

# A Systematic Review on the Integration of Local Culture into English Language Teaching in Southeast Asia: Current Practices and Impacts on Learners' Attitude and Engagement

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## ABSTRACT

As a response to the status of English as an international language and lingua franca, the integration of local culture now becomes a new trend of teaching English, particularly in outer-circle countries. This review study is intended to give a better understanding of current practices of local culture integration in ELT and its impacts on learners' attitudes and engagement in Southeast Asia. The thematic approach was used to interpret the outcomes of the 25 selected articles. The results are reported in three synthesis statements, defining (1) the geographical spread of local cultural integration in the ELT in Southeast Asia, (2) the impact on learning attitudes and engagement, and (3) the practices of local cultural integration. By interpreting the results of the review, suggestions are made for teachers and researchers to pursue more diverse practices in integrating local culture since it offers a constructive attitude, high motivation, and good engagement in learning English.

**Keywords:** Local Culture Integration; Learners' Attitude; Learners' Engagement; Systematic Review

## INTRODUCTION

Learning a language entails learning its culture, as the two are inextricably linked (Khan, 2014). Language and culture are so inexorably connected that they cannot be separated without sacrificing the importance of either language or culture (Kanoksilapatham, 2020; Risager, 2018; Royani, 2013). However, the current status of English as an international language and a lingua franca has contributed to major changes in the relationship between ELT and culture (Chinh, 2013; Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin, 2018). Hence, it raises a question concerning which cultures should be integrated into ELT: target language culture, multi-cultures, or local culture. Different views on culture in ELT can be found in many studies. Some scholars (Jiang, 2000; McDevitt, 2004) hold the view that target cultures should be taught together with the language. The necessity to use target cultures into English teaching emerges primarily from the fact that most learners may encounter certain difficulties in expressing meanings to native speakers even though they use the correct linguistic forms (Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin, 2018). In English language teaching, it is likely that the target cultures of English-speaking countries, such as Great Britain and the United States, cannot be detached from English learning as cultures provide contexts that allow learners to perform how to use the language; additionally, learning the cultures helps learners obtain a thorough understanding of the cultures rooted in the target language.

In contrast to the earlier views, since globalization makes this world become one "big community" and English becomes

the lingua franca, cultural diversity needs to be embraced with the integration of multi-cultures into ELT, not solely the target cultures. That English is used by more people all over the world as an international language has challenged the ELT pedagogy (Jenkins, 2012; McKay, 2010) as relying on target cultures exclusively for learning the English language is now considered improper with the use of English in multilingual and multicultural contexts (Kramsch, 2008; Chinch, 2013; Alptekin, 2005; Ho, 2009; McKay, 2003; Pratiwi, 2013). In order to mediate and negotiate between cultures, a variety of cultural materials from various countries have been being introduced to learners in the ELT practice. However, in his study Khan (2014)

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found that the participants experienced difficulties in learning various cultures in learning English at one time. There are contradictory views on the application of multi-cultures in English Language Teaching.

However, the use of target language or multiculturalism in ELT brings a disputable debate especially in expanding circle countries where people are afraid of losing the identity of the young generation (Kanoksilapatham, 2016; Nambiar et al, 2018; Puspitasari et al., 2021). Therefore, an alternative of integrating local culture into ELT is more favorable (e.g. Albatani & Madkur, 2018; Kanoksilapatham 2018; Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin, 2018; Kanoksilapatham, 2020; Ratminingsih et al, 2020; Suryani et al, 2020; Yektiningtyas & Ginting, 2020; Puspitasari et al., 2021) since it keeps students' identity while learning a foreign language, in this case, English. The integration of learners' local culture into ELT has received a lot of attention. Instead of supplying students with knowledge about the culture of native speakers, the curriculum needs to provide information about learners' culture and students need to be able to use English to communicate about their own culture and issues that are important to them (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Not only will learners be theoretically improved, but they will also find it much easier to learn English from local cultural materials that correspond to their schema or prior knowledge. (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Nault, 2006; Rowsell et al., 2007; Kristiawan, 2012; Khan, 2016). Without the local context in which the language is likely to be used, English teaching can become tedious, irrelevant, and uncontextual (Khan, 2014). Therefore, local culture, which provides local context, has been explored to be an intervention in teaching English and has shown obvious impacts in many studies. Royani (2013) and Prastiwi (2013) argue that inserting local culture into English learning can help students learn more effectively. Many studies focus on the effectiveness of certain strategies for teaching (Royani, 2013; Prastiwi, 2013; Kanoksilapatham, 2015; Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin, 2018; Sheridan et al, 2019) by inserting particular local cultures like folklore and legend (Rahminingsih et al, 2020; Ghosn, 2014) and how to integrate local culture in ELT (Kristiawan, 2012).

