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Exploring the Perceptions of EFL Lecturers toward Agile Pedagogy in Indonesian Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers toward agile pedagogy at the Department of English Language Education, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama (UNU) Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Yet its potential in EFL contexts, particularly in Indonesian higher education where instructional cultures remain largely examination-driven and innovation-resistant, has received almost no empirical attention. Motivated by the near-absence of empirical research on agile pedagogy in EFL and non-STEM contexts, particularly within Indonesian Islamic higher education, this study employed a qualitative descriptive design using semi-structured interviews with five to eight purposively selected EFL lecturers. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework revealed four key themes: (1) limited familiarity with agile pedagogy concepts, (2) perceived potential of agile pedagogy for EFL skills development — particularly in speaking and writing, (3) perceived challenges to implementation rooted in curricular rigidity and professional workload pressures, and (4) moderate readiness with conditional willingness to adopt. The findings indicate that while lecturers are largely unfamiliar with agile pedagogy as a formal framework, they demonstrate intuitive alignment with its core values once introduced. Structural barriers — particularly rigid semester learning plans (RPS), examination-driven assessment systems, and Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi obligations — emerged as primary impediments to adoption. This study contributes the first empirically grounded account of EFL lecturers' perceptions of agile pedagogy in an Indonesian Islamic university context, offering practical implications for professional development design and institutional policy reform, and establishing a baseline for future interventionist research.

Keywords: agile pedagogy; lecturers' perceptions; Indonesian higher education; pedagogical innovation

INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of the global educational landscape in the twenty-first century has placed increasing pressure on higher education institutions to move beyond conventional, teacher-centered instructional models. Contemporary graduates are expected not only to demonstrate linguistic competence, but also to possess adaptive thinking, collaborative skills, and the capacity to navigate complex, real-world challenges (Krehbiel et al., 2017). In response to these demands, scholars and educators have increasingly explored innovative pedagogical frameworks that prioritize flexibility, iteration, and learner ownership — qualities that traditional transmission-based instruction often fails to cultivate (Royle & Nikolic, 2016).

Among the emerging approaches that have gained scholarly attention is agile pedagogy, a framework adapted from the Agile Manifesto originally developed in the software industry in 2001. When transposed into educational settings, agile pedagogy foregrounds four core values: adaptability over prescriptive teaching methods, collaboration over individual accomplishment, continuous feedback over summative-only assessment, and responsiveness to student needs over rigid curricular adherence (Krehbiel et al., 2017). Empirical studies have demonstrated that integrating agile principles into classroom practice increases student engagement, fosters self-regulated learning, and produces higher quality learning outcomes across multiple disciplines (Krehbiel et al., 2017; Stettina & Hörz, 2015). Notably, Krehbiel and colleagues (2017),

in their seminal work published in the Journal of Effective Teaching, reported that students who participated in agile-based courses perceived greater collaboration, responsibility for their learning, and overall satisfaction with the instructional process.

Despite the growing body of evidence supporting agile pedagogy in STEM and business disciplines, its application within language education contexts — particularly English as a Foreign Language (EFL) — remains underexplored. The predominant focus in the EFL literature has been on method-specific innovations such as flipped classrooms, project-based learning, and technology-enhanced instruction (Birgili et al., 2021; Nurkamto & Sarosa, 2020), while the more holistic, process-oriented philosophy of agile pedagogy has received comparatively little attention. This gap is especially pronounced in the context of Indonesian higher education, where EFL instruction continues to be shaped by examination-oriented cultures, imported teaching methodologies, and institutional constraints that limit pedagogical innovation and teacher autonomy (Zacharias, 2016; Zein, 2017; Frontiers in Education, 2026).

Indonesia's higher education EFL landscape presents a particularly complex terrain for pedagogical reform. Lecturers navigating this landscape must contend with heterogeneous student proficiency levels, diverse disciplinary backgrounds, limited institutional resources, and at times ambiguous curricular guidelines (Hamid et al., 2025). Professional development opportunities are often sporadic, urban-centric, and digitally uneven, leaving regional instructors with limited exposure to global pedagogical innovations (Zein, 2017; Qamariah & Hercz, 2025). Within this context, private Islamic universities such as Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Yogyakarta (UNU Yogyakarta) occupy a distinctive position: they carry the dual mandate of academic excellence and values-based education, which may both afford and constrain the adoption of new pedagogical approaches.

