RECONSTRUCTING CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT AS A KEY PILLAR OF REALISING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY IN MARGINALISED SCHOOLS

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Abstract	This study investigates the reconstruction of curriculum management in marginalised schools through the lens of educational justice. Using a critical narrative approach, the research examines the challenges faced by schools in Amuntai, South Kalimantan, where the top-down national curriculum model fails to meet local needs and contexts. The study explores how national policies, despite their intentions to standardise education, exacerbate educational inequalities in rural settings. Data were collected from teachers, school principals, and students through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. The study employs Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) for data analysis, involving three stages: organising the data into thematic categories, interpreting these themes to identify recurring patterns, and deconstructing the ideological narratives underlying curriculum practices. The findings indicate that while teachers demonstrate local initiative in adapting the curriculum to better suit their students' needs, their efforts are largely unrecognised by formal educational authorities, and their involvement in curriculum decision-making is minimal. This lack of recognition limits the sustainability of local adaptations. The study argues that a more flexible, participatory curriculum design is required—one that values local knowledge and practices and empowers teachers and students to contribute to decision-making. It highlights that curriculum reform, rooted in the principles of educational justice, should focus on equitable representation, recognition, and redistribution of educational resources. Ultimately, this research provides recommendations for creating an inclusive educational system that acknowledges the specific needs of marginalised communities and supports local contexts in shaping curriculum design.
Keywords	Curriculum Management, Critical Narrative, Educational Justice, Marginalized Schools, Participatory Curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

The research problem addresses the challenge of realising educational equity through curriculum management in marginalised schools, particularly in Amuntai, South Kalimantan. These schools face a significant gap between national education policies and the local needs of students, leading to educational inequities that hinder the potential of both students and teachers. The focus of this study is to explore how current curriculum management practices in these schools contribute to, or fail to achieve, educational equity and justice. The central problem lies in the rigid, top-down structure of curriculum management in these schools. National curriculum policies are often designed without considering the unique socio-economic, cultural, and infrastructural realities of rural or marginalised regions like Amuntai. This disconnection results in curriculum content that is irrelevant to local contexts and fails to engage students, contributing to lower student motivation, participation, and performance. Teachers are left with limited autonomy to adapt lessons to suit their students' needs, and when local initiatives are introduced, they often go unrecognised by the formal education system. This issue raises the critical question of how curriculum management can be restructured to align with the principles of educational justice, which advocate for the redistribution of educational resources, recognition of local knowledge, and the representation of marginalised voices in decision-making processes.

Additionally, internal and external factors further exacerbate the challenges of equitable curriculum management. Internal barriers include the lack of teacher professional development opportunities and insufficient support from school leadership in adapting the curriculum. External factors such as rigid government policies, inadequate resources, and the lack of political will to reform educational structures also play a significant role in hindering effective curriculum implementation.

This research seeks to identify the most effective curriculum management strategies that can improve access to quality education and promote equity in marginalised schools. By investigating the internal dynamics within these schools, as well as the broader systemic constraints, this study aims to develop a deeper understanding of how curriculum management practices can be transformed to foster a more inclusive and just educational environment in Amuntai. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the larger discourse on educational equity in Indonesia, offering practical recommendations for policymakers and educators to create more inclusive and contextually relevant curricula in marginalised areas. The academic problem arises from the

pressing need to address these gaps in curriculum management, as they perpetuate cycles of disadvantage and hinder the ability of marginalised students to access the same quality of education as their peers in more privileged regions. By identifying the factors that contribute to these inequities, this study hopes to provide solutions that will help to ensure that all students, regardless of their geographical location, have equal opportunities for educational success.

The challenges faced by marginalized schools have been widely discussed in the literature. Several studies emphasize the importance of local context in curriculum development. For instance, Kebubun (2025) and Noviandari (2024) highlight the necessity of participatory approaches in curriculum development, especially in rural schools, to improve the relevance and effectiveness of teaching practices. Similarly, Salinas & Garrido (2022) discuss the heavy administrative burdens placed on teachers in remote areas, which hinder their ability to adapt the curriculum to local needs. Davis-Cotton (2021) explore the potential of local cultural curricula in marginalized schools, but they point out the barriers teachers face in integrating such curricula within the constraints of national policies. Isroani& Huda (2022) and Kamaliah (2022) critiques the centralization of the curriculum, arguing that it fails to accommodate local wisdom and context, particularly in rural schools. The studies by Frizzy & Jingganingsandya (2024) and Smith (2011) also emphasize the persistent gap in education quality between urban and rural schools, underscoring the need for curriculum reforms that address this inequality. Educational justice, as defined by Fraser (2008), involves the redistribution of resources, the recognition of diverse identities, and the representation of marginalized voices in decision-making processes.

