

Integrating Local Wisdom and Character Values in Language Learning: Evaluating Student Insights and Future Needs

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Abstract. This study examines students' perspectives on learning materials in Receptive Oral Language Skills (ROLS) course, with particular attention to the evaluation of existing resources and the development of materials that incorporate local wisdom and character values. While digital resources such as podcasts and videos are increasingly utilized, they often lack integration of cultural contexts and moral education, which are essential for fostering meaningful and contextually relevant learning. Employing qualitative approach, data were obtained through open-ended questionnaires administered to fourth-semester students in the English Education program. The analysis indicates that students appreciate the use of digital resources but emphasize the need for content enriched with local wisdom (e.g., folktales, regional traditions, local history) and moral values, including honesty, cooperation, curiosity, and tolerance. Students also suggested features to enhance accessibility and engagement. These findings provide learner-informed insights for the design of future materials that strengthen listening comprehension, cultural identity, and character education.

Keywords: *Receptive Oral Language Skills, Local Wisdom, Character Education, Digital Learning Materials*

1 Introduction

Education in the 21st century has entered an era shaped by rapid technological advancement. The digital revolution has transformed the ways learners access information and interact with educational content, opening opportunities for more interactive, inclusive, and affordable methods of instruction. Yet, the integration of technology in education should not be limited to enhancing digital literacy. It must also serve as a vehicle to strengthen cultural identity and foster character development. This perspective is in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasizes inclusive and quality education [1]. To achieve this goal, learning must be culturally contextualized so that students become not only competent users of technology but also socially responsible individuals with ethical awareness and sensitivity to their surroundings. Therefore, digital literacy needs to be integrated with local wisdom to shape a generation that can innovate globally while preserving cultural values and identity.

In this context, local wisdom and character education have become increasingly relevant in the era of digital learning. Embedding local culture in digital education provides learners with deeper meaning: they do not merely acquire technical skills but also develop social responsibility, cultural identity, and respect for diversity. Through digital platforms, local traditions such as folktales, rituals, and oral heritage can be presented in attractive and accessible ways [2]. This ensures that learners not only build digital competence but also preserve and appreciate cultural heritage, thereby reinforcing both identity and character.

Culture, as Koentjaraningrat explains, consists of ideas, actions, and artifacts that collectively form shared systems of meaning and social behavior [3], [4]. Preserving and adapting local culture in education is urgent, since it helps strengthen students' cultural identity and enhance the relevance of learning to daily life. Embedding local traditions in teaching materials contextualizes education, enriches classroom interaction, and conveys values such as cooperation, tolerance, and harmony—principles rooted in Pancasila which emphasizes six dimensions: faith and morality, global diversity, cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity [5], [6]. The framework seeks to shape learners who are not only intellectually capable but also resilient, ethical, and adaptable to 21st-century challenges [7], [8], [9].

Empirical studies have further demonstrated that integrating local wisdom into teaching materials enhances motivation and student engagement [10], [11], [12]. Digital teaching resources enriched with local cultural elements, such as interactive flipbooks or multimedia modules, can both contextualize and enliven the learning experience [13], [14]. Such innovations help students connect language learning with their cultural backgrounds, cultivating both linguistic competence and character development. This approach is also supported by contemporary instructional design theories, which highlight the importance of meaningful multimedia integration [13].

One critical course in the English Education program is Receptive Oral Language Skills (ROLS), which focuses on developing students' listening skills. Although central to language acquisition, current instructional practices in ROLS often rely on globally oriented materials with limited integration of local cultural contexts or moral values. This gap reduces the relevance of learning to students' lives. Embedding local wisdom and character values into listening tasks would not only enhance comprehension but also preserve cultural identity and instill positive traits.

Therefore, the renewal of teaching materials in ROLS is essential. The objective of this renewal is not only to improve language proficiency, but also to encourage students to appreciate cultural diversity and develop strong character. The integration of local wisdom and the character values offers a more holistic approach to language education. It prepares students to become not only skilled users of English but also ethical and culturally grounded individuals ready to contribute to a globally connected society [14], [15].

