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## Confucian Local Wisdom in English Teaching: Higher Education Lecturers' Views on Engaging Z Generation

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find out how university instructors feel about incorporating Confucian local knowledge into English Language Teaching (ELT) for Generation Z students in higher education. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from six English lecturers at universities in Palembang, South Sumatra, using a qualitative case study design. Six interrelated themes emerged from the thematic analysis of Sumatra: the perceived applicability of Confucian values, pedagogical modifications for Generation Z, integration practices in ELT, implementation difficulties, lecturer beliefs and professional identity, and student. The results showed that when reframed to fit the traits and expectations of digital-native students, Confucian values like discipline, humility, respect for teachers, and lifelong learning remain pedagogically relevant. Various strategies, such as cross-cultural comparisons, the use of digital media, and storytelling, were employed by lecturers to render traditional wisdom accessible and meaningful. In addition to student resistance, curriculum inflexibility, and institutional constraints, the consistent application of value-based pedagogy was complicated by several challenges. The study emphasizes the dual function of lecturers as cultural mediators and language instructors who mediate conflicts between traditional values and modern learning environments. It is concluded that the integration of Confucian local wisdom in ELT not only improves linguistic proficiency but also cultivates ethical and intercultural awareness. This information contributes to the ongoing conversation regarding the localization of ELT practices in higher education, lecturer agency, and culturally responsive pedagogy.



**Keywords:** *Teacher belief systems, Value-based learning, Youth engagement in language learning*

## 1. Introduction

In the current era of rapid globalization and digitalization, English Language Teaching (ELT) is undergoing a significant transformation, not only in terms of instructional methods but also in terms of its cultural orientation. Students in Generation Z are changing the dynamics of classroom teaching and learning because they are digital natives used to quick, personalized, and interactive experiences (Sedanza et al., 2023). Due to this generational shift, educators are now looking for pedagogical strategies that accommodate the technological and cognitive tendencies of contemporary learners while maintaining a cultural foundation. One potential solution to this challenge is the incorporation of local wisdom, which offers an ethical, cultural, and philosophical foundation for education in a time of global change.

Confucianism is one of the most influential frameworks shaping moral and educational thought across East and Southeast Asia, despite the fact that it is one of the various traditions of Asian philosophy. Its fundamental principles—filial piety (xiào), respect for educators (shī dào), humility (qiānxū), perseverance (rèn), and lifelong learning—have long influenced educational concepts regarding self-cultivation, morality, and discipline (Tang, Halili, & Razak, 2025). Although Confucian values are frequently perceived as rigid or traditional, they are being reexamined in modern pedagogy as a means of cultivating social responsibility and ethical awareness in students (Huang & Asghar, 2018).

Confucianism has been officially acknowledged as one of the nation's belief systems in the Indonesian context, indicating its enduring presence within the country's multicultural fabric. Nasution (2022) posits that Confucian philosophy is in alignment with Indonesia's more expansive concepts of kearifan lokal (local wisdom) when localized, which prioritizes collective well-being, harmony, and respect. Therefore, incorporating Confucian local wisdom into higher education is not only a way to preserve culture but also a pedagogical approach to enhance students' moral and intercultural competencies as they participate in global educational discourses.

The integration of Confucian wisdom into English language instruction introduces an ethical and value-oriented dimension that enhances communicative and humanistic teaching paradigms. Classroom discipline and mutual engagement are aligned with principles such as respect for teachers, while learner autonomy, reflective practice, and resilience in language acquisition are correlated with humility and perseverance (Liu & Littlewood, 2023). Additionally, the integration of Confucian values into ELT can promote the holistic development of students as global yet culturally rooted citizens by fostering both linguistic competence and ethical sensitivity.

However, teachers' beliefs, agency, and pedagogical flexibility are crucial to the success of such integration. Lecturers are not merely the transmitters of linguistic knowledge; they also act as cultural mediators, influencing classroom values through both implicit and explicit instructional decisions (Yanfeng & Andreevna, 2022). The reinterpretation of traditional wisdom for contemporary learners, particularly those of Generation Z, is influenced by their perspectives, which are shaped by digital technology, autonomy, and a critical attitude toward authority. This situation puts lecturers at the nexus of tradition and modernity, necessitating both pedagogical innovation and cultural sensitivity.

