



Local Wisdom in Indonesian Language Instruction and Students' Cultural Literacy: A Qualitative Case Study

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Cultural literacy, Indonesian language instruction, Junior high school students, Local wisdom, Merdeka curriculum. Article History Received: May 19, 2026 Revised: July 10, 2026 Accepted : July 26, 2026	Indonesian language instruction has the potential to connect literacy development with students' cultural identities. However, the integration of local wisdom into classroom instruction is often constrained by limited learning resources and insufficient instructional planning. This study examined how local wisdom was represented in Indonesian language instruction, how teachers and students perceived the value of culturally relevant materials for cultural literacy, and what institutional conditions supported or constrained their integration. A qualitative case study was conducted at SMPN 2 Kolaka, Southeast Sulawesi. The participants comprised one principal, two Indonesian language teachers, and 64 Grade VIII students involved in six observed lessons. Five students were purposively selected for individual interviews. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The data were coded and organized into themes, and the interpretations were strengthened through source and method triangulation. The findings showed that local wisdom had not been systematically integrated into instructional planning or classroom practice. Learning materials were dominated by nationally published textbooks, while locally relevant folklore, traditions, cultural inquiry activities, and community cultural resource persons were used only to a limited extent. The interviewed students were generally more familiar with visible cultural forms than with their underlying meanings, values, and social functions. Teachers considered culturally relevant materials useful for connecting instruction with students' experiences, but they reported constraints related to preparation time, references, instructional resources, and the absence of structured teaching modules. These findings suggest that strengthening culturally contextualized Indonesian language instruction requires systematic planning, locally relevant materials, collaborative module development, cultural inquiry activities, and sustained institutional support.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesian language instruction is not limited to developing students' knowledge of linguistic rules but also supports their ability to understand, evaluate, and produce texts while communicating ideas critically, creatively, and appropriately across different contexts. These competencies are emphasized in the Indonesian Language Learning Outcomes for Phase D of the Merdeka Curriculum (BSKAP Kemendikdasmen, 2024). In this context, cultural literacy refers to the ability to understand and respond appropriately to Indonesian culture as part of national identity (Kemendikbud, 2017). However, Indonesian students continue to face substantial

reading-literacy challenges. The PISA 2022 results show that Indonesian students obtained an average reading score of 359, compared with the OECD average of 476, and that approximately 25% attained Level 2 or higher in reading proficiency (OECD, 2023). These conditions indicate the need for Indonesian language instruction that not only develops textual comprehension but also connects reading and communication activities with students' social and cultural environments. Local wisdom provides a relevant contextual resource because it encompasses community knowledge, values, traditions, narratives, and cultural practices transmitted across generations.

Previous studies have demonstrated the pedagogical potential of incorporating local cultural content into literacy and language instruction. Desyandri (2018) showed that local-wisdom values can support the development of cultural literacy in elementary education. More specifically, Kayati (2020) explained that narrative texts containing local wisdom can be used to strengthen cultural literacy in Indonesian language instruction. Recent studies have also explored the development and use of culturally relevant learning materials. Anengsih et al. (2024) developed local-wisdom-based teaching materials supported by flipbook media to promote cultural and civic literacy, while Ero et al. (2024) examined teaching materials based on Toraja local wisdom. Nenometa (2024) further reported the use of local-wisdom-based narrative-text media in Indonesian language classrooms, and Hatima et al. (2025) discussed the integration of Sundanese cultural values through a literary approach. Collectively, these studies indicate that folklore, narrative texts, literary works, digital media, and locally contextualized teaching materials can provide meaningful resources for connecting language learning with cultural knowledge and values.

Research on Indonesian language instruction has increasingly emphasized the importance of connecting literacy activities with students' cultural and social environments. Joyo (2018) argued that literacy activities can incorporate locally relevant texts to connect language learning, cultural understanding, and character development. Misriani et al. (2023) similarly emphasized the relevance of local wisdom for contextualizing Indonesian language instruction and supporting cultural preservation. Within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, Baidhawi et al. (2024) showed that local cultural content can be incorporated into Indonesian language learning through contextually relevant materials and activities. At the level of instructional planning, Adi et al. (2025) further demonstrated that the development of students' literacy competencies depends on the deliberate inclusion of literacy activities in learning objectives, teaching modules, and classroom procedures.

Although previous studies have demonstrated the potential of local-wisdom-based texts, media, and teaching materials, several have focused on the development or use of particular instructional resources (Muis & Sintang, 2026; Udiyana & Arnyana, 2022). Less attention has been given to how local wisdom is actually represented in instructional planning and classroom practice, how teachers and students perceive its cultural-literacy value, and what institutional conditions support or constrain its integration. This gap is particularly relevant in schools that have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and the School Literacy Movement but have not yet established a systematic local-culture-based literacy program. Accordingly, this study contributes a contextual qualitative analysis of the current integration of local wisdom in Indonesian language instruction at one junior high school. Its contribution lies in identifying existing practices, stakeholder perceptions, implementation barriers, and institutional opportunities rather than developing or testing a new instructional model.

