



INTERCULTURAL LEARNING MATERIALS: CONSIDERING AUTHENTICITY AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract/Izveček

This exploratory case study investigates the integration of intercultural English materials in Banyumas elementary schools. Data from teachers and principals across 10 schools (n=20 questionnaires, interviews, and FGD) were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal significant challenges: limited student vocabulary and insufficient culturally relevant materials. However, all respondents unanimously supported developing Banyumas-specific cultural materials incorporating local traditions (traditional foods, *wayang*, games, folklore). Stakeholders perceived such materials as strengthening language learning and character education aligned with the *Pancasila* Student Profile. As an exploratory study, this research provides preliminary stakeholder insights.

Ključne besede:

zgodnje učenje angleščine, avtentična gradiva, kulturno vključevanje, razvoj značaja, medkulturna kompetenca.

Medkulturna učna gradiva: vidiki avtentičnosti in razvoja značaja pri zgodnjem učenju angleščine

V eksplorativni študiji primera preučujemo vključevanje medkulturnih učnih gradiv za poučevanje angleščine v osnovnih šolah v regiji Banyumas. Podatki, zbrani med učitelji in ravnatelji desetih osnovnih šol (n = 20) z uporabo vprašalnikov, intervjujev in fokusnih skupinskih razprav, so bili analizirani s tematsko analizo. Rezultati razkrivajo pomembne izzive, zlasti omejen besedni zaklad učencev in pomanjkanje kulturnorelevantnih učnih gradiv. Kljub temu so vsi sodelujoči soglasno podprli razvoj kulturnospecifičnih učnih gradiv za Banyumas, ki bi vključevala lokalne tradicije, kot so tradicionalna prehrana, wayang (tj. javanska tradicija senčnega lutkovnega gledališča), igre in ljudsko izročilo. Dležniki so takšna gradiva zaznali kot dejavnik, ki krepi učenje jezika in vzgojo značaja v skladu s t. i. *pancasila* profilom učenca, (*pancasila* – pet načel indonezijske državne ideologije).

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Introduction

Teaching English to young learners (TEYL) serves dual purposes: developing linguistic competence and fostering character development aligned with national educational objectives. In Indonesia, character education, encompassing values such as empathy, respect, accountability, and open-mindedness, has been integrated into the national curriculum through the *Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter* (Character Education Strengthening) initiative (Kemendikbud, 2017). Research suggests that language learning materials grounded in culturally relevant contexts can enhance both linguistic and character development simultaneously (Cameron, 2001; McKay, 2004). However, many English teaching materials used in Indonesian elementary schools emphasize Western narratives and international cultures while minimizing representation of Indonesian local cultures (Widodo, 2016). This gap between curriculum aspirations for culturally grounded character development and the classroom reality of Western-focused textbooks creates challenges for teachers seeking to fulfil both language and character education goals.

Intercultural learning in Indonesian TEYL schools remains difficult despite ongoing attempts to integrate cultural elements into English materials. Indonesian English textbooks still emphasize Western narratives, restricting student exposure to local and regional cultures (Widodo, 2016). The standard textbooks used in the schools feature authentic English usage, although Indonesian learners may not find them culturally relevant. Teachers and material creators must mix local folklore, traditional storytelling, and culturally appropriate topics into English learning materials to overcome this issue. Translating Indonesian folktales like *Malin Kundang* or *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih* into English might help students acquire English and intercultural abilities.

In Indonesian TEYL, teacher mediation is essential for intercultural learning. Teachers require tools to interpret culturally diverse texts and to promote cultural comparisons and global viewpoints. A professional development program on intercultural competence can help Indonesian English teachers incorporate character education and intercultural awareness (Avillanova and Kuswandono, 2019). Role-playing, storytelling, and collaborative projects can also help students engage with cultural themes.

Technology can improve intercultural learning in Indonesian TEYL classrooms. Interactive storytelling apps, online language exchange programs, and virtual cultural tours could give young learners authentic cultural experiences.

This research addresses these issues, such as limited cultural relevance in textbooks, vocabulary gaps, and insufficient local representation, by examining authenticity and character development in TEYL, particularly in Indonesian education. This review of literature and practical examples aims to help designers create intercultural learning materials that improve young learners' language and ethical awareness. This study contributes to the global discourse on language learning, intercultural competence, and character development by promoting a holistic approach to language education.

Research Questions

To guide this exploratory investigation, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the current barriers and challenges that English teachers face when teaching English to elementary learners in Banyumas Regency, Central Java, Indonesia?
2. To what extent are local cultural elements, particularly Banyumas-specific culture, currently integrated into English teaching materials used in Banyumas elementary schools?
3. What are teachers' and educational stakeholders' perspectives on the need for, and preferred content of, culturally relevant English teaching materials that incorporate Banyumas-specific local culture?