Specifically, this study focuses on designing digital learning materials rooted in the local wisdom of three major ethnic groups in North Sumatra—Batak Toba, Batak Mandailing, and Batak Karo—which represent the cultural backgrounds of many students. The design draws on Koentjaraningrat's cultural theory, emphasizing the interplay of ideas, practices, and artifacts, as well as the six character values. Through this integration, learners are expected to develop linguistic competence, cultural awareness, and strong character.

In line with the abstract, this paper evaluates students' insights into existing ROLS learning materials and identifies their expectations for future resources. By incorporating local wisdom and character education into digital teaching, the study seeks to bridge the gap between global language learning and local cultural identity, ultimately contributing to the achievement of quality and inclusive education as envisioned by the SDGs.

2 Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore students' perspectives on previously used learning materials and their expectations for future resources in the *Receptive Oral Language Skills (ROLS)* course. The qualitative design was chosen to capture detailed insights into students' experiences, attitudes, and suggestions, allowing the researchers to identify themes that reflect learners' needs in context. Qualitative research is particularly suited for examining educational phenomena because it provides rich, descriptive data and enables deeper understanding of human experiences [17].

The study was conducted in the English Education program at Universitas Negeri Medan (UNIMED) and involved twenty-eight students enrolled in the ROLS course. Data were collected using an open-ended questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. This instrument encouraged students to provide in-depth responses regarding their experiences with current learning resources, the difficulties they faced, and their expectations for materials that integrate local wisdom and character values.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Result

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into students' perceptions of existing digital learning materials and their expectations for future development. Overall, while students expressed satisfaction with the practicality of current resources, they also identified several challenges and areas for improvement. In line with the study's objective to evaluate and redesign receptive oral language skills (ROLS) learning materials by integrating local wisdom and character education, the following section presents the key findings derived from students' perspectives. The results highlight how learners perceive the effectiveness of the current digital resources, their expectations for more culturally grounded content, the integration of character values, and suggested features to improve accessibility and engagement.

Challenges Faced by Students

Despite acknowledging the usefulness of digital tools, students reported a number of challenges. These included the lack of local cultural context in existing materials, limited access to reliable internet connectivity and digital devices, poor audio quality in some resources, and a limited variety of listening exercises. These issues directly reflect the gap highlighted in the abstract, namely that current materials are functional but insufficient in terms of cultural integration.

Table 1. Challenges Faced by Students

Challenge	Frequency	% of Students
Lack of local cultural context	28	70%
Limited internet/device access	20	50%
Poor audio quality	15	38%
Limited variety in listening exercises	12	30%

Preferred Features for Future Materials

Students expressed a strong preference for features that would make digital materials more engaging and interactive. They recommended video lessons and audio listening activities based on local stories, interactive quizzes, gamified exercises, and project-based assignments. Online discussion forums were also seen as important tools to encourage collaboration and critical thinking. Such features suggest that students are not only seeking accessibility but also meaningful engagement in their learning process.

Table 2. Preferred Features for Future Materials

Feature	Frequency	% of Students
Video lessons based on local stories	32	80%
Interactive quizzes & gamified tasks	25	63%
Project-based assignments	18	45%
Online discussion forums	22	55%

Interest in Local Topics

A particularly strong finding was students' interest in integrating local wisdom into listening and comprehension tasks. Popular themes included folktales, local history, traditional customs and practices, as well as local songs and oral traditions. This confirms the argument that learners benefit more when content reflects their cultural identity and provides context-driven, meaningful learning experiences.

Table 3. Interest in Local Topics

Local Topic	Frequency	% of Students
Folktales	30	75%
Local history	25	63%
Traditional customs/practices	20	50%
Local songs & oral traditions	18	45%

Desired Character Values

In addition to content preferences, students emphasized the importance of embedding character values into digital resources. The most commonly identified values were curiosity, creativity, honesty, cooperation, tolerance, and responsibility. Students believed that these values should not be treated as additional components but integrated into the design of learning materials. To promote character development, students recommended the use of interactive dialogues, audio storytelling, personal reflection tasks, and group projects. Such methods were seen as effective in encouraging learners to reflect on moral lessons while simultaneously developing their listening skills.