In Southeast Asia, a phenomenon of integrating local culture into ELT has been burgeoning in some outer circle countries (Kachru's model of World Englishes) which is beguiling to be investigated further. Local culture integration in ELT is preferred over target language integration in ELT since it provides a familiar context that encourages learners to take part in the learning process. Further, the integration of local culture into English teaching materials provides familiarity and engagement (Sheridan et al., 2019). Integrating local culture in ELT provides context and familiarity that will help learners experience better English language learning when they know the context and they can relate to their real life. With the integration of local cultures, learners tend to learn concrete things which help them engage with the learning process more easily. Kirkpatrick (2007) adds that the use of localized materials serves the purpose of training students to speak in English about their own cultures. Subsequently, the use of localized materials helps students activate their relevant background knowledge, connecting their personal experiences to vicarious experiences (Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin,

2018). Learners acquire better when the materials given are close to the context of the community they live in; therefore, inserting local culture into English materials offers more comfortable learning and seems effective to gain successful learning.

From that view, it can be seen that integrating local culture in ELT has a meaningful role in students' engagement in learning English. The study aims to investigate current practices and Impacts on Learners' Attitude and Engagement on local culture integration in ELT in Southeast Asia. Thus, central to our viewpoints is the inquiry of the implementation of local culture in a specific area of Asia, Southeast Asia being chosen because the majority of countries there belong to the outer circle countries (Kachru's circle), which have a rich culture as their identity. As a result, much is still unknown about the integration of local culture as a tool for teaching English and the factors that contribute to students' success in English learning through systematic literature review. Systematic literature review is an essential component of academic research since knowledge advancement must be built on preceding existing work by identifying gaps as well as testing a particular theory and/or develop new theories by summarizing, analyzing, and synthesizing a group of related literature, and evaluating the validity and worth of current work against a yardstick to unveil weaknesses, discrepancies, and inconsistencies (Xiao & Watson, 2019). We acknowledge the significance of conducting a thorough examination of existing studies on local culture integration in ELT, particularly in the outer circle countries of Southeast Asia, but research on this topic is scarce. That is, using a systemic literature review would reveal the nebulous concept of the impact of local culture integration in ELT and its practices, thereby contributing to the direction of how local culture can add color and contribute to the success of English learning. Moreover, learners' attitude and engagement in learning English with local culture integration may vary as culture has distinctive characters from one setting to another. Local cultures of Southeast Asia countries, where each region is rich with distinct local culture, have been inserted into English teaching in a classroom context (e.g. Kristiawan, 2012; Chinh, 2013; Lwin, 2015; Monfared et al., 2016); therefore, it is worth to investigate its practices. In addition, this aims to provide scholars and teachers with a clearer portrait of the development of integration of local culture in ELT addressing learners' attitude and engagement and teaching ideas in the Southeast Asia context. Thus, in the current study, the research inquiries are formatted as follow.

- (1) What is the geographical spread of local cultural integration in ELT in Southeast Asia?
- (2) What effect does integrating local culture in ELT have on learning attitudes and engagement?
- (3) What are the current practices of local cultural integration in ELT in Southeast Asia?