Despite these valuable contributions, a gap remains in the literature concerning the comprehensive analysis of curriculum management through the lens of **educational justice**, particularly in the context of marginalized schools in Indonesia. While many studies have focused on the importance of local adaptations and teacher autonomy, few have addressed how these adaptations align with the principles of educational justice, such as recognition, redistribution, and representation. This study seeks to fill this gap by applying a critical narrative approach to analyze curriculum management in schools in Amuntai, exploring how local teachers' voices and initiatives can be incorporated into a more participatory and contextually relevant curriculum. The research also seeks to contribute to the theoretical framework of educational justice by examining how these dimensions of justice can be applied to curriculum management in marginalized schools.

This study, therefore, aims to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities for curriculum reform in marginalized schools by incorporating the perspectives of teachers, students, and school leaders, with a focus on ensuring a more just and inclusive educational environment. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on educational equity and provide practical recommendations for policymakers and educators to design curricula that are both context-sensitive and grounded in the principles of educational justice.

METHOD

This research is qualitative with a Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) approach, conducted in marginalized schools in Amuntai, South Kalimantan. The data in this study are derived from observations, interviews, and documentation, with the data sources being teachers, school principals, and students from two selected schools in Amuntai. The study focuses on how current curriculum management practices contribute to educational equity and the barriers educators face in adapting the national curriculum to local contexts, especially within the framework of educational justice (Fraser, 2008).

The data collection techniques were carried out through three primary methods: observation, interviews, and documentation. In the observation stage, data were gathered from March to May 2025 in classrooms and school environments in the selected schools. The observations focused on teaching practices, curriculum delivery, and teacher-student interactions, capturing real-time insights into the curriculum implementation process. In the interview stage, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight teachers (five female, three male), two school principals (one female, one male), and five students from grades 5 and 6. These respondents were selected based on their direct involvement in the curriculum management process, offering critical perspectives on the challenges and strategies used in adapting the curriculum (Lin, 2025; Miller et al., 2020)

In the documentation stage, the research analysed curriculum plans, lesson plans, and policy documents, examining the formal curriculum structure and identifying how local knowledge and adaptations were incorporated into the official school practices. These documents provided a comprehensive view of the formal curriculum and the extent to which local contextual needs were addressed in its delivery. The findings from these methods were then synthesised and analysed using Critical Narrative Analysis, which involves identifying and deconstructing underlying ideological narratives that shape curriculum management (Giroux, 2020).

The data analysis process involved several steps. Data reduction focused on identifying key themes related to curriculum management, local adaptations, and barriers to implementation. Data presentation followed, where the findings were categorised into clear themes regarding the disconnect between national curriculum policies and local educational needs. The analysis was critically examined using relevant theories on educational justice and curriculum reforms (Charles, 2019; Lefebvre, 2024; Shahjahan et al., 2022). Finally, conclusion drawing and verification were conducted by synthesising the findings with existing literature, ensuring that the results were aligned with previous studies on local knowledge integration and participatory curriculum practices (Apple, 2018).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings of this study are derived from data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis in two schools in Amuntai, South Kalimantan. The research identified key themes in how curriculum management is handled in marginalized schools, focusing on top-down management, local teacher initiatives, and limited participation in decision-making. The following table summarizes the primary findings that emerged from the data collection.

Table 1. Key Findings in Curriculum Management Practices

No	Finding	Description
1	Top-Down Curriculum Management	Centralized decision-making leads to a disconnect between curriculum and local needs.
2	Local Teacher Initiatives	Teachers attempt to adapt the curriculum to local contexts, but these efforts lack institutional support.
3	Limited Participation in Decision-Making	Teachers and students have minimal involvement in shaping curriculum decisions.

Source: Summary of Findings

Top-Down Curriculum Management

The research highlights the challenges faced by marginalized schools in Amuntai due to the top-down approach of curriculum management. Teachers, school principals, and curriculum staff reported that the national curriculum was imposed by central authorities, with little consideration for local needs. Despite teachers' expertise and knowledge of local issues, they were unable to significantly modify the curriculum to better suit students' needs.