Against this background, this study aimed to examine the integration of local wisdom into Indonesian language instruction at SMPN 2 Kolaka. Specifically, the study investigated three aspects: how local wisdom was represented in instructional planning and classroom implementation; how teachers and students perceived the cultural-literacy value of locally relevant materials; and what institutional barriers and support mechanisms influenced their integration. Through these objectives, the study sought to provide a contextual account of existing practices and identify practical opportunities for strengthening the use of local cultural resources in Indonesian language instruction.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case-study design to examine the integration of local wisdom into Indonesian language instruction within its natural school context. The case was bounded by one educational institution, SMPN 2 Kolaka, Southeast Sulawesi; Grade VIII Indonesian language instruction; and the teaching of folklore, descriptive, and procedural texts observed during the research period from August to October 2025. The case-study design was selected because the study sought to obtain an in-depth and contextual understanding of instructional planning, classroom practices, stakeholder perceptions, and institutional conditions influencing the use of local cultural resources. The study did not involve the development or experimental testing of an instructional model. Instead, it focused on describing and interpreting existing practices within a clearly defined school setting.

The research site was selected purposively because SMPN 2 Kolaka had implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and the School Literacy Movement but had not yet established a systematic program for integrating local wisdom into Indonesian language instruction. The participants comprised one principal, two Indonesian language teachers, and 64 Grade VIII students from two classes. The principal and teachers were selected purposively because of their direct involvement in school literacy policy, instructional planning, and classroom implementation. All 64 students participated in the lessons observed during the study. Five students were purposively selected from the two classes for individual interviews based on variation in classroom participation, reported cultural experiences, and willingness to describe their learning experiences. The five interviews were intended to provide varied contextual perspectives rather than to represent the experiences of all 64 students. Because no additional students were interviewed, this study does not claim that participant recruitment continued until data saturation was achieved.

In this study, local wisdom was operationally defined as cultural knowledge, narratives, practices, and values relevant to the Kolaka school context and to students' immediate sociocultural environments. The term did not refer indiscriminately to all cultural traditions found across Sulawesi. Cultural examples originating outside Kolaka were considered relevant only when their connection with a participant's documented family or cultural background could be clearly established. Because detailed ethnic-background profiles were not collected as a formal analytical category, cultural examples whose geographical relevance could not be verified were excluded from the final presentation of the findings.

The study focused on three analytical dimensions. The first dimension concerned the representation of local wisdom in instructional planning and classroom implementation, including learning objectives, teaching materials, text selection, instructional activities, media, and the use of the surrounding cultural environment. The second dimension concerned teachers' and students' perceptions of the cultural relevance of locally contextualized materials. The third dimension concerned institutional conditions that supported or constrained the integration of local wisdom, including the School Literacy Movement, library collections, teaching modules, school programs, and access to local cultural resources.

Students' cultural literacy was examined qualitatively through observable and reported manifestations, including their familiarity with local cultural forms, their ability to explain the meanings and values of local traditions, their experiences of reading local folklore, and their ability to relate instructional texts to their cultural experiences. These aspects served as analytical guides rather than as items in a standardized measurement instrument. Therefore, the study did not calculate cultural-literacy scores or classify students into low, medium, or high categories. Evidence was obtained from six classroom observations, interviews with the principal, teachers, and selected students, and documents such as teaching modules, instructional materials, teaching journals, activity photographs, school literacy records, and library collections.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted during six Indonesian language

lessons covering folklore, descriptive, and procedural texts. The observations focused on the use of local cultural texts and media, teacher–student interaction, discussion of local traditions, student responses to culturally relevant materials, and the use of the surrounding cultural environment as a learning resource. Field notes were written during and immediately after each lesson to record classroom activities, participant responses, and relevant contextual information. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, two Indonesian language teachers, and selected students. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was conducted face-to-face. With participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. When recording was not permitted, detailed interview notes were prepared immediately after the session. Document analysis included teaching modules, instructional materials, teaching journals, activity photographs, school literacy records, and library collection data. The three data collection techniques were used to compare and corroborate evidence obtained from different sources.

The researcher served as the primary instrument in collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the qualitative data. To support systematic data collection, the study employed classroom-observation guidelines, semi-structured interview guides, document-review sheets, and field-note formats. The observation guidelines focused on the selection of instructional texts, the incorporation of local cultural content, classroom interaction, student responses, and the use of cultural resources during instruction. Separate interview guides were prepared for the principal, teachers, and students to explore school literacy policies, instructional practices, perceived benefits of local cultural materials, implementation barriers, and students' learning experiences. The document-review sheets were used to examine teaching modules, instructional materials, teaching journals, literacy-program records, activity photographs, and library collections. These supporting instruments functioned as qualitative data-collection guides and were not used to generate numerical scores or classifications of students' cultural literacy.