## METHOD

The study adopted the guidance for publishing systemic assessments and meta-analysis in the PRISMA statement which is largely focused on a literature analysis on integrating local culture into English language teaching in Southeast Asian

countries. Hence, the systematic literature review question guiding this study is "How are the current practices of local culture integration in English language materials and their impact toward learners' attitude and engagement in Southeast Asia?".

### Review Protocol

Specific keywords used in key literature search words and appropriate inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting related papers. Therefore, the findings of this review can be used to answer the study's inquiries about the trends and patterns of studies on the effects of integrating local culture into English language materials on learners' attitudes and engagement in Southeast Asian countries. In order to address the review query, peer-reviewed papers were checked in the "ScienceDirect", "tandfonline" and "JSTOR" online databases. Defined keywords were chosen and the following search string was developed using advanced search functions along with Boolean search.: ("local culture" OR "local wisdom" OR "local value") AND ("English" OR "English teaching" OR "ELT ") AND ("learners' attitude" OR "learners' voice OR "engagement"). In the search area, the search string was then

inserted and set to search for titles, abstracts, and keywords of articles published from 2012 to 2022 in Southeast Asia. Exclusion criteria comprised articles deemed irrelevant to the subject of interest, non-English articles, pre-2012 publications, and duplicate articles from the three web-based databases.

### Data Source Searching

Using the key terms for searching in the three online databases, 866 articles were found in ScienceDirect, 7,376 articles were obtained from tandfonline, and 278 articles were obtained from JSTOR (as of November 17, 2021). Afterward, the total articles were reduced based on the inclusion requirements to select articles within the area of Southeast Asia to 66 articles in ScienceDirect, 11 articles in tandfonline, and 1 article in JSTOR. A total of 25 articles were eventually chosen from the total of 78 articles selected through a rigorous selection of pertinent articles. Figure 1 depicts the overall method of article collection based on the determined parameters.

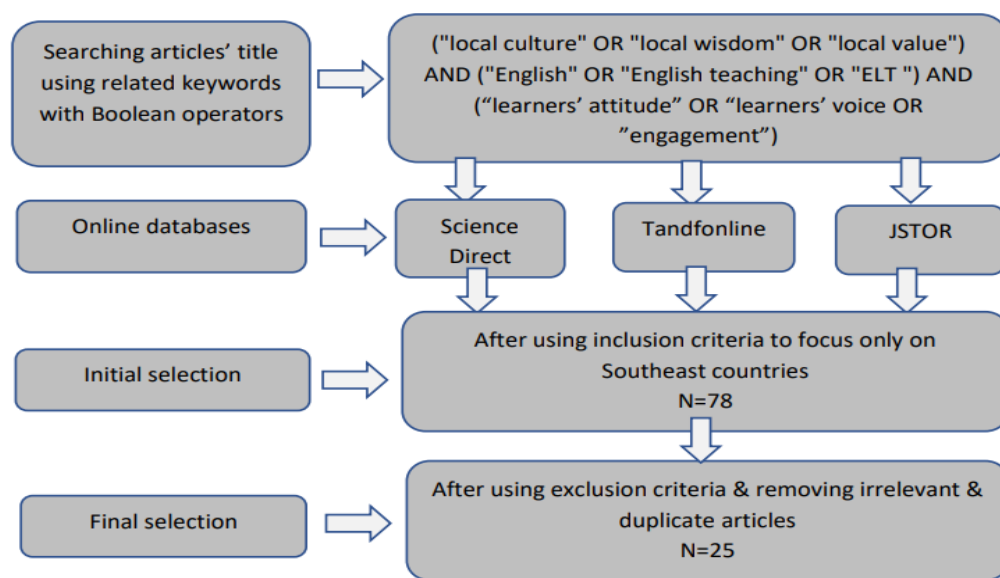


Figure 1: Criteria and procedure of literature search. N=Total number of selected articles.

