



Indonesian EFL Teachers' Strategies for Integrating Character Values and Local Culture: A Review of Implementation and Learning Outcomes

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Abstract

This systematic review synthesizes findings from 23 empirical studies (2023–2025) on how Indonesian EFL teachers integrate local culture and character values into their pedagogy or instructional strategy, following the PRISMA protocol. It addresses a gap in the systematic consolidation of evidence regarding the methods and effectiveness of such integration. The analysis reveals that teachers predominantly utilize local folktales (19 out of 23 studies) as the primary medium for embedding local culture and character values, with research concentrated at the Junior High School level. Vocabulary achievement emerged as the most frequently measured learning outcome, highlighting its role as a foundational skill effectively supported by narrative contexts. The study provides a framework linking the narrative structures of folktales to pedagogical strategies for promoting cultural and character education into EFL classroom. A key practical implication is the need for targeted professional development programs to train teachers in systematically leveraging local folklore. This review's primary contribution is establishing a foundation for future empirical research to quantitatively assess the efficacy of culturally integrated EFL approaches, thereby bridging national educational mandates with classroom practice.

Keywords: Character Values; EFL Teacher; Folktales; Instructional Strategy; Local Culture; Vocabulary Achievement

Introduction

Indonesia's national education philosophy, deeply rooted in the teachings of Ki Hadjar Dewantara (KHD), envisions education as a holistic process that nurture not only intellectual capability, but also character value and cultural identity (Fazira

et al., 2024). Student character building is an integral focus, not only on cognitive aspects but also attitudes, values, and social skills (Pridar, 2025). Within this national education philosophy, the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) occupies a distinctive and complex position. While English functions as a crucial medium for international communication and access to global knowledge (Bhandari & Ghimire, 2025), it simultaneously presents a challenge to maintaining learners' cultural roots and national character (Ratri et al., 2025). Therefore, integrating character education principles and cultural values into EFL based Indonesian Curriculum instruction is considered essential to ensure that language competence develops in harmony with the nation's philosophical education (Wijaya, 2024), reflecting KHD's ideal of nurturing learners who are intellectually capable, ethically grounded, and culturally rooted.

Integration strategies refer to the pedagogical methods and instructional designs employed by educators to embed character values and local cultural elements into learning materials and classroom activities (Ahmadjonovna, 2024). These strategies may include the adaptation of existing textbooks to incorporate culturally relevant examples, the creation of learning modules based on local folktales or community practices, and the design of reflective projects that encourage students to connect moral values with their cultural experiences. For instance, in language education, embedding culturally relevant materials and moral values into lessons supports both linguistic competence and character building, with pre-teaching rituals, interactive activities, and reflective assessments reinforcing ethical consciousness (Sukarno & Riyadini, 2024). Character Values and Local Culture constitute the core content integrated into the curriculum, encompassing the principles of national education philosophy.

Implementation of integrated character values and local culture in EFL teaching materials is achieved through curriculum design, textbook content, and classroom activities that reflect students' cultural backgrounds and character value. Teachers play a key role by selecting or developing materials that resonate with local and character value (Ratri et al., 2025). Empirical studies by (Hasnah et al., 2024) show that students exposed to such materials demonstrate better understanding of both English and their own culture. Implementation and learning outcomes describe the practical realization of these integration strategies in educational settings, focusing on factors such as teacher preparedness, institutional support, and contextual challenges which leads to challenges remain, such as limited availability of locally relevant materials and the need for teacher training to effectively implement these strategies (Nirwana & Damayanti, 2025; Ratri et al., 2025).

Understanding the interaction and complexity of integrating character values and local culture within the Indonesian EFL classroom is a critical strategy for preserving cultural identity and local wisdom in an era of rapid globalization (Satriani & Cahyono, 2024; Wijaya, 2024). However, challenges persist, including limited resources, diverse student backgrounds, and the dominance of Western

cultural elements in English textbooks, which can undermine local values and identity (Sudartini, 2024). Furthermore, embedding moral and cultural dimensions within EFL instruction becomes a strategic venue for addressing the nation's modern moral crises and strengthening character education in ways that are relevant, contextual, and implicitly woven into language learning. These approaches not only enhance students' language proficiency but also build cultural awareness, intercultural competence, and a strong sense of national identity (Kurniawan et al., 2024). Therefore, investigating how these variables interact is not only pedagogically valuable but also offering pathways to cultivate language competent yet culturally grounded individuals through the EFL curriculum.

The purpose of this Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of how character values and local culture are integrated into EFL instruction based on previous studies. Through this structured analysis, the SLR intends to establish a coherent understanding of current practices, thereby guiding future research and pedagogical innovation in value- and culture-based EFL education in Indonesia. Following that, the specific objectives of this SLR are:

1. To identify the local cultural content and character values that are integrated into teaching materials by Indonesian EFL teachers.
2. To analyze the medium of teaching materials used by Indonesian EFL teachers to integrate character values and local culture.
3. To map the most frequently learning outcomes examined on students' English achievement.

Method

This systematic literature review was conducted adhering to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Page et al., 2021) to ensure a structured process.

Article Search Strategy

A systematic search was performed to locate relevant empirical studies published between 2023-2025. Google Scholar was the primary database which coverage of peer-reviewed literature in education. Key search terms included:

"Indonesian EFL teachers," "teaching materials," "local culture," "cultural content," "character values," "integration," "instructional strategies," and "learning outcomes."