The localization of English instruction is receiving more and more scholarly attention, but there is still a dearth of empirical research on how Confucian values are adapted in ELT. Prior research has primarily examined Confucianism's philosophical, ethical, or historical effects on learning motivation and cultural identity (Gong, 2024), ignoring its pedagogical implementation in English language classrooms. Additionally, research on Generation Z learners has primarily emphasized technological integration, digital literacy, and learner-centered practices (Sedanza et al., 2023), frequently disregarding the moral and cultural dimensions that underpin meaningful education. Subsequently, it is imperative to investigate the manner in which lecturers integrate Confucian ethics with the digital realities, learning styles, and expectations of contemporary students.

In the broader Southeast Asian region, including Indonesia, English serves as both a global lingua franca and a medium of intercultural exchange. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend the voices of educators in order to effectively integrate cultural philosophies into teaching practice (Tang et al., 2025; Nosidlak, 2024). Y . However, there are sparse studies that have investigated the reflective practices and lived experiences of lecturers in the context of negotiating this integration within higher education. To close this gap, this study puts lecturers' points of view as important sources of knowledge for understanding value-based language teaching.

Thus, this study investigates the perspectives and experiences of university English instructors in incorporating local Confucian wisdom into ELT for Generation Z students in higher education. It aims to elucidate the processes by which lecturers interpret, adapt, and implement Confucian values in their pedagogical practices, as well as the obstacles and opportunities they face. The objectives of the findings are twofold: theoretically, by enriching the body of knowledge regarding culturally responsive pedagogy, teacher agency, and value-oriented language instruction; and practically, by providing educators and curriculum developers with valuable insights for integrating local philosophical traditions with the changing needs of digital-age learners.

To achieve these aims, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do university-level English lecturers perceive the relevance and pedagogical applicability of Confucian local wisdom in teaching Generation Z students?
2. In what ways are these values reflected in their instructional practices?

3. What challenges and opportunities do lecturers encounter in aligning traditional Confucian ethics with the learning characteristics of digital-native students?

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Confucianism in education and English Language Teaching (ELT)**

Educational thought in East Asia has been significantly influenced by Confucianism, which prioritizes the moral responsibility of both teachers and students, as well as the promotion of social harmony and ethical development. In China, classroom interactions have become deeply ingrained with core values such as filial piety, respect for hierarchy, self-discipline, and lifelong learning. In the present day, these values continue to have an impact on teaching practices across various disciplines, including English language instruction (Gong, 2024). Ho (2020) asserts that the Confucian heritage learning model is distinguished by a strong focus on social responsibility, effort-based achievement, and the learner's moral development. Despite being historically linked to memorization, contemporary reinterpretations have demonstrated that, when used appropriately, Confucian pedagogy can promote educational experiences that are ethically grounded, community-focused, and reflective.

Confucian principles impact not only student conduct but also the teacher's moral position, classroom authority, and the function of knowledge transfer in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT). Ma (2023) examines how Confucianism shapes a teacher's identity and ethical duty to develop students who are not only linguistically proficient but also morally conscious. However, it is still hard to make these values fit with what modern students expect and with global trends in ELT teaching.

Li (2020) talks about the art of silence, a Confucian technique, as a useful way to teach deep listening and self-reflection that can help both students and teachers grow. When English is taught as a medium for ethical communication rather than just as a functional tool, these kinds of activities can foster mindfulness and intercultural awareness in ELT contexts.

### **2.2. Teacher voice and agency in curriculum and pedagogy**

Teachers are cultural agents and curriculum creators who interpret, modify, and transform educational content in accordance with their professional beliefs and the realities of their surrounding environment. They are not merely passive implementers of curricula. This knowledge is essential to the idea of teacher voice, which affirms the significance of teachers' experiences, beliefs, and pedagogical judgments in determining learning outcomes (Smith, 2023).

Teachers in Confucian-based societies are typically seen as moral role models, which increases their authority but may also limit their freedom.

However, recent changes in the discourse surrounding education now place a greater emphasis on the value of teacher agency, particularly when it comes to creating instructional strategies that are contextually grounded and culturally sensitive (Sun, 2024).

Sun (2024) shows that pre-service EFL teachers in Mainland China are becoming more aware of the necessity of combining local cultural awareness with global competencies, and that teacher preparation programs need to allow for this kind of reflection. In the same way, Zhao (2016) says that teachers are more likely to use local knowledge, such as Confucian ethics, in creative and appropriate ways when they feel supported and heard.

In the context of higher education, the importance of teacher voice is significantly increased, as university lecturers are frequently required to adhere to both international standards and local cultural imperatives and have a greater degree of curricular flexibility. This highlights the importance of their insights in comprehending the way Confucian values can be effectively integrated into ELT for contemporary learners.