Literature Review

English for Young Learners (EYL)

English language acquisition at an early age is crucial for cognitive and linguistic development (Lightbown and Spada, 2021). Young learners acquire language more naturally through interactive and contextualized learning environments (Donzelli, 2003). However, EYL instruction often lacks culturally relevant content, making it challenging for students to connect with the material (Mourao, 2003). Studies suggest that contextualized learning materials enhance comprehension and retention by providing meaningful associations between language and culture (Cameron, 2001). Recent studies (Abdul Rahman R et al., 2022; Marhamah et al., 2023) highlight that early exposure to culturally relevant EYL materials can foster positive attitudes towards both the English language and students' own cultural identity.

Moreover, contextual learning environments that incorporate elements such as folklore and traditional games have been shown to enhance language retention and student participation (Kristiawan et al., 2022). Teaching materials that incorporate familiar cultural elements can improve engagement and facilitate deeper language learning (Linse, 2006; Nunan, 2016). For instance, Linse (2006) argues that storytelling and games rooted in local culture create a more immersive and enjoyable learning experience.

Authentic Materials in EFL Instruction

Authentic materials are widely regarded as beneficial for language learning as they provide real-world language use and enhance learner engagement (Gilmore, 2007). Authentic texts, including stories, songs, and folktales, allow learners to experience language in a natural and meaningful context (Mishan, 2004). However, a major challenge in using authentic materials is their cultural specificity. Materials that reflect foreign cultural elements may not always be accessible or relatable to young learners (Knowles and Kramsch, 1995). This necessitates the adaptation of materials that maintain authenticity while incorporating local cultural contexts (Tomlinson, 2012). Recent studies (Darmawan and Kusumawati, 2023; Shukurdinovna, 2024) suggest that authentic materials, which reflect real-world language use and cultural contexts, enhance learners' language proficiency and cultural competence. They provide a dynamic and engaging learning environment that supports linguistic and intercultural development.

The integration of culturally adapted authentic materials in language education significantly enhances student motivation (Almajali, 2022; Namaziandost et al., 2022) and comprehension (Assiddiq, 2019; Kung, 2019). By providing real-world contexts and relatable content, these materials not only improve language skills but also foster cultural awareness and engagement, making them a valuable tool in language learning. Studies also indicate that learners exposed to real-life, culturally embedded content develop stronger communication skills and intercultural awareness.

Local Culture-Based Learning Materials

The integration of local culture in language learning materials is supported by sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of culture in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Numerous studies advocate the inclusion of culturally relevant content in EFL materials to enhance motivation and identity formation (McKay,

2004). When learners see their own culture represented in learning materials, they develop a sense of ownership over the language (Brown, 2007).

Research on culture-based learning materials suggests that local folktales, traditional songs, and regional customs can be effective in teaching English while preserving cultural identity (Kirkpatrick, 2010). For example, Setyono and Widodo (2019) and Isnaini et al. (2019) found that integrating Indonesian cultural elements into EFL textbooks significantly improved student engagement and language comprehension. This approach not only makes learning more relatable but also strengthens cultural identity and intercultural competence. Similarly, Agustina and Kencana (2023) emphasize that integrating cultural aspects in EFL instruction fosters intercultural competence and global awareness among learners and also prepares students to navigate and appreciate diverse cultural contexts. Instructional designs that emphasize cultural metacognition have been shown to significantly enhance intercultural competence in EFL learners, particularly in affective, metacognitive, and behavioural dimensions (Huang, 2023). Besides, the integration of intercultural competence in EFL education is recognized as essential for sustainable development and global citizenship, with specific models proposed for different cultural contexts, such as Vietnam (Hoa and Vien, 2023; Omar and Shaalan, 2023). At the curriculum level, education agencies and school leaders could develop supplementary modules or project-based activities that systematically incorporate Banyumas-specific cultural themes into English lessons. Such initiatives would help bridge the gap between national character-education goals and the current dependence on generic or Western-focused textbooks, while providing teachers with practical examples of culturally grounded material design.

Authenticity in Language Materials: Cultural Relevance vs. Authentic Materials

Two related but distinct concepts require clarification: authentic materials (genuine, real-world texts not created for language teaching, such as recipes, folklore, and traditional songs reflecting actual language use) and cultural authenticity (materials genuinely representing a community's values and practices as understood by community members themselves). Research shows authentic materials enhance comprehension and engagement, particularly for young learners, where community-based texts prove more powerful than textbook materials (Linse, 2006; Nunan, 2016).

Cultural authenticity ensures authentic representation that prevents stereotyping and distortion, particularly important in postcolonial contexts where outsider interpretation risks problematic representation (McKay, 2004).

