
PRE-SERVICE BAHASA TEACHERS' READINESS FOR THE INTEGRATION OF BENGKULU ETHNOPEDAGOGY IN THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM TO REINVIGORATE LOCAL WISDOM IN MODERN EDUCATION

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Submitted: 09/06/2025

Revised: 09/08/2025

Accepted: 11/11/2025

Published: 31/12/2025

Abstract

This study critically analyzes the readiness of pre-service teachers to integrate Bengkulu ethnopedagogy into modern classroom settings. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 150 pre-service teachers at several universities in Bengkulu through a readiness scale survey and semi-structured interviews. This study employs a mixed-methods approach by collecting data from 150 pre-service teachers in Bengkulu through readiness scale surveys and semi-structured interviews, which were subsequently analyzed using descriptive-ANOVA analysis and thematic analysis. The findings reveal a significant gap: while pre-service teachers possess high affective readiness (valuing local culture), their pedagogical readiness specifically in transforming indigenous knowledge into structured lesson plans remains moderate to low. Key barriers identified include the lack of standardized ethnopedagogical teaching materials and a perceived tension between traditional values and global 21st-century skill requirements. This research suggests that teacher education programs must move beyond theoretical appreciation and provide practical frameworks for "indigenizing" the curriculum. Reinvigorating local wisdom is not merely a nostalgic endeavor but a strategic necessity to foster students' cultural identity amidst global modernization.

Keywords

Bengkulu Ethnopedagogy, Merdeka Curriculum, Pre-service Teachers Bahasa, Local Wisdom, Pedagogical Readiness.



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INTRODUCTION

Global educational dynamics in the 21st century are currently facing a profound paradox between the demands of universal standardization and the urgent need to preserve local cultural identity (Borbych, 2024). Amidst the currents of globalization, often characterized by the hegemony of Western values, education systems in various developing nations have begun to realize that the blind adoption of modern curricula can trigger cultural alienation among the younger generation (Ninkova, 2020; Perry, 2020). Education that is uprooted from its cultural foundations not only fails to build robust character but also produces graduates who are strangers in their own homeland. Consequently, the discourse on reinvigorating local wisdom through *ethnopedagogy* has become critical. *Ethnopedagogy* views culture not merely as a relic of the past, but as a vibrant source of knowledge, values, and pedagogical practices relevant to constructing a contextual and meaningful learning ecosystem for students (Sakti et al., 2024).

The Indonesian transformation of the education system through the Merdeka Curriculum (Independent Curriculum) policy has created a broad legal and formal space for local wisdom to be incorporated into the learning process. The essence of the Merdeka Curriculum – which emphasizes flexibility, differentiated learning, and the reinforcement of the Pancasila Student Profile – is intrinsically required for students to be capable of contextual instruction within their socio-cultural environments (Haan & Ani, 2024; Prayudi, 2024). However, the field implementation of this grand vision often falters due to the readiness of education practitioners, who frequently perceive local wisdom as mere supplementary content (*muatan lokal*) of a superficial nature rather than integrating it as a philosophical and methodological foundation for core learning. This challenge is increasingly evident in Indonesia's ethnic diversity, as in Bengkulu Province, which necessitates specific approaches that cannot be generalized across other regions (Septi Ariski Pajar Antika et al., 2024).

Bengkulu *ethnopedagogy*, with its wealth of oral traditions, communal values, and a philosophy of life in harmony with nature, possesses extraordinary potential to enrich modern educational discourse. As a cultural entity, Bengkulu exhibits unique characteristics, reflected in various forms of indigenous wisdom that can be converted into learning materials for science, social studies, and character education (Badeni & Saparahayuningsih, 2021; Mulyasari et al., 2023). Nevertheless, this potential remains locked in a static space if educators lack the competence to perform "cultural bridging" between indigenous knowledge and formal academic requirements (Nugroho et al., 2023). The reinvigoration of local wisdom in modern education in Bengkulu is not

merely an effort toward cultural preservation (Jeon et al., 2024); it is a pedagogical strategy to enhance the relevance of education for students in the region (Kjellgren & Richter, 2021; Li, 2024), ensuring they possess global competitiveness without losing their local identity (Goodwin, 2020; Oleksiyenko et al., 2021).