### **2.3. Generation Z in English language learning**

Gen Z, which was born between 1997 and 2012, is the first generation of learners to have been raised entirely in the digital era. their way of learning is very different from that of previous generations; they clearly prefer visual content, interactive formats, personalized learning experiences, and immediate feeds. However, they frequently face difficulties like reduced tolerance for strict authority structures, fragmented reading habits, and shorter attention spans (Hu & Abidin, n.d.).

Teachers who work in Confucian-influenced schools, which traditionally stress values like patience, obedience, and group harmony, may find these traits difficult to deal with. However, recent research indicates that Generation Z's learning preferences and Confucian values may not be inherently incompatible. There can be significant connections between the two through values like respect, community-mindedness, and intrinsic motivation (Liang & Leng, 2024).

To deal with these issues, teachers need to carefully change the way they teach to meet the cognitive and emotional needs of Gen Z without going against the basic ideas of Confucianism. according to Wang (2022), students who come from Confucian backgrounds still value cultural authority, but they also want to talk to others and have room to think critically, especially when it comes to language. Therefore, a nuanced pedagogical strategy that prioritizes innovative, learner-centered practices while also respecting cultural tradition is necessary to effectively integrate Confucian values into ELT for Generation Z.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Research design and approach**

Utilizing a case study design, this investigation implemented a qualitative research methodology. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives, beliefs, and lived experiences of English language lecturers with respect to the integration of Confucian local wisdom into English Language Teaching (ELT) for Generation Z students, a qualitative approach was selected. As described by Yin (2018), the case study design facilitates a concentrated examination of a particular phenomenon within a predetermined, real-world context. In this instance, the focus is on the interpretation and application of Confucian values in higher education settings. The study prioritizes depth and contextual understanding, rather than pursuing broad generalizations, to capture the nuanced reflections of educators as they navigate and adapt cultural philosophies within their teaching practices.

#### **3.2. Research site**

Six universities in Palembang, South Sumatera, where English lecturers are either familiar with, interested in, or using pedagogical approaches that incorporate Confucian values, participated in this study. The purposeful site selection process considered the accessibility and pertinence of possible participants.

#### **3.3. Participants**

Six university English language teachers who met the following criteria took part in this study

1. Currently teaching undergraduate students belonging to generation Z
2. Have prior experience with culturally embedded pedagogy or Confucian values, as well as an interest in them
3. Willing to participate in an in-depth and reflective interview.

Purposive sampling was implemented to identify participants who are most likely to offer valuable insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

#### **3.4. Data collection**

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview protocol. Each interview lasted approximately 45 - 60 minutes, either in person or via video call, depending on the availability and preference of the participants. With informed consent, all interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In addition to interviews, supporting documents were also collected, such as syllabi, lesson plans, or teaching materials, where evidence of value-based

pedagogy was present.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which includes six systematic steps:

1. Familiarizing with the data (repeated reading of transcripts)
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

This process was inductive, meaning that themes emerged from the data itself rather than from pre-established theoretical frameworks. Coding and analysis were conducted manually

### **3.6. Trustworthiness**

To ensure research trustworthiness, this study employed the following strategies:

- 1) Triangulation: by including both interview data and supporting documents (if available)
- 2) Member checking: participants will be given a summary of their interview data for verification
- 3) Peer debriefing: discussions with supervisors or colleagues will be used to minimize researcher bias and strengthen analytical rigor

### **3.7. Ethical Considerations**

This research adhered to ethical standards for qualitative inquiry, including:

- 1) Obtaining informed consent from all participants
- 2) Ensuring confidentiality through pseudonyms and secure data storage
- 3) Allowing participants to withdraw at any time without consequence
- 4) Using data strictly for academic purposes

A formal ethics approval was sought from the appropriate university research ethics committee prior to data collection.

## **4. Findings**

The study involved six English language lecturers, each representing a different university. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing for both consistency and flexibility in exploring participants' experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. All interview



recordings were transcribed verbatim and subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes within the data. The following table presents the emergent themes and their associated codes, developed from the six interviews:

Table 1: *Themes and codes extracted from interview transcripts*

Theme	Codes	Description
1. Perceived Relevance of Confucian Values	1. Respect for teachers 2. Discipline and humility 3. Lifelong learning	Lecturers emphasized how Confucian values remain applicable in the ELT classroom, especially in reinforcing discipline and ethical behavior.
2. Pedagogical Adaptation for Gen Z	1. Making values relatable 2. Using digital platforms to teach morals 3. Blending tradition with creativity	Teachers shared strategies for presenting traditional values in modern formats (e.g., using stories or digital media) to engage Generation Z learners.
3. Integration Practices in ELT	1. Confucian-themed reading materials 2. Classroom discussions on values 3. Cultural comparison activities	Several lecturers reported using Confucian principles explicitly in lesson content or through comparative discussions on values across cultures.
4. Challenges in Integration	1. Student resistance to “old-fashioned” values 2. Curriculum constraints 3. Lack of institutional support	Some educators encountered reluctance from Gen Z students who viewed Confucian ideas as outdated or overly hierarchical.
5. Teacher Beliefs and Professional Identity	1. Teaching as moral responsibility 2. Role of teacher as value model 3. Preserving cultural heritage	Many participants viewed their role not only as language instructors but also as cultural transmitters and ethical guides.
6. Student Responses and Reflections	1. Mixed receptiveness 2. Engagement when values linked to personal stories 3. Better behavior in Confucian-framed classes	Students reportedly became more engaged when values were presented through relatable experiences or personal storytelling.

4.1. Perceived relevance of Confucian values

All six lecturers acknowledged the continuing relevance of Confucian values in contemporary English Language Teaching (ELT), especially in the context of higher education. Values such as respect for teachers, discipline, humility, and lifelong learning were described as moral anchors that, while traditional, still hold meaning for Generation Z students when communicated appropriately.

*“Even though they (Gen Z students) are very independent and digital, they still respond positively when we explain why respecting teachers matters, not as authority, but as mutual human value.”* (Participant 2).



Other lecturers shared similar sentiments, describing how Confucian values can be reframed to suit modern learners:

*"When I talk about discipline or effort in class, I try to relate it to their goals, like career dreams or academic success. Then they realize Confucius wasn't just about obedience, but personal excellence."* (Participant 4).

*"Many of my students don't know that our culture emphasizes learning as a lifetime journey. When I introduce this idea from Confucius, they feel motivated. They start thinking learning isn't just for exams, it's for life."* (Participant 6)

Several lecturers emphasized the moral and interpersonal value of Confucian teaching:

*"I often tell them: respect in our class is mutual. That's a Confucian idea. And it works. Students begin to treat each other kindlier and take discussions more seriously."* (Participant 1).

One lecturer reflected on the continuity of values across generations, despite cultural shifts:

*"Yes, they are modern, but they still come from families that value politeness and honor. When I connect those family values to classroom values, the Confucian message makes sense to them."* (Participant 3).

Another added a note of caution, emphasizing the need for flexibility and context:

*"We can't force these values—they must emerge naturally through our teaching style. I see Confucianism not as content to teach, but a way of being in the classroom."* (Participant 5).

These responses illustrate that while Generation Z students may appear disconnected from tradition, Confucian values remain relevant when framed in relational, motivational, and practical terms. Teachers play a key role in translating ancient wisdom into contemporary relevance, reinforcing not only language acquisition but also character formation and social harmony.

#### **4.2. Pedagogical adaptation for Generation Z**

A dominant theme emerging from the interviews was the need to adapt traditional Confucian values to the unique learning styles and expectations of Generation Z students, who are characterized by their digital fluency, independence, and desire for relevance and interactivity in learning. All six lecturers described how they recontextualized Confucian principles through innovative pedagogical strategies, particularly by embedding values in digital content, using visual or narrative formats, and encouraging personal reflection. *"You can't just tell Gen Z students to respect or obey. You must show them why it matters—through stories, videos, real-life examples. I once used a YouTube vlog about family sacrifice, and they finally understood what filial piety means in their own lives."* (Participant 1).

Lecturers also reported using project-based learning and digital platforms to bridge the gap between traditional values and modern student

preferences.

*"Instead of giving them a reading on Confucianism, I asked students to make a podcast where they reflected on a family value they grew up with. That's how they connect values with language use and personal identity."* (Participant 4).

Several participants described how student autonomy was essential to engagement:

*"I ask them to choose between different Confucian quotes and apply one to a current issue—like online ethics or climate change. Suddenly, they're not just reading Confucius, they're thinking with him."* (Participant 5).

Others emphasized the importance of visual storytelling and popular media in teaching: *"TikTok and Instagram Reels are tools I use. For example, I made a short animation of 'The Analects' and used it as a discussion starter. They laughed, but they remembered."* (Participant 2).

Lecturers also demonstrated sensitivity to student resistance, recognizing that Generation Z students may not immediately accept value-laden content unless it resonates with their lived experiences.