Optimal culturally grounded materials combine both dimensions: authentic materials that are also culturally authentic. Teaching English through actual Banyumas *rendang* recipes provides authentic material (real, functional recipes) in culturally authentic form, while incorporating genuine *wayang* narratives, stories actually told in communities with embedded moral lessons, and similarly integrates both dimensions. In a canonical correlation analysis with EFL learners, furthermore, Shi and Tsai (2022) found that auditory learning preferences were significantly related to adaptive multimodal English stimuli, such as paper texts accompanied by sound, images with captions, and sound with images, accounting for 44.2% of the variance in English learning outcomes. Their study suggests that when material stimuli are aligned with students' preferred sensory modalities, comprehension and engagement can be substantially enhanced. These findings support the idea that culturally grounded English materials for young learners should not only reflect local cultural content but also be designed using multimodal formats (e.g., visuals of local foods and games, audio storytelling, and simple captions) that match children's sensory learning preferences. This integration strengthens character development potential, since authentic materials grounded in real cultural practices carry embedded values and moral lessons more powerfully than invented scenarios (Alim and Paris, 2017). When students engage with materials authentically rooted in their own culture, they internalize authentic cultural wisdom alongside linguistic knowledge, creating what culturally sustaining pedagogy calls "validity and value" (Paris, 2012). Effective, culturally grounded English materials for Indonesian young learners require both authentic materials and genuine community representation, ensuring language learning occurs within meaningful, culturally integral contexts.

Research Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to investigate English language instruction and cultural material integration in Banyumas Regency elementary schools. Case study methodology was selected because the research aims to develop an in-depth understanding of how teachers and stakeholders conceptualize the role

of local culture in English instruction within a specific, bounded geographic and institutional context (Merriam, B Tisdell, 2016), rather than generating statistically generalizable findings across regions. This approach is more suitable than surveys (which would lose contextual depth) or experimental designs (which would not address exploratory research questions). To achieve this understanding, the study combined questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. This multi-method triangulation—gathering data from diverse sources and participants—strengthens the validity and credibility of findings within the bounded context investigated (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007). Case study design is well-established for exploratory research addressing “how” and “what” questions (Yin, 2013): How are teachers currently addressing cultural integration in English instruction? What are stakeholders’ perspectives on the needed improvements?

Research Participants and Data Collection Techniques

The study involved multiple participant groups across three data collection phases. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of participant categories, numbers, data collection methods, and specific information about each group.

Table 1

Participant Category	Number	Data Collection Method	Schools/ Organizations	Detailed Description
English Teachers	10	Questionnaire, Interview	All 10 schools 1) SD Negeri 1 Parungkamal, 2) SD Negeri Sawangan Kebasen, 3) SD Negeri 1 Kemirih Sumpiuh, 4) SD Negeri 1 Sudagaran Banyumas, 5) SD Negeri 2 Kalibagor, 6) SD Negeri 1 Kranji, 7) SD Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyah 2 Purwokerto, 8) SD Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, 9) SD NU Master Sokaraja, 10) SD Putra Harapan Purwokerto Barat.	English teachers (specialists) or classroom teachers also teaching English from all 10 participating schools in Banyumas Regency. All 10 teachers completed questionnaires; 3 teachers were selected for in-depth interviews.
School Principals	10	Questionnaire	All 10 schools	Principals from the same 10 schools listed above. Principals provided an administrative perspective on English curriculum implementation and agreed that schools offered English instruction. 3 principals were selected for in-depth interviews.

FGD Participants (Total: 22)	22	Focus Group Discussion	Education Agency Banyumas; Expert; Participating schools	Government Education Representative: 1 Head of Curriculum Division from Banyumas Regency Education Agency Cultural Expert: 1 Researcher from <i>Puslitdayalogama</i> UNSOED with expertise in Banyumas cultural heritage. All teachers participated in FGD (3 teachers participated in FGD were selected to interview those who were from SD Negeri 1 Parungkamal, SD Negeri 1 Kranji, SD NU Master Sokaraja). All 10 principals participated in FGD (3 principals from the same schools participated in FGD were selected to interview).
Interview Participants (Subset)	3 teachers; 3 principals	Semi-structured Interviews	3 schools (1 private, 2 public state schools)	Selected Schools: SD Negeri 1 Parungkamal (public), SD Negeri 1 Kranji (public), SD NU Master Sokaraja (private). Selection Criteria: Schools were deliberately selected to represent school types (public vs. private) and teacher qualifications. Teacher Qualifications: English graduate, teaching as a classroom teacher (public school); Elementary Education graduate teaching English (public school); English graduate, specialist English teacher (private school). Duration: Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. These 6 individuals (3 teachers + 3 principals) also participated in the subsequent Focus Group Discussion.