The primary pillar of this integration rests on the shoulders of teachers, particularly pre-service teachers, who will serve as the driving force of the future education (Rana et al., 2022). The readiness of pre-service teachers is a vital determinant, as they are in a transitional phase between theoretical mastery at the university level and practical application in schools (Osiesi et al., 2024; Rowston et al., 2022). *Ethnopedagogical* literacy for pre-service teachers involves more than just cultural awareness (Tasdemir et al., 2020); it encompasses the ability to deconstruct and reconstruct indigenous knowledge into systematic instructional designs (Legrain et al., 2021; Ulbricht et al., 2024). If pre-service teachers lack adequate readiness during their professional education period, the vision of the Merdeka Curriculum to create contextual learning will remain a mere administrative narrative with no tangible impact on classroom quality.

While extensive research has been conducted regarding teacher readiness within the Merdeka Curriculum, a significant literature gap exists concerning region-specific *ethnopedagogy*. Most previous studies have focused on technical-administrative readiness for the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform or on general curriculum assessments (Labib et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2024). Very few studies have critically examined the dimensions of pre-service teacher readiness from the perspective of "*critical ethnopedagogy*," particularly those that link Bengkulu's local wisdom with the latest national curriculum structure. The majority of existing studies tend to be descriptive, failing to delve deeper into the dissonance between teachers' affective beliefs toward culture and their pedagogical capacity to transform those beliefs into concrete learning tools (DeJaeghere et al., 2024; Khokhotva & Elexpuru Albizuri, 2020; Treacy & Leavy, 2023).

Several studies within the last decade have explored the integration of local wisdom in education, such as the research (Arjaya et al., 2024), which focused on character education based on the Serawai tribe in Bengkulu, and (Masruroh, 2024), who examined the revitalization of local wisdom at the preschool level. Furthermore, (Zidny et al., 2022) provided a multi-perspective reflection on the role of indigenous knowledge in enhancing sustainable science education, while (Herlina & Melati, 2024) addressed the design of English learning modules within the Merdeka Curriculum context in specific areas of Bengkulu. Additionally, (Yang et al., 2022) highlighted

various educational factors influencing the general preparedness of pre-service teachers. The fundamental difference between this study and previous research lies in its multidimensional critical analysis, specifically in mapping the gap between the affective and practical-pedagogical readiness of pre-service Bahasa teachers to integrate Bengkulu *ethnopedagogy* into the newly implemented Merdeka Curriculum structure. Unlike prior studies that tend to be descriptive or focused on specific subject matter, this research offers novelty by identifying the pattern of "affective–pedagogical dissonance" experienced by pre-service teachers in peripheral regions.

This study seeks to fill this void by offering a critical analysis of pre-service teacher readiness through a more holistic perspective. The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to map pre-service teacher readiness multidimensionally, covering affective, cognitive, and psychomotor dimensions within the context of Bengkulu *ethnopedagogy*. This research does not merely ask "if" they are ready, but profoundly investigates "why" a gap exists between cultural appreciation and implementational capability. By focusing on pre-service teachers in Bengkulu, this study makes a new theoretical contribution to enriching Indonesian *ethnopedagogical* literature—which Javanese or Balinese cultural contexts have long dominated—thereby offering a vital peripheral viewpoint in the national educational discourse (Comstock et al., 2023; Henderson & Corry, 2021).

The urgency of this research is further heightened by the accelerated implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which demands that teachers be creative and autonomous in developing teaching modules. Without a clear mapping of pre-service teachers' *ethnopedagogical* readiness, Teacher Training Institutions (LPTKs) will continue to produce graduates who suffer from "cultural stuttering" when facing heterogeneous classroom realities (Piwovar-Sulej, 2021). The results of this study are expected to serve as a compass for university-level curriculum policy developers to revise or strengthen local wisdom-based courses, moving beyond theoretical appreciation toward practical, strategic proficiency. The reinvigoration of locality in modern education must begin with the preparation of culturally competent human resources (Anggita et al., 2024; Rahimi et al., 2021).