*"If I come across as preachy, they zone out. But if I tell them a story from my university life and link it to a Confucian value, suddenly they're listening—and they respond."* (Participant 3).

Others highlighted the importance of interactive learning:

*"I created a simulation where students role-played as Confucian scholars debating Gen Z dilemmas—like AI or cancel culture. They loved it! And it made them think critically about values and society."* (Participant 6).

These reflections suggest that successful pedagogical adaptation involves translating Confucian ideals into engaging, interactive, and multimodal formats that speak to Gen Z's digital sensibilities and value of personal relevance. The key lies not in abandoning tradition, but in recasting it through creativity, dialogue, and student-centered practice.

### **4.3. Integration practices in ELT**

Lecturers reported employing a range of pedagogical practices to integrate Confucian values into English Language Teaching (ELT). Rather than treating Confucianism as abstract philosophy, they embedded its principles into learning content, classroom interaction, and reflective assignments. This approach made the values more accessible, relatable, and practical for Generation Z students.

One strategy was to use Confucian-inspired texts and materials in reading and writing activities:

*"I included a short, adapted passage from The Analects in a reading class. Instead of focusing only on grammar, we discussed what the text means today. The students were surprised at how relevant those old sayings still are."* (Participant 2).

Another approach was through classroom discussion and dialogue, where students were encouraged to critically reflect on Confucian ideas:

*"I don't tell them what to believe. I ask: 'What do you think Confucius would say about social media use today?' That's when they start to argue, reflect, and connect values with their own behavior."* (Participant 6).

Teachers also used comparative cultural analysis to foster intercultural competence:

*"I asked students to compare Confucian respect for elders with Western ideas of individual freedom. This opened their minds to see culture as something not fixed, but relative. They began to appreciate that English learning is also about understanding other worldviews."* (Participant 3).

Assignments and projects were another medium for integration. Several lecturers encouraged creative reinterpretations of Confucian values in student work:

*"I gave them an essay task: explain a Confucian value and apply it to a modern challenge, like online bullying. Their reflections were powerful, and they used English in meaningful, personal ways."* (Participant 4).

Beyond textual analysis, lecturers integrated values through classroom management and teaching style, modeling Confucian virtues themselves:

*"I practice humility in my own teaching. When I admit mistakes openly, students see that as part of Confucian learning—teachers are learners too. That is more impactful than telling them to be humble."* (Participant 1).

Others incorporated Confucian ethics into group work and peer learning, reinforcing collectivism and cooperation:

*"When I assign group projects, I frame it with Confucian ideas of harmony and respect. I remind them: 'Your teamwork reflects your values.' It helps reduce conflict and encourages collaboration."* (Participant 5).

These practices demonstrate that Confucian values can be embedded at multiple levels of ELT pedagogy: curriculum design, instructional content, classroom interaction, assessment, and even teacher behavior. By presenting values through language activities, intercultural comparisons, creative tasks, and lived modeling, lecturers successfully transform Confucian wisdom into a living pedagogical tool that enriches both linguistic and moral learning.

#### **4.4. Challenges in integration**

Although Confucian principles are widely regarded as valuable in educational contexts, the lecturers consistently emphasized the challenges involved in integrating these values into English Language Teaching (ELT) for Generation Z learners. Their reflections reveal an underlying tension between longstanding moral frameworks and the evolving demands and realities of contemporary higher education.

##### **Student resistance and misperceptions**

A major challenge reported was the resistance of Generation Z learners, who often view Confucianism as outdated, hierarchical, or irrelevant.

*"When I say 'respect for teachers,' they sometimes laugh and reply, 'Respect*

*must be mutual.' They don't reject respect, but they don't like it framed as authority. They want equality.*" (Participant 2).

*"One student said to me, 'Confucius is from thousands of years ago. What does that have to do with my English exam?' That shows how they separate values from academic learning."* (Participant 5).

### **Curriculum and assessment pressures**

Lecturers noted that exam-oriented curricula often crowd out value-based teaching. The push for standardized outcomes leaves little space for cultural and moral exploration.

*"We are told to prepare students for TOEFL or IELTS. Talking about Confucian ethics doesn't seem to fit into that framework, so sometimes I feel guilty spending time on it."* (Participant 1).

*"The curriculum is full of technical content—writing skills, academic vocabulary, test strategies. There is hardly room for values unless I insert them creatively."*

(Participant 6).

### **Lack of institutional support**

Several participants described feeling unsupported by their institutions, with no official resources, modules, or training to integrate Confucian ideas.