Note: SD = Elementary School; SD Negeri = State Elementary School

This study recruited 20 respondents (10 teachers and 10 principals) who completed questionnaires establishing baseline data from all 10 schools. Subsequently, 6 individuals (3 teachers and 3 principals) were selected for in-depth semi-structured interviews based on purposive sampling criteria ensuring representation of diverse school types (public vs. private) and teacher qualifications (English specialists vs. non-specialists). These same 6 interviewed individuals later participated in a Focus Group Discussion with 2 additional external stakeholders (1 curriculum expert from the Education Agency and 1 cultural expert from Jenderal Soedirman University), and 7 additional teachers and 10 principals from the original questionnaire sample. This sequential participation by some respondents in multiple data collection phases allowed researchers to verify and deepen findings across methods. This multi-method sequential design provided breadth of understanding through the questionnaire (reaching all 20 respondents across 10 schools), depth through interviews (exploring detailed teacher perspectives), and stakeholder validation through the FGD (ensuring findings were meaningful and implementable from multiple stakeholder

viewpoints), allowing comprehensive investigation of research questions RQ1 (barriers to English instruction), RQ2 (current cultural representation in materials), and RQ3 (stakeholder perspectives on culturally specific materials).

Qualitative Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. This method was selected because it provides systematic procedures for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) across qualitative data while maintaining flexibility for exploratory research.

Phase 1, Familiarization: All interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were read multiple times while listening to audio recordings to verify accuracy, with notes made on initial observations and preliminary coding ideas.

Phase 2, Initial Coding: Each transcript was coded line-by-line, assigning descriptive labels to meaningful units of text. Codes were generated inductively from the data itself. Representative codes included “vocabulary challenges,” “cultural relevance need,” “teacher qualification,” “authentic materials,” “character values,” and “curriculum alignment,” with specificity prioritized, e.g., “*Mendoan* (half-cooked fried tempeh) preparation as cultural learning” rather than “traditional foods”.

Phase 3, Organizing Codes into Themes: Related codes were grouped into preliminary themes. For example, “limited English exposure,” “no pre-school English,” “students unprepared,” and “vocabulary gaps” were organized under “Limited Prior English Exposure as Barrier.” Similarly, “Banyumas culture absent,” “Western-focused materials,” “generic textbooks,” and “need for local content” were grouped under “Insufficient Cultural Representation in Current Materials.”

Phase 4, Theme Review: Preliminary themes were reviewed for coherence and consistency by re-reading data segments assigned to each theme, identifying contradictions or misaligned codes, and merging, overlapping, or splitting overly broad themes to ensure final themes accurately represented the data.

Phase 5, Theme Definition and Naming: Each final theme was clearly defined with specific focus and scope, including operational definitions specifying what phenomena the theme encompasses, what it excludes, and distinguishing characteristics.

Phase 6, Report Production: Findings were organized following the structure of Research Questions (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3), with themes described through representative quotations from participants and quantitative findings and explained in relation to existing literature. To ensure validity, source triangulation was employed. Responses

from participants were cross-checked against those of other respondents to identify consistencies and discrepancies. When responses aligned, data were considered valid; when discrepancies emerged, additional supporting evidence was examined to verify and contextualize findings.

Findings

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the current barriers and challenges that English teachers face when teaching English to elementary learners in Banyumas Regency?

Teacher Qualifications as a Fundamental Barrier

Addressing RQ1, a significant barrier to effective English instruction emerges at the teacher level. While all participating schools (100%) had implemented English courses, questionnaire results revealed that only 50% of English courses were taught by English-trained teachers; the remaining 50% were taught by homeroom teachers who lacked formal training or specialized skills in English language instruction (Figure 1). This teacher qualification gap directly impacts instructional quality.

Regarding grade placement, 70% of respondents believed English should be introduced from the first grade, while 15% recommended the third grade and 15% the fourth grade.

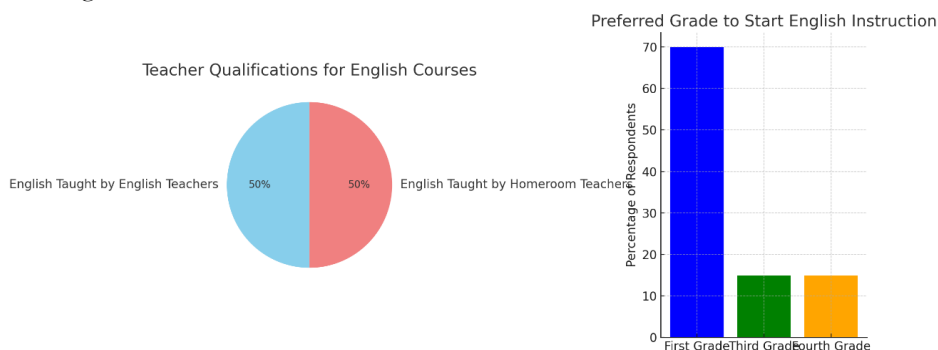


Figure 1

Teacher qualification and preferred grade to start English

Student-Level Barriers: Vocabulary Gaps and Limited Prior Exposure

A significant proportion of teachers (70%) reported encountering substantial challenges in English instruction, directly addressing the barrier component of RQ1. The most frequently reported challenge was students' limited English vocabulary, since many had not received any prior exposure to English before entering school.

