

Culturally Responsive Learning in Indonesian Early Childhood Education: A PRISMA-SCR Scoping Review of Local Wisdom Integration

Yeni Rachmawati¹, Ernawulan Syaodih², Muhammad Fauzar Rosyad¹, Aan Listiana¹, Leli Kurniawati², Aditya Aditama Putri², Murni Sianturi³

¹Ethnoparenting Centre, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

²E-Seed, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

³Excelsia University College, Australia

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Corresponding author

Correspondence to:
Ernawulan Syaodih at Email:
ernawulansy@upi.edu

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ABSTRACT:

Culturally responsive learning has become a global priority in early childhood education, and in Indonesia it is mandated through the *Independent Curriculum* framework via the *Project to Strengthen the Profile of Pancasila Students* and The Core identity learning element. Yet despite this policy mandate, no standardized cultural curriculum or material repository exists, and the literature on how local wisdom is actually operationalized in early childhood classrooms remains fragmented across Indonesia's diverse ethnic and geographic contexts. This scoping review maps the extent, range, and nature of that evidence. Following the Arksey and O'Malley framework and reported per PRISMA-ScR guidelines, a bilingual search of Scopus and Google Scholar was conducted using Publish or Perish, screened against Population–Concept–Context criteria. Fifteen records were identified and screened, yielding seven empirical studies (2021–2025) spanning western to eastern Indonesia. Thematic synthesis identified five clusters of cultural modalities: traditional games and play artifacts, language and oral traditions, performing arts and music, material culture and food, and indigenous philosophies and value systems. Implementation followed a predominantly grassroots, bottom-up model in which teachers act as cultural brokers, embedding heritage into daily lesson plans and local ecosystems absent standardized materials. Three systemic challenges recurred: financial constraints in underfunded centers, the cognitive load of translating local wisdom into national literacy and numeracy indicators, and a values-disconnect from digital and metropolitan culture at home. Findings indicate that effective culturally responsive early education depends less on policy mandate than on sustained investment in teacher capacity and community ecosystems.

Keywords: Culturally responsive learning, Early childhood education, Local wisdom, Indonesia, indigenous

Introduction

The UNESCO (2024) Framework for Culture and Arts Education highlights the global mandate to integrate living cultural heritage in early childhood care and education (ECCE) and situates localized pedagogies as the basis for sustainable child development. In Indonesia, this mandate is enshrined in the Kurikulum Merdeka

(Permendikbudristek No. 12/2024) through the Project to Strengthen the Profile of Pancasila Students and the core Identity learning element, both of which mandate that early instruction be rooted in regional heritage. This study investigates the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in Indonesian early childhood education settings for children aged 0-8 years). We define culturally responsive learning operationally as

those pedagogies that integrate indigenous cultural artifacts, linguistic expressions, physical traditions, or local value systems as integral components of classroom instruction. This study is grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model, both of which view culture as an important macrosystem that promotes early development, and links Western paradigms of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995) with the Indonesian paradigm of ethnopedagogi (Alwasilah et al., 2009). Despite these policy mandates, implementation of culturally responsive learning is challenged by systemic problems emanating from the socio-cultural and geographic fragmentation in Indonesia. The country comprises 633 main ethnic groups consolidated from 1,331 census categories and covers more than 17,508 islands (Ananta et al., 2015). Under the decentralized education system established by Law No. 20 of 2003, early childhood centers are managed locally and have diverse instructional strategies that are implemented in relative isolation. The literature on these practices is correspondingly fragmented. In Indonesia, current systematic literature reviews tend to focus on primary and secondary education levels, or provide broad overviews of localized learning without considering the differences specific to early childhood education. To date, a critical gap exists in the literature for a rigorous, internationally standardized synthesis mapping how these diverse cultural modalities are actually operationalized in early childhood classrooms. A scoping review is more appropriate than a classical systematic review to deal with this fragmentation. The scoping review is the appropriate method here, as suggested by Munn et al. (2018) and Peters et al. (2020), since the Indonesian PAUD literature is highly heterogeneous in terms of research design and the construct of culturally responsive learning is implemented inconsistently across studies. This review is informed by the frameworks of Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and Levac et al. (2010) and explores the extent, range and nature of research activity published within a five-year period (2021-2026). According to Maggio et al. (2021), to ensure the alignment of the rationale and questions, this study's rationale addresses the following three research questions: (1) What are the bibliometric and geographical characteristics of literature on culturally responsive learning in Indonesian

PAUD settings? (2) What cultural modalities, artifacts, and local wisdom themes are most dominantly integrated into early childhood curricula? (3) What pedagogical strategies do educators employ, and what systemic challenges impede implementation? To our knowledge, this is the first PRISMA-ScR-compliant scoping review on this topic, extending culturally responsive frameworks into a multi-ethnic, Global-South context while providing data-driven guidance for policy and practice.

