

Local culture-based English language teaching for young learners: A systematic literature review

Eko Heriyanto^{1*}, Sri Wuli Fitriati², Zulfa Sakhiyya²

¹ Department of English Education, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Humanities, Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang, **Indonesia**

² English Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, **Indonesia**

*Corresponding Author: ekoheriyanto@unimus.ac.id

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Abstract: This study examines the integration of local culture into English language teaching (ELT) for young learners through a systematic literature review (SLR). Following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, peer-reviewed studies published between 2013 and 2023 were identified from Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar databases. The initial search yielded 37 articles, of which 10 met the inclusion criteria and were selected for in-depth analysis. The selected studies were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's framework to identify recurring patterns in the implementation of local culture integration in ELT. The thematic synthesis revealed five major themes: pedagogical benefits, culturally responsive teaching practices, cultural identity and intercultural awareness, teacher readiness and professional challenges, and curriculum and policy implications. Across the reviewed studies, integrating local culture into ELT was found to support students' motivation, engagement, communicative competence, and classroom participation by connecting language learning to familiar socio-cultural contexts. The findings further showed that contextual teaching practices, including the use of local stories, games, and culturally relevant materials, contributed to more meaningful learning experiences while fostering cultural identity and intercultural awareness. However, several challenges emerged, including limited teacher preparedness, difficulties in designing culturally responsive learning activities, insufficient contextual teaching resources, and the continued dominance of foreign cultural content in ELT materials. Overall, the review highlights the importance of teacher professional development, contextualized learning resources, and curriculum support in promoting culturally responsive ELT practices for young learners.

Keywords: culturally responsive ELT; English language teaching; local culture; systematic literature review; young learners

1. Introduction

The integration of local culture into English language teaching (ELT) has become an increasingly important issue in multilingual and multicultural educational settings. English is now seen not only as a foreign language for international communication but also as a tool through which learners negotiate identity, culture, and social interaction in both local and global contexts (Fang, 2016; Norton & Kramsch, 2013). In many educational environments, English teaching materials still primarily reflect Western cultural values and viewpoints, creating a gap between classroom learning and students' socio-cultural realities (Shin et al., 2011; Yuliantari & Huda, 2023). This concern is especially significant for young learners because their experiences are deeply shaped by familiar cultural surroundings and contextual understanding (Pinter, 2017). Therefore, incorporating local culture into

ELT is vital for developing meaningful, contextually relevant learning experiences for young students ([Prastiwi, 2013](#)).

Previous studies consistently emphasize the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in language education. Culturally responsive teaching connects students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and backgrounds with classroom instruction to enhance learning effectiveness ([Gay, 2018](#)). It helps students engage more deeply and participate cognitively during learning activities ([Hammond, 2014](#)). In the context of English language teaching, culturally responsive practices encourage students to participate more actively by aligning learning materials with their social and cultural experiences ([Ratri & Tyas, 2022](#)). The materials grounded in local culture improved students' communicative competence and classroom participation, as learners felt more familiar with the learning content ([Nambiar et al., 2018](#)).

Many studies have shown that incorporating local culture into English learning activities improves teaching outcomes. Project-based activities related to students' local culture can boost collaboration, classroom interaction, and critical thinking skills ([Kurniadi & Cahyaningrum, 2023](#)). In addition, the use of contextual English materials helps students understand vocabulary and communicative expressions more effectively because the learning content reflects their daily experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds ([Ratri & Tyas, 2022](#)). Language teaching materials that are localized and adapted to learners' cultural contexts also make learning more relevant, meaningful, and engaging ([Tomlinson, 2012](#)). Furthermore, contextualized language instruction enables students to connect English learning with real-life communication practices ([Respati et al., 2024](#)). These findings indicate that culturally responsive ELT positively contributes to students' motivation, participation, and learning outcomes.