*"If the university valued cultural integration, they would provide resources or workshops. But it's left to individual lecturers. So it becomes extra work that not everyone wants to take on."* (Participant 4).

*"Sometimes I feel like I am working against the current, because our system prioritizes global benchmarks, not local values."* (Participant 3).

### **Cultural tensions in the classroom**

Another challenge arose from the disconnect between the hierarchical nature of Confucian traditions and Generation Z's inclination toward egalitarian and collaborative learning environments.

*"Confucian values emphasize hierarchy, but Gen Z students prefer flat relationships. If I come across as too authoritative, they disengage. If I am too friendly, the Confucian value of respect gets lost."* (Participant 2).

*"Balancing tradition and modernity is exhausting. I want them to see the wisdom in humility and self-discipline, but not to think of it as blind obedience."* (Participant 5).

### **Risk of misinterpretation**

Finally, some lecturers expressed concern that values may be misunderstood or reduced to dogma if not contextualized carefully.

*"If I present filial piety as simply 'obey your parents,' they resist. But if I explain it as 'caring for your family,' they relate better. The challenge is choosing the right language."* (Participant 6).

*"Confucius is often stereotyped as rigid. Unless we present the values as flexible*

*and human, students won't accept them.*" (Participant 1).

The challenges identified by lecturers underscore the fragile balance required to integrate Confucian local wisdom into ELT for Generation Z. The skepticism of students, the pressure of exam-focused curricula, and the lack of institutional recognition all pose significant barriers. Moreover, cultural tensions between traditional hierarchical models and Gen Z's egalitarian worldview create additional complexities. Despite these challenges, lecturers showed resilience in reframing values as human principles, suggesting that integration is possible but demands creativity, sensitivity, and systemic support.

#### **4.5. Teacher beliefs and professional identity**

Across all six interviews, lecturers described their role as extending beyond teaching grammar or vocabulary. They viewed themselves as moral exemplars, cultural mediators, and character builders, aligning with the Confucian ideal of the teacher as a "model of virtue." This perspective shaped both their pedagogical decisions and their professional identity.

##### **Teachers as moral guides**

Several participants emphasized the importance of modeling Confucian values in their own behavior:

*"I cannot just ask students to be disciplined if I come late or unprepared. I must show them discipline through my own actions. That's what Confucius meant by teaching through example."* (Participant 1)

*"Humility is central for me. When I admit mistakes in front of my students, they see I'm human. That vulnerability is also a lesson in values."* (Participant 4).

##### **Teaching as cultural responsibility**

The lecturers viewed themselves as guardians of cultural continuity, incorporating Confucian principles into their teaching as a means of preserving cultural heritage amid the forces of globalization in education.

*"I believe teaching English is not just about language, it is about identity. If we only use Western models, students may forget their own cultural roots. Confucian values help balance global and local."* (Participant 2)

*"I feel responsible to remind students that education is about character, not just certificates. Confucius' wisdom gives me a framework to do that."* (Participant 5).

##### **Professional identity as cultural translators**

Teachers positioned themselves as translators between tradition and modernity, mediating between Confucian values and Gen Z's needs.

*"I am not teaching Confucius directly; I am teaching through Confucius. My role is to interpret these values, so they make sense for today's learners."* (Participant 6).

*"Sometimes I feel like a bridge. On one side, there is tradition: on the other, modern students with digital lives. My job is to connect them, so values are not lost."* (Participant 3).

### **Sense of pride and challenge**

While proud of their role, lecturers also acknowledged the difficulty of sustaining value-based teaching in a system that prioritizes efficiency and exams. *"Being a teacher today is complex. We are asked to prepare students for global competition, but I also feel called to prepare them as ethical human beings. Balancing the two is not easy."* (Participant 4).

The findings reveal that lecturers' professional identity is deeply shaped by Confucian ideals of the teacher as a moral model. They see themselves not only as language instructors but as cultural custodians who preserve and reinterpret traditional values for a new generation. Their beliefs and sense of agency empower them to integrate Confucian values creatively, even in the face of institutional and generational challenges. This dual identity, as both educators and moral guides, positions them as central actors in sustaining cultural wisdom within globalized ELT contexts.

## **4.6. Student responses and reflections**

Lecturers observed a range of responses from their students when Confucian values were introduced in ELT classrooms. These responses varied from skepticism and disengagement to curiosity, emotional connection, and active participation, depending on how the values were framed and the teaching strategies used.