A critical yet underexamined factor in the successful implementation of any pedagogical innovation is the perceptions held by those who are expected to enact it — namely, the lecturers themselves. Research consistently shows that teachers' beliefs and perceptions directly shape whether and how innovations are adopted and sustained in classroom practice (Gao et al., 2024; Renandya et al., 2018). Positive perceptions toward an innovation, including perceived relevance, feasibility, and benefit, are strong predictors of implementation readiness and fidelity (Fix et al., 2021). Conversely, where lecturers perceive pedagogical innovations as conceptually distant, practically burdensome, or institutionally unsupported, uptake is limited regardless of the innovation's empirical merit (Zadorozhnyy et al., 2025). To date, no study has systematically examined how EFL lecturers in Indonesian higher education perceive agile pedagogy — their understanding of its principles, their assessment of its relevance for language teaching, and their readiness to integrate it into their practice.

This study therefore seeks to address this gap by exploring the perceptions of EFL lecturers at the Department of English Language Education (Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris / PBI), UNU Yogyakarta, toward agile pedagogy. The findings are expected to provide a foundational empirical basis for future experimental research, offer practical insights for professional development design in Indonesian higher education, and contribute to the broader theoretical discourse on pedagogical innovation in non-Western, non-STEM educational settings. Specifically, this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What is the level of EFL lecturers' understanding of agile pedagogy concepts and principles? (2) What are EFL lecturers' perceptions of the potential benefits of implementing agile pedagogy in EFL classrooms? (3) What challenges do EFL lecturers perceive in implementing agile pedagogy in their teaching

context at UNU Yogyakarta? (4) What is the readiness of EFL lecturers to adopt agile pedagogy in their instructional practice?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design situated within a descriptive-exploratory framework. Qualitative inquiry was deemed most appropriate given the primary aim of exploring the perceptions, beliefs, and subjective meaning-making of EFL lecturers toward agile pedagogy — a phenomenon that is both contextually embedded and underexplored in the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A descriptive qualitative approach was adopted, following Sandelowski's (2000) assertion that qualitative description is suitable when the research goal is a comprehensive summary of informational content in everyday language, particularly in investigative studies not yet grounded in established theoretical frameworks within the target context.

Research Site and Context

This study was conducted at the Department of English Language Education (Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris / PBI), Faculty of Education, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama (UNU) Yogyakarta, Indonesia. UNU Yogyakarta is a private Islamic university affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama, one of the largest Islamic organizations in the world, situated in Yogyakarta — a city widely recognized as a center of education and culture in Indonesia. The PBI department was selected as the research site because it represents a contextually distinctive setting where EFL instruction is delivered within an institutional culture that integrates Islamic values, community-oriented pedagogy, and national curriculum requirements.

Participants

Participants were EFL lecturers actively teaching at the PBI Department of UNU Yogyakarta at the time of data collection. Purposive sampling was employed, consistent with the principle that qualitative research requires information-rich participants who can speak meaningfully to the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The inclusion criteria were: (1) currently employed as a lecturer at PBI UNU Yogyakarta; (2) holding a minimum qualification of a Master's degree in English Education or a related field; (3) having a minimum of two years of active university-level teaching experience; and (4) willingness to participate voluntarily and provide informed consent. A total of five to eight lecturers were anticipated, consistent with recommendations for descriptive qualitative studies seeking depth over breadth (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data collection continued until informational sufficiency was reached (Malterud et al., 2016).

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary instrument, offering a balance between structural consistency and flexibility to probe emerging ideas (Ruslin et al., 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2006). An interview guide was developed based on the four research questions and informed by relevant frameworks on agile pedagogy (Krehbiel et al., 2017) and teacher perceptions of pedagogical innovation (Fix et al., 2021). The guide consisted of four thematic clusters covering: (1) lecturers' prior knowledge of agile pedagogy; (2) perceived benefits for EFL instruction; (3) perceived challenges and barriers; and (4) self-assessed readiness to adopt agile approaches. The guide was validated through expert review by two academics with expertise in EFL pedagogy and qualitative research, and a pilot interview was conducted prior to data collection.

Each interview was conducted individually, either face-to-face or via video conferencing, lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted in a combination of English and Bahasa Indonesia to allow participants to express themselves most accurately. All sessions were audio-recorded with prior consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Field notes were kept to document contextual observations and initial analytical reflections.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarization with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report. Coding was conducted inductively, allowing codes to emerge from the data rather than being imposed from a predetermined framework. Data analysis was supported by NVivo (version 14) software to facilitate systematic coding, organization, and retrieval of data segments (Nowell et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured through four criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was established through member checking and peer debriefing. Transferability was addressed through thick, contextually rich descriptions of the research site and procedures. Dependability was upheld through a detailed audit trail of all methodological decisions. Confirmability was ensured through researcher reflexivity, with the first researcher acknowledging and documenting potential biases arising from familiarity with the research site.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional authority at UNU Yogyakarta. All participants received a written information sheet and provided written informed consent. Participant identities were anonymized using alphanumeric codes (P1, P2, etc.). Audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely and will be deleted upon study completion in accordance with institutional data protection protocols.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of the interview data yielded four overarching themes that collectively address the four research questions of this study: (1) Limited Familiarity with Agile Pedagogy Concepts; (2) Perceived Potential of Agile Pedagogy for EFL Skills Development; (3) Perceived Challenges to Implementation; and (4) Moderate Readiness with Conditional Willingness to Adopt. Each theme is presented below alongside illustrative participant excerpts and discussed in relation to existing literature.

