

BUILDING BETTER LEARNERS: A REVIEW OF KINDNESS-CENTERED APPROACHES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Suci Tresna Dewi Handayani¹, Titania Sari², Rimba Krisnha Sukma Dewi³, Multi Nadeak⁴

Universitas Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia^{1,2,3,4}

e-mail: suci@utb-univ.ac.id

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini menganalisis penerapan pendekatan pembelajaran berorientasi kebaikan (*kindness oriented instructional approaches*) dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris (*English Language Teaching/ELT*). Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris pada umumnya masih menitikberatkan pada penguasaan kompetensi linguistik, seperti tata bahasa, kosakata, dan pencapaian akademik, sementara aspek pengembangan karakter, empati, dan keterampilan sosial cenderung kurang mendapatkan perhatian. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kajian pustaka kualitatif dengan menelaah artikel jurnal dan sumber akademik yang relevan dengan pedagogi berbasis kebaikan dalam konteks ELT dan pendidikan. Kajian pustaka ini dilengkapi dengan refleksi akademik yang melibatkan empat dosen dari latar belakang keilmuan berbeda, yaitu dua dosen bidang pedagogi Bahasa Inggris dan dua dosen yang memiliki keahlian dalam pendidikan moral dan nilai-nilai positif. Hasil analisis literatur menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan pembelajaran berorientasi kebaikan, seperti *Social Emotional Learning (SEL)*, *Loving Pedagogy*, dan *Altruistic Teaching*, berkontribusi terhadap terciptanya lingkungan belajar yang inklusif dan suportif. Pendekatan tersebut berkaitan dengan peningkatan kompetensi bahasa, kesejahteraan emosional, interaksi kelas, serta keterampilan komunikasi interpersonal peserta didik. Simpulan penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa integrasi pendekatan pedagogis berorientasi kebaikan dalam ELT mendukung pencapaian akademik sekaligus pengembangan peserta didik secara holistik. Kontribusi artikel ini adalah penyediaan tinjauan konseptual mengenai pembelajaran ELT berbasis kebaikan yang dapat menjadi alternatif dalam mengintegrasikan pendidikan karakter ke dalam pembelajaran bahasa.

Kata kunci: *Pengembangan Karakter, Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, Pendidikan Berbasis Kebaikan*

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the implementation of kindness oriented instructional approaches in English Language Teaching (ELT). English learning generally still emphasizes mastery of linguistic competencies, such as grammar, vocabulary, and academic achievement, while important aspects of character development, empathy, and social skills tend to receive less attention. This study uses a qualitative literature review method by carefully examining journal articles and other academic sources relevant to kindness-based pedagogy in the context of ELT and education. The literature review is supplemented with academic reflections involving four lecturers from different scholarly backgrounds, namely two lecturers in English pedagogy and two lecturers with expertise in moral education and positive values. The literature analysis results show that kindness-oriented instructional approaches, such as Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Loving Pedagogy, and Altruistic Teaching, significantly contribute to creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. These approaches are related to improving

language competence, emotional well-being, classroom interaction, as well as students' interpersonal communication skills and collaborative learning abilities. The study concludes that the integration of kindness-oriented pedagogical approaches in ELT strongly supports academic achievement as well as holistic student development. The contribution of this article is providing a comprehensive conceptual review of kindness-based ELT that can serve as an alternative in effectively integrating character education into language learning.

Keywords: *Character Development, English Language Teaching, Kindness-Based Education*

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing expansion of digital technology and global interaction has further positioned English as a key language for communication in academic, professional, and social contexts. In response to these demands, English language education is expected to equip learners not only with linguistic knowledge but also with the capacity to engage meaningfully in socially diverse environments, as emphasized in discussions on 21st-century language education (Dr. Pentón Herrera & Darragh, 2024). However, instructional practices in English Language Teaching (ELT) largely continue to emphasize language accuracy and academic performance, particularly in areas such as grammar and vocabulary, while paying limited attention to learners' character development, empathy, and social values. This condition suggests a persistent imbalance between the cognitive focus of classroom instruction and the multidimensional competencies promoted in contemporary educational frameworks that advocate the integration of academic and socio-emotional learning outcomes (Dr. Pentón Herrera & Darragh, 2024).