### Screening and Assessment

To ensure that a similar systematic literature review was not conducted, the following search string was created: ("systematic review" AND "local culture" OR "local values") AND ("students' attitude" OR "engagement") AND "Southeast Asia". Google Scholar was used to finding similar systematic reviews by entering the search string above. The search resulted in 9,800 documents (as of November 17, 2022) within 10-year period of 2012 to 2022-time frame and no research articles similar to this study were shown. The 25 articles were examined for shifts in study frequency, geographical distribution, and thematic focus related to learners' attitudes and engagement, as well as current practices of local culture integration. The frequency of studies and geographical distribution highlight which country has introduced and

developed local cultural integration into English teaching in the Southeast Asian region. The themes' attention was classified based on the impact of local culture integration on learners' attitudes and engagement to show how local culture integration has contributed to English language learning and the current practices on integrating local culture in ELT in Southeast Asia.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Geographical Distribution of Local Integration in ELT in Southeast Asia

The geographical distribution of the updated publications suggests a trend of local culture incorporation studies clustering in some Southeast Asian countries. According to the

data, Indonesia dominates the research studies, accounting for 52% of the total studies reviewed (see Figure 2). This is due to Indonesia's cultural diversity, which stretches from Sabang to Merauke, with different local cultures in each region of the country. Indonesia has more than 300 ethnic groups, with their traditions and distinctive indigenous cultures. This may also be the reason why some research has studied the convergence of culture in Indonesia by integrating different local cultures in teaching English. The next reason underlying the growth of local culture integration in Indonesia is the view that character building should be part of education. This character building includes national identity and local culture. It is stated in Child Rights Convention (CRC) (1990), article 29, point (c), education of children shall be directed toward the development of respect for the children's parents, their own cultural identity, language, and values, the national values of the country in which the children live, the country from which they originate, and civilizations other than their own. By its constitutions, the Indonesian government proposes that the education sector invest in preserving local culture. To that end, teachers, including EFL teachers, should use EFL learning as one method of retaining local cultural awareness, particularly among younger generations (Prastiwi, 2013). In schools/higher education institutions, all school/university students are responsible for character building, particularly students,

since the role of education is to establish skills and characters and national civilizations, as described in Act No. 20 the Year 2003 on National Education, Article 3. Every component of the nation must be conscious of the value of building character on their own, either in the family, at school (and university), or in society.

In terms of regional distribution of the updated publications, Thailand has the second most frequent studies focusing on the local culture incorporation into ELT, with a total of 26 percent of all the reviewed articles. This is attributed to Thailand's English Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008 which seeks to equip young Thai learners to be aware of and embrace their own cultures to build national identity before learning other cultures to prepare them closer to a globalized world by upholding their identity (Nomnian, 2013). Thailand has paid more attention to ELT and dedicated a large budget to English education in order to compete with other nations both regionally and globally; however, the outcomes of English language learning as measured by national tests (O-NET or Ordinary National Education Test and GAT or General Aptitude Test) have been unsatisfactory (Kanoksilapatham, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2010). Furthermore, Thai test-takers' TOEFL scores