Data analysis revealed that centralized decision-making led to several negative outcomes for teaching and student engagement. The curriculum was often perceived as rigid, irrelevant, and disconnected from students' daily lives. Teachers were frustrated by the difficulty of teaching topics that students struggled to relate to, given limited resources and local conditions. This sentiment was echoed by classroom observations, which showed that prescribed teaching methods did not meet the diverse needs of students.

Curriculum materials, including lesson plans and reports, were found to strictly follow national guidelines, with minimal informal adaptations made by teachers based on local contexts, such as using agricultural practices in science lessons. These informal adjustments were not supported or recognized by the institution.

Table 2 below summarizes key issues raised regarding the top-down nature of curriculum management and their impact on teaching practices:

Table 2. Key Issues in Top-Down Curriculum Management

No	Issue	Teacher Response	Principal Response
1	Curriculum Imposition	Teachers are required to strictly follow the national curriculum despite its irrelevance to local needs.	Principals agree with the constraints but feel obligated to comply with national directives.
2	Lack of Local Adaptation	Teachers feel unable to adapt the curriculum meaningfully to local contexts due to rigid national guidelines.	Principals acknowledge the disconnect between the curriculum and local realities but lack the authority to modify it.
3	Limited Flexibility	Teachers report that the national curriculum is not flexible enough to accommodate the diverse needs of students in marginalized settings.	School leadership emphasizes following standardized guidelines for accountability purposes.

Source: The centralized curriculum policies significantly impacted marginalized schools. The main issue was a disconnection between the curriculum content and students lived experiences, with students becoming disengaged in lessons where the content felt irrelevant, such as advanced scientific concepts. The lack of resources, outdated textbooks, and minimal technological support worsened the situation, making it difficult for teachers to deliver engaging lessons.

Classroom observations revealed that when teachers adapted the content to include local examples, such as using farming practices to illustrate ecology, students became more engaged. Figure 1 below visualizes the disconnect between the national curriculum and local learning needs: Figure 1 below presents a visual representation of the disconnect between national curriculum content and local learning needs, based on both teacher feedback and classroom observations. The figure shows the misalignment between the national curriculum content and the practical, local knowledge needed for student engagement and understanding.
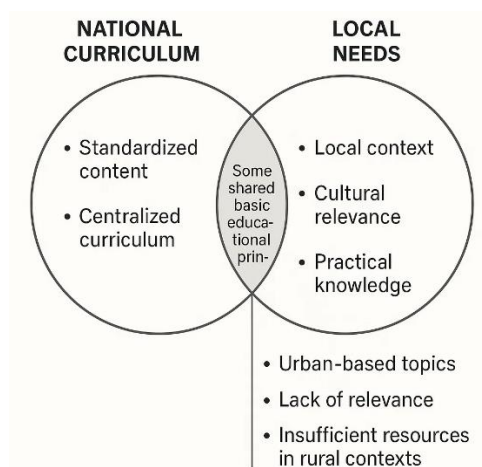
Figure 1. Disconnect Between National Curriculum Content and Local Needs

Despite the challenges, teachers showed resilience in adapting content to local contexts. Many used local knowledge in lessons, but these efforts were informal and not officially supported by the administration. In conclusion, the study found that top-down curriculum management hindered effective teaching in marginalized schools in Amuntai. While teachers adapted the curriculum to local needs, the lack of institutional support and the rigidity of national policies made these adaptations unsustainable. The research highlights the need for flexible, participatory curriculum reforms that allow local autonomy and the integration of contextually relevant content.

Local Teacher Initiatives

The study highlights the local teacher initiatives within marginalized schools in Amuntai, South Kalimantan, where teachers showed resilience in adapting the national curriculum to better meet local needs despite the challenges posed by centralized curriculum policies. Teachers incorporated local knowledge, cultural practices, and hands-on activities to make lessons more relevant and engaging. These adaptations were particularly common in subjects like Science, Social Studies, and Mathematics, where local examples helped explain abstract concepts. For instance, in a science class on ecology, local agricultural practices like irrigation and crop rotation were used to explain ecosystems and resource management.

Although these adaptations were effective in engaging students, they faced significant challenges due to the lack of formal support and recognition from school leadership and curriculum authorities. Classroom observations showed that student participation and engagement increased significantly when teachers used local examples, such as local agriculture, in biology lessons. However, these adaptations were informal and not integrated into the official curriculum or school plans.