Article Selection Criteria

The retrieved records were screened against pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine their eligibility for the final review. The application of these criteria is summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
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Publication Year	2023-2025	Published before 2023
Language	English or Bahasa	Non-English/Bahasa publications
Subject	Indonesian EFL Teachers	Teachers of other subjects or from other countries
Study Focus	Empirical research	Literature review
Document Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Non-peer-reviewed literature
Access	Open access	Full text unavailable

Article Selection Process

The selection process, adapted from the PRISMA flow diagram. The records were imported into Zotero reference management software for systematic handling

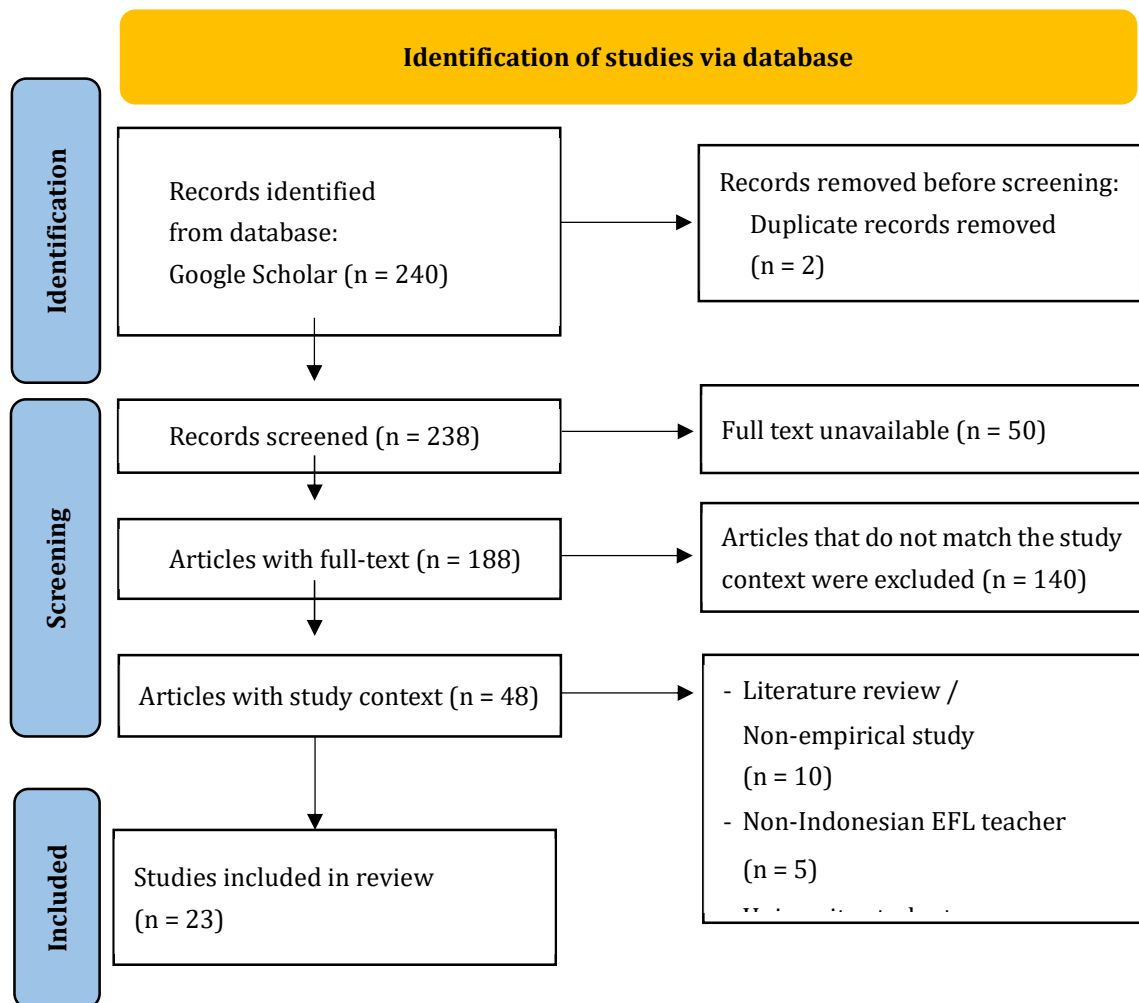


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Article Selection

Results and Discussion

The analysis proceeded in two concurrent stages. First, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify, categorize, and synthesize emergent themes and patterns related to the types of local cultural content, character values, and pedagogical strategies. Second, a frequency analysis was performed to quantitatively map the most prevalent strategies, mediums, and reported learning outcomes.

Types of Local Cultural Content and Character Values Integrated into Teaching Materials by Indonesian EFL Teachers

Based on the synthesis of the provided studies, Indonesian EFL teachers integrate a diverse range of local cultural content into their teaching materials, primarily leveraging folktales, local wisdom, and tangible cultural elements. Folktales and indigenous narratives from specific regions, such as Banten, Nias, Gorontalo, and Maluku, are the most frequently utilized resources (Daeli et al., 2025; Katili, 2023; Manuhutu et al., 2025; Rosnaningsih et al., 2025). Beyond narratives, teachers also incorporate cultural products like traditional foods, dances, and tourist destinations, as well as cultural practices such as customs and religious traditions, to create relatable and engaging learning contexts (Azahary & Fatimah, 2024; Natasya & Kembaren, 2025; Yuliantari & Huda, 2023).