The researchers developed the supporting instruments based on the research objectives, analytical dimensions, and relevant literature on local wisdom and cultural literacy. The researchers developed the supporting instruments based on the research objectives, analytical dimensions, and relevant literature on local wisdom and cultural literacy. Before data collection, the researchers jointly reviewed the observation and interview guides to examine the clarity, relevance, sequence, and suitability of the questions for the principal, teachers, and students. Several questions were revised to reduce ambiguity, avoid leading wording, and strengthen their alignment with the research objectives. No formal expert validation or pilot study was conducted; therefore, the guides functioned as flexible qualitative prompts rather than standardized measurement instruments. Before data collection, the researchers jointly reviewed the observation and interview guides to examine the clarity, relevance, sequence, and suitability of the questions for the principal, teachers, and students. Several questions were revised to reduce ambiguity, avoid leading wording, and strengthen their alignment with the research objectives. No formal expert validation or pilot study was conducted; therefore, the guides functioned as flexible qualitative prompts rather than standardized measurement instruments.

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection. Interview transcripts, classroom-observation notes, and documentary evidence were first read repeatedly to obtain an overall understanding of the data. Relevant segments were then assigned initial codes representing recurring ideas, such as reliance on national textbooks, limited use of local cultural materials, students' familiarity with visible cultural elements, teacher readiness, resource constraints, and institutional support. Codes with similar meanings were compared and grouped into broader categories. These categories were subsequently developed into four principal themes: the limited curricular integration of local wisdom, students' predominantly surface-level cultural knowledge, teacher perceptions and implementation barriers, and institutional opportunities for strengthening culturally relevant instruction. Evidence from observations, interviews, and documents was compared within and across themes to identify convergence, variation, and contradictory information. The themes were refined through

repeated researcher review, and the final interpretations were formulated by relating each theme to the research objectives and the context of the case.

The trustworthiness of the findings was enhanced through source triangulation, method triangulation, and repeated comparison with the original data. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from the principal, teachers, and students. Method triangulation was conducted by examining the convergence of classroom observations, interview accounts, and documentary evidence. For example, teachers' statements regarding limited access to local cultural materials were compared with the teaching modules, instructional resources, and library collection records. Preliminary themes and interpretations were also reviewed through discussion among the researchers. Any differences in interpretation were resolved by returning to the interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence. An audit trail consisting of field notes, interview records, coding notes, and thematic summaries was maintained throughout the research process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were implemented before and during data collection. Formal permission to conduct the study was obtained from the principal of SMPN 2 Kolaka. The principal and the two teachers received information about the purpose, procedures, and intended use of the research data and voluntarily agreed to participate. Because the student participants were under the age of 18, written consent was obtained from their parents or legal guardians, and assent was obtained from the students before their participation. The study did not undergo a separate institutional ethics review; however, formal school permission and participant consent procedures were completed before data collection.

Participation in the student interviews was voluntary and was conducted separately from regular classroom assessment. Students were informed that participation or refusal would not affect their grades, classroom standing, or relationship with their teachers and school. Permission to audio-record the interviews was obtained from each participant and, for student participants, from their parents or guardians. Participants could decline to answer particular questions or withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

Participant anonymity was protected through the use of codes: P1 for the principal, T1 and T2 for the teachers, and S1–S5 for the interviewed students. Personal names and other identifying information were removed from transcripts, field notes, and research reports. Audio recordings, transcripts, observation notes, and school documents were stored in password-protected digital files accessible only to the research team. The data will be retained for three years after publication and then securely deleted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings were organized into four themes derived from the analysis of classroom observations, interviews, and school documents: (1) limited curricular integration of local wisdom, (2) students' predominantly surface-level cultural knowledge, (3) teacher perceptions and implementation barriers, and (4) institutional opportunities for strengthening culturally relevant instruction. These themes describe how local wisdom was represented in Indonesian language instruction, how participants perceived its educational value, and what conditions influenced its implementation in the school context.

Limited Curricular Integration of Local Wisdom

Analysis of instructional planning documents showed that the learning objectives were generally aligned with the Indonesian Language Learning Outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum. However, local wisdom had not been systematically incorporated into the selection of texts, learning resources, or classroom activities. The review of ten reading texts used during the observed lessons showed that only two contained locally relevant cultural content. Most materials were taken from nationally published textbooks, while local folklore, traditional

practices, regional arts, local foods, and regional-language expressions were not positioned as primary instructional resources.