Table 2 documents 14 specific difficulties reported by teachers, revealing a pattern of interconnected challenges across multiple dimensions. These findings reveal that students enter elementary English instruction without foundational prerequisite knowledge, creating substantial instructional barriers that teachers must address before meaningful language learning can occur.

Table 2

The specific difficulties faced by the 14 teachers

No.	Challenges
1	Textbook materials were not fully suitable for elementary school students.
2	Difficulties in explaining and teaching sentence structure.
3	Personal need to expand English vocabulary and improve teaching methods.
4	English instruction was not introduced in the third grade in some schools, creating a learning gap.
5	Lower-grade students struggled with writing, requiring additional teaching strategies.
6	Need for effective methods to teach vocabulary.
7	Many students had no prior knowledge of basic vocabulary, making it difficult to follow lessons. The lesson content was also perceived as excessive.
8	Challenges in developing students' speaking skills.
9	Difficulties in teaching grammar concepts to young learners.
10	Pronunciation challenges and students' low motivation to learn English.
11	Teachers faced personal difficulties with memory and pronunciation, owing to infrequent use of English.
12	Teaching younger elementary students (Phase A) was particularly challenging as they were still developing literacy skills in Indonesian.
13	Teaching lower-grade students was difficult since they were just beginning to learn to read and write.
14	Difficulty in introducing English vocabulary to students with no prior exposure, requiring extra effort to build foundational skills.

Material-Level and Instructional Barriers

At the materials level, teachers identified the inadequacy and unsuitability of current textbooks as significant barriers. Challenge #1 noted that textbook materials were unsuitable for elementary students, while Challenge #3 indicated teachers' need to expand their own English vocabulary and teaching methods. Additionally, Challenge #4 revealed that English instruction was inconsistently implemented across grades, creating gaps in student learning progression. All respondents confirmed they utilized English teaching materials; the textbooks used are listed in Table 3 below.

Table 3*The books used by the teachers*

N o.	School Name	Book Used
1	SD Negeri 1 Kranji	<i>My Next Words</i> (Pusat Perbukuan Kemendikbudristek)
2	SD Negeri 2 Kalibagor	<i>My Next Words</i> (Pusat Perbukuan Kemendikbudristek)
3	SD Negeri Sawangan Kebasen	<i>My Next Words</i> (Pusat Perbukuan Kemendikbudristek)
4	SD Negeri 1 Sudagaran Banyumas	<i>My Next Words</i> (Pusat Perbukuan Kemendikbudristek)
5	SD Negeri 1 Parungkamal Lumbir	<i>Grow with English</i> (Erlangga) & <i>Basic English</i> (Yudistira)
6	SD Negeri 1 Kemirih Sumpiuh	<i>My Next Words</i> (Pusat Perbukuan Kemendikbudristek)
7	SD Muhammadiyah Purwokerto	<i>LKS Bahasa Inggris</i> (Persada)
8	SD NU Master Sokaraja	<i>Grow with English</i> (Erlangga)
9	SD Putra Harapan Purwokerto Barat	<i>Cinta Berbahasa Inggris</i> (Griya Matahari Publishing)
10	SD Al-Irsyad Al Islamiyah 2 Purwokerto	<i>Now I Know 1: I Can Read</i> (Pearson)

Teachers also identified professional development needs. Challenge #11 noted that non-English-specialist homeroom teachers faced personal difficulties with memory and pronunciation due to infrequent use of English, indicating a lack of confidence and proficiency in the language they teach. Barriers to effective English instruction operate at three interconnected levels: (1) teacher level—50% of teachers lack English specialization; (2) student level—children enter school without prior English exposure or foundational vocabulary; and (3) material level—current textbooks do not adequately match student needs, and teachers lack professional development support.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): To what extent are local cultural elements—particularly Banyumas-specific culture—currently integrated into English teaching materials used in Banyumas elementary schools?

Current English Materials in Use

Addressing RQ2, all respondents confirmed they utilized English teaching materials.