Another key issue discussed in the literature concerns cultural identity and intercultural awareness. English language teaching should not only focus on linguistic competence but also support students' understanding of cultural diversity and intercultural communication ([Byram, 2020](#)). Young learners need opportunities to appreciate their own cultural backgrounds while developing awareness of other cultures in global communication contexts. Intercultural communicative competence can be developed more effectively when students learn English through familiar cultural contexts ([Sadeghpour & Sharifian, 2019](#)). In multilingual societies, English language teaching should balance global communication goals with local cultural representation ([Rose & Galloway, 2019](#)). Integrating local culture into ELT can therefore help students maintain their local identity while developing global perspectives and intercultural understanding.

Despite these benefits, implementing culturally responsive ELT still faces several challenges. Previous studies often identify teacher readiness and the availability of contextual teaching materials as major obstacles ([Mutiah et al., 2020](#); [Richards, 2017](#)). Many teachers still rely heavily on standardized textbooks that focus on foreign cultural content rather than local cultural representation ([Shin et al., 2011](#)). In some educational settings, teachers also find it difficult to choose appropriate teaching strategies and effectively incorporate cultural content into language instruction ([Respati et al., 2024](#)). As a result, students may struggle to connect their English learning to their social and cultural environments. These findings suggest that successful implementation of culturally responsive ELT needs curriculum support, teacher professional development, and contextualized learning resources.

Several previous systematic and scoping reviews have examined issues related to culturally responsive pedagogy, intercultural communication, and contextual language learning. The importance of contextual and culturally responsive language education policies in multilingual educational settings has also been widely emphasized in recent studies ([Kassymova et al., 2026](#)). In addition, several review studies have explored the relationship between language learning and cultural identity, particularly in

higher education and multilingual classrooms (Fang, 2016; Norton & Kramsch, 2013). However, few studies have specifically examined how local cultural integration supports English language teaching for young learners across different educational contexts. Existing studies also tend to focus mainly on cultural representation in teaching materials rather than analysing broader pedagogical patterns, teacher-related challenges, and curriculum implications. Therefore, a more targeted systematic review is necessary to synthesize recurring findings and identify emerging trends related to local culture integration in ELT for young learners.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to systematically review recent research on integrating local culture into English language teaching for young learners. The study concentrates on identifying pedagogical benefits, culturally responsive teaching practices, teacher-related challenges, and implications for curriculum development and English teaching methods. Through a systematic synthesis of the existing literature, this study is expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive, contextual, and culturally responsive ELT practices that support meaningful learning experiences for young learners.

2. Methods

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to examine the integration of local culture in English language teaching (ELT) for young learners. A systematic literature review was selected because it enables researchers to synthesize findings from multiple studies in a transparent and organized manner (Snyder, 2019). The PRISMA framework was used to guide the processes of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final selection of relevant studies (Page et al., 2021). This study aimed to identify the pedagogical benefits, teaching practices, challenges, and curriculum implications of culturally responsive ELT for young learners.

The literature search was conducted across three major academic databases: Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected because they contain a broad range of peer-reviewed publications related to education, linguistics, and English language teaching. The search focused on studies published between 2013 and 2023 to ensure inclusion of recent and relevant literature. Several keywords and search combinations were applied during the search process, including “local culture in ELT,” “culturally responsive English language teaching,” “English language teaching for young learners,” and “local culture-based learning.” Boolean operators such as AND and OR were used to refine the search results and improve study relevance (Xiao & Watson, 2019). The initial search identified 37 peer-reviewed articles related to local culture integration in ELT.

After the identification stage, duplicate articles were removed. The remaining studies were screened using title and abstract review to determine their relevance to the study's objectives. Articles that did not focus on English language teaching, young learners, or the integration of local culture were excluded. A full-text review was subsequently conducted to evaluate the methodological quality and relevance of the selected studies. The inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2013 and 2023 that discussed the integration of local culture into ELT for young learners or primary-level education. Only articles written in English were included in the review. Meanwhile, conference proceedings, book chapters, unpublished manuscripts, and studies unrelated to culturally responsive ELT were excluded. After applying these criteria, 10 articles met all eligibility requirements and were selected for in-depth analysis.