Classroom observations across six lessons confirmed this pattern. Instruction was primarily organized around textbook reading, teacher explanation, question-and-answer activities, and group discussion. Local cultural content appeared only incidentally rather than as a planned component of instruction. During two of the six observed lessons, the teachers referred to local folklore or regional traditions. Videos presenting local cultural content were used in two lessons. However, no direct exploration of the surrounding cultural environment or involvement of community cultural resource persons was observed during the research period.

The limited integration of local wisdom was also reflected in the learning tasks. Students were generally asked to identify information, answer comprehension questions, and discuss the structure or language features of texts. Few activities required them to interpret cultural values, compare cultural practices, connect texts with their own cultural experiences, or communicate local traditions through written and oral texts. Thus, local culture functioned mainly as supplementary content rather than as a context that shaped the entire learning process.

Teacher interview data were consistent with the observation and document findings. Both teachers explained that nationally published textbooks remained the primary instructional resources because locally relevant texts and ready-to-use materials were limited. They also reported that preparing supplementary materials based on local culture required additional time and references. These accounts indicate that the limited integration of local wisdom was not caused by teachers' rejection of local cultural content, but by the limited availability of systematically prepared materials and practical instructional resources.

One teacher described the continued dependence on nationally published textbooks as follows:

"During instruction, we mostly use the textbooks provided by the school. Materials specifically addressing local culture are still very limited." (T1)

This statement supports the observation and document findings showing that the limited integration of local wisdom was related to the availability of instructional materials rather than to teachers' rejection of culturally relevant content.

The document review and classroom observations did not identify any instructional text that explicitly focused on a specific Kolaka or Mekongga cultural tradition. The two texts containing locally relevant cultural content referred to regional cultural themes in general rather than presenting detailed accounts of identifiable Kolaka folklore, customs, arts, or community practices. Therefore, the findings do not claim that specific Kolaka cultural materials had already been systematically incorporated into the observed lessons.

Students' Predominantly Surface-Level Cultural Knowledge

The analysis showed that students' cultural knowledge was more developed in relation to visible cultural forms than to the meanings and values underlying local traditions. During classroom discussions and interviews, students were generally able to mention familiar cultural elements, such as traditional dances, foods, celebrations, and local stories. However, they experienced greater difficulty when asked to explain the historical background, philosophical meaning, social function, or values represented by these cultural practices.

Among the five interviewed students, three were able to mention at least one traditional dance or traditional food familiar to them. In contrast, only two students were able to provide a more detailed explanation of the meaning or value associated with a particular cultural tradition. This pattern indicates a difference between recognizing cultural forms and interpreting the meanings embedded within them. However, these findings should not be interpreted as a standardized measurement of students' cultural-literacy competence because they represent qualitative patterns identified within the interviewed group.

Students' experiences of reading culturally relevant texts were also limited. Two of the five interviewed students reported that they had read local folklore outside the texts provided at school. The other students indicated that their knowledge of cultural traditions and local stories was obtained mainly through family narratives, community activities, social media, and brief

references in classroom materials. Family members, particularly parents and grandparents, were described as important sources of information about cultural practices and traditions.

One student demonstrated familiarity with a visible cultural form but provided only a limited explanation of its underlying meaning:

"I know the name of the traditional dance because I have seen it during cultural events, but I do not know the meaning of its movements or the history behind it." (S2)

Another student provided a more interpretive response:

"The tradition teaches people to work together and respect older community members. My family explained that it is maintained because it strengthens relationships among community members." (S4)

These contrasting responses illustrate the qualitative difference between recognizing a cultural form and interpreting the meanings and values associated with it. They are presented as representative interview evidence rather than as a standardized measurement of all Grade VIII students' cultural literacy.

Teacher Perceptions and Implementation Barriers

Both Indonesian language teachers expressed positive views regarding the inclusion of local wisdom in classroom instruction. They considered locally relevant texts to be more closely connected to students' everyday experiences and cultural environments. They also observed that students tended to participate more actively when the instructional materials referred to familiar stories, traditions, foods, or cultural practices. However, these observations represent the teachers' perceptions of student engagement and should not be interpreted as evidence of formally measured changes in students' motivation or academic achievement.

Despite these positive perceptions, the teachers identified several practical barriers to the systematic integration of local wisdom. The first barrier was the limited availability of locally relevant texts and supporting references. Nationally published textbooks remained the primary instructional resources because ready-to-use materials concerning local folklore, traditions, and cultural practices were difficult to obtain. Consequently, teachers had to independently locate, verify, select, and adapt supplementary materials before using them in classroom instruction.

The second barrier concerned limited preparation time. Developing culturally relevant materials required teachers to connect local cultural content with learning objectives, text genres, classroom activities, instructional media, and assessment procedures. The teachers reported that this process required additional preparation beyond their regular teaching responsibilities. The absence of structured teaching modules further increased their workload and made the continuous integration of local wisdom difficult to implement.