Table 4. Desired Character Values

Character Value	Frequency	% of Students
Curiosity	28	70%
Creativity	24	60%
Honesty	20	50%
Cooperation	22	55%
Tolerance	18	45%
Responsibility	15	38%

Preferred Formats and Platforms

Students also indicated their preferred formats and platforms for future materials. They favored multimedia combinations such as podcasts, short videos, and storytelling. In terms of platforms, YouTube and the campus learning management system (Google Classroom) were considered the most convenient, followed by mobile applications. These preferences highlight the importance of accessibility and familiarity in digital learning.

Finally, in their open-ended responses, students expressed hopes that digital materials would help them better understand their own culture, increase their motivation to learn listening skills, and provide a more meaningful and enjoyable learning experience. These comments strongly resonate with the study's aim of designing resources that are not only academically effective but also culturally relevant and personally meaningful.

Table 5. Preferred Formats

Format	Frequency	% of Students
Podcasts	15	38%
Short videos	20	50%
Storytelling	10	25%
Combination	25	63%

Table 6. Preferred Platforms

Platform	Frequency	% of Students
YouTube	22	55%
LMS (Campus/GC)	18	45%
Mobile Apps	12	30%

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study show that while students appreciate the practicality of digital resources currently used in the ROLS course, they also feel that something essential is missing. Most of them pointed out that the materials often lack local cultural context, making learning feel distant from their everyday lives. This concern is not unique to this study. Previous research also suggests that when teaching materials do not reflect learners' sociocultural background, they may lose relevance and fail to fully engage students [10], [11], [12]. Integrating folktales, local history, and traditional practices into listening materials can therefore serve a dual purpose: improving language skills while also strengthening cultural identity. As Koentjaraningrat emphasized, culture is more than knowledge—it is also practices and artifacts that shape the way people live and learn [3], [4].

Another strong message from the students is the importance of character education. They consistently identified curiosity, honesty, cooperation, tolerance, and responsibility as values that should be integrated into digital materials which highlight students' own awareness that education should go beyond academic goals [5], [6], [7]. They suggested practical ways of doing this, such as through interactive dialogues, reflective questions, and audio storytelling. These approaches demonstrate that character values can be naturally embedded into listening tasks rather than treated as additional or separate components.

In terms of pedagogy, the features students requested—interactive quizzes, gamified tasks, project-based assignments, and discussion forums—indicate their preference for learning that is active, collaborative, and motivating. Their choices also align with theories of multimedia learning [13], which stress that students learn best when they are engaged in constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving it. Just as important, their emphasis on familiar platforms such as YouTube, the campus LMS, and mobile apps reflects the reality that accessibility and convenience play a crucial role in sustaining learning motivation.

Finally, students' open comments highlight broader hopes for digital materials: they want to understand their own culture better, feel more motivated, and enjoy the learning process. These aspirations strongly resonate with the idea that education should not only build competence but also nurture identity and social responsibility, as envisioned by SDG 4 [1], [2].

Overall, the discussion suggests that developing future ROLS materials should not be seen merely as updating resources but as rethinking their purpose. Materials enriched with local wisdom and character values can transform language learning into a more meaningful, relevant, and holistic experience. They prepare students not just to communicate in English but also to do so as culturally rooted and ethically aware individuals.

4 Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of integrating local wisdom and character values into digital learning materials for the ROLS course. While students acknowledged the usefulness of existing digital resources such as podcasts and videos, they also pointed out significant gaps, particularly the lack of cultural relevance and moral content. The findings show that students not only want engaging features such as interactive quizzes, gamification, and discussion forums but also strongly expect content that reflects their cultural identity through folktales, local history, and traditional practices. At the same time, they emphasize the need for materials to embed values such as curiosity, honesty, cooperation, tolerance, and responsibility. Together, these insights underline that meaningful language learning must go beyond functional skills, offering experiences that are culturally grounded, ethically relevant, and personally motivating.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that curriculum developers design digital materials that integrate authentic language input with local cultural themes, ensuring that learning feels relevant and meaningful. Instructors are encouraged to enrich existing global resources with locally contextualized activities that also embed character values such as honesty, curiosity, and cooperation. Institutions should provide adequate technological support to make these resources more accessible, particularly for students with limited connectivity. Future research may also explore how such integrated materials impact students' language proficiency, cultural awareness, and moral development over time.

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