Table 3 below summarizes the examples of **local teacher initiatives** observed in the classrooms:

Table 3. Examples of Local Teacher Adaptations

Subject	Teacher's Adaptation	Outcome
Science	Using local farming practices (e.g., irrigation techniques, crop rotation) to explain ecological concepts.	Students were more engaged and able to relate scientific concepts to their own lives.
Social Studies	Incorporating local history, such as the impact of traditional farming practices on local communities, into geography lessons.	Enhanced students' understanding of social systems and their local environment.
Mathematics	Using examples from local trade and markets to teach concepts of arithmetic and problem-solving.	Improved student participation and understanding of how math applies in real-world contexts.

Source: Summary of Findings from Interviews and Observations

The impact of local teacher initiatives was evident in increased student engagement and deeper understanding. Classroom observations revealed that when teachers used local context to explain abstract concepts, students became more motivated and participated actively in lessons. However, despite the positive effects of these adaptations, teachers faced barriers such as the lack of formal recognition and institutional support. These adaptations were not included in official school documents, and teachers had to create their own resources to implement them.

Figure 2 below illustrates the process through which teachers adapt the national curriculum to incorporate local knowledge and practices:

Figure 2. Teacher Adaptation to Local Context

Despite the benefits of local teacher adaptations, several barriers hindered their sustainability. One major challenge was the lack of formal acknowledgment from school leadership. Teachers reported that their efforts to integrate local knowledge were often ignored by the administration. Additionally, the lack of resources, such as outdated textbooks and insufficient teaching materials, limited teachers' ability to maintain these adaptations in the long term.

In conclusion, local teacher initiatives played a crucial role in addressing the gap between the national curriculum and local realities in marginalized schools. While teachers adapted the curriculum to better meet local needs, the lack of institutional support and resources posed significant challenges to the sustainability of these efforts. The study emphasizes the need for formal recognition and support for local adaptations, which could lead to a more inclusive and contextually relevant education for students in marginalized areas.

Limited Participation in Decision-Making

This research highlights the limited participation of both teachers and students in the curriculum decision-making process in schools in Amuntai, South Kalimantan. Curriculum decisions, including content, teaching strategies, and assessments, were largely made by centralized authorities, with minimal input from local educators and students. This lack of participation had significant implications for the relevance and effectiveness of the curriculum, as well as the engagement of teachers and students.

Teachers reported feeling disempowered, as they had no formal platforms to offer feedback or suggest curriculum modifications. Many shared that their voices were rarely considered during curriculum planning, and they were expected to strictly follow the national curriculum, regardless of local context. Principals also echoed this sentiment, noting that while they understood the gap between national directives and local needs, there was little room to modify the curriculum at the school level.

Classroom observations further revealed the disconnect between the national curriculum and classroom practices. Teachers adhered to the prescribed curriculum, even when students struggled to relate to the content. For example, in a social studies class on urbanization, rural students in Amuntai found it difficult to connect the material to their own experiences. Teachers attempted to bring in local examples, but these were not part of the official curriculum and were often limited.

An analysis of school documents and curriculum plans showed that the national curriculum was highly prescriptive, leaving little room for local adaptations. Teachers were required to submit standardized lesson plans that aligned with national guidelines, with little or no input from local teachers. Table 4 below summarizes the key issues related to limited participation in curriculum decision-making:

Table 4. Key Issues in Limited Participation in Curriculum Decision-Making

Issue	Teacher Response	Principal Response
Lack of Teacher Input	Teachers report no formal platform to provide input or feedback on the curriculum.	Principals acknowledge the lack of teacher involvement but cite higher-level directives.
Centralized Curriculum Decisions	Teachers follow a rigid national curriculum with no room for local modifications.	Principals confirm that curriculum decisions are made centrally, leaving little flexibility.
No Student Feedback Mechanisms	Students are not involved in the decision-making process regarding curriculum.	Principals note that student feedback on the curriculum is rarely solicited.

Source: Summary of Findings from Interviews and Observations

The lack of teacher and student involvement in curriculum decisions led to low teacher morale, reduced autonomy, and student disengagement. Teachers felt disconnected from the curriculum, unable to innovate or adjust teaching strategies to meet student needs. As a result, many teachers reported being less motivated to engage students meaningfully. Similarly, students struggled with lessons that felt disconnected from their lives and experiences, leading to disengagement. Teachers attempted to contextualize lessons by introducing local examples, but these adaptations were inconsistent and informal without institutional support.