Methods

2.1 Methodological Framework

This scoping review followed the five-stage framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005), enhanced by the operational recommendations of Levac et al. (2010), and was reported in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR; Tricco et al., 2018).

2.2 Research Questions and Objectives

The primary objective of this review is to map the extent, range, and nature of the heterogeneous literature on the practical integration of cultural heritage within Indonesian early childhood classrooms. The review is driven by three interconnected research questions:

1. What are the bibliometric and geographical characteristics of literature on culturally responsive learning in Indonesian ECE settings?
2. What cultural modalities, artifacts, and local wisdom themes are most dominantly integrated into early childhood curricula?
3. What pedagogical strategies do educators employ, and what systemic challenges impede the implementation of these culturally responsive approaches?

2.3 Eligibility Criteria

Following the JBI guidance for scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2020), inclusion and exclusion criteria were established using the Population–Concept–Context (PCC) framework:

- Population (P): Studies targeting early childhood learners aged 0–8 years, early childhood educators, or classroom environments within Indonesian early childhood education contexts, including private/public kindergartens, Islamic kindergartens, ECE community case, childcare and Alternative ECE Services.
- Concept (C): The practical implementation of culturally responsive learning, broadly defined to encompass culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, ethnopedagogy, local-wisdom-based instruction, culture-based learning, and the structured integration of traditional play or regional artifacts into early instruction.
- Context (C): Indonesia, including its sub-national contexts, regional provinces, urban/rural variations, and distinct localized ethnic communities.

Eligibility was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles that reported empirical qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, action research, or research and development (R&D) data on real classroom implementation. The publication window was set for 2021–2026 to ensure its relevance to the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) framework. Only full-text articles in English or Bahasa Indonesia were included in the studies. Studies that focused solely on primary or secondary education, conceptual papers, theoretical essays, literature reviews, editorial letters, and non-peer-reviewed grey literature (e.g., magazines, student theses) were excluded.

2.4 Information Sources and Search Strategy

A bilingual electronic search was performed using two sources, Scopus and Google Scholar, via Publish or Perish (Harzing, 2007). The major international database used was Scopus. Google Scholar was included to

capture the large body of domestic literature published in Indonesian open-access educational journals, including those indexed in national repositories such as Garuda and the Science and Technology Index (SINTA). To ensure feasibility, Google Scholar searches were limited to the top 200 retrieved entries. The search approach was based on three conceptual blocks linked with the Boolean operator "AND." The full search string (PRISMA-ScR Item 8) was: ("culturally responsive teaching" OR "culturally responsive pedagogy" OR "culturally relevant pedagogy" OR "culturally sustaining pedagogy" OR "culturally responsive learning" OR "culture-based learning" OR "ethnopedagogy" OR "etnopedagogi" OR "kearifan lokal" OR "local wisdom" OR "pembelajaran berbasis budaya" OR "pembelajaran berbasis kearifan lokal" OR "permainan tradisional" OR "traditional games" OR "indigenous knowledge") AND ("early childhood education" OR "ECE" OR "ECEC" OR "early years" OR "preschool" OR "kindergarten" OR "PAUD" OR "pendidikan anak usia dini" OR "Taman Kanak-Kanak" OR "TK" OR "Raudhatul Athfal" OR "RA" OR "Kelompok Bermain" OR "KB") AND ("Indonesia*" OR "Indonesian" OR "Javanese" OR "Sundanese" OR "Bali*" OR "Minangkabau" OR "Bugis" OR "Batak")

2.5 Selection of Sources of Evidence

The search and selection of sources was done by the lead author using Publish or Perish (Harzing, 2007). The software was used to run the search queries and to pull out article metadata from Google Scholar and the other databases. The exported list of records was then screened manually in two stages. First, titles and abstracts were reviewed against the pre-specified PCC inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify potentially relevant studies. Second, full-text PDFs of the potentially eligible articles were retrieved and read in full to confirm their eligibility, yielding the final corpus. In cases of uncertainty about a study's eligibility, the decision was discussed with and resolved in consultation with the supervising author.