The character values integrated through this local content are multifaceted, aiming to build students' moral, social, and civic character. These values are often explicitly drawn from the moral lessons within folktales, emphasizing respect, honesty, responsibility, and filial piety (Sadri & Alvindi, 2025; Susilo & Azizah, 2024). Furthermore, the integration is strategically aligned with broader national educational goals, particularly the Pancasila Student Profile and the national curriculum's emphasis on character building (Fathan et al., 2023; Istiqomah et al., 2025; Sa'dhiyah, 2024). This results in the promotion of values such as religious moderation, tolerance, critical thinking, environmental care, mutual cooperation, and national cultural pride, thereby fostering well-rounded individuals who are both cognitively skilled and culturally grounded (Manuhutu et al., 2025; Putri, 2023; Sujarwo et al., 2023; Umar et al., 2024).

The following figure (as also presented in appendix 1) quantifies the distribution of content types across the 23 reviewed studies. The data clearly illustrates that folktales, legends, and indigenous narratives serve as the primary medium in the vast majority of implementations of local culture and character value.

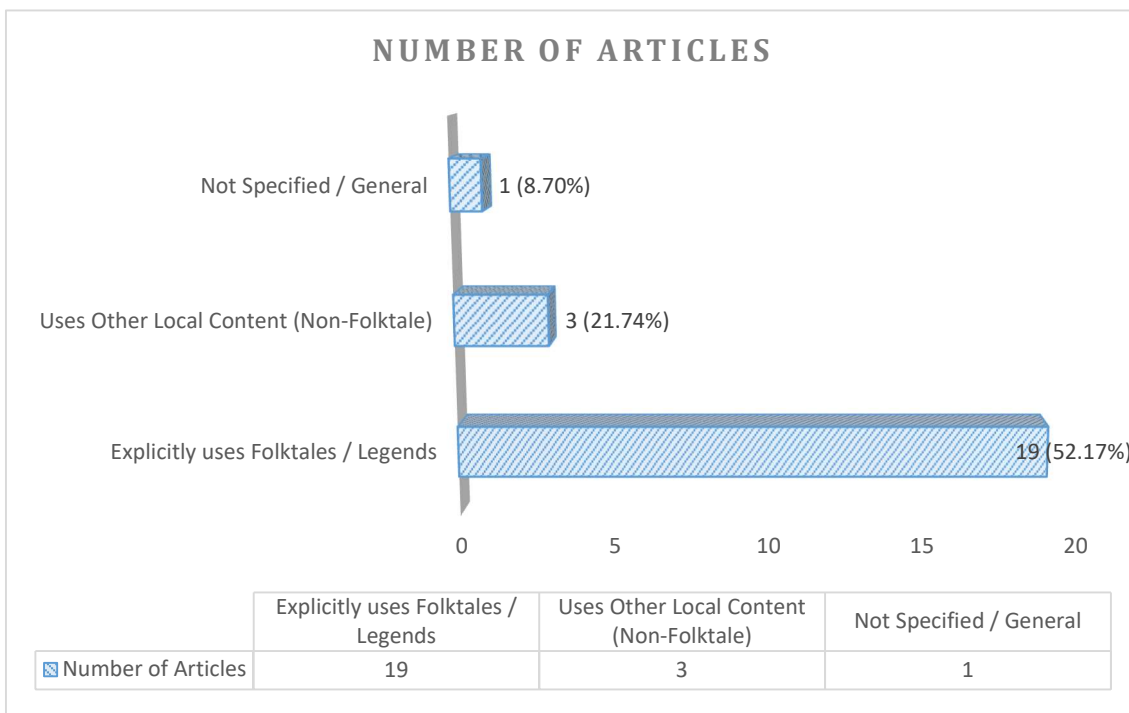


Figure 2. Use of Folktales as Local Cultural and Character Value in the Reviewed Studies

The Medium of Teaching Materials

The following figure (as also presented in appendix 2) shows the medium of teaching materials used by Indonesian EFL teachers to integrate character values and local culture in the previous studies.