The lack of student feedback mechanisms further contributed to disengagement. Students had no formal way to express their opinions on the curriculum, making it difficult for teachers to assess the effectiveness of their adaptations. Figure 3 below illustrates the flow of limited participation in curriculum decision-making:
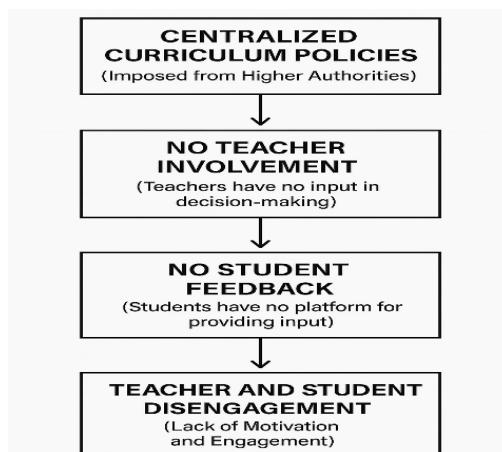
Figure 3. Limited Participation in Curriculum Decision-Making

The study underscores the importance of participatory decision-making in curriculum development. Both teachers and students need to be actively involved in shaping the curriculum to foster a more engaging, relevant, and effective learning experience. Developing mechanisms for teacher and student involvement is essential to creating a curriculum that better aligns with local needs and enhances student motivation and engagement.

Discussion

The Application of Educational Justice in a Centralized Curriculum

In this discussion, Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) is employed to explore how educational justice is applied within the context of a centralized curriculum in marginalized schools. CNA allows for a critical examination of the narratives that emerge from the lived experiences of teachers and students in peripheral schools that are constrained by national education policies. It helps uncover how these educational policies shape their educational experiences, often reinforcing inequities. The primary focus here is on the epistemic injustice that arises when the official curriculum marginalizes local knowledge, making it invisible or less legitimate in educational practices.

From the perspective of educational justice, I argue that true equity in education cannot be achieved unless the curriculum recognizes and incorporates the local knowledge, cultural diversity, and experiential learning of students. This perspective emphasizes that educational justice is not merely about redistributing resources but also about recognizing and validating local forms of knowledge, which have been historically overlooked in a centralized system.

This study finds that the centralized curriculum implemented in marginalized schools in Amuntai overlooks the local context of students. The rigid national curriculum prescribed by central authorities, while standardized across the country, fails to account for the specific needs of students

in rural and marginalized areas. As Omodan (2023) and Campbell (2023) Assert, epistemic injustice occurs when local knowledge, which is deeply rooted in the lived experiences of students, is excluded from the official curriculum. In this context, students are denied the opportunity to see themselves and their communities reflected in the curriculum, which can lead to disengagement and disconnection from the learning process.

The imposition of a standardized curriculum, while intended to create equity across the nation, often results in inequity, particularly for students from marginalized backgrounds. As Cushing (2023) points out, centralized education systems tend to privilege dominant knowledge systems and fail to recognize alternative knowledge that might be more relevant to marginalized communities. In the case of Amuntai, the national curriculum's emphasis on urban-based examples and abstract concepts, such as electricity or advanced scientific theories, does not resonate with the practical realities and local practices of students in rural communities.

