

LOCAL WISDOM AS A STRATEGIC CAPITAL IN EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND LEARNING TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how educational management develops a local wisdom-based curriculum as a strategy to improve learning quality. This study employs a multi-case qualitative design conducted in three public high schools in Aceh: SMA 1 banda Aceh, SMA 3 Banda Aceh, and SMA 1 Pidie. Data were collected from 20 participants, including school principals, teachers, students, and customary leaders, through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and analysis of curriculum-related documents such as syllabi, lesson plans, and school program records. Data were analyzed thematically using a systematic coding process involving open, axial, and selective coding to identify patterns across cases and construct conceptual categories. Findings show that local wisdom functions as strategic curriculum capital, strengthening institutional legitimacy, increasing student engagement in learning, and fostering a more solid moral and social identity. The integration of values such as hospitality ethics, collective solidarity, and customary norms not only enriches teaching materials but also builds collaborative governance between schools and communities. The professional transformation of teachers occurs through a shift in their role from material deliverers to designers of culturally based, contextually relevant curricula. This model results in increased learning relevance, active student participation, and community trust in schools. This study formulates a Strategic Cultural Curriculum Management model that positions local wisdom as a form of educational managerial capital. Its contribution broadens the discourse on curriculum management, educational governance, and learning quality in the global context.

Keywords

Cultural Governance, Curriculum Development, Educational Management, Learning Quality, Local Wisdom.



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, global education policy has increasingly emphasized the importance of integrating 21st-century competencies with sociocultural sensitivity as the foundation for a sustainable education system (Biesta, 2015; OECD, 2021; Supaat et al., 2025; Taufikin et al., 2024). However, this global orientation raises fundamental academic challenges, particularly in the context of post-conflict societies. The process of curriculum standardization driven by global demands often leads to the marginalization of local knowledge and the erosion of students' cultural identities (Fullan, 2016; Hau & Thanh, 2025). In the context of Aceh, a region that experienced prolonged conflict between the Free Aceh Movement and the Indonesian government until the 2005 Helsinki Peace Agreement was reached, education plays a strategic role not only as a means of knowledge transmission but also as an instrument for social reconstruction and the restoration of collective identity (Bashori et al., 2025; Halik et al., 2025; Oktari et al., 2018). Data from the Central Statistics Agency indicate that secondary school enrollment rates in Aceh have exceeded 90% in recent years; however, the quality of learning still faces serious challenges, particularly regarding student engagement and the relevance of instructional materials (BPS, 2023). Additionally, a UNICEF report confirms that post-conflict regions like Aceh still face issues of educational quality disparities and public trust in formal institutions (<https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/sites/unicef.org/indonesia>) (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2014). This highlights a gap between quantitative achievements and the substantive quality of education, necessitating a culturally contextualized approach as a strategic solution.

Within this framework, local wisdom must be positioned not merely as cultural content, but as strategic capital in educational management. In Acehnese society, values such as *peumulia jamee*, *gotong royong*, and the principle of *adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah* constitute a living system of norms that regulates social relations within the community (Darnela et al., 2025; Kasim & Nurdin, 2020; Siradjuddin, 2023). The integration of these values into educational management, particularly in curriculum planning and school governance, has the potential to enhance institutional legitimacy and strengthen the relationship between schools and the community. A study by the World Bank indicates that community participation in education in post-conflict regions significantly contributes to improved school effectiveness and the sustainability of educational programs (Azizbeyli, 2017; World Bank Group, 2018). In Aceh, the involvement of traditional leaders and religious scholars in the educational process has proven to increase

community participation and strengthen trust in schools (Nizariah et al., 2025a; Wardhana et al., 2023). Thus, local wisdom can serve as a strategic resource that not only enriches learning content but also strengthens educational governance structurally.