### **Mixed receptiveness**

Some lecturers noted that students were initially indifferent or skeptical about discussing Confucian principles in an English language class:

*"At first, they didn't see the point. A few students asked, 'Why should we learn about Confucius in English? Isn't this a philosophy class?' That shows they separate culture from language."* (Participant 3).

*"When I mentioned filial piety, some students said it felt irrelevant to their generation. They thought it belonged to the past, not the future."* (Participant 5).

### **Positive engagement through personal connection**

However, many lecturers reported that students engaged more deeply when Confucian values were linked to personal stories, family experiences, or real-life dilemmas.

*"When I shared a story about my parents and connected it to filial piety, suddenly they opened. Students started sharing about their grandparents, their struggles, even their guilt. It became very emotional."* (Participant 1).

*"I gave them a task to write about a value they learned from their family and compare it to Confucian values. The classroom atmosphere changed, students were eager to tell their stories."* (Participant 6).

### **Transformative classroom moments**



Some lecturers described powerful classroom moments where students reflected critically and showed emotional growth:

*“One student admitted he never thought about respecting his teachers until we discussed it in class. He said, ‘Maybe I should be more polite, not just because of grades but because it’s the right thing.’ That reflection was priceless.”* (Participant 2).

*“When they role-played Confucian scholars debating modern issues, students laughed, but they also engaged seriously. They were surprised how relevant the values were to online life and social responsibility.”* (Participant 4).

### **Behavioral impact**

A few lecturers noticed subtle but meaningful behavioral changes after integrating values in their teaching.

*“I observed that after our discussion on respect, students started greeting me more politely. Small things, but they matter, it shows the value touched them.”* (Participant 5).

Students’ responses to the integration of Confucian values varied considerably. While some expressed resistance or skepticism about the relevance of these values, others demonstrated meaningful engagement, particularly when the values were framed within personal experiences, social relationships, or contemporary contexts. The depth of their reflections and emotional resonance indicated that, when approached with creativity and sensitivity, Confucian wisdom has the potential to support not only language development but also the cultivation of ethical awareness among Generation Z learners.

## **5. Discussion**

This study investigated how college professors view and incorporate Confucian principles into their instruction of English to Generation Z students. The results demonstrated that these values, which are rooted in ancient traditions, are still relevant in modern classrooms when they are reinterpreted and presented in a manner that resonates with contemporary learners. The main findings are connected to current literature and theoretical viewpoints in the discussion that follows.

The Lecturers consistently underscored the enduring importance of Confucian virtues, including discipline, humility, lifelong learning, and respect for teachers. These values were characterized as moral anchors that persist in directing educational relationships, even in the presence of digital-native students. This finding is consistent with Gong’s (2024) analysis, which emphasizes the importance of ethical citizenship and character development in Confucian traditions. Though concepts like filial piety and teacher reverence may seem outdated to some, they still have an impact on classroom behavior in settings where hierarchical teacher-student relationships are still deeply embedded in society. As Schenck (2024) pointed out, students from Confucian backgrounds frequently react favorably to structured classrooms where moral guidance and



leadership are expressed.

Concurrently, lecturers acknowledged the significance of modifying these principles to align with the learning preferences of Generation Z. They elaborated on the utilization of digital platforms, storytelling, and cross-cultural comparisons to contemporaries the dissemination of Confucian principles. Such methods are in line with the findings of Sedanza et al. (2023), who contend that Gen Z students favor interactive and digitally mediated instruction. Although these students might not immediately relate to traditional Confucian values, the concepts can be communicated through gamification, multimedia narratives, or reflective social media activities—formats that are in line with their digital culture. Additionally, Sun (2024) emphasizes how important teacher agency and creativity are to the success of value integration, reaffirming the notion that teachers must act as cultural translators rather than passive keepers of tradition.

The study also identified various ways that lecturers integrated Confucian principles into ELT. Some integrated Confucian-inspired texts into reading and writing exercises, while others encouraged classroom discussions on morality or organized comparative analyses of Confucian and Western values. In some cases, lecturers showed students that morals can be lived rather than merely taught by modeling discipline and humility through their actions. This supports Smith's (2023) observation that lecturers are very important for bringing cultural values into language learning. They also back up the claim made by Hu and Abidin (n.d.) that group-based language activities can benefit from the application of Confucian values like collectivism and moral communication. By integrating values into both content and practice, lecturers transformed them into dynamic pedagogical tools.

