally contextualized comprehension questions	✓	✓	✓	Questions linked to Toraja cultural knowledge
Discussion of cultural values from texts	✓	✓	✓	Values: respect for ancestors, community solidarity, gotong royong
Vocabulary building with Toraja cultural terms	✓	✓	✓	Building English vocabulary through Toraja cultural concepts
Comparing Toraja culture with other cultures	✓	✓	✓	Comparing Toraja traditions with other Indonesian or foreign cultures

Listening Activities

Listening skills received the least cultural integration. Only one teacher used a cultural video for listening input, and only one teacher narrated Toraja legends in English for listening comprehension. This left listening skill development as the most significant gap identified in implementation.

Table 7. Ethnopedagogical Strategies in Listening Activities

Strategy	MTR	AGS	ATN	Description
Using cultural video for listening input	✗	✓	✗	AGS showed video of Rambu Solo' ceremony for listening comprehension



Narrating Toraja legends in English	✓	✗	✗	MTR narrated Mount Kandora legend; students listened
Using Toraja songs for listening practice	✗	✗	✗	Not used by any teacher
Teacher-led listening about Toraja culture	✓	✓	✓	Teachers spoke about Toraja culture; students listened
Peer-to-peer listening about cultural experiences	✓	✓	✓	Students listened to classmates sharing cultural experiences

Closing Activities

In closing activities, all teachers effectively reviewed the day's material through questions connected to Toraja culture. They also provided positive reinforcement about the importance of preserving Toraja culture while learning English.

Table 8. Ethnopedagogical Strategies in Closing Activities

Strategy	MTR	AGS	ATN	Description
Reviewing material through culture-based questions	✓	✓	✓	Questions connected lesson content to Toraja culture
Positive reinforcement about cultural preservation	✓	✓	✓	Emphasized importance of preserving Toraja culture while learning English
Reflection on cultural values learned	✓	✓	✓	Students reflected on what they learned about Toraja culture
Homework with cultural theme	✓	✓	✓	Assignments connected to Toraja cultural topics

DISCUSSION

The Nature and Sources of Teachers' Ethnopedagogical Beliefs

The finding that all three Toraja teachers hold strong, positive beliefs about cultural integration aligns with Gay's (2018) assertion that culturally responsive teaching is most effectively implemented by teachers who view students' cultural backgrounds as assets rather than barriers to learning. This finding is particularly significant given the historical dominance of Western-centric English language teaching materials in Indonesian classrooms, which have often positioned local cultures as peripheral or irrelevant to English learning. The teachers in this study have not only rejected this deficit perspective but have actively constructed an alternative pedagogical framework in which Toraja culture occupies a central, generative role.

The teachers' unanimous belief that learning should progress from the familiar (Toraja culture) to the unfamiliar (foreign concepts) reflects Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development and the constructivist principle that new knowledge is built upon existing cognitive frameworks. What makes this finding theoretically significant is that the teachers arrived at this principle not through formal training in educational psychology but through their intimate understanding of Toraja learners and their lived experience as members of the Toraja community. This suggests that indigenous teachers possess pedagogical knowledge that is rooted in their cultural contexts knowledge that may be overlooked or undervalued by externally imposed educational reforms.

MTR's principle of starting "from near to far" operationalizes this constructivist insight in culturally specific terms. For Toraja students, "near" is defined not only in geographical terms but in cultural, emotional, and social terms. The Rambu Solo' ceremony, the Tongkonan house, and the taste of pa'piong are not merely topics for English lessons; they are lived experiences that constitute the fabric of students' daily lives. When English instruction begins with these culturally proximate experiences, students are not learning about abstract concepts in a foreign language; they are learning how to talk about their own lives in English. This shift from learning about to talking about has profound implications for student engagement, motivation, and ultimately, language acquisition.

The teachers' framing of ethnopedagogy as a moral mission rather than merely a pedagogical strategy is a distinctive finding with significant theoretical and practical implications. This finding extends the existing literature beyond the instrumentalist view of culturally responsive teaching which emphasizes cultural integration primarily for its academic benefits to a more holistic view



in which teachers see themselves as cultural agents with responsibilities that extend beyond the classroom (Mangera, La'biran, & Dewi, 2026).