Furthermore, the implementation of local wisdom in post-conflict learning transformation in Aceh is reflected in various contextual pedagogical practices. The integration of cultural values into learning materials, the use of approaches based on local experiences, and the strengthening of community-based learning have proven effective in increasing student engagement (Mardhatillah et al., 2026; Nizariah et al., 2025b). Research in several schools in Aceh indicates that a contextual learning approach rooted in local culture increases students' active participation and strengthens their social identity (Jauza Nareswari et al., 2024; Sarmini et al., 2018). However, the success of this integration is significantly influenced by various factors, such as school leadership, teacher capacity, and local policy support. A UNESCO study emphasizes that the success of culture-based education heavily depends on the synergy between policy, pedagogical practices, and community engagement (Edgar & UNESCO, 2001). Therefore, the transformation of learning based on local wisdom requires a systemic approach that simultaneously integrates managerial, pedagogical, and social dimensions.

This study was specifically conducted at three high schools in Aceh: SMA 1 Banda Aceh, SMA 3 Banda Aceh, and SMA 1 Pidie. The implementation of a curriculum based on local wisdom at these three schools showed different patterns but shared a common trend: the integration of Acehese cultural values remains partial and has not yet been structured within a systematic curriculum management framework. At SMA Negeri 1 Banda Aceh, values such as *peumulia jamee* and local customary practices have been integrated into the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening (P5) project activities, but have not been consistently documented in formal curriculum documents such as syllabi and lesson plans. Meanwhile, at SMA Negeri 3 Banda Aceh, the integration of local values is more prevalent in extracurricular activities and community-based initiatives, such as *gotong royong* and village-based religious activities. Still, it has not yet been incorporated into the core curriculum design. At SMA Negeri 1 Pidie, more systematic efforts were observed through collaboration with traditional leaders and local religious scholars in developing contextual materials. However, these remain limited to specific subjects such as Islamic Religious Education and Sociology.

Although this implementation demonstrates an awareness of the importance of local wisdom, various significant practical challenges persist across all three schools. First, there is a

disconnect between national curriculum policies and local contextual needs, leaving teachers to struggle to integrate cultural values into measurable learning indicators. Second, teachers' capacity to develop a curriculum grounded in local wisdom remains limited, particularly in contextual learning design and culture-based assessment. Third, the absence of a standardized curriculum management model means that the integration of local wisdom relies on individual initiative rather than an institutional system. At SMA 1 Banda Aceh, for example, only 4 out of 18 teachers actively integrate local values into their teaching; at SMA 3 Banda Aceh, locally-based activities are not linked to learning outcomes; while at SMA 1 Pidie, the main challenge lies in the lack of sustained school policy support. These conditions indicate that the primary issue is not the absence of local values but rather the weakness of curriculum management in systematically operationalizing them. Therefore, this study is crucial for examining how curriculum management can function as a strategic instrument in integrating local wisdom in a structured, measurable, and sustainable manner at the high school level.

A number of previous studies have made significant contributions to understanding the relationship between local wisdom, educational management, and learning transformation. Research by Dewi et al. (2026) indicates that local wisdom serves as a source of contextual knowledge capable of enhancing the relevance of learning, though it has not yet examined its managerial dimensions. Rosyidah's (2025) study found that the integration of local cultural values can strengthen students' character, but was limited to the pedagogical implementation level. Fathurrochman et al. (2025) revealed that local wisdom contributes to the formation of students' cultural identity, yet has not been linked to institutional governance. Hasan et al. (Hasan et al., 2025) demonstrate that the application of local values in learning increases student engagement, but have not explained the systemic mechanisms of curriculum policy. Meanwhile, Hanapi et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of collaboration between schools and the community in culture-based education, yet have not integrated aspects of teacher professional transformation. From these five studies, a significant research gap can be identified: the absence of an integrative study that positions local wisdom as strategic capital in educational management, linking policy dimensions, governance, pedagogical practices, and learning quality within a single, cohesive conceptual framework. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in the formulation of the Strategic Cultural Curriculum Management model, which integrates local wisdom as managerial capital in educational transformation.