2.6 Data Charting Process and Data Items

Data from the included sources were extracted using a standardized digital charting form developed in Microsoft Excel. Following Levac et al. (2010), a calibration process preceded full extraction: the two reviewers independently charted the first included sources, then met to compare results, discuss interpretive alignment, and refine the charting variables before completing the remaining corpus. Data items were sought across 12 analytical variables:

1. Author(s) and year of publication
2. Country/province and target ethnic group
3. ECE setting type (e.g., Private/Public Kindergarten, ECE Community-based, Childcare Centre, Islamic Kindergarten, Alternative ECE Services)
4. Study design and core methodology (e.g., qualitative case study, ethnography, R&D, action research)
5. Sample characteristics (sample size, children's ages, and participant roles: child, teacher, parent, or principal)
6. Cultural construct invoked (e.g., local wisdom, ethnopedagogi, traditional plays, cultural base learning activities)
7. Specific cultural artifact, practice, or language integrated (e.g., *congklak*, *gobak sodor*, *batik*, *dolanan*)
8. Instructional/implementation strategy (e.g., standalone curriculum integration, thematic projects such as Project 5, classroom-routine integration, or community engagement)
9. Developmental domains targeted (mapped against the six national child development standards domains: religious-moral, cognitive, language, physical-motor, social-emotional, and art)
10. Reported outcomes (child-, teacher-, and community-level)

11. Systemic barriers and operational enablers identified during implementation

12. Noted literature gaps and recommendations for future practice

2.7 Critical Appraisal of Individual Sources of Evidence

In accordance with the scoping review framework by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and PRISMA-ScR Item 12 guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018), a formal critical appraisal of individual sources was not performed. This decision aligns with the core objective of this scoping review, which is to comprehensively map the extent, range, and nature of the available evidence, rather than to evaluate the methodological quality of the included studies or synthesize statistical effect estimates.

2.8 Synthesis of Results

Extracted data were synthesized using a dual approach combining descriptive summary and qualitative thematic synthesis (Levac et al., 2010). For RQ1, descriptive numerical analysis (frequencies and percentages) summarized bibliometric trends, publication years, geographical concentrations, and setting distributions. For RQ2 and RQ3, thematic analysis was used to group, code, and conceptualize the data on cultural modalities, pedagogical frameworks, and systemic challenges. The study selection process is presented in a PRISMA flow diagram (Fig. 1) in the Results section.

Results

3.1 Study Selection

The search and selection process is summarized in the PRISMA-ScR flow diagram (Fig. 1). The

systematic search of databases (Scopus, Google Scholar, Garuda, and SINTA) initially identified 14 records. No duplicate records were identified. Following title and abstract screening of these database records, 4 records were excluded as out of scope. The remaining 10 reports were sought for retrieval and assessed for full-text eligibility. Of these, 4 reports were excluded for the following specific reasons: a conference proceeding rather than a peer-reviewed article (Lestari, 2025); publication outside the 2021–

2026 window (Lestaringrum & Wijaya, 2019); publication in a community-service journal (Utami et al., 2024); and a focus on primary rather than early childhood education (Douglas, 2020). This resulted in 6 eligible studies from the database search. Concurrently, one additional relevant study (Pertiwi et al., 2025) was identified through hand-searching and met all inclusion criteria. Consequently, the final corpus comprised 7 empirical studies (six from the database search and one from hand-searching).