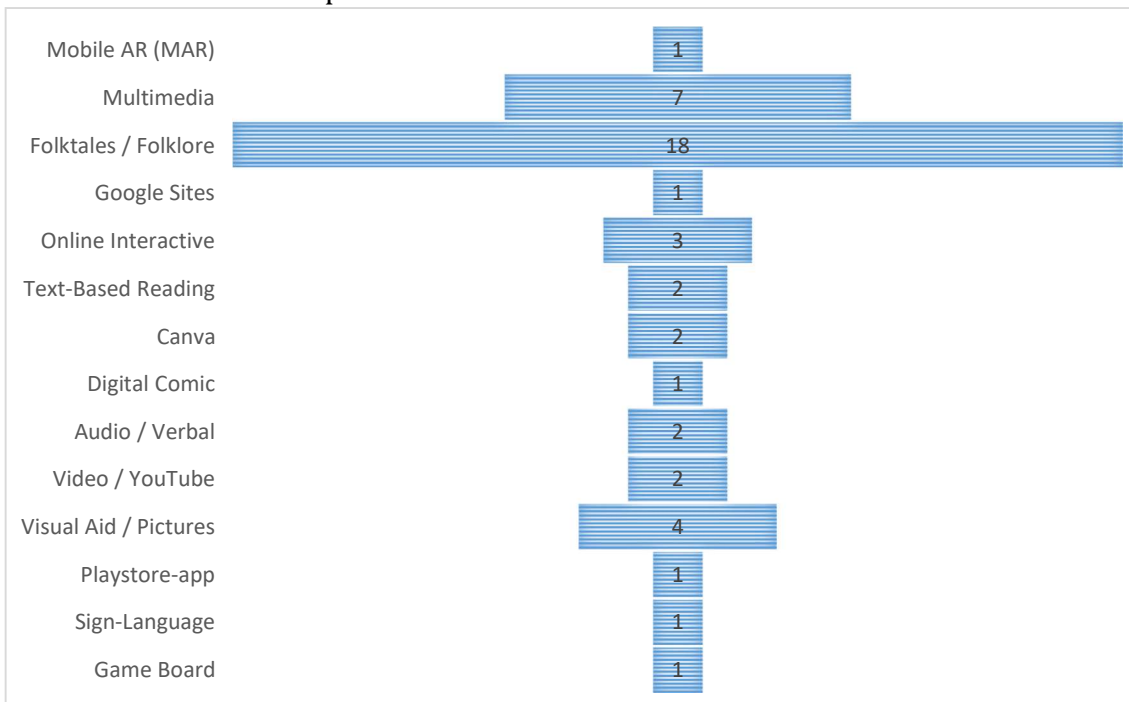


Figure 3. Medium of teaching materials

Based on the synthesis of the provided research, Indonesian EFL teachers predominantly utilize folktales or folklore as the primary medium for integrating character values and local culture into their teaching materials. A significant majority of the studies, for instance, (Azahary & Fatimah, 2024; Daeli et al., 2025; Istiqomah et al., 2025; Lestari et al., 2025; Lomi et al., 2024; Mappatanga et al., 2025; Rosnaningsih et al., 2025; Sadri & Alvindi, 2025; Susilo & Azizah, 2024; Tineh et al., 2023) explicitly employ local narratives such as "Malin Kundang," "Lauwomaru" from Nias, and Banten folktales. These stories serve as authentic cultural vessels, inherently embedding moral, social, and ethical lessons, which makes them an ideal and frequently chosen resource for concurrently teaching language and character.

To enhance engagement and effectiveness, teachers are increasingly leveraging digital platforms and technology to deliver these culturally rich narratives. Strategies include developing Digital Comics (Wardani, 2024), Mobile Augmented Reality (AR) Storybooks (Rosnaningsih et al., 2025), Canva-based narratives (Hardina et al., 2024), and materials hosted on Google Sites structured with the PQ4R method (Istiqomah et al., 2025). The integration of technological tools like AR, which triggers animations and audio, or digital applications for textbooks (Mariani & Basuki, 2023), creates an immersive and interactive learning experience. This digital transformation helps make the traditional folktales more accessible and appealing to the digital-native generation while preserving their cultural and moral essence.

The combination of folklore as core content and technology as a delivery medium creates a pedagogical model. This approach aligns with Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Project-Based Learning (PJBL) frameworks, enabling students to engage with local wisdom through modern mediums (Azahary & Fatimah, 2024; Lestari et al., 2025). Through activities such as retelling stories, analyzing moral dilemmas, creating digital narratives, and participating in reflective discussions, students do not only improve their language skills but also internalize character values such as respect, honesty, environmental care, and tolerance, thereby fostering both cultural identity and moral development (Manuhutu et al., 2025; Sujarwo et al., 2023; Yuliantari & Huda, 2023).

Reported Impact of Integrating Character Values and Local Culture on Students' English Learning Outcomes

Based on the synthesis of the provided research data, the integration of character values and local culture into English language teaching is reported to positively influence a range of students' English learning outcomes. One of the most frequently examined language skills are speaking skills and reading comprehension. Speaking skills, often broken down into components such as pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and grammar, were a primary focus in multiple studies (Daeli et al., 2025; Mappatanga et al., 2025; Rosnaningsih et al., 2025; Sujarwo et al., 2023). Similarly, reading comprehension was a commonly measured

outcome (Hardina et al., 2024; Istiqomah et al., 2025; Katili, 2023; Putri, 2023). Beyond discrete language skills, the integration also consistently fostered broader educational outcomes, including enhanced critical thinking skills (Lestari et al., 2025; Rosnaningsih et al., 2025; Umar et al., 2024; Wardani, 2024), increased student engagement and motivation (Hardina et al., 2024; Sadri & Alvindi, 2025; Susilo & Azizah, 2024; Yuliantari & Huda, 2023), and the development of cultural awareness and character values such as tolerance, empathy, and moral literacy (Susilo & Azizah, 2024; Umar et al., 2024; Yuliantari & Huda, 2023). The most predominantly measured outcome is Vocabulary achievement, examined in 30.4% of the studies, underscoring its continued recognition as a foundational element of language proficiency.