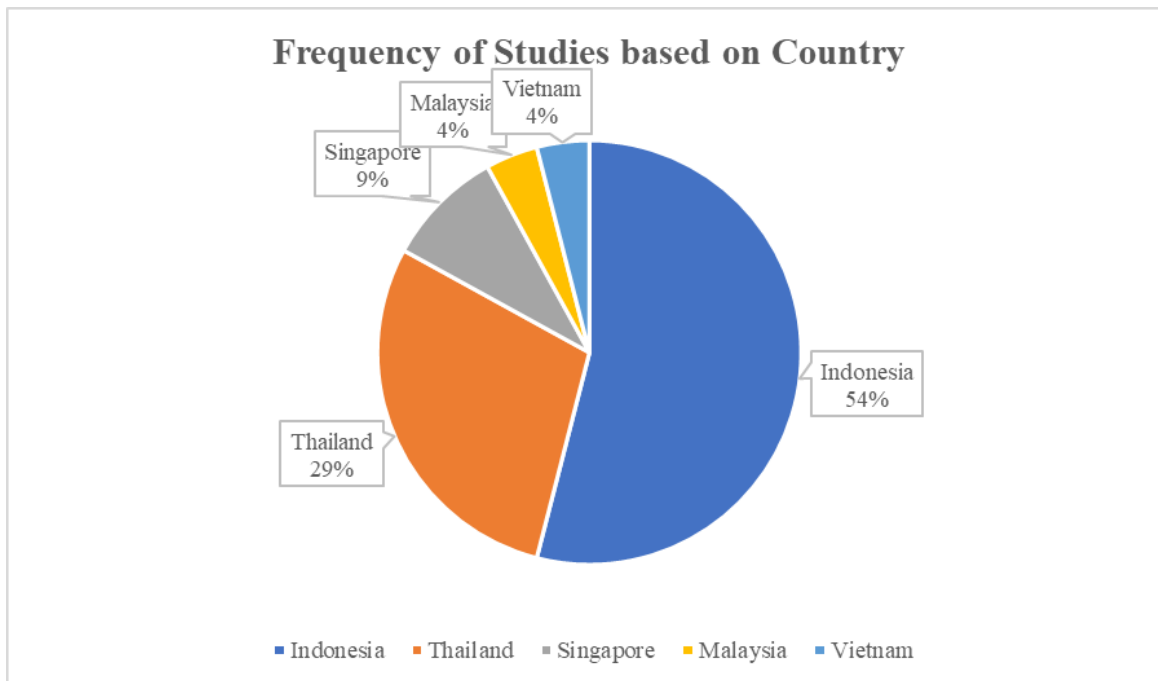


Figure 2: Geographical distribution of the reviewed publication.

are considerably lower than those of test-takers from many non-English-speaking countries (Kanoksilapatham, 2016). The poor performance triggers a potential warning that has encouraged a number of scholars to find possible factors to improve Thai ELT. One of the causes is a lack of opportunities for students to use or be exposed to English in authentic situations, leading them to believe that English learning is irrelevant to their daily lives (Karnnawakul, 2004; Kimsuwan,

2004). Conflicting problems arose when Thailand experienced low success in English, while several scholars (Howard, 2012; Simpson & Thammasathien, 2007) were concerned that Thainess was decreasing due to a variety of external factors, one of which was the use of English. As a result, the reviewed articles address the attempt to deal with the two opposing forces by improving Thai students' English while also preserving Thainess through local culture integration in

English teaching (e.g. Nomnian, 2013; Kanoksilapatham, 2015; Kanoksilapatham 2018; Kanoksilapatham & Channuan, 2018; Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin, 2018; Kanoksilapatham, 2020).

Further, there is one study in Malaysia related to local culture integration in ELT. Malaysia has a program called Your Language My Culture (YLMC) that strives to enhance communicative ability in ELT through the integration of local culture in the form of a supplementary reading module (Nambiar et al, 2018). The pedagogical argument behind the YLMC program is that the use of local culture material promotes both English skills and cultural understanding; this aims to improve both spoken and written English communication (Yahya et al, 2017). This program demonstrates that the incorporation of local culture in ELT has been carried out in Malaysia.

The fourth and fifth largest number of studies are those conducted in Singapore and Vietnam. However, no research on local culture integration in ELT was found in Brunei, Myanmar, and The Philippines. This may be attributed to the fact that some literature has been conducted in non-English, or to the use of various words that have not been properly captured by the search string used in this systematic review. Brunei, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Singapore were all British colonies, while the Philippines was the colony of the United States which may be the reason why local culture integration is not relevant due to their strong attachment to the target language community. In the Philippines, Singapore, and Brunei, English is now used as the medium of instruction for other subjects such as mathematics and science subjects beginning in the first year of primary school, whereas in Myanmar, English is taught as a subject beginning in the first year of primary school. (Kirkpatrick, 2012). This might also explain why people in such nations are comfortable with English since it is used as a medium of teaching because of their country's background and history.

### **Impact on Learners' Attitude and Engagement**

The following analysis of the chosen articles aims to show how local culture incorporation practices in the field contribute to the intended outcomes. Based on the thematic orientation, the data reveal that the papers chosen for this analysis fall into three categories: those focusing on learner attitudes, students' engagement, or both. Reviewed studies are primarily focused on student engagement as many as 17 studies, 3 studies concentrate on learners' attitude and 4 studies focus on both learners' attitude and engagement.