One teacher explained the practical difficulties involved in preparing culturally relevant materials:

"Preparing materials based on local culture requires additional time because we have to search for appropriate references, verify the cultural information, and adapt the materials to the learning objectives and assessment procedures. We also do not yet have a structured module that can be used directly in classroom instruction." (T1)

The quotation shows that the implementation barrier involved not only the availability of cultural content but also the additional work required to verify, adapt, and align the materials with learning objectives and assessment procedures.

Classroom observations and document analysis corroborated the interview findings. Most of the observed lessons relied on nationally published textbooks, and the document review did not identify an Indonesian language teaching module specifically designed around local wisdom. These findings indicate that the limited integration of local wisdom was not primarily caused by teachers' unwillingness to use local cultural content. Instead, it reflected the limited availability of accessible materials, supporting references, preparation time, and instructional resources needed to translate teachers' positive perceptions into consistent classroom practices.

Institutional Opportunities for Strengthening Culturally Relevant Instruction

The school had several institutional conditions that could support the integration of local wisdom into Indonesian language instruction. The School Literacy Movement had been

implemented through a 15-minute reading activity conducted before classroom instruction. According to the principal's interview account, this routine had contributed to the development of regular reading habits among students. However, the reading materials used in the program were predominantly general books and had not been systematically selected to introduce local folklore, regional history, cultural traditions, or other forms of locally relevant knowledge.

The principal expressed support for contextual instruction and encouraged teachers to connect instructional materials with students' social and cultural environments. Nevertheless, this general support had not yet been translated into a structured cultural-literacy program. Local cultural reading activities, classroom projects, and cultural exploration were implemented only occasionally, particularly during school exhibitions, cultural celebrations, or commemorative events.

The principal described the existing literacy program and its potential connection with local cultural materials:

"Our school has implemented a 15-minute reading activity before classroom instruction. However, most of the books used are still general reading materials. We need more reading materials related to local culture so that the literacy program can also strengthen students' cultural understanding." (P1)

This account indicates that the school already had an institutional literacy structure, although the structure had not yet been systematically directed toward the development of local cultural literacy.

Document analysis showed that the school library contained approximately 1,800 books, of which around 65 titles were related to local culture. Thus, locally relevant books constituted only a small proportion of the total collection. The school had not established a cultural-literacy corner, and no Indonesian language teaching module specifically based on local wisdom was identified during the document review. These conditions limited students' regular access to local stories, cultural information, and instructional texts that could support culturally contextualized language learning.

The interviewed students generally perceived culturally familiar stories as easier to connect with their personal and family experiences. Some students also associated cultural traditions with values such as cooperation, respect for elders, responsibility, and cultural preservation. These responses indicate students' perceived relevance of culturally familiar materials rather than evidence of formally measured improvements in motivation or learning outcomes.

Taken together, the findings show that the school possessed several enabling conditions, including an established literacy routine, leadership support, student interest, and an existing library collection. However, these resources had not yet been coordinated into a systematic program connecting the School Literacy Movement, Indonesian language instruction, and cultural-literacy development. Strengthening this integration would require the deliberate selection of locally relevant reading materials, collaborative development of teaching modules, regular cultural inquiry activities, and stronger cooperation with community cultural resource persons.

Discussion

The discussion is organized around four interrelated themes: the limited curricular integration of local wisdom, students' predominantly surface-level cultural knowledge, teacher perceptions and resource barriers, and institutional opportunities for culturally relevant instruction. Rather than evaluating the effectiveness of a particular intervention, this study provides a contextual explanation of how local wisdom was currently incorporated into Indonesian language instruction and why its integration remained limited within the investigated school.

Limited Curricular Integration of Local Wisdom

The findings indicate that alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum did not automatically lead to the systematic integration of local wisdom into instructional planning and classroom practice. Although the learning objectives were formulated in accordance with the curriculum,

the selection of texts, learning resources, and classroom activities remained largely dependent on nationally published textbooks. Local cultural content appeared as supplementary material rather than as an organizing context for reading, discussion, interpretation, and text production. This distinction is important because including one or two local examples does not necessarily constitute culturally contextualized instruction. Meaningful integration requires local cultural knowledge to influence the selection of texts, learning questions, classroom interaction, and the ways students communicate cultural meanings.

Previous studies provide further support for the deliberate integration of cultural content into literacy and Indonesian language instruction. Damaianti et al. (2017) demonstrated that cultural-literacy-based critical reading materials can support junior high school students in interpreting cultural and ethical values contained in texts. Helaluddin (2018) similarly emphasized that cultural literacy in Indonesian language instruction should involve activities that enable learners to understand, interpret, and respond to cultural diversity. Studies by Irfan et al. (2021) and Misriani et al. (2023) also indicate that local wisdom can provide a contextual foundation for connecting language competencies with character formation and cultural understanding. These studies reinforce the argument that culturally relevant instruction requires more than the incidental mention of cultural objects; cultural content must be connected with learning objectives, text interpretation, communication activities, and reflective learning.