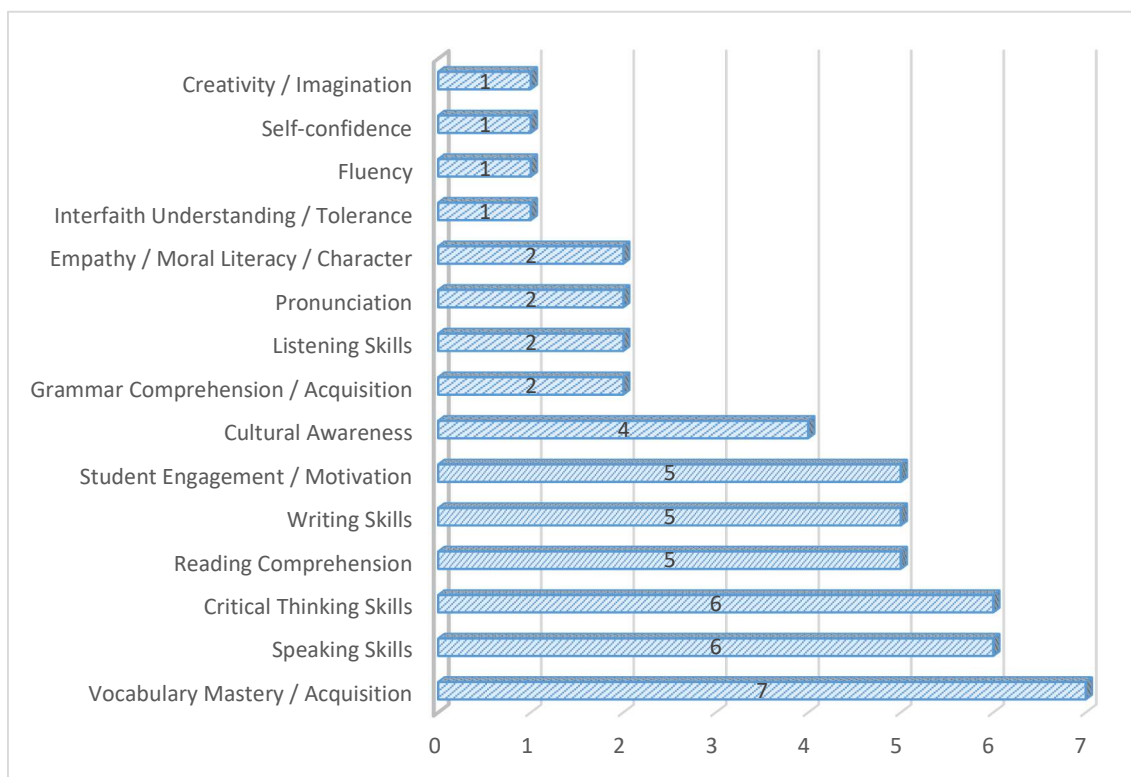


Figure 4. Number of Articles by Measured Students' Learning Outcomes

Regarding the research samples, the most frequently studied group consists of junior high school students (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama*), as evidenced in numerous studies (Daeli et al., 2025; Hardina et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2025; Lomi et al., 2024; Mappatanga et al., 2025; Saputri et al., 2024; Susilo & Azizah, 2024; Tineh et al., 2023; Wardani, 2024). The sample sizes in these studies are typically small to medium, often ranging from a single class of approximately 25-35 students to a slightly larger cohort of around 50 students split into groups. Other educational levels, such as elementary (*Sekolah Dasar*) and special needs schools (SMALB), were also represented, but less frequently. A small number of studies diverged by focusing on pre-service or in-service teachers as the primary sample

to analyze teaching materials rather than direct student outcomes (Azhary & Fatimah, 2024; Natasya & Kembaren, 2025; Sa'dhiyah, 2024). Percentages are calculated from the total of 23 articles. The categories "Pre-service Teachers" and "Educators/Instructors" have been excluded as the research focus. Junior High School Students level remain the most frequently used research sample, appearing in 12 articles (52.17%). Meanwhile, Elementary School Students are the second most common, appearing in 5 articles (21.74%).