Table 3 documents the specific textbooks used; more than 50% reported using Ministry of Education and Culture materials (*My Next Words*), while others used commercial textbooks from Erlangga, Yudistira, Griya Matahari Publishing, Pearson, and LKS Bahasa Inggris Persada. However, only 7 out of 20 respondents (35%) reported that their textbooks contained cultural elements. Table 4 identifies the cultural elements present in existing materials.

Table 4

The identified cultural elements

No.	Cultural Elements in English Teaching Materials	Description
1.	Storytelling featuring Wayang and local culture	Use of Javanese puppetry (Wayang) and local folklore to teach language concepts.
2.	Contextual examples based on local customs	Traditional greetings (salaam) and other cultural practices integrated into lesson examples.
3.	Folklore narratives	Stories from local folklore to enhance reading comprehension and cultural understanding.
4.	Traditional games	Inclusion of local games as a medium for interactive language learning.
5.	The kite festival from China	Exposure to international cultural events to develop cross-cultural awareness.
6.	Traditional dances from various countries	Learning about different traditional dances to introduce cultural diversity.
7.	Traditional arts	Use of local and global traditional arts to support creative expression in language learning.
8.	Customary ceremonies	Explanation of significant ceremonies to deepen cultural appreciation.
9.	Traditional foods	Introduction to traditional cuisines to enrich vocabulary and cultural discussion.

A critical finding directly addresses RQ2: while some teaching materials incorporated cultural content, the representation of Banyumas-specific local culture was minimal, and the proportion of cultural content overall remained relatively low. Current materials contain cultural elements in only 35% of schools, with those elements being predominantly international or generic Indonesian rather than Banyumas-specific. This represents a significant gap between current materials and the culturally grounded instruction advocated in Indonesian curriculum policy.

Research question 3 (RQ3): What are teachers' and educational stakeholders' perspectives on the need for, and preferred content of, culturally relevant English teaching materials that incorporate Banyumas-specific local culture?

Stakeholders' Recommendations for Specific Cultural Content

Directly addressing RQ3, all respondents unanimously agreed (100%) that English teaching materials incorporating Banyumas-specific cultural elements should be developed. Teachers expressed a strong preference for contextualized materials aligning with elementary students' cognitive development and language acquisition needs. When asked about specific cultural aspects to integrate, respondents suggested: (1) traditional foods (*mendoan*, *getuk goreng*, *cimplung*) with procedural texts explaining preparation; (2) *wayang* (Javanese puppetry) as a vehicle for moral lessons; (3) *kenthongan* (traditional music); (4) *begalan* (ritual performances); (5) local tourism sites; and (6) folklore and local stories for language and cultural learning.

During the Focus Group Discussion, curriculum and cultural experts refined these recommendations by narrowing the scope to ensure age-appropriateness for primary students. FGD participants collectively recommended focusing on two priority cultural themes: (1) traditional games and sports that are familiar to students, providing interactive language learning; and (2) traditional foods emphasizing Banyumas's culinary heritage with procedural texts. This expert prioritization identifies traditional games and foods as optimal starting points, culturally significant, age-appropriate, and linguistically rich topics for material development.

Character Development and Global Citizenship Perspective

Seventy percent (70%) of respondents demonstrated understanding of global citizenship and recognized that early exposure to English could better prepare students to participate in a globalized world. Furthermore, 90% expressed optimism that integration of Banyumas-specific cultural content into English teaching materials would strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile and help prepare students to become global citizens. All respondents agreed that developing materials incorporating Banyumas-specific cultural elements would enhance students' learning experience and align with national curriculum objectives (Figure 2). Educational stakeholders demonstrate unanimous consensus (100%) regarding the need for Banyumas-specific English materials. Specific content priorities include traditional games and traditional foods, with secondary recommendations for wayang, folklore, and local music. This universal agreement, combined with 90% support for strengthening character education and global citizenship alignment, indicates strong urgency for material development that simultaneously supports language acquisition and alignment with national curriculum goals (*Pancasila* Student Profile, Character Education Strengthening initiative).