Epistemic injustice, as defined by Fraser (2009), occurs when certain groups are denied the opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge considered legitimate within the educational system. The rigid nature of centralized curriculums silences the local knowledge of teachers and students, particularly in marginalized regions. Teachers in Amuntai, despite their efforts to incorporate local agricultural practices into science lessons, reported that their adaptations were not recognized or supported by the official curriculum (Omodan, 2023). This highlights a key issue: while teachers have valuable, context-specific knowledge that could enhance the curriculum, it is disregarded by the broader educational system that favors standardized, urban-centric content.
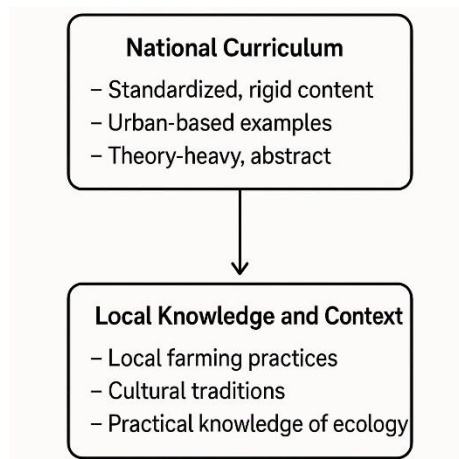
As Tuck and Yang (2012), Charles (2019), and Shahjahan et al (2022) argue, a decolonizing approach to education requires an understanding that knowledge systems are not universal but are deeply shaped by cultural, social, and historical contexts. For marginalized students, the exclusion of their cultural context from the curriculum perpetuates a form of epistemic violence by invalidating their knowledge and experiences. The curriculum-as-imposed thus becomes an instrument of marginalization, rather than empowerment, because it does not acknowledge the valuable contributions that local knowledge can make to broader educational goals.

The disconnect between the national curriculum and local needs is a fundamental issue that this study reveals. The national curriculum, while providing a universal framework, often fails to address the specific educational needs of students in rural areas. In the case of Amuntai, local knowledge, especially in fields like agriculture and local environmental management, is ignored or

sidelined in favor of more abstract or technologically oriented content that is irrelevant to students' daily lives.

Yeh (2023) In her study on DisCrit in education, she emphasizes that educational policies must account for diversity in students' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds. Without such recognition, the curriculum becomes a tool that not only disempowers students but also perpetuates inequality. In Amuntai, for instance, science lessons on ecology would benefit from incorporating local agricultural practices, which would not only make the subject matter more relevant but also engage students more deeply. However, this connection is hindered by the rigid nature of the national curriculum, which prioritizes universal theories over localized knowledge.

To better illustrate the disconnection between the national curriculum and local knowledge, the following figure outlines the key elements:

National Curriculum
– Standardized, rigid content
– Urban-based examples
– Theory-heavy, abstract

Local Knowledge and Context
– Local farming practices
– Cultural traditions
– Practical knowledge of ecology

Figure 4. Disconnect Between Centralized Curriculum and Local Knowledge

Figure 4 shows the misalignment between the national curriculum (focused on abstract, urban-centric content) and local knowledge (focused on practical, community-based understanding). This figure highlights how students in rural schools may find it difficult to relate to a curriculum that does not reflect their lived experiences.

My adopt in this discussion is one that advocates for the integration of local knowledge into the curriculum, particularly in marginalized schools. I argue that educational justice requires restructuring the curriculum so that it acknowledges the validity of local epistemologies and diverse learning experiences. As Giroux (2019) The curriculum should serve as a liberatory tool that empowers students by validating their own cultural and intellectual traditions, rather than marginalizing them. Additionally, this would help bridge the gap between national policies and local realities, ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant and meaningful to students in

marginalized contexts (Lefebvre, 2024).

The Discrepancy Between the National Curriculum and Local Needs

In this discussion, I utilize the Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) approach to critically examine the gap between the national curriculum and the local needs of students in marginalized schools. CNA allows for an exploration of the narratives embedded in the experiences of teachers and students in Amuntai, a region marked by socio-economic challenges and cultural diversity. By focusing on the lived experiences of teachers and students, CNA illuminates how centralized policies overlook local knowledge, leading to a curriculum that may be irrelevant or disconnected from students' daily realities.

The critical nature of CNA positions the researcher to question how dominant narratives in educational policy contribute to perpetuating educational inequities. In the case of Amuntai, the national curriculum, while standardized for the entire country, fails to accommodate the cultural, social, and economic context of students in rural areas. Through this lens, I argue that educational policies must prioritize contextual relevance and inclusive knowledge, enabling marginalized students to see their lived experiences reflected in the curriculum.

One of the most significant findings of this research is the discrepancy between the national curriculum imposed by central authorities and the local needs of students in marginalized areas. As discussed by Yeh (2023) and Boulos et al. (2024)The one-size-fits-all approach of the national curriculum often fails to recognize the diversity and unique challenges faced by students in rural and marginalized communities. This mismatch is especially pronounced in subjects like science, social studies, and mathematics, where the content taught is often abstract, urban-centric, and disconnected from students lived experiences.

For instance, in Amuntai, the national curriculum mandates that students learn about ecology and environmental science, but the content often centers on theoretical concepts that do not align with the local context of the students, many of whom are involved in agriculture and fishing.