Although these endeavors were made, the investigation identified numerous obstacles that complicate the integration of value. According to lecturers, numerous students opposed or questioned the relevance of Confucianism, viewing it as antiquated or unrelated to their academic objectives. Additionally, the absence of curriculum flexibility and the prevalence of exam-oriented instruction resulted in inadequate opportunities for values-based pedagogy. The absence of institutional support or formal resources to facilitate such integration compelled them to rely on their own creativity. These results are in accordance with Liang and Leng. These results agree with Liang and Leng's (2024) research, which discovered that students in classrooms based on Confucianism frequently encounter difficulties with critical thinking because of internalized norms of silence and obedience. Additionally, Khan (2024) warns that if Confucian education is implemented without modification, it runs the risk of turning into repression. The need for careful value negotiation is highlighted by these difficulties, which show the conflict between collectivist traditions and the individualist, egalitarian inclinations of Generation Z students.

Lecturers' perceptions of themselves as cultural stewards and ethical mentors in addition to language teachers was another significant finding. They felt that upholding cultural wisdom via pedagogy and serving as role models for moral integrity were essential components of their professional identity. This

aligns with Ma's (2023) assertion that Confucian philosophy views educators as moral exemplars who cultivate both intellect and character. However, this position in modern ELT contexts necessitates striking a balance between individual convictions, institutional requirements, and student expectations. Sun (2024) points out that this ongoing negotiation, in which systemic pressures and professional agency must coexist, shapes the identity of teachers. The lecturers in this investigation recognized their function as cultural mediators, conceiving of themselves as intermediaries between contemporary student realities and Confucian traditions.

Lastly, the study showed that students' answers varied. Although some people didn't want to talk about Confucian values, others became very interested when values were linked to personal stories or real-life problems. After studying Confucian concepts, lecturers recounted instances in which students reexamined their classroom conduct or thought about their familial relationships. These results support Schenck's (2024) claim that learning a culture works best when it is connected to personal and social experiences rather than being taught as a set of rules. In addition, Sedanza et al. (2023) stress that student-centered, reflective, and personalized learning is most beneficial for Generation Z students. The results of this investigation verify that the key to lecturer success is not the imposition of tradition, but rather the contextualization of it within the lived experiences of students.

In general, the discussion shows that, when applied through creative, reflective pedagogy, Confucian principles remain relevant in higher education English language teaching (ELT). By ensuring that traditional knowledge is not lost but rather reinterpreted for the benefit of future generations, educators play the roles of both innovators and cultural guardians. However, the problems they face, like cultural conflicts, institutional limitations, and student resistance, show that value-based education needs more attention from teachers and help from the system. The results reinforce that values, when humanized and contextualized, can support the development of morally conscious and ethical learners in addition to language proficiency.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings of this investigation suggest that the incorporation of Confucian values into English language instruction is not only feasible but also potentially transformative, particularly when implemented through teacher autonomy, cultural relevance, and pedagogical innovation. Instead of dismissing traditional wisdom as outdated, academics at universities have revitalized and humanized Confucian teachings so that Gen Z students can understand them. But integration is not without its difficulties. Institutional constraints, philosophical traditions, and generational expectations all contribute to tensions. Thus, the success of value integration is contingent upon the empowerment of teachers, student-centered delivery, and flexible pedagogies. Ultimately, this study emphasizes how, in a world growing more interconnected by the day,

higher education can be a place of cultural continuity, value negotiation, and ethical language instruction.

### **Theoretical Implications**

- 1) This study contributes to culturally responsive pedagogy by showing how traditional philosophies like Confucianism can be embedded in ELT.
- 2) It expands the literature on lecturer voice and agency by positioning lecturers as active cultural interpreters and not just curriculum implementers.
- 3) It enriches research on Generation Z learners by exploring how values-based education can still resonate when linked to identity, experience, and interaction.

### **Practical Implications**

- 1) For educators: Lecturers may benefit from reflective training that encourages the reinterpretation of local wisdom for modern pedagogical contexts.
- 2) For curriculum developers: There is a need to design value-integrated ELT materials that align with digital literacy and Gen Z preferences.
- 3) For institutions: Support structures should be strengthened for lecturers interested in culturally grounded innovation in teaching.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

- 1) Future studies could include student perspectives to triangulate findings and understand how learners perceive value-based instruction.
- 2) Comparative studies across different cultural traditions (e.g., Islamic, Buddhist, or Indigenous philosophies) could broaden insights into culturally responsive ELT.
- 3) Longitudinal studies might explore how Confucian-integrated ELT affects students' ethical development, intercultural competence, or language learning outcomes over time.

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