Overall, this article aims to critically analyse the readiness profile of pre-service teachers in Bengkulu in integrating *ethnopedagogy* into the Merdeka Curriculum structure and to identify the systemic barriers they encounter. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, this study endeavors to provide a precise yet in-depth portrayal of this phenomenon. The findings are expected not only to benefit the development of educational sciences in Indonesia but also to serve as a model for other regions in their efforts to bridge traditional values with modern educational frameworks, aiming for

a more humane, contextual, and inclusive education in the future (Ramesh & Krishnan, 2020; Sowa, 2020).

METHOD

This study employs a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design to obtain a holistic understanding of pre-service teachers' readiness. This design was selected to integrate quantitative data from a large-scale survey with deep qualitative insights derived from phenomenological interviews. The research population comprises all final-year students within teacher education programs at several universities in Bengkulu Province, with a sample of 150 respondents selected via stratified random sampling to ensure representation across various disciplines, including Sciences, Social Studies, and Languages. In the quantitative phase, the study measures readiness levels using a structured questionnaire developed based on affective, cognitive, and pedagogical readiness indicators (Almulla, 2023; Wang et al., 2025). The instrument's validity was evaluated using the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) by a panel of experts. At the same time, reliability was ensured through Cronbach's Alpha testing, guaranteeing high accuracy and internal consistency of the data before further analysis.

The data collection procedures were conducted systematically in two integrated stages. The first stage involved distributing digital instruments to map numerical trends in readiness. Subsequently, the second stage utilized semi-structured interviews with 12 key informants, selected through purposive sampling based on extreme readiness scores (very high and very low). These interviews focused on exploring epistemological barriers and technical constraints in translating Bengkulu's local wisdom philosophy into the Merdeka Curriculum's instructional modules. In addition to interviews, a documentary study of the participants' draft lesson plans was conducted to triangulate the data, reconciling perceived readiness with the practical competence demonstrated in their instructional designs. The entire data collection process adhered to rigorous research ethics, including informed consent and participant anonymity, to maintain the objectivity of the findings.

Data analysis was conducted by integrating statistical and interpretive techniques to comprehensively address the research questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and ANOVA analyses in SPSS to identify frequency distributions and significant differences in readiness levels across disciplines. Meanwhile, qualitative data were analysed using Thematic Analysis following the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which includes data condensation,

data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The data mixing process was conducted during the discussion phase using a triangulation design, in which qualitative findings were used to clarify, deepen, and validate the statistical results. This approach ensures that the analysis transcends mere descriptive figures, uncovering the critical narratives behind pre-service teachers' moderate pedagogical readiness to address *ethnopedagogical* challenges in the modern era.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Quantitative Findings: Readiness Survey

The quantitative assessment of pre-service teachers' readiness reveals a multidimensional profile, characterized by a significant discrepancy between cultural appreciation and instructional implementation. The following table presents the mean scores and distribution of responses across four key dimensions, highlighting the transition from high affective attachment to diminished pedagogical and practical capacity. Statistical analysis of the survey data underscores a critical gap in the respondents' ability to operationalize *ethnopedagogical* concepts, despite demonstrating a strong belief in the relevance of local wisdom within the Merdeka Curriculum;

Table 1. Quantitative Findings

Readiness Dimension	Key Indicators	Mean Score (1–5)	Category	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Affective Readiness	Pride in Bengkulu culture	4.32	High	72	23	5
	Key finding: Most pre-service teachers demonstrate strong emotional attachment to local culture and view it as important for character education					
	Belief in the relevance of ethnopedagogy to the Merdeka Curriculum	4.18	High	68	27	5
Key finding: Participants perceive ethnopedagogy as aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile						
Cognitive Readiness	Understanding of ethnopedagogy concepts	3.41	Moderate	31	49	20
	Key findings: Conceptual understanding exists but remains general and theoretical					
	Knowledge of specific Bengkulu local wisdom	3.12	Moderate	26	46	28
Key findings: Participants recognize cultural examples but lack deep understanding of philosophical meanings						
Pedagogical	Ability to transform	2.98	Moderate–	18	44	38