The selected studies were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is useful for systematically identifying recurring patterns and themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In

this study, each article was reviewed multiple times to identify recurring concepts, teaching practices, and pedagogical challenges related to the integration of local culture in ELT. The findings were coded and categorized into several major themes, including pedagogical benefits, culturally responsive teaching materials, intercultural awareness, teacher readiness, and curriculum implications. To ensure the credibility of the review process, the quality of the selected studies was evaluated based on methodological rigor, relevance to the topic, and clarity of findings. The PRISMA flow diagram was also used to present the screening and selection process systematically and transparently.

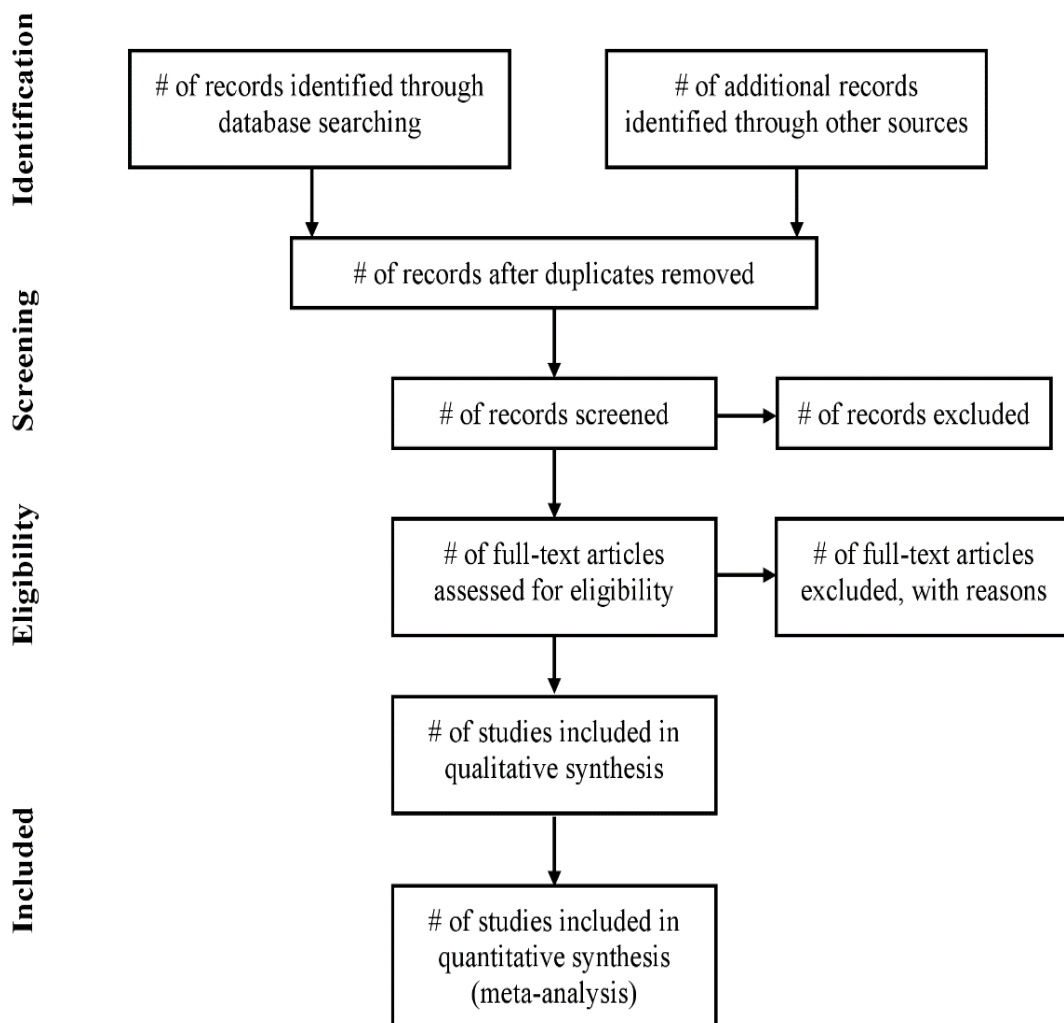


Figure 1. Flow Diagram of Literature Review using PRISMA (Page et al., 2021)