Theme 1: Limited Familiarity with Agile Pedagogy Concepts

The first and most prominent finding was that the majority of participants had little to no prior knowledge of agile pedagogy as a formal pedagogical framework. When asked to describe their understanding prior to the interview, most participants indicated they had never encountered the concept in either their formal academic training or professional development activities.

> *"I've heard the word 'agile' before, but only in the context of software or technology projects. I didn't know it could be applied to teaching English. (P2)"*
>
> *"Honestly, this is the first time someone has introduced this concept to me in a teaching context. I'm not sure where to begin. (P5)"*

This finding is consistent with the broader literature, which has noted that agile pedagogy remains largely confined to STEM and information systems education, with limited penetration into humanities or language teaching disciplines (Rajagopalan et al., 2024; Stettina & Hörz, 2015). As Krehbiel et al. (2017) observed, adaptation of agile principles to non-STEM settings is still at an early stage. This low familiarity may be attributed to professional development opportunities that are frequently sporadic and disconnected from global innovations in pedagogy (Qamariah & Hercz, 2025; Cirocki & Farrell, 2019), as well as institutional cultures that emphasize compliance with national curriculum standards over exploratory engagement with emerging frameworks (Hamid et al., 2025). Crucially, however, unfamiliarity did not translate into dismissiveness. Upon receiving a brief explanation of agile pedagogy's core principles, most participants expressed genuine curiosity and began drawing spontaneous connections to their own teaching instincts — suggesting that the conceptual distance is bridgeable through targeted professional development.

Theme 2: Perceived Potential of Agile Pedagogy for EFL Skills Development

Despite their limited prior knowledge, participants consistently identified promising applications for agile pedagogy once its principles were explained. The areas of speaking and writing emerged as the domains where lecturers perceived agile approaches to be most applicable and beneficial.

> *"In speaking classes, students need to practice, get feedback, and try again — that's exactly what the sprint cycle sounds like. You do it, you reflect, and you improve. I think it could work really well for presentation skills or discussions. (P1)"*
>
> *"Process writing is not new for us — we know that writing is not one shot. But agile makes it more structured, more transparent. Students can see their own progress in each sprint. That's actually very motivating. (P3)"*

These perceptions are strongly corroborated by empirical literature. Krehbiel et al. (2017) documented that students in agile-based courses reported significantly higher levels of collaboration and felt greater responsibility for their learning — two outcomes directly relevant to the demands of speaking and writing instruction. Research on collaborative learning in EFL contexts similarly demonstrates that structured peer interaction and iterative feedback enhance both speaking fluency and writing quality (Alzubi et al., 2024). The sprint-and-retrospective cycle mirrors the feedback loops that language acquisition theorists identify as central to communicative competence development (Long, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Participants also noted that agile's value of adaptability over prescriptive methods resonated with the challenge of teaching linguistically heterogeneous student cohorts, reflecting what Hamid et al. (2025) identified as a defining challenge of EFL instruction in Indonesia.

Theme 3: Perceived Challenges to Implementation

While participants expressed enthusiasm for agile pedagogy's potential, they articulated a range of challenges clustered around two dominant sub-themes: curricular rigidity and assessment constraints, and workload and time pressures.

Curricular Rigidity and Assessment Constraints. Several participants expressed concern that agile pedagogy's flexible, iterative approach would be difficult to reconcile with the structured, competency-based curriculum framework governing EFL instruction in Indonesian higher education.

> *"We are bound by the RPS [Rencana Pembelajaran Semester]. Every week is mapped out. If I want to change the pace or modify learning activities*

based on students' responses, I have to go through approvals. Agile is flexible, but our system is not. (P2)"

"Assessment is the biggest issue. How do you grade sprint work? How do you ensure fairness if different groups progress at different speeds? Our current grading system doesn't have room for that. (P4)"

These concerns are consistent with recurrent findings in the literature on pedagogical innovation in Indonesian higher education. Hamid et al. (2025) noted that lecturers in resource-constrained institutions gravitate toward structured instructional models because flexible approaches are difficult to justify within top-down accountability frameworks. Research on flipped learning in Indonesian EFL classrooms similarly identified curricular constraints as among the most commonly cited barriers to implementation (Frontiers in Education, 2025). This reflects a systemic challenge that individual lecturers cannot resolve unilaterally, pointing to the need for institutional policy reform alongside pedagogical innovation.