ATN's statement that "so that culture does not disappear, we teach English with this approach" reveals a form of professional motivation that has received limited attention in the ELT literature: the motivation of cultural rescue. For teachers in indigenous communities facing cultural erosion due to globalization, modernization, and the dominance of national and global cultural forms, English teaching becomes a site for cultural preservation rather than cultural displacement. This finding challenges the long-held assumption in ELT that English language instruction inevitably leads to cultural imperialism and loss of local identity. The Toraja teachers in this study demonstrate that when local culture is systematically integrated as the content and context of English instruction, English becomes a tool for articulating, celebrating, and transmitting local culture rather than a threat to it.

This perspective resonates with La'biran's (2024) finding that when local wisdom is systematically integrated into English instruction, students achieve both linguistic competence and strengthened cultural identity. It also extends that finding by documenting how teachers' own beliefs about cultural preservation shape their instructional decisions. The implication for teacher education is significant: professional development programs in culturally rich regions should explicitly address the role of teachers as cultural agents and provide them with strategies for leveraging English instruction for cultural preservation purposes.

Alignment of Beliefs and Practices

The close alignment between the teachers stated beliefs and their observed practices in opening and closing activities is noteworthy. The consistent use of Toraja greetings, cultural prior knowledge elicitation, and culturally embedded reflection at lesson close suggests that these practices have moved from deliberate pedagogical choices to habituated professional routines. This finding supports Borg's (2003) conceptualization of enacted beliefs practices that are sufficiently internalized to become automatic and demonstrates the potential for long-term cultural integration to become a self-sustaining feature of local ELT.

What explains this successful alignment for opening and closing activities but less consistent alignment for other instructional areas? One possible explanation is that opening and closing activities are less constrained by external curriculum demands than main instructional activities. Teachers have greater autonomy to shape how lessons begin and end, whereas the core content of lessons is more tightly prescribed by national curriculum standards, textbook requirements, and examination pressures. Another explanation is that opening and closing activities are naturally more flexible and require fewer specialized resources than, for example, listening activities that require audio recordings, or writing activities that require exemplars of different text types.

The implication for professional development is that teacher education programs should identify the instructional spaces where teachers already successfully integrate culture such as opening and closing activities and build on these strengths to expand cultural integration to other instructional areas. This strengths-based approach respects teachers' existing expertise while providing targeted support for areas of development.

Simulation and Role Play as Culturally Grounded Speaking Strategies

The success of simulation and role play as speaking strategies is particularly noteworthy and warrants detailed theoretical attention. When AGS's students enthusiastically assumed roles as tourist guides at Londa, they were simultaneously developing communicative competence (Hymes, 1972), activating culturally embedded knowledge structures, experiencing emotional engagement that research identifies as prerequisite for effective learning, and performing cultural authority as Toraja people.

The simulation at Londa is pedagogically sophisticated in several respects. First, it provides authentic communicative purpose: students are not speaking English merely to complete an exercise but to perform the socially meaningful role of representing their culture to outsiders. Second, it reduces anxiety through cultural familiarity: students are speaking about places, practices, and artifacts they have personally experienced, which provides built-in scaffolding for language production. Third, it positions students as cultural experts: unlike typical classroom role plays where students pretend to be characters or professionals they have never encountered, the tourist guide role in a Toraja context is one that students have observed repeatedly in their own community. They are not pretending to be tour guides; they are playing a role that they have seen real Toraja people perform.

This finding corroborates Mangera, La'biran, and Dewi's (2026) documentation that role play based on Toraja cultural situations not only trains speaking skills but significantly increases student confidence and cultural pride. It also extends this finding by explaining the mechanisms through which culturally grounded role play achieves these outcomes: authenticity of purpose, reduction of anxiety through familiarity, and positioning of students as cultural experts rather than cultural novices.



The Cultural Resource Base for Ethnopedagogical Instruction

The teachers' practices across all four language skills reveal the richness of the cultural resource base available for ethnopedagogical instruction in Tana Toraja. The Rambu Solo' funeral ceremony provides material for descriptive and narrative texts, vocabulary building, cultural comparison discussions, and role-play simulations. Traditional foods such as pa'piong offer opportunities for process descriptions, recipe writing, and sensory vocabulary development. Sacred sites such as Londa and Tongkonan houses serve as settings for tourist guide simulations, descriptive writing, and reading comprehension passages. Folklore such as the legend of Mount Kandora offers narrative models for storytelling, listening comprehension, and moral character education.