Theoretically, this study is rooted in several key discourses. First, Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital asserts that cultural values can function as symbolic resources that generate social legitimacy within educational institutions. Second, Habermas's theory of communicative action emphasizes the importance of deliberative spaces in building participatory governance through dialogue between schools and the community. Third, Freire's critical pedagogy positions education as a liberating dialogic process, in which learners are actively engaged in the construction of knowledge based on their social experiences. Furthermore, normatively, national policy frameworks such as Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System and the Aceh Qanun on the implementation of sharia-based education provide formal legitimacy for the integration of local values into the education system (Mukhlis et al., 2025; Nurdin & Ridwansyah, 2020). Thus, this study is grounded not only in empirical evidence but also in strong theoretical and normative foundations.

Based on this gap, this study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of how local wisdom is constructed, integrated, and operationalized in educational management as a strategy to improve the quality of learning in senior high schools in Aceh. Operationally, this study addresses three main questions: (1) how is local wisdom integrated into curriculum planning; (2) how does this integration influence governance and learning practices; and (3) what is its impact on the quality of learning and the legitimacy of the school institution.

This study holds significance in two main dimensions. Theoretically, it contributes to the development of the Strategic Cultural Curriculum Management framework, which expands the educational management paradigm from an administrative orientation toward a cultural legitimacy-based approach. Pragmatically, it offers implications for policymakers and educational practitioners to design curricula that not only meet national standards but are also socially and culturally relevant. Furthermore, this study also provides strategic guidance for schools in building partnerships with the community, strengthening the role of teachers as cultural mediators, and integrating technology in a contextually appropriate manner. Thus, this study is expected to serve as a relevant conceptual model for countries in the Global South in addressing the challenges of educational modernization without losing their cultural identity.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative, multi-case design to explore in depth how local wisdom is constructed and operationalized in curriculum development management in senior high schools

(Bearman, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2022; de Vries, 2020). This design was chosen because the research questions focus on processes, meanings, and governance dynamics that cannot be reduced to quantitative variables alone. The case study approach allows researchers to understand phenomena in real-life contexts holistically and contextually (de Vries, 2020; Yin, 2014). In addition, the multi-case design provides opportunities for cross-location comparisons, enabling sharper identification of patterns and variations in implementation. Epistemologically, this study departs from a constructivist paradigm that views social reality as the result of meaning negotiations between actors in a particular cultural context (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2017). This framework is relevant to the research objective of understanding how Acehese traditional values and social practices are positioned as strategic capital in curriculum governance.

The research was conducted in three public high schools in Aceh Province, located in SMA 3 Banda Aceh, SMA 3 Banda Aceh, and SMA 1 Pidie. These three locations were purposively selected because they represent variations in Aceh's socio-cultural and geographical characteristics: urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. Aceh has a unique history as a region with a strong customary and religious system, as well as experiences of armed conflict and post-disaster social reconstruction. In this context, schools function not only as academic institutions but also as spaces for the reproduction of social values and community legitimacy. The selection of schools was based on the following criteria: (1) having an explicit initiative to integrate local wisdom into the curriculum or school activities; (2) being recognized by the local education office as a school that is active in learning innovation; and (3) being willing to provide access to data for ethical and transparent research.

Twenty research participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their roles in curriculum development. They consisted of 3 school principals, 9 teachers from various subjects, 4 traditional leaders or local community representatives, and 4 students in grades XI and XII. The inclusion criteria included at least 2 years of experience in implementing a local wisdom-based curriculum or related school activities. In addition to interviews, data sources included curriculum documents (syllabi, lesson plans, extracurricular programs), school meeting minutes, and artifacts of culture-based activities. The documents analyzed were produced between 2021 and 2024 to ensure they are relevant to current national curriculum policies.

Data collection was conducted over six months using three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. The interview guide was

developed based on the Strategic Cultural Curriculum Management conceptual framework developed in this study, covering aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation of local wisdom-based curricula. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent. Observations were conducted on learning activities and extracurricular activities that incorporated elements of local wisdom, focusing on teacher-student interactions and the representation of traditional values in classroom practices. Field notes were compiled systematically immediately after the observations to maintain descriptive accuracy.