Many studies (e.g. Sukarno, 2012; Prastiwi, 2013; Royani, 2013; Lwin, 2015; Kanoksilapatham, 2016; Adityarini et al, 2018; Albatani & Madkur, 2018; Kanoksilapatham 2018; Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin, 2018; Kanoksilapatham, 2020; Ratminingsih et al, 2020; Suryani et al, 2020; Yektingtyas & Ginting, 2020; Ratri & Tyas, 2022) discover that students' engagement in learning English is increased by the help of local culture integration into English materials. According to Intani (2012), student engagement is indicated by their responses in class, which show that all students enjoyed and were eager to participate in learning activities, paid attention to teachers' explanations, and most students

comprehended the materials. Furthermore, local culture integration has an impact on ELT because it provides familiarity in learning, as argued by Royani (2013), that the integration is favorable because learners are acquainted with the subject discussed when learning English. Students will be more motivated to learn English if they are familiar with the topic. Students are more motivated in learning objects, ideas, or things that is familiar in their surroundings, and they are engaged with materials that include local culture (Kanoksilapatham, 2020). On the other hand, Chinh (2013) found that local culture does not motivate learners since they already know the sociocultural content of their own country. Further, it was explained that the materials provided were just general information of local culture that students could easily find on the internet. Therefore, the selection of local culture integration materials should be carefully prepared and selected. Teachers should explore the use of local culture materials that are rarely presented in order to increase students' awareness of their own culture and identity while utilizing English as a medium of communication.

This local culture integration also gives an impact on students' positive attitudes toward learning English. It is shown by learners in some studies (Chinc, 2013; Saraswati et al, 2018; Kanoksilapatham & Channuan, 2018; Yektingtyas, 2020) that they are eager to participate in the process of learning English. Students express positive attitudes toward teaching local culture in ELT, and they believe that if this type of teaching were introduced in the classroom, it would be enticing (Chinh, 2013). In short, students appreciated the integration of local culture into ELT because the materials are feasible and provide a pleasant atmosphere for learning.

### **The Practices of Local Culture Integration**

The practices of local culture have been integrated into English teaching in several respects, not just in teaching skills, but also in various media and activities. From the reviewed articles, it is found that one of the ways to introduce local culture is through teaching reading. It is considered effective to provide students with reading materials containing local culture aiming at students' engagement since the students are learning the culture of the context where the students live and they are common with (Royani, 2013). When the students are engaged in learning English, they will be more motivated. In teaching reading, various genres and topics contain local cultures like folk tales, legends, or other local story tales. In Western folktales, such as Cinderella, Prince Charming and Cinderella danced and showed affection in public, which is not appropriate with local context (Prastiwi, 2013). Therefore, internalization of local culture in ELT through folktales which provides local context can be a means of forming national identity, local wisdom, and character-building. Prastiwi (2013) further mentions that folktales provide familiarity, which encourages students to participate in the learning process. Utilizing folktales may be useful for promoting the comprehension of the values of language for ELT learners to accomplish communicative goals, providing a guiding framework for teachers to use folktales as a way to engage students in learning as well as to improve their cross-cultural knowledge (Lwin, 2015; Lwin & Martina, 2018). In the

Indonesian context, as shown in the reviewed articles, in Sentani (one region in Papua) and Bali, folktales have been used to teach English. By using folklores, it is expected that students will be able to learn English and understand their cultural heritages and be firmly embedded in their history (Yektingtyas, 2017). They also have an opportunity to improve their reading competence (Ratminingsih, 2020). Local culture integration in reading has been used through folklores in many studies since the folklores contain local stories and histories. It seems that other genres in the reading text are not extensively investigated nor applied in the practice of local culture integration. In order to offer more varied reading exercises, other genres like descriptive and report texts which contain local sites or events can be also used as media in instilling local culture.