However, the gaps identified in implementation particularly in media diversity, listening skill development, and writing task variation point to areas where this cultural resource base remains underutilized. The limited use of video materials reflects practical constraints in accessing or creating quality video content about Toraja culture with English narration. The underdeveloped listening skill integration reflects the absence of commercially produced listening materials with Toraja cultural content, leaving teachers to create their own resources from scratch. The limited variation in writing task types suggests that teachers may lack exemplars of different text types (narrative, argumentative, expository, procedural) based on Toraja cultural content.

These findings have clear implications for resource development. There is a need for culturally relevant teaching materials including video resources with English narration, audio recordings of Toraja folklore in English, and model texts of various genres based on Toraja cultural content that can support teachers in extending their ethnopedagogical practices across all skill areas and text types.

Implications for Teacher Professional Development

The findings of this study have significant implications for teacher professional development in culturally rich regions. First, professional development should validate and build upon the cultural knowledge that teachers already possess. The Toraja teachers in this study did not need to be convinced of the value of their local culture; they already viewed ethnopedagogy as a moral mission. Professional development should therefore focus on providing teachers with additional strategies, resources, and frameworks for implementing ethnopedagogy more systematically and across all skill areas.

Second, professional development should address the specific resource constraints that teachers face. In the case of listening skill development, for example, professional development could include training in creating simple audio recordings using accessible technology, or in adapting existing materials from other cultural contexts for Toraja cultural content. In the case of writing task variation, professional development could provide exemplars of different text types based on Toraja cultural content that teachers can adapt for their own classrooms.

Third, professional development should create opportunities for teachers to learn from each other. The differences among the three teachers in this study for example, MTR's use of folklore, AGS's use of video, and ATN's focus on traditional food suggest that each teacher has developed unique strengths in different areas of ethnopedagogical practice. Professional learning communities where teachers share their successful strategies and materials could significantly enhance the collective capacity for ethnopedagogical instruction in Tana Toraja.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the literature on culturally responsive ELT. First, it provides empirical evidence from an under-researched indigenous context that local cultural knowledge is not merely a supplement to English instruction but can serve as its primary organizing principle. The Toraja teachers in this study did not add cultural content as an occasional "icebreaker" or "cultural corner" activity; they organized their entire lessons around Toraja cultural content, from opening greetings through main activities to closing reflections.

Second, this study documents a form of teacher motivation "cultural rescue" that has received limited attention in the ELT literature. For teachers in communities experiencing cultural erosion, English teaching becomes a site for cultural preservation. This finding complicates the simplistic narrative that English language teaching inevitably leads to cultural imperialism and identity loss.

Third, this study provides a detailed analysis of the mechanisms through which culturally grounded instruction supports language development. These mechanisms include activation of prior cultural knowledge, reduction of anxiety through familiarity,



positioning of students as cultural experts, provision of authentic communicative purpose, and emotional engagement through connection to lived experience.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The study involved only three teachers from three senior high schools in Tana Toraja, and the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts or to all teachers in Tana Toraja. The study focused on teacher beliefs and practices and did not measure student learning outcomes. Future research should examine the measurable effects of ethnopedagogical instruction on student English proficiency, vocabulary retention, speaking fluency, and writing development.

Future research should also examine the sustainability of ethnopedagogical practices over time and across different cohorts of students. Longitudinal studies are needed to understand how teachers' beliefs and practices evolve with experience, and how students' English proficiency and cultural identity develop through sustained ethnopedagogical instruction.

Comparative studies across different indigenous cultural contexts in Indonesia and beyond would help identify culturally specific versus universally applicable principles of ethnopedagogical ELT. Such comparative research would contribute to the development of a more nuanced, context-sensitive theory of culturally responsive language teaching.

Finally, future research should investigate student perspectives on ethnopedagogical instruction. While this study has documented teachers' beliefs and practices, students' experiences, preferences, and learning outcomes ultimately determine the effectiveness of any pedagogical approach. Understanding how Toraja students experience and respond to ethnopedagogical instruction would provide an essential complement to the teacher-focused findings of this study

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