This finding is consistent with studies that directly connect local cultural content with Indonesian language and literacy instruction. Kayati (2020) identified local-wisdom-based narrative texts as relevant resources for strengthening cultural literacy in Indonesian language learning. Nenometa (2024) similarly described the use of local-wisdom-based narrative-text media in Indonesian language classrooms. Desyandri (2018) emphasized that cultural-literacy learning should involve the appreciation, interpretation, and reflection of local cultural values, while Hatima et al. (2025) discussed the integration of Sundanese cultural values into Indonesian language learning through literary texts. Anengsih et al. (2024) further demonstrated that local-wisdom-based teaching materials can be systematically organized through digital media to support cultural literacy. Collectively, these studies indicate that meaningful integration requires cultural content to be deliberately connected with text selection, learning activities, cultural interpretation, and students' communication practices rather than being presented only as an occasional example.

The present study extends this body of research by describing the conditions that existed before locally relevant materials were systematically available in the investigated school. The limited integration observed in the classroom was associated with dependence on existing textbooks, the absence of specialized teaching modules, and limited opportunities to use the surrounding cultural environment as a learning resource. Therefore, the contribution of this case study does not lie in proposing or testing a new instructional product. Instead, it identifies the practical gap between the curricular emphasis on contextual learning and teachers' access to usable local cultural resources.

However, the present study extends these development-oriented studies by showing the conditions that existed before such materials were systematically available. The limited integration observed in the classroom was associated with dependence on available textbooks, the absence of specialized modules, and few opportunities to use the surrounding cultural environment. Therefore, the contribution of this case study does not lie in proposing or testing a new instructional product. Instead, it identifies the practical gap between curricular openness to contextual learning and teachers' access to usable local cultural resources.

The findings also suggest that strengthening local-wisdom-based instruction does not require teachers to abandon nationally published textbooks. A more feasible approach would be to supplement existing texts with local folklore, descriptions of cultural sites, procedures for traditional activities, interviews with cultural practitioners, and student-produced texts based on their communities. In this way, local wisdom can function as a recurring instructional context while the required language competencies remain central to the lesson.

Students' Predominantly Surface-Level Cultural Knowledge

The findings revealed a distinction between recognizing cultural forms and interpreting their meanings. Students could more readily identify familiar cultural elements, such as traditional dances, foods, celebrations, and local stories, but experienced greater difficulty explaining the philosophical meanings, social functions, historical backgrounds, and values associated with those traditions. This pattern suggests that cultural familiarity does not necessarily develop into interpretive cultural understanding. Recognizing the name or visible form of a cultural practice represents an initial level of cultural knowledge. Cultural literacy, however, also involves understanding why the practice exists, what values it communicates, and how it functions within community life.

The geographical meaning of local wisdom requires careful interpretation in this study. The concept refers primarily to cultural knowledge and practices relevant to the Kolaka school context and to students' immediate sociocultural environments. However, no instructional material explicitly presenting a specific Kolaka or Mekongga tradition was identified during the six observed lessons. Similarly, several cultural forms mentioned by students could not be attributed specifically to Kolaka because detailed information concerning their family and regional backgrounds was not collected. Accordingly, the findings emphasize general patterns of cultural recognition and interpretation rather than claiming that all cultural examples mentioned by participants represent Kolaka local wisdom.

This finding is consistent with Desyandri (2018) and Kobakhidze and Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė (2023), who explain that cultural-literacy learning involves more than recognizing cultural forms. Students need opportunities to appreciate, identify, interpret, and apply the values embedded in local cultural practices. Mursalim et al. (2026) similarly emphasize that cultural-literacy learning should deepen students' understanding of local culture rather than merely introduce cultural objects or symbols. In Indonesian language instruction, Kayati (2020) and Ansoriyah et al. (2025) show that narrative texts containing local wisdom can provide a context for students to examine cultural meanings through reading and interpretation. In the present case, however, students had limited opportunities to reach this interpretive stage because most classroom activities remained focused on identifying information, text structures, and linguistic features.

The findings also indicate that students' limited interpretive responses should not be understood solely as an individual deficiency. Their responses were related to the learning opportunities available to them. Local folklore and culturally contextualized texts were rarely used, the philosophical meanings of traditions were not discussed in depth, and students were not involved in direct cultural exploration during the observed lessons. Consequently, the learning environment provided greater opportunities to recognize cultural objects than to investigate their meanings, functions, and values.