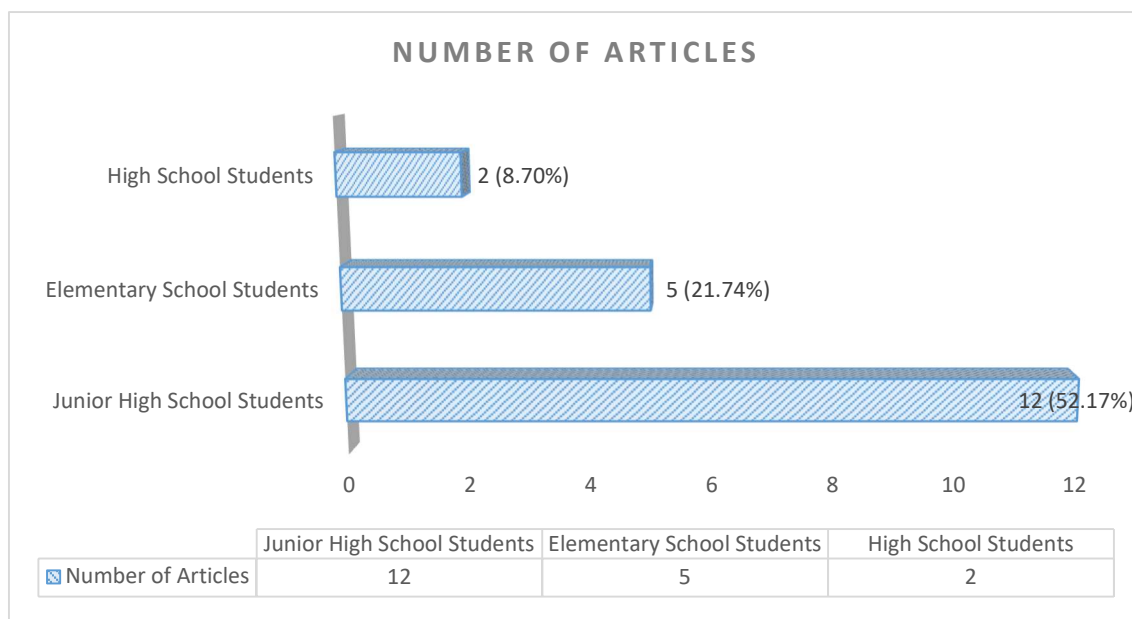


Figure 5. Number of Articles by Research Sample

Conclusion

Based on the review, it is concluded that Indonesian EFL teachers primarily integrate local culture and character values into their teaching by using folktales, which serve as a rich medium for conveying character education value. The analysis of teaching strategies reveals that this integration is most frequently studied at the Junior High School level, with a predominant focus on measuring students' vocabulary achievement as a key indicator of English learning outcomes. A key practical implication is that educators should be encouraged and trained to systematically leverage local folklore as a contextualized teaching material, as it effectively builds foundational vocabulary while simultaneously instilling character values in adolescent learners. Consequently, future research should move beyond descriptive studies and pursue empirical investigations that quantitatively measure the causal relationship between using localized folktales and the enhancement of vocabulary acquisition by providing evidence for this integrated pedagogical approach.

In suggestion, the findings of this review have direct implications for teaching, showing that using folktales is a practical strategy for integrating local culture and character values like morality and social responsibility into EFL materials. This

approach is most commonly researched at the Junior High School level, where student vocabulary achievement is the primary focus. This makes pedagogical sense, as vocabulary is a foundational language skill for adolescents, and folktales provide a meaningful and culturally relevant context to learn new words while absorbing character lessons hence this review points to a clear need for further empirical research that specifically investigates how effective using folktales to promote local culture and character values instilled in its story with other educational approaches to further enhance EFL learning effectiveness.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Types of Local Cultural Content and Character Values Integrated into Teaching Materials by Indonesian EFL Teachers

Table 2. Data extracted from 23 journal articles: local cultural and character values content

Num.	Author	Integrated Local Cultural Content and Character Values	
		Local Cultural Content	Character Values
1	(Rosnaningsih et al., 2025)	Bantenese folktales ("The Origin of Panaitan Island," "The Legend of Gunung Karang," "Queen Shima of Banten Girang," "The Origin of Pandeglang," "The Tale of Ciomas").	Moral messages, religious values, and social wisdom embedded in the Bantenese folktales, used for character education and strengthening cultural identity.

2	(Lomi et al., 2024)	The traditional short story "Maka Ma Pena" from Sahraen, South Amaras.	While not explicitly listed as discrete values, the article emphasizes that the traditional stories were used for "character development" and to deepen students' understanding of "local culture." The review session also reinforced the "moral values from the stories." Therefore, the character values are the moral and cultural values embedded within the local folklore.
3	(Umar et al., 2024)	Not specified	The character values integrated into teaching are those associated with religious moderation. These include: (1) Tolerance and respect for diversity; (2) Empathy and compassion; (3) Critical thinking; (4) Open-mindedness; (5) Peaceful coexistence; (6) Justice.
4	(Sadri & Alvindi, 2025)	Malin Kundang folktale	The story of Malin Kundang inherently teaches values about respecting parents and the consequences of disobedience.
5	(Istiqomah et al., 2025)	Banten folk tales	The character values integrated were those embedded within the Banten folk tales, which align with the Pancasila Student Profile (P3) of the Merdeka Curriculum. These include values such as cooperation, local wisdom, global diversity, independence, creativity, and critical thinking.
6	(Wardani, 2024)	Not specified	The integrated character values are the moral values and local wisdom contained

			within the folktales. The article states that folktales "contain moral values and local wisdom for the community," and using them in learning helps shape student personalities, causing them "to behave well."
7	(Daeli et al., 2025)	Nias folklore, specifically the folktale of "Lauwomaru" and the "Nela Sea."	The article mentions that students identified the cultural and moral values within the folktales. The specific character values integrated were courage and an unyielding spirit. Furthermore, the activity itself fostered an appreciation for local culture and heritage.
8	(Hardina et al., 2024)	Folklore from Ponorogo, specifically The Origin of Reog Ponorogo, The Legend of Lake Ngebel, and The Legend of Golan Mirah.	The primary focus is on enhancing engagement and reading comprehension through cultural relevance, not on teaching character values.
9	(Susilo & Azizah, 2024)	Not specified	The integrated character values include Respect, Honesty, Responsibility, Perseverance, Helping others, Hard work, Keeping promises, Filial piety, Humility, Calmness, and Harmony.
10	(Sujarwo et al., 2023)	Not specified	Character values integrated into teaching include honesty, politeness, togetherness, tolerance, mutual cooperation, and noble moral values. These are drawn from cultural, religious, and national foundations such as Pancasila and the Indonesian Constitution. Students are encouraged to apply these values in their daily lives.
11	(Mappatanga et al., 2025)	Bima folktales	The integrated character values included moral values,