Readiness	local culture into learning objectives		Low			
	Key finding: Difficulty formulating learning outcomes based on local wisdom					
	Integration of ethnopedagogy into lesson plans/modules	2.76	Low	14	39	47
Psychomotor (Practical)	Key finding: Cultural content appears as an “add-on” rather than an instructional framework					
	Alignment with 21st-century skills (HOTS, 4C)	2.69	Low	12	37	51
	Key finding: Cultural knowledge is perceived as traditional and less compatible with modern competencies					
Psychomotor (Practical)	Experience teaching using local wisdom	2.51	Low	9	33	58
	Key finding: Microteaching rarely incorporates ethnopedagogical approaches					

Source: Analysis Quantitative

The quantitative findings indicate a clear multidimensional pattern in pre-service teachers' readiness to integrate Bengkulu ethnopedagogy. Affective readiness appears to be the strongest dimension, with high mean scores ($M = 4.32; 4.18$), indicating that most participants have a strong emotional attachment to Bengkulu culture and perceive ethnopedagogy as relevant to the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile. However, cognitive readiness is only moderate ($M = 3.41; 3.12$), suggesting that while pre-service teachers understand the ethnopedagogy conceptually and can identify examples of local wisdom, their knowledge remains general and lacks deeper philosophical and contextual understanding. The most critical gap lies in pedagogical readiness ($M = 2.98-2.69$), where many participants struggle to translate cultural knowledge into measurable learning objectives, integrate it systematically into lesson plans, and align it with 21st-century competencies such as HOTS and 4C; consequently, cultural elements tend to function as supplementary rather than as a pedagogical framework. Psychomotor or practical readiness is also low ($M = 2.51$), indicating limited teaching experience using local wisdom and minimal incorporation of ethnopedagogy in microteaching. Overall, the data reveal a significant gap between high affective readiness and low practical pedagogical readiness, confirming that the primary challenge is not cultural appreciation but the pedagogical capacity to operationalize ethnopedagogy in classroom practice, with Language Education students showing significantly stronger integration of cultural narratives ($p < 0.05$) and Science Education students facing the greatest difficulty in contextualizing cultural knowledge into scientific learning.

Lesson Plan (RPP) Document Analysis

The systematic evaluation of Lesson Plan (RPP) documents provides empirical evidence of how ethnopedagogical concepts are currently operationalized in instructional design. The following table details the extent to which Bengkulu's cultural elements are integrated into specific pedagogical components, highlighting a prevalence of symbolic over substantive inclusion.

Table 2. Lesson Plan Document Analysis

No	Evaluated Aspect	% of Lesson Plans Meeting Criteria	Observed Pattern
1	Mentioning Bengkulu cultural elements	74	Mostly in introductory activities only
2	Linking culture to learning objectives	38	Objectives often remain generic
3	Using culture as a teaching strategy/method	22	Rarely applied pedagogically; mostly contextual stories
4	Incorporating philosophical values in reflection	19	Descriptive rather than analytical
5	Integration with Pancasila Student Profile / P5	41	Present at slogan level, not operational

Source: Analysis of Document

The analysis of lesson plan (RPP) documents reveals that the integration of Bengkulu ethnopedagogy remains largely superficial and symbolic. Although a majority of lesson plans (74%) mention Bengkulu cultural elements, these references are predominantly limited to introductory activities and do not extend into the core instructional process. Only 38% of the lesson plans explicitly link cultural content to learning objectives, and even then, the objectives tend to be generic rather than competency-based. The use of culture as a teaching strategy or methodological approach is notably limited (22%), with most instances presenting culture merely as contextual stories rather than as a structured pedagogical tool. Similarly, the incorporation of local wisdom's philosophical values into reflection activities is minimal (19%) and remains descriptive rather than analytical or critical. While 41% of lesson plans reference the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) framework, this integration largely operates at a rhetorical or slogan level, lacking clear operational indicators in learning activities or assessments. Overall, the findings suggest that *ethnopedagogical* integration in lesson planning has not yet reached a substantive level of instruction.