This finding demonstrates that cultural literacy in Indonesian language instruction involves more than merely including cultural names or symbols in teaching materials. Instructional activities therefore need to guide students through a gradual process of cultural interpretation, moving from the recognition of cultural forms to the examination of their meanings, values, histories, and social functions. For example, students may identify a local tradition, examine its vocabulary and textual representation, interview family or community members, compare different interpretations, and produce oral or written texts explaining its social and ethical meanings. Such activities would connect language competencies with cultural inquiry without treating cultural literacy as a numerical score.

Nevertheless, this finding represents a qualitative pattern within the interviewed student group and should not be interpreted as a standardized assessment of all Grade VIII students' cultural-literacy competence. The study did not employ a validated cultural-literacy scale or classify students into predetermined achievement levels.

Teacher Readiness and Resource Barriers

The findings indicate that teachers' positive perceptions of local wisdom did not automatically result in its systematic classroom integration. Both teachers recognized that

locally relevant stories, traditions, and cultural practices could make instructional materials more closely connected to students' experiences. They also perceived that students showed greater interest and participation when familiar cultural content was discussed. However, these observations should be interpreted as teachers' perceptions of student engagement rather than evidence of increased motivation or improved learning outcomes.

The gap between teachers' perceptions and classroom practices reflects a distinction between attitudinal readiness and practical readiness. In terms of attitudinal readiness, the teachers recognized the educational value of local wisdom and expressed their willingness to use culturally relevant materials. In terms of practical readiness, however, they had limited access to suitable texts, supporting references, instructional media, and structured teaching modules. They also reported that searching for, selecting, and adapting local cultural materials required additional preparation time. Consequently, teachers continued to depend on nationally published textbooks even though they considered locally contextualized materials educationally relevant.

This finding complements previous studies emphasizing the importance of systematically prepared culturally relevant materials for language and literacy instruction. Anengsih et al. (2024) demonstrated how local-wisdom-based teaching materials can be organized through digital media to support cultural-literacy development. Hatima et al. (2025), Kayati (2020), and Nenometa (2024) also showed that local narratives, literary texts, and culturally contextualized materials can be incorporated into Indonesian language instruction. These studies suggest that meaningful integration depends not only on teachers' willingness but also on the availability of materials that connect cultural content with learning objectives, instructional activities, media, and assessment. The present study extends this insight by showing the conditions that occur when such resources have not yet been systematically developed or made readily available in a school setting.

The barriers identified in this case should therefore not be interpreted merely as individual teacher limitations. They also reflect broader instructional and institutional conditions. When local texts and teaching modules are unavailable, each teacher must independently locate cultural information, verify its relevance, adapt it to the appropriate text genre, and design suitable activities. This additional workload can make the integration of local wisdom incidental rather than continuous. Support from schools, teacher working groups, local cultural institutions, and curriculum developers is therefore important for reducing the burden placed on individual teachers.

A practical response would be to establish a shared collection of locally relevant materials that teachers can adapt collaboratively. The collection may include local folklore, descriptions of cultural sites, traditional procedural practices, interviews with community members, photographs, videos, and student-produced cultural texts. Collaborative material development could help teachers integrate local wisdom without replacing the required curriculum or relying entirely on individually prepared resources. In this sense, strengthening teachers' readiness involves not only changing their attitudes but also providing the time, references, professional collaboration, and instructional tools needed to translate positive perceptions into sustained classroom practice. Recent classroom-oriented studies also illustrate how local cultural resources can be translated into structured Indonesian language learning activities. Supriyanto et al. (2025) documented the use of folklore and problem-based learning to guide students in identifying, discussing, and interpreting local-wisdom values. Yuliarti and Norhayati (2025) further showed that local-wisdom contexts can be incorporated into inquiry-oriented Indonesian language learning supported by digital media. Although the instructional formats differ from the present case, these studies demonstrate that teachers require prepared texts, clearly sequenced activities, appropriate media, and assessment procedures to transform cultural content into sustained classroom practice.

Institutional Opportunities for Culturally Relevant Instruction

The findings show that the school already possessed several institutional conditions that could support culturally relevant Indonesian language instruction. The School Literacy

Movement had established a regular 15-minute reading routine, the principal expressed support for contextual learning, and the interviewed students perceived culturally familiar stories as relevant to their experiences. These conditions indicate that the school did not need to establish an entirely new literacy structure. Instead, the existing program could be strengthened by incorporating locally relevant texts and cultural inquiry activities.

The use of an existing school literacy program as an entry point for culturally relevant instruction is supported by Nugrahani et al. (2020). Their qualitative study showed that a school literacy movement can incorporate local knowledge through reading activities, cultural themes, and learning experiences connected with students' surrounding communities. In the present case, the 15-minute reading routine could therefore be strengthened through the systematic selection of local texts and follow-up activities that require students to retell, interpret, compare, and document cultural knowledge.