- ethics, and life philosophies derived from the local Bima folktales. These values were internalized by students during the learning process, supporting character education in line with the Merdeka Curriculum.
- 12 (Azhary & Fatimah, 2024) The integrated local cultural content refers to the inclusion of elements from Indonesian local cultures into English teaching materials, based on Moran's (2001) cultural dimensions. These include: (1) Products: tourist places, architectures, traditional foods, dances, games; (2) Practices: customs and traditional events; (3) Perspectives: folktales (e.g., Malin Kundang, Telaga Warna, The Crying Stone) that convey cultural values and beliefs. Character values are integrated primarily through the perspective dimension, especially via folktales that teach moral lessons and encourage good behavior. Examples include stories that educate students about honesty, respect, and cultural pride.
- 13 (Katili, 2023) The integrated local cultural content includes: (1) Descriptions of tourism objects in Gorontalo; (2) Local stories, such as legends and myths from Gorontalo; (3) Caution/warning texts related to local environmental and cultural preservation (e.g., keeping tourism objects clean, protecting the environment); (4) Traditional values, ethics, and moral lessons from Gorontalo society. Although not explicitly detailed, the integrated character values include: (1) Cultural pride and awareness; (2) Environmental responsibility (e.g., through warnings about cleanliness and preserving tourism sites); (3) Moral and ethical values from local myths and legends.
- 14 (Mariani & Basuki, 2023) Not specified The article does not explicitly mention the integration of specific character values into the teaching materials.
- 15 (Saputri et al., 2024) The integrated local cultural content is Sasambo local narrative writing aims to

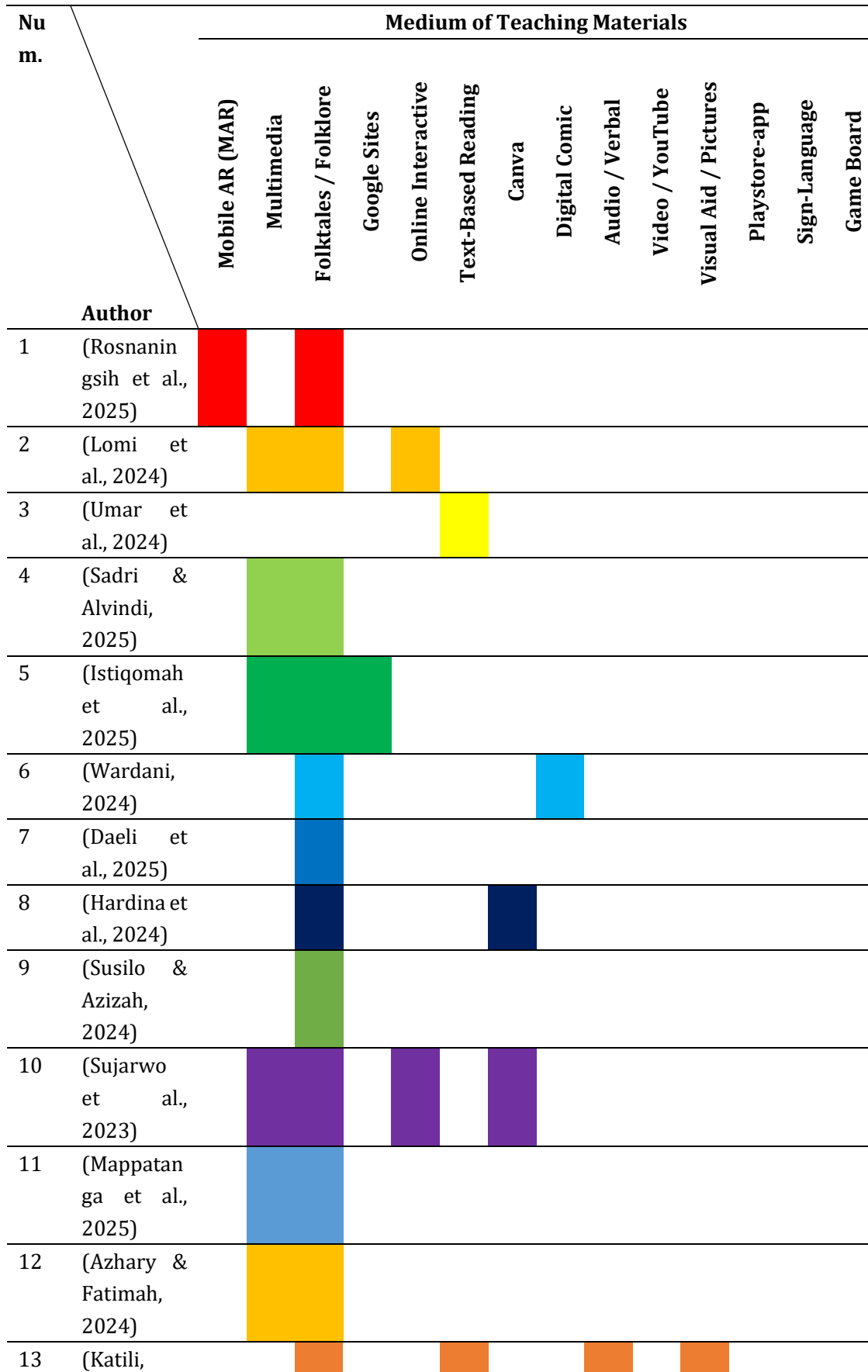
- wisdom. Sasambo is an abbreviation for the three main ethnic groups in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), Indonesia: Sasak, Samawa, and Mbojo.
- wisdom. Sasambo is an sculpt student character and embed "moral fiber." While not listing specific values, it implies the teaching instills virtues and ethics by dissecting the values in literary narratives. The role of local wisdom, in general, is also to foster a love for local culture, curiosity, and critical thinking, which are part of character development.
- 16 (Putri, 2023) The local wisdom of Riau Province, Indonesia. This includes topics and materials related to the students' environment, daily life, and cultural context, such as transactional interaction texts, recount texts, and personal letters that reflect local experiences and values.
- The integrated character values are not explicitly detailed, but the study emphasizes affective, cognitive, and psychomotor development, as well as fostering love for the country and cultural awareness through local wisdom. The materials aim to create students who are "cognitively intelligent and behave culturally."
- 17 (Sa'dhiyah, 2024) The integrated local cultural content refers to the inclusion of Indonesian cultural elements into the English writing teaching materials. This is manifested through visual and verbal content that depicts or references aspects of Indonesian life and environment, such as:
- Pictures of Indonesian foods (e.g., satay, sambal matah, empek-empek).
 - Scenes of local landscapes (e.g., beaches, coral reefs).
 - References to local experiences (e.g., visiting a zoo, which can imply a local context).
- The integrated character values are the values of Pancasila, the foundational philosophical theory of the Indonesian state. The five principles and their associated values are: (1) 1st Principle (Belief in One God): Faith, piety, noble character (religious, personal, and environmental morals); (2) 2nd Principle (Just and Civilized Humanity): Fairness, respect, empathy, tolerance (morals towards others, nature, and the state); (3) 3rd Principle (The Unity of Indonesia): Unity in diversity,