Data analysis was conducted thematically through three main stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Benaquisto, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Scott & Medaugh, 2017). In the initial stage, researchers identified units of meaning related to the integration of local wisdom and curriculum management practices. Next, these codes were grouped into conceptual categories, including institutional legitimacy, collaborative governance, and teacher professional transformation. The final stage focused on developing theoretical propositions that formed the Strategic Cultural Curriculum Management model. To improve the traceability of the analysis, the coding process was conducted manually using a categorization matrix and reflective discussions among researchers. Cross-case analysis compared patterns across schools to identify similarities and differences in practices.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The results are organized in line with the research questions: (1) how is local wisdom constructed in curriculum planning; (2) how does its implementation affect governance and learning practices; and (3) how does it impact learning quality and institutional legitimacy. The findings show that local wisdom is not merely a value but also a strategic mechanism in curriculum management. Empirically, three main patterns are consistent across all research locations, which are then synthesized into a conceptual model. The main findings of this study are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Main finding: Cross-Case Synthesis of Local Wisdom as Strategic Capital in Educational Management and Learning Transformation

Stage	Local Wisdom Role	Governance Transformation	Learning Transformation	Impact	Model Typology
Planning	Normative foundation (adat, religious values)	Vision–mission alignment	Curriculum contextualization	Policy legitimacy	Normative-Integrative
Governance	Social capital (musyawarah, adat leaders)	Participatory decision-making	Teacher autonomy	Institutional trust	Participatory Governance
Learning	Cultural resources (language, practices)	Flexible supervision	Contextual pedagogy	Student engagement	Contextual Learning
Post-conflict context	Peace & resilience values	Conflict-sensitive management	Socio-emotional learning	Reduced conflict	Transformative Resilience

Source: primary data analysis by Researcher

Local Wisdom as the Foundation of Curriculum Planning

The first finding shows that the integration of local wisdom begins at the curriculum-planning stage, through the reinterpretation of traditional values as normative and operational references. Values such as respect for guests, collective solidarity, and adherence to traditional norms are not only mentioned in the vision and mission documents; they are also reflected in the organization's culture. Still, they are also translated into syllabi, learning indicators, and extracurricular programs. Table 2 below summarises the main themes that emerged from interviews, observations, and documentation.

Table 2. Integration of Local Wisdom in Curriculum Planning

Thematic Category	Data Source	Frequency of Occurrence	Representative Quote	Interpretation
Vision–mission revision based on customary values	Principals, school documents	3 schools	“We adjusted the school’s vision to reflect Acehese customary values.”	Local wisdom is institutionalized at the policy level
Integration of local values into the syllabus	Teachers, lesson plan documents	9 teachers	“We connect the learning materials with surrounding cultural practices.”	Curriculum contextualization occurs systematically
Consultation with customary leaders	Principals, customary leaders	3 schools	“Every new program is discussed with customary authorities.”	Co-governance takes place in the planning process
Strengthening local content through extracurricular activities	Activity observations	6 activities	Community service activities and cultural visits	Values are internalized through direct practice

Source: primary data analysis by Researcher

The data in Table 2 shows that all schools conducted informal and formal consultations with traditional leaders before establishing culture-based programs. The frequency of this theme is relatively high and consistent, indicating that the planning process is not entirely top-down. In observing curriculum meetings, the researcher noted discussions about the relevance of national material to local social conditions. In summary, the first finding confirms that local wisdom serves as a normative foundation in curriculum planning and is the initial source of legitimacy for school policies.

Transformation of Governance and Learning Practices

The second finding shows that integrating local wisdom influences governance patterns and learning practices. Teachers no longer follow the standard material structure; they now make contextual adaptations to suit students' social experiences.