A growing body of research has emphasized the role of soft skills and socio-emotional competencies in supporting learners' academic and professional success. Studies have demonstrated that interpersonal communication skills, social awareness, and professional attitudes are increasingly regarded as essential competencies in modern workplaces (Kubátová et al., 2025). In addition, the implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has been widely reported to contribute positively to learners' emotional regulation, empathy, and social interaction (Tran et al., 2024). Despite these findings, existing research in ELT tends to address socio-emotional development in a general manner, often without examining specific moral values that may shape classroom interaction and learning culture.

This tendency reveals a notable research gap. While character education and moral values have been discussed extensively in general education, systematic investigations into the integration of kindness as a pedagogical value within ELT remain limited. Most ELT studies focus either on linguistic outcomes or on broad socio-emotional frameworks, leaving the pedagogical role of kindness insufficiently conceptualized and underexplored in language teaching contexts. To address this gap, the present study offers a novel perspective by synthesizing recent theoretical discussions and empirical studies related to kindness-based education and ELT. The novelty of this article lies in its conceptual framing of kindness as a core pedagogical principle that connects language learning with socio-emotional and character development. Through a critical review of relevant literature, this article aims to explore how kindness-oriented instructional strategies can be integrated into ELT practices, thereby contributing to the development of inclusive, humanistic, and holistic English language learning environments.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine research related to the integration of kindness-centered approaches in English Language Teaching (ELT). The SLR method was selected to provide a structured and comprehensive overview of the development of kindness-based pedagogical concepts in ELT. The review process was designed to ensure transparency and consistency in identifying and synthesizing relevant studies. Overall, the SLR enabled the systematic examination of theoretical and pedagogical discussions on kindness-oriented ELT practices.

Relevant literature was identified through keyword-based searches conducted using the Google Scholar database. The selection process applied clear inclusion criteria, focusing on national and international journal articles published within the last five years and academic books addressing theories of kindness in education. Sources that were not directly related to ELT or kindness-oriented pedagogy were excluded from the review. As a result, a total of 20 journal articles and 2 academic books were selected for analysis.

The selected literature was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis involved organizing the findings into key themes, pedagogical approaches, and instructional practices related to the integration of kindness in ELT. This process allowed for the identification of recurring patterns and conceptual relationships across the studies. The synthesis of these themes provided insights into how kindness-based strategies can be implemented in English language teaching contexts.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Review

1. Social Skills and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in ELT

This section examines the role of social skills and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in English Language Teaching. To organize the findings systematically, the main results from the reviewed studies are summarized in Table 1. The table highlights the research focus and key contributions of studies addressing teacher student relationships and SEL implementation. This presentation allows for a clearer understanding of how socio-emotional competencies support language learning.

Table 1. Social Skills and SEL in ELT

Author (Year)	Focus	Main Finding
Afzal, et al., (2023)	Teacher-student relationship	Positive teacher-student relationships contribute to academic achievement and emotional development
Kubátová et al. (2025)	Core professional soft skills	Interpersonal and social skills are essential in workplaces
Dr. Pentón Herrera & Darragh (2024)	SEL implementation	SEL integration supports both language and emotional development
Tran, Nguyen, & Huynh (2024)	SEL and classroom environment	SEL-based learning creates positive social interaction and a supportive classroom
Gao & Wang (2024)	Listening skills	Active listening supports social and communication skills development
Wicaksono & Saraswati (2024)	Impact of SEL	SEL improves motivation, confidence, engagement, and communication

Author (Year)	Focus	Main Finding
Hiwari, Razeq, & Herrera (2024)	SEL in EFL	SEL implementation requires teacher training and structured curriculum
Gay et al. (2022)	Socio-emotional competence	Socio-emotional competence can be integrated into English teaching

As shown in Table 1, the reviewed studies collectively underline the importance of social-emotional competencies in ELT contexts. The findings indicate that positive classroom relationships and structured SEL practices contribute to learner engagement and communication development. Rather than functioning as supplementary elements, social skills appear to be integral to effective language instruction. These patterns suggest the need for pedagogical frameworks that explicitly incorporate socio emotional learning.

2. Kindness as a Model in Language Teaching

This section focuses on kindness-based pedagogical models applied in language teaching. To summarize relevant studies, Table 2 presents research examining approaches such as Loving Pedagogy and Altruistic Teaching. The table outlines the pedagogical orientation and reported outcomes associated with kindness-centered instruction. This overview provides a basis for analyzing the role of kindness in shaping learning environments.