This disconnect between the curriculum content and the local context contributes to student disengagement and low achievement, as students find it difficult to connect with lessons that are not relevant to their lives. Apple (2012) and Fraser (2009) argue that education systems that fail to acknowledge local diversity inadvertently create inequity by marginalizing students who do not fit the dominant educational mold.

The failure to incorporate cultural and contextual relevance in the curriculum is a central issue. Giroux (2020) and Kumashiro (2008) argue that educational systems must be responsive to the socio-cultural realities of students. In marginalized schools, particularly those in rural areas, students' identities and experiences are not reflected in the curriculum. As Lefebvre (2024) argue, decolonizing education requires not just removing colonial knowledge structures, but actively recognizing and integrating local, indigenous, and community-based knowledge into formal education.

For example, in the case of Amuntai, local knowledge about sustainable agricultural practices, environmental management, and community-based problem-solving offers a wealth of relevant content that could enrich the curriculum and make learning more meaningful for students. However, these forms of knowledge are not recognized or validated by the national curriculum, as it remains focused on universal scientific models that are primarily suited to urban contexts. The national curriculum's focus on standardized content thus excludes critical local knowledge, perpetuating the gap between academic learning and real-world application.

From my perspective, the centralized curriculum in its current form cannot adequately serve the needs of marginalized students in rural areas. The disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical experience needs to be addressed by adapting the curriculum to be more culturally relevant and contextually appropriate for students. As Yeh (2023) and Boulos et al. (2024) suggest, a more inclusive curriculum that recognizes local knowledge and cultural diversity will help students better engage with the material and understand its relevance to their lives.

Moreover, I argue that teachers should be at the center of the curriculum development process, as they are best positioned to understand the needs of their students and the communities they serve. By empowering teachers to adapt the curriculum to local contexts, we can create a more inclusive and engaged learning environment. This participatory approach can help bridge the gap between the standardized national curriculum and the local needs of marginalized students.

Systemic Challenges in Implementing an Inclusive Curriculum

In this section, I use the Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) approach to examine systemic challenges in implementing an inclusive curriculum in marginalized schools. CNA explores the stories of teachers, students, and school leaders to understand how structural inequalities hinder the adoption of a truly inclusive curriculum. This approach is crucial for highlighting how dominant educational narratives often exclude marginalized voices, maintaining a status quo that perpetuates

educational inequity.

Despite policies designed to promote inclusivity, systemic barriers such as rigid centralized policies, lack of local support, and insufficient resources prevent effective implementation. The education system remains biased toward standardized knowledge, which makes it difficult for marginalized schools to access culturally relevant education. A key finding is that institutional, structural, and resource-based barriers prevent the implementation of an inclusive curriculum. Farag (2021) and Ferreras-Stone (2022) argue that inclusive education fails when there is no institutional support and when teachers are not empowered to adapt the curriculum to local needs. In Amuntai, teachers tried adapting lessons with local knowledge but faced resistance from school leadership and a lack of recognition from educational authorities.

Centralized decision-making is a major factor in maintaining the status quo of the curriculum. Giroux (2020) and Therkildsen (2000) argue that centralized systems resist localization because decisions are made by authorities removed from local realities. In Amuntai, rigid curriculum guidelines imposed by the central government fail to address the practical realities of students' lives, making full adaptation to local needs impossible. The lack of resources in marginalized schools further exacerbates the issue. Teachers are forced to improvise with limited resources, meaning inclusivity is often achieved through personal effort rather than institutional support. Cushing (2023) and Omodan (2023) highlight how resource constraints hinder inclusive practices. Teachers in Amuntai reported inadequate teaching materials and a lack of training in inclusive pedagogy, making it difficult to meet the diverse needs of students, especially those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Institutionalized structures that prioritize standardized testing, curriculum uniformity, and accountability further undermine inclusive efforts. Fraser (2009) argues that policies based on formal equality, such as a uniform curriculum, fail to account for the unequal starting points of marginalized students. In Amuntai, students from low-income families with limited access to technology and educational resources are further disadvantaged by the imposition of a one-size-fits-all curriculum.

Drawing on Lefebvre (2024), Charles (2019), and Shahjahan et al. (2022), I argue that decolonizing education requires more than adding diverse content to the curriculum. It requires transforming how knowledge is viewed and valued within the educational system. In Amuntai, the curriculum should validate local knowledge, particularly in areas like agriculture and

environmental management, which are highly relevant but often ignored by the mainstream curriculum.