Interview Findings

The qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews with 12 key informants elucidate the underlying perceptions and systemic barriers pre-service teachers face when implementing *ethnopedagogy*. The following table summarizes the thematic analysis of the participants' perspectives, highlighting the tension between their cultural aspirations and the practical challenges

of modern instructional design;

Table 3. Result of Interview With 12 Informants

No	Theme	Description of Findings	Representative Quote
1	Culture as Emotional Identity	Participants view local wisdom as essential for students' identity formation	"If Bengkulu culture is not taught, students may lose their sense of identity."
2	Methodological Confusion	Uncertainty about converting cultural knowledge into structured instruction	"We know the folklore, but we don't know how to write it into learning objectives."
3	Lack of Practical Models	Teacher education emphasizes theory but lacks sample modules	"Lecturers explain ethnopedagogy, but concrete lesson plan examples are rare."
4	Culture vs. Modernity Tension	Belief that cultural content may not support global competencies	"I'm afraid focusing too much on culture might make students less globally competitive."
5	Dependence on National Textbooks	Hesitation to develop independent local materials	"It feels safer to follow government textbooks."

Source: Analysis of interviews

The interview findings indicate that pre-service teachers strongly position local wisdom as an important foundation for students' identity formation, reflecting a deep emotional and cultural attachment to it. However, this positive orientation is accompanied by substantial methodological uncertainty, as many participants admit difficulty in transforming cultural knowledge into structured instructional components such as learning objectives. The data also reveal a lack of practical models in teacher education programs, where ethnopedagogy is often discussed theoretically but rarely supported with concrete lesson-plan examples. In addition, a perceived tension arises between cultural content and modern educational demands, with some participants worried that emphasizing local culture might reduce students' global competitiveness. This situation is further reinforced by a tendency to rely on nationally standardized textbooks, as pre-service teachers feel more secure with government-provided materials than in developing independent, locally grounded instructional resources.

Emerging Patterns

The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative data reveals several critical patterns that characterize the current state of ethnopedagogical integration among pre-service teachers. The following table delineates the emerging structural gaps that hinder the transition from mere cultural appreciation to substantive instructional practice within the Merdeka Curriculum framework:

Table 4. Emerging Patterns

No	Pattern	Explanation
1	Affective–Pedagogical Dissonance	Strong cultural appreciation is not matched by pedagogical competence
2	Symbolic Integration	Culture functions as decorative content rather than epistemological foundation
3	Institutional Gap	LPTKs have not yet provided an operational ethnopedagogical framework
4	Cultural Romanticism	Local wisdom is viewed as moral heritage rather than a knowledge system

Source: conclusion pattern results

The emerging patterns highlight a structural mismatch in pre-service teachers' *ethnopedagogical* readiness. An affective–pedagogical dissonance is evident, in which strong cultural appreciation is not matched by adequate pedagogical competence to translate local wisdom into instructional practice. This leads to symbolic integration, in which culture appears merely as decorative or contextual content rather than as an epistemological foundation for learning. The findings also point to an institutional gap: teacher education institutions (LPTKs) have yet to provide a clear, operational framework for implementing *ethnopedagogy* in classroom design. Furthermore, a tendency toward cultural romanticism emerges, in which local wisdom is primarily viewed as moral or heritage-based content rather than recognized as a legitimate knowledge system that can inform disciplinary learning.

Discussion

The phenomenon of "Affective–Pedagogical Dissonance" identified in this study reveals a profound disconnect between pre-service teachers' cultural sentiments and instructional proficiencies. The quantitative data, which exhibits high affective readiness ($M = 4.32$) in stark contrast to low practical readiness ($M = 2.51$), confirms that emotional attachment to Bengkulu's local identity remains a passive modality that does not automatically translate into professional competence. This finding aligns with Gay's (2010) theory of Culturally Responsive Teaching, which posits that without robust pedagogical literacy, cultural appreciation remains confined to symbolic celebration. These results further reinforce prior research (Kirwan & Kirwan, 2023) and indicate that while educators often possess strong moral motivation to preserve local wisdom, they frequently encounter a "methodological paralysis" when faced with the technicalities of developing instructional tools. This discrepancy underscores that the primary challenge is not cultural resistance, but rather a failure in knowledge transfer from the domain of values to the domain of practice.