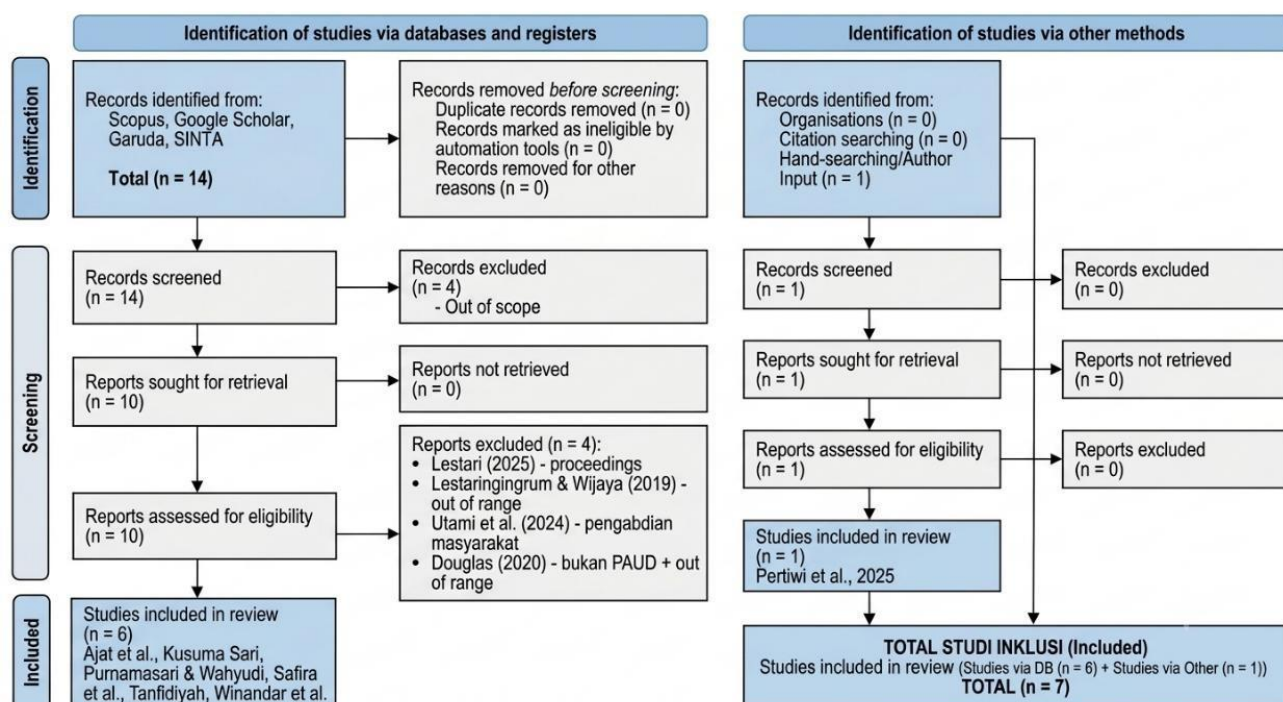


Figure 1 PRISMA-ScR flow diagram of the study selection process

3.2 Bibliometric and Geographical Characteristics of Included Studies (RQ1)

The seven studies were published between 2021 and 2025, reflecting an upward trend in empirical attention to culturally responsive learning (CRL) in Indonesian early childhood education. The corpus is predominantly qualitative: four studies used qualitative case study, descriptive, or phenomenological designs (Tanfidiyah, 2023; Ajat et al., 2024; Winandar et al., 2023; Pertiwi et

al., 2025), while the remainder used mixed methods (Purnamasari & Wahyudi, 2025), Classroom Action Research (Safira et al., 2023), and an ADDIE-based R&D design (Kusuma Sari, 2021). Geographically, the studies span the archipelago Bali, Yogyakarta, East Java, West Sumatra, West Papua, West Java (Cirebon), and Banten capturing cultural ecologies from western to eastern Indonesia. Full characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Bibliometric and geographical characteristics of included studies

N o.	Author(s) & Year	Journal / Study Type	Province/Region	Ethnic/Cultural Group	Study Design	ECE Type
1	Kusuma Sari (2021)	JJPAUD Undiksha	Bali	Nusantara (multi-ethnic)	R&D / ADDIE	Kindergarten
2	Tanfidiyah (2023)	Yaa Bunayya: Jurnal AUD	Yogyakarta (DIY)	Javanese (Bantul)	Qualitative-descriptive	ECE Community base
3	Safira et al. (2023)	Education Journal: R&D	East Java	Javanese (Surabaya)	CAR / PTK (2 cycles)	Islamic Kindergarten
4	Ajat et al. (2024)	AKSARA: Jurnal Nonformal	West Sumatra	Minangkabau	Qualitative case study	ECE Community base
5	Winandar et al. (2023)	Jurnal Wahana Pendidikan	West Papua (Sorong)	Suku Moi	Qualitative + Library	ECE Community base
6	Purnamasari & Wahyudi (2025)	AWLAD Y: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak	West Java (Cirebon)	Cirebonese	Mixed methods (survey + qual.)	ECE Community base (15 schools)
7	Pertiwi et al. (2025)	Studi Fenomenologi	Banten (Serang)	Bantenese / Sundanese	Qualitative Phenomenology	ECE Community base