Table 3. Impact of Implementation on Governance and Learning

Thematic Category	Data Source	Frequency	Representative Quote	Interpretation
Teachers as designers of contextualized curriculum	Teachers	9 teachers	"We develop case examples based on the everyday lives of the surrounding community."	Transformation of teachers' professional roles
School–community collaboration	Principals, customary leaders	3 schools	"The school remains open to community input."	Participatory governance practices
Integration of digital tools and cultural content	Classroom observations	7 classrooms	Digital presentations on local traditions	Modernization without abandoning locality
Value-based supervision	Supervision documents	3 schools	Supervision notes refer to character and ethical dimensions	Evaluation extends beyond academic performance

Source: primary data analysis by Researcher

From interviews with teachers (Table 3), a shift in professional identity was apparent. Teachers admitted to being more reflective in their choice of methods and materials. Classroom observations showed that history, sociology, and language lessons were often linked to local cultural practices. In one class, students created a digital project on local customs and presented it using interactive media. Changes in governance were also seen in the supervision mechanism. Principals not only evaluated academic achievement but also the suitability of learning to local character values. Thus, the integration of local wisdom influenced both managerial and pedagogical

dimensions.

Impact on Learning Quality and Institutional Legitimacy

The third finding relates to perceptions of learning quality and school institutional legitimacy. The data shows an increase in student engagement and community trust in the school.

Table 4. Impact on Learning Quality

Thematic Category	Data Source	Frequency	Representative Quote	Interpretation
Increased student participation	Teachers, classroom observations	8 classrooms	"Students are more active when the material relates to their everyday lives."	Relevance enhances student engagement
Strengthening of moral identity	Students	4 students	"We have come to better understand our own customs."	Internalization of values occurs
Increased trust	parental Customary leaders	3 leaders	"The school now better reflects our culture."	Social legitimacy is strengthened
Decrease in disciplinary conflicts	School documents	2 schools	Records indicate a decline in violations	Cultural values support social regulation

Source: Primary Data analysis by Researcher

The findings in Table 4 show that integrating cultural values into learning not only has an impact on pedagogical aspects but also strengthens the institutional legitimacy of schools in the eyes of the community. Increased student participation in the eight observation classes confirms that the relevance of the material to everyday life encourages active involvement and a sense of ownership of the learning process. At the same time, students' statements about a deeper understanding of their own customs indicate the internalization of values, not just cognitive mastery. Externally, the increased trust of parents and traditional leaders indicates that the school is seen as increasingly representative of the collective identity of the community. The decrease in disciplinary violations in the two schools reinforces the argument that cultural values function as an effective social regulation mechanism. Thus, the quality of learning and social legitimacy grow simultaneously and reinforce each other, forming the foundation for the sustainability of educational institutions.

Model Construction of Cultural Curriculum Management

Based on the cross-case synthesis, this study constructs a model that positions local wisdom as strategic capital in linking planning, governance, learning, and institutional impact within the context of post-conflict education in Aceh (see Table 1 and Figure 1). This model is systemic, built on consistent empirical patterns across three schools, and comprises four main stages: planning, governance, learning, and post-conflict context, which are interconnected through causal relationships and reinforced by a feedback loop.

In the planning stage, local wisdom functions as a normative foundation that is translated into the school's vision, mission, and curriculum. This integration enhances policy legitimacy by reflecting the community's collective values. This stage forms the Normative-Integrative Model, namely the integration of values as the structural foundation of educational management.

The governance stage highlights local wisdom as social capital that fosters participatory governance through musyawarah and the involvement of traditional leaders. The impact is increased institutional trust and teacher autonomy in learning. This stage forms the Participatory Governance Model, which emphasizes collaboration between schools and communities. In the learning stage, local wisdom becomes a cultural resource in the development of contextual pedagogy. Learning is linked to students' social experiences and is supported by more flexible supervision. The result is increased student engagement. This stage yields the Contextual Learning Model, which affirms the relevance of culture in learning.