Table 2. Kindness as a Model in Language Teaching

Author (Year)	Approach	Main Finding
Ghiasvand & Sharifpour (2024)	Loving Pedagogy	Builds trust, emotional care, and learning security
Kuswanto (2025)	Curriculum based on love	Increases student engagement and moral reflection
Alipour, Ghaniabadi, & Noughabi (2025)	Teacher characteristics	Resilience, mindfulness, and teaching enjoyment support loving pedagogy
Ghafouri & Esmaeilee (2025)	Altruistic Teaching	Enhances learning enjoyment and experience
Zare (2023)	Altruistic Teaching and writing	Improves student engagement and confidence
Zare, Aqajani, & Derakhshan (2023)	Positive emotions and summarizing	Enhances writing skills through positive emotions
Zare & Al-Issa (2024)	Reading in ELT	Improves reading comprehension and motivation
Smith (2023)	Character-based approach	Requires planning and active teacher involvement

Based on the studies summarized in Table 2, kindness-oriented pedagogy demonstrates a positive influence on students' emotional well-being and engagement. The findings suggest that teacher characteristics, including empathy and emotional awareness, are essential in sustaining such approaches. Kindness-based models also support the development of language skills through emotionally secure learning conditions. These results position kindness as a pedagogical principle rather than merely a moral value.

3. Implementing Kindness in ELT

This section addresses practical strategies for integrating kindness into English language instruction. To present these strategies concisely, Table 3 summarizes studies focusing on instructional practices such as character-based curricula, role play activities, and multimodal

learning. The table illustrates how kindness-oriented strategies are implemented across different educational contexts. This presentation supports a comparative understanding of practical applications in ELT.

Table 3. Implementing Kindness in ELT

Author (Year)	Implementation Strategy	Main Finding
Bin fet et al. (2022)	Kindness-based assignments	Enhances student kindness behavior and perception
Handayani & Nadeak (2025)	Role-play activities	Increases engagement and motivation
Safitri et al. (2023)	Islamic values integration	Supports positive learning environment despite limited resources
Kaharuddin (2025)	Character-based materials	Enhances language and moral competence
Puspitasari et al. (2025)	Multimodal learning	Improves creativity and moral awareness
Turdybekova (2024)	Spiritual values in ELT	Strengthens character and language skills

As reflected in Table 3, the implementation of kindness-oriented strategies is associated with increased learner participation and positive classroom climates. The reviewed studies emphasize the importance of contextual and cultural considerations in applying these practices. Successful implementation often requires adaptation to institutional conditions and learner needs. These findings highlight the practical potential of kindness-based approaches in ELT.

Discussion

The findings of this review indicate that the integration of kindness-oriented practices in English Language Teaching (ELT) is theoretically consistent with social-emotional learning perspectives, which emphasize that language development is influenced not only by cognitive factors but also by learners' emotional readiness and relational experiences. The significance of supportive teacher-student relationships reinforce previous arguments that relational quality plays a decisive role in enhancing learner engagement and academic outcomes (Afzal et al., 2023). From a socio-constructivist perspective, emotionally secure classroom environments encourage learners to participate more actively in communicative tasks and reduce anxiety associated with language use. This interpretation aligns with the view that values such as empathy, care, and respect are integral components of effective language pedagogy rather than peripheral considerations (Allahyarova, 2025).

The synthesis further suggests that Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) should be understood as a foundational pedagogical framework in contemporary ELT. Supportive classroom climates facilitate the simultaneous development of socio-emotional competencies and linguistic skills, consistent with communicative language teaching principles that prioritize interaction and learner-centeredness (Dr. Pentón Herrera & Darragh, 2024). Empirical studies confirm that SEL-oriented instruction enhances students' motivation, confidence, engagement, and communicative abilities (Tran et al., 2024; Wicaksono & Saraswati, 2024). Moreover, socio-emotional competence is not external to language learning but can be meaningfully embedded within English instruction through activities enhancing overall cognitive and communicative functioning (Gay et al., 2022). However, effective SEL implementation requires systematic teacher preparation and structured curricular integration, highlighting the need for professional development and institutional support (Hiwari et al., 2024).