However, the existence of a literacy program did not automatically result in the systematic integration of local wisdom. The reading routine was still dominated by general reading materials, while local cultural activities were mostly implemented during exhibitions, celebrations, or commemorative events. Local wisdom had therefore not yet become a continuous component of classroom instruction or the School Literacy Movement.

The school library data provide an important contextual indicator. Although the library contained approximately 1,800 books, only around 65 titles addressed local culture. The problem was therefore not the complete absence of local cultural resources, but their limited proportion and insufficient use in literacy and classroom activities. The school had also not established a cultural-literacy corner, and no Indonesian language teaching module specifically based on local wisdom was identified during the document review. Without deliberate selection and instructional use, the available books were likely to remain passive collections rather than active learning resources.

The School Literacy Movement offers a practical entry point for strengthening culturally relevant instruction (Meri et al., 2023; Sukanto et al., 2025). Locally relevant books could be incorporated into the 15-minute reading program and followed by brief reflective activities, student retellings, cultural-vocabulary discussions, or comparisons between the texts and students' family and community experiences. Indonesian language teachers could also connect literacy activities with classroom assignments, such as writing descriptions of cultural places, reconstructing local folklore, preparing procedural texts concerning traditional practices, or reporting interviews with community members.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several methodological limitations. First, it was conducted as a bounded qualitative case study in one junior high school. The findings therefore reflect the instructional practices, participant experiences, and institutional conditions of SMPN 2 Kolaka and should not be generalized directly to schools with different cultural, curricular, or institutional contexts. Second, only five students were purposively selected for interviews. Their accounts provided varied contextual perspectives but cannot represent the experiences and views of all 64 students who participated in the observed lessons.

Third, classroom observations were limited to six Indonesian language lessons conducted between August and October 2025. These observations may not capture variations in instructional practices across an entire academic year, other Grade VIII classes, or other Indonesian language text genres. Fourth, the study did not use a standardized cultural-literacy instrument. Consequently, the findings describe qualitative patterns in students' cultural recognition and interpretation rather than measuring their cultural-literacy levels or changes in learning outcomes.

Fifth, the researcher served as the primary instrument in data collection and interpretation. Although source triangulation, method triangulation, researcher discussion, repeated comparison with the original data, and an audit trail were used to strengthen trustworthiness, researcher interpretation may still have influenced the coding and thematic analysis. Participant member checking was not conducted, which limited opportunities for

participants to confirm the final interpretations. In addition, teacher and principal responses may have been influenced by social desirability because they were asked to describe instructional practices and school programs within their own institution. These limitations restrict the transferability of the findings and should be considered when applying the implications of this study to other educational settings.

The study did not collect detailed demographic information concerning the ethnic or regional origins of the interviewed students and their families. Consequently, the analysis could not systematically determine whether every cultural tradition mentioned by the students originated from Kolaka, the Mekongga cultural context, or another regional tradition. In addition, no instructional text explicitly focused on a specific Kolaka or Mekongga cultural tradition during the observed lessons. To maintain geographical accuracy, the final presentation therefore avoids attributing cultural practices to Kolaka unless their origin was clearly documented. Future studies should record relevant participant-background information and document specific local cultural materials more systematically.

CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative case study found that local wisdom had not been systematically integrated into Indonesian language instruction at SMPN 2 Kolaka. Instructional planning and classroom activities remained largely dependent on nationally published textbooks, while local texts, cultural exploration, and community resources were used only to a limited extent. Students were generally familiar with visible cultural forms but had fewer opportunities to interpret the meanings, values, and social functions underlying local traditions. Although teachers perceived locally relevant materials as valuable for connecting instruction with students' experiences, their implementation was constrained by limited preparation time, references, teaching resources, and specialized modules. The school's literacy routine, leadership support, and existing library collection provide an institutional foundation for improvement. These resources could be strengthened through locally relevant reading materials, collaborative module development, cultural inquiry activities, and partnerships with community cultural practitioners. Because the findings represent one bounded school case, they should be interpreted contextually rather than generalized to other educational settings.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

WP contributed to the conceptualization of the study, research design, data interpretation, and manuscript preparation. AS contributed to data collection, document analysis, validation of the findings, and manuscript review. RK contributed to classroom observations, interview data collection, data organization, thematic analysis, and manuscript revision. All authors discussed the findings, reviewed the final manuscript, and approved the version submitted for publication.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Generative artificial intelligence tools were used only to support language editing, improve sentence clarity, identify textual repetition, and organize several sections of the revised manuscript. These tools were not used to generate research data, fabricate participant quotations, conduct interviews, perform classroom observations, determine research findings,

or make final analytical interpretations. All AI-assisted revisions were reviewed, verified, and approved by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the manuscript.

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