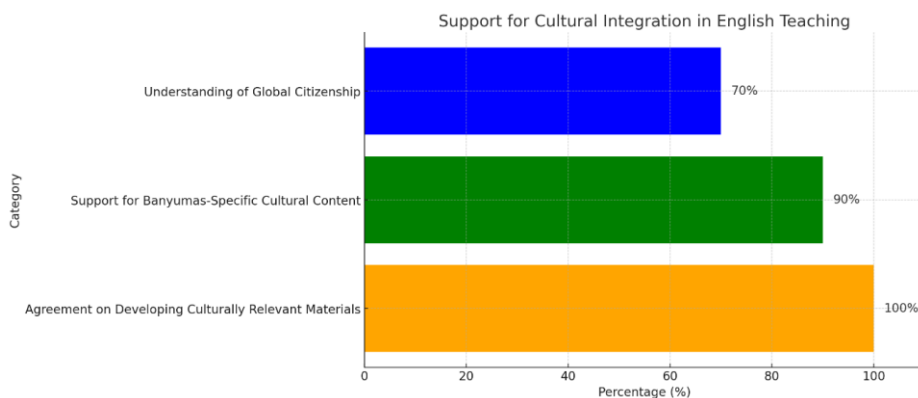


Figure 2
Cultural integration in English teaching

Discussion

Cultural Integration in English Language Teaching

The study found that while some existing English teaching materials in Banyumas schools included cultural elements, these were not specific to the local Banyumas culture. Teachers and cultural experts strongly supported integrating Banyumas-specific content, suggesting topics such as traditional foods (e.g., *mendoan*, *getuk goreng*), folklore, *wayang*, and traditional games. Existing research emphasizes that cultural relevance enhances student motivation and engagement in language learning (Bernhardt and Krashen, 1989; Brown, 2007). Cameron (2001) highlights that young learners benefit most when lessons connect to familiar contexts, such as local culture. Furthermore, McKay (2004) suggests that incorporating students' local culture into English materials fosters identity formation and cross-cultural awareness. Gar-ton and Copland (2018) also support the idea that local culture-based learning makes English more meaningful and accessible for young learners. Similarly, Tomlinson (2012) advocates using culturally rich and authentic materials to increase student engagement. The study aligns with literature suggesting that culturally embedded materials make English learning more engaging and contextually relevant for young learners. However, it also highlights a gap in the curriculum, since current materials lack sufficient representation of Banyumas culture. Addressing this gap could significantly enhance learner motivation and comprehension. The present findings complement earlier work on culturally rich and morally embedded materials. Vidović and Reljac Fajs (2015) showed that fables can be used to develop pupils' language

skills while cultivating judgement and value formation through morally charged narratives. Our stakeholder data suggest that Banyumas-specific stories, folklore, and wayang narratives could play a similar role, enabling teachers to design English tasks that embed local moral lessons and character values within familiar cultural contexts. Besides, this study also extends the intercultural education perspective discussed by Lemut Bajec (2024), who demonstrated that students' intercultural competence is fostered through active, dialogic instructional modes and engagement with authentic materials that address cultural diversity, norms, and prejudice. At the same time, Shi and Tsai's (2022) evidence that adaptive, multimodal English stimuli aligned with learners' sensory preferences significantly improve comprehension indicates that future Banyumas-based materials should be developed not merely as textual descriptions, but as multisensory resources combining visual images, simple audio narration, and written captions to support young learners' vocabulary and understanding.

Material Content and Authenticity

Many teachers reported difficulty in teaching English because of inappropriate or insufficient teaching materials. Schools relied on various textbooks, including those from the Ministry of Education and commercial publishers (e.g., Pearson, Erlangga, Yudistira), yet these materials did not always match the linguistic needs of young learners. Only a few respondents indicated that their materials incorporated cultural aspects, such as storytelling and traditional ceremonies.

Research on authentic materials supports the idea that culturally embedded and real-life context materials enhance learning (Gilmore, 2007; Nunan, 2016). Mourao (2003) argues that authentic materials improve comprehension, making language learning more meaningful. Macalister and Nation (2019) emphasize that materials should align with students' cognitive development and cultural background. Additionally, Richards (2006) suggests that real-life texts, such as recipes, folk tales, and community practices, support language acquisition better than decontextualized textbooks.

The findings reinforce theories advocating authentic, localized teaching materials. The current reliance on generic textbooks indicates a need for curriculum reform to incorporate Banyumas-specific content. Developing localized English teaching materials can provide a more relatable and effective learning experience for students.

Learning Outcomes and Student Readiness

Teachers reported that students struggled with English because of limited prior exposure, vocabulary constraints, and challenges in grammar and pronunciation. The majority (70%) of respondents supported introducing English from Grade 1 to improve learning outcomes. Additionally, 90% of respondents believed that localized materials would strengthen the *Pancasila Student Profile* (Kemendikbud, 2017) and prepare students for global citizenship.

Research consistently shows that early exposure to English enhances fluency and pronunciation (Cameron, 2001; Lightbown and Spada, 2021). Ellis (2015) highlights the importance of contextual learning for young learners, making cultural integration essential for effective language acquisition. Additionally, Suleman et al. (2019) suggests that early bilingual exposure helps students develop cognitive flexibility and international communication skills. The *Pancasila Student Profile* aligns with UNESCO's (2015) global citizenship education framework, which promotes English learning while preserving local culture.