Beyond the SEL framework, kindness-centered pedagogical models such as Loving Pedagogy and Altruistic Teaching provide further insight into the affective and moral dimensions of language learning. Emotional closeness between teachers and learners fosters psychological safety and communicative confidence, which are essential conditions for language acquisition (Ghiasvand & Sharifpour, 2024). Teachers' resilience, mindfulness, and enjoyment in teaching also sustain kindness-oriented practices in classroom contexts (Alipour et al., 2025). Empirical evidence further demonstrates that altruistic teaching enhances students' enjoyment of learning and overall learning experiences, thereby supporting positive emotional engagement and deeper meaning-making in ELT (Zare, 2023; Zare et al., 2023; Ghafouri & Esmaeilee, 2025). These findings affirm that affective and moral engagement strengthens learners' willingness to communicate and participate actively in language learning.

Importantly, kindness-based approaches also contribute directly to the development of specific language skills. Studies indicate that kindness-oriented and supportive learning environments improve reading comprehension and learner motivation by reducing performance anxiety and encouraging reflective engagement with texts (Zare & Al-Issa, 2024). Similarly, active and empathetic listening practices not only enhance listening proficiency but also promote social awareness and interpersonal communication skills, which are essential in authentic language use (Gao & Wang, 2024). These findings suggest that kindness-centered pedagogy does not detract from linguistic rigor but instead enhances language skill development through emotionally responsive instructional practices.

From an implementation perspective, the reviewed literature indicates that kindness-based instruction can be operationalized through diverse pedagogical strategies sensitive to cultural, moral, and spiritual contexts. Kindness-oriented assignments strengthen students' prosocial self-perceptions and interpersonal awareness (Bin fet et al., 2022), while character-based instructional approaches require intentional planning and active teacher involvement to be effective (Smith, 2023). Character-integrated teaching materials have been shown to enhance both linguistic competence and moral development, demonstrating the pedagogical feasibility of value-infused ELT materials (Kaharuddin, 2025). Furthermore, the incorporation of moral and spiritual values into ELT supports character building while simultaneously strengthening language skills, and positive learning environment (Kuswanto, 2025; Handayani & Nadeak, 2025; Safitri et al., 2023; Turdybekova, 2024). Multimodal and character-based instructional designs further reinforce creative engagement and moral awareness, underscoring the adaptability of kindness-based pedagogy across diverse educational settings (Puspitasari et al., 2025).

Overall, the synthesized evidence confirms that kindness-centered ELT contributes to the development of linguistic competence alongside emotional, social, and moral growth. Pedagogical approaches emphasizing empathy, care, and positive interaction support the formation of reflective, collaborative, and socially responsible learners. These competencies align with broader educational and professional demands, as interpersonal and socio-emotional skills are increasingly recognized as essential soft skills in academic and workplace contexts (Kubátová et al., 2025). The findings also resonate with holistic educational frameworks advocating the integration of moral, social, and spiritual dimensions into curriculum design to strengthen character formation and sustainable educational outcomes (Joshi, 2025; Hadi et al., 2025; Subasman et al., 2025). Consequently, future research is encouraged to design and empirically test systematic kindness-based instructional models that integrate language skills, character education, and socio-emotional development to further strengthen their theoretical and practical contributions to ELT.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review demonstrates that integrating kindness-based values into English language teaching (ELT) is fundamental to creating learning environments that are not only linguistically effective but also emotionally supportive and socially responsive. Positioned within principles of empathy, care, and respect, kindness-oriented pedagogy addresses the limitations of predominantly cognitive approaches by strengthening learners' social-emotional competencies alongside language development. By synthesizing recent empirical and theoretical research, this review advances a consolidated perspective that frames kindness as a central pedagogical principle in holistic ELT rather than a supplementary moral component.

The findings further suggest that the sustainable enactment of kindness-based ELT depends on intentional instructional design, consistent pedagogical practices, and active teacher engagement, supported by institutional structures such as professional development programs. Teachers emerge as key agents in fostering inclusive and psychologically safe classrooms, while institutional commitment is essential to sustaining character-oriented pedagogy. Looking ahead, future research should focus on developing and empirically validating structured kindness-based instructional models across diverse educational contexts, as well as refining assessment tools that capture social-emotional growth alongside linguistic outcomes. Collectively, this review underscores that kindness-oriented pedagogy offers a theoretically robust and practically relevant foundation for addressing the evolving demands of twenty-first-century language education.

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