3. Results

The literature search process identified 37 peer-reviewed articles from Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar databases. After removing duplicate articles and conducting title and abstract screening, several studies were excluded because they did not focus on English language teaching, young learners, or the integration of local culture. The remaining articles were reviewed through full-text assessment to evaluate their relevance and methodological quality. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 10 articles were selected for in-depth analysis as summarized in Table 1. They focused on various aspects of integrating local culture into English language teaching for young learners across different educational contexts.

Table 1. Characteristics of selected studies

Research focus	Method	Main findings	Ref.
Challenges in teaching English to young learners	Qualitative review	Identified pedagogical and contextual challenges in TEYL practices	(Copland et al., 2014)
ELT challenges for young learners	Case study	Highlighted curriculum, policy, and teacher-related challenges	(Garton, 2014)
Local culture integration in ELT materials	Experimental study	Local culture-based materials improved communicative competence	(Nambiar et al., 2018)
Locally tailored ELT textbooks	Developmental research	Contextual materials increased learning relevance and engagement	(Ratri & Tyas, 2022)
Project-based learning and local culture	Qualitative study	Improved collaboration, interaction, and critical thinking	(Kurmiadi & Cahyaningrum, 2023)
Cultural context in English teaching	Qualitative study	Local culture supported contextualized language learning	(Procel et al., 2023)
Local culture integration in ELT	Systematic review	Improved students' attitudes, engagement, and cultural awareness	(Ratri et al., 2024)
Teacher readiness in TEYL	Survey study	Teachers experienced difficulties in culturally responsive teaching	(Mutiah et al., 2020)
Game-based learning for vocabulary mastery	Experimental study	Interactive learning activities improved vocabulary learning	(Fidyaningrum et al., 2021)
Potential of local culture in ELT	Response paper	Emphasized the importance of local cultural representation in ELT	(Yusniawati & Lestari, 2021)

The findings revealed several recurring themes related to the implementation of culturally responsive ELT for young learners. One major theme was the pedagogical benefits of integrating local culture into English learning activities. Most studies reported that students showed higher motivation, stronger classroom engagement, and more active participation when learning materials reflected their local cultural backgrounds and daily experiences. Contextual learning activities also helped students understand vocabulary, communicative expressions, and classroom instructions more effectively because the learning content was familiar and meaningful to them.

Another important finding related to the use of culturally responsive teaching materials. Several studies highlighted that local stories, traditional games, songs, and community-based learning activities created more interactive and student-centered learning environments. Students appeared more confident when discussing topics related to their own social and cultural experiences. The reviewed studies also showed that integrating local culture into ELT supported the development of communicative competence and intercultural awareness among young learners.

In addition, the findings identified several challenges in integrating local culture into ELT. Teacher readiness was frequently mentioned as a major issue. Many teachers experienced difficulties in designing culturally responsive classroom activities and adapting learning materials to students' cultural contexts. Limited contextual teaching resources and the continued dominance of foreign cultural content in English textbooks also became recurring challenges across the reviewed studies. Some

studies further emphasized the need for curriculum support and professional teacher development to improve the implementation of culturally responsive ELT practices. The thematic analysis identified several key categories, including pedagogical benefits, culturally responsive teaching materials, cultural identity and intercultural awareness, teacher readiness, and curriculum implications. These themes show that integrating local culture not only enhances students' language skills but also makes learning more meaningful and relevant for young learners. The themes were derived using a thematic analysis method adapted from [Braun & Clarke \(2022\)](#) framework for detecting common patterns in qualitative data. The reviewed studies were coded and grouped based on similarities in teaching practices, learning outcomes, teacher issues, and curriculum implications for integrating local culture into ELT. This process produced five main themes as reported in Table 2 that highlight the most common patterns and issues found across the selected research.