The following figure illustrates the systemic barriers preventing the implementation of an inclusive curriculum. The figure shows how centralized policy decisions, lack of local adaptation, and resource constraints create a disconnect between policy intentions and classroom realities.

I argue that systemic barriers prevent the meaningful implementation of an inclusive curriculum. Centralized policies imposing a standardized curriculum without considering local contexts create significant challenges for teachers in marginalized schools. As Arwen (2019) and Kistaubayev et al. (2023) suggest, curriculum reforms must decentralize decision-making, allowing local control over what is taught. This will make the curriculum more relevant and validate local knowledge that has been historically marginalized.

Increasing Teacher and Student Participation in Curriculum Decision-Making

In this section, I explore the critical role of teacher and student participation in shaping a more relevant and inclusive curriculum, especially in marginalized schools. Using the Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) approach, I highlight the experiences of teachers and students often excluded from decision-making, challenging top-down educational policies that fail to address the diverse realities of students, particularly in rural or under-resourced areas.

I argue that educational justice is achieved when teachers and students actively participate in curriculum development. Their involvement ensures local knowledge and cultural relevance are integral, enhancing engagement and inclusivity. Tran & Guzey (2023) emphasize that culturally sustaining pedagogy allows teachers to adapt curriculum content to reflect local cultural contexts while preserving academic integrity. Teachers, familiar with their students' lived experiences, are best positioned to customize content, integrating local knowledge and community practices to foster greater engagement.

In marginalized areas, teachers often improvise due to the lack of institutional support, using their deep understanding of local issues to adapt lessons. Moll et al. (1992) and Cahill et al. (2020) argue that local expertise, accumulated through community and family life, should be recognized as valuable educational resources. By integrating this knowledge, we can build a more inclusive curriculum that respects both academic content and marginalized students' experiences.

Banks (n.d.) suggests that teachers' cultural competence is crucial for inclusive education. Teachers who participate in curriculum development can better reflect on their cultural identities,

which enhances teaching practices and creates an inclusive environment where all students feel represented.

Student participation is equally crucial. Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that decolonizing education involves moving away from top-down models and involving students in the creation of knowledge reflecting their identities. Gay (2021) and Ladson-Billings (2021) emphasize the importance of culturally responsive teaching, integrating students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum. When students shape their learning, they feel empowered, leading to a dynamic, engaged learning environment where their lived experiences are represented.

Systemic changes are necessary to realize these benefits. Decentralizing curriculum design is critical for a participatory educational system. As Souto-Manning (2024) notes, educational justice requires redistributing resources and recognizing marginalized voices in curriculum development. Including teachers and students in decision-making provides local autonomy, ensuring curriculum decisions align with community needs.

Banks (2015) and Ladson-Billings (1995) stress the importance of student-centered curriculum development, where students are involved in decisions about their learning. This approach ensures the curriculum is responsive to local contexts and empowers students to contribute actively to their education.

In conclusion, teacher and student participation in curriculum development is crucial for creating an inclusive, responsive educational system. Decentralizing decision-making and allowing teachers to adapt content based on local knowledge and student experiences fosters an engaged, relevant education. Student participation ensures the curriculum reflects their cultural identities, promoting empowerment and belonging. Integrating local knowledge and student perspectives bridges the gap between policy intentions and classroom realities, creating a more inclusive, equitable education system. This discussion underscores the need for decentralization and participation in curriculum development as a pathway to educational justice, where every student's voice is valued.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the challenges of curriculum management in marginalized schools in Amuntai, South Kalimantan, through the lens of educational justice. The findings underscore the gap between centralized national policies and the unique needs of local contexts, revealing the

limitations of a top-down approach that disregards local knowledge and teacher autonomy. The study advocates for a participatory curriculum design that empowers teachers and local communities to shape educational content in ways that are relevant and meaningful to students' lived experiences. In conclusion, the research highlights the critical need for curriculum reforms that foster inclusivity and contextual relevance. A flexible, decentralized approach to curriculum management, which values local knowledge and promotes active participation from teachers and students, is essential for addressing educational inequalities and achieving greater equity in marginalized regions. By aligning curriculum practices with the principles of educational justice, schools can become more effective in supporting the diverse needs of all students.

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