Workload and Time Pressures. A second cluster of challenges related to the professional workload demands placed on EFL lecturers.

"We have Tri Dharma obligations — teaching, research, and community service. Sometimes I teach more than 20 credits per semester. Adding the learning curve for a new method on top of that is really hard. (P1)"

"Without support from the institution — training, reduced teaching load, or at least some guidance — I don't think I can do this alone. (P5)"

These sentiments echo Qamariah and Hercz (2025), who found that Indonesian EFL lecturers' professional development is consistently hampered by competing Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi demands. Creagh et al. (2023) similarly documented that work intensification is a global barrier to pedagogical innovation. For lecturers at smaller private universities like UNU Yogyakarta, where institutional resources are more limited, this challenge is particularly acute (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019).

Theme 4: Moderate Readiness with Conditional Willingness to Adopt

The fourth theme concerned participants' overall readiness to adopt agile pedagogy. Analysis revealed a pattern of moderate readiness — participants were neither wholly resistant nor unconditionally prepared, but expressed tentative willingness contingent upon specific enabling conditions.

"I think I'm ready in terms of attitude — I'm open to trying new things. But in terms of knowledge and preparation, I'm not there yet. I need to learn more before I can teach differently. (P7)"

"If the university provides training and gives us space to experiment — maybe a pilot semester — I would do it. But I can't take that risk alone. (P4)"

The conditions most frequently cited as necessary for adoption included: targeted professional development training on agile pedagogy; institutional support through flexible curriculum guidelines or designated pilot programs; contextually relevant models of agile implementation in EFL; and collegial peer networks for shared learning. This pattern aligns with the concept of staged readiness described by Fix et al. (2021), who proposed that teachers' adoption of innovations follows a trajectory shaped by individual beliefs, contextual enablers, and institutional support. This finding diverges partially from studies in more resource-rich settings, where teacher readiness tends to be higher even without guaranteed institutional backing (Rajagopalan et al., 2024). As Gao et al. (2024) observed, institutional and cultural contexts fundamentally mediate the translation of

positive attitudes into actual practice — a dynamic that is especially pronounced in the context of private Islamic universities in regional Indonesia. Nonetheless, the presence of genuine interest and conditional openness suggests that agile pedagogy adoption is feasible, provided that institutional conditions are intentionally cultivated.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the perceptions of EFL lecturers at the Department of English Language Education (PBI), Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Yogyakarta, toward agile pedagogy across four dimensions: conceptual understanding, perceived benefits, anticipated challenges, and implementation readiness. The findings collectively reveal a coherent and internally consistent picture. EFL lecturers at PBI UNU Yogyakarta are largely unfamiliar with agile pedagogy as a formal framework — a reality reflecting the structural conditions of professional development in Indonesian higher education, where exposure to emerging global pedagogical innovations remains limited at regional private universities. Yet this unfamiliarity is not accompanied by resistance. Once introduced to agile principles, participants readily identified meaningful correspondences with their own pedagogical instincts, particularly in the domains of speaking and writing — two language skills whose development depends precisely on the iterative, feedback-rich, and collaborative processes that agile pedagogy systematizes. Simultaneously, participants perceived substantial structural barriers rooted in curricular rigidity, assessment accountability systems, and the intensifying professional demands of Tri Dharma obligations — barriers that are systemic rather than individual, and which require institutional-level responses rather than individual initiative alone. Their readiness is best characterized as conditional and aspirational: positive in orientation but contingent on enabling conditions that are currently absent.

These findings make a distinct contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, this study extends the emergent literature on agile pedagogy by providing the first empirically grounded account of its reception in an EFL context within an Indonesian Islamic university — challenging the implicit assumption that adoption challenges are primarily motivational and demonstrating that structural and institutional factors are equally determinative, particularly in non-Western, resource-constrained settings. Practically, the findings offer actionable guidance for institutional leaders to create deliberate infrastructure for pedagogical innovation, and for professional development designers to provide context-grounded, EFL-specific training on agile pedagogy. For researchers, this study establishes a foundational empirical baseline from which more interventionist designs — experimental studies, curriculum development research, or longitudinal observation — can productively proceed. Future research should seek to replicate and extend these findings across multiple institutional types and Indonesian regions, and to develop longitudinal studies that track how perceptions evolve following agile pedagogy training and actual classroom implementation.

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