- appreciation for culture, intercultural communication; (4) 4th Principle (Democracy): Critical reasoning, deliberation, cooperation, caring, sharing; (5) 5th Principle (Social Justice): Independence, creativity, producing original work, self-awareness, self-regulation.
- 18 (Natasya & Kembaren, 2025) Teachers integrate local cultural content by modifying textbook materials to include culturally relevant examples such as local foods (e.g., Padang satay, Padang rice), local folktales, and historical events. This helps make the learning material more relatable and engaging for students from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- 19 (Fathan et al., 2023) The integrated local cultural content refers to incorporating elements of local wisdom from the Sumalata Timur and Gorontalo regions into the English writing worksheet. This includes:
- Local folktales and their moral values.
 - Traditional cuisine.
 - Other aspects of local culture, heritage, and students' everyday experiences and surroundings.
- 20 (Lestari et al., 2025) The integrated local cultural content consists of indigenous narratives (also referred to as local legends, folktales, myths,
- While the study does not explicitly detail character values integration by the teachers themselves, it references previous research that highlights how cooperative learning strategies in Indonesia are used to instill values such as nationalism, moral education, and religious understanding.
- The integrated character values are derived from the local wisdom content and the national curriculum's focus on character building. Specifically, the worksheet aims to foster: (1) Moral values extracted from local folktales; (2) Cultural appreciation, pride, and a stronger connection to students' own cultural heritage and identity; (3) The development of student character, as emphasized by the Curriculum 2013, which includes religious and moral values, attitudes, and skills.
- The integrated character values are the moral, ethical, and cultural lessons embedded within the indigenous

		and oral histories) from the students' own region (Bandung, Indonesia). These narratives, such as "The Legend of Soreang" and "The Origin of Kampung Citaliktik," are used as the basis for project-based learning to teach narrative writing and promote critical thinking.	narratives. These include themes such as: (1) Moral responsibility and ethical choices (e.g., taboo of incest); (2) Consequences of unchecked emotions; (3) Importance of peace, self-reflection, and keeping promises; (4) Community resilience, leadership, and teamwork; (5) Respect for cultural and supernatural boundaries
21	(Manuhutu et al., 2025)	Maluku local wisdom "Kalesang"	The integrated character values are derived from "Kalesang", including: (1) Environmental care and responsibility; (2) Mutual aid and solidarity (baku kalesang); (3) Ethical reflection and communal well-being.
22	(Tineh et al., 2023)	The integrated local cultural content is folklor, specifically, traditional stories, myths, legends, and folktales from the local culture (e.g., North Sulawesi). These narratives are used in an integrated manner, incorporating cultural values, traditions, and social contexts.	The integrated character values include moral values, ethics, social norms, cultural awareness, empathy, respect for diversity, and intercultural competence. These are conveyed through the themes and messages embedded in folklore narratives.
23	(Yuliantari & Huda, 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local legends and folktales (used as material for narrative writing). - Religious traditions. - Cultural values such as teamwork, mutual respect, tolerance, respect for elders, civility, and pride in one's own local culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teamwork - Mutual Respect - Tolerance - Respect for older people - Civility - Pride in one's local culture

Appendix 2: The Medium of Teaching Materials

Table 3. Data extracted from 23 journal articles: medium of teaching materials



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Indonesian EFL Teachers' Strategies for Integrating Character Values and Local Culture: A Review of Implementation and Learning Outcomes