Table 2. Thematic synthesis of reviewed studies on local culture integration in ELT for young learners

Theme	Main findings	Discussion focus	Ref.
Pedagogical Benefits	Local culture integration improved students' motivation, engagement, participation, and classroom interaction.	Enhancement of motivation, participation, and meaningful learning	(Copland et al., 2014 ; Kurniadi & Cahyaningrum, 2023 ; Nambiar et al., 2018 ; Procel et al., 2023 ; Ratri et al., 2024 ; Ratri & Tyas, 2022)
Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices	Local stories, games, culturally relevant materials, and contextual activities created more meaningful learning experiences.	Development and use of contextualized ELT materials	(Fidyaningrum et al., 2021 ; Kurniadi & Cahyaningrum, 2023 ; Nambiar et al., 2018 ; Procel et al., 2023 ; Ratri & Tyas, 2022)
Cultural Identity and Intercultural Awareness	Students developed a stronger cultural identity and intercultural understanding through local culture integration.	Balancing local identity with global communication	(Nambiar et al., 2018 ; Procel et al., 2023 ; Ratri et al., 2024 ; Yusniawati & Lestari, 2021)
Teacher Readiness and Professional Challenges	Teachers faced difficulties designing culturally responsive activities and selecting appropriate contextual materials.	Teacher competence and professional development	(Copland et al., 2014 ; Garton, 2014 ; Mutiah et al., 2020 ; Yusniawati & Lestari, 2021)
Curriculum and Policy Implications	Curriculum and educational policies should support contextual and culturally responsive ELT practices.	Institutional and curriculum support for contextual ELT	(Garton, 2014 ; Procel et al., 2023 ; Ratri et al., 2024 ; Ratri & Tyas, 2022 ; Yusniawati & Lestari, 2021)

4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that integrating local culture into English language teaching provides important pedagogical benefits for young learners. Across the reviewed studies, students consistently showed higher motivation, stronger classroom engagement, and more active participation

when English learning materials reflected their social and cultural experiences. These findings support the argument that contextual learning helps students connect classroom instruction with real-life situations, making language learning more meaningful and relevant (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2014). In culturally responsive classrooms, students are not only language learners but also active participants, with their cultural backgrounds serving as valuable learning resources.

The reviewed studies also indicate that integration into local culture contributes significantly to students' communicative competence and confidence in using English. When students discuss familiar cultural topics, they tend to participate more actively because the learning content is closely connected to their daily experiences. This finding aligns with previous studies emphasizing that culturally relevant learning materials improve students' interaction and communication skills (Nambiar et al., 2018; Ratri et al., 2024). In addition, localized teaching materials increase learning relevance because students can more easily understand contextual examples and communicative situation (Tomlinson, 2012). Integrating local culture into ELT can therefore create more student-centered and communicative learning environments for young learners.

Another important issue highlighted in this review concerns cultural identity and intercultural awareness. English language teaching should not only develop linguistic competence but also help students understand cultural diversity and intercultural communication (Byram, 2020). The reviewed studies revealed that integrating local culture into ELT enables students to appreciate their own traditions, values, and identities while learning English as an international language. Language learning is closely connected to identity formation and intercultural communication, particularly in multilingual educational contexts (Fang, 2016). In addition, English learning in multilingual societies should maintain a balance between global communication and local cultural representation (Rose & Galloway, 2019). Through culturally responsive ELT, students can develop intercultural awareness without losing connection to their local cultural identity.