The post-conflict context stage positions local wisdom as a source of peace and social resilience. Through conflict-sensitive management and the strengthening of social-emotional learning, schools can reduce conflict and strengthen social cohesion. This stage forms the Transformative Resilience Model. Collectively, these four stages form the Strategic Cultural Curriculum Management Model, in which local wisdom functions not only as content but as a managerial framework linking policy, practice, and educational outcomes. The feedback loop mechanism indicates that improvements in learning quality and institutional legitimacy will continue to strengthen the sustainable integration of local wisdom.

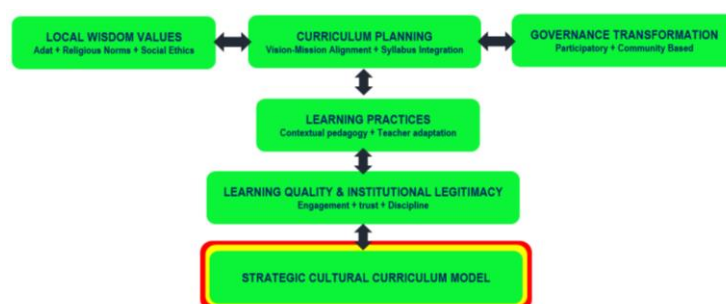


Figure 1. Model Construction of Cultural Curriculum Management

Discussion

The integration of local wisdom is indeed underway, but it has not yet been firmly institutionalized in curriculum management. At SMA 1 Banda Aceh, the integration of values such as *peumulia jamee* appears in project-based activities. Still, it has not yet been consistently incorporated into the formal curriculum framework. At SMA 3 Banda Aceh, the practice of local

wisdom is more vibrant in the school's social-religious activities, yet it is not directly linked to learning outcomes. SMA 1 Pidie, on the other hand, is making more progress by working with traditional leaders, but this is only happening in certain subjects. Overall, all three schools indicate that local wisdom exists as a practice but has not yet become a system. This situation aligns with findings from recent studies indicating that cultural integration in education often remains at the symbolic level and has not yet reached the structural level within the curriculum (Ainscow, 2020; Biesta, 2015; Hao Nguyen & Hargittai, 2024; Hidayati et al., 2025; OECD, 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, this situation can be analyzed through Pierre Bourdieu's framework of cultural capital; local wisdom in Aceh functions as symbolic capital with significant potential to enhance the school's social legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1986; Medvetz & Sallaz, 2018; Mohseni, 2022). However, because it has not yet been institutionalized within the formal curriculum, this capital has not been fully converted into structural power. These finding underscores that legitimacy does not arise automatically from cultural values but from the process of institutionalization within the educational system. This argument is reinforced by various recent studies confirming that cultural capital is only effective when integrated into the structure of educational organizations, not merely as informal practices (Arifin et al., 2023; Pizarro & Toro, 2023; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009).

Furthermore, the patterns of interaction between schools and the community in the three high schools indicate the emergence of co-governance, although it is not yet fully developed. Within Jürgen Habermas's framework, this condition can be understood as a communicative space that is not yet fully deliberative (Gaspar, 1999; Molotokiene, 2012). Schools remain dominant as the primary actors, while the community plays a supplementary role. Yet, the legitimacy of educational policies requires an equal dialogue. These findings are consistent with the literature, indicating that community participation in education is often procedural rather than substantive (Corbella & Úcar, 2022; Fraser, 2025; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Syam et al., 2020).

At the pedagogical level, the transformation of the teacher's role also appears inconsistent. Some teachers have begun to function as cultural mediators, while others remain in the old pattern as curriculum implementers. From the perspective of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, this situation indicates that learning is not yet fully dialogic (Paulo Freire, 1993; Peruzzo, 2020; Rodríguez, 2022; Torres-Olave, 2021). Teachers remain in an ambiguous position between agents of change and policy administrators. These findings align with recent research showing that curriculum reforms often fail because they are not accompanied by the professional transformation of teachers (Biesta, 2015;

Darling-Hammond, 2017; Fullan, 2016; Huda et al., 2024; Priestley et al., 2015).