In this case, reading exercises are the element in the provision of meaningful input texts for receptive skills. For example, students have the ability to investigate and elaborate in-depth on their own local culture and to explore the use of the culture in their writing and speaking activities. To make it possible, Sukarno (2012) shared some steps, which are (1) rendering meaningful culture-related input texts; (2) discussing materials; (3) exploring and cultivating local cultures for productive skills. In the area of productive skills, in his research, Cahyono (2018) investigated EFL students' perceptions of the combination of local culture and creativity through video making, which assisted them in writing essays. The findings indicated that the essay writing experiment was meaningful for the students, and they believed that their writing skills had improved as a result of the project. This indicates that local cultural integration is effective in offering constructive feedback and leads to improving students' writing skills. Not only in writing skills, but local culture integration is also practiced in the teaching of speaking. By having materials that are close to them, it is easier for students to perform their speaking since they know what they are speaking about. One example of speaking activities inserting local culture is the tour-guide simulation performed by Thai students that were proven to be successful since they are describing tourism places that they are familiar with (Kanoksilapatham & Suranakkharin, 2018; Kanoksilapatham 2020).

In addition to teaching skills, a textbook is also used to guide the practice of local cultural adaptation. An English textbook used in Thailand's secondary schools reported by Nomnian (2013) included five major cultural aspects: 1) products (rice, sepak takraw, tuk-tuk); 2) procedures (cooking, eating, and Thai boxing); 3) people (Siamese king, Vanessa-Mae); 4) viewpoints (Thai people, traffic congestion, food, weather, and Thai language); and 5) areas (tourist sites such as Phi Phi Island, Phuket, Bangkok, Chiang Mai). This study may have some implications for the development of culturally relevant English language textbooks for language teachers and learners. The module was generally interesting and enjoyable for the students. In the same vein, Nambiar et al. (2018) state that incorporating local culture into textbooks increased students' confidence in using English. Correspondingly, Yahya et al. (2017) create an English module called *Your Language My Culture (YLMC)* for secondary schools in Malaysia to strengthen both English proficiency and local culture awareness. Furthermore, Wanniarachchi (2021) and Ratri and

Tyas (2021) elicit that the use localized English textbooks prioritize national culture, which helps learners strengthen their identity. As one of the sources for learning English for teachers and students, textbooks play an important role, and developing local culture-based textbooks may encourage familiarity, which promotes students' understanding in learning English.

Local cultural integration in the ELT is also delivered via songs and games for young learners. Songs and games are considered valuable educational tools that aid language acquisition. Song and games can provide attractive and instructional media in learning activities because of the pleasant and relaxed atmosphere. Therefore, the implementation of local culture integration is deemed effective especially using traditional songs and games. Students can learn the language as well as their local songs and games in an enjoyable manner. It is hoped that by using songs, the teachers will be able to inspire students to study and pay attention to the contents that the teachers introduce (Intani, 2012), and the students find it fun and encouraging to accomplish the activities through games (Nambiar et al, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this systematic review have uncovered several points: (1) the unequal distribution of local cultural integration in ELT among countries in Southeast Asia due to each country's background and history, (2) local culture integration gives a positive impact on students' attitudes and participation in learning English, and (3) some practices of local cultural integration in various ways. The development of local culture integration in ELT studies in some countries in Southeast Asia indicates that its practice is also increasingly preferred, as it might be related to the background and history of each country. The practices of local culture integration that promote learners' good attitude and engagement are accessible in several ways like teaching skills, textbooks, songs, and games. However, the diverse approaches to incorporating local cultures have emerged as an intriguing subject to be explored. All in all, the local culture integration offers a positive contribution to English teaching since it results in a constructive attitude, high motivation, and good engagement in learning English.

## SUGGESTION

With the positive attitude and engagement of local culture integration shown in this study, it is highly recommended to insert local culture in teaching, particularly in outer circle countries, since it promotes familiarity when learning a foreign language. Further research on the use of various teaching materials and strategies of local culture integration in ELT, as well as their impact on students' English improvement, is encouraged.

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