The document analysis of lesson plans, showing that 74% of participants only inserted cultural elements into introductory activities, highlights a "Symbolic Integration" that is inherently superficial. Bengkulu's local wisdom is treated as a decorative supplement rather than an epistemological foundation for learning. This serves as a critical reflection on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which rhetorically encourages *ethnopedagogy* through the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) but, in practice, remains at a "surface-level" implementation. These findings support (Elizabeth, 2024) argument for Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, asserting that culture should function as a cognitive bridge for understanding complex concepts rather than a disjointed contextual narrative. The failure to link culture with higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) and the 4Cs suggests that pre-service teachers still perceive local wisdom as traditional and antithetical to modernity. This dichotomy is irrelevant in progressive education.

The tension between culture and modernity emerging from the interviews reveals a misconception that local content may hinder students' global competitiveness. Participants' apprehension that focusing on Bengkulu culture might detract from 21st-century competencies reflects the persistent "Epistemological Hegemony" of Western frameworks in teacher education. Theoretically, (Eliana et al., 2023; Yusoff et al., 2023) concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) emphasizes that effective teachers are those capable of contextualizing subject matter. However, this study suggests that pre-service teachers in Bengkulu face a professional identity crisis; they aspire to be guardians of cultural heritage yet feel constrained by the monolithic standardization of national textbooks. The high reliance on government-mandated materials ($M = 2.76$ for module integration) proves that the teacher autonomy promised by the Merdeka Curriculum has not yet been fully internalized due to a lack of concrete modelling at the Teacher Education Institution (LPTK) level.

The institutional gap identified in this research points to LPTKs' failure to provide an operational *ethnopedagogical* framework. Although *ethnopedagogical* theories are taught, the absence of concrete examples in microteaching leads to "Cultural Romanticism" devoid of "Pedagogical Agency." This stands in contrast to teacher education systems in developed nations that have systematically integrated Indigenous Knowledge Systems (Chapman & Schott, 2020; Druker-Ibáñez & Cáceres-Jensen, 2022; Mbah & Ajaps, 2021; Zidny et al., 2020). In the Indonesian context, this study found that Language Education students are more adept at integrating cultural narratives compared to Science students. This indicates a disparity in cultural literacy across disciplines, where science is

still viewed as a culture-neutral field, despite the immense potential of ethnoscience to enhance learning relevance for students in regional areas.

The novelty of this study lies in its identification of the "Multidimensional Dissonance" pattern within the newly implemented Merdeka Curriculum in peripheral regions such as Bengkulu. Unlike previous studies that focused on single-method approaches, this sequential mixed-methods study shows that cultural integration in Indonesia remains primarily rhetorical and administrative. The central argument posits that *ethnopedagogy* will never reach a substantive level as long as it is treated as a separate "local content" rather than a worldview for constructing knowledge. This research contributes an evaluation model of readiness that urges LPTKs to reorient their curricula from mere cultural introduction toward the development of Instructional Design competencies based on local wisdom that are adaptive to global challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that while pre-service Bahasa teachers in Bengkulu demonstrate strong affective commitment to local culture, their readiness to integrate *ethnopedagogy* into the Merdeka Curriculum remains pedagogically and practically limited, revealing a consistent gap between cultural appreciation and instructional implementation. *Ethnopedagogical* elements are still positioned symbolically rather than functioning as epistemological and methodological foundations for learning, indicating that the main barrier lies not in values but in the absence of operational pedagogical frameworks and modelling within teacher education institutions. The novelty of this research lies in its multidimensional mapping of readiness (affective, cognitive, pedagogical, and psychomotor) and in identifying the pattern of affective–pedagogical dissonance within a peripheral cultural context, offering a critical perspective that moves beyond dominant Java-centric *ethnopedagogical* discourse and beyond merely administrative interpretations of the Merdeka Curriculum. These findings suggest that reinvigorating local wisdom in modern education requires a paradigm shift in LPTKs from theoretical cultural appreciation toward structured instructional design training, including model lesson plans, *ethnopedagogical* microteaching practices, interdisciplinary ethnoscience approaches, and stronger collaboration with cultural practitioners, so that local wisdom can function as a legitimate knowledge system that strengthens both students' cultural identity and their global competencies.

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