3.3 Cultural Modalities, Artifacts, and Local Wisdom Themes (RQ2)

The seven studies integrated a diverse range of cultural modalities, grouped here into five thematic clusters (Table

2). Traditional games and play artifacts were the most frequently reported modality, appearing across four studies and including *congklak*, *engklek*, *gobak sodor*, *wayang*, *ular tangga*, and *batu tujuh*. Language and oral traditions functioned both as instructional mediums

(Javanese and the Moi mother tongue) and as content vehicles for character education through regional folklore. Performing arts and music appeared as regional dance, traditional songs, and religious-cultural traditions such as *Muludan*. Material culture encompassed regional foods, traditional clothing and houses, and natural *loose parts* and agro-ecosystems used as open-air learning environments. Finally, studies from non-Javanese communities most explicitly

foregrounded indigenous philosophies and value systems, including the Minangkabau *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* (ABSSBK; custom grounded in Islamic law, which is grounded in the Qur'an), Moi communal cosmology, and the Bantenese values of *gotong royong* and *tepo seliro*.

Table 2. Cultural modalities integrated in included studies

No.	Author(s) & Year	Traditional Games / APE	Language & Oral Traditions	Performing Arts & Music	Material Culture & Food	Indigenous Philosophy / Values
1	Kusuma Sari (2021)	—	—	Regional dance	Traditional clothing & houses	—
2	Tanfidiyah (2023)	<i>Wayang, congklak, engklek, gobak sodor</i>	Javanese (<i>ngoko</i> & <i>krama</i> registers)	<i>Tembang Jawa</i> (Javanese songs)	Traditional market snacks, natural materials	—
3	Safira et al. (2023)	<i>Congklak</i>	—	—	—	—
4	Ajat et al. (2024)	<i>Alek Pacu Jawi</i> event theme	Minangkabau proverbs & oral traditions	<i>Randai</i> , Minangkabau dance	<i>Rendang, Rumah Gadang</i>	<i>Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah</i>
5	Winandar et al. (2023)	<i>Batu tujuh</i> , woven sago leaves	Moi mother tongue	<i>Tifa</i> instruments, Moi carvings	Moi traditional artifacts	Moi communal cosmology
6	Purnamasari & Wahyudi (2025)	—	Cirebonese language	<i>Tari Topeng Cirebon</i>	Regional traditional food, <i>batik</i>	—

No.	Author(s) & Year	Traditional Games / APE	Language & Oral Traditions	Performing Arts & Music	Material Culture & Food	Indigenous Philosophy / Values
7	Pertiwi et al. (2025)	<i>Engklek, ular tangga, loncat tinggi</i>	<i>Legenda Batu Kuwung</i> (folklore)	"Banten Jawara" song, <i>Muludan</i> tradition	Rice fields, vegetable gardens, natural loose parts	<i>Gotong royong, tepo seliro</i>

3.4 Pedagogical Strategies and Systemic Challenges (RQ3)

Pedagogical Strategies

Educators employed various strategies to operationalize Cultural Responsive Learning (CRL). The most common were thematic integration (Tanfidiyah, 2023; Safira et al., 2023) and Project-Based Learning aligned with the national Project 5 (P5) framework (Ajat et al., 2024; Winandar et al., 2023). The technology-based vehicles for cultural transmission were in the form of audio-visual media and internet resources (Kusuma Sari, 2021; Purnamasari & Wahyudi, 2025) while total environmental immersion was reported by Tanfidiyah (2023). Pertiwi et al. (2025) added embodied learning through physical morning routines, and micro-curricular contextualization, where local wisdom is embedded directly into the Daily Lesson Plans.

Systemic Challenges

Across the corpus, three barriers recurred. Firstly, the rural non-formal centres were underfunded and faced severe constraints financially and technically which limited the budget for durable play tools and field trips. Second, teachers had a high cognitive load in transforming oral folklore and traditional game mechanics into quantifiable national literacy and numeracy indicators. Thirdly, there was a value-disconnect between the school pedagogy and home environment due to a shift in children's play preference towards digital gadgets. The most common barrier overall was the absence of suitable culturally responsive

teaching media (Winandar et al., 2023; Purnamasari & Wahyudi, 2025).

4 Discussion

This review mapped how culturally responsive learning (CRL) is operationalized across seven empirical studies in Indonesian early childhood education. Three higher-order patterns emerge, situated against the culturally responsive pedagogy literature (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and *etnopedagogi* (Alwasilah et al., 2009).