When considered alongside previous research, local wisdom has consistently demonstrated positive impacts on student character and engagement (Afrianto & Yusuf, 2024; Nur et al., 2025; Yani et al., 2025). However, most research has remained at the pedagogical level. This study indicates that these impacts are highly dependent on the structure of curriculum management. These findings align with and expand upon recent studies on culturally responsive education, which emphasize the importance of integrating cultural identity into learning (Austin et al., 2025; Avidar, 2025; Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022; Taufikin et al., 2025).

On the other hand, there is a dimension that does not fully align with the global literature, particularly regarding digitalization. Many studies view digitalization as a threat to local culture. However, findings from the three high schools indicate that technology has instead become a new medium for the expression of local culture. From Anthony Giddens' perspective, this constitutes a form of reflexive modernity (Braslavskiy, 2023; Giddens, 1991). These findings both affirm and correct the literature on educational globalization, which tends to be pessimistic regarding the relationship between technology and culture (Edwards & Ritchie, 2022; Selwyn, 2019; Siregar et al., 2025; Williamson, 2017).

However, this study's findings also contain an important counterpoint. Not all integration of local wisdom automatically yields positive outcomes. In the three high schools studied, unmanaged integration actually led to fragmentation. Cultural values were present but not measurable in learning outcomes. This situation indicates that without a robust management design, local wisdom risks becoming merely symbolic. These findings critique the dominant assumptions in the literature that are overly normative in their view of culture-based education (Biesta, 2020; Marginson, 2014; Tikly et al., 2020).

Based on the overall analysis, this study confirms that the primary issue lies not in a lack of local wisdom but in the weakness of curriculum management in integrating these values. Therefore, the concept of cultural legitimacy driven curriculum sustainability becomes relevant. This model positions cultural legitimacy as the foundation for the sustainability of learning quality. These findings expand the discourse on educational management, which has traditionally been more administratively oriented, to one grounded in social and cultural legitimacy (M. D. Bush, 2014; T. Bush, 2020; Fullan, 2016; Hallinger & Kovačević, 2022; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Prabowo et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of findings from SMA 1 Banda Aceh, SMA 3 Banda Aceh, and SMA 1 Pidie, this study confirms that the sustainability of learning quality is not primarily determined by administrative compliance with curriculum standards, but rather by the level of cultural legitimacy inherent in its design and implementation. The main novelty of this study lies in the formulation of the concept of Cultural Legitimacy–Driven Curriculum Sustainability, namely the idea that a curriculum rooted in local wisdom, managed through collaborative school–community governance, strengthened by the reorientation of teachers' professionalism, and articulated through contextual digital integration will produce learning quality that is not only effective but also socially sustainable. These findings show that cultural legitimacy serves as a binding force between curriculum structure and community trust, enabling student engagement, identity cohesion, and learning relevance to grow simultaneously. Thus, this study shifts the discourse on educational quality from mere administrative quality assurance to a more substantive cultural legitimacy assurance.

The implications of these findings are strategic. In terms of policy, curriculum designers need to consider the dimensions of social and cultural legitimacy as key variables in education reform, not merely as indicators of academic achievement. Institutionally, schools are encouraged to build deliberative partnerships with communities and facilitate the professional development of teachers as cultural mediators. The integration of technology also needs to be positioned as a medium for articulating local values, not as an instrument of global homogenization. This approach provides a practical framework for educational institutions to manage change adaptively without losing their social roots. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in its cross-theoretical synthesis—social reproduction, critical pedagogy, and culturally responsive education—reconstructed into a single integrative model based on legitimacy. However, this study has limitations in specific sociocultural contexts and has not longitudinally tested the impact of cultural legitimacy on quantitative academic performance. Further research could develop instruments to measure cultural legitimacy comparatively across regions or countries and test this model using a mixed-methods approach to strengthen its external validity. Despite these limitations, this study still makes a significant contribution to expanding the horizon of thinking about the curriculum as an arena for negotiating social meanings that determine the direction of educational sustainability.

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