The findings align with research indicating that early exposure and contextually relevant materials improve language learning. Teachers' strong consensus on integrating Banyumas culture suggests that localized content can serve dual purposes: preserving cultural heritage while enhancing English proficiency. Despite its advantages, integrating local culture into EFL instruction presents several challenges. Teachers often lack access to culturally adapted materials or training on how to incorporate local elements effectively (Tomlinson, 2012). Additionally, standardized curricula may limit flexibility in material selection (McKay, 2004).

To address these challenges, researchers recommend teacher training programs that focus on material adaptation and cultural pedagogy (Richards, 2006). Developing localized English textbooks and supplementary materials tailored to young learners' cultural backgrounds can also enhance learning experiences (Musthafa, 2010). Collaborative efforts between educators, curriculum developers, and cultural experts are essential in designing effective culture-based learning materials (Patras et al., 2023).

Mechanisms of Character Development through Culturally Embedded Materials

While this study did not directly measure character development outcomes, stakeholder consensus (90%) regarding the potential of Banyumas-specific materials to strengthen character education suggests possible mechanisms. Theoretically, culturally embedded language materials may support character development through several pathways. Traditional foods (e.g., mendoan, getuk goreng) represent community

values and family care, helping students develop empathy through authentic cultural contexts. Wayang narratives and folklore transmit moral lessons about respect for elders and cultural heritage across generations. Traditional games require rule-following and collaboration, embedding accountability within meaningful social practice. This approach aligns with sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Alim and Paris, 2017), which emphasize that character development occurs through meaningful engagement with authentic cultural practices, not abstract instruction. Importantly, these mechanisms depend on materials being genuinely grounded in Banyumas culture; invented scenarios would lack the embedded values and wisdom refined within communities over time. However, empirical measurement of these character development outcomes requires future research employing longitudinal designs, validated instruments, and direct student participation.

Practical Implications for Elementary Teachers and Curriculum Developers

For elementary-school teachers in Banyumas, the findings suggest several concrete strategies for integrating intercultural English materials into everyday practice. Teachers can, for instance, design vocabulary and reading tasks around procedural texts describing how to prepare local foods such as mendoan or getuk goreng, or use traditional games and wayang stories as the basis for storytelling and role-play activities. These materials not only provide familiar cultural contexts that support comprehension, but also embed character values such as cooperation, respect, and responsibility, which are central to the Pancasila Student Profile.

At the curriculum level, education agencies and school leaders could develop supplementary modules or project-based activities that systematically incorporate Banyumas-specific cultural themes into English lessons. Such initiatives would help bridge the gap between national character-education goals and the current dependence on generic or Western-focused textbooks, while providing teachers with practical examples of culturally grounded material design.

Limitations and Their Implications for Generalizability

This exploratory case study has important limitations. The sample of 20 respondents from 10 schools in Banyumas Regency is appropriate for exploratory research but insufficient for statistical generalization or representation of Indonesian elementary education broadly. Findings represent Banyumas stakeholder perspectives specifically; generalization to other Indonesian regions with different cultural contexts would require independent validation. A primary limitation is that this study did not

measure actual character development outcomes; all statements represent stakeholder perceptions, theoretical mechanisms, or curriculum alignment analysis rather than empirical evidence. Measuring character development would require longitudinal studies with pre- and post-assessment and validated instruments. Additionally, these teachers provided their perspective on the desired material characteristics but lacked experience implementing Banyumas-specific materials (since these do not yet exist at scale); therefore, findings regarding actual implementation challenges are speculative. Participants were selected via Education Agency recommendation and convenience sampling, potentially overrepresenting schools with stronger administrative support or teachers already predisposed to cultural integration. These limitations position this study as Phase 1 exploratory research, providing preliminary insights warranting larger-scale investigation but not constituting definitive evidence regarding the efficacy or impact of culturally embedded materials on character development.

Conclusion

This exploratory case study has identified key barriers to English instruction in Banyumas elementary schools, including limited teacher specialization, students' lack of prior exposure to English, and textbooks that do not adequately represent local culture. It has also shown that existing materials rarely incorporate local-specific cultural elements, despite strong support from teachers, principals, and external stakeholders for the development of localized intercultural English resources. At the same time, the study demonstrates unanimous agreement among stakeholders that Banyumas culture, particularly traditional foods and games, offers rich potential for designing authentic and culturally grounded English materials that support both language learning and character development aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile. Future research could move beyond exploratory stakeholder perspectives to experimental and longitudinal studies that test the effectiveness of locally based intercultural materials in improving young learners' vocabulary, motivation, and character outcomes. Comparative studies across different regions, or design-based research involving iterative development and classroom trials of local culture-based English modules, would further clarify how culturally grounded materials can be scaled up within Indonesia's elementary education system.

Data Availability Statement

The article is based on data fully presented and discussed within the article itself; therefore, no additional data archiving is required.

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