The findings also revealed that contextual teaching materials play an important role in improving learning experiences for young learners. Learning activities based on local stories, games, songs, and community practices created more engaging classroom environments because students were already familiar with the cultural content. Previous studies have similarly shown that contextualized language instruction improves comprehension and classroom participation among young learners (Fidyaningrum et al., 2021; Pinter, 2017). In addition, culturally responsive teaching materials help students reduce anxiety by connecting English learning to familiar social situations and cultural experiences. This indicates that local culture integration can strengthen both emotional engagement and language comprehension during the learning process.

Despite these positive findings, the reviewed studies also highlighted several pedagogical challenges. Teacher readiness was one of the most frequently discussed issues in the literature. Many teachers still face difficulties integrating local culture into English learning activities because they lack pedagogical training and practical guidance in culturally responsive teaching (Mutiah et al., 2020). Moreover, effective language teaching requires teachers to adapt instructional materials and classroom strategies to students' educational and socio-cultural contexts (Richards, 2017). However, many English teachers continue to rely heavily on standardized textbooks that prioritize foreign cultural content over local cultural representation (Shin et al., 2011). As a result, students may struggle to connect classroom learning with their own daily experiences.

Another challenge identified in the reviewed studies concerns the limited availability of contextual learning resources and institutional support. Several studies reported that curriculum policies often emphasize standardized English competence while paying limited attention to local cultural integration

(Procel et al., 2023; Yusniawati & Lestari, 2021). The importance of culturally responsive language education policies in multilingual educational settings has also been highlighted in recent studies (Kassymova et al., 2026). These findings suggest that curriculum developers, policymakers, and educational institutions need to support the development of more inclusive and context-sensitive ELT materials and learning practices.

The reviewed studies collectively suggest that culturally responsive ELT should be viewed as an essential component of English language teaching for young learners. Local culture integration not only improves students' language learning outcomes but also strengthens cultural awareness, social participation, and intercultural understanding. This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing that culturally responsive pedagogy creates more equitable and meaningful educational experiences for diverse learners (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2014). In this context, local culture functions not merely as additional classroom content but as a pedagogical bridge connecting English learning with students' identities, experiences, and socio-cultural realities.

This systematic literature review demonstrates that integrating local culture into ELT contributes to meaningful, contextually relevant English learning for young learners. Across the reviewed studies, culturally responsive ELT practices consistently supported students' motivation, communicative competence, classroom participation, and intercultural awareness. At the same time, the findings reveal the importance of teacher professional development, contextual teaching materials, and supportive curriculum policies for effectively implementing culturally responsive ELT. Therefore, English language teaching for young learners should continue to promote inclusive and culturally relevant learning practices that support both local identity and global communication competence.

5. Conclusion

This systematic literature review shows that incorporating local culture into English language teaching for young learners offers important pedagogical and cultural advantages. The reviewed studies consistently found that culturally responsive ELT practices boost students' motivation, engagement, communicative skills, and cultural awareness by linking language learning to students' everyday experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds. The findings also indicate that integrating local culture helps develop intercultural understanding while enhancing students' cultural identity in global communication settings. However, several challenges persist, including limited teacher preparedness, a lack of suitable contextual teaching materials, and the continued predominance of foreign cultural content in ELT resources. Therefore, teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers should work together to create more inclusive, contextual, and culturally responsive English learning resources and teaching strategies that promote meaningful and sustainable learning experiences for young learners.

Author's declaration

Author contribution

Eko Heriyanto: Conceptualization, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Writing – original draft. **Sri Wuli Fitriati:** Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. **Zulfa Sakhiyya:** Validation, Writing – review & editing.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Ethical clearance

Ethical approval was not required because this study was based solely on published literature and did not involve human participants.

AI statement

The authors declare that artificial intelligence tools were used only for language refinement and proofreading assistance. The authors take full responsibility for the content, accuracy, analysis, interpretation, and integrity of the manuscript. No AI tool was used to generate research data, conduct analysis, or replace the authors' scholarly judgment.

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