4.1 A grassroots, bottom-up model

Cultural Responsive Learning in early childhood education institution in Indonesian is enacted from the ground up rather than through a standardized cultural curriculum. Despite the scaffolding of Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) and Project 5, no study described a central repository of cultural materials; educators themselves selected and embedded local heritage into daily instruction, most explicitly through the micro-curricular contextualization of the daily lesson plan (Pertiwi et al., 2025).

This positions the teacher as a *cultural broker* who translates community knowledge into developmentally appropriate experience consistent with culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings', 1995) and the *etnopedagogi* premise that local wisdom is a legitimate epistemic foundation, not decorative content (Alwasilah et al., 2009). The model's organic character rests on the ambient ecosystem as the

primary resource: rice fields and gardens as open-air laboratories, natural *loose parts*, traditional plays, and routines such as morning regional-anthem singing (Pertiwi et al., 2025; Tanfidiyah, 2023; Winandar et al., 2023). Cultural responsiveness here is thus less a discrete lesson than a pervasive environmental condition (Gay, 2018) a strength where teacher initiative and community richness are present, but fragile where either is lacking.

4.2 The systemic paradox: ambition versus capacity

The corpus repeatedly identified the scarcity of culturally responsive media as the dominant barrier (Purnamasari & Wahyudi, 2025; Winandar et al., 2023), but this reflects a deeper paradox. Though promoted as low-cost and locally grounded, effective CRL still demanded resources that underfunded rural and non-formal centers could not reliably supply durable play tools and field-trip funding especially where families were low-income (Pertiwi et al., 2025). The settings positioned as ideal for community-rooted pedagogy are often the least equipped to sustain it. Compounding this is the cognitive load of mapping diffuse, orally transmitted knowledge onto measurable literacy and numeracy indicators—a direct corollary of the bottom-up model: absent a standardized curriculum, the burden of translating abstract local wisdom into accountable outcomes falls entirely on the individual teacher. The same decentralization that enables context-sensitive practice offloads substantial design labor onto under-supported practitioners, suggesting that policy enthusiasm must be matched by investment in teacher capacity.

4.3 The modernization and school-home disconnect

Several studies recognized the infiltration of digital culture and metropolitan lifestyles as an emerging threat. Children's play preference shifted to gadgets, creating a values-disconnect between school pedagogy and the modernized home (Pertiwi et al., 2025; Purnamasari & Wahyudi, 2025). This is a divergence between

two socializing forces: where the home once reinforced local knowledge cultivated at school, it now increasingly transmits globalized, digitally mediated norms the classroom must work against. CRL thus functions less as celebration of heritage than as a counterweight to cultural erosion—and exposes the limits of a school-centered approach, since weakening the home ecosystem undermines the foundation classroom practice rests on. The studies engaging community and parents most actively (Ajat et al., 2024; Winandar et al., 2023) hint at extending responsiveness beyond the classroom, but the corpus offers little evidence this is systematic.

4.4 Limitations and future directions

Several limitations apply. The corpus comprised only seven studies, limiting the breadth of practices captured; the search drew primarily on two databases with supplementary hand-searching; eligibility was restricted to English and Bahasa Indonesia; and, per PRISMA-ScR guidance, no critical appraisal of methodological quality was conducted. The synthesis therefore maps the landscape rather than evaluating effectiveness. Future work should pursue larger multi-database syntheses and primary studies spanning Indonesia's fuller ethnic and ecological diversity, investigate the teacher-as-cultural-broker role and the support that eases cultural-translation load, test strategies for bridging the school-home disconnect, and use longitudinal designs to assess effects on children's cultural identity and development.

5 Conclusion

This review mapped how culturally responsive learning is implemented in Indonesian early childhood education under Independent Curriculum. The evidence describes a predominantly grassroots model in which teachers act as cultural brokers, drawing on local ecosystems, traditional plays, oral traditions, and indigenous values to embed heritage into daily practice absent standardized curricula. Yet this vitality coexists with a systemic paradox high pedagogical expectations against the limited capacity of underfunded centers and the burden

of translating local wisdom into national metrics and with a tension between school-based transmission and the digitally mediated home. The promise of culturally responsive early education in Indonesia will thus depend less on policy mandate than on sustained investment in teacher capacity, material support, and the community ecosystem in which children's cultural identities form.

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Conflict Of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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